

# The Cross and the Lotus

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## INTRODUCTION

Judging from the Nestorian Documents in Chinese, the first Christians in T'ang China saw themselves as bearers of a religious message they claimed to be universal. At the same time, they realized it carries with it the vocabulary and symbolism, which are in many respects alien to the Chinese. They proceeded therefore to explain and communicate their message to the people they found on the Eastern end of the Silk Route by making bold attempts in using the *common currency* of the T'ang society.

The *synthetic* feature of the T'ang Nestorianism had been the studies of scholars for many years<sup>1</sup>. Some condemned Nestorianism outright as a syncretism that deviated from the Catholic doctrine and treated the Nestorians with contempt<sup>2</sup>. However, there were others who heralded their efforts in inter-faiths exchanges and held it as a model for modern inter-religious dialogues<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>For the past seventy years, translations and studies were done by various scholars on the Xi'an Stele's inscription and the documents discovered from Tun-huang. The early studies mainly centered on the historical, philological and doctrinal aspects of the findings. See:-

AC Moul, *Christians in China Before the Year 1500* (London, 1930).

PY Saeki, *Nestorian Documents and Relics in China* (London, 1937).

J Foster, *The Church of the T'ang Dynasty* (SPCK, 1939).

Lo Hsiang-lin, *Nestorianism in the T'ang and Yuan Dynasties*, HK University, 1966.

J Legge, *The Nestorian Monument of Xi'an-fu*, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> Scholars represented by James Legge, after examining the Nestorian Documents, concluded that these first Christians were syncretic in their adaptation and communication of their faith to the T'ang China. Legge referred to Nestorianism as overwhelmed by Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist ideas in compromising fashion.

<sup>3</sup> In recent years, renewed interest in the studies of Nestorianism are being taken up by researchers on inter-faiths dialogues and religious pluralism; emphasizing the parallels in teachings and practices of Nestorianism and Buddhism. Researches on the verification of Tun-huang and Syriac materials related to Nestorianism are taken up by both Chinese and Western scholars. S Holt, *The Encounter between Christianity and Chinese Buddhism During the Nestorian Period*; D Scott, *Christian Responses to Buddhism in Pre-Medieval Times*; Lee Shiu

The term *syncretism* has had different meanings in the history of religions, depending on one's viewpoint. In Western ideological disputes, syncretism was generally regarded as a betrayal of principles or as an attempt to secure unity at the expense of the truth. The syncretistic thinker was seen as a suspicious character, like a double agent, whose loyalty and commitment were absolutely questionable. They were charged by critics for incorporating other beliefs and practices to the extent of ignoring any inconsistencies which prevailed<sup>4</sup>.

However, the term *syncretism* was derived from a historic incident in which the citizens of Crete overcame internal disputes and were bonded together to face a common enemy. In such a paradigm, views were not reconciled in an arbitrary or irrational way, but for the purpose of survival. As such, religious syncretism is seen not as arbitrary or irrational, but as serving a religious purpose. Syncretism in this sense assumes a firm foundation for religious authority. It is not simply a random mixing of elements into an idiosyncratic whole, but the incorporation of various elements into a home tradition. It tends to be highly selective in the process; a selection based on the particular religious needs and interests of the syncretistic thinkers and the historical and cultural contexts against which they emerged. Thus, syncretism requires that borrowed elements be reconciled, and be accommodated into the worldview and doctrines of the home tradition<sup>5</sup>. In his observations of religious syncretism for ritual practices in the context of Buddhist religion in Tuva, Piatigorsky sees it as a situation whereby elements of two or more religions were being consciously chosen by those who used them for their own ends<sup>6</sup>. In this respect, syncretistic thinkers are not the usual ecumenical diplomats seeking peace among competing traditions; they are religious persons who seek to respond to new religious differences and needs.

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Keung, *Nestorianism in China*; and lately, M Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity*.

<sup>4</sup> J Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Zhao-en* (Columbia, 1980), pg. 2ff.

<sup>5</sup> J Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Zhao-en* (Columbia, 1980), pg. 9ff.

