



East Syriac Christianity along the Ancient Silk Road: A multi-ethnic Christian history on the Chinese western frontier (AD 386-1392)

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DEDICATION

To the Kingdom and Righteousness of God on the Earth in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior through the Holy Spirit. Amen.

To my advisor Rev. Dr. William David Spencer, his wife Rev. Dr. Aída Besançon Spencer, and their son Stephen Spencer, as well as my family, for their 22 years' worth of support of my academic research!

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ABSTRACT

To resurge a long-forgotten part of Christian history, this thesis examines events that stretch over a millennium in four historical stages with their associated historic landmarks in the regions around the eastern part of the Tian-shan Mountains in the westernmost frontier of China. To facilitate a better understanding of the interaction between Christianity and racial-ethnic identity during the observed periods, this thesis provides a corresponding introduction to the racial-ethnic and religious context of each historical stage and the relevant ruling groups in each era.

Just as Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and Manichaeism came to the regions along the Silk Road in different ages, so too did missionaries from the East Syriac Church in Persia successfully introduced Christianity, after Zoroastrianism and Buddhism had been established. Christianity achieved indigenisation (contextualisation) among the different racial-ethnic groups and kingdoms before eventually diminishing under Islamic conquest. In the history of the Silk Road, ethnic groups migrated west while religions spread east. Consequently, the identities and self-awareness of people living along the Silk Road mutated in complex ways.

The central theoretical argument of this study is that Christianity was a prevalent religion in the regions surrounding the eastern part of the Tian-shan Mountains, not only among the native Indo-Europeans since at least the fifth century, but also among the East Asian Uyghurs after the ninth century. Before the Islamic conquest in the fourteenth century, the two dominant religions in this region had become Christianity and Buddhism. Other minority religions in the regions included Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Daoism.

Besides introducing some minor theories, this thesis develops and contributes two major theories to the field of Central Asian ethnic-religious studies:

1. The history of Christianity began as early as the 5th century in the regions surrounding the eastern Tian-shan Mountains, at least four centuries earlier than currently believed by academia.

2. After the Uyghur immigration to the regions in AD 841, Christianity, not Buddhism (as some scholars generally believe), gradually became the dominant religion among the Uyghurs, being Uyghurised until the Islamic conquest in 1392.

Key terms

East Syriac Christianity, Persian Christianity, Uyghurised Christianity, Buddhism, Uyghurised Manichaeism, Islam, Silk Road, Tian-shan Mountains, Beshbalik, Turpan, Yan-qi and Tarim Basins, Indo-Europeans, Tocharians (Daxia), Scythians, Huns, Chinese, Turks, Uyghurs, Khitans, Mongols.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION: DEFINITIONS, PROBLEM STATEMENTS, CLARIFICATIONS, AND RESEARCH METHODS IDENTIFIED

1.1 Preface: Crossing the academic swamp of central Asian studies

Clarifying the history of Central Asia-Xinjiang has long been recognized as one of the greatest puzzles in world history regarding its complex racial-ethnic, geopolitical, national, and religious backgrounds. A great variety of claims, narratives, and theories have been generated from the perspectives of different racial-ethnic groups, political entities, religions and academic camps. My research aims to present a more accurate and more comprehensive summary of Christian history in these regions from earlier than the 5th century through the 14th century by piecing together a progressive framework of major players and events.

Historians generally agree that the earliest systematic written record of the ancient history of the “Western Regions” (a geographical name given by Chinese historians), specifically including present-day Xinjiang in northwest China and the rest of Central Asia, is found in the historical court records of China’s Han dynasty. Its court dispatched Zhang Qian and later many envoys on separate missions to the Western Regions, thereby formally documenting the historical development along the Silk Road that connected Europe and Asia and the shifting of local cultures and civilisations of different racial-ethnic groups and their kingdoms in Central Asia.

While the ancient records by Greek and Latin historians, such as Arrian of Nicomedia, Quintus Curtius, Diodorus Siculus, Justin, Plutarch, and others mostly relate to the conquest of Alexander the Great, when considered together with archaeological discoveries in Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, unearthed literary fragments, religious sites and other sources from Central Asia, a history begins to piece together. These sources united illuminate significant events in the western side of the Pamirs, mainly in Bactria and Sogdiana (Holt, 1988: 5), which shaped the civilisations, beliefs, cultures and courses of history. For instance, since the 1990s, the Khalili Collections’ discoveries of the Aramaic documents from the local government in the Bactria kingdom in the fourth century BC, although comprised of less than 50 short pieces, stands out as another complementary supplement to the Chinese records in the second century BC, representing “the final decades of the Achaemenian administration in Bactria and extending up to the year 7 [324 BC] of Alexander the Great,” whose army reached Bactria from the east in the spring of 329 BC after passing through the Hindukush mountain range (Naveh & Shaked, 2012: 15, 18, 19).

