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A New Adventure in China: Personal and Theological Discoveries around Jingjiao and Nestorian Christianity

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大秦
景教
流行
中國
碑

A New Adventure in China :
Personal and Theological
Discoveries around Jingjiao and
Nestorian Christianity

Tianyi Yuan

2020 THL/PHL

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My Four Discoveries

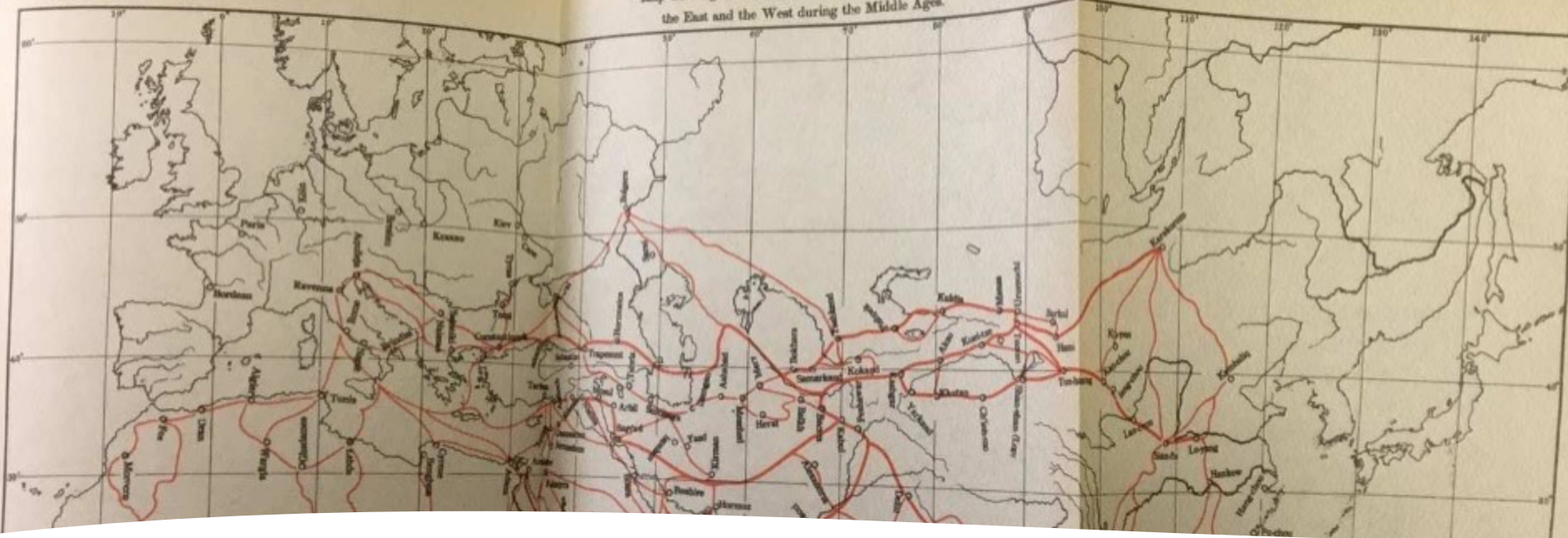
- I- The Discovery of Nestorian/Jingjiao History
 - Theological Lineage and Development from Nestorian Christianity in Syria and Persia to Jing-Jiao in China
- II- The Discovery of Jingjiao Documents
- III- The Discovery of Fundamental or Essential Christian Doctrines from Nestorian Documents
- IV- The Discovery of Jingjiao Relics in China as well as My Own Identity
 - Rich Jingjiao/Nestorian Legacy
 - My Past
 - My Present
 - My Future

