

The Nestorian Age and the Mongol Mission, 635–1368

Prologue

The new Beijing City Museum is a stunning showcase of daring recent Chinese architecture, built about 2004 or 2005, and is one of several monumental buildings that make central Beijing visually much more interesting than when the official style was “Stalinesque Victorian.” The city museum had formerly been in a one-story wing of the “Confucius Temple,” a peaceful but run-down structure on the northeast side of the city, with far too little viewing space to display its holdings. When the museum moved to its spacious new quarters on the main East–West artery, visitors could see an entire floor of artifacts, photos, exhibits, and other items all on the history of the city of Beijing, including history from the time before it was called Beijing. For of course it used to be called Kambaliq, or Dadu (Great capital) when the Mongols ruled China. Walking through the exhibits of that period of Beijing’s history, it is hard to miss a cross carved on a large stone slab. This is a Nestorian cross, with the four spikes of equal length, a symbol of the Christian Church of the East, often just called Nestorian. Moreover, there is a photo of a pile of rubble and perhaps part of a stone wall, identified as (possibly) the remains of a Nestorian Christian monastery in the suburbs of Beijing. These items do not date back to the very beginnings of Christianity in China – another stone we will discuss

presently will do that. But it adds concrete visual evidence of the recurring Christian presence in pre-modern China, which began almost 15 centuries ago, if not earlier.

Just exactly when Christianity first entered China is a matter of some debate and even dispute among scholars, church representatives, and other interested parties. Much of this uncertainty has arisen only in recent years. It is due to the discovery, almost 30 years ago in the early 1980s, of some very interesting bas-relief sculptures on a rock face at Kongwangshan, near the city of Lianyungang, in what is now Jiangsu Province. Lianyungang was an important port city in earlier times, first port of entry into China for many who came by sea. These bas-reliefs depict three persons. The undeniable existence of these sculptures, and probable dating of them to the reign of the Mingdi emperor (r. 57–75 CE) of the Later Han Dynasty (25–220 CE), have led to the conclusion that these are from the period of the very early entrance of Buddhism into China, and depicted Buddhist figures. This conclusion would not have been seriously questioned, until recently. Within the past five to ten years, however, some have begun to think that these carved figures might not be Buddhist, rather that the evidence pointed to their being Christian; the human figures on the rock face were the Apostle Thomas and Mary the mother of Jesus, with a variety of candidates for the third figure.

This idea of Thomas in China is not new. His alleged visit to China has never been questioned by the Mar Thoma church in India, which has always claimed direct descent from the claimed church-planting of the Apostle there in the early 60s CE. Their books and church traditions clearly have Thomas in the 60s CE coming to India, then to China, and back to India, where he died. Two breviaries (concise liturgy books) of the Church in later centuries, one from Malabar, south India, and one in Syriac from the Church of the East, also seem possibly to refer to Thomas and China. Nevertheless, few people believed the Thomas-in-China theory; there simply was not enough concrete evidence to take it very seriously. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the early Portuguese explorers, chroniclers, and historians who came to India related the stories of the Indian church on the southeast coast concerning St. Thomas and China. Some favored accepting the claim, others were highly skeptical. Matteo Ricci, the first great Jesuit China missionary (in China 1583–1610), encountered there some ambiguous references to (possibly) Thomas. But no one had any concrete evidence.¹ Then in 2008, two Frenchmen wrote a book strongly advocating the Thomas-in-China thesis. They based their argument on the Kongwangshan bas-reliefs and other evidence that they adduced, and concluded that Thomas went from India to China by sea, because of an outbreak of unrest on the Old Silk Road through central Asia. They also claim that rather than Buddhism setting the bar for other religions, Christianity may have influenced Buddhism, which

was just in its formative stages in China at this time. Now there is some controversy over these issues, because of their linkage to those of national self-image and questions such as which of the world religions got to a given place first.² For example, Professor Perrier found a group of scholars of religion at Nanjing University, the school with some expertise in this period, quite resistant to his suggestions about the content of the bas-reliefs.³ I, for one, cannot see where this argument will end, or if it will end. The key evidence seems not at all clear-cut, so a more cautious stance would seem in order until more mainstream scholars become involved.