Additionally, historical writers, travellers, artists, and architects from different nationalities with a variety of religious backgrounds, such as Persian Zoroastrianism, Tocharian Buddhism, East-Syriac Christianity, Sogdian Manichaeism, Chinese Daoism, and Turkified Islam, left behind extant texts with rich and illuminating historical information as well as a great deal of artifacts. For example, the Christian Church and its historians provided accurate written materials with detailed historical information, while Muslim historians and writers provided supplemental narratives with interesting historical details. Although these exhibit different perspectives driven by each group's own religious interests, sometimes mixed with their political interests, the historical materials provide us valuable first-hand information that also sheds valuable light on geopolitical and racial-ethnic history, which in turn facilitates more effectively the research for constructing religious history.

Studies in different subjects of Central Asia have proved to be incredibly complex and easily controversial, and I have certainly undertaken one of the most complex and controversial of these: ancient Silk Road Christianity surrounding the eastern part of the Tian-shan Mountains. This historical study is influenced by the history of my faith, including my traditional fundamentalist Protestant House Church Movement background in China, as well as the Russian Orthodox Church that I joined five years ago in 2020, which is a conservative branch of the Eastern Orthodox Church (Russian Branch).

1.2 Objectives of the thesis

The particular topic we are trying to address is extremely complex, because the history we are attempting to understand involves the religions of millions of people over a period of a thousand years as their faiths and even their ethnicities shape and mutate and settle only to have these loyalties shifted again. The topic of this thesis does appear broad, but these people groups are interrelated and constantly interacting. If any people group is left out, inaccurate conclusions may arise. The dense complexity from different racial-ethnic groups interrelating and interacting occurs because such intense interaction is taking place in a very limited locality in Central Asia, China's westernmost frontier at the foot of the eastern part of the Tian-shan Mountains at the juncture of the Silk Road, from the fifth to fourteenth centuries. Religious persuasions keep altering as a multitude of different leaders with strong convictions continue to seize power, changing the faiths of entire people groups. For example, more than twenty different languages (Dickens, M. & Zieme, P. 2014: 303) with competing religious inscriptions have been found in a single local in the Turpan basin, including Christian inscriptions in Syriac, three types of Persian, Tocharian, Sogdian, Uyghur and Chinese.

This broad study intends to recommend more precision in determining the timeline and the entries of different racial-ethnic groups over this long period, thereby securing a more accurate framework for this territory and the flux of its people groups. This refined data triggers the opportunity to study more narrowed questions about ancient Christianity in this area, and its nature, influence, impact, and legacy. As a result, other scholars and I will be enabled to study more thoroughly and accurately specific elements of the significant regions in Central Asian studies.

The central theoretical argument of this study is that Christianity was a prevalent religion in the regions surrounding the eastern part of the Tian-shan Mountains, not only among the native Indo-Europeans, since at least the fifth century, but also among the East Asian Uyghurs after the ninth century. Before the Islamic conquest in the fourteenth century, the two dominant religions in this region had become Christianity and Buddhism. Other minority religions in the regions included Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Daoism.

The chapters in the thesis will strive to present the whole picture and updated framework of the Christian history of the different racial-ethnic groups in the regions surrounding the eastern part of the Tian-shan Mountains, including the Jimsar and Qi-tai area on the northern side of the Mountains and the Turpan Basin and its adjacent areas in the northwest corner of the Tarim Basin, the Yan-qi Basin on the southern side of the Mountains, and the region of Kumul surrounding the easternmost Tian-shan range, across Central Asia's ancient Silk Road. The extensive and intensive presentation will reveal how Christianity was already a major religion at least from the fifth century onward, alongside Buddhism as well as Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, Daoism, and finally Islam. The research to support these conclusions will be primarily based on Syriac sources, Chinese court history chronicles, travelogues in different languages, and archaeological discoveries with interpretations.

