Digging out God from the Rubbish Heap – The Chinese Nestorian Documents and the Ideology of Research

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(draft – not for citation)

Introduction

I would like to start my presentation with some preliminary remarks to avoid unfulfilled hopes. What you are going to hear is not a merely philological presentation but rather an attempt to describe in a special field of research of Chinese religious literature the gap which has developed between the research work and results of the specialist –philologist or historian – and the common knowledge of or the popularized pool of information on the same subject, which in my case covers the earliest period of Christianity in China, the Nestorians in the *Tang* period.

I would like to start my paper with some general remarks. Research in humanities and cultural studies has undergone a change in the recent past. There is an increasing awareness of the fragility of such conceptions like the one of positivistic objectivity on the one side and, on the other side, of the dependency of scholars of their own personal background, their academic tradition and its history which influences the method and the way of research and even the choice of topics. The consequent conclusion of this should be that we have to investigate these preconditions under which research was undertaken and is still done at present in order to realize one's own position as a researcher and to eventually correct deficiencies and mistakes which eventually arise from this situation.

The paper will endeavour to trace some of these ideological and cultural presuppositions and its resulting problems in connection with the so-called Chinese Nestorianica from the *Tang* period. These documents in some respect represent an ideal material basis for such an undertaking, as two and academic fields are involved: the Theologians in the broadest sense of the term and the Orientalist in the most neutral sense of the term. There is a remarkable gulf of ignorance between those working in missiology and making constant use of translations of these Chinese documents of, for example, the workd of the Chinese specialists who have reccently

discussed the authenticity and – to a certain extent – the contents of these texts. The point where these two views – the theologian's and the specialist's –met in a rather unfortunate way for the overall perception of the Nestorian texts in the Western world more than half a century ago is definitely the English translation of the Chinese Nestorian texts by the Japanese Christian minister and scholar Peter Yoshirō Saeki which for a long time has been almost the only source in a Western language by which a theolgogian could get access to the complete bulk of Chinese Nestorianica[1].

That we are not dealing with a triviality may be demonstrated by a quotation of a German handbook of theology:

> *"The pillar of Si-ngan-fu relates in Syr. and Chin. language that a church organization existed in China* **even before 635** *which has eventually* **even influenced Mahayana Buddhism***."*[2]

I will try to show by two examples from the Nestorian stele of *Xi'an* and from the so-called Dunhuang-texts how, why and to what results there is no communication between the two groups of "users" of the documents by concentrating on the non-specialists, mainly theologians (A. Rosenkranz, Peter Chiu, Samuel Moffett, Martin Palmer) but also Religious Studies specialists or Sinologists (Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, Li Tang) who, in the well-established tradition of Saeki, try to read Christian ideas and terms into the texts which are at best an *interpretatio sinica* of Christian concepts in Ruist, Buddhist or Daoist disguise – thus trying to "dig out God from the rubbish heap". I further will try to demonstrate the underlying ideology of this way of reading the texts which is to be brought into the broader context of the debate about Edward Said's notion of Orientalism as a colonialist discourse of power, representing Eastern cultures and religion as a kind of inverted examples of its own cultural, religious and national preconception. In the case of Christianity in the East – in the

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[1] In this way Saeki's own hope, expressed in the preface to the first edition of his book, p.3, is truly fulfilled: „*.... to usher the hitherto almost unknown and very much neglected Nestoriania Sinica into the learned Societies in Christendom through the medium of the English language.*"

[2] Volker Drehsen (ed.), *Wörterbuch des Christentums*, Düsseldorf 1988, 867a., Nikolaus Thon, s.v. „Nestorianische Kirche": „*Die ... Säule von Si-ngan-fu berichtet in syr. und chin. Sprache, daß* **schon vor 635** *eine Kirchenorganisation in China bestand und möglicherweise* **sogar den Mahayana Buddhismus beeinflußt hat**.*"* (bold types added by my) As an example to what strange conclusions the literaly reading of the highly propagandistic stele leads see also Wilhelm Baum, Dietmar W. Winkler, *The Church of the East. A Concise History*, London, New York 2003, 47: "*... under Emperor Kao-tsung (...) churches were built in all of China's provincial capitals. ... Under the empress Wu (...) Christianity was regarded as competition for Buddhism and was persecuted.*"

Near East, India, Central Asia and finally in East Asia – this has developed into a specific discourse on an all-pervading religious "truth" represented through Christianity and eventually found in any time and at any place in the world – a phenomenon which I use to label as "trans-orientalism" because it detects the West's own religious superiority, be it in distorted forms, in Asian cultures of the past.

The Texts and Their Translations / Translators

As most of you probably know the Chinese texts of the Church of the East, also called Nestorian or *Jingjiao*, *"Radiant Teaching"*, of the *Tang* period are divided in two main groups: 1. the Nestorian stele of Xi'an and 2. the manuscripts which came to light – one is tended to call it "twilight" – of scholarly attention at the beginning of the last century through the discovery of the Dunhuang library and the subsequent hunt for Chinese manuscripts by Japanese scholars in mainland China before and during the second world war. It would be an interesting and tempting task to discuss this phenomenon in the broader context of the Japanese „conquest of China" from the time after the Sino-Japanese war on but I do not have the time to do this in my paper.

