

nasty (1368–1644). This new imperial family restored Chinese prestige and influence in East Asia to levels enjoyed under Tang and provided China with stability and prosperity until the late sixteenth century. Under the Ming traditional Chinese civilization attained full maturity. Toward the middle of the Age of Ming, however, China reluctantly established relations with seaborne Western European merchants and missionaries, and the resultant challenge of the West would result, centuries later, in major transformations in Chinese life.

Chapters 12 and 13 will deal with the Yuan and Ming Eras. For the moment we will concentrate on Tang and Song, two of China's most celebrated Golden Ages.

Open to the World: Christianity in Tang China

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69 ▼ Bishop Adam, THE CHRISTIAN MONUMENT

The revived Silk Road provided missionaries, as well as merchants, with a convenient route into the heart of Tang China. In 635 a *Nestorian* Christian bishop from Persia named Aluoben (Abraham?) arrived in Chang'an, China's capital city. In the fifth century the Nestorian Christians of Syria, who drew a sharp distinction between the human and divine natures of Jesus, had been declared heretics (deviant believers) by the imperial Roman Church. The charges of heresy were motivated more by political considerations than theological doctrine, but the result was no less devastating. The Nestorians were effectively denied a place within the imperial Christian Church that looked to Constantinople and Rome as its twin centers of authority. Moving east, the Nestorians found a home in the Sassanid Empire of Persia. Despite sporadic persecution by the Sassanid *shabs*, or emperors, who promoted Zoroastrianism as the state religion, Nestorianism flourished in Sassanid Persia's two major cultural centers: Mesopotamia (also called *Babylonia*) and Iran. From there Nestorian Christian ideas traveled farther east to the Turkic peoples of Inner Asia and finally to China. Bishop Aluoben was not the first Nestorian to reach China, but he is the first of whom we have any record.

Aluoben was fortunate that he arrived in the reign of Tang Taizong (r. 626–649), the second Tang emperor. Of mixed Chinese and Turko-Mongol descent, Tang Taizong was open to novelties from the western steppes, including Buddhism, Manichaeism (Chapter 7, source 56), and Nestorian Christianity. Under the emperor's protection, Aluoben established a monastery, which initially housed twenty-one monks, probably all of them Persians.

In 781 a scholar-bishop named Adam, who also bore the Chinese name Jing Jing, composed a short history of the early fortunes of the Nestorian Church in China. Under the patronage of a prominent Chinese-born Nestorian of Persian descent named Yazdbozid, whose Chinese name was Yisi, Adam's history was then inscribed on a nine-foot-high stone memorial that bears the heading "A Monument Commemorating the Propagation of the Daqin (Syrian) Luminous Religion in the Middle Kingdom (China)." Interestingly, Yazdbozid, who apparently was Adam's father, was an assistant bishop in the Nestorian Church and

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had formerly served as a high-ranking general in the Chinese army and an imperial civil official. The career of this Christian priest, warrior, and civil servant of Persian heritage nicely illustrates the cosmopolitanism of early Tang, in which non-Chinese were called to the imperial service. Yazdbozid is also a symbol of the Nestorian Church's eighth-century political connections, which gave it a measure of influence in Tang China.

That good fortune did not last, however. By tying its fortunes to the patronage of the Tang emperors, this minor foreign religion suffered irreversible losses when the empire waged an assault on foreign religions between 840 and 846. Although some small communities possibly survived, Nestorian Christianity essentially disappeared in China by the late tenth century. It would only reappear in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, brought in from Central Asia by various Turkic tribes that had adopted the faith. But it would suffer a second eclipse in the fourteenth century with the rise of the antiforeign Ming Dynasty (1368–1644).

Regardless of future reverses, the Nestorian community's *Christian Monument* celebrates an age when China was open to foreign innovations, including this faith from Southwest Asia.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. Review source 23 in Chapter 4. How does Adam borrow Daoist imagery and terms to describe Nestorian Christianity? Why do you think he does so?
2. What Buddhist and Confucian overtones can you find in this memorial? How and why does Adam use them?
3. What reasons did Emperor Tang Taizong give for allowing this new religion into his empire? What does your answer suggest about the man and his reign?
4. How does the memorial deal with the issue of its reverses under Empress Wu? What do you infer from your answer?
5. What do those assaults on Nestorian Christianity suggest to you?
6. How does the memorial describe its imperial patrons? What do you infer from your answer?
7. At the apex of the monument is an ornate engraved cross, which rises from a white cloud, a symbol of Daoism, and beneath the cloud is a Buddhist lotus blossom. In light of the text of the memorial, what do you think this carved image means?

But, at any rate, "The Way" would not have spread so widely had it not been for the Sage,¹ and the Sage would not have been so great were it not for "The Way." Ever since the Sage

and "The Way" were united to gather as the two halves of an indentured deed would agree,² then the world became refined and enlightened.

¹Emperor Tang Taizong.

²Just as the two copies of a legal contract executed in duplicate would agree in all respects.

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When the accomplished Emperor Taizong began his magnificent career in glory and splendor over the (recently) established dynasty³ and ruled his people with intelligence, he proved himself to be a brilliant Sage.