<sup>6</sup> A Piatigorsky, *Buddhism in Tuva: Preliminary Observation on Religious Syncretism*, in Skorupski ed., *The Buddhist Heritage* IBS Tring (UK. 1989), pg. 219.

## IMPACT OF THE T'ANG SECULAR AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXTS

The Nestorians arrived in China at a time most favourable for the propagation of foreign religions. Before AD 635, many merchants of Persian origin lived in Chang-an and undoubtedly, there were some Nestorians among them. When their numbers increased, Bishop Alopen led a mission which arrived in the capital city of T'ang China to serve the Nestorian community there. Alopen and his team were warmly received by the T'ang court. They were granted permission to translate their sutras and teach its doctrine. Imperial patronage which began with Emperor T'ai-tsung was reported by Ching-cheng and continued by Gao-tsung, X'uan-tsung, Su-tsung, Dai-tsung and De-tsung.<sup>7</sup> There were also influential families and army chiefs who were adherents of Nestorianism and provided huge support to its advancement in the T'ang society<sup>8</sup>. Apart from the attacks and persecutions during the Shen-li and Hsien-t'ien eras by the Buddhists and the Taoists, the Nestorians had enjoyed almost two centuries of political favor at T'ang court. This placed the Nestorians on a different footing with the successive Christian encounters.

Also when Alopen arrived in Chang-an, the Buddhists, having competed with Taoism and Confucianism for followers in the T'ang society, already had five centuries of successive growth in China. The complex religious scene of the T'ang society; with Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism dominating the religious scene for centuries, meant that the Nestorians did not come to China when it was a philosophical and spiritual vacuum. Thus, encounters between Nestorianism and these local religions were expected. Successful methods and experiences in other religions, particularly that of Buddhism, had proven to be of great use to the Nestorians as they communicated with people in the T'ang society. Furthermore, the competition for patronage from the Imperial house or influential families also left its marks on the T'ang Nestorianism. But it

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<sup>7</sup> Based on the Nestorian Stele's records, Chinese historical annuals such as *Tsin-t'ang-su*, *T'ang-hui-yao*, *T'z'i-chi-tung-jien* provide records to attest the patronage given by the Emperors.

<sup>8</sup> Support and protection given by notables and influential families are common phenomena in Mediaeval China. In the Nestorian's case, the most obvious was the support given by I-ssu, a military general of the Imperial Government.

was in the area of *language* that the T'ang society had a great impact on the synthetic outlook on Nestorianism<sup>9</sup>.

The best place to account for linguistic impact on the Nestorianism is in their documents in Chinese. We have the *Alopen Documents*<sup>10</sup> and the *Ching-cheng Documents*<sup>11</sup>; all written after the arrival of Alopen at Chang-an in AD635, and within a time span of two centuries. On top of these is the famous Xi'an Stele<sup>12</sup>, with its inscription composed by Ching-ching at around AD 780. These materials provide us with good written evidences of the efforts made by the Nestorians to advance their communication of the Christian message to the T'ang Chinese. The Nestorians also designed their own symbol to communicate the Christian message to the Chinese. They have boldly made use of the Chinese symbols of the dragon, the white clouds and the lotus, in designing a new logo to present the Nestorian message of the Gospel of the Cross and the Messiah. This paper takes the Nestorian symbol as an example, to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the *common currency* of the T'ang society as well as their boldness to use them for their own ends.

### THE CHOICE OF THE CHINESE SYMBOLS

The Xi'an Stele was originally erected in AD 781, in the Nestorian Monastery at the I-ning Ward in Hsian-fu, and remained there ever since until it was recovered in AD 1623. It is ten feet by three and a half feet wide and a little under a foot thick. The head of the Stele consists of an immense pearl between two Chinese *lungs* over twenty feet long. In the centre of the figurehead right under the pearl is the apex of a triangle,

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<sup>9</sup> H. T. Lau, *The Nestorianism of the T'ang Dynasty: Authentic? Syncretic?* MA Dissertation, SOAS, University of London, 1991.

<sup>10</sup> Between 1901-1908, seven manuscripts were discovered in the Tun-huang cave. Two of them, the *Hsu-t'ing-mi-shih-so-ching* and *I-shen-lun* were probably written during the Chen-kuan era, for the Emperor, shortly after the arrival of Alopen. The other documents include *Yu-ti-er*, *I-t'ien-lun-ti-I* and *shih-tsun-pu-shih-lun-ti-san*.