The Chinese Nestorian texts of the second group are the following. (It should be noted that I follow Saeki's order only for the sake of conventionality. I do not subscribe to Saeki's implicated opinion on the date of the texts. Note also that the translation of the titles are my own and differ – in some parts radically – from others'):

1. *Xuting-mishi-suo-jing (yijuan)* 序聽迷詩所經, *„Sūtra of Hearing the (Preaching) of the Messiah"*

2. *Yishen-lun , „Treatise of the One God"* 一神論 by Haneda Tōru

3. *Yu di'er* 喻第二, *„Similis, Number 2"*

4. *Yitian-lun diyi* 一天論第一, *„Treatise of the One God"*

5. *Shizun-bushi-lun disan* 世尊布施論第三, *„Treatise of the Alms-Giving of the World-Honored One "*

6. *Jingjiao-san-weimeng-du-zan* 景教三威蒙度讚, *„Praise of the Pāramitā of the Three Majestics of the Illustrious Teaching"*

7. *Zun-jing* 尊經, *„Sūtra of Veneration"*

8. *Zhixuan-anle-jing* 至玄安樂經, „*Sūtra of the Ultimate and Mysterious Happiness*"

9. *Daqin-jingjiao-xuanyuan-(zhi)ben-jing* 大秦景教宣元至本經, „*Sūtra of the Origin of Origins of the Illustrious Teaching from Daqin* "

10. *Daqin-jingjiao-dasheng-tongzhen-guifa-zan* 大秦景教大聖通真歸法讚, „*The Praise of the Seeking Refuge to the Pervading Truth of the Great Saint of the Illustrious Teaching from Daqin*"

As both Paul Pelliot[3] and Lin Wushu[4] have written extensively on the history of the stele, its discovery and its translation, I mainly refer to their work and will only highlight some points which are of interest for my goal of tracing the trans-orientalist strategy from the very beginning of the preoccupation of and the research on the text. If we scan the Western translations of the stele it becomes clear that all with only one exception – Pelliot's French translation, edited by Antonino Forte – have been undertaken by missionaries or at least convinced Christians. This stands also true for the older Chinese studies of the text the authors of which were all Christian Chinese.

In this respect things changed not considerably when the so-called Dunhuang documents were discovered at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century. I will not go into the story of the discovery of these documents and into the discussion about their authenticity but they were first collected and some of them edited by Chinese and Japanese collectors and scholars – except documents 6 and 7 found by Pelliot – who had no direct connection to Christianity. The documents first have been completely translated into English by the Japanese Methodist clergyman and scholar Peter Yoshirō Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, Tokyo 1939, mainly used in its second edition Tokyo 1951.

Two of the documents, no.3 and 4, called *"Gloria in excelsis deo"*, and a part of no.1, have already been translated by A.C. Moule in his „*Christians in China before the year 1550*", Shanghai 1930.

Reference is sometimes made to the German „translation" by Gerhard Rosenkranz[5] – this is, however not a real translation of the Chinese documents, but a

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[3] Paul Pelliot, Antonino Forte, (ed.), *L'inscription nestorienne de Si-Ngan-Fou, Edited with Supplements by Antonino Forte*, Rom / Paris 1996 (Italian School of East Asian Studies Epigraphical Series 2 / Collège de France, œuvres posthumes de Paul Pelliot)

[4] Lin Wushu, *Tangdai-jingjiao-zai-yanjiu* („*Neue Studien zum Nestorianismus der Tang-Zeit*"), Beijing 2003 林悟殊，唐代景教再研究，北京

[5] Gerhard Rosenkranz, *Die älteste Christenheit in China in den Quellenzeugnissen der Nestorianer-Texte der Tang-Zeit*, Berlin 1939 (= 2nd edition of Rosenkranz' „Die älteste Christenheit in China in

secondary work based on Moule's and Saeki's English translations and not of the Chinese originals, as Rosenkranz somewhat hiddenly expresses in his foreword: *"The following translations are based for the 'Inscription' and for the 'Gloria' including the appendices on Moule's translations, in case of the other translations on Saeki's renderings."*[6].

Peter (Chung-hang) Chiu has written a doctoral thesis *"An historical study of Nestorian Christianity in the T'ang Dynasty between A.D. 635 – 845"*, Forth Worth 1987, in which he translates completely documents 8 and 9 and parts of the other texts.

In 2002 Tang Li published her doctoral dissertation in English[7], *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*, originally accepted by the University of Tübingen, Germany. Both studies, Chiu's and Tang's, still heavily drew on Saeki's translations or just show the authors' ignorance of classical Chinese and of the religious terminology of the *Tang* period by trying to again superimpose and identify Christian conceptions in the text which in reality are not there. Especially Tang's study and translation shows – without being able to go into details here – that it is not enough to be a native speaker of Chinese in order to solve the complex and specific problems of the documents by looking up some "strange" expressions in dictionaries such as the *Cihai* 辞海 or the *Xiandai-hanyu-cidian* 现代汉语词典, the *"Modern dictionary of Chinese"*, and then translating them without any historical and text-immanent contextualization.