Another objective that will support this research aim seeks to address how Manichean Uyghurs who migrated to the Yan-qi, Turpan and Tarim Basins at the south of the eastern Tian-shan Mountains and the Beshbalik region at the north of Tian-shan in the ninth century suddenly become known worldwide as comprising a Christian nation during Genghis Khan's conquest, so much so that their Uyghur civilisation, with its Christianity, even transformed the Mongol Empire among the Mongol royal families, leaving a religious legacy in Asian history.

Since I have the privilege of being a local, born and reared in the northwestern region of China in the Yili River valley at the foot of the Tian-shan Mountains, I am able to read ancient Chinese classics which most Chinese people do not understand today, and I have ample knowledge of the East Syriac language and its Christian history, and of other religions in these

regions. Thus, I have several advantages when applying both speculative analysis and empirical experience to discern the genres of different religions in ancient times and different racial-ethnic groups living in my hometown today, including a handful of descendants of ancient natives. Thus, I hope to be able to assist readers in understanding several following fine-tuning points that will help refine the current understanding of the ancient history of Christianity in the central Asian Silk Road area. This will be accomplished by the following:

1. Exposing readers to a Central Asia-oriented thinking model instead of a limited Chinese-oriented or Turkic language speaking people-oriented one, with the Tian-shan Mountains as the geographic point of reference.

2. Helping readers discover that the ancient history of Central Asia was primarily of native European-type ethnic groups, instead of Chinese, Turks, Uyghurs, or any other groups.

3. Assisting readers to understand better that religions in these regions were more or less attached to their racial-ethnic identity from the earlier age, espousing Persian Christianity (i.e., East-Syriac Christianity) and Buddhism among the native Tocharian Indo-Europeans, Manichaeism among the immigrant Uyghurs, Zoroastrianism among the native Scythian Indo-Europeans, and Daoism among the Chinese immigrants.

4. Finally, I hope to provide readers with a clear set of historical proofs that Christianity was a dominant institutional-religion among European-type natives in the regions around the eastern part of the Tian-shan Mountains since the fifth century at least. Then, Manichean-Christian Uyghurs migrated with their Sogdian teachers to the regions and as they gradually became more Christian and less Manichean, made local Christianity more multi-racial-ethnic and Uyghurised. The Uyghurs became a dominant, powerful governing group, ruling and colonising these regions as the Uyghur Kingdom. In further complicating the picture, Uyghurs also intermixed with the natives.

1.3 Terms and Definitions

This section will describe and explain the geographic and racial-ethnic terms and definitions related to Central Asian history. The complexity of geography and racial-ethnicity, causing frequent changes to the term names throughout history, due to the changing rule of different national groups and the competition between different religions has made historical studies in Xinjiang very difficult. In order to explore and construct the history of ancient Christianity in this

area, we must first clarify the historical names and concepts related to geography, race, ethnicity, nationality, and religion.

1.3.1 Geographic Terms and Definitions

The term “Western Regions” (*Xi-yu*) refers to approximately present-day Xinjiang, China. This term has been frequently used throughout ancient Chinese historical sources since the Han dynasty of China in the second century BC during the reign of the Han-wu emperor, and it is often referenced in this thesis. A term I coined, “Chinese westernmost frontier” (a more specific geographical term than “Chinese western frontier”) for this thesis is a core reference that refers to the gateway, hub, or “router” of the Silk Road. In addition, this thesis uses more frequently “Four-Regions” as a synonym for the “Chinese westernmost frontier”, and also occasionally uses “Minor Western Regions”, a term is used by modern Chinese scholars.

The “Chinese westernmost frontier” or the “Minor Western Regions,” refers to a relatively small portion of Xinjiang. This area includes the northeastern rim of the Tarim Basin and the regions surrounding the eastern section of the Tian-shan Mountain range, or, in a scientific term, “eastern Chinese Tian-shan” (80° or 88°E to 94°E longitude) (Cui *et al.* 2024: 382; Li *et al.* 2006: 896; Wang *et al.* 2023). The area is adjusted and defined in this thesis between 85°E to 94°E longitude, from west to east including Mount Bogda, Mount Barkul, and Mount Karlik, inside the present-day east Xinjiang province of northwestern China, adjacent to Gansu province. This area also includes the four residential regions: the Yan-qi Basin and the Turpan Basin at the southern foot of the mountains, the region of present-day Chang-ji, Urumqi, Jimsar and Qi-tai at the northern foot of the mountains, and the region of Hami (Kumul) at the southern foot and Barkul at northern foot of the easternmost section of the mountains.

