



Jingjiao Studies Today:

Sources, Methods, and Emerging Directions

David TAM  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4327-4258>

Institute for Ethics and Religious Studies, Tsinghua University, Beijing

Hong Kong Institute of Jingjiao Studies, Hong Kong

david.tam@hkijs.org

Abstract: This article surveys major areas of recent Jingjiao research in order to assess the present state of the field and identify emerging directions in discovery and method. Organized principally by geographical and material settings, this article reviews scholarship on Turfan and the Tangchaodun site in Xiyu, *Yishen lun*, *Xuting mishisuo jing*, the Jingjiao Stele, P. 3847 and the writings listed in *Zunjing*, materials from Inner Mongolia and Quanzhou, and debates concerning manuscript authenticity and evidentiary status. Across these areas, recent scholarship moves between two complementary scales of analysis: broader reconstruction of the history of Christianity in China, the Church of the East, and Inner Asia, and close examination of individual manuscripts, inscriptions, objects, and archaeological sites. The article argues that recent advances have often come from testing broader historical reconstructions against the particular evidence on which they depend. This has encouraged a more differentiated assessment of manuscripts, texts, inscriptions, sites, and objects, while also expanding attention to their literary, theological, liturgical, and material dimensions. Questions of provenance, transmission, textual formation, authorship, classification, and authenticity have consequently been reopened. Together, these developments show a field that is increasingly interdisciplinary and methodologically self-reflective, with a firmer basis for reconstructing the histories, texts, and religious lives of Christian communities within the wider Chinese world.

Keywords: Chinese Jingjiao, Church of the East in China, Xiyu, Turfan, Tangchaodun, *Yishen lun*, Jingjiao Stele, P. 3847, manuscript studies, epigraphy, provenance, authenticity, historiography

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I. Introduction

Jingjiao studies have never depended on a single type of evidence. The field includes stone inscriptions, Chinese and multilingual manuscripts, Christian architectural remains, mural fragments, funerary monuments, and portable objects. Some of these materials preserve texts; others survive as ruin sites, images, or objects whose Christian identity and historical settings need to be established by non-textual means. A manuscript cannot be studied in quite the same way as a tombstone, nor can the remains of a church be treated as if they were written documents. Philology, codicology, epigraphy, archaeology, art history, and theological interpretation are all indispensable, yet they do not answer the same questions.

The present review does not attempt to provide a complete bibliography of Jingjiao studies or to catalogue every known site and relic. Such a survey would be difficult to encompass within one paper and, more importantly, would obscure the areas in which the field has changed most noticeably in recent years. The discussion is therefore selective. It concentrates on places and materials where new discoveries, renewed debates, or changes in methods have altered the questions being asked. Particular attention is given to provenance, authorship, manuscript transmission, textual relationships, classification, and authenticity, because several long-held assumptions in Jingjiao scholarship have recently been reconsidered.

A brief terminological clarification is necessary at the outset. In the Jingjiao Stele, the term *Jingjiao* 景教 functions broadly as a designation for Christianity, whereas *dongfang zhi jingzhong* 東方之景眾 points more particularly to the Church of the East community.¹ Yet the focus of this report is neither Christianity as a whole nor the Church of the East in its entirety. Zhu Qianzhi's expression *Zhongguo Jingjiao* 中國景教 ("Chinese Jingjiao")

1 In the stele's doctrinal statement, 真常之道, 妙而難名, 功用昭彰, 強稱景教, "The Way of True Constancy is subtle and difficult to name; its efficacious activity is manifest and evident. It is therefore provisionally called Jingjiao," *Jingjiao* is used as a broad designation for the religion. See also the historical reference to the Catholicos-Patriarch Hnanisho, 時法主僧寧恕知東方之景眾也, "At that time, the Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Hnanisho had charge of the Christian community in the East," where 東方之景眾 points more specifically to the Church of the East as a whole. The Chinese text is based on the rubbing reproduced in Zhao Liguang 趙力光, ed., *Xi'an Beilin mingbei jingcui* 西安碑林名碑精粹 [Selected Masterpieces of Famous Stelae in the Xi'an Beilin] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 2012), "Daqin Jingjiao liuxing Zhongguo bei" 大秦景教流行中國碑 [The Monument Commemorating the Propagation of Daqin Jingjiao in the Central Territory], unpaginated plates. Translations are mine.

therefore remains a useful working designation for the field.² “Church of the East” is used where the ecclesiastical tradition is intended, while “Nestorian” is retained only in quotations and historical titles because it is a historically misleading designation for that tradition.³ “Chinese Christian texts” refers more broadly to Christian writings in Chinese, including works such as *Yishen lun* 一神論 (*Discourse on the One God*) and *Xuting mishisuo jing* 序聽迷詩所經 (conventionally, *Scripture on Hearing the Messiah*), as well as the more specifically delineated group referred to in this review as the “Daqin Jingjiao texts.”

Within this broader category of Chinese Christian texts, a further distinction concerns the materials treated in Section VII as “Daqin Jingjiao texts.” P. 3847 provides an important bibliographical nexus for this group. It contains the *Daqin Jingjiao Sanwei mengdu zan* 大秦景教三威蒙度讚 (*Hymn of Daqin Jingjiao in Praise of Salvation through the Three Majesties*) and the *Zunjing* 尊經 (*Book of the Honored*); the *Zunjing* in turn catalogues works including *Xuanyuan zhiben jing* 宣元至本經 (*Book Proclaiming the Ultimate Foundation of the Primordial Origin*), *Zhixuan anle jing* 志玄安樂經 (*Book on Aspiring to Profound Bliss*), and *Sanwei zan jing* 三威讚經 (*Book of Praise to the Three Majesties*), apparently the catalogue title corresponding to the work whose fuller title in P. 3847 is read here as *Daqin Jingjiao Sanwei mengdu zan*. Its concluding note attributes the translation of the preceding thirty scrolls to Jingjing 景淨, “a monk of great virtue of this religion.” Alongside the Daqin Jingjiao Stele, these materials are brought together through overlapping forms of manuscript context, bibliographical association, attribution to Jingjing,

2 Zhu Qianzhi 朱謙之, *Zhongguo Jingjiao: Zhongguo gudai Jidujiao yanjiu* 中國景教：中國古代基督教研究 [*Chinese Jingjiao: A Study of Ancient Christianity in China*] (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe 東方出版社, 1993). On Zhu Qianzhi’s role in the study of Chinese Jingjiao origins, see Zhu Donghua 朱東華, “Zhu Qianzhi yu Zhongguo Jingjiao de suyuan yanjiu” 朱謙之與中國景教的溯源研究 [“Zhu Qianzhi and the Study of the Origins of Chinese Jingjiao”], *Shijie zongjiao wenhua* 世界宗教文化, no. 6 (2019): 35–42.

3 Sebastian P. Brock, “The ‘Nestorian’ Church: A Lamentable Misnomer,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 78, no. 3 (1996): 23–35. The terminology also carries historiographical consequences. Glen L. Thompson cautions that *Jingjiao* and the Yuan-period *Yelikewenjiao* should neither be reduced to the inherited Western category of “Nestorian heresy” nor so fully assimilated to Chinese religious categories that their continuing relationship with the transregional Church of the East disappears. See Glen L. Thompson, “Strange Teaching from a Strange Land: Foreignness, Heresy, and Our Understanding of the *Jingjiao* and *Yelikewenjiao*,” in *The Church of the East in Central Asia and China*, ed. Samuel N. C. Lieu and Glen L. Thompson, China and the Mediterranean 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 143–163.

explicit Jingjiao designation, and a wider ecclesial context connected with the Church of the East. This organizational grouping does not imply that the surviving manuscript and epigraphic witnesses share a common provenance, or that the writings themselves necessarily share a single author, translator, date, place of composition, or theological programme.

The broad use of “*Zhongguo Jingjiao*” as a name for the field, as proposed by Zhu Qianzhi, should likewise not be taken to imply that all the materials discussed in this review belong to a single historical lineage. The Christian communities represented by the Turfan 吐魯番 and the Tangchaodun 唐朝墩 evidence, the tradition reflected in *Yishen lun*, the inscriptions and writings in Chang’an and Luoyan, and the later *Yelikewen* 也里可溫 materials in Inner Mongolia and Quanzhou may represent different episodes or formations in the history of the Church of the East within the wider Chinese world. Their historical relationships need to be established rather than assumed.

What, then, has changed in recent Jingjiao studies? The answer is not simply that more materials have been discovered. New discoveries are certainly important, particularly in Xiyu 西域 (“the Western Regions”), but equally important is the way in which both new and previously known materials are now being studied. Across the field, recent scholarship moves between two complementary scales of analysis. One places manuscripts, inscriptions, archaeological sites, images, and other objects within broader histories of Christianity in China, the Church of the East, and the movement of peoples and religions across Inner Asia.⁴ The other begins with a particular manuscript, inscription, site, or object and asks first what can actually be established from that evidence.⁵ An inherited attribution, provenance, or

4 On major large-scale syntheses and recent synthetic treatments of Jingjiao texts, history, and material evidence, see Li 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* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002); Víctor Manuel Aguilar Sánchez, *Corpus Nestorianum Sinicum: “Thus Have I Heard on the Listening of Mishihe (the Messiah)” 序聽迷詩所經 and “Discourse on the One-God” 一神論: A Theological Approach with a Proposed Reading Structure and Translation* (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2021); Matteo Nicolini-Zani, *The Luminous Way to the East: Texts and History of the First Encounter of Christianity with China*, trans. William Skudlarek (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); and Alexis Balmont, *Le christianisme chinois du haut Moyen Âge: Recherche historique, philologique et théologique sur les textes chrétiens chinois du VIIe au Xe siècle* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2025).

5 Examples in this regard are many, including Wu Qiyu 吳其昱, “Jingjiao Sanwei mengdu zan yanjiu” 景教三威蒙度讚研究 [“A Study of the Jingjiao Sanwei mengdu zan”], *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集

classification is not necessarily rejected, but neither is it accepted merely because it has long been repeated. Only after the particular evidence has been examined can it be securely reconnected with the larger history.

These scales of analysis need not be mutually exclusive. Broader historical reconstruction is necessary if individual discoveries are to have historical meaning, but such reconstruction can only be tested by returning to the manuscripts, inscriptions, objects, and archaeological remains on which it depends. Recent scholarship therefore moves in both directions: from particular evidence to larger history, and from larger historical questions back to particular evidence. The distinction is important because the history of a surviving manuscript is not necessarily the same as the history of each text copied on it; two texts copied on one scroll need not have the same author or place of composition; an inscription may combine different languages and kinds of information; and materials found in geographical proximity do not necessarily belong to a single community or a single period.

Several developments discussed below illustrate this change. Xiyu, particularly the area encompassing Turfan, Qitai 奇台, and Dunhuang 敦煌, has become increasingly important not simply as the route by which Christianity reached Chang'an 長安, but as a region in which Christian communities lived, worshipped, and used texts. The discoveries at the Putaogou Xipang 葡萄溝西旁 site and the Tangchaodun site have brought archaeology, architecture, mural painting, and spatial organization more directly into a field once dominated by written sources. Together with the multilingual Christian manuscripts from Turfan, they make it possible to pose more concrete questions about what forms Christian institutional, liturgical, and communal life assumed in the region.

Manuscript study has brought a related change. Greater attention to the physical witnesses has raised questions concerning paper, handwriting, scroll formation, titles, textual units, copying, provenance, and transmission, and has made it necessary to distinguish a manuscript from the texts it contains. The 2020 examination of the scroll containing *Xuting mishisuo jing* and *Yishen lun* provides a particularly clear example. The two texts were copied by the

刊 57 (1986): 411–438; Zhu Donghua 朱東華, “Tangdai shenxuejia Jingjing de liang ge keneng de linggan yuanquan: *Yijing* yu Fojiao” 唐代神學家景淨的兩個可能的靈感源泉: 《易經》與佛教 [“Two Possible Sources of Inspiration for the Tang Theologian Jingjing: The *Yijing* and Buddhism”], *Xiyu yanjiu* 西域研究, no. 1 (2025): 98–106; David Tam, “The Names of God in the Tang Jingjiao Document *Yishen Lun* (A Discourse on God),” in *Yearbook of Chinese Theology 2018*, ed. Paulos Z. Huang (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 3–21; and idem, “From ‘Here’ to Persia: The Place of Authorship of the Ancient Chinese Christian Manuscript *Yishen lun* (Discourse on God),” *Journal of Chinese Theology* 8 (2022): 9–34.

same hand on the same scroll, but this physical relationship does not by itself establish common authorship, date of composition, textual origin, provenance, or missionary purpose.⁶

At the same time, Chinese Christian writings are being read more closely as literary and theological works. Earlier studies understandably concentrated on reconstructing the provenance of these writings and the history of the Christian mission. These questions remain necessary, but recent work has also asked how individual texts argue, how they organize their materials, how they use Chinese religious and literary vocabulary, what biblical or extra-biblical traditions they preserve, and whether writings conventionally grouped together necessarily express the same theology. Chen Huaiyu has approached this issue through the idea of a “shared textual community,” arguing that Buddhist, Daoist, and Christian writers in Tang China could draw on overlapping vocabulary, metaphors, literary forms, and rhetorical conventions without thereby expressing the same religious meanings.⁷ Zhu Donghua has recently described this development explicitly as a “paradigm change” in *Jingxue* 景學 (Jingjiao studies), calling for greater attention to the intellectual, theological, exegetical, and liturgical content of the Chinese Jingjiao writings and to their East Syriac background.⁸ Translation has become part of this discussion. A difficult Chinese expression is not merely a problem of finding a precedent in the classics or an English equivalent; the choice of translation may affect how the religious world and theological argument of a text are understood. Recent translations and retranslations of the Tang Christian writings have therefore themselves become part of the historiography.