Background Knowledge

- Nestorianism / Nestorian Christianity, is an early Christian school after Nestorius. This School was once dominant in Roman Syria. After the Council of Ephesus (AD. 431), Nestorian Christianity was condemned as heresy for holding the principle that Mary is the mother of “Christ the human person,” or *Christotokos*, rather than the bearer of Christ the integral divine person, which is also known as *Theotokos*. Nestorian Christians refused to believe that Mary, as a woman, could give birth to God, and hence violated the orthodox “*theandric (Divine-Human) mystery*” of the union of human and divine nature in Jesus Christ the Divine Person. Had been experiencing Roman and Persian persecutions, on account of religious and political reasons, Nestorian Christians moved eastward, for the sake of both survival and missionary duties.
- Jingjiao, or the Luminous Religious, is a historical Chinese name given to those descendants of Nestorian Christians, who migrated from ancient Syria to China. Jingjiao is an eclectic descendent of Nestorian Christianity which syncretized with many other religions like Zoroastrianism, Manicheism, and Mahayana Buddhism. Jiao jiao performed remarkable missionaries on the Chinese territory during the Tang (618 – 907 A.D.) and Yuan (or the Mongols) Dynasty (1271 – 1368 A.D.). Within those hundreds of years period in China, Jingjiao also experienced inculturation under the context of Chinese, especially Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist, culture, as well as the more pluralist culture of the Mongol Empire.

MAP I

Map showing the Over-land Communication between the East and the West during the Middle Ages.



I- The Discovery of Nestorian / Jing-Jiao History

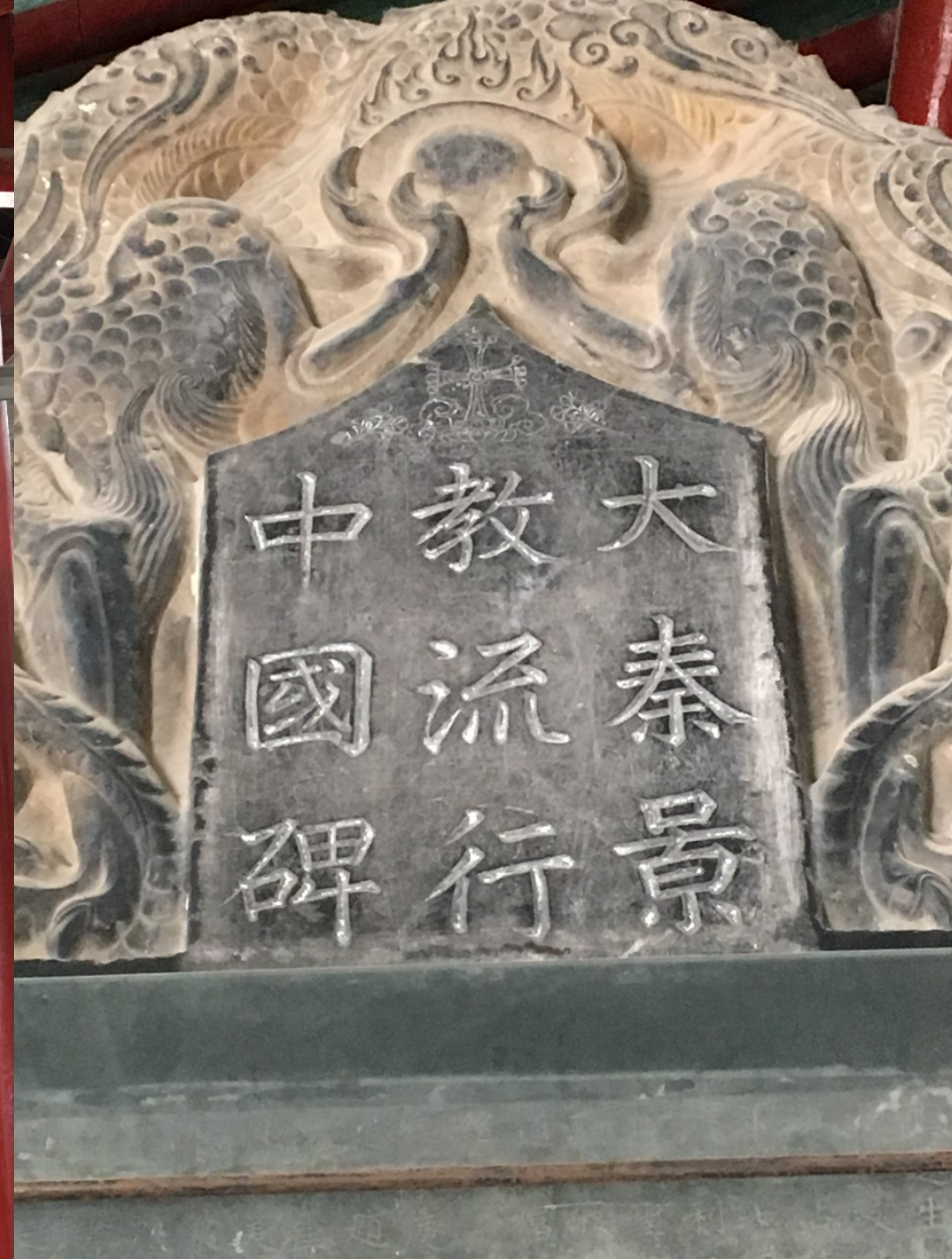
- The Missionary Journey of Christianity
 - (By Areas) Roman Empire -> Sasanian Persia -> Central Asia -> Silk Road -> Tang Empire
 - (By Cities) Antioch -> Edessa -> Seleucia-Ctesiphon -> Samarkand -> Chang'an
- Theological Lineage and Connection
 - With the preservation of its fundamental Christian doctrines, Jing-Jiao maintained its historical and theological connection with its Syriac Nestorian Predecessors
- Inculturation
 - On its Eastward Journey, Nestorian Christianity encountered with Zoroastrianism, Manicheism, and Mahayana Buddhism
 - Jing-Jiao experienced radical inculturation in the Tang and Yuan China.
- Vitality of Faith
 - Jingjiao's Christian identity is maintained via Christian doctrines,
 - In addition, faith and Inculturation are two dynamisms which render the spread of Nestorian Christianity in Central Asia and China possible.

