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On the Nestorian Introduction of Christian Monotheism into China (635-845): A Preliminary Evaluation of its Strategies of Strangification

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Introduction

Despite the fact that some Nestorians were already present in China much earlier than the sixth century, the Nestorian version of Christian monotheism was officially introduced to the Chinese people by a Nestorian missionary Olopen (or Alopen) in 635.[1] This might have brought some very profound message to this old civilization in the East. Unfortunately, by now more than 13 centuries have passed, but Christianity, unlike Buddhism, has not become one of the major constitutive elements of Chinese culture. On the other hand, Buddhism from India, introduced to China in 2 BCE according to the earliest record, has long since already become, together with Confucianism and Daoism, one of the three traditions (*sanjiao* 三教) of Chinese culture. There must be some lessons we can learn by examining how Christian monotheism was first introduced to China with the Nestorians.

In ancient China, there was a common faith in a Supreme God on High, named *di* 帝 or *shangdi* 上帝 in the Shang Dynasty (1751-1112 BCE), or *tian* 天(Heaven) in the Zhou Dynasty (1111-249 BCE), though always within a polytheistic context. In the Shang Dynasty, *di* or *shangdi*, arguably evolving from its ancestry cult, dominated over a pantheon of divinities composed of natural powers (like the sun, Yellow River, mountains), former lords, and pre-dynastic ancestors. In the Zhou dynasty,

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[1] According to the *History of Jin Dynasty*, the ancestors of Mar Sargis, belonging to a Nestorian family, emigrated from Western Lands to Lintao in the year 578. See *Jin Shi* 金史 (History of the Jin Dynasty), *juan* 124, *Biography of Ma Qingxiang* (*Bainaben Ershiwushi*: 1153).

tian, evolved from *shangdi* into a more universal power, as the supreme ruler of both human society and the universe, yet was not independent of the entourage of multiple divinities, such as those of mountains and rivers, those from ancestral spirits, and even those of the stove and the household shrine.[2] In Chinese intellectual history, the idea of *tian* had changed, from Confucius who still kept its religious meaning as God on High, through the mediation of Zisi 子思, Confucius' grandson, to Mencius, who saw it more as the highest principle of morality, immanent and therefore accessible to human nature. In the *Zhongyong* 中庸(*Doctrine of the Mean*), *cheng* 誠, sincerity on the psychological and ethical level, means also True Reality on the metaphysical level. According to Mencius, if one could unfold fully one's own mind/heart, one should be able to understand one's nature, and when one understands one's own nature, one understands Heaven. This means there was a humanistic tendency in Confucianism that turned the transcendent God into a principle immanent to and accessible by human subjectivity.

Polytheism continued in the tradition of religious Daoism, even if this has a contrasting tendency, on the one hand to see all gods as various manifestations of the same Dao, and on the other, to emphasize the cultivation of one's inner bodily and spiritual resources and therefore to indulge in the immanence of human subjectivity. We should mention here that, in the Tang Dynasty, religious Daoism was much cherished by the Tang royal family, who took Laozi, supposedly sharing the same surname 'Li' as their sacred origin. This was without doubt a strategy of subsuming religious power under the control of political leaders, as evidenced by the fact that the Emperor Xuanzong had annotated the *Laozi* and set up the Daoist *Five Scriptures* for the purpose of education and state examination.[3]

Even if there was a tendency in Buddhism's Indian tradition, according to the Mahāsamghikas, to worship Buddha as Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient and living endlessly and eternally in the Tusita Heaven, in contrast to the Sthaviras (the Elders), who, in their humanistic position, took the human body of Buddha as needing clothing,

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[2] As evidenced by Wan-shun Jia's dialogue with Confucius: "It is better to pay homage to the spirit of the stove than to the spirits of the household shrine. What does this mean?" The Master replied: "It is not so. A person who offends against *tian* has nowhere to pray." (*Analects* 3.13, Ames & Rosement, 85).

[3] The "Daoist Five Scriptures" means the *Laozi*, the *Zhuangzi*, the *Liezi*, the *Wenzi* and the *Gengshangzi*, all canonized as the *Zhengjing* 真經 (True Scriptures). See *Tang Huiyao* 唐會要, *juan* 卷 9, 74.

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eating, sleeping and medical care when ill, only the Buddha's *Dharmakāya* (Spiritual Body) was perfect[4], in its Chinese tradition, despite the fact that there was originally a tendency in the popular form to see Buddha as an omniscient, omnipresent and compassionate Divinity, the intellectually more powerful form of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism would emphasize the non-substantial concept of Mind as the infinite spiritual resources of all sentient-beings. For example, in the early stage of Chinese Buddhism, there was a debate on whether there is a substantial immortal spirit. Against an attack from Fan Zhen 范縝 (450-515), who, in his *shenmie lun* 神滅論 (On the Perishability of Spirit), said that spirit was one with body and when body died, spirit perished too, a counter attack was launched by Zheng Xianzhi 鄭鮮之, the author of *shenbumie lun* 神不滅論 (On the Immortality of Spirit), who, together with others, claimed the existence of Buddha depended on the immortality of a substantial spirit which, after a process of purification, could finally achieve the intuition of essence of all, like a mirror reflecting things as they were, and thereby became Buddha. In the transformation from ignorance to enlightenment, one was able to return to the original true-thusness of Buddhahood, which was one in all. According to the *Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna*, produced in about the same époque, the only existence was the Mind of all sentient beings, the One Mind, which manifested itself in myriad sentient beings. In illusion, myriad sentient beings presumed their individuality; in enlightenment, they were all in the One Mind.

With the deepening of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism's development in China, the substantialist vision of immortal spirit was soon replaced by the non-substantialist idea of *kong* 空 (emptiness) in the Madhyamika school and the non-substantialist concept of *xin* 心 (mind) in the Tiantai School, the later Huayan School and the Chan (Zen) School. Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism had since then emphasised the infinite resources of the non-substantialist Mind, the development of which arrived at its height in the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

The idea of Christian monotheism, putting an emphasis on One God who has created the world, and who intervenes in the world by His Providence and saves the world from its Fall by incarnating himself in the world, was textually and thereby officially introduced to China by a Nestorian missionary, Olopen (Alopen), who came to Chang An, the Capital of the Tang Dynasty, in 635, with some Nestorian Scriptures.

[4] Yin Shun, 61-63.

According to the History of the Tang Dynasty and the *Nestorian Inscription* unearthed in 1625, Olopen was welcomed by Fang Xuanling 房玄齡, the Chinese Prime Minister at that time, who had been dispatched by the Tang Emperor Taizong 唐太宗 and, accompanied with guards of honour, and was installed in the Royal Library to translate the scriptures he brought with him. Later he was received by the Emperor Taizong in the latter's forbidden apartment to investigate with him the Way according to the Nestorian Church. In 638, Taizong promulgated a decree that officially allowed the spreading of the Nestorian Church in China, and commanded the Chinese government to build for it at Yi'ningfang 義寧坊 a temple with 20 Nestorian priests ordained to serve in it. This was indeed an exceptional favorable condition for a Christian missionary in China. Among the Christian texts translated by Olopen, the *Xuting mishisuo jing* 序聽迷詩所經 (Sutra of Jesus the Messiah) and the *Yishen lun* 一神論 (On One God) were the earliest to be introduced to Chinese people.[5] These are of special interest to help us understand the Nestorian monotheism as interpreted in its earliest Chinese version. Nestorianism spread in China for some two centuries, before it was banned, unfortunately, under the impact of the Tang Dynasty's persecution of Buddhism, in 845 together with other 'foreign' religions, such as Zoroastrianism and Manicheanism, called together with Nestorianism, the *san yijiao* 三夷教 (three foreign religions).