Regardless of the above controversy, when we turn to later times it is accurate to say that from the seventh century to the sixteenth century there were two false starts for the implantation of Christianity in China before the Christian presence became permanent. I will deal with both of them in the remainder of this introductory chapter. As we will see, from the verifiable beginning of the transmission of the Christian religion in the seventh century, the form in which it entered China was both replicated and transformed in varying degrees. We will probably never know just how close the Roman empire and the Later Han Dynasty in China (25–220 CE) came to linking up and establishing direct contact at the end of the first century. The peace which facilitated communications between the two great empires made possible commercial exchange along the Old Silk Road, which crossed central Asia and today's Turkestan. But the trade remained in the hands of Middle Eastern or central Asian middlemen. Rome ruled all to the west of the Caspian Sea, and Han envoys made it as far as the east side of the Caspian. Conceivably Christianity could have entered China during these years, but there is no real evidence that it did so. Ironically, the same period of relative order along the Silk Road which enabled Rome and China to have a near-miss in contact did make possible the first significant foreign missionary movement successfully to arrive in China that of Buddhism, brought from India. Who can say what might have resulted if Christianity had been successful in establishing itself in China at the same time as Buddhism? There would have been two foreign religions competing for attention and converts. Of course that did not occur, and from the early third century China was in chaos and the Silk Road practically nonfunctional. To the west of China, as Rome's empire dwindled over the next few centuries and competition grew between the Roman church and the Eastern church, first arose the Syrian Church of the East, and then the Persian empire in the Sassanid period (225–651) developed as the geographical base for Eastern Christianity. The Eastern Christians, who after the fifth century were called by some Nestorians or Nestorian Christians, succeeded in establishing a secure minority position vis-à-vis the Zoroastrians and Manicheans, their main competitors in the Persian religious marketplace.⁴ Despite the waning of the power of the Sassanid state, and strong competition from other branches of Eastern Christianity, the Persian Nestorians continued

vigorous in their identity, especially in their missionary outreach to regions beyond the Persian empire. In the sixth and seventh centuries, a dynamic missionary movement emanated from the Patriarch of the church in Persia through the metropolitans and bishops of the ecclesiastical structure. The result was tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of converts among the diverse peoples of central Asia. India also became a metropolitanate for the first time; and finally in 635 the first carriers of the Christian gospel, a band of Persian Nestorian Christians, arrived in China.

Nestorian Christians in Tang China

In either 1623 or 1625, either in today's Xi'an or in an area about 75 km to the west of Xi'an, a nine-foot high marble stele (a commemorative slab, tablet) was dug up which told a remarkable story.⁵ In the more than 1800 Chinese characters and in the smaller number of Syriac letters carved on it, allegedly a Christian monk named Jingjing, claiming to be writing in the year 781, gives a detailed history of Nestorian Christianity from its beginnings in China in 635. He also (in Syriac) records the names of the bishops and priests of the Da Qin (vaguely countries of the west, probably meaning Persia or Syria, or even the Roman empire) monasteries around the empire. The title at the top of the stele translates as "A Monument Commemorating the Propagation of the Da-Qin (Syrian) Luminous Religion in China." A slightly freer translation might be "The Story of the Coming of the Religion of Light from the West to China." At the very top is a Christian cross rising from a (Buddhist) lotus blossom.⁶ It is hard to overstress the impact this discovery had on Christian history in China, after it was generally accepted as authentic. In the 1620s, the Jesuit missionaries in China, who had been there only 40 years, were often confounded by the claim that Christianity was entirely foreign and too new to have any appeal in China. As far as anyone knew, Roman Christian envoys were the first; they had come to Mongolia and then China in the thirteenth century, and were gone already just over a century later. But here in this massive stone tablet seemed to be proof positive that Christianity had been firmly established early in the Tang, more than six hundred years before the first European emissaries came in the thirteenth century. Moreover it survived for well over two hundred years. It was a member of the Chinese social and political elite, a Christian convert, who heard about the stele and alerted the Jesuits to its discovery. But this leads us to events to be covered in the next chapter, so we will leave the stele and return to the story it helps to clarify concerning the beginnings in early Tang.