And behold there was a highly virtuous man named Aluoben in the Kingdom of Daqin.⁴ Auguring (of the Sage, i.e., Emperor) from the azure sky,⁵ he decided to carry the true Sutras⁶ (of the True Way) with him, and observing the course of the winds, he made his way (to China) through difficulties and perils. Thus in the ninth year of the period named Zhenguan (635 C.E.) he arrived at Chang'an.⁷ The Emperor dispatched his Minister, Duke Fang Xuanling, with a guard of honor, to the western suburb to meet the visitor and conduct him to the Palace. The Sutras (Scriptures) were translated in the Imperial Library. (His Majesty) investigated "The Way" in his own forbidden apartments,⁸ and being deeply convinced of its correctness and truth, he gave special orders for its propagation.

In the twelfth year of the Zhenguan Period (638 C.E.) in the seventh month of Autumn, the following Imperial Rescript was issued: —

"'The Way' had not, at all times and in all places, the selfsame name; the Sage had not, at all times and in all places, the selfsame human body. (Heaven) caused a suitable religion to be instituted for every region and clime so that each one of the races of mankind might be saved. Bishop Aluoben of the kingdom of Daqin, bringing with him the Sutras and Images,⁹ has come

from afar and presented them at our Capital. Having carefully examined the scope of his teaching, we find it to be mysteriously spiritual and of silent operation. Having observed its principal and most essential points, we reached the conclusion that they cover all that is most important in life. Their language is free from perplexing expressions; their principles are so simple that they 'remain as the fish would remain even after the net (of the language) were forgotten.' This Teaching is helpful to all creatures and beneficial to all men. So let it have free course throughout the Empire."

Accordingly, the proper authorities built a Daqin monastery in the Yining Ward¹⁰ in the Capital and twenty-one priests were ordained and attached to it. The virtue of the honored House of Zhou had died away;¹¹ (the rider on) the black chariot had ascended to the West.¹² But (virtue revived) and "The Way" was brilliantly manifested again at the moment when the Great Tang began its rule, whilst the breezes of the Luminous (Religion) came eastward to fan it.¹³ Immediately afterwards, the proper officials were again ordered to take a faithful portrait of the Emperor, and to have it copied on the walls of the monastery. The celestial beauty appeared in its variegated colors, and the dazzling splendor illuminated the Luminous "portals" (i.e., congregation). The sacred features (lit., foot-prints) (thus preserved) conferred great blessing (on the monastery), and illuminated the Church for evermore. . . .

³A great warrior even in his teens, Tang Taizong (his given name was Li Shimin) was the driving force that toppled the short-lived *Sui Dynasty* (581–618) and placed his father, Li Yuan, on the throne as first Tang emperor. His father later abdicated the throne in Li Shimin's favor.

⁴Syria. We should not take it literally. Aluoben came from the West with a religion that was shaped in Syria. Thus Iran, Mesopotamia, and Syria are all lumped together under this term.

⁵He discovered in the heavens signs of the Sage Emperor.

⁶The Bible.

⁷Tang China's capital, Chang'an (known today as Xi'an), was the largest and richest city in the world in the seventh century.

⁸The private imperial chambers.

⁹Artistic representations, or *icons*, of Jesus and the saints.

¹⁰The name of a street in the western part of the city.

¹¹Rule by virtue, as established in the early Zhou Dynasty (Chapter 1, source 5) and later taught by Confucius (Chapter 4, source 24), had departed long before the rise of Tang.

¹²According to one tradition, when the virtue of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty failed (770–256 B.C.E.), Laozi, the founder of Daoism (Chapter 4, source 23), abandoned China in disgust. He went west (or ascended to the Western Heaven) in a chariot drawn by a black ox, thereby leaving China without a moral guide. The Tang Dynasty shared Laozi's family name, *Li*, and claimed descent from him.

¹³Laozi had gone west (note 12); now the Way was returning from the West.

The great Emperor Gaozong (650–683 C.E.) succeeded most respectfully to his ancestors; and giving the True Religion the proper elegance and finish, he caused monasteries of the Luminous Religion to be founded in every prefecture. Accordingly, he honored Aluoben by conferring on him the office of the Great Patron and Spiritual Lord of the Empire. The Law (of the Luminous Religion) spread throughout the ten provinces, and the Empire enjoyed great peace and concord. Monasteries were built in many cities, whilst every family enjoyed the great blessings (of Salvation).

During the period of Shengli (698–699 C.E.),¹⁴ the Buddhists, taking advantage of these circumstances, and using all their strength raised their voices (against the Luminous Religion) in the Eastern Zhou,¹⁵ and at the end of the Xiandian Period (712 C.E.)¹⁶ some inferior scholars¹⁷ ridiculed and derided it, slandering and speaking against it in the Western Hao.¹⁸ But there came the Head-priest (or Archdeacon) Luohan,¹⁹ Bishop Jilie,²⁰ and others, as well as Noblemen from the “Golden” region²¹ and the eminent priests who had forsaken all worldly interests. All these men co-operated in restoring the great fundamental principles and united together to re-bind the broken ties.