Beside the mentioned translations, made with a clear scholarly self-understanding of the translators despite their shortcomings, the documents – I am tempted to say - have suffered a popularisation in form of a recently published book of the British

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den nestorianischen Quellenzeugnissen der Tang-Zeit", in: Zeitschrift für Missionskunde und Religionswissenschaft 52 (1937)) (Schriftenreihe des Ostasien-Mission, Heft 3/4)

[6] *„Der folgenden Übersetzung liegen für die „Inschrift" und das „Gloria" samt Anhängen die Übersetzungen Moules, für die übrigen Übersetzungen Saekis zugrunde."* (p.6)

[7] 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 a.M. / Berlin / Bern / Bruxelles / New York / Oxford / Wien 2001 (European University Studies / Europäische Hochschulschriften / Publications Universitaires Européennes, Series / Reihe / Série XXVII, Asian and African Studies / Asiatische und Afrikanische Studien / Études asiatiques et africaines, Vol. / Bd. 87).

theologist Martin Palmer[8] with the title *The Jesus Sutras - Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity* including so-called translations of the Chinese originals which were executed - according to Palmer[9] – by a team of Chinese native speakers. Comparing the original Chinese with Palmer's translation one very often gets the impression that the "translators" used different texts. Serious philologists and scholars tend to keep silence on the existence of Palmer's book but as it seems to become the new "Saeki" for Church historians I think it should be included in the discussion here.

All these translations are defective for different reasons; a general tendency is that the translators try to "christianize" the Chinese originals[10] and do not take into account the historical, political and religious setting in which these were produced. The weakness resulting from this is that the identification of Christian terms behind a certain Chinese expression is made far too easily and without sound philological reasoning and foundation. This also concerns the hasty and very often intentional identification of Syriac or Persian terminology behind the Chinese transcriptional material. A lot of these identifications lose their credibility when measured by the strict rules and results of historical philology especially of (Early or Late) Middle Chinese. Most of the authors show a merely shallow understanding and knowledge of the religious terminology of Buddhism and Daoism, the two religious strands which quite obviously and heavily have influenced the Sino-Christian terminology in the period. That this has indeed something to do with their emic position as Christian scholars or even theologians is clearly shown by the fact that the Chinese Manichaean texts have never been treated in such a unprofessional way as the Nestorian texts[11].

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[8] Martin Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras - Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity*, New York 2001.

[9] Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras* ..., p. XV.

[10] Despite the fact that Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras* ..., p. Xiii, claims to have given due credit to the Daoist, Confucian and Buddhist influence, this is done in a rather associative way than by sound philological work and thus often leads to a complete misconception of the original text.

[11] The rather difficult procedure for achieving sound results in this type of literature can be seen in Peter Bryder's study on Chinese Manichaean terminology: *The Chinese Transformation of Manichaeism. A Study in Chinese Manichaean Terminology*, Lund 1985

Two Examples of "Digging Out God from the Rubbish Heap"

To elucidate what I mean by this retrieving of Christian contents from the texts I will gibe you two examples from the texts, the first being an example form the famous Stele of *Chang'an*, the second one dealing with the problem of the title of document no 1., the *Xuting-mishi-suo-jing (yijuan)* 序聽迷詩所經, *„Sūtra of Hearing the (Preaching) of the Messias"*.

1. What can be done with a name: *Aluoben* – Abraham, the first Nestorian missionary and patriarch in China

In this fascinating document of the Nestorian Christians in the *Tang* empire we learn details about the mission history of the Eastern Church in China. One of the very facts that text relates to us is the name of the first missionary coming to China – the patriarch of Nestorian Christianity who is celebrated in the text of the stele and in the literature about *Tang* Nestorianism as well. He is called *Aluoben* in the text and this name has from the very beginning created an almost feverish hunt for its original form.

Actually it was Haneda Tōru who carefully pointed out that *Aluoben* (and *Aluohan*) could be Abraham, and Saeki took this for granted[12]. The identification of *Aluoben* as a Chinese transcription of the biblical name Abraham was then popularized in Saeki's first translation of the Nestorian stele and repeated in the second edition of his book about the Nestorian documents: *"... we would stick to our old theory to identify the word Alopên with Abraham. Our ground is that the word "Abraham" in the Inscription of Jews at K'ai-fêng-fu was designated with the Chinese characters* 阿無羅漢 *(A-wu-lo-han) or* 羅漢 *(Lo-han), whilst the Persian Prince by the name of Abraham was designated with the Chinese characters* 阿羅憾 *(A-lo-han) in the Inscription on the Stone-Tablet set up in 709 A.D., to commemorate the late great Persian Chieftain, the General and Commander of the Right Wings of the Imperial Army of Great T'ang ..."*[13] Here we have a typical

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[12] See Forte, in: Pelliot, Forte, 379.