The Tang dynasty (618–907) was young and vigorous in 635. Its second emperor, Taizong, presided over a capital city (Chang'an, today's Xi'an) larger, richer, and more magnificent than any in the world. The Tang armies,



Figure 1.1 The Nestorian stele. Credit: dk/Alamy.

this early in the dynasty, were stronger than those of any neighbors, and Tang jurisdiction stretched farther west than that of any previous Chinese authority. With relative peace re-established in the area between China and Persia, a booming international trade revived on the Old Silk Road, of which the terminus was Chang'an. Some of the Middle Eastern and central Asian merchants who participated in the trade surely were Christian, but they were not missionaries. Yet Taizong may have learned a bit about their following a different religion and was curious; in addition to Buddhism being a fairly recent import, there were among the many foreigners in

cosmopolitan Chang'an Zoroastrians from Persia, Manicheans, inner Asian tribal groups with their own practices and rituals, and Jews. And Guangzhou, already by this time an important south China coastal entrepôt, had a large number of Arabs, of diverse religious identities, engaged in maritime trade. So when a delegation of Nestorians, led by their bishop, Alopen (or Aluoben), dressed in white robes and carrying their scriptures and icons of Christ, Mary, and the saints, arrived in dignified procession at the city gate after months on the Silk Road, they were formally greeted and escorted in dignified procession to the emperor. At least this is the story told on the stele. The court certainly knew they were coming, and must have known something about them, because (again, according to the inscription on the stele) Taizong ordered the Christian scriptures which the Nestorians had brought with them to be translated. It is implied that Alopen himself was heavily engaged in this work. After familiarizing himself with the basic doctrines, three years later, in 638, the emperor issued an edict of approbation for the Christians:

The way does not have a common name and the sacred does not have a common form. Aluoben, the man of great virtue from the Da Qin empire, came from a far land...his message is mysterious and wonderful beyond our understanding. The message is lucid and clear; the teachings will benefit all; and they shall be practiced throughout the land.⁷

In the same year, 638, the group of Nestorians around Alopen built the first Christian church in China, in Chang'an. There were 21 Nestorian monks in China, probably all Persian. For the period down to its creation in 781, the stele itself is the primary source of what is known about Tang Nestorian Christianity. It records a pattern of expansion and growth, with perhaps two or three dozen monasteries being established during that century and a half. There was also some persecution, especially during the late seventh century when Empress Wu reigned (685–704) and favored the Buddhists. For centuries there was very little known of events after the 781 stele. And the theology of the Nestorians is not described in detail on the stele. But early in the twentieth century, at Dunhuang (in the far West, on the northern route of the Silk Road in today's Xinjiang), thousands of manuscripts were discovered stored in sealed grottoes in approximately the year 1005. They had been preserved by the dry climate. Among them were several early Nestorian documents, including scriptures translated very early, some perhaps by Alopen himself.⁸ From these documents we can see the remarkable combination of Christian ideas and concepts mixed with Daoist and Buddhist terms that constituted Nestorianism in China. One scripture found at Dunhuang, "The Treatise of Veneration," even includes a Manichean scripture.⁹ Other titles of these scriptures and liturgies include: "The Book of Jesus-Messiah," "Sutra of the Teachings of the World-Honored One," "Discourse on

Monotheism,” “Da-Qin Luminous Religion Hymn in Adoration of the Holy Trinity,” and several others.¹⁰ The first two of these are thought by several scholars to have been, as the documents themselves claimed, translated into Chinese between 635 and 641. If so, then Alopen himself may well have been the translator. According to scholars who have analyzed them, they show a clearly discernible Christian core, not any significant deterioration of the essential dogmas of Christianity, although there is little emphasis on the crucifixion of Jesus, and considerable admixture of Daoist and Buddhist terms and images.¹¹ Yet the whole question of the extent to which Christianity and Daoism (more so than Buddhism) might have been compatible with each other still awaits systematic treatment by scholars conversant with both traditions.¹² In other words, we still do not have a good grasp of the “religious content” of Nestorian Christianity in China.