<sup>11</sup> Ching-ching materials include one stele inscription and four other documents. Thus, the *Ta-ch'in Ching-chao San-wei-meng-to-tsan*, *Tsun-ching*, *Chih-hsuan-an-lo-ching* and *Ta-ch'in-ching-chao-hsuan-yuan-pen-ching*.

<sup>12</sup> Set up in AD781 and with its texts composed by Ching-cheng. The monument was donated by Yazedbouzid, who was a high-ranking military officer and lieutenant-governor of the northern region. He collaborated closely with Guo-ziyi in the work of pacification after the An-lu-san rebellion, and was on intimate terms with him.

which forms a canopy over nine Chinese characters arranged vertically in three lines forming the title of the Stele, which reads 'Ta-ch'in Ching-chao Liu-shing Chung-kuo Pi'. Upon taking a closer look at the roof shape of the title on the Stele, one is struck by the design of the unique symbolic signs of the cross, the cloud, the lotus and two branches of a tree. The cross symbol undoubtedly shows that the Stele itself is a Christian monument, but beneath the cross is the white cloud—a characteristic symbol for the Taoist, and a lotus flower—the characteristic emblem of the Buddhist (see fig.1)<sup>13</sup>.

The first impression of the symbolic presentation was that of a design, used to denote that 'the three religions are one'. Under this symbolic heading are the texts, stating the purpose and content for the erection of the monument, in Chinese and Syriac. It is stated in Chinese that this is a monument commemorating the propagation of the Ta'chin Luminous Religion in the Middle Kingdom. It also stated in Syriac, "my lord Yazedbouzid, the Presbyter and Chorepiscopus of Khumdan, city of the King, who is the son of the late Presbyter Milis from Balkh, city of Tahounstan, erected this stone monument in which the Law of our Saviour was written and that our forefathers preached to the Rulers of China"<sup>14</sup>. These words show clearly what the Ta-ch'in Ching-chao represents, and that the purpose of the monument is to declare the Law of the Messiah. Hence, the unique symbol designed by the Nestorian was not to denote that the three religions are one, but rather to propagate the unique message of the cross of the Messiah.

The choice and use of the lotus flower together with the cross, continued to be the dominant symbol on the inscription of tomb-stones and relics during the T'ang and the Song periods. Figures 2 and 3 are pictures of the Ch'uan-chou crosses dated back to the Song period<sup>15</sup>; whereas figure 4 is the restoration of the remain of a wall painting found in Kan-su Tuan-hwan Cave in 1908, presently housed in the British Museum<sup>16</sup>. The painting depicts a Syriac Nestorian priest, bearing three crosses—one on the headdress, one on the chest collar with the third on

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<sup>13</sup> PY Saeki, *Nestorian Documents and Relics in China* (London, 1937), pg. 26.

<sup>14</sup> PY Saeki, *Nestorian Document and Relics in China* (London, 1937), pg. 40.

<sup>15</sup> AC Moul, *Christians in China Before the Year 1500* (London, 1930), pg. 78-80; Saeki, pg. 436-7.

<sup>16</sup> PY Saeki, *Nestorian Document and Relics in China* (London, 1937), pg. 408.

his left hand's staff simultaneously holding out the symbol of a lotus finger in his right hand!

The Nestorians in the Yuan Dynasty continued to use the symbol of the *lung* with the cross in their witness to the Chinese. The Yuan Dynasty Stele, which commemorated the founding of a Nestorian Monastery in the year AD1383, uses the symbols of the cross, guarded by four *lungs*. The inscription on the Yuan Stele states that this stone marks the site of the Monastery of the Cross<sup>17</sup>. The choice of the symbol of the cloud seems to have diminished after the T'ang period.

Can we justify the choice and use of these Chinese symbols of the *lung* and the lotus together with the cross of Christ Jesus? This essay seeks to survey the meanings and usage of the symbols of the lotus and the *lung* in the T'ang contexts so as to examine the approach and choice of these symbols used by the Nestorians in their Chinese documents. Hence confirming the model for religious encounter used by the Nestorians in their approach to communicate with people in the T'ang society.

