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Publication Date

2021

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Barbara

The Invention of the Early Tang Bible

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Asian Studies

by

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September 2021

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June 2021

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by

Yuyu Zhang

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of my M.A. study at UCSB is approaching. I am indebted to my teachers, colleagues, and family, who have been with me on this journey that has meant so much to me.

My gratitude goes first to my advisors, Thomas Mazanec and Dominic Steavu. All my academic progress could not be achieved without their thorough training and generous support. Thomas Mazanec has kept me in the right direction of scholarship, exposed to extensive scopes of religious literature and alternative voices across time and space. His deep empathy is as much as his learning that inspires me. Dominic Steavu first introduced me to Nestorian manuscripts discovered in Dunhuang, shared his enthusiasm and expertise, and intrigued me to restudy the fascinating manuscript of *Xu ting mishisuo jing*. I benefited immensely from his careful and critical reading of my draft.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Xiaorong Li, Katherine Saltzman-Li, Peter Sturman. I thank Xiaorong Li for her warmest encouragement, especially for taking on the responsibility of being my committee member and giving helpful comments on my research. Katherine Saltzman-Li, my first seminar teacher, helped build my initial confidence during the most challenging time. Peter Sturman ushered me into Chan paintings of Bada Shanren in my last seminar, which kept me soul-refreshed till the last.

I owe particular debts of gratitude to Alyson Alexander and teachers of Chinese and Japanese language programs. Alyson Alexander went out of her way to offer me all kinds of help. I thank Daoxiong Guan, Chen-Chuan Hsu, and Shu-Chuan Chen for their care and

trust. To Japanese teachers Sugawara Hiroko and Akiyo Cantrell, I owe all their constant encouragement to my Japanese learning.

I feel fortunate to have spent the last two and a half years at UCSB with many brilliant young minds. I am indebted to the camaraderie of Sophia Shi, Wandu Wang, Susie Wu, Ursula Deser Friedman, Patrick Fryberger, Linshan Jiang, and Soohyun Lee, who shared their insights with me and gave valuable advice on my papers. I also thank Zachary Belgum and Leah Ku for providing me precious friendship.

I would like to thank Zhengmao Ni, my mentor in China, who set a model for me of taking learning as a lifelong journey.

Finally, boundless gratitude goes to my family. With my daughters Harbor and Sophie, and my husband Zhiwei Huang by my side, I dare live recklessly. Whenever I need any support, my two younger sisters Ying Li and Yi Li are always there. This thesis is dedicated to my parents Ciyu Li and Shiqing Zhang.

ABSTRACT

The Invention of the Early Tang Bible

by

Yuyu Zhang

The manuscript of *Xu ting mishisuo jing* 序聽迷詩所經 (the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor) is thought to be the oldest Nestorian artifact produced in China. It conveys valuable information about the earliest contact between Nestorian Christianity and Central China. However, current transcriptions of this text are not entirely faithful to the original. The English translations fail to situate Chinese terminologies abounding in this text in their textual, historical, and religious contexts, thus misreading the original text in varying degrees. This thesis revisits "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor," offers a new transcription and English translation, and rereads the interreligious relationships reflected in this text. It takes two approaches as methodology. First of all, it gives a close rereading of the interreligious content in this text and discusses the different responses of early Nestorians to Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. Second, it adopts the perspective of manuscript studies, analyzing some details of the manuscript to corroborate the arguments with the aid of the newly released color photocopy of the manuscript. This thesis's analysis shows that "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor" is a theological invention by early Nestorians to defend monotheism in a multipolar Chinese religious landscape. The interreligious relationships reflected in this text reveal different attitudes of early Nestorians

toward Chinese religions and thought, namely, suppressing Buddhism, extolling Daoism, and connecting with Confucianism. According to the interreligious relations and the writing details, this thesis dates the manuscript to the reign of Emperor Taizong 太宗.

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Introduction

In the year 635, Aluoben 阿羅本, the first known Nestorian missionary, led a mission from Persia to Chang'an 長安, initiating Christianity's introduction into Central China. The pioneers of Nestorianism were treated with decorum and were authorized by the Tang imperial court to establish the first Nestorian church three years after they arrived in Chang'an. Over the next two centuries, Nestorianism gradually took root in China and later was known as "the Luminous Religion" (Jingjiao 景教). However, its prosperity was short-lived. In 844, Nestorianism was involved in a catastrophe—Huichang Persecution, which aimed to annihilate foreign influences on the Tang empire and became a crushing blow to all foreign religions. Hence, the first episode of Christianity's spread to China ended with the retreat of Nestorianism to the frontier. Nevertheless, this tragic episode marks the outset of the contact between Christianity and Central China. It, therefore, bears a particular significance for medieval religious history and the history of sino-western cultural exchange. Thankfully, Nestorianism has left visible tracks in China, enabling researchers to follow and decipher. The material remains of Nestorianism are comprised of two steles excavated in Xi'an and Luoyang and six manuscripts discovered in the Mogao caves at Dunhuang, which constitute the most significant primary sources for Nestorianism study.

Among these sources, the manuscript of "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor"¹ (*Xu ting mishisuo jing* 序聽迷詩所經) is thought to be the oldest Nestorian artifact. This manuscript is now preserved in Japan. P.Y. Saeki claimed that Takakusu Junjirō

¹ In this thesis, I translate the title of the manuscript *Xu ting mishisuo jing* 序聽迷詩所經 into "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor." I will elaborate my understanding of the title in the following section.

purchased it from a Chinese in 1922 and brought it back to Japan.² Later, it was in the possession of Tōru. Haneda 羽田亨. In 1931, Haneda publicized the black-and-white photocopy of this manuscript and "Discourse On One God" (*Isshinron* 一神論), another Nestorian manuscript with the same handwriting as the former.³ Though it is still hard to do a nuanced and deep reading of the text with this rough copy, the document soon drew researchers' attention and kindled a new wave of research. In 2012, the color photocopy of this text appeared for the first time in *Private Dunhuang Collections* (*Tonkō hikyū* 敦煌秘笈) published by Kyōu shōku 杏雨書屋, included in the sixth volume, cataloged under the pressmark Yu 羽 459.⁴

The color photocopy's publication is crucial in light of the greater number of manuscript details it preserves. The manuscript contains 2,845 characters, written in one hundred and seventy lines without punctuation. At the end of the text are seven blank lines, with no end title, colophon, and seal found. The content of the last sentence implicates that the text is incomplete. As for the reason of incompleteness, the original Chinese holder informed Takakuso that the last part of this manuscript was cut out and discarded due to being worn. The later holder Haneda was suspicious of this claim and speculated that the original Chinese holder probably split the manuscript into two parts for sale.⁵ In terms of format, according to the description of *Private Dunhuang Collections*, the manuscript was copied on "hemp paper

² Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*. 2nd ed., 115.

³ Haneda, *Isshinron kan san·Jochō meishishokyō ikkan*.

⁴ Kyōu Shōku, *Tonkō hikyū*, Eihen satsu, vol. 6 敦煌秘笈・影片冊・六 (Private Dunhuang Collections, vol.6), 83-87.

⁵ Drake, "Nestorian Literature of the T'ang Dynasty," 678.

of top quality" (*Jōshitsu mashi* 上質麻紙) and was very well written in standard script (*kaisho* 楷書).⁶ The high quality of paper and calligraphy corresponds with the standard of copying Buddhist canons in the Tang period. In terms of content, it could be read as two parts. The first part depicts the supremacy of the Celestial Worthy (Tianzun 天尊, referring to God), his creation process as well as his principle, the Ten Vows (*shiyuan* 十願). The last part recounts Jesus' birth, baptism, preaching, crucifixion, and resurrection.

"The Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor," thought to be the earliest Nestorian artifact produced in China, could be a window onto the earliest stage of contact between the monotheistic Nestorianism and a multipolar Chinese religious landscape. One of the most striking features of "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor" is the extensive use of Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian terms and doctrines. However, the Chinese undertones in the original text have been more or less misread, abated, even muffled in current English translations. Consequently, western scholars who have to depend on others' translations to further their researches cannot see a panorama of the religious contact presented by the original text. Moreover, the most recent English translation was published in 2002, before the photocopy of "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor" was released, so it does not refer to the latest studies produced in the wake of the photocopy's publication.⁷ Thus, a new English translation is called for which incorporates these insights and renders the abstruse text in a readable but faithful manner. To that end, a new transcription needs to be done first.

⁶ Kyōu Shōku, *Tonkō hikyū*, vol. 6, 83.

⁷ Tang Li, *A study of the history of Nestorian Christianity in China and its literature in Chinese: Together with a new English translation of the Dunhuang Nestorian documents*, 145-156.

This thesis revisits "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor" and provides a new transcription and English translation based on the newly published photocopy, clarifying obscure sentences that other versions might have overlooked or failed to explain clearly, highlighting the Chinese religious undertones in the original text. Then, it zooms in specifically on the interreligious relationships in "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor." Based on the analysis of the interreligious content and the details of the manuscript, it will position this text in its Tang context to substantiate the assumption concerning this text's dating.

1. Current Transcriptions and English Translations

Transcription and translation lay the groundwork for studying "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor," and quite a few scholars contributed to this fundamental task. There are ten representative versions concerning transcription, three of them appearing after the color photocopy's publication.⁸ Of these, Nie Zhijun's 聶志軍 transcription is the most thorough and meticulous. Nevertheless, the downside to all versions is that they replaced many characters of popular form such as the vulgar characters (*sutizi* 俗體字) and the variant characters (*yitizi* 異體字) with simple interchangeable ones. For example, Nie Zhijun changed *jie* 戒 to *jie* 戒. Wang Lanping 王蘭平 replaced *er* 尔 with *er* 尔. In Xu Xiaohong's 徐曉鴻 version, all the characters of *sha* 煞 in the original text have been standardized as

⁸ For the ten versions of transcription, see Haneda, *Haneda hakushi shigaku ronbunshū. Gekan, Gengo-shūkyō hen*, 242-248; Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China. 2nd ed.*, 13-29; Gong Tianmin, *Tangchao jidujiao zhi yanjiu*, 110-122; Luo Xianglin, *Tang yuan erdai zhi jingjiao*, 207-212; Jiang Wenhan, *Zhongguo gudai jidujiao ji kaifeng youtairen*, 73-78; Weng Shaojun, *Hanyu jingjiao wendian quanshi*; Nie Zhijun, *Tangdai jingjiao wenxian ciyu yanjiu*, 330-337; Wu Changxing, "Lun Jingjiao 'Xuting mishisuo jing' zhong zhi shangdi, jidu yu jiushi sixiang," 34-46; Wang Lanping, "Ribei xingyu shuwu cang tangdai dunhuang jingjiao xieben 'Xuting mishisuo jing' shikao," 30-34; Xu Xiaohong, "Xuting mishisuo jing shiyi."

sha 殺. Though the changes do not fundamentally alter the original meaning and even facilitate the reading for the convenience of modern readers, it is difficult to say that they are entirely faithful or accurate. Moreover, from the perspective of the manuscript studies, the variant forms of characters' writing may reveal vital information such as authenticity, date, scribe. Thus, "the interpretation of popular words and expressions is a task that has been continuously in the focus of attention of scholars working on the linguistic aspects of Dunhuang studies."⁹ In this light, a transcription retaining the original written forms of characters will help us better understand the text.

Furthermore, since this manuscript is widely recognized as the most incomprehensible of Nestorian texts, scholars have held different opinions about sentence breaks and understanding; no version has been universally accepted. Take the case of line 78—79, a sentence in which the Buddha is mentioned: "*Xian qian zhongsheng li zhutian fo wei fo shouku zhili tiandi*" (先遣衆生礼諸天佛為仏受苦置立天地). All modern transcribers understand this to be three clauses but disagree about where they break. Nie Zhijun punctuated it with the first break after *fo* and the second after *ku* (先遣衆生礼諸天佛, 為仏受苦, 置立天地), while Gong Tianmin 龔天民 placed the first break one character earlier, after *tian*, and the second two characters later, after *li* (先遣衆生礼諸天, 佛為仏受苦置立, 天地). Wang Lanping, by contrast, agrees with Saeki and Gong on the first break, but with Nie on the second (先遣衆生礼諸天, 佛為仏受苦, 置立天地). Their different understandings of this single sentence result in various interpretations. According to Nie's

⁹ Rong Xinjiang, Imre Galambos(tran), *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, 396.

understanding, this sentence can be translated into "at first, [the Celestial Worthy] allows sentient beings to pay reverence to devas and Buddhas. As the Buddhas are willing to suffer for sentient beings, they are set up between heaven and earth." Gong's understanding leads to a different interpretation: "at first, [the Celestial Worthy] allows sentient beings to pay reverence to devas. Buddhas were set up for the sake of Buddhas' suffering between heaven and earth." Wang's rendering brings up another possible explanation: "at first, [the Celestial Worthy] allows sentient beings to pay reverence to devas. Buddhas suffer for Buddhas, being set up between heaven and earth." Not only that, most Buddha-related sentences are dealt with in different manners, and some make little sense, being they are taken out of context; even in the same work, there is no consistency in the understanding of the Buddha. However, those Buddha-related sentences may hold some vital clues to early Nestorian attitudes toward Buddhism, revealing Nestorianism's early attempts to compete with Buddhism by improving Nestorian theology. Therefore, it is essential to re-transcribe the text to clarify the still confused interpretation of Buddhas by closely reading all Buddha-related sentences in context.

