

History of Christianity in China: 635 - 1000 AD

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[0:00] Great. Okay, folks, welcome back to our second class on the history of Christianity in China.

We're going to do a brief overview of what we talked about last week, and then we'll jump right in. Before I do that, though, I just want to let you know, for those of you who came, there's been just some technological difficulties.

My laptop's frozen the last few minutes. I just got it started up, but Zoom seems to not be agreeing with it. So if that happens again and I go away, then just stick around for a few minutes, and I'll use a different computer and try and get back on.

If you guys have questions, feel free to use the chat, and I will do my best to answer those questions as soon as I can, although we may wait to the end of the meeting.

I'm just doing some last-minute cleanup here. I'm looking usually the chat. Well, I'll figure that out when the time comes.

[1:17] Usually the chat, I can see the chat while I'm sharing, but apparently not this time, but we'll figure that out when the time comes. Okay. So welcome back.

Last week we talked about history of Christianity in Asia and China from beginnings from 30 AD, the resurrection of Jesus, until about 500 or so.

So, and I'm going to bring up my pointer here so you guys can see. We talked about the Church of the East, which is the church east of the Persian, of the Roman Empire, in the Persian Empire, around this area here.

And we talked about how even around 200 AD, there were Christians in the Kushan Empire, which is around here in western China, eastern Afghanistan, and northwestern India and Pakistan, around 200 AD.

And then we did some history. We talked about the Church of the East theologically, how they're sometimes mislabeled as not being orthodox Christians, but they do affirm the Nicene Creed and the Constantinopolitan Creed, which are the two big creeds that Protestants use, as well as Roman Catholics and Orthodox, eastern Orthodox churches.

[2:38] We spoke about how there were various missions in Western China, like amongst the Huns in the 500s, the Mongols in, it's a little unclear, 500s, 600s, 700s.

And then we talked about how over here in eastern China, in the capital, there may have been some missions in the early 500s, and we've got some reasons for that. It looks probable, but we can't be totally certain.

But it does seem that there were Christian monks from the Church of the East hanging out there. And we're going to continue this story today.

So I'm going to open in a word of prayer, and then we'll begin. Father in heaven, we thank you for this privilege to gather virtually. We pray for our world today.

We pray that you would heal our world of this pandemic. We pray also, Lord, that in this time when we learn about your church flowing throughout the four corners of the earth, that we would be inspired and encouraged, but also that we would have discernment.

[3:38] Lord, that we know that your saints of old in the Bible, they did many wonderful things. They also made many mistakes. And we pray that we would learn from our brethren who've gone before us, both from their gifts and their failings.

We thank you, Lord, that you have spread your gospel throughout the earth. We pray that you'd help us to be light in this world. We pray all this in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen.

Okay. I'm going to open with a quote. This quote is from a Church of the East theologian, so a Syriac Persian theologian writing around this corner of the world.

And he's writing around the year 500. He's a very famous theologian in their tradition. He's a poet. And this is a quote from a poem. And just like we do when we write hymns or Christian poetry, sometimes we will take up the person of God or of Jesus to express emotions or theology. And Narcite does the very same thing in the quote I'm going to show you. He takes up the person of Jesus. And I want you to listen to what he has to say, because what he says, I think, shows one of the guiding principles of the Church of the East.

[4 : 52] So here it goes. So remember, he's writing poetry in the person of Jesus. Your task is this, to complete the mystery of preaching. And you shall be my witnesses of the new way which I have opened up in my person.

You I send as messengers to the four quarters of the earth to convert the Gentiles to kinship with the house of Abraham. By you as the light, I will banish the darkness of error.

And by your flames, I will enlighten the blind world. Go forth. The church of the East was more zealous for mission and for evangelization than any other ancient church, especially once you get into the 300s, the 400s, the 500s, 600s, 700s.

They were great missionaries and they went to the ends of the earth. And we're going to read about that and hear about that today. We're going to begin in 635 AD in what today is Xi'an China, Chang'an in ancient times.

This was the capital of the Tang Dynasty. And the reason why we are beginning here is because of something that was found about a thousand years later.

[6 : 09] So in 635, we're going to be talking about. But the reason why we know about what happened in 635 is because about a thousand years later, in 1625, this was discovered.

This is a very large monument. And it is was dug up. It was found buried and it was dug up in 1625. And you can see how large it is.