This also explains why the present review is organized principally by geographical and material settings. Geography is not merely a convenient arrangement of the evidence. Different regions preserve different kinds of materials and raise different historical questions. Turfan has yielded

6 Tōno Haruyuki 東野治之, *Dunhuang miji Jingjiao jingdian sizhong* 敦煌秘笈景教經典四種 [Four Jingjiao Scriptures from the Dunhuang Secret Collection] (Osaka: Kyō-U Shooku 杏雨書屋, 2020).

7 Chen Huaiyu, “Shared Issues in a Shared Textual Community: Buddhist, Christian, and Daoist Texts in Tang China,” in *The Church of the East in Central Asia and China*, ed. Samuel N. C. Lieu and Glen L. Thompson, China and the Mediterranean 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 93–109.

8 Zhu Donghua 朱東華, *Jingfeng qianxun: Tang Yuan Hanyu Jingjiao wenxian yili yanjiu* 景風千尋——唐元漢語景教文獻義理研究 [In Search of the Luminous Wind: Confluent Horizons in Theologico-Philosophical Readings of Tang-Yuan Jingjiao Manuscripts], Institute of Sino-Christian Studies Monograph Series 62 (Hong Kong: Daofeng shushe 道風書社, 2026), 1–2, 18–22.

multilingual manuscripts and Christian material remains. Tangchaodun presents an archaeological, architectural, liturgical, and visual set of issues. The Central Territory is represented above all by inscriptions and Chinese texts connected with the Tang imperial world. Inner Mongolia and Quanzhou bring the discussion into the Mongol and Yuan periods and into a different body of funerary, inscriptional, manuscript, and archaeological evidence. To move from one region to another is therefore also to move from one set of evidentiary and methodological problems to another.

The review begins with Turfan and Tangchaodun because some of the most important recent archaeological and manuscript research has taken place there. These sites and materials provide access to Christian communities in Xiyu that were multilingual and locally situated. *Yishen lun* is discussed next because the cumulative geographical, linguistic, scribal, and documentary evidence points most plausibly to the Gaochang 高昌–Turfan region as its setting. Its placement after the archaeological sections therefore allows the review to move from securely localized Christian evidence in Xiyu to a Chinese Christian text whose inherited Chang'an provenance has been reconsidered.

The discussion then turns to *Xuting mishisuo jing*, whose physical association with *Yishen lun* is now established but whose literary formation, terminology, theological profile, and historical relationship to that work remain open to separate investigation. The review next examines the Jingjiao Stele as a Chinese, Syriac, monumental, and ecclesiastical witness, before turning to P. 3847 and the writings connected through *Zunjing*. These writings and their surviving witnesses are considered individually and through their manuscript, bibliographical, inscriptional, liturgical, and theological relationships, rather than as a unified authorial corpus.

The materials from Inner Mongolia and Quanzhou are treated separately because they belong chiefly to the Mongol and Yuan worlds and preserve different forms of evidence for Christian social life, mobility, linguistic plurality, institutional organization, and regional connections. The paper concludes with debates concerning the authenticity and evidentiary status of several manuscripts traditionally included among the Jingjiao materials. The issue is not simply whether a witness is genuine or false, but what its material support, handwriting, copying, textual content, transmission, provenance, attribution, and relationship to other witnesses can actually establish. Evidence concerning one of these questions does not automatically settle the others.

II. Turfan

Turfan has long been important to the study of the Church of the East in

Asia. Since the expeditions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a large number of Christian manuscripts and fragments have been recovered from the region, particularly from Bulayiq, the site now discussed in recent Chinese archaeological reports as Putaogou Xipang. Written in Syriac, Sogdian, Old Uyghur, and other languages, these materials include biblical, liturgical, and devotional texts. Turfan was therefore already one of the principal sources for the study of Eastern Christianity in Central Asia long before the recent development of Jingjiao studies.

The evidentiary situation, however, remained difficult. Many of the manuscripts were fragmentary, dispersed among different collections, and recovered under archaeological conditions that were poorly documented by present standards. The texts could be edited and compared with Christian writings known elsewhere, but the communities that copied and used them were more difficult to reconstruct. Earlier scholarship therefore tended to place the Turfan materials within the larger history of the Church of the East and its expansion from Mesopotamia across Central Asia.⁹

The work of Erica C. D. Hunter and Mark Dickens has been particularly important in this respect. Hunter has drawn attention to the ecclesiastical and liturgical life reflected in the Christian materials of the region. Dickens, working extensively with the Turfan manuscripts, has shown the importance of their multilingual character and the different uses of Syriac, Sogdian, and Uyghur. What these studies make clear is that the Turfan materials cannot be explained simply as Christian texts carried eastward from Mesopotamia. They belonged to communities that copied, read, and used Christian writings in a multilingual environment.¹⁰

9 For surveys of the Turfan Christian manuscript corpus, see Mark Dickens, "Multilingual Christian Manuscripts from Turfan," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 9 (2009): 22–42; and, specifically on Syriac materials discovered in China, Lin Lijuan 林麗娟, "Zhongguo jingnei chutu Jingjiao Xuliyayu wenshu yanjiu zongshu" 中國境內出土景教敘利亞語文書研究綜述 ["A Survey of Research on Syriac Jingjiao Documents Unearthed in China"], *Xiyu yanjiu* 西域研究 2024, no. 3: 123–146.

10 Erica C. D. Hunter, "Syriac Manuscripts from Turfan: Public Worship and Private Devotion," in *From Ancient Manuscripts to Modern Dictionaries: Selected Papers on the Semitic Languages of the Near East and Central Asia*, ed. Keith Dyer and Tarsee Li (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2017), 77–96. On Turfan as part of the wider network of the Church of the East, see also Erica C. D. Hunter, "The Church of the East in Central Asia," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 78, no. 3 (1996): 129–142; Mark Dickens, "The Church of the East: The Rest of the Story," *Fides et Historia* 32, no. 2 (2000): 107–125. For the wider East Syriac ecclesiastical, literary, and theological context, see Sebastian P. Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity: History,*

The manuscripts themselves provide further evidence of this phenomenon. Psalters, biblical fragments, calendars, prayer booklets, and other texts survive in different languages and forms.¹¹ Studies of scribal practices and manuscript use suggest that texts were copied and adapted for local use.¹² The question, therefore, is no longer only where these Christian texts originally came from. It is also how they were used in Turfan. Once the question is put in this way, the manuscripts may tell us something about teaching, prayer, liturgical practices, and the everyday religious life of the Christians who possessed them.

Recent archaeological work at Xipang has added an important new dimension to this discussion. Excavations in 2021 and 2023 recovered 871 groups of documents, including Chinese Buddhist and Daoist writings together with Christian and secular texts in Syriac, Old Uyghur, Sogdian, and other scripts and languages. Particularly striking are reused manuscript fragments in which Chinese Buddhist or Daoist texts occur together with Syriac-Sogdian or Syriac-script Uyghur liturgical writings, providing unusually concrete evidence for the multilingual and multi-religious textual environment of the community.¹³ The monastery itself, with its church buildings, residential and service spaces, and associated material remains, makes it possible to relate at least part of the Turfan Christian manuscript corpus to a specific institutional and social setting. Xipang therefore changes the question from what Christian texts reached Turfan to how a local Christian community copied, reused, read, and lived with texts within the wider religious and linguistic world of the region.

Literature, and Theology (Hampshire: Variorum, 1992).

- 11 For studies on Psalters, biblical fragments, calendrical texts, and amulets, see Mark Dickens and Nicholas Sims-Williams, "Christian Calendrical Fragments from Turfan," in *Living the Lunar Calendar*, ed. Wayne Horowitz, Jonathan Ben-Dov, and John M. Steele (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2012), 269–296; Mark Dickens, "Biblical Fragments from the Christian Library of Turfan, an Eastern Outpost of the Antiochian Tradition," in *The School of Antioch: Biblical Theology and the Church in Syria*, ed. Vahan S. Hovhannessian (Bern: Peter Lang, 2016), 19–40; and Erica C. D. Hunter, "Traversing Time and Location: A Prayer-Amulet to Mar Tamsis from Turfan," in *From the Oxus River to the Chinese Shores: Studies on East Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia*, ed. Dietmar W. Winkler and Li Tang (Vienna: LIT Verlag, 2013), 23–41.
- 12 Mark Dickens, "Scribal Practices in the Turfan Christian Community," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 13 (2013): 3–28.
- 13 Wang Zexiang 王澤祥, Liu Wensuo 劉文鎖, and Wang Long 王龍, "Xinjiang Tulufan shi Xipang Tang Song shiqi Jingjiao siyuan yizhi" 新疆吐魯番市西旁唐宋時期景教寺院遺址, *Kaogu* 考古 2024, no. 7: 24–46.

Taken together, these developments change the way in which Turfan may be used in Jingjiao studies. Its importance no longer lies simply in the number of Christian manuscripts found there. At Xipang, manuscripts can now be considered together with buildings, residential and service spaces, material remains, and a multilingual textual environment that included Christian, Buddhist, Daoist, and secular writings. What begins to emerge is therefore a history of Christians living, worshipping, copying, reusing, and reading texts in Turfan, rather than merely a history of Christian texts found there. Turfan shows that *Xiyu* cannot be treated only as the route by which Christianity travelled eastward to Chang'an. It was also a region in which Christian communities developed their own institutional, religious, and textual life.

III. Tangchaodun

The Tangchaodun ancient city site in Qitai County, Xinjiang, entered Jingjiao studies through excavations reported from 2021 onward. Archaeologists uncovered a substantial religious complex identified as Christian within the north-central area of the city, which had been established in 640 CE as the administrative seat of Pulei County in Tingzhou under the Tang. Excavations from 2021 to 2022 revealed that the monastery was founded in the mid-eighth century and underwent multiple phases of expansion, destruction, and rebuilding, continuing in use until the mid-fourteenth century, thus spanning the Tang, Qocho Uyghur, and Yuan periods.¹⁴ Its architecture, including a *bema*-style church, centred on an elevated liturgical platform in the nave, murals with crosses and Syriac inscriptions, and spaces for both worship and communal life, provides a form of material evidence not available from Chinese Christian writings alone. Unlike Turfan, where manuscripts discovered more than a century ago are now being reconsidered alongside newer archaeological finds, Tangchaodun has entered the field primarily as a recent archaeological discovery.

14 Ren Guan 任冠 and Wei Jian 魏堅, "2021 nian Xinjiang Qitai Tangchaodun Jingjiao siyuan yizhi kaogu fajue zhuyao shouhuo" 2021 年新疆奇台唐朝墩景教寺院遺址考古發掘主要收穫 ["Principal Findings from the 2021 Archaeological Excavation of the Jingjiao Monastic Site at Tangchaodun, Qitai, Xinjiang"], *Xiyu yanjiu* 西域研究, no. 3 (2022): 106–113; Ren Guan 任冠 and Wei Jian 魏堅, "2022 nian Tangchaodun gucheng yizhi kaogu gongzuo de zhuyao shouhuo" 2022 年唐朝墩古城遺址考古工作的主要收穫 ["Principal Findings from the 2022 Archaeological Work at the Tangchaodun Ancient City Site"], *Xiyu yanjiu* 西域研究, no. 2 (2023): 132–138; David Tam, "A Perfect Church on Earth: The New Discovery of an Ancient Church Site of a 7th–9th Century in Tangchaodun, China," *International Journal of Sino-Western Studies* 21 (2021): 207–219.