The obscurity of transcriptions also caused the corresponding translations to be unclear. Until now, three complete translation versions have been published.¹⁰ Saeki, the first English translation contributor, admitted that he was puzzled about this perplexing text, primarily the meanings of Chinese religious terms, and doubted that anyone could decipher the text in detail. He, along with Haneda, insisted that in this text, the terms Fo and Tianzun are

¹⁰ Besides Tang Li, Saeki and Palmer provided the other two English translations: Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*. 2nd ed., 125-160. Martin Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity*, 159-168.

translational counterparts, both referring to God.¹¹ He also considered the term Yishen (One God 一神) employed in another manuscript Discourse On One God (*Yishenlun* 一神論) that followed, a better choice than Fo to designate God.¹² However, Saeki found a weakness in this interpretation: if Fo and Tianzun both refer to God, many sentences containing these two terms can hardly be elucidated, and some even seem to be utterly contradictory. Saeki finally explained that this text employs Chinese religious terminologies in a casual and obscure manner. Just as confused as Saeki was A. C. Moule, another pioneering scholar in the study of Nestorianism. He evaded the puzzling part full of Chinese religious terminologies and ended up only translating part of the text, from line 114 to the end: "From line 114 onwards, a more consecutive translation or paraphrase is attempted, but even as a paraphrase, it is largely and necessarily guesswork."¹³ Gong Tianmin tried to differentiate the use of Fo and Zhufo 諸佛 (Buddhas), claiming that only the former designated God while the latter referred to all other deities. Though slightly revising Saeki's interpretation, he still took the same approach of looking for counterparts in the Bible. He drew a similar conclusion that the intention of the early Nestorianism's using Buddha to designate God is to "ingratiate itself with Tang emperor and facilitate commoners' understanding of the new teaching."¹⁴ Despite how awkward and unjustifiable it may be to put it in context, the

¹¹ Gong Tianmin, *Tangchao jidujiao zhi yanjiu*, 53-55.

¹² Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*. 2nd ed., 119.

¹³ Moule, *Christians in China before the Year 1550*, 60-64.

¹⁴ Gong, *Tangchao jidujiao zhi yanjiu*, 55-57.

understanding that equates the Buddha in this text with God has been circulating in the literature, cited as a dependable and authoritative argument.¹⁵

Neither of the other two versions is satisfactory in terms of their translations of Chinese terminologies. Palmer gave credit to the influence of Chinese religions and thought on "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor," yet his version barely clarified the Chinese elements and did not stand up to philological scrutiny. For example, when translating "*Xian qian zhongsheng li zhutian fo wei fo shouku*" (先遣衆生礼諸天佛為仏受苦), his version condensed the whole sentence into "Buddha creates Buddha's own bitterness and suffering."¹⁶ His rendering is as hard to understand as the original, doing nothing to help clarify the role of the Buddha. Moreover, most of his translations are not contextualized with critical apparatus, including notes, commentary, or analysis. Compared with Palmer's, Tang's translation is complete and grammatically faithful to the original text. Nevertheless, some translations seem erroneous, as Tang translated them without textual or religious contextualization. A single representative example will suffice. Tang translated the following sentence, "*Zaitian jie zhufu wei ci fengliu zhuan shijian*" (在天皆諸佛為此風流轉世間) as "For this, all the Buddhas toured around all the famous places in the world in admiration."¹⁷ Tang incorrectly took *fengliu* 風流 as a commonly used compound word in classical Chinese, which means "distinguished and admirable." In this context, *feng* 風 refers

¹⁵ See Vladimir Liščák, "Early Chinese Christianity in the Tang Empire: On the Crossroads of Two Cultures," 103-125. Jianqiang Sun, "The Earliest Statement of Christian Faith in China? A Critique of the Conventional Chronology of The Messiah Sutra and On One God," 145.

¹⁶ Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity*, 163.

¹⁷ Tang, *A study of the history of Nestorian Christianity in China and its literature in Chinese: Together with a new English translation of the Dunhuang Nestorian documents*, 146.

to the wind, the Holy Spirit; thus, it should be more logically accurate to translate *fengliu* as "the flow of the wind." Therefore, none of the current translations help elucidate the narratives concerning the Buddha in the original text: whom does the Buddha refer to? What is the connection between the Celestial Worthy and the Buddha? Why does this text mention the Buddha? It would be hasty to conclude that Early Nestorians borrowed the term of the Buddha to cater to the Tang emperor and Chinese audience without understanding and clarifying the above questions. It is essential to revisit the original text, situate the Chinese terminologies, and understand them in their textual, historical, and religious contexts.

Another shortcoming of the current translations is that in contrast to the original text, they more or less downplayed Chinese elements, attenuated Chinese tones abounding in the original, failing to demonstrate to Western scholars a complete picture of the early Sino-Christian contact. Saeki, a devout Christian, offered a Christianized English version by somewhat distorting the original meaning. The quite obvious evidence is his interpretation of this text's title. Saeki insisted that this text is an unsatisfactory translation of the Syriac Bible.¹⁸ Therefore, he strove to correlate this text's terms with Biblical terms, just like his association of Buddha with God. To make it more biblical, Saeki even distorted the title. He followed and furthered Haneda's conclusion that four out of six characters of *Xu ting mishisuo jing* 序聽迷詩所經 were miswritten by the scribe, and the correct title should be *Xucong Mishihe Jing* 序聰彌師訶經 (Jesus Messiah Sutra).¹⁹ Saeki insistingly claimed that Xucong "can correctly be identified with the Chinese sound 'Ye-su' 耶穌 (Jesus) of the Tang dynasty." Thus, "the title, 'the Hsu-ting Messiah Sutra' means no other than Jesus-Messiah

¹⁸ Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*. 2nd ed., 119.

¹⁹ Haneda, *Haneda hakushi shigaku ronbunshū. Gekan, Gengo-shūkyō hen*, 242-248.

Sutra."²⁰ Some scholars questioned and challenged their views. Wu Changxing 吳昶興 examined the Syriac phonetics and understood the title to mean "the Sutra of the Righteous One and the Intercessor" (*Yizhe zhongbao jing* 義者中保經). He proposes that in Syriac, the Intercessor is pronounced as *metsaya*, similar to the Middle Chinese pronunciation of *mishisuo* 迷詩所 (MC: *mej-syi-srjoX*). Though still taking this text as a sutra, he justified that the title was not incorrectly written. There were also a few other scholars who thought outside the box. In 1935, F. S. Drake introduced this text as "A Preface to the Hearing of the Messiah Sutra."²¹ Drake did not deem the title a scribal error; he regarded the text as a "preface." Xiang Bingguang 項秉光 held a similar view as Drake. He claimed that "the text was neither a direct translation from the original nor a collection of translations, but a record of sermons by the Nestorian clergies."²² Both Drake and Xiang preferred the common usage of *xu* 序 in classical Chinese, which refers to preface, record, offering a more contextual and sound interpretation.

However, the views of Saeki and Haneda still prevailed and profoundly impacted researchers. Palmer and Tang both titled their translations "sutra," and many scholars accepted the two Japanese scholars' assumptions unquestioningly.²³ More unexpectedly, this assumption added fuel to the forgery theory, which threw doubt on the authenticity of "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor." Lin Wushu proposed the forgery theory 林

²⁰ Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*. 2nd ed., 147.

²¹ Drake, "Nestorian Literature of the T'ang Dynasty." 677-681.

²² Xiang, "Dunhuang xiejuan 'Xu ting mishisuo jing' xieben kao," 186.

²³ See Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia: Beginnings to 1500*, 2nd edition, 307; Ian Gillman, Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, *Christianity in Asia Before 1500*, 275.

悟殊 and one of his main arguments is that an authentic religious text should not have miswritten a sutra's title.²⁴

From the perspective of manuscript studies, the conjecture about the miswritten title does not hold water. We may take a close look at the title and the first sentence following the title.

Xu ting mishisuo jing yijuan

序聽迷詩所經一卷

Ershi Mishihe shuoTianzun xusuofa yun

爾時彌師訶說天尊序娑法雲

In the first sentence, immediately following the title, comes the term Mishihe 彌師訶 (Messiah), an almost fixed and consistent translation for "Messiah" throughout the entire text (except in line 124, where it was miswritten as Mishihe 迷師訶). It is hardly justifiable that the scribe would have written a term wrong in the title and then write the same term correctly in the following sentence without noticing the former mistake. Also, it is unlikely that a scribe could misspell all three characters of a term, let alone one that carries the most weight to Nestorianism (the scribe only once miswrote the term Mishihe 彌師訶, and only one character was miswritten). Moreover, the newly released photocopy provides more details that might attest to this manuscript's significance. Hemp paper of top quality was scarce in the Tang period and was primarily used for manuscripts written in Chang'an. The manuscript looks yellow-colored since "for manuscripts that were important, before writing on it, the paper had to be dyed yellow by soaking it in a huangbo 黃檗 (Phellodendron) solution, which acted as an insecticide. All of the finely copied manuscripts from the Six

²⁴ See Lin, *Tangdai Jingjiao zai yanjiu*, 186-228. The forgery theory has never been proved by reliable evidence, and the majority of scholars disagree with this theory. Wang Lanping's response to the forgery theory is quite persuasive. See Wang, *Tangdai Dunhuang hanwen Jingjiao xiejing yanjiu*, 54-123.

Dynasties and the Sui and Tang periods are yellow, which is a result of having been dyed with huangbo."²⁵ In terms of calligraphy, this manuscript's calligraphy was very highly regarded by Chinese historian Chen Yuan 陳垣: "Recently, I saw a scripture titled *Xu ting mishisuo jing*. I have seen thousands of scriptures and the calligraphic beauty of this one is one of the best."²⁶ Luo Xianglin 羅香林 identified the calligraphy of this text as being in the style of the regular script of Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 (596-658).²⁷ "In the early years of the Tang, under the influence of great calligraphers such as Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558-638), Chu Suiliang and Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557-641), calligraphy gradually evolved towards the standard Tang scribal hand... The standard sutras of the early Tang are all written in the regular kai script."²⁸ Though it is risky to date the manuscript based on calligraphy, this manuscript's accomplished handwriting, which was not inferior to any court sutra, is at least a reflection of the scribe's professionalism.

Moreover, the vulgar character forms employed in this text might provide vital information concerning the scribe and perhaps the text's authenticity. According to Zhang Yongquan's 張湧泉 *Dunhuang suzi Yanjiu* 敦煌俗字研究, many of the vulgar character forms in Dunhuang manuscripts took form in the process of copying Buddhist sutras, stemming from the scribes' writing habits, even mistakes. As time passed, they were inherited by scribes of later sutras and became commonly used vulgar character forms in copied sutras. In this text, a telling testimony to the scribe's professionalism is that the scribe

²⁵ Rong Xinjiang, Imre Galambos (tran), *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, 484-485.

²⁶ Chen, *Chen Yuan xueshu lunwen ji*, 98.

²⁷ Luo, *Tang yuan erdai zhi jingjiao*, 32.

²⁸ Rong Xinjiang, Imre Galambos (tran), *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, 493-495.

was well versed in all vulgar character forms used in copied sutras, such as *yu* 於, *e* 惡, *liu* 留, *chen* 疔, *chu* 處, *xiao* 嘆, and *sha* 煞.²⁹ The above writing forms originated from and mainly appeared in Dunhuang manuscripts of Buddhist sutras; some were not passed down to later scribal traditions. Besides, the scribe also used many other types of vulgar character forms prevalent in the Dunhuang manuscripts. Therefore, the vulgar character forms used in this text might provide crucial evidence from a linguistic perspective to refute Lin's forgery theory. It would be unlikely that a man in the early twentieth century was able to write all vulgar character forms that were only preserved in Dunhuang manuscripts, and some of them even got lost later because, since the early twentieth century, Dunhuang manuscripts had been scattered around the world and few were published. Calligraphy could be imitated, yet the vulgar character forms never seen and written by modern people could not be faked. Lastly, the marks in this text reveal the scribe's meticulousness as well. From start to finish, the scribe strictly observed the rule of reverence marks (*jingkong* 敬空); thirteen spaces are left blank before the words Shengshang 聖上 (Your Majesty) and Shengdi 聖帝 (Holy Emperor). It is hard to believe that a professional scribe with such attention to detail would initially get the title of a religious text wrong.

The erroneous understanding of some Chinese terminologies and their tendency to Christianize *Xu ting mishisuo jing* led Saeki and Haneda to a problematic interpretation. Unfortunately, quite a few subsequent studies relied too much on their predecessors' perspectives and repeated some of their errors. Therefore, a large part of the picture of the early contact between Nestorianism and Central China might still be shrouded in misinformation. In this thesis, I regard the nature of this text as a record of hearing a sutra

²⁹ Zhang, *Dunhuang suzi yanjiu*, 359, 380, 411, 430, 452, 477, 557.

rather than a sutra translated from the Syriac Bible. Thus, I read this text not only in a Christian context. Instead, I understand the abundant Chinese elements on their own, not as translational counterparts but as parts of a theological invention created by early Nestorians to respond to Chinese religions and thought. In this significant prologue, early Nestorians focused on addressing an unavoidable fundamental problem to pave the way for justifying the supremacy of a monotheistic God in a multireligious Chinese environment. The interreligious relationships in "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor" are multi-layered.

2. Rereading Interreligious Relationships in "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor."

In opposition to the interpretation of the Buddha as God, I argue that the Buddha and Buddhas in this text represent nothing other than their own Buddhist identities—the awakened who have attained the perfect wisdom in Buddhism, either dwelling in the buddha-land or being reincarnated into the world to save sentient beings. Likewise, other Chinese terms such as *shen* (神 deity), *zhutian* (諸天 devas), *Shengshang* (聖上 Your Majesty), and *wenren* (文人 literate ancestors) keep their original connotations as well. However, the Celestial Worthy, the typical Daoist terminology, is a circumlocution consistently employed to designate God in this text. Besides, *feng* 風 (the wind) refers to the Holy Spirit. At the very beginning, the text distinguishes between the Celestial Worthy and Buddhas and other creatures:

"Of all the Buddhas and non-humans, deities [in charge] of evaluations, Arhats, who has ever seen the Celestial Worthy? As for sentient beings, no one can see the Celestial Worthy.

諸佛及非人平章天阿羅漢。誰見天尊？在於衆生。無人得見天尊。"³⁰

Here is the first appearance of the term "Buddhas" in this text, and it comes straight to the point that even Buddhas cannot see the Celestial Worthy. However, Saeki's translation of the same sentence misread the term from the very beginning: "who could ever see all the Buddhas as well as Kinnaras and the Superintending-devas (?Yama) and Arahants? Likewise, no human being has ever seen the Lord of Heaven abiding with people."³¹ He thought that the text uses Buddhas as an analogy to God, thus setting the wrong tone for the rest of his reading and translation.