You can see there's Chinese characters on the top. And this monument contained a history of Christianity in China from 635 to 781.

And just so you can get an idea of how extraordinary this is, this was this was stunning news. Nobody knew about this history. It had been lost. And it was it was so amazing, in fact, that at the time, scholars thought that this was a forgery.

They thought that this was not an authentic archaeological discovery. And the reasons they thought that was because it was just so stunning and surprising and amazing. But also because this monument was found just about a thousand years from the time it commemorates.

[7 : 24] And that seemed a bit too convenient to some scholars. And the Jesuits were beginning missions in China. And they thought, you know, whoa, it's sure it's a nice coincidence that you found this monument documenting China just a thousand years ago starting.

But all those doubts have passed. Scholars unanimously affirm the authenticity of this monument. It is beyond doubt. And there's various reasons why they do, which I'll explain as we go on.

I want to give you a little bit more background, though. You'll notice if you're reading the inscription, you'll notice down here it says a full-size cast of the Nestorian Church of the East replica of this monument. In Yale University, the only production in the USA, there were a few copies of this monument made.

The only one in North America was given to Yale University. It was placed, I believe, in the entry stairwell to Sterling Memorial Library in the early 1900s. And I have worked very hard contacting librarians, curators at the Beinecke, at the Peabody, at all sorts of places, the Art Museum, at Yale. None of them have any idea where this thing is right now. And I think I've determined that it was lost sometime between the early 1900s and the 1930s when Sterling was moved to a new location.

[8 : 44] This didn't come with it and nobody knows where it is. So it's a real shame. But a full-size replica of this used to be just down the road from where we are right now. This is a picture of the monument as it stands today.

You can see it's covered in glass to protect it. You can see a turtle on the bottom of it. I think it's eight or ten feet tall. You can see the beautiful engraving at the top.

Here is an etching of the monument. You can see all of the beautiful Chinese characters. I should say etching a tracing of it, a rubbing of the figures.

You can see when we really zoom in that whoever made this monument had enormous skill.

Making an engraving is difficult. Making an engraving of this size that looks this good is really, really hard and very expensive.

So we can tell, even without reading the content of this, that whoever put this together was an organization or a person of immense means and resources.

[9 : 49] There are about 1,700 Chinese characters on this monument. If you translate them all, it makes about six pages of, you know, single-spaced text.

So it's quite a lengthy inscription. Other than Chinese characters, there's some other characters on the monument as well. Even if you don't read these languages, you'll notice that this script is a very different script from Chinese.

It's going from top to bottom. It's actually not Chinese. It is Syriac. And if we move it from right to left, which is how it's often written, you can see it here.

You can see the top, a picture of the inscription. And then on the bottom, there's a typewritten version of it. And the first word here is the Syriac word, Adam.

And it's the name of the man who put this monument together. And I'm sure you'll recognize that name, Adam. That comes from the Bible.

[10 : 48] We use that name today. And the Syriac folks used it as well. And Adam was a missionary from the Church of the East to China. And he put this monument together. And actually, what this inscription reads is Adam, priest and country bishop and pope of China.

Now, that word pope, it means something different back then than it does today. Maybe we should translate this as patriarch. In Syriac, it's papash, patriarch of China.

When this was founded, this was simply extraordinary that there was a Christian community that was flourishing to this extent that they could afford a monument or something like this.

But we're going to, I think, get even more surprises as we start reading what this monument has to tell us. Here's a typewritten version of the monument in Chinese and Syriac. If you're interested in this, you can, if you just Google the Nestorian monument in China by a guy named Saeki, you can see in the lower left-hand corner, S-A-E-K-I.

You can read all about it in his 1916 publication. You can read a full translation if you're interested. You can download a PDF of that book on archive.org. It's out of copyright. Here's some more pictures on the back of the monument.

[12 : 05] These are names of priests associated with the monument. And you can see their Syriac names are at the top, running from top to bottom. And then their Chinese names are from top to bottom below that.

So what does the inscription say? We've talked a little bit about it. But what does it say? And what does it tell us? Like I said, it gives us a history of Christianity from 635 to 781 in China.

And what I want to do now is read through what this inscription has to tell us. We'll start with the preface. It says this, That's how it begins.