The excavated complex is organized into a western religious-activity zone and an eastern living zone, the latter comprising courtyards, residential rooms, and areas used for storage and production.¹⁵ Within the western religious sector, the reports describe an elevated mudbrick platform—identified as the *bema*—in the centre of the northern nave, positioned opposite a sanctuary room.¹⁶ Excavation of the *bema* and sanctuary area also exposed extensive painted and epigraphic remains, including niches, equestrian holy figures, winged figures, crosses, Old Uyghur inscriptions, and Syriac and Old Uyghur *Yelikewen* designations, with the sanctuary murals displaying artistic conventions associated with the Qocho Uyghur period.¹⁷ Together, the architectural layout and the visual and epigraphic remains make it possible to consider worship, residence, storage, and production as parts of a single institutional setting, while also raising questions about the languages, artistic conventions, devotional practices, and local affiliations of the Christians who occupied and decorated the complex.¹⁸ Tangchaodun therefore enlarges the archaeological question from whether Christians were present in Xiyu to how a settled Christian community organized sacred and everyday space, and to the cultural and religious identities they expressed through material and visual culture.¹⁹

A 2021 study identified Tangchaodun as an East Syriac *bema* church by relating its rectangular *bema*, three-chamber eastern end, *qestroma*—a platform extending from the sanctuary into the lower nave—and central nave *bema* to the liturgical architecture of the Church of the East. The argument brought the site into direct comparison with Syriac church architecture and liturgical practice, rather than treating it only as evidence for a Christian presence in Xiyu. Drawing especially on the *Anonymi Auctoris Expositio officiorum ecclesiae*

15 Ren and Wei, “2022 nian Tangchaodun gucheng yizhi kaogu gongzuo de zhuyao shouhuo,” 132–138; Ren Guan 任冠 and Du Meng 杜夢, “Tangchaodun Jingjiao siyuan shengtai he shengtang de kaoguxue yanjiu” 唐朝墩景教寺院聖台和聖堂的考古學研究 [“An Archaeological Study of the Bema and Sanctuary of the Tangchaodun Jingjiao Monastery”], *Xiyu yanjiu* 西域研究 2024, no. 3: 45–55.

16 Ren and Du, “Tangchaodun Jingjiao siyuan shengtai he shengtang de kaoguxue yanjiu,” 46, 48–49.

17 Ibid., 47–49; Tam, “A Perfect Church on Earth,” 207–219.

18 Ren and Wei, “2022 nian Tangchaodun gucheng yizhi kaogu gongzuo de zhuyao shouhuo,” 132–138; Ren and Du, “Tangchaodun Jingjiao siyuan shengtai he shengtang de kaoguxue yanjiu,” 45–49.

19 Ren and Wei, “2022 nian Tangchaodun gucheng yizhi kaogu gongzuo de zhuyao shouhuo,” 132–138; Ren and Wei, “2021 nian Xinjiang Qitai Tangchaodun Jingjiao siyuan yizhi kaogu fajue zhuyao shouhuo,” 106–113; Ren and Du, “Tangchaodun Jingjiao siyuan shengtai he shengtang de kaoguxue yanjiu,” 45–55.

and J. M. Fiey's idealized plan, the study reads the layout through the cosmological symbolism of East Syriac sacred space: the nave as the world or earthly church, the *bema* as Jerusalem or Golgotha, and the *qestroma* and sanctuary as Paradise and Heaven. The study further compares Tangchaodun with known East Syriac *bema* churches in Iraq, especially al-Ḥira and Bazian, thereby placing the site within the wider history of East Syriac *bema*-centred architecture. The study also noted the reported mural and epigraphic traces, including Jingjiao crosses and *Yelikewen* notations in Uyghur script, pointing to the importance of the site's visual and inscriptional remains for future interpretation.²⁰

The chronological sequence of these architectural remains is itself significant. The excavation reports date the complex from the mid-eighth to the mid-fourteenth centuries and identify successive phases in the eastern sanctuary area, together with modifications to the principal religious building.²¹ The early sanctuary (F19-1) dates to the Tang through early Qocho Uyghur periods (8th–10th centuries), while the late sanctuary (F9-1) and the central *bema* were constructed in the mid to late Qocho Uyghur period (10th–13th centuries), accompanied by an expansion of the nave to the south.²² These changes prompt questions about the reorganization of liturgical space, as the ritual centre appears to have shifted from the sanctuary to the *bema*, reflecting both an increase in the size of the congregation and a change in the functional emphasis of the sanctuary.²³ Further excavation may refine the sequence, but the broad trajectory is already well established. Tangchaodun should therefore be approached not as a static architectural type, but as a complex whose form preserves a history of continued occupation, modification, and changing communal practice.²⁴

Taken together, the architecture, murals, inscriptions, and associated residential and productive spaces have changed the scale on which

20 Tam, "A Perfect Church on Earth," 207–219; Ren and Wei, "2021 nian Xinjiang Qitai Tangchaodun Jingjiao siyuan yizhi kaogu fajue zhuyao shouhuo," 106–113; Ren and Du, "Tangchaodun Jingjiao siyuan shengtai he shengtang de kaoguxue yanjiu," 46–52.

21 Ren and Wei, "2022 nian Tangchaodun gucheng yizhi kaogu gongzuo de zhuyao shouhuo," 132–138.

22 Ren and Du, "Tangchaodun Jingjiao siyuan shengtai he shengtang de kaoguxue yanjiu," 49, 53–54.

23 Ibid., 53–54.

24 Ren and Wei, "2021 nian Xinjiang Qitai Tangchaodun Jingjiao siyuan yizhi kaogu fajue zhuyao shouhuo," 106–113; Ren and Wei, "2022 nian Tangchaodun gucheng yizhi kaogu gongzuo de zhuyao shouhuo," 132–138; Ren and Du, "Tangchaodun Jingjiao siyuan shengtai he shengtang de kaoguxue yanjiu," 49, 53–55.

Christianity in Xiyu (the Western Regions) can be studied. Covering more than 2,000 square metres and occupied from the mid-eighth to the mid-fourteenth centuries, Tangchaodun is evidence not simply that Christians were present in the region, but that they constructed a substantial religious complex, organized worship and communal life, employed Christian images and inscriptions, and maintained the site through more than one architectural phase.²⁵ The site therefore cannot be treated merely as a station on the route by which Christianity travelled eastward to the Central Territory. It must also be studied as a local Christian centre in its own right and as evidence for the forms that East Syriac worship, architecture, visual culture, and community life assumed in Xiyu.

IV. *Yishen lun*

Haneda Tōru first introduced the Tomioka manuscript, formerly in the collection of Tomioka Kenzō 富岡謙藏, to modern scholarship in 1918. Since its opening was missing but its final line read *Yishen lun juan disan* 一神論卷第三 (“Third Scroll of the Discourse on the One God”), he took *Yishen lun* to be the title of a larger work of which the surviving manuscript represented the third scroll. He identified the text as Christian through its parallels with the Sermon on the Mount and its distinctive terminology, subsequently interpreting its chronological statement as indicating 641 CE and placing its geographical horizon east of Persia.²⁶ Early scholarship then situated *Yishen lun* within broader attempts to order the Chinese Christian texts by date and attributed authorship. Moule distinguished the earlier *Yishen lun* and *Xuting mishisuo jing* from the later texts associated with Jingjing, drawing attention to

25 Tam, “A Perfect Church on Earth,” 207–219; Ren and Wei, “2021 nian Xinjiang Qitai Tangchaodun Jingjiao siyuan yizhi kaogu fajue zhuyao shouhuo,” 106–113; Ren and Du, “Tangchaodun Jingjiao siyuan shengtai he shengtang de kaoguxue yanjiu,” 45–55.

26 Haneda Tōru 羽田亨, “Keikyō kyōten Isshinron kaisetsu” 景教經典一神論解説 [“Explanation of the Jingjiao Scripture *Discourse on the One God*”], *Geibun* 藝文 9, no. 1 (1918): 141–144; reprinted in *Recueil des œuvres posthumes de Toru Haneda*, vol. 2, *Études religieuses et linguistiques*, Oriental Research Series 3/2 (Kyoto: Tōyōshi Kenkyūkai, 1958), 235–239; idem, “Kan’yaku Keikyō kyōten ni tsukite” 漢譯景教經典に就きて [“On Chinese Translations of Jingjiao Scriptures”], *Shirin* 史林 8, no. 4 (1923): 157–158. See also Tōhō Bunka Gakuin Kyōto Kenkyūjo 東方文化學院京都研究所, ed., *Isshinron maki dai-san; Jochō Meishisho kyō ikkan* 一神論卷第三・序聽迷詩所經一卷 [*Discourse on the One God, Scroll Three; Scripture on Hearing the Messiah, One Scroll*] (Kyoto: Tōhō Bunka Gakuin Kyōto Kenkyūjo, 1931), facsimile edition, with an explanatory note by Haneda Tōru.

their presumed dates and translation contexts.²⁷ Although Saeki introduced a separate Cyriacus group in 1951, later scholarship generally retained the earlier Aluoben 阿羅本–Jingjing division.²⁸ *Yishen lun* was consequently interpreted within an early-Tang and Aluoben-associated framework.

Saeki linked the statement in Lines 365–66 of the manuscript that 641 years had elapsed since the Messiah’s incarnation with the Stele’s account of Aluoben’s arrival in 635 and the production of Christian writings at the Tang court, thereby placing *Yishen lun* and *Xuting mishisuo jing* within the earliest phase of the Chang’an mission.²⁹ Zhu Qianzhi, Jiang Wenhan, Weng Shaojun, and Li Tang broadly retained this early-Tang, Aluoben-associated, and Chang’an-centred framework, while differing in how they described the works’ authorship and translation.³⁰

Sun Jianqiang reopened the question of the conventional dating of *Yishen lun* in 2018. Lines 365–66 state that since Mishihe 彌師訶 (“Messiah”) appeared in the world and assumed a body, “it has not been more than 641 years.” Sun regarded the postnumeral placement of *buguo* 不過 as grammatically problematic and therefore considered the interpretation of the statement as a reference to 641 CE insufficiently secure.³¹ In response to Sun’s critique, Aguilar Sánchez called for redating *Yishen lun* and reassessing its

27 A. C. Moule, *Christians in China before the Year 1550* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1930), 52–64, particularly 58–59. Moule remarks that the *Yishen lun* “seems to be dated” 642 and discusses the textual features of the *Hsü ting mi shih so ching*.

28 P. Y. Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 2nd ed. (Tokyo: Maruzen, 1951), 8–9, 384. Introducing the three classes on p. 8, Saeki writes that “the third we call Priest Ching-ching’s (景淨) or Adam’s documents, for convenience’ sake,” and immediately adds that *Zunjing*, although commonly attributed to Jingjing, “could not be so.” He lists the works assigned to the three groups on pp. 8–9 and identifies Cyriacus with 大德及烈 on p. 384.

29 Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 8–10, 113–124.

30 Zhu Qianzhi, *Zhongguo Jingjiao*, 114–121; Jiang Wenhan 江文漢, *Zhongguo gudai Jidujiao ji Kaifeng Youtairen: Jingjiao, Yuanchao de Yelikewen, Zhongguo de Youtairen* 中國古代基督教及開封猶太人：景教、元朝的也里可溫、中國的猶太人 (Beijing: Zhishi chubanshe, 1982), 57–60; Weng Shaojun 翁紹軍, “Lun Hanyu Jingjiao jingwen de chuanshu leixing” 論漢語景教經文的傳述類型 [“On the Modes of Transmission in Chinese Jingjiao Texts”], *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* 世界宗教研究, no. 4 (1996): 110–118; Tang, *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and Its Literature in Chinese*, 103–110, 128–129.

31 Sun Jianqiang, “The Earliest Statements of Christian Faith in China? A Critique of the Conventional Chronology of the Messiah Sutra and On One God,” *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 18 (2018): 133–152, 140.

authorship, while Nicolini-Zani questioned 641 as its composition date, distinguished the surviving copy from the underlying text, and rejected automatic attribution to Aluoben. Feng noted that Sun's proposal would unsettle conventional classifications if accepted, but did not adopt it.³²

A separate but related line of inquiry has concerned the date and physical formation of the surviving manuscript. Tōno Haruyuki approached the question through palaeographical and codicological evidence. On the basis of the paper, writing format, handwriting, water stains, cut edges, and other physical features, he proposed that the surviving manuscripts of *Yishen lun* and *Xuting mishisuo jing* had once formed a single roll. Drawing particularly on the apparent relation of the handwriting to the calligraphy of Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 and the occurrence of a misused Wu Zhou character, he suggested that the combined manuscript had been copied in the first half or around the middle of the eighth century, while allowing that its exemplar or underlying textual material might go back to the seventh century. His discussion thus distinguished the proposed date of the surviving copy from the possible earlier date of the text it transmits.³³

A 2019 doctoral dissertation and a subsequent 2021 article reconsidered the date, authorship, and place of composition of *Yishen lun*, developing the argument for a setting outside Chang'an by interpreting the analogies "from here to Persia" and "from Persia to Fulin," together with linguistic and documentary comparisons, as pointing towards Xiyu, particularly the Gaochang–Turfan region.³⁴ A 2022 study brought the questions of chronology and provenance together. Addressing the grammatical basis of Sun's objection, also cited by Aguilar Sánchez and Nicolini-Zani, it compared *liubai sishiyi nian buguo* 六百四十一年不過 with constructions in P.1774 and S.4129 in which *buguo* likewise follows and delimits a preceding quantity. On this basis, the study maintained that the phrase could be read as "not more than 641 years" and that an early date around 641 remained defensible, although the chronological statement does not in itself require attribution to Aluoben or

32 Aguilar Sánchez, *Corpus Nestorianum Sinicum*, 144–145; Nicolini-Zani, *The Luminous Way to the East*, 153–169, particularly 164–165; Feng, *Science, Religion(s), and Spirit(s) in China*, 18, 236.