The new English translation suggests this text's usage of Chinese religious and theoretical terminologies is logically consistent and clear, although the clarity is overshadowed by the irregularity of vocabularies and grammar throughout the text. We can reread Nestorian theology and interreligious content in "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor" through these Chinese religious terminologies. The reason for a rereading is that scholars have read this part too broadly and one-sidedly. It is untenable to judge that the early Nestorians were influenced by Chinese religions and thought because they borrowed Chinese terminologies. It is unreasonable to conclude that this text's massive Buddhist loans indicated that the early Nestorians were significantly too attached to Buddhism, thus deformed at the beginning of its entry into China.³² As Zurcher pointed out, "influence" and "borrowing" both are vague terms. "At least, for the purpose of analysis, we have to

³⁰ Lines 4—6.

³¹ Saeki, "The Hsu-T'ing Mi-shi-so Sutra, or Jesus-Messiah-Sutra," 31.

³² In his article, Chen Yihai regarded the employment of many Buddhist terms in this text as a sign of the deformation of early Nestorian theology. See Chen, "Bianlexing de fuyin: tangdai jingjiao yanjiu zhi er," 73-78.

distinguish various types or levels of borrowing."³³ In addition, "Chinese religions and thought" seems to be a too general umbrella term under which we get used to dealing with Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism as a whole. However, the problem is that did this text take them as a whole? Or did it treat them differently? Hence, it is essential to carry out a nuanced reading concerning the interreligious content in this text. Rereading "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor" enables us to realize that the charge of distorting doctrine is quite unfair to the early Nestorians since this text stays true to primary Nestorian theological positions.³⁴

Moreover, their defending monotheism in a multireligious environment is based on including Chinese religions and thought into a dialogue. Specifically, in the first contact between Nestorianism and Central China, Nestorianism was neither passively absorbing and accepting Chinese religious views and thought; nor was it utterly engrossed in expounding Nestorian theology with no regard for its audience' context. Instead, it initiated a dialogue with Chinese religions and thought, not just intended to "solicit the Imperial favor,"³⁵ but to build itself up by relocating the relationship between God and the Chinese figures of worship. It insists that God is the only true one to salvation, yet it does not negate deities in non-Nestorian religions; it engages in a dialogue with Chinese religions to defend the only one God. This dialogue is much richer and multi-layered than scholars gave it credit for, in which the early Nestorians held different attitudes towards Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism and had different models of interaction with them.

³³ Zureher, "Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism: A Survey of Scriptural Evidence," 86.

³⁴ Wu, *Zhenchang zhi dao: Tangdai Jidujiao lishi yu wenxian yanjiu*, 187.

³⁵ Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*. 2nd ed., 117.

2.1 Absorbing and repressing Buddhism

According to Nie Zhijun, "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor" borrowed more than fifty Buddhist terms and only seven Daoist terms; it is a text of the most strong Buddhist flavor.³⁶ However, what really matters is not how many Buddhist terms were borrowed but what types of borrowing they belong to and what Nestorians intended to say by borrowing these terms. "Influence" and "borrowing," as Zurcher says, "cover a whole range of phenomena, from the most superficial 'ornamental' use of a Buddhist term to the incorporation of a whole complex of Buddhist origin."³⁷ Distinguishing the types of borrowing is significant to judge whether and to what extent Buddhism influenced a text.³⁸ Rereading the Buddhist terms suggests the complexity of the relationship between Nestorianism and Buddhism, which simple data cannot reflect.

On the one hand, this text could be an eloquent testimony to the influence of Buddhism on early Nestorians because its Buddhist loans did not stay in levels of formal and conceptual borrowing, but to a doctrinal level, in Zurcher's words, "borrowed complexes: the absorption of a coherent cluster of ideas."³⁹ This text incorporates the fundamental Buddhist doctrines into its theoretical system.

"The Celestial Worthy permanently dwells in the realm of serenity and the place of joy, yet the retribution [the fruits of karma] goes everywhere.

天尊常在靜度快樂之處。果報無處不到。"⁴⁰

³⁶ Nie, *Tangdai Jingjiao wenxian ciyu yanjiu*, 184.

³⁷ Zurcher, "Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism: A Survey of Scriptural Evidence," 86.

³⁸ When discussing the Buddhist loans in early Daoist scriptures, Zurcher identified four types of borrowing, including formal borrowing, conceptual borrowing, borrowed complexes and pervasive influence. See Zurcher, "Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism: A Survey of Scriptural Evidence," 84-147.

³⁹ Zurcher, "Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism: A Survey of Scriptural Evidence," 87.

⁴⁰ Lines 11—12.

"These rewards or retributions are not brought about by the Celestial Worthy or committing various great evil themselves. They are due to dependent arising and karma created in the previous life, and the unity of seed and fruit [cause and effect]. Sentient beings who commit sin should first think about their own retributions.

此即不是天大諸惡自由至。為先身緣業種果團圓。犯有衆生先須想自身果報。

"⁴¹ Such narratives are extraordinarily striking as they suggest that Nestorianism, which traditionally held no belief in reincarnation, "had moved radically in their thinking from classical Western non- reincarnation beliefs to seeing Jesus as the solution to the existential issues of rebirth and karma."⁴² Although this text lacks Chinese language competence, it threads Buddhist terms and ideas harmoniously, absorbing Buddhist elements as an essential part of its narratives rather than stylistic borrowing. It is not surprising that early Nestorians had such a good command of Buddhism. After being condemned and exiled as a heresy during the Council of Ephesus, Nestorians found their niche in Persian empires and joined the East Syrian Church, spreading all over Central Asia, Arabia, and India. Before entering China, Nestorians had engaged in missionary enterprises on the Silk Road for one century. "Metropolitan bishops were nominated in Merv, Balkh, and Samarkand. As significant centers of trade and civil administration on the Silk Road, these cities also had religious importance because Buddhist and Manichean communities had established themselves there as well."⁴³ It follows that the earlier contact between Nestorianism and Buddhism would have taken place outside China.⁴⁴ Since then, Nestorians have probably felt the urgency to study Buddhist

⁴¹ Lines 40—42.

⁴² Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity*, 138.

⁴³ Nicolas Standaert ed., *Handbook of Christianity in China, Volumn One: 635-1800*, 1.

⁴⁴ Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity*, 138.

theory and contrive sermons that could include and compete with Buddhist theory since Buddhism was undoubtedly its main rival on the Silk Road. The result could be seen from "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor," in which Nestorians exploited the most representative Buddhist doctrines, such as karma, reincarnation, and retribution, to reinforce Nestorian teaching. Thus, at a doctrinal level, Nestorianism was influenced by its competitor.

On the other hand, the doctrinal influence of Buddhism on Nestorianism and this text's massive employment of Buddhist terms do not necessarily mean that early Nestorians depended on Buddhism, nor did they distort Nestorian doctrine. Instead, Nestorians included Buddhist elements was to defend monotheism.

As the new translation suggests, in this text, Buddhas who rank the highest in Buddhism are degraded into "subordinate deities" (*shushen* 漏神) in Nestorian divine hierarchies; The term "deities" (*shen* 神) includes gods, devas, and spirits of all religions, and Buddhas are the most mentioned representatives. "The Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor" clearly defines the inferior status of all deities to God. At the very beginning, the text claims that Buddhas, other creatures, human beings cannot see the Celestial Worthy and asks:

"Who has the power to see the Celestial Worthy? Since the countenance of the Celestial Worthy is like the wind, who can see the wind?"

何人有威得見天尊？為此天尊顏容似風。何人能得見風？⁴⁵

The above descriptions are perfectly in tune with the Biblical narration: "No man hath seen God at any time,"⁴⁶ "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the

⁴⁵ Lines 6—7.

⁴⁶ John 1:18. All Biblical reference are to the KING JAMES VERSION (KJV).

Spirit."⁴⁷ The difference is that this text adds Buddhas and other Chinese deities as a foil for God's supremacy, expanding the sphere of God's power eastward.

Next, Nestorians invented a story of God in the presence of Buddhas. They did not oppose Buddhism; instead, they made a theoretical effort to subordinate Buddhism. "The Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor" expounds how the Buddhas' provenance, power source, and missions all hinged on God.

"All Buddhas dwell in Heaven, but they are transferred into the world by the flow of the wind [the Holy Spirit]. There is nowhere that the flow of the wind cannot go. The Celestial Worthy permanently dwells in the realm of serenity and the place of joy, yet retributions [the fruits of karma] go everywhere.

在天皆諸佛。為此風流轉世間。風流無處不到。天尊常在靜度快樂之處。果報無處不到。"⁴⁸

"The Celestial Worthy suffered a lot to create sentient beings. He established universal principles of sentient beings, and it was not long before he established Buddhas. The creation of the human body can only be done by the Celestial Worthy.

天尊受許辛苦始立衆生衆生理。佛不遠立。人身自專。"⁴⁹

From those narratives, it could be seen that the text describes a relationship between God and Buddhas, attributing Buddhas' origin and power to God. It also implicates that the mission of Buddhas is to carry out retributions of karma and manifest the power of purification:

"At first, the Celestial Worthy allows sentient beings to pay reverence to devas and Buddhas. As Buddhas are willing to suffer for sentient beings, they are set up between heaven and earth for the simple reason that they have the power of purification. The emperor needs to be diligent in visiting the temples and learning from the sages. The emperor's palace is sought and obtained from Buddhas.

⁴⁷ John 3: 8.

⁴⁸ Lines 10—12.

⁴⁹ Lines 42—43.

先遣衆生礼諸天佛。為佻受苦。置立天地。只為清淨威力因緣。聖上^{雄(唯)}湏
勤伽習俊。聖上宮殿。於諸佛求得。"⁵⁰

That is to say, the text does not negate the existence of Buddhas and other deities, and neither does it revoke their divine power. Instead, it preserved their status, whereby Buddhas and other deities still carry out their original roles determined by their respective religions: Buddhas take charge of karma, and Yama handles people falling into evil paths.⁵¹ Thus, the text introduces God to a world full of gods without radically changing the divine map that that Chinese audience was familiar with. However, it also aims to reveal God as the creator of the divine map, the ultimate source of all deities' power, who "never reveals himself in the world and never manifests power as deities do, 不曾在世間。無神威力"⁵² yet he is in charge of everything.

"For all sentient beings, each one should fear the Celestial Worthy as he controls sentient beings' life and death at the same time, and he manages, leads, and controls all deities.

一切衆生皆各怕天尊。並縮攝諸衆生死活。管帶縮攝渾神。"⁵³

Thus, Buddhas and all Chinese deities are included in the divine hierarchy of Nestorianism, in which they are redefined as "subordinate deities" and manifestations of God. Moreover, the text provides the fundamental reason for God's supremacy over all deities. God's supremacy comes from his power to create humankind,

"For a split second, the Celestial Worthy has already wandered about and inspected all dwellings and households in the world. For this reason, everyone holds and contains the pneuma of the Celestial Worthy. Only in this Way can they survive.

⁵⁰ Lines 78—81.

⁵¹ Lines 59.

⁵² Lines 17.

⁵³ Lines 61—62.

天尊不盈少時巡歷世間居編。為此人人居帶天尊氣。始得存活。"⁵⁴

"For all people, your bodies, lives, capacities, and spirits are always what the Celestial Worthy made them be.

所在人身命器息。惣是天尊使其然。"⁵⁵

"Sentient beings have bodies and lives due to the wind. When you cannot live anymore, and on your deathbed, the wind leaves sentient beings, and the wind is no longer in mind. Sentient beings exist due to the wind.

衆生身命為風。無活臨命之時。風離衆生。心意無風。為風存活。"⁵⁶

Since the foremost concern of humankind is that of life and death, God, who possesses the ultimate power of controlling life and death, becomes the only savior of humankind capable of providing the taste and experience of eternal life. Moreover, "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor" repeatedly stresses that God's power to create humankind is exclusive, which any other deities and creatures do not have.

"The Celestial Worthy suffered a lot to create sentient beings. He established universal principles of sentient beings, and it was not long before he established Buddhas. The creation of the human body can only be done by the Celestial Worthy.

天尊受許辛苦始立衆生衆生理。佛不遠立。人身自專。"⁵⁷

"Ignorant sentient beings then use clay and wood to make statues of camels, elephants, ox, donkeys, horses and so on, sentient beings themselves, and roebucks, deer. Although they have made the shapes and countenance, they could not give them lives. Sentient beings have wisdom; you should think about the cause and effect for yourselves. You should also be aware of everything you see. All things must depend on the Celestial Worthy to be real and by this to exist in this world. There are many sentient beings who even made a mass of craftsmen. This thing [the creation of the human beings] and other things are all fulfilled by the Celestial Worthy. No one else can give life to all that they made.

⁵⁴ Lines 7—8.

⁵⁵ Lines 23—24.

⁵⁶ Lines 26—27.

⁵⁷ Lines 42—43.

無知衆生。遂泥木駝象牛驢馬等衆生及麀鹿。雖造形容。不能与命。衆生有智。自量緣果。所有具見。亦復自知。並即是實。為此今世有。多有衆生。遂自作衆衆作士。此事等皆天尊。遂不能(能)与命俱。"⁵⁸

"The emperor's palace is sought and obtained from Buddhas, yet after all, his body is his own.

聖上宮殿。於諸佛求得。聖上身惣是自由。"⁵⁹

As the above sentence indicates, God is in charge of life and death while Buddhas, other deities, and human beings are devoid of this power. Therefore, the text reminds people to surrender themselves to God rather than to Buddhas and other deities.

"Every time people get permanent happiness and the chance to become immortal or feel a sense of urgency, they will call the Buddhas' names every time. There are too many ignorant people who regard deities (such as Buddhas) as being the same sort of thing as the Celestial Worthy! They also think it is joyful to act according to and worship those deities' decree. Everyone holds such parochial and vulgar statements. We are detached from the Celestial Worthy too much while he is always with us! Every time you have faith in him, every time he stays with you. The Celestial Worthy has given human beings much wisdom. Who is [still] repaying the kindness of Buddhas? You should calculate and consider [whom do you owe a debt of gratitude to]!