This paper will evaluate the strategy of strangification practiced by the Nestorian missionaries in China. Strangification will be analyzed on three levels: linguistic, pragmatic and ontological. We will take these three levels to critically evaluate the introduction of Christian monotheism to China. Some comparisons with the introduction of Buddhism, a non-theistic religion, to China will be made for a better understanding in a comparative context.

1. STRANGIFICATION AND ITS BUDDHIST MODEL

My basic idea is that we can learn some lessons from the introduction of Christianity to China. Today people in the world feel so close to each other, yet in the meanwhile so vulnerable and susceptible to conflicts of all kinds. Now we should learn more to open ourselves to multiple others, instead of keeping within our own self-enclosure. In order

[5] The *Sanwei mengdu zan* 三威蒙度贊 (Hymn to Take Refuge in the Holy Trinity), which contains important prayers for understanding the Nestorian idea of the Trinity, seems to be translated much later, around 800. See later in this paper.

to overcome antagonistic conflict by appealing to effective dialogue, I have proposed in recent years, on the levels of intercultural interaction and religious dialogue, 'strangification' and 'language appropriation' as viable strategies.[6] The term 'strangification', a neologism perhaps strange in English but more understandable in Chinese—*waitui* 外推, means, etymologically, the act of going outside of oneself to multiple others, or going outside of one's familiarity to strangeness, to the strangers. This act presupposes the appropriation of language by which we learn to express our ideas or values in languages understandable to others. In their turn, 'strangification' and 'language appropriation' presuppose an original generosity toward multiple others, without limiting oneself by the claim of reciprocity, quite often presupposed in social relationships and ethical golden rules. Here I use the term 'multiple others' to replace the post-modern concept of 'the Other' proposed by Lacan, Levinas, Derrida, and Deleuze. For me 'the Other' is a mere abstraction. In no moment of our life are we facing purely and simply 'the Other'. We are all born into multiple others and we grow up among multiple others. It is better for our life of sanity that we keep in mind the existence of multiple others and our relation with multiple others. In the history of Chinese philosophy and religion, all schools of thought understood well that they were facing multiple others. This is also the case with Buddhism and Christianity. Take the example of Nestorian Christians. Right from its introduction to China, Nestorianism was aware that it was facing the competition of multiple others, not only the local traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism, but also other foreign religions such as Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism.

As I see it, three approaches of strangification could be put into practice:

First, linguistic strangification: If one discourse/value or cultural expression/religious belief can be translated into a discourse/value/cultural expression/religious belief understandable to another scientific, cultural or religious community, then it has a larger or more universalizable validity. Otherwise, its validity is limited only to its own world and reflection must be made now on the limit of one's own discourse/value or expression/belief.

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[6] The term 'strangification' was first proposed by Fritz Wallner of the University of Vienna as an epistemological strategy for interdisciplinary research. This concept was later developed by myself to the domains of intercultural interaction and religious dialogue.

Second, pragmatic strangification: If one discourse/value or expression/belief can be drawn out from its original social and pragmatic context and be put into other social and pragmatic context and is still valid, this means it is more universalizable and has greater validity than when limited to its own original context. Otherwise, reflection must be made on one's discourse/value or expression/belief to see why it is limited only to one's own social and pragmatic context.

Third, ontological strangification: A discourse/value or expression/belief, when universalizable by a detour of experiencing Reality Itself, for example, a direct experience with Reality Itself, such as other people, Nature, or even the Ultimate Reality, would be very helpful for mutual understanding among different scientific micro-worlds (disciplines or research programs), cultural worlds, and religious worlds.

In the context of Chinese history, Buddhism has been a successful model of strangification in becoming an essential part of Chinese culture. We can therefore take it as a mirror case for the Christian strategy of strangification in China. Buddhism, in its long process of becoming Chinese, took different measures of strangification.

First, in the field of linguistic strangification, there were successive translations of Buddhist scriptures and intellectual dialogue with Daoism and Confucianism through a process of language appropriation. The translation of Buddhist scriptures was not easy in the beginning, and its quality was low, as evidenced by Kumārajīva (343-413), who said that translation was like "chewing rice for others, which would not only lose its original taste, but also make people feel like vomiting".[7] Nevertheless, Buddhist scriptures' translation became a very systematic and rigorous enterprise, having its own institutions, regulations, functions and procedures. In the Tang Dynasty, under Taizong's reign, Xuanzang 玄奘 went to India, brought back 657 Buddhist works and translated 75 of them into Chinese. Under his leadership, Chinese Buddhism conducted the largest translation project in Chinese history.

Buddhism made itself understandable through a process of language appropriation, the so-called *geyi* 格義, of Daoist languages, such as Daoist concepts of *dao* 道, *you* 有 (being), *wu* 無 (non-being), *benwu* 本無 (original non-being). But, when this kind of language appropriation became misleading for understanding Buddhism, there arose critique of *geyi* Buddhism, and talented Chinese monks like Sengzhao 僧肇 brought

[7] Takakusu & Watanabe (eds.), Vol. 50, 332.

the discourse of being and non-being back to that of emptiness, by saying that both being and non-being were unreal, therefore empty. Since Daosheng 道生, the doctrine that "All sentient beings can become Buddha" made itself congenial with the Confucian doctrine of "Everyone can become Yao and Shun." Later, with Chan Buddhism, the proposition was radicalized into "All sentient beings are already Buddha." Translation of Buddhist sutras and appropriation of Daoist and Confucian languages had the effect of making Buddhism understandable to Chinese intellectuals. They also had a great impact on Chinese philosophy, literature, arts, and language.

For pragmatic strangification, it was necessary for Buddhism to leave its Indian social context and to adapt itself to the Chinese socio-politico-economic context. Envisaging critiques from Chinese elites, Buddhism, in the long history of its conquest of China, adapted itself by taking different measures of strangification. For example, it faced the critique of anti-filiality by translating or even inventing Buddhist texts on filial piety.[8] Also it faced the critique of disrespect for the emperor and his officials by distinguishing, such as Huiyuan (331-414) did in his *Shamen bujing wangzhe lun* 沙門不敬王者論 (*On Why Buddhist Monks do not pay respect to Political Leaders*), between the common believers and the monks. The Buddhist common believers in the secular world should pay respect and obey the emperor, his officials and social ethics,