We do know, in broad outline, the fate of Tang Christianity. After a massive internal rebellion which nearly toppled the state in the 750s, the cosmopolitanism of the early Tang ebbed, and nativist elements revived. The court was weaker (its writ not extending as far), poorer (unable to subsidize religions as it had before), and more vulnerable to the cultural conservatives, many of them ardent Confucianists, who in the ninth century created a rising chorus of anti-foreignism and demands for a crackdown on “foreign religions.” This culminated in 845, with a decree from the throne which was aimed mainly at cutting back the wealth of Buddhist monasteries and restricting use of them as tax shelters, laicizing many of the clergy, and drastically tightening overall control of Buddhism. Monks were now required to register with the state, and the state itself took on the authority to ordain new clergy (in this regard, obviously one is reminded of the imperatives of the present Chinese state in maintaining a system of official registration of church buildings and clergy). Near the end of the edict, almost as an afterthought, the emperor added, “We have ordered more than 2,000 men of the Nestorian and Mazdean religions to return to lay life and to cease polluting the customs of China.”¹³

This was a severe enough blow to Buddhism to check its growth for some time, although it made a comeback fairly quickly. It seems to have been a truly disastrous event for the Christians, and as a matter of fact for all other foreign religions as well, except Islam. We do not know the health of the overall Christian church in China as of 845, although it must have had several monasteries in order to have so many monks laicized. But apparently it was moribund by the end of the dynasty in 907. Snippets of sources, a handful of scattered references, in the tenth century indicate that no Christians were left in China.

There is not full agreement on the most important cause of the decline and disappearance of Tang Christianity. Some theologically oriented scholars stress the alleged amalgamation, even syncretism, between Christian dogma

and Daoism or even Buddhism, and blame this for Christianity's loss of doctrinal integrity and its fading from the scene. Some stress the change in context, that is, the loss of the openness of Chinese society and the imperial court which had characterized the cosmopolitan seventh century. Others point out a related factor: there is very little evidence anywhere in the sparse documentation on the Nestorians that ethnic Chinese became converts or monks. In fact the evidence, such as it is, indicates that virtually all of the clergy and converts were foreign, both Persian and several other identities. Only a handful of Christians could have conceivably been Han Chinese. Thus we are probably justified in judging Nestorian Christianity in Tang China to have been a marginal religion, not central to the processes of Chinese history and society. Yet what is most noteworthy and portentous for the future, perhaps, despite the relative paucity of documentation, is the alacrity with which the Christian faith took on distinct Chinese characteristics, as seen in the cross-fertilization of Daoism and Christianity in some of the early scriptures and liturgical pieces which have survived. This feature of Christianity in China, the process of cross-cultural movement and the simultaneous replication and transformation of the faith in a new cultural setting, is one to which we will frequently return.

Christians and Mongols (Thirteenth to Fourteenth Centuries)

Just as the "pax Romana" during the first two centuries imposed sufficient security on the Mediterranean basin for the apostles to make missionary journeys far and wide, the "pax mongolica" imposed by the Mongols made possible the first direct European Christian contacts with China. But when the European friars who were the first emissaries of the Western church arrived among the Mongols a few decades before the 1271 Mongol conquest of all of China, they discovered many Nestorian Christians among them, including among the Mongol elite and their tribal allies. This is a chapter of China's Christian history that is often overlooked or given short shrift. We will try concisely to do it justice here.¹⁴

Nestorian Christianity remained prevalent in its core area of Persia, and many Persian Christian merchants plied the trade routes of central Asia, where they had considerable contact with a Turko-Mongolian tribe called the Keraites. In the early twelfth century the Keraites, who numbered about 200,000, began to convert to Nestorian Christianity, and by the thirteenth century were virtually entirely Christian. Other tribes, such as the Ongut, the Naiman, the Merkit, and others, converted in smaller numbers. In the late 1100s the Christian Kerait were an early ally of the Mongol subclan which produced Genghis (or Chinggis) Khan (1162–1227) as its leader. When Genghis Khan began to amalgamate the Mongol tribes into the greatest

fighting machine the world had ever seen, he took many of his leaders and officials from the Kerait. Despite a falling-out with the Kerait chief, which cost the latter his life, Genghis took three daughters of the Kerait royal family as wives – one each for himself, his oldest son Jochi, and his fourth son Tolui. This wife of the fourth son, Sorkaktani-beki (or Sorghaghtani), a Kerait Christian princess, became the mother of three emperors: a Great Khan of the Mongols, an emperor (ilkhán) of Persia, and the founding emperor of the Yuan dynasty in China, Khubilai (1216–1294).