### THE CHINESE LUNG

The symbol of dragon is widely used in cultures of the East and the West. In the West, there were the *Cosmic dragon*, the *Greek dragon*, the *Egyptian dragon* and the *Classical dragon*<sup>18</sup>. With very few exceptions, the dragons of the West were monstrous, evil, earthbound and hideous. They were cave-dwelling, fire-breathing and destructive creatures. Most Western dragon stories are significantly based on the Bible. They are seen as a form of the devil himself or as a symbol of destruction both spiritual and physical<sup>19</sup>. However, the Chinese *lung* is almost exclusively benevolent; which differentiates them from the Western dragons to the extent that it may be more adequate to consider them as different symbols rather than as the same symbol interpreted differently<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> M Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras* (Ballantine, 2001), pg. 145.

<sup>18</sup> Allan, Judy & Griffiths, Jeannie, *The Book of the Dragon*, Chartwell, 1979, pg. 8-23.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pg. 46-55.

<sup>20</sup> Lee Yu, *Can Dragon be equal to Lung?* In *The Presbyterian Messenger*, January 2001, pg. 13. In an earlier essay, the same author cited scholars such as PW Kroll, Newton Hayes and artist Hugo Munsterberg, who had argued that the Western dragon should not be equated with the Chinese *lung*; in the *Trinity Theological Journal*, Volume 6, pg. 35-46.

The symbol of the Chinese *lung* has taken different shades of meanings over the many centuries of China's cultural history and continues to be a subject of much debates by the scholars. This essay will deal with three major usage of the symbol of *lung* by the T'ang period.

Firstly, the *lung* as an auspicious spiritual creature. The Chinese folklore regards the *lung* as one of the four divine creatures<sup>21</sup> that were thought to be beneficent creatures. The *t'ien-lung* protects and supports the many layers of heavens. The *shen-lung* controls the rain, wind and weather to benefit earthly agriculture. The *t'sang-lung* mounts guard on the treasures hidden in the earth. The *lungs* were also seen as vehicles for the saints and the sages to ascend into heavens<sup>22</sup>. Thus, by the T'ang and the Song periods, most Chinese see the appearances of these *lungs* as sign of auspicious good omen for them and their community.

Secondly, the *lung* represented a *totem*, which binds the same tribe and community together as a unit. *Lung* as a totem started very early in Chinese cultural history. As one of the many primitive beliefs, the *lung* was used to name the particular tribal community; or taken to be an ancestor by members of the community and become the symbol of that community. The *Lung* as a totem led to other developments. Two of most important developments were that it should become a *religious lung* to be worshipped as a god; as well as a *political lung* with the status of an emperor. This second development has grew from strength to strength and became a norm after the Han Dynasty right through the T'ang and the Song periods<sup>23</sup>. Thus, the Chinese see *lung* as a symbol for their race representing the descendents of the Yean-huang and called themselves *lung-de-quan-ren*—the lineage of the dragon. The emperors as sons of the *lung*, become the defenders and providers of their subjects. The totem as the ancestor's symbol or as tribal protector, however, has become an object of worship for some in the Chinese communities.

The third usage is that, *lung* is used as a symbol for *life* and *vitality*. This is a popular view for many generations of literati in the Chinese society. The author witnessed a discussion by a group of Confucian scholars; emphasizing *lung* as symbol of *creativity*, which is the spirit of the T'ang's

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<sup>21</sup> These are the Fung-huang—the Chinese Phoenix; the Ki-ling—the Chinese unicorn; the Tortise and the Lung—the Chinese Dragon. The Chinese considered them as divine creatures. See Tu-er-mu, *Fung, Ling, Kui and Lung*.

<sup>22</sup> Liu Chi Xion, *Lung Yu Chong Guo Wen Hua*, pg. 116-130.