33 Tōno, *Dunhuang miji Jingjiao jingdian sizhong*, 5–18.

34 David Tam 譚大衛, *Tang Jingjiao wenxian Yishen lun yanjiu* 唐景教文獻《一神論》研究 [A Study of the Tang Jingjiao Document *Yishen lun*] (PhD diss., Tsinghua University 清華大學, 2019), 14–25; David Tam, "Gudai wenshu *Yishen lun* de xiezuo didian" 古代文書《一神論》的寫作地點 ["The Place of Authorship of the Ancient Manuscript *Yishen lun*"], *Daofeng: Jidujiao wenhua pinglun* 道風：基督教文化評論 55 (2021): 169–197.

composition at Chang'an.³⁵ Its argument for a Xiyu provenance drew on the analogy involving Persia and Fulin, the simultaneous recognition of an emperor and a king, the contrast between *neng zizuo* 能自作 and *zuoren* 作人 and the documentation of *zuoren* in Turfan, the use of 苟 for 狗, the substitution of cotton for the linen burial shroud of the Gospel tradition, and the adaptation of analogies to an inland desert environment. Lexical, syntactic, and scribal comparisons with Dunhuang and Turfan manuscripts were also presented as favouring Xiyu, particularly the Gaochang-Turfan region, over Chang'an.³⁶

In 2025, Alexis Balmont also treated western China as a serious alternative to Chang'an, drawing attention to the manuscript's rhetoric, terminology, and religious environment. Jason T. S. Lam, writing in the same year, adopted Gaochang or another location in Xiyu as the most plausible historical setting for his Christological interpretation of the text. Both presented the proposed provenance as plausible rather than conclusively established.³⁷ Across these studies, the date of the surviving manuscript has increasingly been distinguished from that of the text it transmits, and both have been considered separately from the questions of authorship, literary formation, and place of

35 Tam, "From 'Here' to Persia," 27. Hidemi Takahashi has separately suggested that the same chronological statement might correspond to 635/636 CE under a different method of reckoning. See Hidemi Takahashi 高橋英海, "Representation of the Syriac Language in Jingjiao and Yelikewen Documents," in *The Church of the East in Central Asia and China*, ed. Samuel N. C. Lieu and Glen L. Thompson, China and the Mediterranean 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 23–92, at 25.

36 Tam, "From 'Here' to Persia," esp. 10–11, 14–21, 23–29. The principal manuscript collections consulted for these comparisons are Guojia wenwuju guwenxian yanjiushi 國家文物局古文獻研究室, Xinjiang Weiwuer Zizhiqu bowuguan 新疆維吾爾自治區博物館, and Wuhan University, eds., *Tulufan chutu wenshu* 吐魯番出土文書 (Beijing: Beijing Chubanshe, 1981); Tang Gengou 唐耕耦 and Lu Hongji 陸宏基, eds., *Dunhuang shehui jingji wenxian zhenji shilu* 敦煌社會經濟文獻真蹟釋錄, 5 vols. (Beijing: Shumu Wenxian Chubanshe 書目文獻出版社, 1986); Hao Chunwen 郝春文 and Shi Rui 史睿, eds., *Yingcang Dunhuang shehui lishi wenxian shilu* 英藏敦煌社會歷史文獻釋錄, 11 vols. (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Chubanshe 社會科學出版社, 2006); and Wang Zhongmin 王重民 et al., eds., *Dunhuang bianwen ji* 敦煌變文集, 8 vols. (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe 人民文學出版社, 1957, 2nd printing, 1984).

37 Alexis Balmont, *Syriac Christians in Tang China: Chinese Texts and Theologies*, *Orientalia-Patristica-Oecumenica* 23 (Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2025), 23–29; Jason T. S. Lam 林子淳, "《一神論》中由世尊翳數反映出的亞當基督論——回應譚大衛與朱東華的晚近研究," *Daofeng: Jidujiao wenhua pinglun* 道風: 基督教文化評論 63 (2025): 15–38, esp. 31–32.

composition.

Closer theological analysis has shifted attention from translation, annotation, and historical contextualisation to the internal conceptual structure and purpose of *Yishen lun*. A recent study argues that it is organised around a sustained affirmation of monotheism, with *Yishen* 一神 functioning throughout as a recurrent appellation for God. The opening movement trains the reader to discern unseen divine agency through the visible order of the cosmos and the human person, while later sections develop this monotheistic claim in ethical, soteriological, and eschatological terms. The work's critique of object-centred worship likewise presents belief in "other gods" as a failure to recognise that all things are created, sustained, and ordered by the One God. *Yishen lun* is therefore interpreted as a missionary and polemical discourse shaped by the religious environment in which it was composed. Related studies have further opened a Jewish and rabbinic comparative horizon, reading the parable of the wise and foolish builders in relation to Avot D'Rabbi Nathan and identifying possible Jewish elements in the text's language of Gentile sanctification, messianic self-claims, designation of Jerusalem, and imagery of the curtain or parochet.³⁸

The historiography of *Yishen lun* has therefore moved from an inherited Aluoben–Chang'an framework toward the separate investigation of composition date, manuscript production, authorship, provenance, and theological structure. Its physical form, language, textual strata, and argument must now be assessed independently before being combined into a broader historical reconstruction.

V. *Xuting mishisuo jing*

Xuting mishisuo jing entered modern scholarship through the manuscript preserved in the collection of Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎. Following Haneda Tōru's initial discussion, A. C. Moule described the manuscript, presented substantial portions of its text in English, and reproduced its final twenty columns.³⁹ As noted above, Moule and Saeki associated it closely with *Yishen lun* and placed both works among the earlier texts connected with Aluoben; later scholarship generally retained this placement within the

38 David Tam, "Seeing the One God in the Visible and the Invisible: Cosmology and Epistemology in *Yishen lun* (Lines 1–76)," forthcoming in *Journal of the American Society for Premodern Asia*; idem, "The Parable of Wise and Foolish Builders in *Yishen lun* and Rabbinic Literature," *Religions* 15, no. 1 (2024): 107; idem, "Jewish Elements in the Ancient Chinese Christian Manuscript *Yishen lun* (Discourse on God)," *Religions* 15, no. 10 (2024): 1265.

39 Moule, *Christians in China before the Year 1550*, 58–64.

Aluoben–Jingjing division. Saeki dated *Xuting mishisuo jing* approximately between Aluoben’s arrival at Chang’an in 635 and the imperial edict of 638, interpreting it as an elementary statement of Christian teaching and *Yishen lun* as a fuller exposition produced slightly later. This early-Tang, Aluoben-associated, and Chang’an-centred framework was broadly retained by Zhu Qianzhi, Jiang Wenhan, Weng Shaojun, and Li Tang. Sun Jianqiang later judged the observations supporting the proposed date of 635–638 insufficient, while Nicolini-Zani and Balmont rejected the automatic attribution of the work to Aluoben.⁴⁰

Tōno Haruyuki’s codicological study, also discussed above, proposed that the Takakusu manuscript had originally followed *Yishen lun* on the same roll before the two were separated. He dated the combined manuscript to the first half or around the middle of the eighth century, while allowing that the underlying textual materials might be older. For *Xuting mishisuo jing*, this establishes a probable common act of copying and transmission with *Yishen lun*, but not necessarily a common date of composition, authorship, textual origin, or missionary purpose.⁴¹

The title and literary formation of the work remain uncertain. The manuscript bears the form *Xuting mishisuo jing yijuan* 序聽迷詩所經一卷, conventionally understood as “Scripture on Hearing the Messiah, Scroll One.” Max Deeg observed that the body of the text normally renders “Messiah” as *Mishihe* 彌師訶 rather than *Mishisuo* 迷詩所 and conjecturally proposed *Ting mishisuo jing* 聽迷所說經, “Sutra of the One Preaching the Regulation of Errors.” Balmont instead understood *ting* 聽 in the sense of “heed” or “obey” and proposed “Scripture of Obedience to the Messiah.” Since neither interpretation is secure, the transliterated title remains preferable.⁴² Interpretations of the work’s formation have likewise diverged. Xiang Bingguang read its unstable terminology, colloquial syntax, abrupt transitions, and loose reformulation of biblical material as traces of oral preaching

40 Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 8–10, 113–124; Zhu Qianzhi, *Zhongguo Jingjiao*, 114–121; Jiang Wenhan, *Zhongguo gudai Jidujiao ji Kaifeng Youtairen*, 57–60; Weng Shaojun, “Lun Hanyu Jingjiao jingwen de chuanshu leixing,” 110–118; Tang, *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China*, 103–110, 128–129; Sun, “The Earliest Statements of Christian Faith,” 133–152; Nicolini-Zani, *The Luminous Way to the East*, 153–165; Balmont, *Le christianisme chinois du haut Moyen Âge*, 103–109.

41 Tōno, *Dunhuang miji Jingjiao jingdian sizhong*, 5–18.

42 Max Deeg, “Messiah Rediscovered: Some Philological Notes on the So-called ‘Jesus the Messiah Sutra,’” in *The Church of the East in Central Asia and China*, ed. Samuel N. C. Lieu and Glen L. Thompson, China and the Mediterranean 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 111–119; Balmont, *Le christianisme chinois du haut Moyen Âge*, 105–109.

recorded or adapted by a Chinese collaborator. Nicolini-Zani began more cautiously from the surviving manuscript and its transmission history, while Balmont interpreted the received work as composite, combining discourse placed in the Messiah's mouth with third-person narrative through a final stage of redaction. He also described it as *sui generis*, since its account of the Messiah and possible Jewish-Christian features complicate straightforward attribution to the Church of the East.⁴³

Direct comparison with *Yishen lun* reinforces the need to separate material transmission from textual formation. The two works recount overlapping Christian traditions but differ in chronology, geographical names, terminology, and theological emphasis. *Yishen lun* follows a Johannine Passion chronology, uses *shang xuangao* 上懸高 for the crucifixion and *Yida cheng* 伊大城 for Jerusalem, and speaks of the resurrection of *you fude sizhe* 有福德死者, "the blessed dead." *Xuting mishisuo jing* describes the Messiah as *mu shang fuzhuo* 木上縛著, "bound upon the wood," calls Jerusalem *Wulishilian cheng* 烏梨師斂城, includes the two thieves and the fifth hour, and extends resurrection to *suoyou siren* 所有死人, "all the dead." Its vocabulary also differs from the characteristic language of *Yishen lun*: alongside *Aluohan* 阿羅漢, *Yishu* 移鼠, *Liangfeng* 涼風, and *Yanluo wang* 閻羅王 stand the latter work's *Yishen* 一神, *Yishu* 翳數, *Jingfeng* 淨風, and *Suoduona* 娑多那. These differences indicate that common copying did not make the two texts a single literary or theological work. Balmont accordingly treated western China and an audience familiar with Buddhist, Manichaean, and other religious traditions as a serious context for interpreting *Xuting mishisuo jing*.⁴⁴

Closer textual and theological analysis has shifted attention from the work's use as a documentary witness to the first Chang'an mission toward the traditions it incorporates and the purposes of their Chinese adaptation. Zhu Donghua relates several features of *Xuting mishisuo jing* to the textual tradition of Tatian's *Diatessaron*, including its account of John the Baptist's diet and elements of its Passion and resurrection narrative. He further connects the

43 Xiang Bingguang 項秉光, "Dunhuang xiejuan *Xuting mishisuo jing*xieben kao" 敦煌寫卷《序聽迷詩所經》寫本考, *Daofeng: Jidujiao wenhua pinglun* 道風: 基督教文化評論 46 (2017): 157–187, particularly 161–181; Nicolini-Zani, *The Luminous Way to the East*, 152–165; Balmont, *Syriac Christians in Tang China*, 85–102; idem, *Le christianisme chinois du haut Moyen Âge*, 103–109.

44 Balmont, *Le christianisme chinois du haut Moyen Âge*, 273–275, 479; idem, *Syriac Christians in Tang China*, 96–102; Tōno, *Dunhuang miji Jingjiao jingdian sizhong*, 5–18; David Tam, "On One God and Book of the Messiah Reconsidered: The Kyō-U Library Report and the Composite Nature of a Jingjiao Scroll," manuscript submitted for publication.

text's emphasis on abstention from meat and wine with the encratite tendency associated with Tatianic tradition, and argues that the cumulative correspondences place the Chinese work within a *Diatessaronic* textual lineage rather than indicating dependence on a single canonical Gospel.⁴⁵ The "Ten Vows" (*shiyuan* 十願) have likewise been interpreted as an adaptation of the Decalogue: Tian Haihua emphasized their accommodation to Tang political and familial values, while Z. Li-Layec drew attention to the absence of the Exodus narrative, covenantal setting, and biblical sequence.⁴⁶ Philological and ethical studies have further revised the transcription and interpretation of individual terms and clarified the work's internal movement. Wang Lanping re-examined the manuscript from the Kyō-U colour facsimiles; Nie Zhijun reconsidered *Yishu* within the text's phonetic and religious environment; Feng related the injunction to fear or serve God, the emperor, and one's parents to a Syriac Christian "God-fearing" ethos adapted to Chinese political and familial order; and Balmont read the work as progressing from the necessity of obedience, through the commandments that express it, to the Messiah as the model and divine response to human disobedience.⁴⁷

The historiography of *Xuting mishisuo jing* has therefore moved from an inherited Aluoben–Chang'an framework toward the separate investigation of modern provenance, manuscript production, composition date, title, authorship, literary formation, Gospel traditions, ethical teaching, terminology, and audience. Its physical association with *Yishen lun* is now

45 Zhu Donghua 朱東華, "Chinese Jingjiao and the Antiochene Exegesis," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in China*, ed. K. K. Yeo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 48–57; idem, *Jingfeng qianxun*, 75–80.