At the halfway point of the thirteenth century, as Pope Innocent IV (1243–1254) and other strategists of Western Christendom surveyed the world which confronted them, they were concerned about both the Moslem occupation of the Holy Land and the memory of Europe's recent (1230s) providential escape from being ravaged by the fearsome Mongol war juggernaut. Thus for strategic reasons of realpolitik the Vatican wished to make contact with the Mongol rulers in order to avoid future hostilities and to explore forming an alliance which could oust the Islamic defilers of Jerusalem and the Holy land. There was also an authentic religious motivation at work. In recent decades two new missionary-minded orders had been founded, the Dominicans and the Franciscans. Why not send missionaries from among these enthusiastic priests to try to convert the Mongols to Christianity in addition to the politico-strategic purpose?

Accordingly, between 1245 and 1253 Innocent IV commissioned two different Franciscan-led diplomatic-religious missions to the Mongols.¹⁵ Both friars made it to Qaraqorum (Karakorum), the Mongol capital before it was moved to China proper. And both returned to Europe after two years, each writing a description of what he had seen and experienced, even though the hope of achieving an alliance with the Mongols had evaporated and there was no success in converting them to Christianity. The friars also alerted the European world to the success and prominence of the Nestorian communities among the members of the Mongol coalition. There were no more Christian emissaries sent by Rome until the 1290s, by which time the forces of Khubilai Khan had defeated the last Song Dynasty resistance, destroyed the old regime, and in 1271 set up a new dynasty, the Yuan, ruling all of China. Several years before that, Khubilai had already moved the Yuan capital from Qaraqorum to Khanbaliq (also called Dadu), the site of today's Beijing. Thus until 1293 the Nestorians, still largely non-Chinese, maintained a monopoly on the institutional Christian religious presence in China. Indeed, there is scattered documentary and archaeological evidence (tombstones, tablets with inscriptions and images) that there were small groups of Han Chinese converts among the Nestorians, although the preponderance of the members of these Christian communities remained non-Chinese.

It is just at this juncture of the Christian story in China that we should acknowledge the story of the Polo brothers and Marco Polo's famous

Description of the World (published circa 1298). They are representative of the presence of several Italian traders, Roman Christians, in Yuan China. The Venetian brothers Niccolo and Maffeo Polo left Venice about 1252, and they managed to make it to Khanbaliq in 1265, where they had at least one audience with Khubilai. After a return to Europe, they set out on their second voyage in 1271, accompanied by Niccolo's son Marco (1254–1324/5). They reached Khubilai's summer capital Shangdu in 1275, and then remained in China for the next 16 years, apparently in the employ of Khubilai and the dynastic government. Only in 1291 were they given permission to leave China, accompanying a mission to the Khanate in Persia. They left the rest of their traveling companions at Hormuz, and were back in Venice in 1295. Marco's *Description of the World* has unique and valuable information on the distribution of Nestorian Christians in Yuan China.

There were other Italian merchants, who were residents in several cities, and who were sometimes helpful to the Roman Catholic missions which existed in a handful of places in Yuan China. The first papal envoy since the 1250s, Friar Giovanni da Montecorvino, was accompanied by an Italian merchant from Venice, Pietro de Lucalongo, arriving at Quanzhou on the southeast coast and coming to Khanbaliq in 1293 via the Grand Canal. De Lucalongo also a few years later bought for Friar Giovanni a piece of land in the capital on which to build a church. Italians in other cities assisted the small number of Catholic missionaries in various ways.