Now, I should explain some words here. Da Qin or Ta Qin, which you see here. That refers to the Eastern Roman Empire or to the Western Persian Empire.

And then the luminous religion, Jing Zhao, that is the name for Christianity in the Tang Dynasty at this time period. The religion of light, the luminous religion. So we have the Roman or the West Persian Christian religion in the Middle Kingdom.

[13 : 21] The Middle Kingdom refers to China at this time. China viewed itself as the most important empire in the world. And with good reason, they were one of them. And like most of us and most empires, they viewed themselves as the center of the world and the center of the universe.

And so they called themselves the Middle Kingdom because they thought they believed they lived in the center of all it was. The Byzantines thought the very same thing about Constantinople.

You get the Romans talking about the very same thing with Rome. We just tend to do this as humans. And the Chinese are, of course, no different. It continues. A eulogy on a monument commemorating the propagation of the luminous religion in the Middle Kingdom.

Already, not only is this a Christian monument, but it's commemorating the spread, the propagation of this religion in China. That's amazing. The preface to the same composed by Qing Qing or Qing Qing, a priest of the Daqian Monastery, Adam.

So his Chinese name, Qing Qing, his Syriac name, Adam, priest and core episcopus. That's country bishop. And Papas or Pope of Sinistan.

[14 : 27] That's China. And remember, I said that Pope, that means something very different today than it did back then. Father, something like that. Patriarch. So this monument is commissioned and

composed by this guy, Adam, who is this priest.

And he's in charge of all the Christians in China. Let's keep going here. You see Qing Qing there and the Pope of China there. All right.

After that introduction, it gives another introduction, which is like a theological introduction. So before it gets to the history of Christianity in China, it explains Christian theology.

And I want you to hear what it has to tell us. It starts like this. Behold, there is one who is true and firm, who being uncreated is the origin of the origins.

I think that's what it says. My screen sharing is blocking those words. Who is ever incomprehensible and invisible, yet ever mysteriously existing to the last of the lasts. This is some very ornate language here, but it seems to be professing monotheism.

[15 : 36] There is only one God who is uncreated. He's the origin of all origins. He's the last of the last. In biblical terminology, what would we say? We would say that he is the first and the last, the alpha and the omega.

He holds the secret source of origin. He created all things and he bestows existence on all the holy ones. He is the only unoriginated Lord of the universe.

This unoriginated, maybe we could say unbegotten Lord. Something we'll be hearing about is how difficult it is and challenging it is to translate Christian ideas into other languages.

Chinese is no exception. It's very clear once we read these Christian documents that are in Chinese that they struggled and tried very hard to accurately communicate the truth of the gospel, sometimes with great success, sometimes maybe not.

Here, this phrase, bestowing existence on all the holy ones. That's that deep Christian truth where we come to exist because of God, that he's the source of all existence.

[16 : 40] But something that's interesting here is that phrase, bestowing existence on all the holy ones, is actually a concept that can be found in Confucianism.

It actually can be found in the Confucian work called the I Ching. And Confucianism was one of the great religious traditions of the Chinese Empire at this time. So what we see here, apparently, is that these Christians are borrowing from the theological concepts known amongst the Chinese at the time in order to explain the gospel message.

And in this case, they're borrowing from Confucianism to explain that God is the source of all existence for the saints. And it goes on. It says, is not this one our aloha?

That is the Syriac word for God, sometimes pronounced aloha. And you'll notice if you know a little bit of Hebrew, the Hebrew word for God, Elohim, begins with an L sound, also has an H sound.

It's because Syriac and Hebrew are a similar language family. So the words for God sound similar. If you know Arabic, the Arabic word for God is Allah. Allah, and that is closely related to this.

[17 : 59] All those three languages, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew are interrelated. Is this person not our aloha? The triune. There's a Trinitarian message here. Mysterious person, the unbegotten, and true Lord.

So this theological introduction explains monotheism, but in a Christian sense where there's this triune deity. Let's keep going. Dividing the cross, he determined the four cardinal points.

This is a bit of a mysterious phrase. Dividing the cross evidently is an introductory phrase that was common in Chinese at the time. Christians seem to have liked it because the cross in China, the word for ten, the ideograph, the character for ten is a cross symbol.

So Christians naturally congregated to that symbol as a way to represent Christianity. He determined the four cardinal points seems to be. He created the four points of the earth, the four corners of the earth.