These geographical names are used for ease of expression in this thesis, providing readers with a clear sense of geographic orientation and localization. Please refer to the area enclosed in purple-red on the map below.

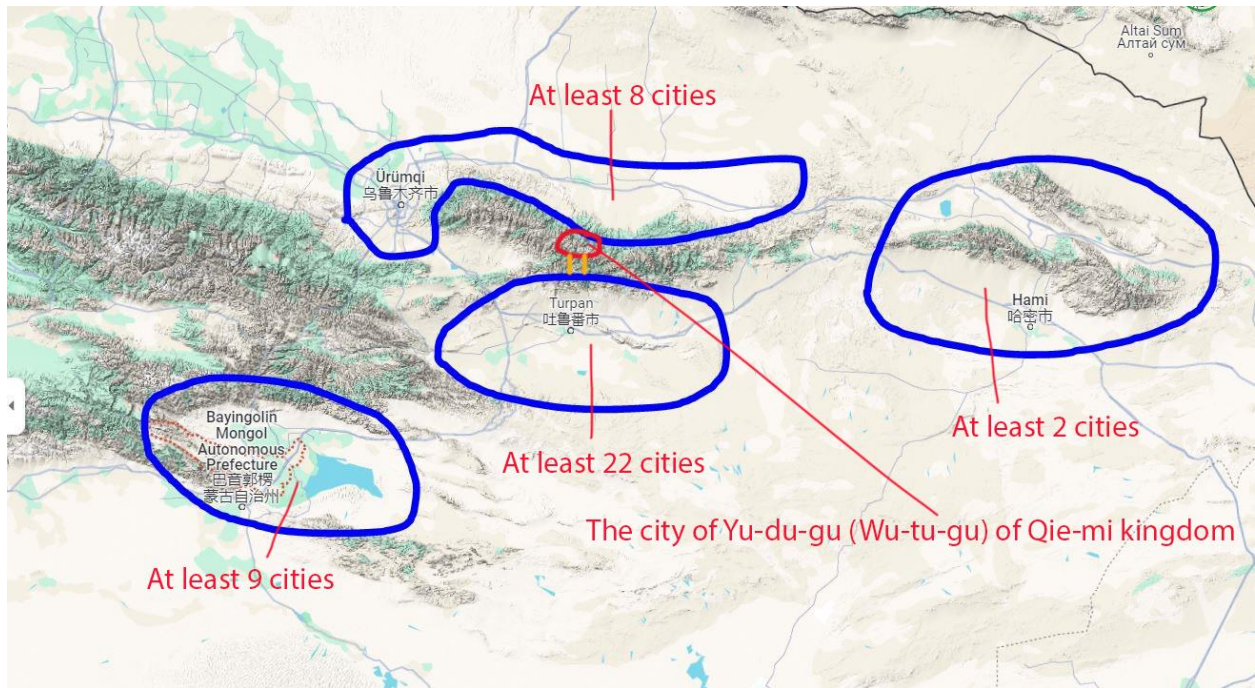


Figure 1. 3: The Four Regions and respective cities surrounding the eastern Tian-shan Mountains by the time of Tang China ¹

This area touches both what was once the southern branch of the Silk Road south of the Tian-shan Mountains as well as the northern branch that ran along the northern foot of the Mountains. Please refer to the branches and routes enclosed in blue on the map below.

According to Han China court history from the second century BC, the westernmost frontier defined in this thesis, *de facto* the Chinese military controlled colonies, consists of seven Aryan type Indo-European kingdoms more active in Chinese court history though there were more than seven kingdoms in the regions. Five of these kingdoms are at the southern root of the Tian-shan Mountains and two on both sides of the Tian-shan.

The seven major player kingdoms are listed from west to east below:

1. The Qiu-ci kingdom, in present-day Ku-che (Kucha), strong in music and metallurgy. According to the above geographic definition, strictly this kingdom is not part of the eastern Tian-shan Mountains but part of the westernmost Chinese frontier.

¹ Source: <https://www.google.com/maps/@42.2877168,87.9689794,7z/data=!5m1!1e4?entry=ttu>

2. The Lun-tai kingdom, in present-day Lun-tai between Qiu-ci and Yan-qi. Later in Tang China, Lun-tai was relocated in the southern suburb of present-day Urumqi (where an ancient city ruin is located) (Wu, 2022: 284).