Del Carpini and van Rubroek had observed the established Nestorian presence in the Mongol capital of Qaraqorum in the 1240s and 1250s, but did not stay long enough to get into competition with the Nestorian hierarchy. Giovanni da Montecorvino, however, had considerable success, so much so that it prompted the Roman Church to send several more missionaries, a few Dominicans as well as Franciscans, to China. The result was direct competition between Catholics and Nestorian Christians. Montecorvino claimed as many as six thousand baptisms by about 1305. One group was from the Nestorian Ongut tribe, whose chief (whom the missionaries called Prince George) converted with many of his fellow tribesmen. Several thousand Armenian Christians and Byzantine Alans in the capital city also came into the Catholic fold, partly because they had no clergy of their own nearby and they were not permitted in the Nestorian churches without converting. As far as we can tell, Montecorvino, who was consecrated archbishop of Khanbaliq in 1313 by newly arrived priests bringing instructions from the Holy See, was a dedicated and enthusiastic representative of the Franciscans, and preached and evangelized with perseverance, so much so that he sparked active and voluble opposition, even threats, from the Nestorians.¹⁶ Tension and conflict between Catholics and Nestorians were frequent in these circumstances.

From the 1320s until the end of the dynasty in 1368, both varieties of Christianity persevered, but without signal success. In addition to two

churches in the capital, a few Catholic missionaries and as many as three churches were present in the port city of Quanzhou. Fujian Province, and Hangzhou and Yangzhou, for a time had Franciscan residences. After Montecorvino's death in 1330, instability in the empire, and uncertainties of transport in sending more missionaries, slowed the Catholic efforts, and by the 1350s virtually all of the European Catholic priests were gone.

What of an overall verdict on Christianity in Mongol times? We know more about its presence and nature than we do about Christianity in the last part of the Tang, but that is still not a great deal. We do know that Nestorianism was sufficiently successful along the Silk Road that the Patriarchy in Baghdad established several metropolitan provinces on the way to China, two of them, including Khanbaliq, in China proper. Almost nothing concerning Christianity appears in Chinese sources of the Yuan. There is not even a specific Chinese language term for Christianity, Nestorian or Catholic. There is also very little evidence of interaction between either Catholics or Nestorians with Buddhism and Daoism. Over the time of the century from the 1240s to the 1340s, there were only a handful of clues: a Buddhist-Christian "debate" in which Willem van Rubroek participated in May 1254; conflict in 1304 between Nestorians in Jiangnan (lower Yangzi R. delta) and the local Daoist clergy whom the Christians were evangelizing; and the restoration of two Nestorian monasteries to the Buddhists in 1311. It seems that there was more trouble between Montecorvino and the Nestorians in Khanbaliq over his alleged stealing of Nestorian sheep than occurred between either version of Christianity and native Chinese religions. One inference that may be drawn from this is that none of the Chinese religious traditions saw Christianity as a religious or ideological threat.

Thus we must conclude that, much as in the case of the Tang Nestorians, in the Mongol period, despite the Roman church joining the Church of the East in missionary work in China, the elements of Christianity present seem to have been so closely tied to the foreign presence that there was almost no influence on indigenous persons and institutions. Even though the Franciscans, for example Montecorvino, preached to the Chinese and wanted to convert them, there is no evidence that any responded in verifiable numbers, at least not in sources that are at present available.

What became of Christianity in China from the mid fourteenth century? Ming dynasty sources have no reference whatsoever to Yuan Christians' fate. The demise of the Yuan dynasty in 1368 did not necessarily have to entail an end to the faith in China, but it created severe restrictions on missionaries. Their primary source of protection and funding was the Mongol ruling clan and the foreign merchants, most of whom retreated north with the Mongols; or, if they stayed, they were expelled by the somewhat xenophobic politics of the new Ming. Still, the establishment of a new dynasty alone, however xenophobic, cannot account fully for the decline of the missions

which now occurred, in the East in general as well as in China. By the mid fourteenth century the Franciscans had become crippled by internal contention and strife, and they were hit very hard by the Black Death in 1348. Moreover, the original strategic goal of the Papacy for the China Mission, to bring Mongol firepower into a joint campaign against the Saracens in the Holy Land, dissipated as the great Khanates of the Middle East, central Asia, and South Asia as well as the Yuan dynasty, collapsed into the annals of history.