<sup>23</sup> Her Sing Liang, *Chang Lung Teng Kung*, Shen Ke, 1998, pg. 199-217.

and the Song's Confucianism. They take the symbol of the *lung* as a combination of the various symbolic parts of different domestic animals to form a powerful sign for *creativity*. Thus, the horns are those of a deer; the head is that of a horse; the body is that of the snake; and the claws are those of the rooster. These parts represent the life-force, creativity and vitality of various animals. One could judge the age of a deer by the growth of its horn. An experienced farmer could tell the age of a horse by looking at its teeth. Similarly, the craws reveal the youth of the rooster; while the snake enters a new phase of growth by shading its skin. Many Confucian scholars love the symbol of *lung* for it represents human vitality and creativity. Since the Nestorians had enjoyed successive Imperial patronage at the T'ang court as well as in their direct encounters with the T'ang literati. The choice and use of the symbol *lung* is conceivable.

#### THE SYMBOL OF THE LOTUS FLOWER

The lotus is of unique importance in Chinese symbolism due to Buddhist influence. In fact, the Buddhists have claimed the symbol of lotus from Brahmaism. There were references to the many-fold coloured lotus in ancient India. These are the green, the white, the red and the yellow lotus. The lotus flowers were linked to the creation of the universe in Brahmaism. Visnu, the maker of the great waters, produced a golden lotus from its navel side, on which sat the Brahma King. The Brahma King further gave birth to eight princes who then created the earth, the heaven, the human race and other myriad creatures<sup>24</sup>. But as a tradition critical of Brahmaism, especially on the notion of existence by creation; Buddhism did not place great emphasis on the lotus at the early stage. However, when the symbol of the lotus gained popularity among the masses, Buddhism started to embrace the symbol of the lotus. The lotus comes out of the mire but is not itself sullied and also, it is inwardly empty. The symbol of the lotus was used in the Buddhist texts<sup>25</sup>, and has since become the characteristic emblem of Buddhism<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> M Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, New American Library, 1974, pg. 190.

<sup>25</sup> One of the most important sutras, the *Miao-fa-lian-hua-ching*, translated into Chinese by Kumarajiva. The earliest translation took the transliteration title of *Saddharmapundarika*, 薩達磨芬陀利經

<sup>26</sup> Chiang Yi-wu, *Song-ru Yu Fo-chao*, Tong-Da, pg. 86-87



In the *Chung-a-han-ching*<sup>27</sup>, the twenty second chapters *Ching-pai-Lianhua-yu* speaks of the different colored lotus, grown in the water and out of water, yet untouched by water. Buddhism used the notion of “the lotus grows in a world full of changes, yet it is untainted or defiled by the world.” Then, the Mahayana Pure-land Buddhism based its teaching on the *Great Lotus-king*, taking it as the manifestation of the *fa-jie-zhen-ru*---the *buddha-nature* in all thing. The Buddhist *zhen-ru* is not seen as isolated from the secular world; but it is in the world and yet not defiled by the world. Hence, ‘the lotus coming out of the muddy pool and yet not tainted by the muddy water’ has become the emblem of Buddhism<sup>28</sup>. Again, the text continues to stress that the self-blossoming nature of the lotus is taken up by Buddhism to represent the *dhama-nature*, permeating in the sentient beings, for those who take the right path and are able to attest to it. The picture of the lotus blossom, offering itself totally, for the bees to freely absorb honey, is analogous to the *fa-jie-zhen-ru* giving itself to the bodhisattvas.

However, besides these Buddhist images of the symbol lotus, the Confucians also made a strong claim and use of the symbol of the lotus, for their own purpose. The great late T’ang/early Song Confucian master Chou-tun-yi shared his passion for the lotus in his famous poem *Ai-lian-shou*<sup>29</sup>. In it, he affirmed the common usage of the symbol—out of the muddy pool and yet untainted, that is, purity. However, he applied the notion of *chong-tong-wai-tzi* to it, to express the way of a *jun-tzi*, thus claiming the lotus as uniquely Confucian. Chou-tun-yi had boldly led the Neo-Confucian tradition to claim the use of the lotus by keeping the common usage shared by the Buddhists, and incorporating the Confucian’s idea of *chong-tong-wai-tzi* to the symbol<sup>30</sup>.