[13] Saeki, 84f., note (10). It is intriguing that Saeki inserted the name of Abraham into the Chinese text of the stele without any comment: Saeki Yoshirō, *Keikyō-no-kenkyū (*„*Studien zum Nestorianismus"*), Tokyo 1935 (reprinted 1983 and 1985) 佐伯好郎，景教の研究，東京, p.510, and also 597.

example of Saeki's combination of philological insufficiency and wild contextualizing speculation: identifying the names *Awuluohan*, *Aluohan* and *Aluoben* as identical and indirectly suggesting that the Persian military commander *Aluohan* had been a Christian[14].

Saeki's identification is now quite established at least in the theological handbooks, but there were also other identifications[15]. Assemani took *Aluoben* to represent *Yahballaha*[16]. A protestant Christian trying to prove that the stele was a fake from later times: *Olupuen* resp. *Lopuen* as an anagram for Polven, Pol Vénitien (Marco Polo)[17].

Now, let's have a closer look on the Chinese name: *Aluoben* 阿羅本 is – in Pulleblank's transcription of Early Middle Chinese *ʔa-la-pənʼ[18]. As has been argued from several sides there are a bunch of difficulties in identifying this Chinese name which is definitely an attempt to „transphone" as I would call it a foreign name. It should be emphasized that phonetically the metathesis of −b- and −r- and the final −n in the reconstructed Chinese against the −m in the Semitic name, but also the context does not support the identification of *Aluoben* with a Syriac-Iranian name.

Saeki, having already drawn comparison with the Kaifeng-Jewish name in the quoatation above, seems to have been influenced by the idea of a connection of the first Christian missionary in China – as a kind of Christian „wishful thinking" – with the Hebrew patriarch Abraham of the Old Testament.

Another identification which first has been brought forward is to connect *Aluoben* with the Syriac word *rabbouni*, „*teacher*" (cp. Hebrew *rabbi*); the „name" would then be a religious title[19]. For this interpretation the initial syllable ʔa- (阿) would be a

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[14] Saeki, 85, 92, and 453ff., Appendix No.1. To his Japanese readership, however, he made it clear that *Aluohan* was not a Nestorian but probably a Zoroastrian: *Keikyō-no-kenkyū*, 520.

[15] Saeki himself gives an overview in his note (10), p.84f.

[16] Pelliot, Forte, 123.

[17] Pelliot, Forte, 153.

[18] In Late Middle Chinese – following Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *Lexicon of Reconstructed Pronunciation in Early Middle Chinese, Late Middle Chinese, and Early Mandarin*, Vancouver 1991 – the last character is reconstructed as: *pun´*.

[19] Wu Qiyu, „Tangdai-jingjiao zhi fawang yu zunjing-kao" („Untersuchungen zu den ‚Dharmakönigen' und zu den ‚Verehrungssūtras' im Nestorianismus der Tang-Dynastie"), DTY 5 (2001), 13 – 58 吴其昱，唐代景教之法王與尊經考，敦煌吐魯番研究, 13. This interpretation was lately repeated by Barat (2002), 193.

„Sproßvokal" due to the local pronunciation of the word *rabbouni* before the sybillant *r-*[20].

What all these identifications obviously have in common – with the exception of Itō's which is notably not taken up by most Western scholars – is that they 1. are brought forward by Christian scholars and 2. refer to names or titles in the context of the Bible and so again show how Christian conceptions or semantics are read into the text.

I have to confess that I am not very convinced of the „Semitic" identifications but would rather suggest an Iranian name behind the cryptic *Aluoben* – as already Ito Gikyō had tried to show that *Aluoben* was a Persian name *Anōš-ruwān*[21]. As destructivism very often leads the criticism back to the destroyer I will at least try to give you another explanation for the name. In Middle-Iranian language the final membrum of personal names *–bān*, bzw. *–pān* (written as *–pn* or *-p'n*), meaning *„protected (by, through)"* (or: *„the one who protects …"*) is found quite often and it is a perfect equivalence to the Chin. *ben / *pən'* 本 in Aluoben. Examples from the corpus of Middle-Iranian names are *Ādur<u>bān</u>*, *„the one protected by the fire"*, *(Ādurbed-)Bay<u>pān</u>*, *„the one protected by god (Bay)"*, *Marz<u>bān</u>*, *„the protector of the frontiers"*, etc. (Gignoux, Philippe, *Iranisches Personennamenbuch* (hrsg.v. M. Mayrhofer u. R. Schmitt), *Band II: Mitteliranische Personennamen, Faszikel 2: Noms propres Sassanides en moyen-Perse épigraphique*, Wien 1986 (ÖAW, Phil.-Hist.Kl.), 31, Nr.36; 32, Nr.40; 120, Nr.591).

This explanation being accepted for the moment there is still the initial part of the name Chin. *Aluo- *ɔa-la-* 阿羅. I think that the Middle-Iranian "candidate" fitting best in terms of phonology and semantic is Middle-Iranian *ard* (Gignoux, 44, Nr.116), which in personal names often occurs as *Ardā-* (< Old-Iranian *artāvan*, *„posessing the law, righteous"*): cp. *Ardādar*, *„the more righteous one"*, *Ardāy-Farr*, *„light of the righteous ones"*, etc. (Gignoux, 45, No.119; 47, No.130). The basic word *ard*

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[20] To make the picture of decontextuatlized and purely allusive identification complete I could come up with a Syriac-Greek word which would at least phonetically correspond quite well to *Aluoben*. In the Syriac rite of baptism we have a word for "guarantee" or "godfather", Syriac *'arrābā, 'arrōbō* : Greek ἀρραβών (Timothy A. Curtin, S.J., *The Baptismal Liturgy of Theodore of Mopsuestia*, Washington D.C. 1970 (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Catholic University of America, Studies in Sacred Theology, Second Series No.222), 94). This could be interpreted in the case of *Aluoben* as a cognomen of somebody who is committed to a vow of who has baptized many people – not bad for a missionary.