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[8] The early translated *Liudu Jijing* 《六度集經》(*Collected Sutras on Six Pāramitrās*) already featured the importance of filial piety by saying that filial piety was more important than charity. The second part of the Brahma-jāla-sūtra (*Fanwangjing* 《梵網經》), attributed to Kumārajīva as translator, also emphasized the filial piety of Śākyamuni and combined filial piety with Buddhist śīlas (commandments). Buddhist scholar Qi Song 契嵩 (1011-1072) in his very influential *Xiaolun* 《孝論》(*On Filial Piety*), said that Buddhism, more than other religions, emphasized filial piety. Qi Song also equalized the five Buddhist śīlas (*wujie* 五戒) with the Confucian five cardinal virtues: *ren* 仁, *yi* 義, *li* 禮, *zhi* 智, and *xin* 信. In the Tang Dynasty, an invented sutra in Chinese, the *Fumu Enzhong Jing* 《父母恩重經》(*Sutra on the Weighty Grace of Parents*) appeared to feature a Buddhist value of filial piety. The *Ullambanapātra-sūtra* (*Yu lan pen jing* 《盂蘭盆經》), said to have been translated into Chinese by Dhamaraksa 竺法護 (266-313), is often seen as the *Xiao Jing* 《孝經》of Buddhism, in which we find the story of Maudgalyāyana (*Mulian* 目蓮), a disciple of Śākyamuni, who enters purgatory to relieve his mother from suffering. This led to the biggest national Buddhist festival—All Souls, which has been held on about the 15th of the seventh moon, from the 6th century until now, with the joint participation of Confucianism and Daoism. Together with innumerable Chinese commentaries and related literature, images and dramas, all these transform Buddhism into a religion of filial piety.

whereas Buddhist monks should go beyond worldly ethics and rituals so as to concentrate themselves on Buddhist truth. Once a monk had perfected his virtue, he saved by the same token, not only his parents, brothers and relatives, but also the whole world, therefore his contribution to the welfare of people was not less important, but sometimes even nobler than that of Confucians and government officials.

By ontological strangification, with its experience of 'emptiness' or *xin* 心 (the Mind) as Ultimate Reality, Buddhists were able to make Buddhism understandable to other endogenous philosophies such as Confucianism and Daoism. The Buddhist experience of emptiness and the Mind, the Daoist experience of *dao* and *wu* (non-being), and the Confucian experience of *ren* 仁 (humanness, humanity, and cosmic interconnectedness) and *cheng* 誠 (sincerity and true reality), though quite different in themselves, still enjoy some sort of similarity and complementarity as experiences of Ultimate Reality. From as early as Mourong's *Lihuolun* (*On the Correction of Doubt*, c.196 BCE), different versions of complementarity have been proposed among these three teachings. Also, by proposing various versions of the doctrine of the Common Origin of the Three Teachings (*sanjiao tongyuan* 三教同源), Buddhism had made itself understandable to Chinese intellectuals from different traditions.

With developments in time, Buddhism penetrated both the intellectual life and the everyday life of Chinese people. Chan Buddhism even went so far as to become immanent to people's everyday life. As the *Platform Sutra* said,

> If one's heart is even, there is no need of obeying obligations. If one's act is right, there is no need of practicing *dhyana*. There is gratitude when one is filial and nourishes one's parents. There is justice when the superior and the inferior are sympathetic one to another. When one knows how to cede to elders, there is harmony between the noble and the mean... *Prajna* is to be sought in one's heart, there is no need to search for metaphysical truth in the external world. Just by listening, saying and cultivating one's self in this way, the Western paradise appears just in the present moment.[9]

This immanentist attitude had made some basic changes to Indian Buddhism. According to Nāgārjuna and Asanga, the Buddhist way of life

[9] *Platform Sutra*, Chapter 3 (*Taisho sinshu daizoko*, Vol. 48, 352). My translation.

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should lead to compassion and altruism, to a way of existence for the enlightenment of all sentient beings. By contrast, Chan Buddhism would see the goal as the enlightenment of one's own heart in everyday life and in everyday virtue. In everyday things, whether big or small, there is the Dao of enlightenment. If Buddhism became acceptable to the Chinese elites when Dao Sheng began to proclaim that "All sentient beings can become Buddha", the Southern Chan Buddhist sects would take it for granted that "all sentient beings are originally Buddha," which rendered a philosophical foundation to the affirmation that everyone's everyday practice was the Dao.[10] Though this had the merit of transforming Buddhism into the everyday life of Chinese people, and unfolding the infinite resources in the human mind, in human subjectivity, by the same token it captured Chinese life and philosophy in the realm of immanence, without any necessity to be open to the other, to go outside of one's self and go to the stranger, to multiple others. This, unfortunately, was the final unexpected consequence of Buddhism's strangification in China. I would say this is exactly the crucial point at which Christianity can and should intervene and do something for Chinese culture, in order to enhance it to the dimension of multiple others, to the virtue of generosity toward multiple others, so as to transform Chinese culture, already rich in immanent resources, into an ever-renovating cultural dynamism supported complementarily by spiritual resources from strangers, from foreign parts of the world.

2. CHRISTIANITY'S STRANGIFICATION, GENEROSITY, AND EARLY CHINESE MONOTHEISM

According to my understanding, Christianity, like Buddhism, is a religion of strangification *par excellence*, in the sense that it is based on the faith that Jesus Christ has died for the salvation of all human beings, that is, for his love of and generosity toward multiple others, even to the extent of sacrificing his own life for them.[11] The existence of the Christian Church, even when accompanied with human ambitions and social conflict, is meaningful only when the Church serves as a kind of religious community that assures the realization of Christian ideal values

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[10] Huang Po said, "This Mind/heart is Buddha. Buddha is all sentient beings, all sentient beings are Buddha." (*Taisho sinshu daizoko* 大正新修大藏經, Vol 51, 270).

[11] Concerning strangification in Buddhism, see Shen, "Appropriation of the Other and Transformation of Consciousness into Wisdom."

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through communitarian life. The spirit of strangification is found in the doctrine and history of Christianity.

On the doctrinal level, we can see God's creation of the world as a generous act of producing beings other than Himself, by going outside from Himself to multiple others, to all things in the cosmos. His providence or his continuous care and participation in the creative process of the universe are his unceasing generosity to the world. Christ's incarnation and his death for the sake of humankind's redemption could be seen as an act of self-sacrifice for the Other's cause *par excellence*. All things, human beings included, are called upon, so it seems, to act accordingly, to go outside of themselves to multiple others so as to return eventually to the perfect Being.

On the level of historical dynamism, Christianity's missionary enterprise, first from Judea to Greece and Rome, then to Europe, then to other places in the worlds such as Africa, America and Asia and elsewhere, could be seen as an unceasing process of strangification, of going outside of itself to multiple others and becoming a constitutive element of the other's culture thereby bringing them to the process of self-transcendence. In short, Christianity is a religion of strangification and incarnation. It goes to the other, recontextualizes itself in the other and realizes itself as a constitutive element of that culture and then transcends again any definite form of contextualization and concretization.

In this regard, the introduction of Christianity to China could be seen, not only as a historical moment of its extension and strangification to East Asia under the deep influence of Chinese culture, but also as bringing the most important Christian spirit to Chinese culture that is the virtue of infinite generosity and unlimited altruism realizing itself in the process of unceasing strangification, incarnation and strangification again. This Christian spirit *par excellence*, if it becomes a constitutive element of Chinese culture, could bring a much more balanced development of Chinese culture in the contrasting situation of immanence and transcendence, humanness and righteousness, intuition and construction, already constituted by Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism.