#### THE NESTORIAN MODEL OF RELIGIOUS ENCOUNTER

The Nestorian arrived in China when Buddhism was at its zenith, with several emperors as ardent Buddhists. It was quite natural that they took up matters addressed by the Buddhists, and tried to interpret things from the Buddhists’ perspective; and adopt Buddhist methods in translating

<sup>27</sup> *Chung-a-han-ching* (*the Madhyamagama*), T26.

<sup>28</sup> *Sgih-Ta Chen-lun-shi*, T31, pg. 264a

<sup>29</sup> Chou-Tun-yi, *Ai-lian-shou*, in *Gudian-jing-hua*, Shan-wu, 1997, pg. 100-103.

<sup>30</sup> Chiang Yi-wu, *Song-ru Yu Fo-chao*, Tong-Da, pg. 89-92.

Nestorian Scriptures. Buddhist mode of thought was after all the major *currency* of the day; and the methods and approaches developed throughout the centuries in translating foreign religious ideas into the T'ang Chinese were well established by the Buddhists. There was the straightforward borrowing of terms and ideas in great quantity from Taoism at the early stage; a method called *ke-yi*<sup>31</sup>. Later, translators like Kumarajiva and Tao-an, had worked hard for the emancipation of Buddhist ideas from Taoism<sup>32</sup>. The Chinese Buddhists in the late fourth and early fifth centuries developed the *upaya* method in the rhetorical structure of Madhyamika works, where unfavourable ideas were presented in a favorable way in essays<sup>33</sup>. Such works would seem Taoist to the Taoists and Buddhist to those who understand and gain aesthetic pleasure from them<sup>34</sup>. Some literati applied the 'nei' and 'wai' approach in their writings, when one, who is basically a Buddhist yet appears to be Confucian<sup>35</sup>. Others simply employed the *skilful* writing technique in order to survive amidst undesirable circumstances.

The Nestorians took up these matters and methods which had been the norms of the Buddhists and used them for their own ends. This is evident in their writings and the use of the Chinese symbols to introduce the Messiah to their readers. The belief of the Triune God, the Person and work of the Messiah, the Holy Spirit, the fallen human nature and the Salvation.... are evident in the Chinese Nestorian Documents<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> Ko-I, literary means 'matching the meaning'. A common method employed by expounders of the Buddhist teachings, to borrow terms from the traditional Chinese writings of Confucianism and Taoism and use these familiar terms when attempting to explain Buddhist terms that were thought to be similar meaning.

<sup>32</sup> Kumarajiva who came to Ch'ang in AD402, was the most important Indian translator of Sanskrit texts in China, where he decisively improved the method of translation for the Buddhist texts. Tao-an was the most important Chinese Buddhist scholar of the fourth century, who compiled the first catalog of Buddhist sutras, regulated the conferral of monastic names and established guidelines for the communal life of monks.

<sup>33</sup> R Robinson, *Early Madhyamika in India and China* (Wisconsin, 1967), p. 115ff

<sup>34</sup> Take Sheng-jui's preface to the *Middle Treatise* and the *Twelve Topic Treaties*; they combine elegant rhetoric and doctrinal precision in presenting Buddhist ideas. The prefaces can be read as Six Dynasties essays, or as Buddhist tracts, as Neo-Taoist discourse, or as an incisive attack on Buddhist-Taoist ideas. Its vocabulary is chosen from both the Buddhist sutras and the Taoist *hsuan-hsueh* writings.

<sup>35</sup> T. H. Barrett, *Dismantling the Tao*, in SOAS Buddhist Forum, 1990.

<sup>36</sup> H. T. Lau, *The Nestorianism of the T'ang Dynasty: Authentic? Syncretic?* MA Dissertation, SOAS, University of London.

The symbol of the lotus flower has been chosen to introduce the Gospel of the Cross of Jesus Christ. Chou-Tun-yi led Song Neo-Confucians to claim the use of the lotus, by keeping the common ground and applying the Neo-Confucian's idea of *chong-tong-wai-tzi* to the symbol; claiming the symbol of lotus to be uniquely theirs. Ching-cheng tried to do the same in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, about two centuries before Chou-Tun-yi.