3. The Yan-qi (or Arshi, Karasahr) kingdom, in present-day Yan-qi Basin.

4. The Front Section of the *Ju-shi* kingdom, the cities of which included the capital Jiao-he; later known as the Gao-chang kingdom, in present-day Turpan Basin.

5. The Lou-lan kingdom, the southern neighbour of the *Ju-shi* kingdom, located at the eastern entrance of the Tarim Basin.

6. The Wu-sun kingdom around Kumul (present-day Hami) on the southern and northern sides of the easternmost mountains.

7. At the northern foot of the Tian-shan Mountains is the Back Section of the *Ju-shi* kingdom, which includes six cities, its most strategic one being the capital *Bei-ting* (meaning “northern court” in Chinese) in present-day Jimsar.

According to the *Geographical Book of Xizhou* written in Chinese during the eighth century of Tang China and discovered in Dun-huang, there were several paths across the Tian-shan Mountains connecting the Front Section of the Turpan Basin on the southern side of Tian-shan and the Back Section on the northern side of Tian-shan. The most convenient of these paths, Wu-gu road, stretched about 400 *li* (about 200 kilometres) from Gao-chang to Bei-ting (Wu, 2022: 51, 268, 273).

Nearly eight centuries later, Tang China inherited the Han dynasty’s legacy and further annexed regions on a larger and deeper level of military and administrative governance. In his well-articulated article about his research on the regions with extant access to the Chinese classics, the Chinese scholar Yan Geng-wang writes in the first paragraph of his book about the definition of the Chinese westernmost frontier from Tang-China’s administrative perspective:

The Tang dynasty enlarged its northwestern territory to the northern and southern sides of the Tian-shan Mountains, including the establishment of the *Xi-zhou* (Western Prefecture; today’s Astana, 70 *li* east of Turpan) at the southern side of the Golden Mount (present-day Bogda Mount) of the eastern Tian-shan range, of Ting-zhou [Court Prefecture, present-day Jimsar] (the ruined city at the north of Hu-bo-zi, which is twenty *li* north of Fu-yuan county town) at the northern side of the Mount, and of *Yi-zhou* (Yiwu Prefecture, present-day Hami county) at the southern side of the *Luo-man*

Mount (present-day Barkul Mount) and the prefecture also includes the area on the north of the Mount (where the *Yi-wu* [Chinese] Army base set up at present-day Zhen-xi county). These three prefectures were all formal and official ones, which included in all 360 prefectures of the whole of China, and set up the *Bei-ting* Protectorate in Ting-prefecture as the capital to govern the military and administrative systems of the three prefectures. For the northern and southern sides of the western Tian-shan range, only military towns were established. These towns were all part of the An-xi Protectorate (at Qiu-ci, present-day Kucha County), and controlled the subordinated [state] kingdoms without establishing a [Chinese] county and prefecture. Therefore, the three prefectures of Ting-zhou, Yi-zhou and Xi-zhou were directly governed by China at that time, and they were part of the north-westernmost area on a Chinese map.” (Yan, G. W., 1974: 95)²

The historical names for the regions remain politically sensitive even today from the perspectives of different national, racial-ethnic and religious interests. Please note that the term “Chinese westernmost frontier” in this thesis, mainly for wording convenience, implies the Chinese colony here before the Ming dynasty retreated its army in AD 1529 from Kumul (Hami), and later in 1759 when the Manchuria Qing dynasty annexed it again by its military, adding the area to the map of its empire and, in later China, officially as a province. A century ago, scholars used terms such as “Chinese Turkestan,” “East Turkestan” (corresponding to West Turkestan which is modern Uzbekistan), “Uyghuristan,” “Xinjiang,” and so forth depending on their different perspectives. This thesis uses “China,” “China Proper,” or “Inner China” in reference to the classical “core” regions of China, and the “Chinese westernmost frontiers.” In addition, this thesis primarily defines the targeted “regions” with natural geographical parameters, such as non-political mountains, basins, rivers, and names of cities as alternative terms related to the “Chinese westernmost frontiers,” or “Four Regions”, a shorter term for the “regions surrounding the eastern section of the Tian-shan Mountains”.