II- The Discovery of Nestorian Documents and Legacy

- 《大秦景教流行中國碑》 (Dà-Qín-Jīng-Jiào-Liú-Xíng-Zhōng-Guó-Bēi) *The Monument Commemorating the Propagation of the Daqin Luminous Religion in the Middle Kingdom (The Nestorian Monument)*
 - Erected by the Nestorian Bishop Jing-Jing in 781 A.D to commemorate Jing-Jiao's (Luminous Religion's) spread in the Chinese Empire during the Tang Era (618 A.D. – 906 A.D.)
 - *The Nestorian Monument* is a primary text which addresses Nestorian Christians' or Jing-Jiao's worshippers' survival, inculturation and public reputation in China during the 7th and 8th centuries. It is also a primary source gives the basic theological concept of Jingjiao. Through reading the *Monument's* inscription, readers will find the Nestorian Christians' masterful adoption of Chinese spiritual languages and ideologies while retaining their distinct Christian identity.
- 《序聽迷詩所經》 (Xù-Tīng-Mí-Shī-Suǒ-Jīng) *The Jesus Messiah Sutras / The Surtra of Hearing the Messiah*
 - It is a sermon said by Jesus Christ or Jesus the Messiah himself. In the text, Christ address his disciples and all the intellectuals, the meaning of virtue, the ministry of Christ (Himself), and the way to the Resurrection in a way similar to Buddha Shakyamuni's preaching to his disciples and all the Bodhisattvas.
 - Its literal style appeals to Chinese audience during the Tang Dynasty. Christ is portrayed as a quasi-Buddha master from the mystical West.