Notes

1. I am indebted to Professor Liam Brockey for information on the early Portuguese chroniclers of the church in India.
2. The recent French work is Pierre Perrier and Xavier Walter, *Thomas Fonde L'Eglise en Chine (65–68 Ap. J-C)* (Paris: Editions du Jubilé, 2008).
3. Pierre Perrier and Xavier Walter, *Thomas Fonde L'Eglise en Chine (65–68 Ap. J-C)* (Paris: Editions du Jubilé, 2008). Conservative Catholic groups, for example, very much like this Thomas-in-China angle because it serves to elevate Christianity against other religions and tends to be triumphalist in general.
4. These events are well chronicled in Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, Vol. 1: Beginnings to 1500* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), Chs. 4–12. Moffett believes that the severe condemnation of Nestorius and his followers as heretics at Ephesus in 431, during the third of the great ecumenical church councils of the early church, was unwarranted. Another very competent general account is Jean-Pierre Charbonnier, *Christians in China A.D. 600 to 2000*, trans. M.N.L. Couve de Murville (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2007; original French edition, Paris, 2002), pp. 21–67.
5. A thorough discussion of the uncertainties of date and place is in Nicolas Standaert, ed., *Handbook of Christianity in China, Vol. 1: 635–1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 12–15. There is no favorite between the dates, but most scholars think the site was Xi'an. Since 1907 the stele has been in the Beilin Museum in Xi'an, where it has a prominent place. Visitors can purchase rubbings of either the title phrase at the top, on a smaller piece of marble, or one of the entire thing, which stands about eight feet tall.
6. The stele is variously referred to as the Nestorian monument or the Nestorian tablet. "Luminous religion" or "the religion of light" are translations of jingjiao.
7. From Martin Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity* (New York: Ballantine, 2001), p. 43. The text of the edict is from the Nestorian stele itself, not official Tang records.
8. These are described in Nicolas Standaert, ed., *Handbook of Christianity in China, Vol. 1: 635–1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 4–7.
9. The Manichean inclusion is noted in David Bundy, "Missiological Reflections on Nestorian Christianity in China in the Tang Dynasty," in Frank K. Flinn and Tyler Hendricks, *Religion in the Pacific Era* (New York: Paragon House Publishers, n.p.).

10. Translations of these titles vary extremely widely. Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras* translates the second in the above list as “Sutra of the Teachings of the World-Honored One,” where Jean-Pierre Charbonnier translates it as “Discourse of the Master of the World on Almsgiving.” Jean-Pierre Charbonnier, *Christians in China A.D. 600 to 2000* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2007), pp. 47–50.
11. Recent treatments of the content of Tang Christianity are Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, Vol. I: Beginnings to 1500* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), pp. 302–314, Nicolas Standaert, ed., *Handbook of Christianity in China, Vol. 1: 635–1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 33–38, Jean-Pierre Charbonnier, *Christians in China A.D. 600 to 2000* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2007), Chs. 2–3, and Martin Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity* (New York: Ballantine, 2001), *passim*.
12. Two essays which move in this direction are Livia Kohn, “Embodiment and Transcendence in Medieval Taoism,” and John H. Wong, O.S.B.Cam., “*Tao-Logo*-Jesus, Lao Tzu, Philo, and John Compared,” in Roman Malek, SVD, ed., *The Chinese Face of Jesus Christ*, Vol. 1, Monumenta Serica Monograph Series, no. 50 (Sankt Augustin, Ger.2002).
13. For the full text of the imperial edict see Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, comp., *Sources of Chinese Tradition, Vol. I: From Earliest Times to 1600* (New York: Columbia University Press), pp. 585–586.
14. Unless otherwise noted, the narrative in this section is based mainly on Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, Vol. I: Beginnings to 1500* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), pp. 399–420, 442–475, and Nicolas Standaert, ed., *Handbook of Christianity in China, Vol. 1: 635–1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) pp. 43–112, *passim*. Despite being outdated, a still very useful broad but detailed account of Christianity in China is Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (London: SPCK, 1929). Pages 61–77 are on the Mongol period.
15. Giovanni dal Piano del Carpin, and Willem van Rubroek.
16. Montecorvino was the last archbishop consecrated in China until modern times.