每受長樂仙緣。人急之時。每稱佛名。多有無知之人。喚神比天尊之類。亦纒作_旨尊_旨樂。人人鄉俗語舌。吾別天尊多。常在。每信每居。天尊与人意智不少。誰報佛慈恩？計合思量。"⁶⁰

"If someone receives the precepts and has no fear of the Celestial Worthy; in that case, even this person reaches full compliance with Buddha-Dharma, he does not accomplish the result of receiving the precepts, and he is a traitor [to the Celestial Worthy].

⁵⁸ Lines 44—48.

⁵⁹ Lines 80—81.

⁶⁰ Lines 17—21.

如有人受戒。及不怕天尊。此人及一依佛法不成受戒之所。即是返逆之人。"⁶¹

Thus, in contrast to Buddhas, the supremacy of God was made clear and delivered to the Chinese audience. All Chinese deities were finally incorporated into a new Chinese version of Nestorian theology and became subordinates of God.

It is worth noting that, in the text, those subordinate deities not only constitute a foil to God but are logically connected to the advent of Jesus Christ. It seems to be echoing a common theme of the early and medieval Christian theologies, namely, the birth of Christ signified the departure of the old gods. From line 114, the text returns to the Christian context, depicting Jesus' life story from birth to resurrection, roughly in line with Biblical narrations. The birth of Jesus is the time for the old gods—Buddhas and deities to make their exit. The text underscores that God finally decided to send his son into the world because Buddhas and deities failed to change the evil in human nature and failed to save human beings. The text indicates that God was not opposed to the human worship of the Buddha at the beginning. "At first, the Celestial Worthy allows sentient beings to pay reverence to devas and Buddhas. 先遣衆生礼諸天佛。" "The emperor needs to be diligent in visiting the temples and learning from the sages. 聖上^唯(唯)湏勤伽習俊。" However, as the text continues, God changes his mind since sending the subordinate deities down to earth becomes a failure. In a world with Buddhas and deities, humankind still commit sins:

"However, sentient beings did not follow this teaching. They still killed living beings to offer sacrifice; they ate meat, chewed the flesh, and deceived the subordinate deities. Then, they also killed lambs. Sentient beings disobeyed this teaching; they did not deal with others with kindness. Sentient beings did evil behind the scenes. Thus, they turned their backs on the Celestial Worthy.

⁶¹ Lines 68—70.

衆生不依此教。自煞生祭祀。喫穴噉美。將(將)漏(灑)詐神。即煞羊等。衆生不依此教作好處分人等。衆生背面作惡。遂背天尊。"62

The above sentences foreshadow the text's real intention:

"Although the Celestial Worthy sees sentient beings doing this, he still showed undiminished pity and continued to exhort those who did not follow the teaching of doing good. Then the Celestial Worthy sent the cool wind to a virgin, whose name is Moyan. The cool wind followed the Celestial Worthy's instruction and entered soon into Moyan's womb. Moyan got pregnant immediately. By sending the cool wind to get this virgin pregnant when there was no man around, the Celestial Worthy made all sentient beings witness Moyan's pregnancy without a man. He made people in the world see the miracle and think, 'the Celestial Worthy has the [inconceivable] power.' In this Way, the Celestial Worthy lets sentient beings keep pure faith and return to good karma.

天尊見衆生如此。憐愍不少。諫作好不依。天尊當使涼風向一童女。名為末艷。涼風即入末艷腹內。依天尊教。當即末艷懷(懷)身。為以天尊使涼風伺童女邊無男夫懷(懷)任。令一切衆生見無男夫懷(懷)任。使世間人等見即道。天尊有威力。即遣衆生信心清淨迴向善緣。" 63.

At this point, the text's purpose becomes clear: God decided to send his son to the world to save humankind from sin after the subordinate deities attempted in vain. Even the suffering of the Buddhas could not awaken the goodness of humankind; only by giving away his son could humankind be saved from sin. Therefore, from then on, Jesus takes the place of Buddhas and deities in manifesting God's power and love and suffering for humankind. Thus, the advent of Jesus is the watershed event that changes the map of divine power from allowing humans to worship Buddhas at the beginning of the text to warning humans not to serve all subordinate deities:

"Mishihe is my son. All sentient beings in the world should follow what Mishihe ordered, and whatever he arranges must be done well. Mishihe looks like sentient

⁶² Lines 112—114.

⁶³ Lines 115—120.

beings. The realm of heaven is disposed of by the Celestial Worthy, and Mishihe disposes of worldly affairs. Therefore, sentient beings, stop serving subordinate deities!

弥師訶是我兒。世間所有衆生。皆取弥師訶進止所是處分皆作好。弥師訶即似衆生。天道為是天尊處分。處分世間下。衆生休事属神。"⁶⁴

A rereading of the Buddhist content in "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor" suggests a multi-layered dialogue between Nestorian Christianity and Buddhism. Early Nestorians absorbed Buddhist doctrines and made the latter a manifestation of God's teaching, expounding it to a world where people had implicit faith in transmigration and the principle of karmic retribution. More importantly, they incorporated the Buddhas and deities into the Nestorian divine hierarchies to justify God's supremacy and defend monotheism in the face of all Chinese deities. Therefore, early Nestorians did not distort the doctrine; instead, they adapted it by expanding its sphere of application to a new cultural setting. Neither did they depend on Buddhism; instead, they made the latter subsidiary to God. For early Nestorians, Buddhism was undoubtedly the most significant rival and an ideal target of theological attacks.

2.2 Extolling and elevating Daoism

"The Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor" only borrowed a few Daoist terms, much less than Buddhist loans.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, it does not mean that early Nestorians took less interest in Daoism. On the contrary, compared with Buddhism, which Nestorianism deemed a rival or target, Daoism seemed to be taken as an ally. Their preference for Daoism

⁶⁴ Lines 135—138.

⁶⁵ The Daoist terms used by this text include: Tianzun 天尊 (the Celestial Worthy), *qi* 氣 (breath), *qi* 器 (capacity), *changle* 長樂 (permanent happiness), *xianyuan* 仙緣 (chance to become immortal), *tiantong* 天通 (born to know everything).

is evident as they borrowed the Daoist term "Tianzun" 天尊 (the Celestial Worthy), rather than the Buddhist term Tianrenshi 天人師 (Teacher of Gods and Men) or Shizun 世尊 (World-Honored One) to designate God. For Nestorians versed in Buddhist terms, it would have been quite natural to borrow one of the ten honorific titles for Buddha to designate God; yet it turned out that the Daoist term "the Celestial Worthy" became the first Chinese proxy for God. This terminological selection is not cursory or far-fetched; instead, it conveyed Nestorians' affinity with Daoism, in sharp contrast to their repressive attitude toward Buddhism.

It should be first noted that "the Celestial Worthy" in this text is borrowed from Daoist uses. Some scholars argued that "the Celestial Worthy" is originally a Buddhist term and later borrowed by Daoism because two Buddhist scriptures, the Infinite Life Sutra (*Fo shuo wuliangshou jing* 佛說無量壽經) and the Sutra on the Fields of Merit (*Fo shuo zhude futian jing* 佛說諸德福田經), used this term to refer to the Buddha. However, the title "the Celestial Worthy" was also "long in use as a common honorific title even in Lingbao 靈寶 scriptures of the Jin 晉-Song 宋 period (317-479),"⁶⁶ roughly the same time that the above Buddhist sutras were produced.⁶⁷ In this light, it is hard to say which side first used this term since this period, as Strickmann has argued, was the beginning of "the formative age of Chinese religious practice and institutions." During this period, Buddhism and Daoism underwent

⁶⁶ Liu, "Zhongguo daojiao shenxue tixi de jiangou yu fazhan-yi Yuanshi tianzun de zhizunxing yu fotuohua wei zhongxin," 91.

⁶⁷ Recent research suggests that the Infinite Life Sutra which was dated as a work of the third century was possibly produced in the fourth, or fifth century. See Liu Yi's article, 80.

"Great Fusion," absorbing, borrowing, inspiring, differentiating each other, and eventually forming respective traditions in the latter half of the sixth century.⁶⁸

Therefore, more important than the inquiry of the term's provenance is situating the term "the Celestial Worthy" in the religious map of the Tang period, namely which tradition it was most closely associated with at that time. In the late sixth century, "the Celestial Worthy" had evolved into a term characterizing and representing Daoism since in this period, Daoists absorbed Buddhist thought to reshape Yuanshi tianzun 元始天尊 (the Celestial Worthy of the Primordial Commencement) and made him the supreme god recognized by both northern and southern Daoism. During the Tang period, the theoretical system of Daoism was built around the teachings of Yuanshi tianzun. Records of Tianzun in *Suishu* 隋書 (The Book of Sui) produced in the early Tang clearly showed that "the Celestial Worthy" was a proper noun, explicitly referring to the highest god in Daoism.⁶⁹ At the same time, the ten epithets of the Buddha did not include this term. Hence, "the Celestial Worthy" is supposed to be firmly used as a Daoist term rather than a Buddhist term in the Tang period. Moreover, as discussed above, "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor" has a solid tendency to subjugate the Buddhas; it would contradict the tone of the whole text to refer to God with another epithet of the Buddha. There should be no doubt that early Nestorians borrowed the Daoist term "the Celestial Worthy" to designate God.

How should we classify this borrowing of "the Celestial Worthy" if we take Zurcher's framework? Compared with Buddhist loans, there are no signs of the influence of Daoist

⁶⁸ Strickmann, "The Consecration Sutra: A Buddhist Book of Spells," 77-80.

⁶⁹ Liu, "Zhonggu daojiao shenxue tixi de jiangou yu fazhan-yi Yuanshi tianzun de zhizunxing yu fotuohua wei zhongxin," 75-78.

doctrines and practices on this text. However, borrowing the term "the Celestial Worthy" to designate God indicated that early Nestorians' understanding of Daoism was not superficial. This borrowing functioned both formally and conceptually. In addition to adding some decorative effects to the introduction of God, more importantly, it restored and reinforced pre-existing concepts of God. Before Nestorians had the ability or time to coin their title for God (later, they invented some exclusive epithets, such as *yishen* 一神 and *yizun* 一尊), "the Celestial Worthy" was the best among existing choices. *Suishu* 隋書 (The Book of Sui) described the Celestial Worthy as follows:

"Daoist scriptures say the Celestial Worthy of the Primordial Commencement was born before the Greatest Beginning. He holds the breath of nature, ascending to Heaven and agglutinating somewhere far away. No one knows the limit of the height he reached... The Celestial Worthy's body lasts forever, never extinguishes. Every time at the beginning of the separation of Heaven and earth, he is either on the Yujing Mountain or in the vast wildness, imparting the secret Way. He calls it removing Kalpa to save humans... Those who have ever been saved are all immortals of high grades, such as Taishang laojun, Taishang zhangren, Tianhaung zhenren, Wufang tiandi, and all other immortals with honorific positions. They chant the Way together, accept and uphold it. People in the world never know the Great Form.

道經者，雲有元始天尊，生於太元之先，稟自然之氣，沖虛凝遠，莫知其極。... 天尊之體，長存不滅。每至天地初開，或在玉京之上，或在窮桑之野，授以秘道，謂之開劫度人。... 所度皆諸天仙上品，有太上老君，太上丈人，天皇真人，五方天帝及諸仙官，轉共承受。世人莫知豫也。⁷⁰

"The Celestial Worthy" sounds like a more appropriate counterpart for God than the Buddha. As Bokenkamp points out, the Buddha was originally a mortal and transformed from mortal to holy, while the Celestial Worthy of the Primordial Commencement was born out of breath (*qi* 氣) no beginning, no end. Furthermore, the Buddha often incarnated in the world to expound Dharma to all sentient beings while the Celestial Worthy of the Primordial

⁷⁰ *Suishu* 隋書 (The Book of Sui), vol. 35.

Commencement was always rising above the world; thus, people in the world never know its Great Form.⁷¹ In contrast to the description in "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor," the image of God and that of the Celestial Worthy were more similar.

"The Celestial Worthy himself has divine might, and he dwells in a place where no one can find. That is a place where there is also no death and life, no encounters with sufferings and ephemerality. Since the Celestial Worthy has already achieved the goal of creating Heaven and earth, he never reveals himself in the world and never manifests power as deities do.

天尊自有神威。住在一處。所住之無人捉得。亦無死生。亦無麗姿相值所。造天地已求。不曾在世間。無神威力。"⁷²

"The Celestial Worthy suffered a lot to create sentient beings. He established universal principles of sentient beings, and it was not long before he established Buddhas.

天尊受許辛苦始立衆生衆生理。佛不遠立。"⁷³

Despite their differences, the highest deity in Daoism and the only God in Nestorianism share some common ground. In ontological terms, both are absolute permanent beings, equivalent to transcendental Reality. Both are associated with the pneumatic elements. The former came from breath, and the latter is compared to the wind. Concerning their status, both are the supreme deity of uniqueness and finality in their respective theoretical system, different from Buddhism, which expanded its pantheon with innumerable Buddhas. Both are unknowable and mysterious to mortals and reveal the teachings through subordinate deities or Holy prophets. Lastly, both are Saviors in eschatological systems. Therefore, borrowing the term "the Celestial Worthy" partially retained God's pre-existing image and doctrinal connotation:

⁷¹ Bokenkamp, "Some Questions Concerning the Highest God of the Lingbao scriptures, the Celestial Worthy of the Primordial Commencement," 215-226.

⁷² Lines 15—17.

⁷³ Lines 42—43.

uniqueness, transcendence, and saviorhood, which might make God's debut in a Chinese environment effective. More significantly, early Nestorians' intentionally comparing Tianzun to God appeared to be a gesture of goodwill towards Daoism, understood as the most influential Chinese indigenous religion.

2.3 Connecting and compromising with Confucianism

In "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor," early Nestorians transmitted goodwill towards Confucianism as well. The text's compilers established Ten Vows analogous to the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament, among which being loyal to the emperor and being filial to parents were listed in the second and third places:

"One needs to do preliminary three things: first, to serve the Celestial Worthy; second, to serve the emperor; third, to serve parents.