It is evident that the Scholars in T'ang society knew clearly that the Nestorians were preaching a new message, as the eminent monk Yuan-chao of the Tsi-ming Temple commented: "... A Buddhist monastery and a temple of Ta-ch'in differ in customs and in their religious practices, Ching-ching should preach the teaching of the Messiah and the Buddhist monk must make known the message of Buddhist Sutra.... Truth and error are not the same, just like the Ching River and the Wei River are not alike...."<sup>37</sup> Yuan-chao saw clearly the uniqueness of the Nestorian message and the Ching-ching missionary position<sup>38</sup>.

With the re-discovery of the Ta-Ch'in pagoda<sup>39</sup>, a few miles from the great Taoist Center—Lou Guan Tai, it reveals the most favourable status of the Nestorians at the T'ang court. Lou Guan Tai was the site declared as the Imperial Ancestral Temple by AD630. It was alleged to be the site where Lao Zi wrote his book of *Tao Te Ching*, before he left the county through the Pass for the West eventually. The fact that the Nestorians were granted the permission to build a 'Church building' right at the doorstep of the Taoist's sacred centre, shows that the Nestorians must have gained great favour at the Imperial Court and made much inroads into the T'ang higher society.

#### MAKING CHRISTIANITY CHINESE

Foster made a very perceptive observation more than half a century ago in his comparison of the work of the Nestorians and that of Justin Martyr

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<sup>37</sup> Yuan-chao, *Ta Tang Zhen-yuan-si-Kai-Yuan-Shi-chao-lu*, T55, pg. 748.

<sup>38</sup> Yuan-chao was an eminent monk at Tsi-ming Temple in T'ang capital city. Apart from the Buddhist sutras, he was also well-versed in the Chinese Classics. He was one of the important translators of Buddhist texts in T'ang China, who has written some eighteen titles on Buddhist Chronicles. It is interesting to note of Yuan-chao's criticism of Ching-ching's involvement in the translation of the Buddhist *Sstparamita Sutra*, with a Indian Buddhist monk named Prajna.

<sup>39</sup> M. Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras* (Ballantine Wellspring, 2001), pg. 13-38.

and Clement of Alexandria. He says, “Not only was this missionary (Ching-cheng) endeavouring to make Chinese people Christian he laboured also to make Christianity, in a worthy sense, Chinese. Underneath the strange terminology are quotations from the Bible and ideas, which came from the great Fathers of the Christian Church. Borrowing from non-Christian sources is but the eastern counterpart of the debt owed by the Church in the West to Greek philosophy”<sup>40</sup>. The Nestorians were not pluralists who practised the belief of *universalism*, but rather, theirs is the model of *particularism*; a new synthesis of *exclusivism* and *inclusivism*. For them, the Gospel of the Cross of Jesus Christ is the normal and preferred path to God, as the Cross takes the central position in the design of the Nestorian symbol. But they also believed in natural revelation; that all revelations of truth come from Christ—the Word which created all things. They affirmed that there are ‘connects’ as well as ‘disconnects’ between Christianity and other religions. To the Nestorians, any religion that grasps the truth through natural revelation by the Universal Christ, can also be connected with the truth given through special revelation. However, the special revelation of the Historical Jesus—the Word that became flesh, is uniquely Christian.

There are good reasons for the decline of Nestorianism in China: the over-dependence on Imperial favour; their negligence of the people in the market place; the over use of Buddhist and Taoist terms etc... However, the Nestorians had demonstrated how they advanced the communication of their message to the T’ang literati. Although they bore a *synthetic* outlook which had led to their condemnation by critics as deviating from the Catholic doctrine, and the Nestorians were being treated with contempt as syncretists. However, they were the true syncretists in the sense of the word. They have indeed taken courage to communicate the message of the Cross of Christ Jesus to the upper class of the T’ang society.