[21] *Zoroasutā kenkyū*, 1979, 301; see Forte, in: Pelliot, Forte, 383 and 411.

means „*(cosmic) law, justice*" and is one of the old Iranian religious keywords (Avestan *aša*, Old-Iranian *arta*, Old-Indian *r̥tá*). The Chinese *Aluoben* would then be an attempt to render a Middle-Iranian name **Ardābān*, „*the one protected by the righteous ones*", or **Ardabān*, „*the one protected by the (cosmic) law* ". There is only one small phonological crux with this identification: the Chinese syllable *luo / *la* 羅 has to transcribe a Middle-Iranian *–rdā-*; but in the light of the fact that *luo / *la* 羅 is used in the Buddhist transcriptional corpus to transcribe quite a variety of foreign phonems (*r, l, ḍ*) – but also taking into account the Middle-Iranian writing variants for *Ardā-*: *'lt', 'rt'* – this seems indeed to be the minor problem compared with the phonological difficulties of the other identifications. Besides, the Chinese name may well reflect an Iranian local pronunciation in which the consonant-cluster *–rd-* was assimilated or / and cerebralized into **Aḍ(ḍ)ābān*.

If my identification is correct the first Christian missionary would not have had a Christian but a typical Iranian name: *"the one protected by the law"*. This would have been his birth-name or it may have been interpreted in a Christian way: the one who is protected by the transcedent law, the teaching of Christianity. And this would have been – I may be allowed to add this slightly ironic remark – a very suitable name for the man who ventured the not undangerous undertaking of bringing Christianity to China.

2. How to make sure that your text is a Christian text

Saeki identified as one of the earliest Nestorian texts in Chinese, according to him belonging to the oldest layer of Christian texts "translated" by *Aluoben*, our text no.1, the *Xuting-mishi-suo-jing* (*yijuan*) 序聽迷詩所經(一卷) [22] . The manuscript is, although not complete, the longest of the so-called Nestorian documents from the *Tang* period. Allegedly it is from *Dunhuang* and belonged to the well-known Japanese Buddhologist Junjirō Takakusu 高楠順次郎 who is said to have acquired it from a Chinese in the year 1922[23]. I could not get information about the whereabouts of this manuscript but it may be that one of our Japanese colleagues knows a little bit

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[22] Pénélope Riboud, „Tang", in : Nicolas Standaert, (ed.), *Handbook of Christianity in China, Volume One: 635 – 1800*, Leiden / Boston / Köln 2001 (HdO IV.15.1), 4.

[23] Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents ...*, 6; Riboud, „Tang" (2001), 4, in her overview also dates it to the seventh century.

more about the issus, especially because there have been some rumours about *Tang*-Nestorian documents extent in private collections in present Japan.

Following an emmendation made by Haneda Tōru, Saeki rendered the title as *Jesus-Messiah Sūtra* and did this very insistingly:

"The title: "The Hsü-t'ing Messiah Sūtra" means no other than "Jesus-Messiah Sūtra.""

What follows is a "masterpiece" of Saeki's treatment of transcriptional material:

"The old sound of the first Chinese character used here for Hsü (序) (lit., "preface") is "ye" or "ie" according to the sound preserved in South China, whilst its Chinese sound preserved in Japan is "djo" or "jo." The second character T'ing (聽) (lit., "to hear") is pronounced "cho" in Japan, whilst its old Chinese sound is "chu." These two letters, therefore, will give us "Jo-cho" in Japanese and "Ye-chu" in old Chinese, and can correctly be identified with the Chinese sounde "Ye-su" of the T'ang Dynasty ..."[24]

Saeki's commentary here is actually a distorted rendering of Haneda Tōru's attempt to establish an emmendation of the title to *Xucong-mishihe-jing* 序聰彌詩訶經 (*"Jesus-Christ-Sūtra"*) instead of *Xutingmishisuo-jing* 序聽迷詩所經[25]. In both cases, Haneda's and Saeki's, I cannot see how *Xucong* or *Xuting* could render a Syriac *(y)îšô* (Jesus). Besides, the character *ting* 聽 is rather unlikely to be used as a transcriptional element.

What is interesting, however, is that Saeki obviously did not dare to do the same in his almost identical Japanese books on Nestorianism in China, in which he pays due tribute to Haneda and discusses Haneda's emmendations in all details[26]. The outcome is nevertheless the same as in his English book, only with the difference that while keeping the manuscript form of the title – 序聽・迷詩所經 – Saeki glosses the Chinese original "names" by *Katakana-furigana Esu Mishiho* エス・ミシホ, *"Jesus*

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[24] Saeki, 147, note (1).