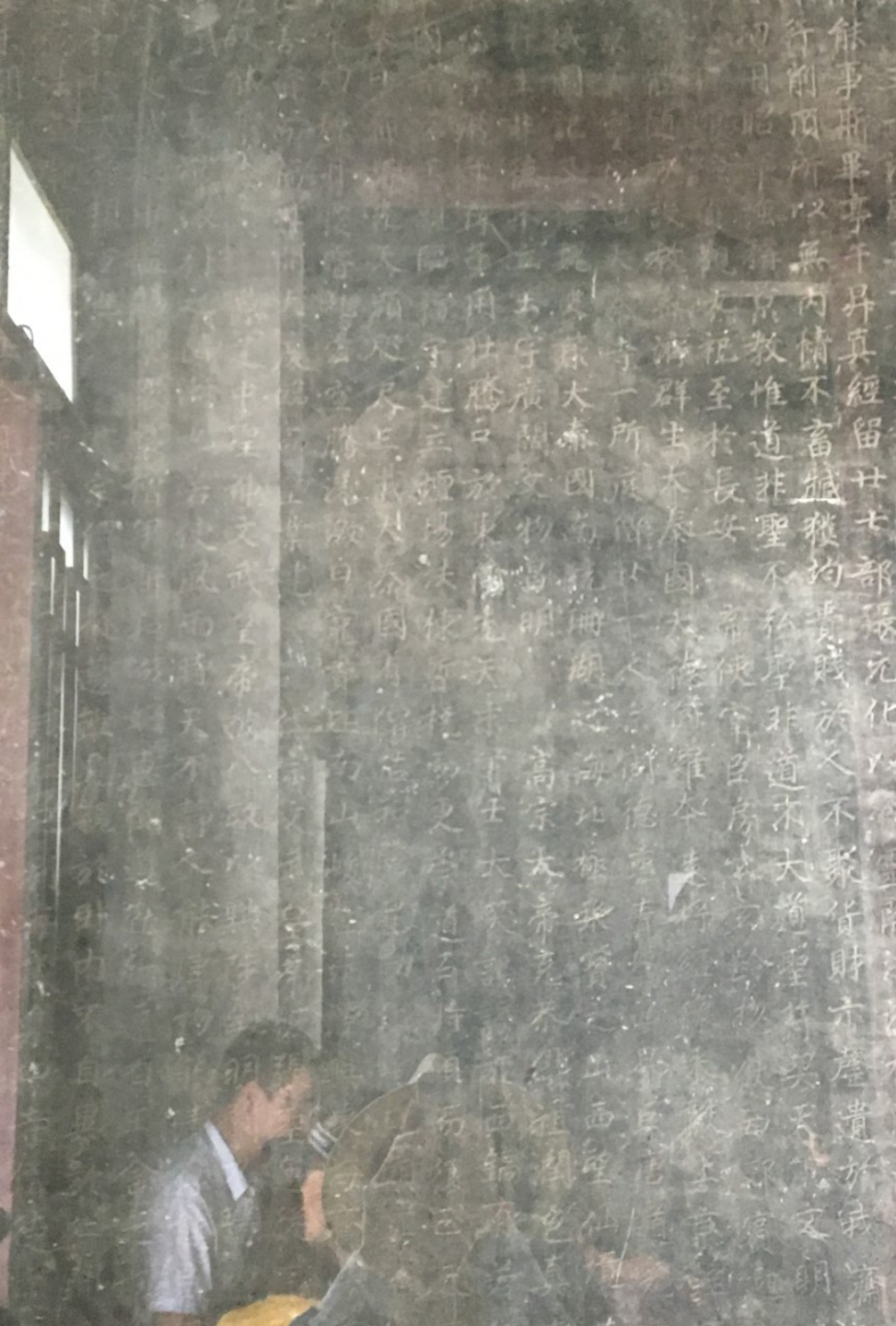
大秦景
教流行
中國碑



大秦景
教流行
中國碑

*The Nestorian
Monument*

Bei'lin
Museum, Xi'an,
Shaanxi
Province.



Essential Christian Doctrines and Faith Under the Garb of Inculturation and Chinese Discourse on *the Nestorian Monument*.

- 于是我三一分身景尊弥施河，
- Whereupon (one Person of) our Trinity became incarnate: **The Illustrious Honored-One, Messiah,**
- 戢隐真威，
- hides away his true majesty
- 同人出代。
- and came into the world as a man (or among men),
- 神天宣庆，
- An angel proclaimed the joy.
- **室女诞圣于大秦，**
- **A virgin bore a Sage in Syria (Da'qin)**

After Jingjing, the author of the text, states the sin of the world according the Christian principle (not quoted), he proclaims the advent of the Messiah who is from the Trinity. The Messiah (**the Sage**) was given birth by a virgin (i.e. Mary) in the country where Jingjiao came from (**Da'qin**) and granted the Salvation and Redemption to the world.