46 Tian Haihua 田海華, "Xuting Mishisuo (he) jing zhi 'shiyuan' chuyi" 《序聽迷詩所（詞）經》之“十願”芻議, *Zongjiaoxue yanjiu* 宗教學研究, no. 4 (2009): 120–122; Z. Li-Layec, "From 'Shiyuan 十願' (Ten Vows) to 'Shijie 十誡' (Ten Commandments): Importance of Absent Elements in Translation as Case Study of Inculturation of Christianity during the Early Tang Dynasty (7th Century)," in *Yearbook of Chinese Theology 2018*, ed. Paulos Z. Huang, Xiaofeng Tang, and Donghua Zhu (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 82–93.

47 Wang Lanping 王蘭平, "Ribben Kyō-U Shooku cang Tangdai Dunhuang Jingjiao xieben *Xuting mishisuo jingshikao*" 日本杏雨書屋藏唐代敦煌景教寫本《序聽迷詩所經》釋考, *Dunhuangxue jikan* 敦煌學輯刊, no. 4 (2014): 27–47; Nie Zhijun 聶志軍, "Tangdai Jingjiao *Xuting mishisuo jing*zhong 'Yishu' Hanyi shiyi" 唐代景教《序聽迷詩所經》中“移鼠”漢譯釋疑, *Zongjiaoxue yanjiu* 宗教學研究, no. 3 (2012): 191–196; Chengwei Feng, "The Wind of the Spirit Is Blowing East: Ancestors, Deities, and the Holy Spirit in the Earliest Mission to China," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 49, no. 2 (2025): 126–138; Balmont, *Le christianisme chinois du haut Moyen Âge*, 105–109; idem, *Syriac Christians in Tang China*, 85–95.

supported by codicological evidence, but the historical relationship between the two works remains open. The shared roll is an important codicological fact; it does not by itself establish common authorship, textual origin, provenance, or missionary purpose, and the differences between the texts may be as historically significant as their material association.

VI. Daqin Jingjiao Stele

The monument conventionally known as the Jingjiao Stele or Xi'an Stele, erected in 781, bears the heading *Daqin Jingjiao liuxing Zhongguo bei* 大秦景教流行中國碑 (*Stele on the Propagation of Daqin Jingjiao in the Central Territory*). By epigraphic convention, this title designates the monument as a whole, while the opening line *Jingjiao liuxing Zhongguo beisong bingxu* 景教流行中國碑頌並序, "Stele Eulogy with Preface on the Propagation of Jingjiao in the Central Territory," designates the inscriptional text proper.⁴⁸ Its Chinese historical and doctrinal inscription, Syriac subscriptions, and monumental form together preserve different dimensions of the community that produced it: its account of imperial patronage and religious transmission, its affiliations with the wider Church of the East, and its public presentation within Tang China. This combination makes the stele not only the principal narrative source for the history of Jingjiao under the Tang, but also a composite epigraphic witness to the form Christian life had taken in the Central Territory by the later eighth century.

Since its discovery in the seventeenth century, the Jingjiao Stele has occupied a privileged place in writings on Christianity in China. Early interpretations, especially those shaped by late Ming and Qing Catholic interests, approached it largely through apologetic concerns, seeking to show that Christianity had taken root in China centuries before the arrival of the Jesuits.⁴⁹ By the eighteenth century, however, the monument had also become

48 Although *Jingjiao* 景教 is often translated as "Luminous Religion," especially where *jing* 景 is understood in terms of light or illumination, the semantic range of 景 on the monument is broader than this translation alone might suggest. The graph occurs seventeen times, not only in 景教 but also in 景宿, 景日, 景風, 景福, 景門, 景寺, 景眾, 景命, 景力, 景尊, 景士, and the name Jingjing 景淨, as well as in the expression 法非景不行. In these contexts, its semantic force appears to encompass auspiciousness, grandeur, or exalted favour as much as, and perhaps more than, luminosity alone. The count and transcription are based on the rubbing reproduced in Zhao Liguang, ed., *Xi'an Beilin mingbei jingcui*, "Daqin Jingjiao liuxing Zhongguo bei," unpaginated plates; translations are supplied here.

49 Emmanuel Diaz (Yang Manuo 陽瑪諾), *Tang Jingjiao bei song zhengquan* 唐景教碑頌正詮 (1641; Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2023).

the object of sustained European suspicion. As Michael Keevak has shown, such doubts were often driven less by close analysis of the inscription than by anti-Jesuit polemic, deist criticism, and broader assumptions about what China could or could not have contained.⁵⁰ Nineteenth-century studies by Alexander Wylie, Henri Havret, and James Legge brought greater philological and historical precision to the monument. Although they did not resolve every problem of reading and interpretation, their work helped establish the stele as an inscription requiring critical study rather than merely as evidence in confessional controversy.⁵¹

Twentieth-century scholarship further developed historical and philological approaches to the material, although often within a relatively fixed narrative of Christian transmission. Unlike later scholarly groupings of “Daqin Jingjing texts” under Jingjing’s name, the stele’s association with Jingjing rests on the monument itself: its Chinese inscription identifies its composer as “the monk Jingjing of the Daqin Monastery” (*Daqin si seng Jingjing shu* 大秦寺僧景淨述), while the Syriac colophon identifies him as Adam, priest, chorepiscopus, and *p’apši* of Šinestan. Saeki examined its genuineness, discovery and location, physical form, date of erection, authorship and patronage, before turning to selected philological and doctrinal problems in the inscription.⁵² Feng Chengjun, drawing together earlier Chinese and Western scholarship, treated the history of the stele’s discovery and Qing evidential research, reconstructed Jingjiao under the Tang from the inscription and other historical sources, and supplied a study of the inscription together with a comparative table of its Syriac personal names.⁵³ Drake likewise regarded the monument as historically reliable and as the principal framework within which the newly discovered Jingjiao writings should be interpreted. He argued that its Chinese literary style, Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian terminology, and use of established religious expressions showed how far the Church had related itself to Chinese culture by 781, while maintaining that its theological thought remained unmistakably Christian. At the same time, he criticized the inscription’s praise of the

50 Michael Keevak, *The Story of a Stele: China’s “Nestorian” Monument and Its Reception in the West, 1625–1916* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008).

51 Alexander Wylie, “On the Nestorian Tablet of Se-gan Foo,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 5 (1855–1856): 277–336; Henri Havret, *La stèle chrétienne de Si-Ngan-Fou, 1re partie: Fac-similé de l’inscription syro-chinoise*, Variétés Sinologiques 7 (Shanghai: Imprimerie de la Mission catholique, 1895); James Legge, *The Nestorian Monument of Hsî-an Fû in Shen-Hsî, China* (London: Trübner, 1888), 33–65.

52 Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 11–51.

53 Feng Chengjun 馮承鈞, *Jingjiaobei kao* 景教碑考 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan 商務印書館, 1928).

emperors and inferred that Jingjiao institutions remained dependent upon imperial favour and support.⁵⁴ Cen Zhongmian, however, drew attention to unresolved problems of terminology, historical detail, and interpretation, demonstrating that the monument's apparent narrative coherence did not remove the need for critical examination of its individual claims.⁵⁵ More recent studies by Matteo Nicolini-Zani and Alexis Balmont have increasingly read the stele in relation to other Chinese Christian writings and to Syriac and Central Asian evidence. Such comparisons place its terminology, theology, and historical account within a broader East Syriac and Chinese Christian documentary world, shifting attention from the stele as an isolated master narrative to its position among multiple and sometimes differing witnesses to Tang Jingjiao.⁵⁶

Recent studies have also asked what kind of monument the stele is. It is not merely a Christian text written in Chinese, but a Chinese inscription formed within established calligraphic, monumental, and literary conventions. Zhu Donghua's study of the stele's calligraphy treats the monument as an aesthetic as well as historical object. He reconstructs a genealogy of surviving rubbings, situates Lü Xiuyan's 呂秀巖 calligraphy within early and High Tang traditions, and reads Jingjing's 景淨 language and literary style as reflecting contemporary Chinese aesthetic culture.⁵⁷ Related comparison of the monument within Tang stele culture shows that its *chishou-guifu* 螭首龜趺 ("dragon-headed stele on a tortoise base") form and *beisong bingxu* 碑頌並序 structure correspond closely to Tang stelae preserved in the Beilin Museum and to *beisong bingxu* texts collected in the *Tang Wencui* 唐文粹 (*Selected Writings of the Tang*), while being used to narrate nearly a century and a half of Christian history and successive imperial patronage. The placement of the cross within the central *gui*-shaped triangle of the *chishou* offers a particularly visible example of adaptation within an inherited monumental form.⁵⁸

54 F. S. Drake, "Nestorian Literature of the T'ang Dynasty," *Chinese Recorder* 66 (1935): 608–617.

55 Cen Zhongmian 岑仲勉, "Jingjiaobei nei haojige meiyou chedi jie jue de wenti" 景教碑內好幾個沒有徹底解決的問題 ["Several Problems in the Jingjiao Stele That Have Not Been Thoroughly Resolved"], in *Jinshi luncong* 金石論叢 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1981), 302–322.

56 Nicolini-Zani, *The Luminous Way to the East*, 117–136; Balmont, *Le christianisme chinois du haut Moyen Âge*, 66–76.

57 Zhu Donghua 朱東華, "Daqin Jingjiao liuxing Zhongguo bei shufa kaolun" 《大秦景教流行中國碑》書法考論 ["A Study of the Calligraphy of the Stele on the Propagation of Daqin Jingjiao in the Central Territory"], *Daofeng: Jidujiao wenhua pinglun* 道風：基督教文化評論 34 (2011): 233–254; idem, *Jingfeng qianxun*, 161–176.

58 David Tam, "Reconsidering the Jingjiao Stele: A Comparative Study within the

Comparison with the Han-dynasty Huashan Temple Stele likewise suggests that the inscription's movement through cosmological exposition, religious teaching, historical narrative, and eulogy can be considered within a longer Chinese inscriptional tradition.⁵⁹ The question is therefore not only what Christian doctrines the inscription contains, but how a Christian community used Chinese monumental and literary forms to record its own history.

The bilingual character of the monument adds another evidentiary dimension. Erica C. D. Hunter draws attention to the different kinds of information preserved in its Chinese and Syriac inscriptions. The Chinese text presents a public and court-facing account of Christianity under the Tang, whereas the Syriac inscriptions reveal more directly the church's hierarchy, patriarchal affiliation, and Persian and Central Asian connections.⁶⁰ Samuel N. C. Lieu treats the Chinese and Syriac portions as components of a single bilingual and transcultural document, examining how *Daqin* 大秦 and *Zhongguo* 中國, Chinese titles, Syriac names, and Central Asian linguistic forms are brought together within the inscription. He also shows that the unequal treatment of the two languages in many earlier editions and translations has obscured features that cannot be understood from the Chinese text alone.⁶¹ Read together, the two portions present the community simultaneously within the political and literary world of Tang China and within the ecclesiastical networks of the wider Church of the East.

The names, ranks, and titles recorded on the stele provide more specific evidence for this institutional position. Nicolini-Zani shows that the Syriac designations preserve a recognizably East Syriac hierarchy of bishops, *chorepiscopi*, archdeacons, priests, and other ecclesiastical offices. The Chinese titles *seng* 僧, *dade* 大德, *sizhu* 寺主, and *fazhu* 法主, by contrast, draw upon Buddhist and Chinese institutional vocabulary.⁶² These terms cannot always

Context of Chinese Stele Culture," paper presented at the 2024 Xi'an International Jingjiao Forum, July 5–7, 2024; revised manuscript submitted for publication, 2026.

59 Tam, "Reconsidering the Jingjiao Stele."

60 Erica C. D. Hunter, "The Persian Contribution to Christianity in China: Reflections in the Xian Fu Syriac Inscriptions," in *Hidden Treasures and Intercultural Encounters: Studies on East Syriac Christianity in Central Asia and China*, ed. Dietmar W. Winkler and Li Tang, *Orientalia-Patristica-Oecumenica* 1 (Vienna: Lit Verlag, 2009), 71–86.

61 Samuel N. C. Lieu, "From Rome (Da Qin 大秦) to China (Zhongguo 中國): The Xi'an 西安 (Nestorian) Monument as a Bilingual and Transcultural Document," in *The Church of the East in Central Asia and China*, ed. Samuel N. C. Lieu and Glen L. Thompson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 121–141.