[25] Haneda Tōru, *Haneda Tōru Hakase shigaku-ronbun-shū-gekan: gengo-shūkyō-hen* 羽田亨、羽田博士史学論文集、下巻、言語・宗教篇 (originally: Haneda Tōru, „Jingjiao-jingdian Xuting-mishi-suo-jing kaoshi", in: *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Library* (Peking) 6 (1928), 433 – 456), 262f.

[26] Saeki, *Keikyō-no-kenkyū*, 677 and 679; Saeki Yoshirō, *Shina-kirisutokyō no kenkyū I,* ²Tokyo 1979 (first published: 1943) 佐伯好郎，支那基督教の研究，東京, 244f.

Messiah"[27]. So both groups of readers have the impression that this is actually what the title means.

Saeki's interpretation has obviously become the *communis opinio* in Western literature[28], and again we have the case of a highly Christianized translation with two key-names, Jesus and Messias and I again would like to question Saeki's interpretation as a hyper-Christianized wishful-thinking.

There were other interpretations of the title line which questioned the authority of Saeki's rendering. J. Foster tried to show that *xuting* is a mistake for *xuyan* 序言, *"forword"* (to what?), while T. D. Chao opined that *xuting* was a rendering of the Greek ςωτηρ, *"saviour"*, and *mishisuo* for Greek μεσον, *"middle, mediator"*. Dr. Yao Zhihua (now University of Hongkong) in an unpublished M.A. thesis tried to show that *Xutingmishisuo* taken as a valid transcription is the rendering of the title of the Syriac gospel harmony, the Diatessaron of Tatian[29] – which he thinks to be the basis for the Chinese text. I have to say that all these theories do not convince me, most of them, except Yao's, being in the same hyper-Christian line as Saeki's.

The title of the text is mysterious and has puzzled most scholars – except Saeki to whom the case is clear, as we have already seen. Let us have a look on the title and on the first line of the text:

序聽迷詩所經一卷
尒時彌師訶說天尊序娑法云。

In the second line we find a clear transcription of Messias, *Mishihe* 彌師訶, which influenced, as we have seen, Haneda's emmendation of the title into … 彌詩訶 … What was considered to be another transcription by Haneda is *xusuo* (or: *xusa*) 序娑,

[27] Saeki, *Keikyō-no-kenkyū*, 671; Saeki, *Shina-kirisutokyō* …, 240.

[28] See Rosenkranz, *Die älteste Christenheit in China* …, 4f. u. 8ff.; Heinz Klett, *Aufstieg und Untergang einer christlichen Missionsarbeit (Eine Untersuchung über die Gründe, die zum Zusammenbruch und Untergang der Missionskirche der Nestorianer in China im Zeitalter der Tang-Dynastie geführt haben)*, Greifswald 1942 (unpublished dissertation), 41; Chiu, *An historical study of Nestorian Christianity* …, 174; Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, Vol. I: Beginnings to 1500*, ²New York 1998, 307; Ian Gillman, Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, *Christians in Asia before 1500*, Ann Arbor 1999, 275f.

[29] Yao Zhihua, *A Chinese Gospel Harmony. Jesus in the Book of Xu-ting-mi-shi-suo* (personal copy, received from the author).

and and it was again Saeki who has cemented this idea by a philologically and logically wild explanatio; very much resembling the one on the title quoted above:

"The Laws of Hsü-po, the Lord o Heaven, &c. The original Chinese is Hsü-so (序婆), not Hsü-p'o (序婆), as we read it. But 婆 "so" and 婆 "p'o" are so similar as to be easily mistaken and we are sure that the transcriber must have made a mistake in putting "so" instead of "p'o," which two characters are decidedly Buddhistic terms, being rarely used in classical Chinese. Hsü-p'o, being sounded "ye-pa" or "ye-va" in the old Chinese of the 7th century, may well be identified with "Jeho-vah", whilst the context compells us to do so."[30]

The identification is to be doubted on several reasons. First because of the fact that the Chinese Nestorian texts are "Elohim"- (*Aluohe* 阿羅訶) and not "Yahve"-texts and in this they follow perfectly the Syriac texts and theological customs. My "personal specialist" for matters Syriac, Dr. Heleen van den Berg, University of Leiden, gives me the following information:

"In general the Syriac Peshitta Old Testament (most likely the translation which was used at the time) translates the combination of yawhe elohīm (a common reference to God in parts of the OT) in line with the Jewish traditional reading of it. Since they were/are not allowed to pronounce the word YWH' (the consonantal reading of it), they added the vowels of the word 'Lord' (Adonai - which by the way explains the reading 'Yehova' in some circles) - as does the western church (the Lord God / Herr Gott). In syriac: maryā alāhā (cf. e.g. Genesis 2: 4). As far as I'm aware at the moment, nothing like the word yawhe was in any common use in the Syriac-speaking churches."[31]

The identification of *xusuo* does even loose ground if the Early Middle Chinese and the Late Middle Chinese reconstructions are consulted, which would be **shi'-sa / *ziə'-sa.* On the methodological side I have to confess that I am not ready to do an emmenation without any contextual basis which would be a for instance a word parallel. I would rather stick to the text a close and as long as possible and think about other solutions – or just leave it open for the moment if such a solution cannot be attained.