景教三威蒙度讚

无上諸天深敬歎大地重念善安和人元
真性蒙依止三才慈父阿羅訶一切善衆
至誠禮一切慧性稱讚歌一切合真盡歸仰
蒙聖慈光救離魔難尋無及正真
常慈父明子淨風王於諸帝中為師帝
於諸世尊為法皇常居妙明無畔界
光威盡察有界壇自始無人嘗得見
復以色見不可相惟獨純凝清淨德
惟獨神威無等力惟獨不轉儼然存
衆善根本復無極我今一切念慈恩歎
彼妙樂照此國弥誦普尊大聖子
廣度苦界救無億常活命王慈喜美
大善能苦不辭勞躬捨群生積重罪
善讓真性得無絲聖子端任父右座
其座復起無窮高大師前彼乞衆請降
俄使免火江深大師是我等慈父大師
是我等聖主大師是我法王大師能為
善救度大師慧力助諸羸諸目瞻仰不
整移復與枯樵降甘露所有家閭善
根滋大聖普尊稱施訶我歎慈父海
藏慈大聖諒及淨風性清凝法耳不
思議

大秦景教三威蒙度讚一卷

尊經

教禮妙身皇父阿羅訶 應身皇子弥施訶
證身虛訶寧俱沙 已上三身同歸一體

輪罕難法王 盧伽法王 摩矩韓法王 明泰法王
牟世法王 多惠法王 景通法王 寶路法王
千眼法王 椰寧遠法王 珉斃法王 摩薩吉思法王
宜和吉思法王 摩沒吉思法王 岑穩僧法王 廿四聖法王
憲難耶法王 賀薩耶法王 孫沙也法王 娑羅法王
瞿盧法王 報信法王

(Photos from <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8303183c/f4.planchecontact>)

《景教三威蒙度讚》 (Jing-Jiào-Sān-Weī-Méng-Dù-Zàn) *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*

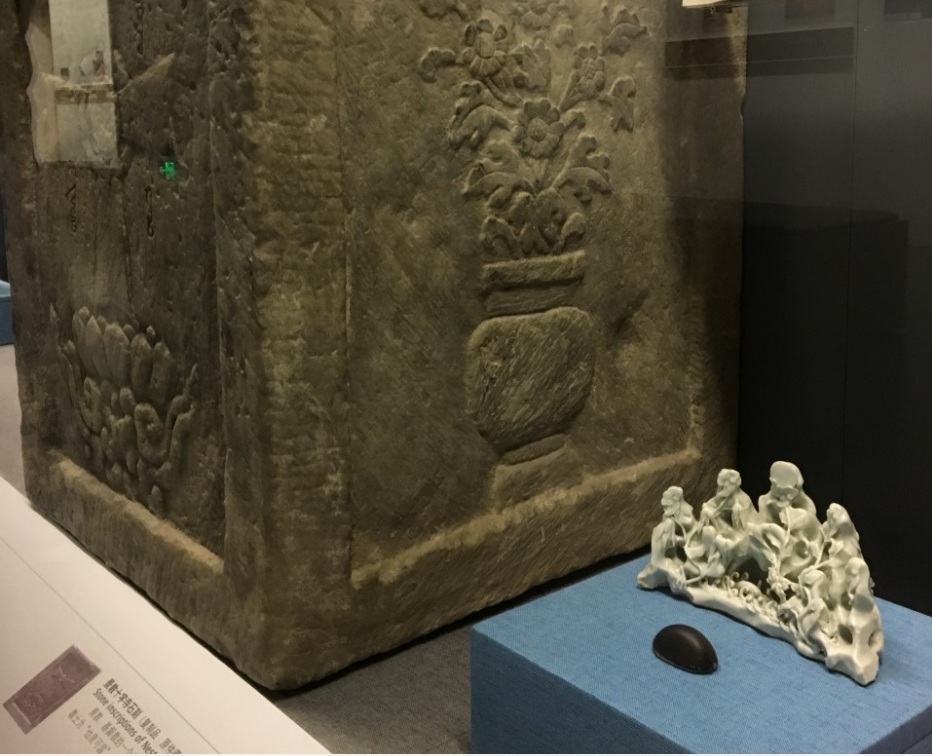
(Starts from the far Right,) It is a Liturgical Document, which was translated from Syriac to Chinese in the 7th century. The Merciful Holy Father Alaha (God the Father), The Great Sage and Holy Son Mi'she'he (Christ / The Messiah the Son), and the King Pure Wind/Breath (God the Holy Spirit) are proclaimed.