62 Nicolini-Zani, *The Luminous Way to the East*, 87–98. Nicolini-Zani discusses the Syriac hierarchy and the Chinese titles *seng* 僧, *dade* 大德, *shangzuo* 上座, *sizhu* 寺主, and *fazhu* 法主, showing the difficulty of treating the Chinese titles as simple

be mapped directly onto Syriac offices: some function as honorifics, some appear to reflect the requirements of religious life under Tang administration, and some may represent specifically Chinese Christian usages. The stele therefore records an ecclesiastical structure that remained connected with Persia and the wider Church of the East while adopting locally intelligible forms of public and institutional language.⁶³ Nicolini-Zani further notes that Yisi's 伊斯 high official rank made him an appropriate person to erect a *chishou-guifu* stele, a monumental form whose use was regulated by social and official status.⁶⁴ The monument's Chinese form was thus not only a literary choice. It belonged to the social world of Christians who held positions within Tang military and administrative structures and could act within the conventions governing public commemoration.

Other recent studies have placed the monument within broader questions of religious naming and Chinese cultural history. Xie Dingjian argues that *Jingjiao* should not be treated merely as a conventional label for Christianity in Tang China, but as a historically situated act of identification and self-identification shaped by the political and cultural environment of the Tang empire.⁶⁵ Zhu Donghua's discussion of the cultural effects of *Jingjiao* and the later formation of *Jingxue* similarly approaches the stele and related materials not only as Christian relics but also as participants in Chinese intellectual, literary, and ritual history.⁶⁶ Taken together, these approaches change how the *Jingjiao* Stele may be read. It remains the principal narrative source for the history of *Jingjiao* under the Tang, but its stone form, literary structure, Chinese and Syriac inscriptions, ecclesiastical titles, and choice of institutional language all form part of the evidence. The monument presents a Christian community still connected with Persia and Central Asia, yet capable of articulating its teaching, history, and communal identity through forms recognizable within Tang China. It is therefore not only a record of Christianity's arrival in the Central Territory, but evidence of the form

equivalents of Syriac ecclesiastical offices.

63 Nicolini-Zani, *The Luminous Way to the East*, 95–98. Nicolini-Zani concludes that the ecclesiastical organization reflected on the stele retains the fundamentally “Persian” structure of the Church of the East, while the Chinese evidence shows the adoption of Buddhist and locally intelligible honorific and institutional vocabulary.

64 Nicolini-Zani, *The Luminous Way to the East*, 103, citing Dorothy C. Wong on the regulation of *chishou-guifu* monuments by social and official rank.

65 Xie Dingjian 謝丁堅, “‘Jingjiao’: Naming ‘Christianity’ in the Realm of the Tang Empire (618–907),” *Archiv orientální* 91, no. 2 (2023): 255–278.

66 Zhu Donghua 朱東華, “Jingfeng dongshan ji qi wenhua xiaoying” 景風東扇及其文化效應 [“The Eastward Fanning of the *Jingjiao* Wind and Its Cultural Effects”], *Aomen ligong xuebao* 澳門理工學報 25, no. 3 (2022): 70–78.

Christian life had taken there by 781.

VII. P. 3847 and the Writings Listed in Zunjing

P. 3847 provides the manuscript and bibliographical point of departure for this section. A. C. Moule introduced the roll as a small but exceptionally important Christian manuscript, found by Pelliot at Dunhuang in 1908 in three pieces but otherwise nearly complete. He dated the surviving copy to around 800 and described it as containing a Trinitarian hymn, lists of honoured persons and sacred books, and a short historical note; he further stated, without explaining the basis in the passage cited, that it was probably written at or near Chang'an.⁶⁷ P. 3847 contains *Daqin Jingjiao Sanwei mengdu zan* followed by *Zunjing* and a concluding note of uncertain date. *Zunjing* names, among other works, *Xuanyuan zhiben jing*, *Zhixuan anle jing*, and *Sanwei zan jing* 三威讚經, apparently the catalogue title corresponding to the work whose fuller title in P. 3847 is given here as *Daqin Jingjiao Sanwei mengdu zan* 大秦景教三威蒙度讚. The concluding note states: *benjiao dage seng Jingjing, yide yishang sanshi bujuan* 本教大德僧景淨, 譯得已上卅部卷 (“Jingjing, a monk of great virtue of this religion, translated the above thirty and more rolls of books”). Read with the catalogue immediately preceding it, the note presents the catalogued works, including *Sanwei zan jing*, as translations by Jingjing 景淨; it does not attribute *Zunjing* itself to him. The attribution connects these works with the same Jingjing who is directly identified on the 781 *Daqin Jingjiao Stele* as the composer of its Chinese inscription (*Daqin si seng Jingjing shu* 大秦寺僧景淨述). A further point of connection is provided by explicit Jingjiao nomenclature. *Daqin Jingjiao Sanwei mengdu zan* and the surviving manuscript and inscriptional witnesses of *Xuanyuan zhiben jing* bear *Daqin Jingjiao* 大秦景教 in their titles, while *Zhixuan anle jing* uses *Jingjiao* 景教 within the text.⁶⁸ P. 3847 and the writings connected through *Zunjing* are therefore related through overlapping forms of immediate manuscript context,

⁶⁷ Moule, *Christians in China before the Year 1550*, 52–57.

⁶⁸ Pang Moon-yuen 彭滿圓, “Daqin Jingjiao Sanwei mengdu zan de beijing yu fanyi” 《大秦景教三威蒙度讚》的背景與翻譯 [“The Background and Translation of *Daqin Jingjiao Sanwei mengdu zan*”], *Jiandao xuekan* 建道學刊 49 (2018): 117–142. Pang notes that Pelliot, Zhu Qianzhi, and other scholars identify *Sanwei zan jing* with *Daqin Jingjiao Sanwei mengdu zan*, while also recording Wu Changxing’s unexplained suggestion that they may be distinct. For the surviving manuscript witnesses and title forms, see Tōno, *Dunhuang miji Jingjiao jingdian sizhong*, 10–16. The Stele identifies the composer of its Chinese inscription as *Daqin si seng Jingjing shu* 大秦寺僧景淨述; see Zhao Liguang, ed., *Xi’an Beilin mingbei jingcui*, “Daqin Jingjiao liuxing Zhongguo bei,” unpaginated plates.

bibliographical association, attribution to Jingjing as translator, and explicit Daqin Jingjiao designation. The concluding note attributes the catalogued works, but not *Zunjing* itself, to Jingjing as translator. Saeki nevertheless included *Zunjing* in his “Jingjing” group, a classification adopted “for convenience’ sake” even while stating that *Zunjing* “could not be” composed by Jingjing;⁶⁹ the label thus functioned as a broader organizational category rather than a claim of common authorship.

Saeki’s translation established the principal framework for interpreting *Zunjing* as a Chinese form of the East Syriac diptychs, or liturgical commemorative lists, containing names of honoured persons and authoritative books. Wu Qiyu reopened the text through Middle Chinese and Syriac philology, while Li Tang offered a more cautious English translation. Wang Lanping distinguished the post-Tang date of the surviving P. 3847 copy from the composition of *Zunjing*, which he placed between about 781 and 845, and interpreted the roll as a missionary document combining congregational praise with oral explanation. Nicolini-Zani, in turn, treated *Zunjing* as a layered catalogue of heterogeneous authorities and writings rather than simply as a liturgical diptych.⁷⁰

Drake identified *Daqin Jingjiao Sanwei mengdu zan* as an adaptation of the Syriac *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, rejecting Saeki’s baptismal interpretation of the title and emphasizing the closeness of the Chinese hymn to the East Syriac liturgical form. He also drew attention to its forty-four seven-character lines and argued that its structure was better understood thematically than through Moule’s division into eleven equal stanzas.⁷¹ Wu Qiyu extended this interpretation through comparison with Syriac, Greek, and Latin witnesses, arguing that the Chinese hymn preserves the Trinitarian praise and doxological structure of the tradition while expanding, rearranging, and reworking it for a Chinese setting.⁷² Pang Moon-yuen further approached the work as hymn, prayer, and Tang poem. He analysed its forty-four lines as

69 Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 8–9.

70 Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 273–276; Wu Qiyu 吳其昱, “Tangdai Jingjiao zhi fawang yu Zunjing kao” 唐代景教之法王與尊經考, *Dunhuang Tulufan yanjiu* 敦煌吐魯番研究 5 (2001): 13–58; Tang, *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and Its Literature in Chinese*, 184–188; Wang Lanping 王蘭平, “Zailun Dunhuang Jingjiao xieben P. 3847 Zunjing zhi yizhuan shijian” 再論敦煌景教寫本 P. 3847《尊經》之譯撰時間, *Ningbo gongcheng xueyuan xuebao* 寧波工程學院學報 26, no. 3 (2014): 51–54; Nicolini-Zani, *The Luminous Way to the East*, 226–232.

71 F. S. Drake, “The Nestorian ‘Gloria in Excelsis Deo,’” *Chinese Recorder* 66 (1935): 291–300.

72 Wu Qiyu, “Jingjiao Sanwei mengdu zan yanjiu,” 413–420.

eleven predominantly seven-character stanzas, identified approximately eleven lines without direct counterparts in the East Syriac *Gloria*, and accordingly presented the text as a creative poetic and theological adaptation rather than a translation alone. His reverse translation into East Syriac further seeks to distinguish inherited liturgical structure from additions introduced in the Chinese form.⁷³

Drake characterized *Zhixuan anle jing* as the most Buddhist in style among the Jingjiao writings he examined, noting its sutra-like setting, graded contemplative scheme, and emphasis on non-desire, non-assertion, non-merit, and non-demonstration; he also detected Daoist elements in its language of non-action. At the same time, he argued that its underlying thought remained Christian, since deliverance from defilement depends not on human effort alone but on the help of the Messiah, and he therefore regarded the work as an original Chinese composition rather than a straightforward translation. Wu Changxing similarly reads it as a mature Chinese Christian work of spiritual formation whose Buddhist and Daoist language serves a fundamentally Christian and Syriac ascetic vision. Wang Lanping interprets its “Ten Contemplations” 十觀 as biblical teaching presented through Chinese religious forms, especially Buddhist and Daoist schemes of graded practice. Balmont, in turn, proposes Isaac of Nineveh’s theology of creaturely finitude as a possible East Syriac framework: the meditations on mortality, impermanence, passion, and illusion train the reader to recognize human weakness as preparation for transformation. He presents this as a historically plausible comparison rather than a claim of direct textual dependence.⁷⁴

Moule rendered *Xuanyuan zhiben jing* as the “Proclaim origin reach root book,” identified it as the second work in the *Zunjing* catalogue attributed there to Jingjing 景淨 as translator, and dated it probably to the later eighth century. He also noted that the surviving manuscript was then held in the Li Shengduo 李盛鐸 collection but remained unpublished.⁷⁵ Subsequent study has focused more closely on its textual witnesses, literary form, and theology.

73 Pang Moon-yuen, “Daqin Jingjiao Sanwei mengdu zan de beijing yu fanyi,” 125–131.

74 Drake, “Nestorian Literature of the T’ang Dynasty,” 738–742; Wu Changxing 吳昶興, “Lun Jingjiao Zhixuan anle jing de anle shijie” 論景教《志玄安樂經》的安樂世界, *Taiwan Jinshenhui Shenxueyuan xueshu niankan* 臺灣浸信會神學院學術年刊 (2007): 101–128; Wang Lanping 王蘭平, “Yi Zhixuan anle jing ‘shiguan’ wei li kan Tangdai Jingjiao yu Fo Dao zhijian de guanxi” 以《志玄安樂經》“十觀”為例看唐代景教與佛道之間的關係, *Dunhuangxue jikan* 敦煌學輯刊, no. 1 (2008): 157–162; Alexis Balmont, “Isaac of Nineveh and the Chinese Book of Those Who Seek the Joy and Peace of the Mystics,” forthcoming in *Scottish Journal of Theology*.

75 Moule, *Christians in China before the Year 1550*, 56–58, 64.

The Luoyang Jingjiao pillar preserves an epigraphic version closely corresponding to the Kyō-U Shooku manuscript formerly held by Li Shengduo, together with the fuller title *Daqin Jingjiao Xuanyuan zhiben jing* 大秦景教宣元至本經, including the graph *zhi* 至 omitted from the manuscript. Balmont reads the work as an apocalyptic and speculative discourse framed partly through the literary conventions of Buddhist sutras: an inaugural heavenly vision introduces Jingtong 景通 as the bearer of a sealed revelation, whose teaching presents the eternal Creator, human error, and the divine economy accomplished in the Messiah. He further argues that its dense use of Chinese metaphysical and Buddhist terminology, together with its close lexical relationship to the Jingjiao Stele, points to Chinese-speaking recipients familiar with philosophical speculation and to a shared literary environment within Tang Jingjiao.⁷⁶

Other recent studies have placed these writings and their wider setting within broader comparative frameworks. Zhu Donghua develops a theological and intellectual-historical reading that reconnects the Chinese writings with East Syriac exegesis and theology while examining their engagement with Chinese philosophical and religious traditions.⁷⁷ Chen Huaiyu approaches Tang Christian writings as part of a “shared textual community” in which Christian, Buddhist, and Daoist authors could employ overlapping vocabulary, metaphors, and literary conventions while assigning them different religious meanings.⁷⁸ Tang Xiaofeng emphasizes the interaction of Jingjiao writings with Buddhist and Daoist forms within Tang intellectual history;⁷⁹ Huang Rong examines them through East Syriac theology, translation, and archaeological evidence, asking how Christian concepts were rendered intelligible in Chinese settings without losing their theological identity;⁸⁰ Glen L. Thompson situates Jingjiao within the transregional history of the Church of the East while cautioning against interpreting it either primarily through the inherited category of “Nestorian heresy” or by assimilating it too completely to Chinese religious categories;

76 Balmont, *Syriac Christians in Tang China*, 157–162. Balmont translates the title as “The Book of the Revelation of the Perfect Principle of the Primary Origin.”