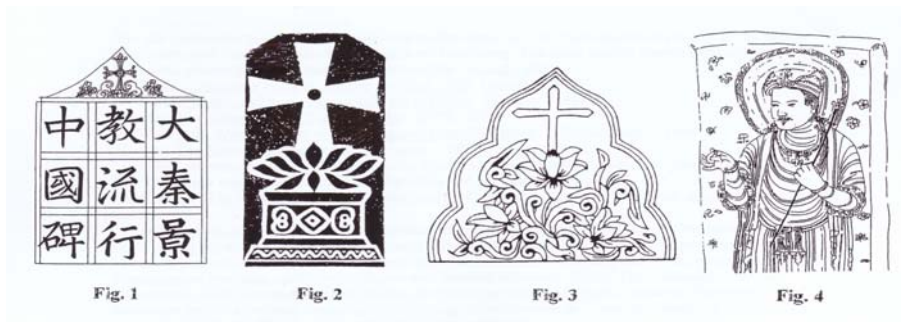
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<sup>40</sup> J Foster, *The Church of the T’ang Dynasty*, SPCK, 1939, pg. 112-113.

**Transliteration Table:**

<i>An-lu-san</i>	安禄山
<i>Ai-lina-shuo</i>	《爱莲说》
<i>Alopen</i>	阿罗本
<i>Chang-an</i>	长安
<i>Ching-cheng</i>	景曾
<i>Chih-xuan-an-lo-ching</i>	《志玄安乐经》
<i>Chang-a-han-ching</i>	《中阿含经》
<i>Chong-tong-wai-tzi</i>	中通外直
<i>Ch'uan-zhou</i>	泉州
<i>Dai-tsung</i>	代宗
<i>De-tsung</i>	德宗
<i>Fa-jie-zhen-ru</i>	法界真如
<i>Guo-zi-yi</i>	郭子仪
<i>Gao-tsung</i>	高宗
<i>Gudian-jing-hua</i>	《古典精华》
<i>Hsu-ting-mi-shih-so-ching</i>	《序厅迷诗所经》
<i>I-shen-lun</i>	《一神论》
<i>I-t'ien-lun-ti-I</i>	《一天论第一》
<i>Jun-zi</i>	君子
<i>Ke-yi</i>	考义
<i>Lao-zi</i>	老子
<i>Lin-zhao-en</i>	林兆恩
<i>Lou-guan-tai</i>	楼观台
<i>Lung</i>	龙
<i>Miao-fa-lian-hua-ching</i>	《妙法莲花经》
<i>Nei</i>	内
<i>Saddharmapundarika</i>	薩達磨芬陀利經
<i>Sgih-Ta-Chen-lun-shi</i>	攝大乘論釋
<i>Sheng-li</i>	圣历
<i>Shi-tusn-pu-shih-lun-ti-san</i>	《世尊布施论第三》

<i>Song-ru Yu Fo-chao</i>	《宋儒与佛教》
<i>Su-tsung</i>	苏宗
<i>Tao-an</i>	道安
<i>Tao-te-ching</i>	《道德经》
<i>Ta-Tang-Zhen-yuan-xu-kai-yuan-shi-chao-lu</i>	
《大唐贞元续开元释教录》	
<i>Ta-ch'in-ching-chao-liu-shing-chong-kuo-pi</i>	《大秦景教流行
中国碑》	
<i>Ta-ch'in-ching-chao-xuan-yuan-pun-ching</i>	《大秦景教宣元
本经》	
<i>Ta-ch'in-ching-chao-sun-wei-meng-to-tsan</i>	《大秦景教三威
蒙度赞》	
<i>T'ang-hui-yao</i>	《唐会要》
<i>T'ai-tsung</i>	太宗
<i>T'sin-t'ang-su</i>	《新唐书》
<i>Tsun-ching</i>	《尊经》
<i>Tun-huang</i>	敦煌
<i>T'zi-chi-tung-jien</i>	《资治通鉴》
<i>Wai</i>	外
<i>Xi'an-fu</i>	西安府
<i>Xi-ming-si</i>	西明寺
<i>X'uan-tsung</i>	玄宗
<i>Xi'an</i>	西安
<i>Yuan</i>	元
<i>Yuan-zhao</i>	圆照
<i>Yu-ti-er</i>	《喻第二》
<i>Zhen-guang</i>	贞观
<i>Zhen-yuan-Tsi-Ting-shi-chao-mu-lu</i>	《贞元新订释教目录》
<i>Zhou-dun-yi</i>	周敦颐



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