²“唐代西北疆域擴展至天山南北,天山山脈東段之金嶺(今博克多山脈)南置西州(今吐魯番東七十里阿斯塔拉),北置庭州(今孚遠縣北二十里護堡子北之破城),時羅漫山(今巴爾庫山脈)南置伊州(今哈密縣),兼轄山北(置伊吾軍,今鎮西縣)。此三州皆為正州,在全國三百六十州之列;並置北庭都護府於庭州,以統三州之軍政。其天山山脈西段之南北地區,則僅置軍鎮,統屬於安西都護府(在龜茲,今庫車縣),總攝屬國,不置州縣;故論中國當時直接統轄版圖,則以庭、伊、西三州為西北之極邊。”



Figure 1. 4: The geography of Chinese westernmost frontier and the Silk Road

These geographical names are used for ease of expression in this thesis, providing readers with a clear sense of geographic orientation and localization. Additionally, the Silk Road through the area of the Chinese westernmost frontier is also a very useful geographical coordinate. This area touches the “router” of both what was once the southern branch of the Silk Road that ran along the southern foot of the mountains and the southern rim of Tarim Basin as well as the northern branch at the northern foot of the mountains. Please refer to the area enclosed in purple-red and the Silk Road in blue on the maps below. To avoid criticism of Sinocentrism, this area, the “Chinese westernmost frontier” is equivalent to the “northeastern rim of the Tarim Basin and the regions surrounding the eastern Tian-shan mountain range” in this thesis.

Today the entire area is part of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (*de-facto* a province) of the People’s Republic of China.

1.3.2 Racial-ethnic Terms and Definitions: Indo-Europeans and East Asians

Who the natives of central Asia were remains a confounding issue to academia. Through the study of ancient Chinese texts and from information revealed by contemporary archeological discoveries, this thesis will present concrete evidence that, before the arrival of the Huns, Chinese, Rou-ran, Turks, Uyghurs, Khitans, Mongols, and Manchurians, the natives living on the northern side of the Tian-shan Mountains were primarily Scythian Indo-Europeans (Mediterranean-type) and those on the southern side were primarily Aryan Indo-Europeans

(Sarmatians-type or Siberian-type). The ethnographic map changed when Huns invaded and the Chinese followed to fight the Huns. Chinese historians called Indo-Europeans in Central Asia *Sai* (Saka) people and later *Hu* people, and used “Tocharian” for the Aryan-type.

The racial-ethnic distribution in areas west and north of the Great Wall was similar. That is, prior to the appearance of Genghis Khan’s Mongols, the history of East Asia was not just the history of the East Asian peoples, it was also the history of Indo-Europeans, both Scythian and Siberian types. Chinese historians call them *Di* people (Scythian-type with ruddy faces), or “raw people” (indicating pale skin) for the Siberian-type. More importantly, among these Indo-European groups in the early 8th century East Syriac Christianity saw early success in its missionary efforts on the East Asian steppes. Only later did this success expand to other East Asian ethnic groups: the Turks, Uyghurs, Chinese, Khitans and Mongols. Accordingly, this thesis will introduce the third term for the Indo-Europeans in Central Asia, who more likely belong to the Alpine-type, having round faces, represented by the Hephthalites, called “white Huns”, whose empire accepted East Syriac Christianity as a national religion in the fifth century.

The English Orientalist Sir William Jones first put forth his concept of Indo-European languages in 1786 in the journal *Asiatick Researches* (Mallory & Mair, 2000: 119). The definition of “Indo-European” that is used in academia today, which is also the definition used in this thesis, refers to those European-type whites who historically lived as natives in the eastern plateau of Iran, in Central Asia, in the area of Xinjiang and Gansu, on the steppes of East Asia north of the Great Wall, and in northwest India.

Overall, this thesis designates Indo-Europeans as the white groups in Central Asia and North Asia, including Scythian and Tocharian types, and East Asians as the yellow or brown groups, including Huns, Chinese, Manchurians, Uyghurs, Khitans, and Mongols. For the groups that resulted from intermixing between the Indo-Europeans and East Asians, which was happening constantly since the second century BC throughout the history of Central Asia, the designation of “mixed blood *Hu*” belongs to them, and characterizes group such as Turks and possibly Karluks.

Note that, in the Turpan Basin, which was one of the key places that was a domain of native Tocharian Indo-Europeans, the Chinese population remained the largest minority since their migration in the fifth century. Later, they were joined by other East Asian immigrant groups, including Rou-ran Jurchen people and some Indo-European groups such as Gao-che Di people from the neighbouring east and north Asian areas.