77 Zhu Donghua, “Chinese Jingjiao and the Antiochene Exegesis,” 48–57; idem, *Jingfeng qianxun*, esp. 1–2, 18–29.

78 Chen Huaiyu, “Shared Issues in a Shared Textual Community,” 93–109.

79 Tang Xiaofeng 唐曉峰, “‘Yi Fo Dao shi Ye’—Tangdai Jingjiao ‘Zhongguohua’ de chubu changshi” 「以佛道釋耶」——唐代景教「中國化」的初步嘗試, *Shijie zongjiao wenhua* 世界宗教文化, no. 3 (2021): 16–22.

80 Huang Rong 黃蓉, *The Luminous Wind Fanned the East: A Comparative Study of the East Syriac Christian Documents in China (618–907)* (PhD diss., Harvard University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2024).

and Feng brings the texts into constructive discussion with *qi* 氣, creation, science, and religion. Taken together, these approaches show that the writings are now being read not only as documentary evidence for Christianity in Tang China, but also through Syriac theology, Chinese intellectual history, comparative textual study, translation studies, transregional ecclesiastical history, and contemporary theology.⁸¹

VIII. Inner Mongolia and Quanzhou

Inner Mongolia and Quanzhou are geographically distant, and their Christian materials do not constitute a single corpus. They are considered together here because much of the evidence belongs to the Mongol and Yuan periods and consists primarily of manuscripts, funerary inscriptions, crosses, plaques, ceramic objects, and other archaeological remains rather than Chinese doctrinal writings.⁸² These materials make it possible to identify clergy and laypersons, families, social ranks, languages, and places of settlement with a degree of specificity not often available from the Tang Chinese texts. They therefore bring the social organization, mobility, and multilingual life of Christian communities in the Mongol and Yuan worlds more directly into view.

The Kara-Khoto manuscripts provide an important textual point of departure within the Inner Mongolian evidence. Peter Zieme's study of the Turkic Christian folios showed that they preserve a Christian discourse concerned with almsgiving, reward, and judgement.⁸³ Chen Wei

81 Thompson, "Strange Teaching from a Strange Land," 143–163; Feng, *Science, Religion(s), and Spirit(s) in China*.

82 For the importance of funerary, epigraphic, manuscript, and portable materials in the study of Yuan-period and Inner Asian Christian communities, see Niu Ruji 牛汝極, *Shizi lianhua: Zhongguo chu Xuliyawen Jingjiao beiming wenxian yanjiu (gongyuan 13–14 shiji), faben* 十字蓮花：中國出敘利亞文景教碑銘文獻研究（西元 13–14 世紀）法文版 [*Cross and Lotus: A Study of Syriac Jingjiao Inscriptions Unearthed in China (Thirteenth to Fourteenth Centuries), French Edition*] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2010); Yang Xue 楊雪 and Tursunjan Yiming 吐送江·依明, "Huigu Jingjiao yanjiu shuping" 回鶻景教研究述評 ["A Review of Research on Uyghur Jingjiao"], *Haijiaoshi yanjiu* 海交史研究, no. 4 (2023): 79–93.

83 Peter Zieme, "A Cup of Cold Water: Folios of a Nestorian-Turkic Manuscript from Kharakhoto," in *Jingjiao: The Church of the East in China and Central Asia*, ed. Roman Malek et al. (Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica, 2006), 341–346. See also Peter Zieme 茨默, "Yi bei liangshui: Heishuicheng chutu Tujueyu Jingjiao wenxian" 一杯涼水：黑水城出土突厥語景教文獻 ["A Cup of Cold Water: Turkic Jingjiao Documents Unearthed at Kara-Khoto"], trans. Yang Fuxue 楊富學 and Peng Xiaojing 彭曉靜, *Xixia yanjiu* 西夏研究, no. 2 (2016): 34–38.

subsequently situated Kara-Khoto within the history of East Syriac Christianity in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, while He Xiangjun returned to the Uyghur manuscript with fuller annotation and Chinese translation and drew attention to its treatment of sin, judgement, and Eucharistic discipline.⁸⁴ These studies show that the fragments are not merely evidence for the presence of Christians in the region. They preserve part of a vernacular Christian textual culture in Uyghur and therefore provide evidence for the language in which Christian teaching was copied, read, or used.

Elsewhere in Inner Mongolia, research has concentrated more heavily on archaeological sites and portable objects. Wang Dafang's examination of an Old Uyghur ceramic stele from Chifeng addressed the reading of its inscription, its attribution to the Ögedei Khan period, and the Christian community to which it may have belonged.⁸⁵ Research at Aolunsumu enlarged the scale of inquiry. Wei Baolei, Yang Xingyu, and Zheng Chengyan proposed that the remains should be understood as those of a Yuan-period "Jingjiao city."⁸⁶ Whatever degree of Christian predominance that designation is taken to imply, the study marked an important change in approach: rather than interpreting a Christian object in isolation, it treated an archaeological site as a possible setting for the settled life of a Christian community.

Portable objects, however, present a different set of problems. Zheng Yu classified Ongut crosses from the Yinshan region according to form and

84 Chen Wei 陳瑋, "13–14 shiji Heishuicheng de Jingjiao xinyang" 13–14 世紀黑水城的景教信仰 ["Jingjiao Belief at Kara-Khoto in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries"], *Xungen*, no. 1 (2011): 64–69; He Xiangjun 何湘君, "Nei Menggu Heishuicheng chutu Huigu Jingjiao xieben yanjiu" 內蒙古黑水城出土回鶻景教寫本研究 ["A Study of the Uyghur Jingjiao Manuscript Unearthed at Kara-Khoto, Inner Mongolia"], *Tulufanxue yanjiu* 吐魯番學研究, no. 1 (2019): 72–84.

85 Wang Dafang 王大方, "Nei Menggu Chifeng shi Songshan qu chutu Wokuotai Han shiqi de Gu Huiguwen Jingjiao cibeikao" 內蒙古赤峰市松山區出土窩闊台汗時期的古回鶻文景教瓷碑考 ["A Study of the Old Uyghur Jingjiao Ceramic Stele of the Ögedei Khan Period Unearthed in Songshan District, Chifeng, Inner Mongolia"], *Nei Menggu shifan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 內蒙古師大學報 (哲學社會科學版) 29, no. 5 (2000): 42–44.

86 Wei Baolei 魏苞蕾, Yang Xingyu 楊星宇, and Zheng Chengyan 鄭承燕, "Aolunsumu gucheng—zhongshiji de Nei Menggu Jingjiao chengshi" 敖倫蘇木古城——中世紀的內蒙古景教城市 ["The Ancient City of Aolunsumu: A Medieval Jingjiao City in Inner Mongolia"], *Nei Menggu wenwu kaogu* 內蒙古文物考古, no. 2 (2001): 101–103.

attempted to relate their types and distribution to distinctions of social rank.⁸⁷ Liu Boyun and Zhu Shuai's review of Yuan-period Christian bronze plaques emphasizes the uncertain provenance and complicated collecting history of many surviving objects, leaving aspects of their classification, dating, and religious attribution open to reconsideration.⁸⁸ Patrick M. W. Taveirne has pressed this caution further in his review of the so-called Ordos "Nestorian bronze crosses." He shows that the category has often rested on poorly documented collections and on the assumption that cross-like, bird-like, or swastika-like forms are necessarily Christian, although such motifs circulated much more widely across Eurasian religious and artistic traditions.⁸⁹ Niu Ruji, by contrast, has used portable material comparatively, examining a bronze mirror bearing a cross-lotus design and Syriac inscriptions alongside Christian crosses, tombstones, and other objects from different regions to explore the circulation of Christian symbols, languages, and communities in Yuan China.⁹⁰ These studies reveal both the historical potential and the limitations of portable materials. Comparison across regions may disclose recurrent visual and epigraphic patterns, but such conclusions remain dependent on establishing provenance, transmission history, function, dating, and the grounds on which an object has been identified as Christian.

The Christian inscriptions from Quanzhou provide a more securely localized and socially detailed body of evidence. Niu Ruji brought their Syriac, Uyghur, and Phags-pa texts into systematic study through the reading, identification, and translation of individual inscriptions. His work moved beyond the history of their discovery to recover individual Christians and their social relationships: personal names, offices, kinship relations, ethnic

87 Zheng Yu 鄭玉, "Yinshan Wanggu Jingjiao shizijia leixing yu dengji yanjiu" 陰山汪古景教十字架類型與等級研究 ["A Study of the Types and Ranks of Ongut Jingjiao Crosses in the Yinshan Region"], *Nanfang wenwu* 南方文物, no. 6 (2021): 160–166.

88 Liu Boyun 柳博贊 and Zhu Shuai 祝帥, "Yuandai Jingjiao tongpai yanjiu de lishi yu qianzhan" 元代景教銅牌研究的歷史與前瞻 ["The History and Prospects of Research on Yuan-Dynasty Jingjiao Bronze Plaques"], *Zongjiaoxue yanjiu* 宗教學研究, no. 6 (2023): 171–177.

89 Patrick M. W. Taveirne, "The Study of the Ordos 'Nestorian Bronze Crosses': *Status Quaestionis*," in *The Church of the East in Central Asia and China*, ed. Samuel N. C. Lieu and Glen L. Thompson, China and the Mediterranean 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 213–231.

90 Niu Ruji, "History Is a Mirror: On the Spread of Nestorianism in China from the Newly Discovered Bronze Mirror with Cross-Lotus and Syriac Inscriptions," in *The Church of the East in Central Asia and China*, ed. Samuel N. C. Lieu and Glen L. Thompson, China and the Mediterranean 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 177–188.

backgrounds, and funerary practices can sometimes be identified with unusual specificity.⁹¹ His comparison of the Quanzhou inscriptions with materials from Ordos, Kara-Khoto, Almaliq, Turfan, and other regions further situated the city within the East Syriac networks of the Mongol period.⁹²

Comparison between the northern and southern materials has also raised more specific questions about routes of transmission. Zheng Yu approached their relationship from this perspective, suggesting that the earlier dating of the Yinshan Ongut remains and the predominantly Yuan dating of the Quanzhou inscriptions may indicate a southward movement of Jingjiao culture within China, while cautioning that the possible influence of the Maritime Silk Road on Quanzhou Christianity should not be excluded.⁹³

Broader studies have placed these regional materials within the institutional, interreligious, and transregional history of Christianity under Mongol rule. Tang Xiaofeng surveys Yuan-period Christian communities, institutions, relations with the Mongol court and other religions, and their surviving material remains.⁹⁴ Glen L. Thompson stresses the continuing transregional identity of the *Yelikewenjiao*, cautioning against treating their presence in China as equivalent to complete cultural or religious assimilation.⁹⁵ David Wilmshurst examines relations among the Church of the East, Latin Christians, Buddhists, and Manichaeans, distinguishing documented rivalry between the two Christian traditions from the more varied and sometimes ambiguous evidence for Christian relations with other religious communities.⁹⁶ Yang Xue and Tursunjan Yiming, in turn, situate the Uyghur materials within a wider field of Syriac, Sogdian, and Uyghur Christian evidence extending from Semirech'e to China. Their observation that philological study and textual cataloguing have advanced further than research on social life, localization, and relations with other religious

91 Niu Ruji 牛汝極, "Fujian Quanzhou Jingjiao beiming de faxian ji qi yanjiu" 福建泉州景教碑銘的發現及其研究 ["The Discovery and Study of Jingjiao Inscriptions in Quanzhou, Fujian"], *Haijiaoshi yanjiu* 海交史研究, no. 2 (2007): 1–48, esp. 28; Niu, *Shizi lianhua*.

92 Niu, *Shizi lianhua*.

93 Zheng, "Yinshan Wanggu Jingjiao shizijia leixing yu dengji yanjiu," 165–166.

94 Tang Xiaofeng 唐曉峰, *Yuandai Jidujiao yanjiu* 元代基督教研究 [A Study of Christianity in the Chinese Yuan Dynasty] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe 社會科學文獻出版社, 2015).

95 Thompson, "Strange Teaching from a Strange Land," 143–163.

96 David Wilmshurst, "Interfaith Conflict in Yuan (Yüan) China," in *The Church of the East in Central Asia and China*, ed. Samuel N. C. Lieu and Glen L. Thompson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 165–175.

communities identifies an important direction for future work.⁹⁷ The Inner Mongolia and Quanzhou materials now permit individual Christians, families, offices, social distinctions, and local communities to be studied with unusual specificity, but the histories reconstructed from them remain dependent on careful distinctions among regional setting, language, provenance, function, religious attribution, and type of evidence.