In all these religions there exist different concepts of Ultimate Reality, such as *ren* (humaneness), or *cheng* (sincerity) in classical Confucianism; the Dao in Daoism; Buddha, Emptiness or the One Mind in Buddhism, *li* (principle or reason) in Realist neo-Confucianism, and *xin* (Mind) in Idealist Neo-Confucianism, yet none of them retain an irreducible dimension of otherness, as the *Deus Absconditus* or Hidden

God in the Judeo-Christian tradition, that would keep them from being reduced to the dimension of immanence. For example, the Dao in Daoism exists everywhere and is immanent to all things after having given birth to them. Emptiness and Mind in Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism have become the infinite resource immanent and accessible to human subjectivity, as expressed by Sengzhao 僧肇, the first great Chinese Buddhist philosopher, who said, "Is the Dao far away? Its reality is there when in contact with events; Is the sagehood far away? Live it with innate experience and it becomes marvelous".[12] Or again, principle or *li* 理 taken by Zhu Xi 朱熹, a neo-Confucian of the 13th Century, as the Great Ultimate, operates within and explains the world and should not be seen as the Ultimate Other.

In its first introduction to China, the idea of an Ultimate Other was shown very clearly in scriptures translated into Chinese by the *Jingjao* 景教 (the Luminous Church) with terms such as 'unthinkable' and 'incomprehensible' for God. Nevertheless, since the Nestorians appropriated Buddhist and Daoist languages to make their doctrine accessible to Chinese people, their idea of God seemed to be contaminated with a Daoist and Buddhist sense of immanence, although the altruistic generosity on the ethical level was preached and practiced as proclaimed by the Lord of Heaven Himself.[13] *The Sutra of Jesus the Messiah* is the earliest Chinese Nestorian text we have, even if the calligraphical style of its manuscript seems to be the same as that of the *On One God*, and therefore must be by the same transcriber. This text consists of two parts: the first part exposes Nestorian theology and ethics; the second part tells the life, words and deeds of Jesus.

In its first part, which is this paper's concern, the idea is expounded that the invisible God is omnipresent in the world and it depends on Him that all things and all human beings exist. Because of his omnipresence, His laws are also omnipresent, that is why all people should practice good deeds and avoid doing evil. Those who do good will be able to see God; those who do evil will be punished in hell. From these ideas the ten vows (*yuan* 願)or commandments are derived, starting with the three essential obligations: "Of all these three things: the first thing is to obey the Lord of Heaven; the second is to obey the **Sage Emperor**; the

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[12] Sengzhao 僧肇, *Buzhen kong lun* 不真空論 (*Emptiness of the Unreal*) (*Taisho sinshu daizoko*, Vol. 45, 153). My translation.

[13] As evidenced by the third part of the texts contained in the *On One God*, titled *The Lord of Heaven's Discourse on Alms-Giving.*

third is to obey father and mother".[14] These obligations consist in obeying God, the emperor and one's parents. Here we can see the strategic adaptation or recontextualization of Christian dogmatic and ethical theology with Confucian ethics and politics.

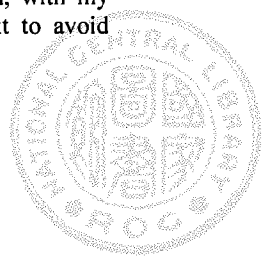
The idea of God is shown clearly in the text of the *Sutra of Jesus the Messiah*. The terms '*tianzun*' 天尊 (Heaven Honored One, or Lord of Heaven) and 'Buddha', were used to translate the One God. This might be under the influence of Olopen's Buddhist assistant(s) in the process of its translation. The beginning of the text seems to give us a hint of a polytheistic context in saying that "All the Buddhas as well as Kinnaras and the superintending-devas, and arahats can see the Lord of Heaven".[15] Here we understand that the Sanskrit term "arahat" is used to say the sages or saints, but the plural form of "Buddha" (Buddhas, *zhufo*) is somehow misleading. Since the angels are referred to by terms such as "kinnaras" and "superintending-devas", originally denoting Indian spirits and gods, the term "Buddhas" would not be used to mean angels. The term *fo* 佛 (Buddha) is used later in the same text for rendering God. Therefore, there should be no *zhufo* 諸佛 (All Gods) in a monotheistic theology, except in case when used to denote the Trinity, to say the Holy Father, Holy Son and Holy Spirit, but this is not clear in the text, where we see the singular term "Buddha" is used to translate "God". This shows the use of Chinese theological terms in the *Sutra of Jesus the Messiah* is not proper and precise, apart from the fact that it quite often borrows Buddhist terms that are themselves very misleading.

The *Sutra of Jesus the Messiah* puts more emphasis on the omnipresence of God in the universe, in dynamic rather than static terms, in the sense that God is traveling and operating incessantly in the whole world. It says, "The Lord of Heaven incessantly going around all over the world, is constantly present everywhere".[16] The text suggests that this work is done by the Holy Spirit, as the Wind, termed in Chinese *feng* 風 (wind) and *liangfeng* 涼風 (cool wind), later corrected to *jingfeng* 淨風

[14] See Weng Shaojun, 91. P.Y.Saeki's translation as "Sacred Superior" is misleading, see Saeki, 134. This is because, in Chinese tradition, there has been an emphasis on "sage-king", in which *sheng* 聖 should be understood as "sage" rather than "Sacred", therefore, I correct the translation of *shengshang* 聖上 into "Sage Emperor". To help Western readers, I use Saeki's translation, with my corrections in bold. Sometimes I need to retranslate the whole text to avoid misunderstanding.

[15] Saeki, 125.

[16] Saeki, 125.



(Pure Wind) in later texts such as the *On One God*, *Nestorian Inscription*, and *Honored Scriptures*. In the *Sutra of Jesus the Messiah*, God's omnipresence becomes the main argument supportive of the idea of God's immanence in the world: that his wind is everywhere, and his law (dharma, *guobao* 果報) is also everywhere. The only transcendent attributes of God seem to be his invisibility, untouchability, and inaccessibility, those characteristics of God beyond human senses: that His countenance is invisible, His color unknown, His residence unapprehendable. Still, all depends on Him for existence. The omnipresence of God, in a certain sense, is used to argue theologically that his law is also everywhere, depending on which all human beings are to be rewarded or punished according to their deeds, good or evil, measured by God's law. It is from here that the three most important obligations and ten vows or commandments mentioned above are derived.

It is clear then, that in the *Sutra of Jesus the Messiah*, God was not textually emphasized as the Ultimate Other. Even if God is said there to be invisible, still those who have done good will be able to see him. God's creativity and Providence are not conceived in reference to his generous act, but rather with reference to his law-giving act. The ethical generosity as shown in alms-giving is therefore considered as commanded by the law of God rather than as coming directly from his infinite generosity.