不多此三事。一種先事天尊。第二事聖上。第三事父母。"⁷⁴

Besides, in several places of the text, loyalty to the emperor and filial piety to parents were emphasized:

"Since sentient beings have the wit, you should fear the Celestial Worthy and the emperor, and your parents together.

衆生有智計合怕天尊及聖上。并怕父母。"⁷⁵

"Third, you should fear your parents. To venerate your parents and regard them as the Celestial Worthy and the holy emperor. Therefore, if someone serves the Celestial Worthy and the emperor first, and there is nothing lacking in his/her serving parents, this person will get blessed rewards from the Celestial Worthy.

第三須怕父母。祗承父母。將(將)比天尊及聖帝。以若人先事天尊及聖上。及事父母不闕。此人於天尊得福。"⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Lines 73—74.

⁷⁵ Lines 76—77.

⁷⁶ Lines 70—72.

The repeatedly highlighted "loyalty" and "filial piety" are evident signs of early Nestorian's attempt to speak to Confucianism. Although filial piety was not first proposed by Confucianism and did not exclusively belong to Confucianism, it was Confucianized during the early medieval period. "Filial piety tales were important tools in laying the early medieval period's Confucian foundation." Confucian mourning rites "became more important than ever before because they were so effective in providing families with a sense of solidarity and identity." Therefore, it was during the early medieval period that "Confucianism became ensconced in the values and ritual practice of China's elite" and "achieved its first overwhelming political and social significance."⁷⁷ Filial piety, along with loyalty, constituted the hallmarks of Confucian ethics. However, can we attribute the text's emphasis on loyalty and filial piety to the influence of Confucianism? As we shall see, a comparison with the related Biblical narratives suggests that the dialogue with Confucianism is also multi-layered.

On the one hand, early Nestorians aimed to connect with Confucianism through the shared ethical value of filial piety (*xiao* 孝). *The Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing* 孝經), one of thirteen Confucian Classics, claims: "filial piety is the principle of Heaven, the law of Earth, and the proper conduct of people. 夫孝, 天之經也, 地之義也, 民之行也。"⁷⁸ Filial piety stands at the heart of Confucianism, and other essential Confucian ethics rightness (*yi* 義), benevolence (*ren* 仁) were promoted based on filial piety. Tang emperor Xuanzon 玄宗 (712–756) specifically commented on *the Classic of Filial Piety*, which fully testified the vital importance of filial piety to Confucianism, to the hierarchical-structured social governance in

⁷⁷ Knapp, *Selfless Offspring: Filial Children and Social Order in Medieval China*, 187-189.

⁷⁸ *Xiao jing* 孝經 (the Classic of Filial Piety), chapter 7.

traditional China. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Nestorianism used filial piety as a link between itself and the Chinese audience at the beginning. Nevertheless, it does not mean that the Confucian ethics of filial piety influenced early Nestorians as piety is also "usually associated with the Abrahamic traditions."⁷⁹ Though its expression and connotation differed from Confucianism, filial piety was a pre-existing idea and doctrine in Nestorian teaching, not unique to Confucianism. The fifth Commandment stated very clearly, "Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."⁸⁰ Many other statements reaffirmed this Commandment. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth."⁸¹ "Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness."⁸² It could be seen that the ethics of filial piety was not a Confucian addition to the body of Nestorian teaching; instead, it served to convey and reinforce the established Nestorian idea without changing and reshaping it. Therefore, the emphasis on parents and filial piety is not the result of Confucian influence but rather a strategy of finding common ground to make the two sides compatible.

In addition to filial piety, Nestorianism and Confucianism also shared common ground regarding the emperor's sovereign power source. They both attribute the origin of secular sovereign' authority to a transcendental domain; the difference is that in the Confucian theory

⁷⁹ Henry Rosemont, Jr., and Roger T. Ames. *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing*, 1.

⁸⁰ Exodus 20:12.

⁸¹ Ephesians 6:1-3.

⁸² Proverbs 20:20.

of "Mandate of Heaven" (*tianming* 天命), the determining force was described as an abstract and obscure notion "Heaven"; while in Nestorian political cosmology, it specifically pointed to God. "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God."⁸³ "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive themselves damnation."⁸⁴ A similar stance endowed Nestorians with a potential advantage to impress the Tang emperor as they kept in line with Confucianism in terms of the function of consolidating the emperor's sovereign power. They only needed to replace the abstract Confucian term "Heaven" with a concrete God:

"If sentient beings fear the Celestial Worthy, they should also fear the emperor. The emperor possessed meritorious virtues in his former life, and the Celestial Worthy appointed him to fill the emperor's vacancy.

衆生若怕天尊。亦合怕懼聖上。聖上前身福私天尊補任。"⁸⁵

In this light, early Nestorians desired to subjugate Buddhist and Daoist deities and substitute the Confucian notion of "Heaven" with God. However, Nestorians made concessions as well. The Bible required people to be loyal to the emperors as God appointed them, yet the loyalty was conditional: people were obligated to obey the emperor's laws only when the emperor's laws did not conflict with God's laws; otherwise, God permitted people to disobey their rulers. This teaching is what Berman called "the first principle of Christian jurisprudence," "the principle of civil disobedience: laws that conflict with Christian faith are not binding in

⁸³ Romans 13:1.

⁸⁴ Romans 13:2.

⁸⁵ Lines 62—63.

conscience."⁸⁶ The Hebrew midwives disobeyed the king of Egypt and saved the menchildren alive; the military man refused to follow King Saul's orders to kill the priests and their families—the Bible offered numerous instances of civil disobedience. God's laws provided a check and judging force on the divine right of kings and established clear guidelines for people to act when the laws of the land conflict with God's laws: "We ought to obey God rather than men."⁸⁷

While in "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor," when expounding the emperor's divine power, early Nestorians made clear that God appointed the emperor; they also underscored people's obedience to the emperor. Nevertheless, the principle of civil disobedience was left out. What remained was the admonition of absolute obedience to the emperor:

"All sentient beings should take [follow] the emperor's edicts. If someone does not follow and disobey the emperor's orders, this person is a traitor to sentient beings.

一切衆生皆取聖上進止。如有人不取。聖上駟使不伏。其人在於衆生即是返送。

⁸⁸

When it came to a Chinese environment, Nestorians had to compromise. Though in Confucianism, "Heaven" was theoretically equipped with an authority of checking on "the son of Heaven," in practice, it was deprived of functions of moderating and judging, more often associated with rituals. Essentially, Confucianism was utilized for the purpose of the consolidation of imperial power. Therefore, disobedience and disloyalty to the imperial

⁸⁶ Berman, *The Interaction of Law and Religion*, 35.

⁸⁷ Acts 5: 29.

⁸⁸ Lines 64—66.

power became the prime target that the rulers fought against. Even under Tang emperor Taizong 太宗 (598–649), one of the most enlightened rulers of Chinese history, the penalties for any offense that threatened the power of the Crown were severe. *The Code of the Zhenguan reign-period* (*Zhenguan lü* 貞觀律), the prototype of *the Tang Code*. (*Tanglü shuyi* 唐律疏義), defined ten extremely serious crimes called "the Ten Abominations" (*shi'e* 十惡), for which the harshest punishments were imposed. Among them, the top three crimes were "plotting rebellion" (*moufan* 謀反), "plotting great sedition" (*mou dani* 謀大逆), and "plotting treason" (*moupan* 謀叛), all threats to the imperial power.⁸⁹ This is the environment that Nestorians who arrived in China faced, where people had to render unconditional obedience to the emperor. Therefore, early Nestorians abandoned the complete teaching regarding the emperor's power and continuously declared the unity of God's laws and the emperor's. They were well aware that putting God's laws on the opposite side of the emperor's edicts and including the principle of disobedience would only put them in danger.

3. Positioning "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor" in a Tang context

The interreligious relationships in "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor" indicate early Nestorians' tendency to elevate Daoism, compromise with Confucianism, and rival Buddhism. From the beginning, Nestorianism strove to establish a good relationship with Chinese imperial power. For a new foreign religion, the most crucial target audience was the Tang emperor. Therefore, the content of Nestorian texts might reflect religious preference and

⁸⁹ "Selections from the Great Tang Code," 549-552.

policy at a particular time, providing clues to make an educated estimation about the period when the text was created. Saeki dated this manuscript to about 640. Nevertheless, several scholars challenged his assumption due to a lack of more convincing evidence.⁹⁰ It is risky to date this manuscript with a specific year since no colophon is included in the text to reveal its exact production date. However, Saeki's dating to the reign of Taizong might be correct. The interreligious relationships and taboo words (*minghui* 名諱) in this manuscript provide some textual evidence to substantiate a rough dating of "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor" to the reign of Taizong.

This text's different attitudes toward Daoism and Buddhism seem in keeping with the religious policy of the early Tang period. During the Tang period, Confucianism remained the status of state ideology, yet the Tang emperors' policies towards Daoism and Buddhism varied from time to time. The first emperor, Gaozu 高祖 (566-635), set the tone for the early Tang period, during which religious policies that prioritized Daoism and Confucianism and diminished Buddhism were carried out. As Bokenkamp points out, "Whatever Li Yuan's personal faith might have been, he came to the throne at a time when concepts of kingship had been profoundly changed by Taoism."⁹¹ By relating himself to the lineage of Laozi 老子, whose family name was Li 李, Li Yuan reinforced his power in a politico-religious sense. Moreover, according to T. H. Barrette, during Li Yuan's campaign to overthrow the Sui dynasty, he received tremendous support from the Daoists, who widely spread the "myth of

⁹⁰ Sun, "The Earliest Statement of Christian Faith in China? A Critique of the Conventional Chronology of The Messiah Sutra and On One God," 133-152.

⁹¹ Bokenkamp, "Time After Time: Taoist Apocalyptic History and the Founding of the T'ang Dynasty, " 61.

the Li messiah" and manufactured divine evidence for the coronation of Li Yuan.⁹² Finally, Li Yuan deliberately adopted a religious stance different from the Sui 隋 monarchs, who favored Buddhism. "He chose to identify himself closely with a religion that portrayed itself as the Chinese answer to an imported faith. This open opposition was to be foregrounded again immediately, through yet another attempt to proscribe Buddhism."⁹³ Soon after establishing the Tang regime, Li Yuan returned Daoist support and distanced himself from the Sui emperor by formulating new religious policies. His religious preference was embodied in an edict issued in 625, which was consistently carried out in the early Tang period:

"Daoism and Confucianism are the basis of this land. Buddhism came later; it is better to treat it with courtesy as guests. So now we may prioritize Daoism, then Confucianism, and put Buddhism last.

老教, 孔教, 此土之基。釋教後興, 宜從客禮。今可先老, 次孔, 末後釋宗。"⁹⁴

Taizong and Gaozong 高宗 (628-683) adhered to this policy, keeping Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism in co-existence, yet prioritizing the first two, especially Daoism. Taizong reaffirmed the Tang's connection to the recognized founder of Daoism, Laozi, and unambiguously manifested his religious preference. "Laozi is my ancestor; his name and title should be placed ahead of the Buddha" 老子是朕祖宗, 名位稱號宜在佛先。⁹⁵ Like his father, he sided with Daoism when the debate over Buddhism and Daoism came to a head again; he ordered the arrest of the influential monk, Falin 法琳 (572-640), accusing Falin of defaming the emperor's "ancestor" Laozi. In 637, he issued an edict, legally stipulated that the

⁹² Barrette, *Taoism Under the T'ang: Religion and Empire During the Golden Age of Chinese History*. 14.

⁹³ Ibid. 85.

⁹⁴ T52n2104_003.

⁹⁵ T50n2053_009.

status of Daoists and Daoist nuns is higher than that of Buddhist monks and nuns, which could be regarded as a clear signal of his religious stance, namely promoting Daoism while repressing Buddhism.⁹⁶ His son Gaozong also consistently implemented this policy.⁹⁷

Now, we may roughly outline the religious environment that Nestorians encountered when they entered China. It may not be a scene of religious harmony but of intricate infighting, and Daoism was in the ascendancy at that time. The exaltation of Daoism in "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor" should be related to the domination of Daoism in the early Tang period. Though theoretically subjugated Chinese deities to God, the subordinate deities listed in this text were all Buddhist deities with no Daoist deities included; it used the term *shen* to cover all Chinese deities without explicitly mentioning any Daoist deities' names. It seemed that early Nestorians tried to circumvent conflicts with Daoism that was gaining momentum as possible as they could since any careless mistake might incur the charge of slandering the emperor's ancestor, Laozi, who was regarded as a manifestation of "the Supreme Venerable Sovereign" (Taishang laojun 太上老君), a high Daoist deity. It was undoubtedly wise for newcomers to show respect and exaltation to the most favored indigenous religions. However, with respect to Buddhism, a foreign religion treated by the Tang emperors as a "guest," Nestorians had no scruples about competing head-to-head with it by producing a targeted sermon. Early Nestorians likely aimed to replicate Buddhism's success in China, even replace the latter as a new leading outsider that can share the glory with the other two native traditions. Approaching the problem from another angle, Nestorians would have been unlikely to create a text such as "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the

⁹⁶ T52n2103_025.

⁹⁷ Concerning the details of the religious policy in the early Tang period, see Barrette, *Taoism Under the T'ang: Religion and Empire During the Golden Age of Chinese History*. 11-45.

Intercessor" that tended to belittle Buddhism during the reign of Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (624-705), since the empress, who entirely relied on Buddhism to justify her seizing power, prioritized Buddhism over Daoism as soon as she came to the throne. Therefore, Nestorianism's relation to Buddhism and Daoism in this text might reflect the religious climate of a particular era.