He set in motion the primordial spirit, the wind. He produced the two principles of nature. The dark void was changed and heaven and earth appeared. This sounds a whole lot like Genesis chapter one, where in the beginning there is void in darkness and the spirit of God is hovering over the waters.

[19 : 14] That the two principles of nature seem to refer to the idea of yin and yang, light and darkness, which is which was very popular in Taoism at the time.

Taoism is the second great Chinese religion at the time. So here we have again this Adam, the guy who wrote this, borrowing from contemporary religious thought to try and explain the Christian message.

And here he's borrowing from Taoism. He goes on to say, So this is talking about creation now.

It's moved from talking about God to talking about God's creation and the creation of humans. The original nature of man was pure and void of all selfishness and unstained and unostentatious. His mind was free from inordinate lust and passion. That means that that originally humans were pure and we weren't arrogant. We weren't ostentatious. We were unstained. When, however, Satan employed his evil devices on him, man's pure and stainless nature was deteriorated.

[20 : 31] The perfect attainment of goodness on the one hand and the entire exemption from wickedness on the other became alike impossible for him. This seems to be talking about the fall of Adam and Eve and how in the garden the devil worked his wiles on them.

And it also seems to be talking about the depravity of man. How after this, the attainment of goodness was impossible for us. Let's keep going.

Whereupon one person of our Trinity, the Messiah, who is the luminous Lord. And again, my screen share is blocking this phrase. The luminous Lord, I think it says, of the universe, of the worlds, veiling his true majesty appeared upon earth as a man.

Now, we know who this is. This is Jesus, the Messiah. Angels proclaim the glad tidings. That sounds an awful lot like the good news. A virgin gave birth to the Holy One in Dakin.

Remember, Dakin is the Eastern Roman Empire of Western Persia. That's precisely where Jesus was born. A bright star announced the blessed event. Persians saw the splendor and came forth with their tribute.

[21 : 38] Clearly, this is talking about the virgin birth of Jesus and how a star announced his birth. Notice that this monument is written by Persians and they take careful effort to mention that Persians, the Magi, the Magi were from Persia.

When they brought gifts to Jesus, the Persian church was very proud of that, that they were the first Gentiles to welcome the birth of the Son of God. And here we see this expressed in China in the 7th and 8th centuries.

Let's keep going. Now, you might be wondering what's going on here.

What's this old law? What's this 24 sages? Well, it will help to know that in the ancient church, the Old Testament was viewed as having 24 books.

Now, you look at our Old Testament today and you think we've got a whole lot more books than 24 in our Old Testament. What's the deal here? The reason why we have more books is simply because we count the books differently.

[22 : 48] We, for instance, we have 12 minor prophets. We count those as 12 books. The ancient church counted the 12 minor prophets as one book. We count the first five books, the Pentateuch, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

We count that as five books. They counted it as one book. The same for 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Samuel. These were each one book or sometimes all those four books were combined into one. And you do all that. You start combining these things. Jeremiah and Lamentations are one book, etc. And pretty soon you come up with 24 books. So this seems to be saying that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament.

All the books of the Old Testament, Jesus fulfilled. And he established his new teaching of non-assertion. That's interesting. We'll come back to that. Here this seems to be speaking about regeneration.

That through Jesus fulfilling the plan of the Old Testament and through the Holy Spirit, humans now have the ability to do good works. That seems to be what it's trying to say here.

[23 : 58] Now, it mentions this teaching of non-assertion. That is a Taoist concept. You can find it in the Tao Te Ching, chapter 2. And here we have Adam adapting that Taoist concept.

Now, we're going to talk about this, hopefully, next class, the idea of syncretism. Syncretism. Because sometimes the Church of the East in China is accused of being syncretistic, meaning that they are merging Christianity with other religious traditions in ways that are not helpful or even wrong or false.

Other times they're complimented for adapting the gospel message to the culture and the language of the time. And, of course, we're all called to do that.

Now, Jesus was the master of this. He adopted the culture of the ancient Israelites and ancient Hebrew. And we see the apostles also doing this, taking this kind of Hebrew message, this Old Testament Hebrew message of the gospel and adapting it to Greek and Latin audiences in the Roman Empire.