IX. Authenticity Doubts

The manuscripts and inscriptions discussed in this historiographical review do not all stand on the same evidentiary footing. Some have secure archaeological or documented contexts; others entered collections through the antiquities market with little record of their earlier history. These differences have shaped a long debate over which materials should be included in the Jingjiao corpus and on what grounds. The Jingjiao Stele and the Luoyang pillar provide broadly secure inscriptional witnesses, while P. 3847 has a documented association with the Dunhuang Library Cave through Pelliot's collection. The surviving manuscripts of *Zhixuan anle jing* and *Daqin Jingjiao Xuanyuan benjing* lack comparable archaeological contexts, although their modern collection history can be traced from Li Shengduo through his son Li Pang to their purchase by Haneda Tōru in Kyoto in 1936.⁹⁸

The most direct forgery debate concerned the Kojima manuscripts. Saeki's publication and endorsement, followed by Haneda Tōru's acceptance of them as genuine Dunhuang materials, led Kojima A (*Daqin Jingjiao dasheng tongzhen guifa zan* 大秦景教大聖通真歸法讚) and Kojima B (*Daqin Jingjiao Xuanyuan zhiben jing* 大秦景教宣元至本經) to be widely treated as Tang Jingjiao manuscripts from Dunhuang. Lin Wushu and Rong Xinjiang undertook a joint investigation of their authenticity in 1991. Rong examined the manuscripts' transmission history, their alleged connection with Li Shengduo, and the attributed annotations and seals, while Lin assessed their contents against Tang Jingjiao history and doctrine. They concluded that the manuscripts were very likely forgeries produced after Li Shengduo's death by one or more antiquities dealers and argued that, at minimum, they should not be accepted as Tang Jingjiao manuscripts from the Dunhuang Library Cave or cited unconditionally as evidence in research on Jingjiao or Dunhuang history.⁹⁹ Chen Huaiyu subsequently added further internal evidence

97 Yang and Tursunjan, "Huigu Jingjiao yanjiu shuping," 79–93.

98 Tōno, *Dunhuang miji Jingjiao jingdian sizhong*, 10.

99 Rong Xinjiang 榮新江, "Dunhuang Jingjiao wenxian xieben de zhen yu wei" 敦煌景教文獻寫本的真與偽 ["The Authenticity of Dunhuang Jingjiao Manuscripts"], in *San Yijiao yanjiu: Lin Wushu xiansheng guxi jinian lunwenji* 三夷教研究: 林悟殊先生

concerning Tang Jingjiao terminology, historical knowledge, and the compositional and metrical features of Tang writing. Wang Lanping likewise accepts the forged status of both manuscripts, and for Kojima B, he points particularly to the *Daqin Jingjiao Xuanyuan zhiben jing* engraved on the Luoyang pillar: although it bears the same title as Kojima B, its text is entirely different and instead corresponds closely to the genuine Li Shengduo manuscript of the *Daqin Jingjiao Xuanyuan benjing* 大秦景教宣元本經. He therefore treats the excavated inscription as confirming the non-authenticity of Kojima B. Nicolini-Zani similarly regards the comparison as removing any remaining doubt concerning that manuscript.¹⁰⁰

The Tomioka (*Yishen lun*) and Takakusu (*Xuting mishisuo jing*) manuscripts present a more difficult case. Lin Wushu questioned both on the grounds of uncertain provenance and what he saw as a contrast between their unusually careful physical presentation and texts marked by disorder, irregular formatting, problematic names, and doctrinal or linguistic confusion. In the Takakusu manuscript, he focused especially on the title *Xuting mishisuo jing* and the form *Yishu* for Jesus. Since he regarded the two manuscripts as written by the same hand and closely related in language and content, suspicion concerning one affected the other. Lin suggested that the Tomioka manuscript might be a carefully copied forgery, but did not claim that either manuscript had been conclusively proved false. Rong Xinjiang later developed these doubts. Taking Saeki's placement of the two texts within the Aluoben group to mean that they represented the officially sponsored translation activity associated with Aluoben, Rong argued that their structural disorder, scribal errors, and inconsistent terminology were difficult to reconcile with the standards expected of such production. Rong consequently

古稀紀念論文集, ed. Zhang Xiaogui, Wang Yuanyuan, and Yin Xiaoping (Lanzhou: Lanzhou University Press, 2014), 268–289; Lin Wushu 林悟殊, “Dunhuang Hanwen Jingjiao xiejing yanjiu shuping” 敦煌漢文景教寫經研究述評 [“A Review of Research on Chinese Jingjiao Manuscripts from Dunhuang”], in *Zhonggu Sanyi jiao bianzheng* 中古三夷教辨證 [Debate and Research on the Three Persian Religions: Manichaeism, Nestorianism, and Zoroastrianism in Medieval Times] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2005), 161–203.

- ¹⁰⁰ Chen Huaiyu 陳懷宇, “Suowei Tangdai Jingjiao wenxian liangzhong bianwei bushuo” 所謂唐代景教文獻兩種辨偽補說 [“Supplementary Notes on the Authentication of Two So-called Tang Jingjiao Documents”], in *Tang yanjiu* 唐研究, vol. 3, ed. Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京大學出版社, 1997), 41–53; Wang Lanping 王蘭平, *Tangdai Dunhuang Hanwen Jingjiao xiejing yanjiu* 唐代敦煌漢文景教寫經研究 [A Study of Tang-Dynasty Dunhuang Chinese Jingjiao Manuscripts] (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe 民族出版社, 2016), 54–57; Nicolini-Zani, *The Luminous Way to the East*, 154–155.

treated the manuscripts as later copies of Christian texts made by a scribe unfamiliar with their contents and excluded them from the Tang Jingjiao corpus.¹⁰¹

Lin and Rong's conclusions were subsequently reconsidered by several scholars. Wang Lanping's 2016 study examined the principal arguments concerning transliteration, terminology, textual irregularity, and character forms, and maintained that these features did not require the manuscripts to be classified as modern forgeries. He drew attention instead to Syriac phonetic transcriptions, terminological correspondences, and graphic forms paralleled in other Dunhuang manuscripts. The question therefore remained open when renewed examination of the physical manuscripts became possible.¹⁰²

A further shift came with the 2020 Kyō-U Library report. As discussed above, Tōno Haruyuki proposed on palaeographical and codicological grounds that the *Yishen lun* and *Xuting mishisuo jing* manuscripts had once formed a single roll, with *Yishen lun* preceding *Xuting mishisuo jing*. He placed the copying of the surviving roll in the first half or around the middle of the eighth century, while allowing that the texts or exemplars it transmitted might be older.¹⁰³ These findings materially grounded the relationship between the manuscripts and reinforced the need to distinguish the date and formation of the surviving copy from the dates, origins, and authorship of its constituent texts. Nicolini-Zani, who had excluded the Tomioka and Takakusu manuscripts from his working corpus in 2006 because of their uncertain origin, adopted a more qualified position by 2022, taking also account of Wang's reconsideration and the renewed attention to difficult readings, variant characters, and manuscript provenance. Balmont likewise regards the Kyo-U findings as weakening parts of the earlier case against them. He places the two manuscripts between the more securely documented witnesses and the rejected Kojima manuscripts, while maintaining that the texts they transmit have a strong claim to antiquity.¹⁰⁴

In response to proposals to exclude the Tomioka and Takakusu manuscripts from the Tang Jingjiao corpus, a 2024 study approached the question from a different direction by examining how the case for doubting their authenticity had been constructed. Applying James L. Kinneavy's theory of discourse, it argues that Lin's case remains exploratory rather than

101 Lin, "Dunhuang Hanwen Jingjiao xiejing yanjiu shuping," 183–201; Rong Xinjiang, "Dunhuang Jingjiao wenxian xieben de zhen yu wei," 288–289; Saeki, *Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 8–9.

102 Wang, *Tangdai Dunhuang Hanwen Jingjiao xiejing yanjiu*, 57–123.

103 Tōno, *Dunhuang miji Jingjiao jingdian sizhong*, 5–18.

104 Nicolini-Zani, *The Luminous Way to the East*, 155–165; Balmont, *Le christianisme chinois du haut Moyen Âge*, 111–117.

demonstrative and that Rong's more formal reasoning still does not prove forgery. The article identifies several weaknesses in the skeptical arguments, including dependence on secondary annotation, the conversion of interpretive difficulty into evidence of fabrication, shifting conjectures about the supposed source of forgery, circular use of provenance uncertainty, and the *non sequitur* by which "not an Aluoben document" becomes "forged."¹⁰⁵

More broadly, questions of authenticity in the Jingjiao corpus cannot be reduced to a simple choice between genuine and false. The age of the physical witness, the date and circumstances of copying, the antiquity of the text transmitted, its history of circulation, and its attributed authorship are related but distinct questions. A manuscript may preserve an old text without being the author's copy, while uncertainty about provenance does not by itself determine either the age of the manuscript or the antiquity of its contents. Each witness must therefore be assessed on its own material, textual, and historical evidence before conclusions are drawn about its place within the Jingjiao corpus.

X. Conclusion

The recent development of Jingjiao studies is marked not by a single new discovery or interpretive model, but by the convergence of several forms of evidence and several scales of analysis. Archaeological discoveries at sites such as Tangchaodun and Xipang have enlarged the material basis for reconstructing Christian communities in medieval China and Inner Asia. At the same time, renewed examination of manuscripts, inscriptions, portable objects, and individual texts has complicated earlier assumptions about provenance, authorship, chronology, classification, and authenticity. These developments have made it increasingly difficult to treat "Jingjiao" as either a single textual corpus or a homogeneous historical phenomenon.

Two complementary tendencies are particularly visible in the scholarship reviewed here. One works at the larger historical scale, reconstructing the movement of the Church of the East across Central and East Asia, its institutions and communities, and its place within the religious and political worlds of Tang and Yuan China. The other begins with individual pieces of evidence: the physical characteristics of a manuscript, the linguistic usage of a particular text, the form and location of an inscription, the archaeological context of a church, or the provenance of an object. The strongest recent studies increasingly move between these two scales. Broad historical

105 David Tam, "Authenticity Doubt on the Tomioka (*Yishen lun*) Manuscript: A Discourse Analysis," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 80, no. 3 (2024): a10135, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i3.10135>.

reconstruction remains indispensable, but its claims become more secure when continually tested against the particular evidence from which they are built.

This evidence-first tendency also requires several distinctions that earlier scholarship did not always maintain consistently. The history of a manuscript is not identical with the history of every text copied upon it; the date and provenance of a surviving witness do not by themselves determine the date or place of composition of the work it preserves; and questions concerning the authenticity of paper, handwriting, textual transmission, attribution, and historical content must be assessed separately. The same caution applies to larger classificatory categories. The writings associated through P. 3847, the *Zunjing*, *Jingjing*, and explicit Daqin Jingjiao terminology belong to a historically connected Christian milieu whose relationship with the Church of the East is further illuminated by the Daqin Jingjiao Stele and its Syriac ecclesiastical context.

At the same time, greater evidentiary caution has not narrowed the field. On the contrary, it has made possible a broader range of questions. Recent studies increasingly read the Chinese Christian writings not only as documents for reconstructing the history of Christianity in China, but also as works of theology, exegesis, translation, liturgy, literature, and intellectual encounter. The Jingjiao Stele can likewise be examined simultaneously as historical testimony, bilingual inscription, monumental object, work of calligraphy, and product of Tang stele culture. Syriac and other Central Asian materials make it possible to situate Chinese evidence within the transregional history of the Church of the East, while comparison with Buddhist, Daoist, and broader Chinese textual traditions illuminates the linguistic and conceptual environments in which Christian ideas were articulated. Zhu Donghua's recent proposal of a "paradigm change" in *Jingxue*, from a predominantly historical-philological orientation toward more sustained study of theology, exegesis, liturgy, and intellectual encounter, is itself evidence of this widening of the field.

The result is not the replacement of historical and philological scholarship by theological or comparative interpretation, but a more integrated field in which these approaches can correct and strengthen one another. Archaeology establishes contexts that texts alone cannot provide; codicology tests assumptions about manuscripts and transmission; philology reconstructs meanings from actual linguistic usage; epigraphy places Christian inscriptions within local material and literary conventions; comparative study clarifies both borrowing and difference; and theological analysis asks what these texts were attempting to say within those settings. Translation itself increasingly emerges not merely as a means of recovering an assumed foreign original, but

as a historical process through which Christian concepts were selected, reformulated, and made intelligible in Chinese linguistic and intellectual worlds.

The field therefore appears to be moving toward a more differentiated understanding of Christianity in medieval China. Rather than seeking a single centre, corpus, theology, or model of “Sinicization,” recent work increasingly reveals multiple communities, textual histories, material settings, linguistic strategies, and forms of religious encounter. The task ahead is to preserve the specificity of those individual witnesses while continuing to ask the larger historical questions that connect them. It is precisely in the movement between these scales—between object and network, manuscript and text, local setting and transregional church, philological detail and theological meaning—that the next stage of Jingjiao studies is likely to develop.

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