In addition to the content, some details of the manuscript might enable us to date the text to Taizong's reign. Specifically, the naming taboo in "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor" provides information regarding dating. There are two characters, *shi* 世 and *min* 愍, supposed to be written in variant forms in this text as these two characters are taboo for the personal name of emperor Taizong, Li Shimin 李世民. Even characters that contain a component used as a full character in the emperor's name, as in the appearance of *min* 民 in the character *min* 愍, are taboo. However, in this text, the scribe did not change the written forms of these two characters and wrote them in their original forms. Strangely, a professional scribe who kept all reverence marks to show respect to the emperor did not comply with the rule of naming taboo. If we take a close look at the rules of naming taboo during the Tang period, we will see that Taizong made an exception for the rules of naming taboo concerning his name. In 626, he issued an edict, claiming that the rules of naming taboo have resulted in unconformity with ancient classics since too many characters were artificially altered, and his willingness to soften the rules: "if the two characters, *shi* 世 and *min* 民 are not written together, there is no need to follow the rule of naming taboo. 有"世民"兩字不連續者,並不須諱。"⁹⁸ Therefore, during the period of Taizong, the rules of naming taboo were not strictly observed.

⁹⁸ *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 (The Old Book of Tang), Vol.2.

Take the case of "the Preface to Xuanzang's Holy Teachings" (*Datang sanzang shengjiao xu* 大唐三藏聖教序), composed by Taizong and written by Chu Suiliang. When writing *zhonghun zhi ye* 重昏之夜 (a deep dark night), Chu kept the original writing form of *hun* 昏 without abiding by the rule of naming taboo.

However, when it came to the reign of Tang Gaozong, the rules became stricter. The rule of "avoiding offense by missing a stroke" (*bihui quebi* 避諱缺筆) was carried out since Gaozong and thence passed down. In his reign period (649-683), *hun* 昏 was required to be written as *hun* 昏; *ye* 葉 to be written as *ye* 葉 to avoid offending the previous emperor Taizong.⁹⁹ Also, *min* 愍 was written as *min* 愍 or *min* 愍.¹⁰⁰ In "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor," the writing forms of *shi* 世 and *min* 愍 did not change. Considering that these two characters were allowed to write in their original forms only during the Taizong period in the Tang dynasty, this manuscript was probably produced in the Taizong period. The above analysis of the naming taboo in the manuscript will provide convincing evidence to confirm Saeki's dating this text to the reign of Taizong, as his assumption has been challenged by scholars due to a lack of substantial textual evidence.

Conclusion

The release of the color photocopy of this manuscript necessitates a revisiting of "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor," the starting point for Nestorian scriptures to be made in China. The first step toward a restudy is to provide a more faithful transcription and a more consistent translation that retains the Chinese tones in the original text to lay a

⁹⁹ Ibid.10.

¹⁰⁰ Zhang, *Dunhuang suzi yanjiu*, 382.

solid basis for further study. The new translation clarifies this text's use of Chinese terms and suggests that "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor" is not a sutra translated from the Syriac Bible but a theological invention. The creativity of this text lies in early Nestorians' removing most Jewish historical background and substituting it with Chinese context, making God transcend the historical and geographical boundaries and be God for all. Moreover, my analysis of the interreligious relationships reflected in "the Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor" shows that early Nestorians adopted different strategies in response to Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism rather than take them as a whole. In this light, this text is carefully designed for a new environment Nestorians encountered when they first arrived in Central China. The writing details in the manuscript also reveal that the text might be dated to the reign of Tang Taizong.

In addition to the content, the manuscript's form conveys much valuable information, which scholars have given short shrift. This thesis demonstrates the potential of looking into the details of the manuscript and hopes to bring the scholar's attention to the significance of the perspective of manuscript studies in further research. Moreover, by pointing out that early Nestorians adheres to monotheism and essential Nestorian doctrine, this thesis clears up some misunderstandings about this text and displays a broader picture of the first contact between Nestorian and Chinese culture. Based on this thesis, a comparative textual analysis of Nestorian manuscripts of different eras could be done. Comparisons of different texts spanning more than a hundred years may reveal the trajectory of Nestorianism in Tang China.

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Appendix: Transcription and Translations of *Xu ting mishisuo jing* 序聽迷詩所經

序聽迷詩所經一卷

The Record of Hearing the Sutra of the Intercessor [One Volume]

Line1-6

尔時彌師訶說天尊序娑法云。異見多少誰能說？經義難息事誰能說？天尊在後顯何在？停止在處其何？諸佛及非人平章天阿羅漢。誰見天尊？在於衆生。無人得見天尊。何人有威得見天尊？為此天尊顏容似風。何人能得見風？

At that time, Mishihe¹ was expounding the teaching of the Celestial Worthy² Xusuo,³ saying, "who can tell how many different opinions there are? Who can explain things that even the doctrines of scriptures cannot solve? The Celestial Worthy is behind everything. Where does he reveal himself? At which place does he stop? Of all the Buddhas and non-humans, deities [in charge] of evaluation,⁴ Arhats, who has ever seen the Celestial Worthy? As for sentient beings, no one can see the Celestial Worthy. Who has the power to see the Celestial Worthy? Since the countenance of the Celestial Worthy is like the wind, who can see the wind?"

6-15

天尊不盈少時巡歷世間居編。為此人人居帶天尊氣。始得存活。然始得在家安。至心意到。日出日沒已來。居見想心去處皆到。身在明樂靜度安居。在天皆諸佛。為此風流轉世間。風流無處不到。天尊常在靜度快樂之處。果報無處不到。世間人等。誰知風動。唯只聞聲顛。一不見形。無人識得顏容端正。若為非黃非白非碧。亦無人知風居強之處。

For a split second, the Celestial Worthy has already wandered about and inspected all dwellings and households⁵ in the world. For this reason, everyone holds and contains the pneuma of the Celestial Worthy. Only in this Way can they survive, and then can they stay safe at home till the mind and the spirit [that are also the Celestial Worthy's gift] come. Since the sunrise and sunset [Everyday], the Celestial Worthy stays there and observes; he can go all places his heart wants to go while his body dwells in the realm of brightness, joy, and serenity. All Buddhas dwell in heaven, but they are transferred to the world by the flow of the wind. There is nowhere that the flow of the wind cannot go. The Celestial Worthy permanently dwells in the realm of serenity and the place of joy, yet retributions [the fruits

¹ Mishihe 彌師訶 (MC: *mjie-srij-xa): supposed to be a transliteration of "Messiah" (in Syriac: *Mashiha*), referring to Jesus Christ.

² Tianzun 天尊: the Celestial Worthy. It is borrowed from Chinese Daoist terminology. In Daoism, it refers to the gods, spirit and objects of worship.

³ Xusuo 序娑 (MC: *zjoX-sa): supposed to a transliteration of "Jehovah." (in Syriac: *Levha*).

⁴ pingzhang 平章: evaluate; lay out in proper order. Tian 天: in Buddhism and Daoism, it refers to heavenly beings and deities (Sanskrit: *deva*).

⁵ ju 居 is a noun, referring to dwelling. bian 編 refers to "household." Since Shang Yang's reform 商鞅變法, civilians have been incorporated into the household registration of the government in successive dynasties. Each household is called a bianhu 編戶.

of karma]⁶ go everywhere. Who, in the world, knows the movements of the wind? People only heard the sound of the wind over their heads⁷. They did not see the Celestial Worthy's body [shape] at all. No one knows whether he has a regular countenance or not, and what if he is not yellow, not white, and not green? Also, no one knows where the wind is at its strongest.

15-25

天尊自有神威。住在一處。所住之無人捉得。亦無死生。亦無麗娑相值所。造天地已求。不曾在世間。無神威力。每受長樂仙緣。人急之時。每稱佛名。多有無知之人。喚神比天尊之類。亦喚作白(旨)尊白(旨)樂。人人鄉俗語舌。吾別天尊多。常在。每信每居。天尊与人意智不少。誰報佛慈恩？計合思量。明知罪惡。不習天通。為神力畜養人身到大。亦合衆生等思量。所在人身命器息。惣是天尊使其然。衆生皆有流轉。關身住在地洛。為此變造微塵。所有衆生皆發善心。自紀思量。

The Celestial Worthy himself has divine might, and he dwells in a place where no one can find. That is a place where there is also no death and life, no encounters with sufferings⁸ and ephemerality.⁹ Since the Celestial Worthy has already achieved the goal of creating heaven and earth, he never reveals himself in the world and never manifests power as deities do. Every time people get permanent happiness and the chance to become immortal¹⁰ or feel a sense of urgency, they will call the Buddhas' names every time. There are too many ignorant people who regard¹¹ deities (such as the Buddhas) as being the same sort of thing as the Celestial Worthy! They also think it is joyful to act¹² according to and worship those deities' decree. Everyone holds such parochial and vulgar statements.¹³ We are detached¹⁴ from the Celestial Worthy too much while he is always with us! Every time you have faith in him, every time he stays with you. [Or: He stays with each one who has faith in him.] The Celestial Worthy has given human beings much wisdom. Who is [still] repaying the kindness of the Buddhas? You should calculate and consider [whom do you owe a debt of gratitude to]! You are fully aware of what sin is and born to know everything without learning them. It is because the divine power nourishes the human body to grow strong, which sentient beings also should consider. For all people, your bodies, lives, capacities, and spirits are always what the Celestial Worthy made them be. Sentient beings all go through

⁶ *guobao* 果報: a fundamental Buddhist terminology, referring to retribution for good or evil deeds, implying that different conditions in this (or any) life are the variant fruits of seed sown in previous life or lives.

⁷ *dian* 顛: the crown of the head.

⁸ *li* 麗 is a phonetic loan character of *li* 罹 in Middle Chinese, which means “suffering, misery.”

⁹ *suo* 娑 might be an abbreviation of *suopo* 娑婆 (in Sanskrit: *sahā*), referring to this ephemeral world.

¹⁰ *xianyuan* 仙緣: a Daoist terminology, referring to the chance to become immortal.

¹¹ *huan* 喚: to consider; to think.

¹² *zuo* 作: to do, to act.

¹³ *xiangsu* 鄉俗: a compound word referring to country custom. It may be understood here as an adjective which means “parochial and vulgar.” *yushe* 語舌 means “language” which may have an extended meaning of “statement; opinion.” This understanding fits the context since the previous sentence describes people’s ignorance.

¹⁴ *bie* 別: to separate; set apart; detach.

transmigration. A bigwig¹⁵ may end up living in the frontier¹⁶. For this reason, everyone will eventually be transformed¹⁷ into motes of dust. All sentient beings should arouse a good mind, regulate¹⁸ themselves and consider seriously.

25-33

生者皆死。衆生悉委。衆生身命為風。無活臨命之時。風離衆生。心意無風。為風存活。風離衆生。有去留之時。人何因不見風去風顏色。若為若緋若綠及別色。據此不見風。若為衆生即道。天尊在何處。衆生優道。何因不見天尊？何因？衆生在於罪中。自於見天尊。天尊不同人身。復誰能見？衆生無人敢近天尊。善福善緣衆生。然始得見天尊。

The living will all die, and sentient beings will all wither. Sentient beings have bodies and lives due to the wind. When you cannot live anymore, and on your deathbed, the wind leaves sentient beings, and the wind is no longer in mind. Sentient beings exist due to the wind. The wind leaves the sentient beings, and there is a time of death coming. Why can't people see the wind go away? What color is the wind? Is it similar to red, green, or another color? According to this, people have never seen the wind. If sentient beings are near¹⁹ the Way, then [why they do not know] where is the Celestial Worthy? If sentient beings excel in the Way, then why did they not see the Celestial Worthy? Why? Because sentient beings are in sin. You want to go²⁰ and see the Celestial Worthy yourselves. However, the Celestial Worthy is different from the human body, and who can see him? No one among sentient beings dares to approach the Celestial Worthy. Only those sentient beings of good merits and good conditions can then see the Celestial Worthy.

33-42

世間元不見天尊。若為得識。衆生自不見天。為自脩福。然不墮惡道地獄。即得天得。如有惡業衆。墮落惡道。不見明果。亦不得天道。衆生等好自思量。天地上大。大諸惡。衆生事養者。勲心為國多得賜官職。并賜雜菜無量無量。如有衆生。不事天。大諸惡。及不取進止。不得官職。亦無賜償。即配徒流。即配處死。此即不是天大諸惡自由至。為先身緣業種果團圓。犯有衆生先須想自身果報。

People in the world have never seen the Celestial Worthy. How could they possibly see him? Sentient beings, of course, did not see the Celestial Worthy. If you cultivate virtuous behaviors for yourselves, you will not fall into evil paths[destinies] and hells, and then you will obtain a heavenly path. Or else, if you are a person who creates evil karma, you will fall into evil paths[destinies], will not see bright[promising] results, and will not attain the heavenly path. Sentient beings, you would better think about it yourselves. The sky is high, and the earth is vast, and [between them], there are various great evils. Sentient beings who serve and make offerings will work hard for the country wholeheartedly. They

¹⁵ *guan* 關: key; crucial. *shen* 身: body; person. *guanshen* 關身: important person.

¹⁶ *diluo* 地洛: it may be a transcribing error here. The correct word might be *diluo* 地絡, referring to frontier or border.

¹⁷ *bianzao* 變造: to add, trim, or subtract things that already exist and transform them into something else.

¹⁸ *ji* 紀: to regulate; to manage.

¹⁹ *ji* 即: to approach; to be near.

²⁰ *yu* 於: to go.

are more likely to be granted official positions and innumerable multi-colored silks.²¹ If there are people who do not serve the Celestial Worthy, or commit various great evil or refuse to take [follow] the imperial edicts²²; in that case, they will not obtain official positions and rewards as well. Then they will be sentenced to servitude, exiled, or be punished to death. These [rewards or retributions] are not brought about by the Celestial Worthy or committing various great evil themselves. They are due to the dependent arising and karma²³ created in the previous life²⁴ and the unity²⁵ of seed²⁶ and fruit²⁷ [cause and effect]. Sentient beings who commit sin should first think about their own retributions.