The second Nestorian scripture translated into Chinese was *Yishen lun* 一神論 (*On One God*), translated misleadingly by P.Y. Saeki as *A Discourse on Monotheism*[17], which contains three sections, the first *On One Heaven*, the second *Metaphors*, and the third *The World Honored One on Alms-giving*. It is very curious that this text starts with the second, the *Metaphors*, in which the beginning paragraphs explain, by using metaphors, the idea of One God and His attributes, and the idea that that all beings, visible and invisible, are created by One God. Then, it proceeds to expound human beings as constituted of body, soul and spirit, and it connects this discourse on man, by taking it as a metaphor, with the previous discourse on God, by saying that, "As there is but one master for one house, so is there one soul for one body. If a house has more than one master, then the house can not do any good. If a man's body has more

[17] This is an incorrect translation based on a misunderstanding of Chinese. In the Tang Dynasty, there was no technical term *yishen lun* 一神論 for Monotheism. The term "*lun*" means "a discourse on", or simply "on", whereas the term "*yishen*"一神 means One God. Nevertheless, in the following, we will still use Saeki's translation, correcting it in bold when necessary.

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than one soul, then the man can not do good. The soul of a man, therefore, can neither be two, nor three...Likewise, there can be only one God in the universe, as there can neither be two nor be three Gods".[18] It argues also for the invisibility of God by the invisibility of the soul: "The One God exists in the universe, but He is invisible, like the soul existing in the body of man is invisible".[19]

The *On One God* gives us longer explanation of the idea of Trinity by using the human body as a metaphor:

> "...heaven and earth are nothing but that which exists by virtue of the One God... Therefore we know that the **marvelous** power of this One God is infinite and **inexhaustible**. Such Divine power of this one God is possessed by no other gods. There truly exists the Only One God from the beginning. Though He himself is invisible, yet there have been two manifestations. For instance, these may be likened to one's right and left hands or legs. But there are no such distinctions of before and after or of upper and lower (between them). They are so alike that one cannot be distinguished from the other. Likewise, the one Godhead begot the other one out of one and the same substance and form... Now, this One God entirely takes the form of One Single Being, and there can not be, indeed, any second or a third".[20]

This text affirms the marvelous and exhaustible power of One God, who has two manifestations. Therefore the two other persons of God were understood in term of manifestation, with somehow a Daoist overtone. The metaphor of body is used here to communicate the idea that the three persons own only one substance, like one body. Two terms are used to say the Godhead "manifests" (*jian* 見) and "issues" (*chu* 出 or begets) other persons, without offering further conceptual precision or explanation of

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[18] Saeki, 165.

[19] Saeki, 165.

[20] Saeki, 163-164, my corrections in bold. I have changed Saeki's translation "one God" into "One God". Also Saeki's translation of *guzhi yisheng miaoli, buke qiongjin* 故知一神妙力，不可窮盡 as "we know that the mysterious power of this one God is infinite and cannot be understood completely" does not correspond to the meaning of the Chinese text, in which the term *miao* 妙 means 'marvelous' rather than 'mysterious', and *buke qiongjin* 不可窮盡 means God's power itself is 'infinite and inexhaustible', rather than the human subjective incapability to understand completely, which contradicts the beginning of this sentence that reads "therefore we know".

these two terms. This might produce confusion since the same term "manifestation" is also used to speak of God's creation of the world.

The wording of *On One God* suggests to us that whoever assisted Olopen in rendering it into Chinese was more of a Daoist than a Buddhist. This may be shown in the term used to translate 'creation' of the world as 'manifestation'. The idea of *creatio ex nihilo* is not evident in the text, whilst, at least on the level of literary meaning, the manifested and the manifestation are clearly identical. Although it reads clearly: "It can be known that all things are made by one God." "There are things visible as well as invisible, which have been all created by the one God".[21] However, the act of creation is understood in the Daoist sense of manifestation: "Everything that is made, without exception, is like the manifestation thereof".[22] The identification of the process of manifesting and the manifested will surely weaken the sense of God's otherness, implied in the use of terms such as "invisible", "infinity" and "eternity".

That is to say that, in the *On One God*, Heaven and earth are made by One God and thereby they manifest God, and all things are in God and are without exception the one God. All things existing in Heaven and earth are supported by God, otherwise, everything will fall into destruction. The text reads, "By virtue of the Divine power of the One God heaven and earth are made neither to crumble nor to fall, and that, because of this Divine power, they will remain steadfast for ever and ever".[23]

As we mentioned before, the relation between God and the world is understood in this text in analogy to that of soul and body: "This One God is present everywhere all over the universe in the same manner as the soul of man pervades the whole of his body, indulging to do as he pleases. He dwells in Heaven, but he is not limited in anyone placed or any period of time".[24] Based on the invisibility of soul, the invisibility of God is proposed. In other words, God's invisibility is understood and argued through its analogy with the invisibility of the human soul. In a certain sense, we can say that God as described, even metaphorically, in *On One God* is substantial, pantheistic, and anthropomorphic.

In short, the text of *On One God* shows us no strong sense of the Ultimate Otherness of God. God is the Ultimate Reality, but not the

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[21] Saeki, 161.
[22] Saeki, 161.
[23] Saeki, 163.
[24] Saeki, 165-166.

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Ultimate Other. The Christian spirit of generosity in its Nestorian form was presented and understood on the human ethical level as charity, but not in terms of God's infinitely generous creativity.

Even if the *On One God* says clearly that there is only One God, not two Gods, nor three Gods, the later *Jingjiao Sanwei Mengdu Zan* 景教三威蒙度贊 (Nestorian Hymn to Take Refuge in the Holy Trinity), and the *Sanwei zan jing* 三威贊經 (Sutra of the Hymn to the Trinity), as recorded in the *Zun Jing* 尊經 (The Honored Scriptures), were written arguably in 800 in the form of a prayer to the three persons of God. As a hymn, used mostly in liturgy, of which the first part is supposed to be the Nestorian version of *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, there was no place for theological argumentation or explanation, only the performative language used in praying, as a statement of faith, which should have both a conscious and unconscious impact on the believers or chanters. The textual value of this hymn consists in the fact that the name of the three persons of the Trinity are made clear: the Tender-hearted Father (*ci fu* 慈父), the Illustrious Son (*ming zi* 明子) or Holy Son (*sheng zi* 聖子), and the Pure Spirit (*jing feng* 淨風). The term *shengzi* (Holy Son) is much better than the term *feilüe* (費略), the Chinese phonetic translation of *filio* adopted by the Jesuits in China in the late 16th Century and early 17th Century. As shown in the Chinese text, the attributes of the Trinity which are emphasized are the "powerfulness", "mercifulness", "incomprehensibility" and "unattainability" (*nanxun wuji* 難尋無及) of the Holy Father, the wisdom and the universal redemption of the Holy Son, and the purity, limpidity and voidness of the Holy Spirit. The later part of this text reads:

> Thou dwellest from eternity to eternity in the **marvelously** bright **realm without boundary**; And Thy Brightness and Majesty thoroughly search out the **bordered realm of being**. And yet no mortals have ever been able to see Thee, nor can **they see thy Image in any material form**...O Thou **great holy** and universally honored Messiah! We adore thee, Oh Merciful Father! For thy mercy is as **immense** as the Ocean. Oh thou **great** Holy Spirit wind **pure and void, your limpid and crystal law is unthinkable**.[25]

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[25] Saeki, 266-268, my corrections in bold. Saeki's translation of the title of this Hymn as "A Nestorian Motwa Hymn in Adoration of the Trinity" is incorrect, and therefore modified by me now as "Nestorian Hymn to Take Refuge in the Holy Trinity," in which the term "*sanwei*" should mean "Trinity" and "*mengdu*" 蒙度 should be understood as the "*meng yizhi*" 蒙依止 in the main text, that is,

We should notice here that the theological terms inherited from the Chinese tradition, including Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism, were not enough to render explicit the Trinity as One God. If without explicit discussion of the idea of 'persons' and their relation to one God, and with its vague use of terms such as 'manifestation' and 'issuing', the idea of Trinity might appear, in the mind of common believers, as closer to the religious Daoist deities "Three Clarities" who manifest the Original Dao, understood somehow in a polytheistic sense, rather than the Christian idea of One God hidden and transcendent.