1.3.3 Religious Terms and Definitions

Throughout Central Asia, including the Chinese westernmost frontier, given the complex racial-ethnic historical background, the religious history is equally, if not more, complex because of its tight attachment to racial-ethnic and national identity in ancient times. Different religions spread and competed in Central Asia, and, after being localized or even alienated, continued to spread eastward to the end of the Asian continent, the Pacific coast, as will be recounted in this thesis.

These religions included, according to the rough timeline, Shamanism, Zoroastrianism from Persia, Macedonian-type Greek mythical religion, Buddhism in Greek form, and the Tocharian-type, Persian-type East-Syriac Christianity, Uyghur-type Persian Manichaeism, and Chinese-type Daoism. Among them, this thesis focusses on East-Syriac Christianity in the Persian form. Thanks to meticulous and professional linguistic research, the academic community's findings and conclusions on the racial-ethnic and religious history of this region are valuable, but, overall, they are also tunnel-like in perspective, lacking a holistic insight, thus, a promising framework. Therefore, several important misunderstandings and major misleading assumptions will be clarified in this thesis.

East-Syriac Christianity, the core focus in this thesis, originated from Antioch and Edessa during the apostolic age and is treated as a genuine Christian tradition in Persia by most scholars today, in place of being grouped together under the term "Nestorianism", which designates a Christian heresy, as used widely among scholars in the last century. This thesis will also briefly mention West-Syriac Christianity (or Jacobites) on occasion. Both branches belong to Syriac (Syrian) Christianity with distinct differences in Christology.

Manichaeism, from which St. Augustine converted, being the second most important religion in the thesis, also originated from Persia in the third century as a heretical form of Christianity, and developed into a highly institutionalized Gnostic religion, significantly impacting Central Asia and East Asia. Manichaeism in Central and East Asia later evolved into a highly muted form syncretized by Buddhism, Tengrism type Shamanism, and even Daoism according to the research done by scholars and this thesis.

In addition, Buddhism in this thesis represents a Tarim Basin form, or Indo-European Tocharian type, mostly among Tocharian natives, syncretized by East-Syriac Christianity as the two major religions in the Tarim Basin, Yan-qi Basin and Turpan Basin at least from the fifth century, competing with each other for centuries. Tocharian Buddhism spread to China as early as in the third century and prevailed in the Wei-Jin dynastical times of China with some famous foreign Buddhist missionaries and Chinese Buddhist monks in the fourth century, a few centuries

before the rise of the Sui-Tang dynasties and became the earliest version of institutionalised Chinese Buddhism, anticipating the later East Asian denominations of Zen, Pure Land, and Tantra Buddhism.

1.4 Problem Statements

Throughout more than a century, studies on the ancient religions of the modern-day Turpan Basin, Yan-qi Basin, and the Tarim Basin, and the northern foot of the eastern Tian-shan Mountains in northwest China, have relied on historical materials and collections of ancient manuscripts discovered in the Turpan Basin (and Dun-huang) early last century, as well as in recent decades. Despite their valuable contributions, I believe scholars also hold some major misunderstandings and minor but detrimental errors, which have distracted their attention from a more holistic and accurate map with which to explore the important history, blurring their sight of the Christian history especially.

1.4.1 The Major Misunderstanding in this Field: Christianity as a Minor Regional Religion

When I began my preliminary research first in 2005 for my master's degree thesis and then, in 2009, I followed the controlling theory in the field that Buddhism dominated the regions especially among the Uyghurs until Islam took over in the fourteenth century. I too regarded Manichaeism and Christianity as only minority religions before and after the Uyghurs' great migration to these regions. This theory and related framework were widely-supported and promoted, as indicated by the following statement that the prominent scholar Mark Dickens, whose careful solid study and translation of manuscripts focuses on ancient Christianity in the Turpan Basin at the southern foot of the Tian-shan Mountains, sent to me through email, and which confirms one of the commonly-held misunderstandings in the field regarding Christian history:

“Hi Mark. All those who study this agree that Manichaeism and Buddhism were more prevalent among the Uyghurs than Christianity was. The latter was always a minority religion...”
(Dickens, 2018)

As I continued my research, especially through textual analysis of overlooked ancient Chinese and East Syriac Church records, I realized certain neglected specimens of the primary source texts needed to be accessed for the additional information they could bring to the search

for the origins of Christianity in this historic area. They also needed to be analysed to supplement the inadequate amount of Christian manuscripts found in the Turpan Basin about a century ago. Furthermore, I became confident that future archaeological discoveries, including the findings from the past few years in Xinjiang and other parts of Central Asia, would produce materials to confirm the information in these Chinese classics, on account of their high scholarship, of recording which, for them, were often contemporary data.