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[30] Saeki, 147, note (2). In *Shina-kirisutokyō ...*, 248, Saeki again *furigana*-glosses Ehoba エホバ (Yehova).

[31] Personal note from 27.09.2004.

So let us go back to our first two lines of the text. Let us consider the possibility that the manuscript which was the basis for the copy which we have (called version B) was itself a copy or another text (called version A) and that the lining of A was redone in B in order to separate the title from the beginning of the text. If we take this structuring of a running text back we would get for version A, proposing that a line had 15 to 16 characters as in the case of the manuscript which we have:

序聽迷詩所經一卷尒時彌師訶說天尊
序娑法云

We can see now that the mysterious *xu* 序 at the beginning of our title is running parallel with the *xu* in the second line of version A. It is quite possible then that a scribe had mistakenly transferred the *xu* 序 from line 2 in version A to line 1, the title of the text, in version B. So the original version A (*A) might have looked like:

□聽迷詩所經一卷尒時彌師訶說天尊
序娑法云

If we now accept that *ting* 聽 has "regained" its own right as a semantic character meaning *"to hear"* there is still problem of *mishisuo* 迷詩所 before the conluding – *jing* 經, *sūtra*. Here I would go with Haneda and suspect that this „word" should correspond to the agens Messiah in line 2, version B, and that we have here a mistake of a scribe who wrote *suo* 所 instead of *he* 訶. Then the title of the text would be:

Ting-mishihe-jing 聽迷詩訶經, the „*Sūtra of hearing the Messiah*"

If one likes to keep the character *suo* 所 and to get a syntactically more elegant title one should add a verb after suo which could have been shuo – like in line 2 of version B and in accordance with the names of Buddhist texts:

Ting-mishihe-suo-shuo-jing 聽迷詩訶所說經, „*Sūtra of hearing the Messiah preaching*"

This reconstruction is, I am aware, far from being perfect but it avoids the technically impossible introduction of Jesus. It still does not clear the problem of *xusuo* (*xusa*) and I have to confess that I have no definitive solution. It is clear that it should refer as a modifier to *fa* 法, *"law, teaching"* (Skt. Skt. *dharma*) and is either an

qualifier for *tianzun* 天尊 or in a syntactical equal position. As *tianzun*[32] clearly is the title of the Christian god *xusuo* may conceal an Iranian or Syriac epitheton of *Allaha*. Again with the help of my adviser on Syriac, Dr. van den Berg, I would tentatively argue that *xusuo*, **shi'-sa* / **ziə'-sa* is indeed an attribute qualifying *tianzun* and it may be an attempt to render Syriac *qaddīš*, *"holy"*, pronounced with a backward *q*- and therefore not transcribed or included in the initial consonant of the Chinese word[33].

But I have to emphasize that this is rather speculative and I would be very careful to propagate this as a final solution an add another "wishful-thinking" guess as in the case of Haneda's and Saeki's Yahve.

The Motivation behind and the Ideology of "Digging Out God from the Rubbish Heap"

The background of the strange Christianizing distortion of the Chinese Christian documents of the Tang period is already easily found in the early translations of the Stele of Chang'an by Christian missionaries: into Portugese (anonymus, 1625; P. Semedo, ca.1637) and into Latin (anonymus, 1625; Athanasius Kircher, 1636; Antonius de Guvea, 1652), then also in contemporanous languages such as French (P. Gaspar Luiz, 1628; Pauthier, 1857; Havret 1895), Italian (anonymus, 1631), English (Wylie, 1854-55; Hirth, 1885; Legge, 1888) and German (P. Heller, 1897). It is this

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[32] In Buddhist texts the word stands for Skt. *bhagavat*, *"the Venerable One"*, and in stands for the hightest of the "gods": cp. the commentary to the *Amitāyussūtra*, *Wuliang-shou-jing-jingyingshu* 無量壽經净影疏: *"Tianzun is another name for the Buddha. There are five kinds of gods – as the Parinirvāṇasūtra says: Buddha is the highest of the five (kinds) of gods; that is why he is called tianzun (honoured by the gods)."* 天尊是佛異名。 天有五種。 如涅槃說。佛於五天中上。故曰天尊。

[33] *"As to your second question concerning dsesa or shisa – content-wise the most likely correspondence is that to the Syriac for 'Holy Spirit': ruhā qaddīšā (spirit holy) or in an alternative form ruh qudšā (the same, but literally something like 'spirit of holiness') – the q pronounced quite far backwards in the throat and therefore not always very clearly heard. Another solution, since you don't seem to have a correspondence to the ruhā, might be that you have a reference to the trisagion – a hymn with the three times holy in mass (before consecration): qaddīš, qaddīš, qaddīš. Although a careful pronunciation would perhaps lead to another Chinese rendering, it does not seem impossible to me that a less careful pronunciation would get rid of some of the consonants in Syriac."*; personal communication from 18.09.2004.