John is famous for doing that with the logos, the word logos, the beginning of John, meaning the word, which is a very Greek concept. And so, but there's debate over this because some feel that the Church of the East went too far in their willingness and their adaptation of Chinese religious traditions.

[25 : 32] But let's go for a little bit farther. 27 standard works of his sutras were preserved. Sutras are writings or scriptures. And 27, I'm going to give you a moment to think about that number.

We already had the Old Testament. So, you know what this is? This seems to be the New Testament. We've got 27 books in our New Testament. And evidently, they did as well. And this is a bit surprising because if you listen to my Sunday school class on the reliability of the Bible, the third one talks about how the canon of scripture was put together.

And in there, I mentioned how churches that were located where the New Testament documents were written or were recipients of these documents or spoke the same language that they more quickly were able to assemble the New Testament.

But churches in far-flung areas who spoke different languages took a bit longer. And the Syriac church in Persia took quite a long time to finally get to 27 books.

[26 : 33] But here we have, they're in China, and they apparently have 27 books. And it says that conversion or transformation was extended.

The sealed gate of the blessed life was unlocked. His law, that's Jesus' law, is to bathe with water and with the spirit. And thus to cleanse from all vain delusions and to purify men until they regain the whiteness of their nature.

Again, it seems to be talking about regeneration, even baptism. Baptism was very important to them. Okay. This obviously has all the hallmarks of a Christian mission and a Christian message. We're going to fast forward a little bit through the inscription because the inscription will give us, after the theological introduction, it tells us about the practices of the Christians in China.

Let's see what they have to say. How do they demarcate themselves? How do they show that they're different from the world? And look what they say. They say that they do not own either male or female slaves, but they put all men on equality.

[27 : 44] They make no distinction between the noble and the mean, between the high and the low. They neither accumulate property nor wealth, but they give all they possess. And they set a good example to others.

I think this is a powerful message that these folks chose to identify themselves as people who don't own slaves, who don't make a distinction between the mighty and the lowly, between the rich and the poor.

Isn't this a wonderful expression of the gospel? We see Paul will say that in Christ, there is no male or female. There's no slave or free.

There's no Scythian or Jew. We could add that there's no European or Chinese or African. All are one in Christ Jesus. And here we have this Church of the East apparently preaching something very similar, even the exact same message in China.

They also, regarding slavery, they may have had an interpretation of Colossians chapter 4, verse 1, where Paul commands masters.

[28 : 52] He says to give your slaves what can be translated justice and equality. And they seem to have taken that very literally, that we need to treat people equally.

The Greek for that is *tante kai on kai isoteta*. And *isoteta* usually means equality or equalness.

Tante kai on means justice. *Tante kai on* means justice.

Tante kai on means justice. *Tante kai on* means justice. Okay. So already, this has been extraordinary. When this was discovered, people had no idea that there was a Christian community like this in China.

And it was very shocking news. What we're going to do now, though, is we're going to keep going through the inscription and see what the inscription has to tell us about how Christianity came to China.

So it begins in 635. So the monument was made in 781. But the history begins in 635.

[29 : 51] And it says this. It says, when the accomplished emperor, Taichung, who, this is the emperor of the Tang dynasty, Tang dynasty, he reigned from 627 to 649. And when he began his reign in glory and splendor over the recently established dynasty, he ruled his people with intelligence.

He proved himself to be a brilliant sage. So they're talking about this emperor, how great he was. He's ruling between 627 and 649. What happened? Behold, there was a highly virtuous man named Allopan in the kingdom of Ta-kin.

So this is Western Persia or Eastern Rome. And auguring from the azure sky, he decided to carry the true sutras. These are the scriptures.

With him and observing the course of the winds, he made his way to China through difficulties and perils. Thus, in the ninth year of the period named Chengquan. This is 635 AD.

He arrived at Cheng'an. That's Xi'an, China. This is the capital of the Tang dynasty in China. So in 635, we've got this fellow, Allopan, whom we have not heard before in history, who carries the Christian scriptures all the way, over thousands of miles, to the capital of China.

[31 : 10] In 635, let's see what happens. The emperor dispatched his minister, Duke Fang Suanglin. Again, unfortunately, I have this screen share thing, and it's blocking that.

I wonder if I can... Oh, I can move that. I should have done that earlier. Okay. The emperor dispatched the minister, Duke Fang Suanglin, with a guard of honor to the western suburb to meet the visitor and conduct him to the palace.