42-46

天尊受許辛苦始立衆生衆生理。佛不遠立。人身自專。善有善福。惡有惡緣。無知衆生。遂湮木駝象牛驢馬等衆生及麀鹿。雖造形容。不能與命。衆生有智。自量緣果。所有具見。亦復自知。並即是實。為此今世有。

The Celestial Worthy suffered a lot to create sentient beings. He established universal principles of sentient beings, and it was not long before he established Buddhas. The creation of the human body can only be done by the Celestial Worthy himself.²⁸ Good people will have good merits, while evil people will have evil conditions. Ignorant sentient beings then use clay and wood to make statues of camels, elephants, ox, donkeys, horses, and so on, sentient beings themselves, and roebucks, deer. Although they have made the shapes and countenance, they could not give them lives. Sentient beings have wisdom; you should think about the cause and effect for yourselves. You should also be aware of everything you see. All things must depend on²⁹ the Celestial Worthy to be real³⁰ and by this to exist in this world³¹.

47-52

多有衆生。遂自作衆衆作士。此事等皆天尊。遂不能(能)與命俱。衆生自被誑惑。乃將(將)金造象。銀神像及銅像并湮神像及木神像。更作衆衆諸畜產。造人似人。造

²¹ According to the context, it is possible that *zakai* 雜菜 is a transcribing error. The correct word might be 雜綵 or 雜彩, referring to varicolored silk which was used to be a precious object bestowed by the court.

²² *jinzhi* 進止: considering this text emphasizes that “one should serve the Celestial Worthy, the emperor and parents as well,” here, *jinzhi* may refer to imperial edict. Besides, it also has another meaning, referring to will.

²³ *yuanye* 緣業: a Buddhist term referring to dependent arising and karma. Colloquially, one’s fate is conditioned by his or her past activities.

²⁴ *xianshen* 先身: a Buddhist term referring to former life.

²⁵ *tuanyuan* 團圓: unity; reunion.

²⁶ *zhong* 種: literally, ‘seed,’ referring to cause, origin.

²⁷ *guo* 果: literally, ‘fruit,’ referring to result, effect. In Buddhism, the unity of seed and fruit means cause and effect is concomitant in their retribution. They correspond to each other in continuity.

²⁸ *zizhuan* 自專: to solely take charge of something.

²⁹ *bang* 並: used as a verb here, a phonetic loan character of *bang* 傍, which means to rely on; to depend on.

³⁰ *shi* 實: a Buddhist terminology, referring to “real; true; solid.” It contrasts with *xu* 虛, which means “false; unreal.”

³¹ *jinshi* 今世: a Buddhist terminology, referring to “this world; this life; at present,” as distinguished from *qianshi* 前世 (previous life) and *laishi* 來世 (next life).

馬似馬。造牛似牛。造驢似驢。唯(唯)不能(能)行動。亦不語話。亦不喫食息。無肉無皮無器無骨。

There are many sentient beings who even made a mass of craftsmen³². This thing [the creation of the human beings] and other things are all fulfilled by the Celestial Worthy. No one else can give life to all that they made. Since sentient beings were confused/deluded, they made figures out of gold; they made silver statues of deities and bronze statues, along with earthen statues of deities and wooden statues of deities. Moreover, they made a mass of people and all kinds of livestock. They made a man that looked like a man; made a horse that looked like a horse; made an ox that looked like an ox, and made a donkey that looked like a donkey. What they made cannot move; cannot speak; also cannot eat and breathe, with no flesh, no skin, no organs, and no bones.

52-56

合一切由緒不為具說。一切緒內略說少見多。為諸人說遣知好惡。遂將(將)飲食多中嘗少。即知何食有，氣味無氣味。但事天尊之人。為說經義。並作此經。一切事由。大有歎處。多有事節。由緒少。但事天尊人。及說天義。

All causes[reasons] do not need to be expounded [to people] in detail. Now we talk briefly about the origin of all things internally[privately], to see more by saying less. Then you expound it to the multitude and make them know good things and bad things. It is like eating³³ food, you only need to taste a little bit from the whole, you will immediately know what kind of food it is and whether or not it has flavor. Those who serve the Celestial Worthy created this scripture together to expound the doctrine of the scripture. The whole story [in this scripture] dedicated much to praise the Celestial Worthy while it curtailed the details and causes. Those who serve the Celestial Worthy will also expound the heavenly doctrine.

56-62

有人怕天尊法。自行善心。及自作好。并諫人好。此人即是受天尊教。受天尊戒。人常作惡。及教他人惡。此人不受天尊教。突墮惡道。命屬閻羅王。有人受天尊教。常道我受戒教人受戒。人合怕天尊。每日諫悞。一切衆生皆各怕天尊。並縮攝諸衆生死活。管帶縮攝渾神。

If one fears the Celestial Worthy's law, he acts out of a good mind, does good himself, and admonishes others to be good. Such a person has received the Celestial Worthy's teaching and precepts. If someone always does evil and teaches others to be evil, this person has not received the Celestial Worthy's teaching. He may suddenly fall into evil paths[destinies], and his life will belong to Yama³⁴. If one has received the Celestial Worthy's teaching, he/she will always say, "I have received the precepts, and I will teach others to receive the precepts." People should fear the Celestial Worthy and correct negligence³⁵ every day. For all sentient beings, each one should fear the Celestial Worthy as

³² *zuoshi* 作士: craftsman engaged in labor.

³³ *jiang* 將: a verb here, to eat.

³⁴ Yanluowang 閻羅王: a Buddhist terminology, referring to the king of the world of the dead.

³⁵ *wu* 悞: the same as *wu* 誤, referring to negligence.

he controls³⁶ sentient beings' life and death at the same time, and he manages, leads, and controls all deities.

62-72

衆生若怕天尊。亦合怕懼聖上。聖上前身福私天尊補任。亦無自乃天尊耶。屬自作聖上。一切衆生皆取聖上進止。如有人不取。聖上駢使不伏。其人在於衆生即是返逆。償若有人受聖上進止。即成人中解事。并伏駢使。及好之人。并諫他人作好。及自不作惡。此人即成受戒之所。如有人受戒。及不怕天尊。此人及一依佛法不成受戒之所。即是返逆之人。第三須怕父母。祗承父母。將(將)比天尊及聖帝。以若人先事天尊及聖上。及事父母不闕。此人於天尊得福。

If sentient beings fear the Celestial Worthy, they should also fear the emperor. The emperor possessed³⁷ meritorious virtues in his former life, and the Celestial Worthy appointed him to fill the emperor's vacancy. The emperor likewise does not think of himself as the Celestial Worthy. He created a category of the emperor for himself. All sentient beings should take [follow] the emperor's edicts. If someone does not follow and disobey the emperor's orders, this person is a traitor to sentient beings. If someone accepts the emperor's edicts, he becomes a man of sense among people and is willing to obey the orders and be a good man. He also admonishes others to do good, and he never does evil himself. Then, this person accomplishes the result³⁸ of receiving the precepts. If someone receives the precepts and has no fear of the Celestial Worthy; [in that case,] even this person reaches full compliance [complete conformity] with³⁹ Buddha-Dharma, he does not accomplish the result of receiving the precepts, and he is a traitor [to the Celestial Worthy]. Third, you should fear your parents. To venerate your parents and regard them as the Celestial Worthy and the holy emperor. Therefore, if someone serves the Celestial Worthy and the emperor first, and there is nothing lacking in his/her serving parents, this person will get blessed rewards from the Celestial Worthy.

73-81

不多此三事。一種先事天尊。第二事聖上。第三事父母。為此普天在地並是父母行。據此聖上皆是神生。今世雖有父母見存。衆生有智計合怕天尊及聖上。并怕父母。好受天尊法教。不合破戒天尊所受。及受尊教。先遣衆生禮諸天佛。為仏受苦。置立天地。只為清淨威力因緣。聖上雄(唯)須勤伽習俊。聖上宮殿。於諸佛求得。聖上身惣是自由。

One needs to do primarily three things: first, to serve the Celestial Worthy; second, to serve the emperor; third, to serve parents. To this end, the one in heaven [the Celestial Worthy] and the one on earth [the emperor] are together the high seniorities⁴⁰ like parents. On these grounds, every emperor was born of deities, although he has parents in this life.

³⁶ *wanshe* 縮攝: to govern; to control.

³⁷ *si* 私: to possess.

³⁸ *suo* 所: result.

³⁹ *yiyi* 一依: to be completely in conformity with.

⁴⁰ *xing* 行: seniority in the family or clan; generation.

Since sentient beings have the wit, you should fear the Celestial Worthy and the emperor and your parents together. In this way, it would be easy to receive the Celestial Worthy's teaching, and you should not violate the precepts and what the Celestial Worthy has taught, and you should accept⁴¹ the Celestial Worthy's honored teaching⁴². At first, the Celestial Worthy allows sentient beings to pay reverence to devas and Buddhas. As Buddhas are willing to suffer for sentient beings, they are set up between heaven and earth for the simple reason that they have the power of purification⁴³. The emperor needs to be diligent in visiting the temples and learning from the sages⁴⁴. The emperor's palace is sought and obtained from Buddhas, yet after all, his body is his own⁴⁵

81-92

天尊說云。所有衆生返諸惡等。返逆於尊。亦不是孝。第二顛(願)者。若孝父母并恭給。所有衆生孝養父母恭承不闕。臨命終之時乃得天道。為舍宅為事父母。如衆生無父母。何人處生？第四顛(願)者。如有受戒人。向一切衆生皆發善心。莫懷(懷)睚惡。第五顛(願)者。衆生自莫煞生。亦莫諫他煞。所以衆生命共人命不殊。第六顛(願)者。莫奸他人妻子自莫宛。第七顛(願)者。莫作賊。第八衆生錢財見他富貴并有田宅奴婢天睚妬。第九顛(願)者。有好妻子并好金屋。作文證加祿他人。第十顛(願)者。受他寄物。并將(將)費用。

Here is what the Celestial Worthy says: [my first promise is,] all sentient beings' going back to evil, is equivalent to betrayal to the Celestial Worthy. It is also not filial piety. My second promise is, you⁴⁶ should be filial to your parents and provide for them respectfully. All sentient beings who provide for their parents with filial piety with nothing lacking will attain a heavenly path near the time of death. [The third wish is,] you should build a house to serve your parents. If sentient beings have no parents, then who gave birth to you? My fourth wish is, if someone has received the precepts, he/she should arouse a good mind toward all sentient beings. Do not harbor wrath and spite. My fifth wish is that sentient beings naturally do not kill living beings and do not abet others to kill. The reason is that all life and human life are equal, without distinction. The sixth wish is, do not commit adultery with another's wife; do not go astray⁴⁷. My seventh wish for you is not to be a thief. The eighth is related to sentient beings' view of wealth. When you see rich people have land, houses, slaves, and maidservants, do not carry a grudge every day. When you see someone

⁴¹ *shou* 受: the first *shou* 受 in this sentence is a phonetic loan character of *shou* 授, which means to teach. The second *shou* 受 means to accept; to receive.

⁴² *zunjiao* 尊教: *zun* 尊 is used in honorific term and here, *zunjiao* 尊教 is an honorific term for the Celestial Worthy's teaching.

⁴³ *qingjing weili* 清淨威力: the power of purification.

⁴⁴ *jun* 俊: people of great intellect.

⁴⁵ *ziyou* 自由: be on one's own; to make one's own decision. This sentence may imply that since the human body can only be created by the Celestial Worthy, the emperor's body is his own, neither attained from nor determined by the Buddhas.

⁴⁶ *ruo* 若: you; your.

⁴⁷ *wan* 宛: originally meaning is "to bend." According to the context here, it might be understood as "to go astray."

who has a beautiful wife and a gorgeous house, my ninth wish is not to frame⁴⁸ him with a false document of evidence. The tenth wish is, you should not consume the goods of others entrusted to you.

92-99

天尊并處分事^燕(極)多。見弱莫欺他人。如見貧兒。實莫迴面。及宛家飢(飢)餓多與食飲。割捨宛事。如見男努力與努力與湏漿。見人無衣即與衣著。佐兒財物不至一日莫留。所以作兒規徒多少。不避寒凍。庸力見若莫罵。諸神有威力。加罵之得災。貧兒如要湏錢。有即湏與。無錢可與以理發遣無中布施。

There are a great many things that are disposed of by the Celestial Worthy. Therefore, when you see the weak, do not bully them. If you see the poor, you really should not turn your face away. Moreover, if you see those who go astray are starving, you should let go of their wrongdoing, give them enough food and drinks. If you see a man working hard [on the farm], you should give him a hand and offer some broth. If you see someone without clothes, you should immediately give him clothes to wear. If [you see] a servant not paid, do not detain his wages for a single day. If so, how little money does the servant have to seek a livelihood? He could not avoid suffering from the cold. If you see a hired laborer, do not curse him. As all deities have power, you are sure to receive [the retribution of] disasters and obstacles if you curse. If a poor person needs money, give it to him if you have any; if you have no money to give, send him away with principles, which is the donation out of nothing [the donation of the Celestial Worthy's teaching].

99-108

見他人宿疾病。實莫嘆他。此人不是自由如此疾病。貧兒無衣破碎。實莫嘆。莫欺他人取物。莫枉他人。有人披訴。應事實莫屈斷。有憫獨男女及寡女婦中訴。莫作怨屈。莫遣使有怨。實莫高心莫誇張。莫傳口合舌。使人兩相鬪(斗)打。一世已求。莫經州縣官告。無知答。受戒人。一下莫他惡向。一切衆生皆常發善心。自惡莫顛(願)惡。所以多中料少。每常造好向一切衆生。如有人見顛(願)知受戒人寫。誰能依此經。即是受戒人。

If you see someone with an extended illness⁴⁹, you must not mock him since he did not cause such illness himself. If a poor man has no clothes or in rags, you must not mock him. Do not bully others and make them run errands for you. Do not wrong others. If someone brings a lawsuit, verify whether it is true or not; do not create a distorted judgment. There are men or women without siblings and widows; if they are charged, do not feel animosity⁵⁰ toward them and distort the facts. Do not cause⁵¹ animosity. You really should not be arrogant. Do not exaggerate; do not carry tales from one to another and cause them to fight⁵² each other. You should seek blessings by yourself in this life rather than from your province

⁴⁸ *mei* 謀: might be a transcribing error of *mou* 謀, to conspire.

⁴⁹ *chen* 疢: the old style of *chen* 疢, referring to the disease.