Now, we will proceed to examine more closely the Nestorians' strategies of strangification in China, on linguistic, practical and ontological levels.

3. THE NESTORIAN STRATEGIES OF STRANGIFICATION

3.1 *Linguistic Strangification*

First, on the level of linguistic strangification, the Nestorian missionaries, without previously being well prepared in Chinese language and belles-lettres, and, unfortunately, without adequate assistance from their Chinese assistants, produced translations which are honestly speaking not elegant enough to be attractive to the Chinese people, and besides, they are overloaded with Daoist and Buddhist terms. We should understand that, in the context of Chinese culture dominated by elites and men of letters, such inelegant writings could not proceed far.

This was the case with the Nestorian linguistic strangification. Their earlier translations were either too brutal or too misleading to invite Chinese to religious faith. The term 'Jesus' was translated as *yishu* 移鼠

"take refuge in", borrowed from Buddhism to express the idea of "salvation." We do not cut "*wei*"威 from "*san*"三 to form a unit with "*mengdu*" 蒙度 to become "*weimengdu*"威蒙度, wherefrom comes Saeki's guessed term "Motwa". Here we do not agree with Saeki. In this text, the Chinese term *wupanjie* 無畔界 means "realm without boundary" rather than Saeki's translation as "world of infinity". The following verse "*fu yi se jian bu ke xiang* 復以色見不可相" should read *fu bu ke yi se xiang jian* 復不可以色相見, which means "nor can they see thy Image in any material form", rather than Saeki's translation "nor can any eye of flesh form Thy (glorious) image". Also *dasheng* 大聖 means "great holy" rather than "most holy", and *qingning fa er busiyi* 清凝法爾不思議 means "your limpid and crystal law is unthinkable", rather than Saeki's translation as "Whose Purity is absolutely embodiment of Law beyond all thought".

(a moving mouse), Maria as *moyan* 末艷 (the least beautiful), and John as *ruohun* 若昏(the seemingly confused). All these terms, in their Chinese connotations, not only lacked any aesthetic sense of beauty, but were also liable to provoke disdain or disgust. These translations indeed matched Kumārajīva's decription: "not only losing [their] original taste, but also making people feel like vomiting".

A more serious problem involved in the Nestorian linguistic strangification was that it had over appropriated Daoist and Buddhist terms, such as "Buddha", "Dao", "Marvelous Dao", to translate "God", which, not only misinterpreted the Christian message, but also made it indistinguishable from Buddhism or Daoism. For example, even if *On One God* has the merit of introducing monotheism into China, saying that "in all things we see the operation of one God" and "the myriad of things are created by God", yet it calls this one God by Daoist terms such as *yuan yi* 元一 (the Original One), *tian zun* 天尊 (the Heavenly Honored One), which are not easily differentiated from religious Daoism. Also the fact that there are three Nestorian texts, the *Sutra of Jesus the Messiah*, *Hymn to Take Refuge in the Holy Trinity*, and the *Nestorian Inscription* included in the Buddhist Canon, is textual evidence that at least they were perceived as closely related to Buddhism.[26]

In the *Sutra of Jesus the Messiah*, "God" was translated as "Buddha", "priest" as *seng* 僧(sanga), and Buddhist terms were borrowed to translate physical matter and metal states. Thus confusion with Buddhism is easy, thereby diminishing the communicability of the true Christian message to Chinese people. Its most important theological and doctrinal terms hesitated between Daoism and Buddhism. In a much later text, the *Xuanyuan zhiben jing* 宣元至本經 (Sutra on the Origin of Origins), the use of terms such as "Dao", "Marvelous Dao", "Mysterious Dao", *lingfu* 靈府 (Spiritual Mansion), *wu* 無 (non-being), made Nestorian doctrines no different from those of Daoism.[27]

In short, Nestorian missionaries went directly to strangification without previous preparation in language appropriation and without proper assistance in Chinese belles-lettres. Consequently it was hard for them to expect any good results in their translation. Since it was an historical truth the Nestorians everywhere in the world used Syriac texts in their rituals and liturgy, the quality of Chinese translation seemed to be of little importance in the Nestorian Church. But, since the translation of

[26] For example, in Volume 54 of the *Taisho shinshu daizokyo*.
[27] Weng, 159-167.

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basic terms was misleading, even to the point of being absorbed by Buddhism or Daoism, Nestorianism suffered the fate either of persecution with Buddhism, or survival in Daoist disguise. Hence they became Daoist-Christians for survival under a religious holocaust against Buddhism in the year 845.

On the level of linguistic strangification, Nestorians were in need of a community of high intellectual Chinese priests, as, in the case of Buddhism, monks Daoan 道安, Sengrui 僧叡, Sengzhao 僧肇 and Daosheng 道生, who had criticized *geyi* Buddhism and returned to the true Buddhist doctrine of emptiness after early Buddhist appropriation of the Daoist language of being and non-being. Unfortunately, Nestorian missionaries did not have a feasible project for preparing Chinese intellectual priests to deliver their true message in good Chinese, and to defend the Nestorian Church in the Chinese context, in short, to strangify without losing their own true self. This was one of the reasons why Nestorianism remained one of the three foreign or barbarian religions.

3.2 *Pragmatic Strangification*

On the ethical level, Nestorians made great efforts to adapt to Confucian ethics and political norms such as filial piety and loyalty to political leaders, as evidenced by the *Sutra of Jesus the Messiah* which says: "The three most important things: The first to serve God, the second to serve the Emperor, the third to serve parents." (*yizhong xianshi tianzun, di er shishengshang, di shan shifumu* 一種先事天尊，第二事聖上，第三事父母). This was justified by saying that the emperor is born by God, very much like the idea of Son of Heaven in ancient China, and that our existence in this life is due to our parents. That is why, besides serving God, one should also respect the emperor as Son of God, and practice filial piety to one's parents.

The Christian practice of charity or alms-giving practiced by the Nestorians went along very well in the social context with Buddhist charity work. The Nestorian Inscription mentions that the Emperor Taizong decreed that the Nestorian Church "is altruistic and benefits people, therefore is suitable for spreading in all Under Heaven (*jiwu liren, yixing tianxia* 濟物利人，宜行天下".[28] So it seemed that Nestorians were once famous for their charity work, to the point of being known even to the Chinese Emperor. The *Sutra of Jesus the Messiah* mentions, in

[28] Weng, 55.

terms of the *Gospels*, taking care of the weak, the hungry and the naked. All this is supportive evidence that Nestorians in China continued the charitable tradition of the early Christians. They were indeed practicing altruism and generosity to the Other, a spirit proper to Christianity, and thereby witnessed to an ethics for the Other.