The Emperor Xuanzong,²² who was surnamed “the Perfection of the Way,” ordered the Royal

prince, the King of Ningguo and four other Royal princes to visit the blessed edifices (i.e., monastery) personally and to set up altars therein. Thus the “consecrated rafters” which had been temporarily bent, were once more straightened and strengthened, whilst the sacred foundation-stones which for a time had lost the right position were restored and perfected. In the early part of the period Tianbao (742 C.E.) he gave orders to his general Gao Lishi to carry the faithful portraits of the Five Emperors²³ and to have them placed securely in the monastery, and also to take the Imperial gift of one hundred pieces of silk with him. Making the most courteous and reverent obeisance to the Imperial portraits, we feel as though “we were in a position to hang on to the Imperial bow and sword, in case the beard of the Dragon should be out of reach.”²⁴ Although the solar horns²⁵ shine forth with such dazzling brilliance, yet the gracious Imperial faces are so gentle that they may be gazed upon at a distance less than a foot.

In the third year of the same period (744 C.E.) there was a priest named Jihe²⁶ in the Kingdom of Daqin. Observing the stars, he decided to engage in the work of conversion; and looking toward the sun (i.e., eastward), he came to pay court to the most honorable Emperor. The Imperial orders were given to the Head-priest (Archdeacon) Luohan, priest Pulun²⁷ and others, seven in

¹⁴One of several periods in the reign of Empress Wu, who ruled the empire in her own name from 690 to 705. She had gained effective control over the state around 654, but at first used several puppet emperors to mask her power.

¹⁵Empress Wu changed the name of her short-lived dynasty to *Zhou* and moved her primary capital east to Luoyang, the capital city of the ancient Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770–256 B.C.E.). She declared Buddhism the official state religion in 691 and seems to have encouraged persecution of Christianity, although persecution did not become an articulated state policy. In 698 a mob sacked the Nestorian church in Luoyang.

¹⁶The last year of disorder following Empress Wu's retirement in 705.

¹⁷Probably Confucians but possibly Daoists. Maybe both.

¹⁸*Hao* was the name of Chang'an when it was the capital of the Western Zhou Dynasty (ca. 1100–771 B.C.E.). Hostile crowds attacked and violated the monastery in the Yining Ward, which Tang Taizong had patronized.

¹⁹Abraham.

²⁰Gabriel?

²¹From the West, the source of so much gold and silver that flowed into Tang China by virtue of China's favorable balance of trade.

²²Under Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712–756) Tang China reached the heights of its greatness and prosperity (see source 70, note 3).

²³The legendary Five Sage Emperors, who established the foundations of Chinese civilization in predynastic times.

²⁴Although the emperor (the dragon) might be far away, his power extends to the monastery.

²⁵The radiance emanating from the faces of the Five Sage Emperors.

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all, to perform services to cultivate merit and virtue with this Bishop Jihe in the Xingqing Palace. Thereupon the monastery-names, composed and written by the Emperor himself, began to appear on the monastery gates; and the front-tablets to bear the Dragon-writing (i.e., the Imperial hand-writing).²⁸ The monastery was resorted to by (visitors) whose costumes resembled the shining feathers of the king-fisher bird whilst all (the buildings) shone forth with the splendor of the sun. The Imperial tablets hung high in the air and their radiance flamed

as though vying with the sun. The gifts of the Imperial favor are immense like the highest peak of the highest mountains in the South, and the food of its rich benevolence is as deep as the depths of the Eastern sea.

There is nothing that "The Way" cannot effect (through the Sage); and whatever it effects, it is right of us to define it as such (in eulogy). There is nothing that the Sage cannot accomplish (through "The Way"); and whatever He accomplishes, it is right we should proclaim it in writing (as the Sage's work).

²⁸The emperor composed an inscription to be fixed above the monastery's door. Almost all public buildings in China had similar inscriptions.

Troubles in Late Tang



70 ▼ Du Fu, POEMS

The Chinese consider the eighth century their golden age of classical poetry. Among the century's many great poets, three are universally recognized as China's preeminent poetic geniuses: the Buddhist Wang Wei (699–759), the Daoist Li Bo (701–762), and the Confucian Du Fu (712–770). Despite their differences in personality and perspective, they knew, deeply respected, and genuinely liked one another. Of the three, the Chinese most esteem Du Fu, primarily for the tone of compassion for the downtrodden that pervades his poetry.

Du Fu himself knew adversity. Despite his extraordinary erudition, he was denied a position of public responsibility and spent much of his adult life as an impoverished wanderer and farmer. He lived to see one of his children die of starvation and suffered through the destruction of General An Lushan's rebellion (755–763), a civil war from which the Tang regime never recovered. Despite these adversities, Du Fu never lost his love for humanity or his belief in the innate goodness of the common person.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. According to Du Fu, what costs have the Chinese paid for their empire? Has it been worth it? What does he think of military glory?
2. From a Confucian perspective, what is wrong with eighth-century China?
3. Can you find any Daoist sentiments in these poems?
4. What do the second and third poems tell us about the economic and social consequences of An Lushan's rebellion?