⁵⁰ *yuan* 怨: the same as *yuan* 怨, referring to animosity.

⁵¹ *qian* 遣 and *shi* 使 all means “let; allow.”

⁵² *dou* 鬪: the same as *dou* 鬥, which means “to fight; to compete.” *cheng* 打: to hit against.

and county officers⁵³, as they are also ignorant and would have no answers. People who have received the precepts do not do evil to others, not even once. All sentient beings should always arouse a good mind. As for those who have done evil, do not reconcile yourself to living in sin. In this Way, the few are chosen⁵⁴ [by the Celestial Worthy] from the multitude. Therefore, each of you should always build up goodness in all sentient beings. If there is someone who sees those wishes and knows that people who have received the precepts wrote them, whoever can follow this Sutra is the one who has received the precepts.

108-114

如有衆生不能依不成受戒人。處分皆是天尊向諸長老及向大小。迎相諫好。此為第一。天尊處分衆生。依天尊依。莫使衆生煞祭祀。亦不遣煞命。衆生不依此教。自煞生祭祀。喫穴噉美。將(將)瀾(瀾)詐神。即煞羊等。衆生不依此教作好處分人等。衆生背面作惡。遂背天尊。

If there are sentient beings unable to follow it, they will fail to become precept-receivers. All disposals are made by the Celestial Worthy, going to all the elders, the adults, and the youth. It would be best if you welcomed his exhortations to do good, which is the first thing. The Celestial Worthy deals with all sentient beings; make them follow what the Celestial Worthy follows; make them not kill to offer sacrifice, also not allow others to kill lives. However, sentient beings did not follow this teaching. They still killed living beings to offer sacrifice; they ate meat, chewed the flesh, and deceived the subordinate deities.⁵⁵ Then, they also killed lambs. Sentient beings disobeyed this teaching; they did not deal with others with kindness. Sentient beings did evil behind the scenes. Thus, they turned their backs on the Celestial Worthy.

114-124

天尊見衆生如此。憐愍不少。諫作好不依。天尊當使涼風向一童女。名為末艷。涼風即入末艷腹內。依天尊教。當即末艷懷(懷)身。為以天尊使涼風伺童女邊無男夫懷(懷)任。令一切衆生見無男夫懷(懷)任。使世間人等見即道，天尊有威力。即遣衆生信心清淨迴向善緣。末艷懷(懷)後產一男。名為移鼠(鼠)。父是向涼風。有無知衆生即道。若向風懷(懷)任生產。但有世間下聖上放勅。一紙去處。一切衆生甘伏據此。天尊在於天上。普署天地。

Although the Celestial Worthy sees sentient beings doing this, he still showed undiminished pity and continued to exhort those who did not follow the teaching of doing good. Then the Celestial Worthy sent the cool wind to a virgin, whose name is Moyan. The cool wind followed the Celestial Worthy's instruction and entered soon into Moyan's womb. Moyan got pregnant immediately. By sending the cool wind to get this virgin pregnant when

⁵³ *guangao* 官告: a compound word, referring to the letter of appointment. In ancient China, the officer would get a commission when appointed. Officers of provinces and counties were called *fumuguan* 父母官, who were expected to protect the local people, like their parents. This text admonishes people not to rely on officials but to rely on themselves to follow the Celestial Worthy's teaching.

⁵⁴ *liao* 料: to select.

⁵⁵ As some scholars speculated, the correct order of *Jiang shu zha shen* 將瀾詐神 might be *jiang zha shushen* 將許瀾神. *Shu* 瀾 means "deferential" and it can be understood as the interchangeable character of 屬 which means "subordinate; inferior."

there was no man around, the Celestial Worthy made all sentient beings witness Moyan's pregnancy without a man. He made people in the world see the miracle and think, "the Celestial Worthy has the [inconceivable] power." In this Way, the Celestial Worthy lets sentient beings keep pure faith and return to good karma. Moyan conceived and later gave birth to a boy named Yishu, whose father was the previous cool wind. Even the ignorant people now thought it was as if the previous cool wind made Moyan pregnant and gave birth. On earth, there are emperors who issue imperial edicts. Wherever the edict goes, all sentient beings are willing to obey and rely on it. Meanwhile, the Celestial Worthy dwells in heaven and disposes of all things from heaven to the earth.

124-133

當產移鼠(鼠)迷師訶。所在世間居見明果在於天地。幸星居知在於天上。星大如車輪。明淨所天尊處。一尔前後生於拂林園烏梨師斂(斂)城中。當生弥師訶五時。經一年後。語話說法。向衆生作好。年過十二求於淨處名述難字。即向若昏人湯谷。初時是弥師訶弟。伏聖在於硤中居住。生生已來不喫酒肉。唯(唯)食生菜及蜜。蜜於地上。當時有衆生不少向谷昏渾禮拜。及復受戒。

When Yeshu- Mishihe [Messiah]⁵⁶ was born, every dwelling in his world sees the bright results between heaven and earth, and people noticed a new⁵⁷ star in the sky, which is as big as a cartwheel. The star is in the bright and pure place where the Celestial Worthy dwells. In a single moment⁵⁸, Yishu was born in Fulin[Ancient Rome]⁵⁹, in the city of Wulishilian[Jerusalem]⁶⁰. Mishihe must have been born at the fifth shi⁶¹. After one year, he could speak, and then he expounded the teaching for sentient beings in the hope of them to do good. When he was twelve years old, he went to pray in a pure place named Shunan⁶². Then Yishu went to the river valley where a man named Ruohun⁶³ lived. Initially, Ruohun was a brother of Mishihe. He obeyed the Holy one and lived in the valley. Since he was born, he never drank wine nor ate meat; he only ate raw vegetables and honey, and the honey was from earth. At that time, many sentient beings went to Guhun⁶⁴. They all worshiped with him together, and then they followed him to receive the precepts.

133-139

當即谷昏遣弥師訶入多難中洗。弥師訶入湯了後出水。即有涼風從(從)天求。顏容似薄閤。坐向弥師訶上。虛空中問道。弥師訶是我兒。世間所有衆生。皆取弥師訶進止所是處分皆作好。弥師訶即似衆生天道為是天尊處分。處分世間下衆生。休事屬神。即有衆當聞此語。休事瀾(瀾)神。休作惡。遂信好業。

⁵⁶ Mishihe 迷師訶: also written as mishihe 彌師訶, supposed to be the transliteration of the Messiah.

⁵⁷ *xin* 辛: the same meaning as *xin* 新, which means "new."

⁵⁸ *yi er* 一尔: in an instant.

⁵⁹ Fulin 拂林: Ancient Rome, also recorded as *fulin* 拂菻.

⁶⁰ Wulishilian 烏梨師斂: might be a transliteration of the Syrian word "Ūrišlem," which refers to Jerusalem.

⁶¹ According to traditional Chinese timekeeping, the fifth shi refers to shenshi 申時, about three to five o'clock in the afternoon.

⁶² Shunan 述難: might refer to Jordan River.

⁶³ Ruohun 若昏: might refer to Saint John the Baptist.

⁶⁴ Guhun 谷昏: supposed to be an interchangeable world of Ruohun 若昏, referring to Saint John the Baptist.

[When Mishihe came,] Guhun immediately sent Mishihe into Duonan⁶⁵ to get baptized. When Mishihe went into the water and then came out, a cool wind from heaven soon drew a cool wind whose countenance was like a pigeon.⁶⁶ It stopped right over the Mishihe and uttered from the air: "Mishihe is my son. All sentient beings in the world should follow what Mishihe ordered, and whatever he arranges must be done well. Mishihe looks like sentient beings. The realm of heaven is disposed of by the Celestial Worthy, and Mishihe disposes of worldly affairs. Therefore, sentient beings, stop serving subordinate deities!" Hereupon there were people who heard such words, "Stop serving subordinate deities. Stop doing evil. Comply with faith in good karma!"

139-149

弥師訶年十二及只年卅二已上。求所有惡業衆生遣迴向好業善道。弥師訶及有弟子十二人。遂受苦迴。飛者作生。瞎人得眼。形容異色者遲差。病者醫療得損。被鬼(鬼)者趨鬼(鬼)。跛脚特差。所有病者求向弥師訶邊把著迦沙。並 愆得差。所有作惡人。不過向善道者。不信天尊教者。及不潔淨貪利之人。今世並不放却。嗜酒受肉。及事漏(灑)神文人。留在著遂誣。或趨覩遂欲煞却。為此大有衆生。即信此教。為此不能煞弥師訶。

Mishihe began his teaching at the age of twelve and lived only a little more than thirty-two years. [Throughout his life,] He sought to let sentient beings who had created evil karma return to good karma and virtuous paths. Mishihe, together with his twelve disciples, then went through many hardships, twists, and turns. He made those who had flown away [the dead] come back to life; the blind see again. He made those who did not look very well recover⁶⁷ gradually; the sick got healed, and their pain abated. For those who suffered from demons, Mishihe drove demons away; he made the lame people recover extraordinarily. All those who were sick came to Mishihe for help. They stood by him, held his clothes⁶⁸, then all of them entirely recovered. However, all those who did evil, who did not confess his sins and go to the virtuous paths, who had no faith in the Celestial Worthy's teaching, and those who were unclean and greedy, who could not give up drinking wine and eating meat in this life, and serving the inferior deities and the ancient sages⁶⁹—— there remained many such people. They then tried to slander Mishihe, and some of the Jews⁷⁰ even wanted to kill him. However, since there were many sentient beings with faith in this teaching, the wicked could not kill Mishihe [for a while].

149-156

⁶⁵ Duonan 多難: supposed to be an interchangeable world of the previous Shunan 述難, referring to Jordan River.

⁶⁶ *boge* 薄閣: might be a homophone of *boge* 鶉鴿, referring to the pigeon.

⁶⁷ *chai* 差: later written as *chai* 瘥, used as a verb which means to be recovered.

⁶⁸ *jiasha* 迦沙: also written as 袈裟, a Buddhist term referring to the surplice that Buddhist monks wear. Here it refers to Mishihe's clothes.

⁶⁹ *wenren* 文人: here might not refer to the literati or officers. It has another meaning, referring to cultured and wise ancestors. It might have the same connotation as *shengren* 圣人, such as Confucius. China has a tradition of serving and worshipping ancestors and sages.

⁷⁰ *xuedu* 趨覩: might be a transliteration of Jew.

於後惡業結用扇趨觀信心清淨人。即自平章。乃欲煞却弥師訶。無方可計。即向大王邊惡說。惡業人平惡事。弥師訶作好。更加精進教衆生。年過卅二。其習惡人等。即向大王毗羅都思邊言。告毗羅都思前即道。弥師訶合當死罪。大王即追惡因緣共證。弥師訶向大王毗羅都思邊(邊)。弥師訶計當死罪。

Then, the evil forces colluded together and put forth their strength; they instigated those of the pure faith among the Jews, but they were exposed immediately. Then they wished to kill Mishihe. Since they could not think of any plan, they then spoke ill of Mishihe around the governor⁷¹. Those evil persons slanderously appraised his vices. However, Mishihe always did good, and he tried harder to teach people. When Mishihe was over thirty-two years old, people who were used to do evil then went to the governor Piluodusi⁷² and slandered Mishihe; they denounced him to the emperor, saying, "Mishihe should be condemned to death." The governor then ordered him to be arrested, according to the combined testimony. Mishihe was brought to Piluodusi; he reckoned that he would be condemned to death.

156-163

大王即欲處分。其人當死罪。我實不聞不見。其人不合當死。此事從(從)惡緣人自處斷。大王云。我不能(能)煞此。惡緣即云其人不當死我男女。大王毗羅都思。索水洗手。對惡緣等前。我實不能煞其人。惡緣人等。更重諮請。非不煞不得。弥師訶將(將)身施与惡為一切衆生。遣世間人等知其人命如轉燭。為今世衆生布施代命受死。

Then, the governor was about to hold a trial, saying: "Should this man be condemned to death? I really neither heard nor saw his wrongdoing. This man should not be condemned to death!" [He might know] this case was decided in error by those evil persons on their own, so the governor said, "I cannot put this man to death." Those evil persons then said, "If this person does not deserve to be executed, then we men and women are going to die!" The governor Piluodusi asked for water to wash his hands; then he went up to those evil persons, saying: "I really cannot put this man to death!" Thereupon, those evil persons submitted the petition once again, saying: "it is impossible not to put him to death." Mishihe was willing to give his life to the evil for the sake of all sentient beings, to let people in the world know that human life is as impermanent as a candle flame flickering in the wind. He gave charity to sentient beings of this world by dying in the place of humankind.

163-170

弥師訶將(將)自身与遂即受死。惡業人乃將(將)弥師訶別處向。沭上。枋枋處名為訖句。即木上縛著。更將(將)兩箇刮道人。其人比在右邊(邊)。其日將(將)弥師訶木上縛著五時。是六日齋。平明縛著。及到日西。四方闇黑地戰山崩。世間所有墓門並開。所有死人並悉得活。其人見如此。亦為不信經教。死活並為弥師訶。其人大有信心人即云...

⁷¹ Dawang 大王: supposed to be referring to Pontius Pilate, the fifth governor of the Roman province of Judaea.

⁷² Piluodusi 毗羅都思: might be a transliteration of Pontius Pilate.

Mishihe was willing to give his life and was soon put to death. Those evil persons took Mishihe to another place; removed⁷³ his clothes. The palace where they set stakes was called Qigou.⁷⁴ Then, they tied Mishihe to the cross, together with two robbers on the right side next to him. On that day, they tied Mishihe to the cross for five hours. That is the sixth day of fasting. He was tied from dawn until sunset. Suddenly, it was completely dark; the earth shook, and the mountains collapsed. All the tombs in the world opened at once, and all the dead together came back to life. Some people there saw this, yet they still did not believe the teaching of the sutras since [they thought that] the power of life and death is in the hands of Mishihe. While some people had great faith in it and said...

⁷³ *shu* 沐: might be a transcribing error, supposed to be *mu* 沐, which means “to remove.”

⁷⁴ Qigou 訖句: might be a transliteration of Golgotha.