《尊經》 (Zūn-Jīng) *Venerable Books*

(On the Left, starts with the characters, “尊經”) Lists all the canonized Jingjiao documents and clergymen, after a doxology of the Trinity (which is similarly to the “sign of cross” yet in a Buddhist style discourse). The followers of Jingjiao venerate their cardinals, bishops, and other clergymen, as the Catholics ask for the prayer from their Saints.

III- The Discovery of Fundamental Christian Doctrines in Jingjiao Documents

- In *The Nestorian Monument*, *The Jesus Messiah Sutras*, “*Gloria in Excelsis Deo*,” and “*Venerable Books*” we can find Christian doctrines and Faith that are stated implicitly under Chinese (e.g. Daoist & Confucian & Buddhist) Discourse
 - 1) Messiah or Christ Jesus
 - 2) Trinity
 - 3) The Birth Narrative, and the Ministry of Jesus Christ
 - 4) The Resurrection



IV – Nestorian Relics
Cross Under Chinese/ Sino –
Central Asian Expressions and
Depictions

There are a plenty of Nestorian / Jingjiao relics exhibited in Museums in China. A common them of these religious art pieces is: **the Cross arises from the Lotus Flower, which arises from the mud of the world.** The combination of Cross and Lotus, which are both expressions of transcendent wisdom has unique spiritual beauty. In addition, ancient Syriac, as the liturgical language of Jingjiao, is often written on these pieces as well (**please attention to the four sides of the cross**).

Grave Description of a Yuan Dynasty Nestorian Christian in Zaytun (i.e. Quan-Zhou)

- Lotus and Cross
 - “Zaytun Cross”
 - Cross arose from the Lotus, as the symbol of Buddha’s wisdom arose from the lotus, which arose from the world, but for the world.
 - Nestorian Identity is mostly preserved:
 - Distinct from Chinese Eulogy.
- Museum’s Translation: (21 Line of the Syriac language) From Quanzhou Maritime Museum

*In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, on the 8th day of the 8th month in the year 1601 of Alexander the Great Calendar (1289 AD), or on the 7th day of the 7th month in Chinese Calendar, the offspring of King Philip of Macedonia, the pure princess, **Shenmark fulfilled God’s mission at the age of 20. May her soul forever rest in peace in Heaven! All her offspring will cherish the memory of her. We will always remember her! Amen!***



Yuan Dyn

年出土于泉





A Nestorian Stone (rectangular) with the Depiction of Fei'tian (Gandharva or Kimnara)

Yuan Dynasty

There is always more things to explore !



A Nestorian Stone (triangular) with the Depiction of Fei'tian (Gandharva or Kimnara)

Yuan Dynasty



IV- The Discovery of Myself from the Nestorian Relics in China

Mom, after I did my research, I do not have my existential Crisis any a longer.

- My Past:
 - I am familiar with Chinese classical language, Philosophy and history.
- My Present:
 - With the theology education at Providence College, I am being trained to thinking critically and theologically
- My Future
 - After the research, I am currently studying Syriac and will study the history and theology of Jingjiao in my graduate programs.
 - My PC summer research project helps me to plan an M.T.S. program in history of Christianity at Harvard Divinity School. My future scholarship will be in the field of Syriac Christianity studies, or religious tudies of missionary, as well as religious dialogues and dialectics



Thank you for Reading!

- To my parents, professors, friends, and all the missionaries who struggles for their Faith in Asia.
- “I should pursue” theological studies “even as far as China,” as Christ’s Good News once reached there in China’s most glorious time (*Pax Sinica*).

“There were many other things that Jesus did; if all were written down, the world itself, suppose, would hold all the books that would have to be written.” (John 21:25)

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