Now, let me give you a bit of background about this. This duke is one of the extraordinary figures in Chinese history. He was never emperor himself, but he was one of those political leaders that every country, every empire hopes they have.

He apparently was highly educated, a man of great integrity, and he personally rescued China from invasion multiple times in a very heroic fashion.

And, you know, in American history, I'm trying to think of an analog we have. This would be someone who never actually became president, but was enormously influential.

[32 : 16] So someone like Ben Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, someone who's been enormously influential in American tradition politically, but never actually became president.

This is this guy. And he comes out to meet Alapen. This seems to suggest... It suggests one of two things. Either that there was an enormous miracle which took place, and somehow Alapen showed up and got attention of the emperor and the duke to get this kind of honor.

Or that Alapen is actually some kind of embassy. He's an ambassador from Persia, from the Persian emperor, who is not a Christian, but who appointed a Christian as an ambassador to come to China.

That's another possibility. Either way, that would be extraordinary as well, that a Christian was given this kind of duty. Anyway, Alapen brings the sutras, and it says the sutras were translated in the imperial library.

This claims that the Christian scriptures were put into the Chinese language in the imperial library itself. His majesty, the emperor, investigated, don't this, the way.

[33 : 31] Now, we in the New Testament, sometimes Christianity is called the way. In the book of Acts, it's called the way. And here we see the same term used, but the Chinese term is the Tao.

And that's a Taoist concept. The Tao can have all sorts of translations. One translation is the way. So here we have Taoism being borrowed from in order to express a Christian truth.

His majesty, the emperor, in his own forbidden apartments, investigated all this. He was deeply convinced of its correctness and truth, and he gave special orders for its propagation.

I'm reminded of when Jesus, in Matthew 10, 11, said to the apostles, say, you will stand before governors and kings on account of me.

And the apostles did stand before emperors. Paul seems to have stood before the emperor himself during his trial, where he was eventually executed. And we know from history that Christians stood before the emperor of Persia.

[34 : 37] Allapan himself may have done that very thing. And here we have Allapan standing before the king of China. And the emperor of China is evidently moved by this, and he gives special orders for the propagation of Christianity.

We're going to talk about it because, well, let's see what the emperor has to say. Because after this, if I'm not mistaken, the actual order of the emperor is quoted from.

Remember, this is all from the monument. So in the 12th year, in 638, the following imperial rescript, this order, was given. And we're about to read what the imperial order from the throne, the emperor of China himself, has to say.

It says, The emperor is instead articulating a pluralistic view of the world, where he thinks that there is this way.

The Tao expresses itself differently to different people. And in different races, the Tao expresses itself differently. And this guy, Bishop Allapan from the kingdom of Dakin, is bringing one of those messages.

[36 : 16] That's what he has to say. Having carefully examined the scope of his teaching, we find it to be mysteriously spiritual. And of silent operation, having observed its principle and most essential points, we reach the conclusion that they cover all that is most important in life.

Their language is free from perplexing expressions. Their principles are so simple that they remain as the fish would remain even after the net of language were forgotten. That's a Chinese proverb, evidently.

This teaching is helpful to all creatures and beneficial to all men. So let it have free course throughout the empire. Like I said, what seems to be happening is the emperor has not become a Christian himself, but he seems to be intrigued by Christianity and is giving permission for Christianity to be preached freely and unobstructed throughout the empire.

We have biblical examples of this, you know, where we have someone like Joseph being brought up to be second in command to Pharaoh or Daniel being brought up in Babylon or Esther, for instance, in the Persian, the ancient, more ancient Persian empire.

And that sometimes we'll have kings, you know, like Nebuchadnezzar, who will confess that the Jews were true, but doesn't seem to have converted himself.

[37 : 31] It seems to be another example of that. But one of the issues is this story that this monument is telling seems so extraordinary that I think it's fair to be a little suspicious about how true it is.

And it does just seem beyond belief that Alipen showed up and the king himself, the emperor, one of the most powerful men, if not the most powerful man in the world at the time, welcomed him in and embraced him, translated the scriptures and had it preached throughout the empire.

So what I want to do is try and figure out if we've got some corroboration of this outside of this monument, because you'd think that maybe the Chinese would keep some record of this. Chinese were very good record keepers.