what I have labelled "Digging out God from the Rubbish Heap" – the attempt of Christian authors to prove that China had already had an orthodox Christianity in the time of its cultural and political climax, in the *Tang* period, that is in a time in which some parts of Europe were still struggling with the introduction of this religion. There was, however, a difference of view between the early Catholic missionaries in the 17th century, especially the Jesuits, and 19th century Protestant or Anglican translators: while the Jesuits were looking for concrete linguistic material to solve their problems of translating Christian vocabulary into Chinese and for a model of their own attempts to adapt Christianity to Chinese culture, the latter were rather enthusiastically taking the Christian stele – and later the Nestorian documents – as a proof that Christian faith could indeed be implanted in the Middle Kingdom and tried to learn from the mistakes which had led their antecedessors' undertaking to a failure[34]. The deeper goal for them was to show that Christianity had already deeply influenced religion in China and that the proselytizing of the Supreme Faith in China was just a legitimate consequence and undertaking of this prelude in the *Tang* period. This was also an important point for the Chinese converts of the early days. Directly after the discovery of the stele in *Xi'an* the Chinese Christian Leo / Li Zhizao 李之藻, the man who identified the content of the text as Christian, stated: *„From now on the mediocre learned man can not any more reproach the Holy Religion (that is: Christianity) of having come too late (to China)."[35]*

This connecting of the Tang period Nestorian documents with the objective of spreading Christian faith in East Asia is also very easily found in the general statements of scholars of the 20th century. Saeki, for example, in the foreword of the first edition of his book from the year 1937 writes: *"... the author decided to publish this book as the needs of times urged him to do, for no problem at present attracts*

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[34] As a kind of program expressed by Saeki in his preface to the first edition of his book, p.3: *"The author believes that through these pages Western scholars would clearly see how Chinese thoughts confronted with the Nestorian missionaries some twelve hundred years ago as they do to-day with the Christian missionaries."* The same kind of conception is also seen in the conclusive chapter of Saeki's book, p.448ff., where he desbribes the decline of Nestorianism in Tang China as caused by a kind of assimilative degeneration process with Buddhism, Daoism and "local cults" and by the missing support throuth the mother church. Cp. also his *Chūgoku ni okeru keikyō-suibō no rekishi - Kirisuto-kyō no seiritsu ni oyoboshitaru rōma-hōgaku-shisō no eikyō* (Kyōto 1955) 中國に於ける景教衰亡の歴史 ・キリスト教の成立に及ぼしおよぼしたるロマ法學思想の影響

[35] Pelliot, *Inscription ...*, 147.

more attention at home and abroad than that of China, while the future of the Christian Missions in the Far East can only be lighted by the lamp of the past – the history of the Nestorian Church in China."[36] The almost unhidden imperialistic and proselytizing pitchfall of this foreword has been taken back in the second edition from 1951, five years after the end of the Pacific War, by the remark that the book will be presented to the public "... *with a most humble prayer that the book may proof 'the Macedonian Cry' for the cause of the Christian Churches in the Far East.*"[37]

In the same line of argumentation the German theologian R. F. Merkel said in his foreword of the first edition of the German „translation" by Rosenkranz: „*An almost completely unknown era of struggling of Christianity with the religions of Asian cultures is slowly eludicated and it shows more and more and very clearly that Christianity, too – be it in an overtly synchretistic form – had a strong influence on the development of the world of Eastern beliefs and faith.*"[38] This statement is in full accord with the historification of of Karl Rahner's idea of the "hidden Christian": finally the Chinese have already been Christians without knowing and with all the imperfections of a synchretist creed.

Robert Palmer's basic approach to the texts, although he interpretes them in the light of an idealized Daoist concept of transcendency, is not very different in terms of the strategical concept of "digging out god". He considers the texts as reflecting a high degree of original Chinese "spirituality" but still tries to show that this is in accordance with the highest truth of Christianity in the greater framework of a religious universalism. Palmer obviously is not aware that he as his predecessors is caught in the trap of a hyperorientalist's inclusivism by trying to get rid of the specific cultural and religious connotations which are evident in the terminology of the texts.

Conclusion

What is needed for the future research on the Chinese Nestorian documents from the Tang period is the closing gap between the specialists' work and the "common"

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[36] *Preface to the First Edition*, 4.

[37] *Preface to the Second Edition*, 3.

[38] „*Eine fast völlig unbekannte Epoche der Auseinandersetzung des Christentums mit asiatischen Kulturreligionen lichtet sich langsam und zeigt immer deutlicher, dass auch das Christentum, freilich in überwiegend synkretistischer Prägung, von nachhaltigem Einfluß auf die Entwicklung der östlichen Glaubenswelt gewesen ist.*" Rosenkranz, op.cit., p. III.

theologian who is using the documents as sources for research on church history and very often draws conclusion from the conclusion drawn by the older translators, especially by Saeki. To do this I would like to propose two ways: the one would be to come forward with new translations from the hands of specialists and the second one would be the making available of the valuable research contributions of our Chinese colleagues in Western languages and the revival of the study of the Chinese Nestorian documents by Japanese specialists.