Unfortunately the ethical effort of the Nestorians was unable to deal with the Chinese political abuse of their religion. On the one hand, Nestorians were politically supported by the Tang Empire, and this not without political motivations. Not only was a Temple built for the Nestorians by the Tang government, but all the "ten provinces" of the empire were full of Nestorian churches, as described by the *Nestorian Inscription*, "Nestorian teaching was spread in all ten provinces, the state was rich and spirit peaceful, Nestorian temples existed in one hundred cities, while every family enjoyed the great blessings realized in Nestorian churches".[29] Unfortunately, on the other hand, Nestorians were used and abused politically by the Tang. It was common for all religions in China that they could not avoid being politically used and sometimes abused. This was also the case with the Nestorians under the Tang. That is why they could not survive the political persecution after 845, except in the form of Daoist-Christian, as evidenced by archeological evidence and some texts in the *Complete Works of Patriarch Lu Dongbin*, in which we find some chants and Christian prayers.[30] We will come back to this a bit later.

The Tang royal family, taking Laozi as its holy ancestor, propagated the idea that saw Nestorianism as a result of Laozi's going to the West after his retirement from the Zhou court. He is now said to have returned in Tang's glorious days. Below is what is said in the *Nestorian Inscription*: "When Zhou's virtue was in decline, Laozi went to the West, riding on a blue cow; When the Dao of the Tang Empire is shining brilliantly now, the Nestorian wind spreads back to the East".[31] We might suppose that the promotion of the Nestorian Church by Tang Emperor

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[29] Weng, 58 My translation. Saiki translates as "The Law of (Luminous Teaching) spread throughout the ten provinces. Monasteries were built in many cities, whilst every family enjoyed the great blessings (of Salvation)." (Saeki, 59).

[30] Wuwuozi, Volume II, *juan* 22, 7-9.

[31] My translation. Saeki translates so "The virtue of the honoured House of Zhou has died away; the rider on the black chariot had ascended to the west; But virtue revived and "The Way" was brilliantly manifested again at the moment when the Great Tang Dynasty began its rule, while the breezes of the Luminous Religion came eastward to fan it." (Saeki, 58)

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Taizong was for the purpose, on the one hand, of offering a spiritual comfort or religious consolation to foreign mercenaries and merchants and other foreigners from the Western Lands, and, on the other, of propagating the glory of the Tang Empire in the context of multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism. Immediately after the decree officially recognizing the Nestorian Church in 638, a huge portrait of Taizong was copied on the four walls of the Nestorian Temple. This could be considered a symbolic act, as proved by the text of the *Nestorian Inscription* which reads: "[Taizong] ordered immediately the officers to copy the Emperor's portrait on the four walls [of the temple], so that the Heavenly gesture will spread his glory to shine upon the gate of Nestorian Temple, and His sagely portrait (traces of image) will promote good omen, that will illuminate eternally over all realms of Dharma".[32] It is understandable therefore, that, in the high glory of the Tang Dynasty, when China's foreign policy opened her to foreigners and with intensive multi-ethnic interaction with the Western Lands, the Nestorian Religion was seen as instrumental for Tang's openness to foreigners to calm down their anxiety caused by multicultural tension. In this situation, when the policy was changed to become anti-foreign, the Nestorian Church would surely suffer together with other three foreign religions when Buddhism was persecuted in 845.

3.3 *Ontological Strangification*

The Nestorians' ontological strangification in China is shown in the Nestorian Scriptural use of, and thereby mixture with, Daoist terms such as "Dao", "Marvelous Dao", *wu* (non-being), *xuan* 玄 (dark, mysterious) and *benwu* 本無 (Original non-being). This was misleading to the extent of confusing Christian Ultimate Reality with that of Daoism. This confusion was not only unhelpful in religious dialogue, but it could also be quite distorting in its own self-understanding. Because of the misleading confusion with Daoist and Buddhist terms, Nestorian names for the Ultimate Reality were put into a situation of confusion with these religions. Not only were the Chinese terms for the object of worship confounded with Daoism, as in the *On One God*, where God was called the Dao, Marvelous Dao, Mysterious Dao, *wu* (non-being) and as in the *Xuanyuan zhiben jing* 宣元至本經 (Scripture on the Origin of Origins), which appropriated not only Buddhist term of emptiness, but also Daoist terms such as the Original Non-Being, the Dao and Non-Being to name

[32] Chinese text see Weng, 55. This is my translation.

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the Ultimate Reality. The consequence of this was ontological confusion instead of ontological strangification. In the *Zhixuan anle jing* 志玄安樂經 (Sutra on the Mysterious Rest and Joy), we find Daoist terms such as *xuan* 玄, *xuantong* 玄同, *wu* 無, and Buddhist terms such as *bianzhao* 遍照, *jiaming* 假名, *daci dabei* 大慈大悲 (great compassion) and *xukong* 虛空 used by both Daoism and Buddhism. The ontological confusion thus produced might have prepared the later integration of the Nestorian survivors into Daoism first in the time of religious persecution and later with Buddhism after the latter's recovery from persecution.

The fact that some Chinese Nestorian texts, such as the *Sutra of Jesus the Messiah*, the *Nestorian Hymn to Take Refuge in the Holy Trinity*, and the *Nestorian Inscription* were included in the Buddhist Canon – in Volume fifty four of the *Taisho shinshu daizokyo* – is evidence that, because of the linguistic similarity, they were seen, though not as pure Buddhist texts, at least as closely related to Buddhist history. Personally I have seen in the early years of Xilai 西來 Temple in Los Angeles a copy of the *Nestorian Inscription*. This is proof that it was probably seen as a Buddhist object until the temple authorities realized the mistake.

The existence of "Daoist Christians" after Nestorians were persecuted together with the Buddhists, is evidenced in the *Luzu quanshu* 呂祖全書 (*Complete Works of Patriarch Lu Dongbin*), attributed to one of the major religious Daoist pioneers. Descriptions of miracles performed by Patriarch Lu are very similar to those of Jesus, such as the miracles of "transforming water into wine", "giving sight to the blind", "curing the lame", and also in "feeding several hundred priests to the full with a handful of flour".[33] In Volume 22 of Lu's *Complete Works*, there are some chants, titled *zhouwen* 咒文 (charms and anathemas) by the editor, for "Salvation from catastrophes and witness of the Dao", with some Chinese texts in very elegant Chinese, together with some phonetic Chinese translation of prayers originally either in Sanskrit or in Syriac.

For example, in the *Tianwei* chapter (*tian wei zhang* 天微章 On the Profoundness of Heaven), we read first, "With the head on the ground, Oh Lord of Heaven, we pray thee! Thy original peace pervadeth everywhere. We pray thee, the God of Great Mercy and Sympathy, to save us from all the miseries of life", followed by a line of Chinese phonetic translation of texts, read phonetically as "*An cha na li la niu ta chi ma sha ho* 唵刹哪唎囉哞哆嗔嘛娑訶", which, if read as Sanskrit, would mean:

[33] These are also mentioned in Saeki, 401.