They kept imperial orders recorded down. And it so happens that if we do some digging, we find something in the records called the Notabilia of Tang, the Tang dynasty.

And it has an order from the very same emperor. And it says in the seventh month of the 12th year, 638, exactly when we're talking about, the edict reads the Tao, that's the way, has no eternal name.

[38 : 35] The saint has no eternal body. The religion has been set up in their respective regions. It has helped the people immensely. The Persian monk, Alu Ben, that's Alu Pen, brought the scriptures from afar and presented them at the capital.

Having carefully inspected its doctrine, we find it mysterious, right, and well summarized. It is helpful to things and to people. It is suitable to be practiced in the country. The proper officers forthwith immediately in the street of Yingying built a Daqian monastery.

So, in other words, this report in the monument is backed up by Chinese sources. Now, note that if we only had this Chinese source, we would maybe think Alu Ben was a Christian.

It doesn't say he's a Christian specifically in this Chinese version of the commandment. But because we now have that monument, we know he was. And these kind of mutually reinforce each other.

So, it seems like this really happened. And that the scriptures were presented to the emperor at the capital. And the emperor did give permission for Christianity to be propagated throughout the empire.

[39 : 41] This is a stunning event. And there's really nothing, very little quite like it in history. There are some other instances of this where similar things happen.

But it's very rare and very extraordinary for this to happen. You can see Alu Ben is highlighted right there. We're going to do one more thing before we close. So, this is the inscription continues on the monument.

And now it's moving to the next emperor. This is Emperor Kaotsong from 650 to 683. And he succeeded most respectfully to his ancestors. And he gave the true religion the proper elegance and finish.

And listen to this. He caused monasteries of the luminous religion to be founded in every prefecture, every province of China. So, this emperor, the next emperor, apparently still favored Christianity.

Perhaps did not become a Christian himself, but appreciated it. And he made monasteries of Christianity be founded, according to this, in every province.

[40 : 47] And he honored Alu Ben by conferring on him the office of the great patron and spiritual lord of the empire. Talk about a successful missionary.

This guy arrives in 635. And within a couple decades, they've got monasteries, churches in every province, allegedly.

And Alu Ben is greatly honored as spiritual lord of the empire. It continues, the law of the luminous religion spread throughout the ten provinces. And the empire enjoyed great peace and concord. Monasteries were built in many cities, while every family enjoyed the blessings of salvation. Now, I am conscious of the time and realizing that it's kind of getting away from me.

So, what I want to do in the final couple minutes is show you a map of the Tang Dynasty. Here, you can see the ten provinces numbered here.

[41 : 45] And then you can see the outer edges of the reach that the Tang Dynasty had. So, this is Western China out here. And you get into Afghanistan and Uzbekistan, Pakistan out here, where some outposts or military sorties would be sent occasionally by the Tang Dynasty.

And the claim on the stele, the stele, the monument, was found here. And the claim is that there were monasteries set up in every single one of these provinces.

So, what we're going to do is next class, we're going to see if that's true. Because that's quite an extraordinary claim.

Scholars are very skeptical of that claim. But I think next week we'll find out that that is a true account of what actually did happen. We're going to talk about some Christian locations that are discovered during this time frame, 635 to 1000 AD around China.

And then we'll wrap up the next few hundred years, which unfortunately we don't have as much evidence about. But we'll wrap that up. We'll also talk more about the ways that Christianity was spread in China and how this may have not been the best ways and the most fruitful ways, although there's still much we can learn from it.

[43 : 10] We'll talk about that, the issues of syncretism and some other things as well. So, I want to pause now to see if you folks have any questions. And I'm going to try to get my chat opened up here.

There we go. Okay. And if you do have a question, just feel free to type it. If not, we can... I can close for the week.

We're going to have more pictures of other monuments and archaeological discoveries next class.

And some more stories about what Christians were doing in China next week. I'm looking forward to seeing you all again. And feel free to email me if you have any questions.

I'm going to pause the recording and hopefully we'll get that posted online for you to watch later, if need be. Okay. Thanks. God bless. God bless. God bless. God bless. God bless. God bless.

[44 : 22] God bless. God bless. God bless. God bless. God bless. God bless. God bless. God bless. God bless. God bless. God bless. God bless.