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"Oh Three Spirits, May we be awakened to cut ourselves off the momentary pleasure and be saved", but, if as Syriac, would mean "Indeed, Christ is he who goes up to the highest".[34] The Chinese parts of the rest of this chapter are always followed by similar chants incomprehensible in Chinese but to be read as phonetically repeating the original prayers (either in Sanskrit or Syriac):

> "**Constant Being with Great Divinely Power**, thou thoroughly and completely givest the shining Light to the human soul! We pray thee, the God of Great Mercy and Sympathy, save us from all the miseries of life." *An cha na li la niu ta chi ma sha ho.*
>
> "Your successive operation endures from the ancient to the present time, to assist universally all sentient beings. We pray thee, save us from all the miseries of life." *An cha na li la niu ta chi ma sha ho.*
>
> "Holy wisdom reveal thyself as True Master, forever keep and hold thy purity and brightness. We pray thee, save us from all the miseries of life." *An cha na li la niu ta chi ma sha ho.*[35]

This kind of prayer, made up of Chinese prayers with phonetic rendition of Sanskrit or Syric prayers, continues in the following chapters such as *Dizhen zhang* 地真章 (Chapter on the Truth of the Earth),

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[34] Wuwuozi, Volume II, *juan* 22, 7; Saeki, 402-403 my corrections in bold. Saeki's original translation of "*An cha na li la niu ta chi ma sha ho* 唵剎哪唎囉哞哆暪嘛娑訶", if read as Sanskrit, is "O three Spirits! May we be awakened to cut ourselves off the pleasure of a moment and be saved!" and, if read as Syriac, is "Yes, the Christ did go up to high things!"

[35] These texts, together with other chapters mentioned below, were translated by Saeki (Saeki, 400-407). I use here Dr. Saeki's English translation of the Syriac and Sanskrit chants, in correcting in bold his English translation of the Chinese texts. In the Chinese text, *changyu dashengtong* 常有大神通 means "Constant Being with Great Divinely Power" rather than Saeki's reading: "Ever being in communion with the Great God". Also *dieyun ligujin, puji yu zhongsheng* 迭運歷今古，普濟於眾生 should be understood as "Your successive operation endures from the ancient to the present time, to assist universally all sentient beings", rather than Saeki's translation: "At all times and at all places, Thou canst save all the living beings without exception!" Also, the last verse, *shenghui xian zhengzong, qingming yong guchi* 聖慧顯真宗，清明永固持 should mean "Holy wisdom reveal thyself as True Master, forever keep and hold your purity and brightness', in which "reveal thyself as True Master" is indeed more correct than Saeki's rendition as "revealth the True Religion".

Zhengxian zhang 證仙章 (Chapter on the Witness of Immortals), *Tidao zhang* 體道章 (Chapter on Incarnating the Dao). For lack of space, we will not go deeper into them. They are mentioned here only to prove the existence of Christian Daoists. These prayers show that for them, God is omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, and the savior in the misery of life. These Christian ideas are combined with Buddhist terms such as *cibei* 慈悲 (compassion), *qingjing xin* 清淨心 (pure and clean mind), *yi sheng* 一乘 (One Vehicle), *jüelu* 覺路 (the road to enlightenment), and Daoist terms such as *lingtai* 靈台 (Spiritual Platform), *taixu* 太虛(Great Void), *xian* 仙 (immortal), *taiji* 太極 (Great Ultimate), and *yin yang* 陰陽.

Conclusions

Based on these historical traces, we might argue that the Nestorians, after having faded out from China after the persecution of Buddhism in 845, made some effort to survive in the form of Daoist-Christians. Later, in the Yuan 元 Dynasty (1271-1368), Nestorians came back to China, but this period was less significant as regards the philosophical and religious dialogue between East and West, China and Christianity. All things considered, we should not take the Nestorian experience in China as an example of failure. Just as heroes are not to be judged by the measure of failure or success, the Christian missionaries who generously brought their Christian teachings to a foreign land like China should not be judged by the secular measure of failure or success either. But if religion is seen as a living community and not as historic relics, there are some lessons that we can draw and learn from the interruption and discontinuity of the Nestorian's first effort to introduce Christian monotheism to China and accommodate Christian monotheism with other Chinese religions such as Daoism and Buddhism and Chinese culture in general. On this, we should note:

1. The shortcomings in the Nestorian's strategy of strangification in China: first, the launch of linguistic strangification without a previously good preparation in the Chinese language and belles-lettres, that is, without proper language appropriation and adequate language assistance from local men of letters; second, the loss of its own subjectivity and authenticity in the process of pragmatic strangification in the social and political order; third, the ontological confusion, rather than ontological strangification, which hindered the believers' true understanding of their own religious experience as well as its transmission to others. Its Ultimate Reality, the One God,

appeared in the form of Buddhist emptiness or Buddha and the Daoist Dao or Original non-being. It was an unhappy and misleading confusion, with the result that it became absorbed by these two religions and thereby blurred its Christian monotheistic features.

2. The political abuse of the Nestorian Church and the violence of political persecution by the Tang Empire: Nestorianism suffered right from the start of its spread in China from the political intervention of the Tang's state power, where the policy in dealing with foreigners in China finally led to political abuse. In the end, the Nestorians suffered from religious persecution together with other foreign religions and this caused the disintegration of the Nestorian Church itself.
3. The absence of a good policy of localization: Nestorian missionaries did not enroot their church in the Chinese people and their culture, and, unlike Buddhism, they had not prepared a community of Chinese priests strong enough both intellectually and pragmatically to be capable of apologetic self-defense and propagating Nestorian Christianity with more suitable strategies of enculturation. Lacking a Chinese community consisting of Chinese priests and believers, there was no possibility of revival after the period of persecution was over.

As we know, the symbol of Nestorian Christianity as it appeared on the *Nestorian Inscription* was a cross emerging on the basis of a huge lotus flower, symbolizing Christianity's unity with and promotion of Buddhism. Unfortunately, its first encounter with Chinese culture was unable to purify the lotus by promoting it towards the One God and the Ultimate Other. On the contrary, it suffered a compromise with the lotus, falling in the political dirt and was obliged to survive under the form of Daoist-Christianity. From the case of Nestorian Christianity, we understand the insufficiency of the virtue of generosity for a successful realization of the task of missionaries. As Jesus said, "Be cunning as snakes and yet as innocent as doves" (*Matthew*, 10:16), where "innocent" or "pure" should be understood here in terms of the purer essence of Christian doctrines, whereas "cunningness" should be understood in terms of the proper discernment and appropriation of the new context, or the adequate strategies of recontextualization and strangification.

Also it should be noted that, in Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism, a successful model of strangification in China, it was taught that there should be both *shizhi* 實智 (substantial wisdom) and *quanzhi* 權智 (expedient wisdom). Substantial wisdom concerns the enlightenment that understands emptiness in seeing all things as arising from interdependent

causation and therefore having no substance or self-nature of their own. Nevertheless, one still has to use expedient means, or *fangbian* 方便 (Upāya) to deal properly with the real situations of the world and to spread one's own religious truth in them.

In taking Buddhism as an historic mirror, not only because of its successful strategy of strangification in China which made it a member of the family of the Three Teachings of China, but also because of its later bringing Chinese thought to the immanent One Mind, both China, which is now open to a new world order, and Christianity, which has been seen as a foreign religion by the Chinese people despite thirteen centuries of effort, have a lot to learn to incarnate the gospels of unconditional generosity to multiple others, and the true spirit of strangification, to renovate the creative energy in Chinese culture.

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