Thus, with a newly provided perspective from the Chinese and Syriac records, I gradually constructed a theoretical macro-picture of a forgotten aspect of Christian history, which indicates that Christianity emerged, not only indigenously, but also prevalently, compared to other religions in the region of present-day Xinjiang. Reorganizing and synthesizing the information in these sources provides a fuller understanding of Christianity's origins in this area with a new and more comprehensive framework, thus deepening knowledge in this field, supplementing with a century's worth of studies by scholars from both the West and East.

Given the complexity of this history, several factors emerge that I caution scholars in this field to keep in mind. Besides lacking a cohesive macro-picture and more comprehensive framework, this field has failed to pay sufficient attention to archaeological discoveries that relate specifically to racial-ethnicity during this ancient period. Limited access to relevant Chinese classics also impedes our ability to understand fully the history in question here. Most importantly, however, in order to avoid being misled, scholars should keep in mind that the present-day inhabitants of this region could, after a few millennia, be quite altered from the racial-ethnic groups of ancient times from which they descended. Even in Europe, after only half-a-century's worth of invited immigration, the racial-ethnic demography has changed quickly.

All that being said, it is worth mentioning that the history of racial-ethnic identities in the ancient Chinese westernmost frontiers, the Four Regions, including the Tarim, Yan-qi, and Turpan Basins, and other places surrounding the eastern Tian-shan Mountains have been clarified by several sources. These include ancient Chinese classics such as the *Book of Han*, the *Records of the Grand Historian*, and the commentaries on these two books by scholars from later dynasties. Additionally, the *Book of Wei*, the *Book of Zhou*, the *Book of Sui*, the *History of the Northern Dynasties*, the *History of Five Dynasties*, the *Old Book of Tang*, ancient paintings, sculptures, and well-preserved mummies in the Tarim and Turpan Basins, which are dated as early as 1800 BC, are excellent supplementary sources on this matter. This racial-ethnic history is also well-supported by the studies of prominent scholars such as Sinologist Victor Mair from the University of Pennsylvania, and the Chinese anthropologist Han Kang-xin. Relevant works of

theirs include Mair's *The Tarim Mummies* and *The Prehistory of the Silk Road* (Kuzmina, E. E., 2008), in which Professor Kang-xin is quoted.

My argument about the prevalent racial-ethnic Christianity in the Four Regions under discussion can be illustrated by the example of the successful mission of the East- Syriac Church based in Iran-Persia among the same racial-ethnic groups of Indo-Europeans on both sides of the Pamir mountains as early as the fourth century, and later in the seventh-eighth centuries among the East Asian groups such as Turks, Uyghurs, Chinese, and other different racial-ethnic groups, including Khitans and Mongols in later centuries. The argument is enhanced by the research and insights of Alphonse Mingana in *The Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East* (1925), and sources from ancient Syriac-speaking churches, such as the Bishop of Mytilene Zacharias' book *The Syriac Chronicle Known as That of Zachariah of Mitylene* (Zacharias, 1899) and *The Book of the Laws of Countries: Dialogue on the Fate of Bardaisan of Edessa* (Philippus, 2007), and others.

As I developed my approach, based on the above-mentioned references, I continued my in-depth preliminary research with great curiosity and interest. First, I laid out the structure of the region's racial-ethnic history in comparison to the currently-accepted narrative of this field. Then, I narrowed down the racial-ethnicity-oriented religious landscape to highlight how Christian history stood out as a distinct and influential racial-ethnic religion instead of a geographic religion as well as a Silk Road religion instead of a regional religion.

My thesis mainly aims to demonstrate two theories:

(1) It seeks to show that, as early as the fifth century, Christianity, in the form of the East Syriac Church from Persia, became indigenized and prevalent in the Turpan Basin and its adjacent parts in the Yan-qi Basin and the Tarim Basin on the southern side of the eastern Tian-shan Mountains, as well as the Beshbalik-Khatai (present-day Jimsar-Qitai) region on the northern side.

(2) It also seeks to show that indigenous Christianity was also prevalent in the Four Regions until the conquest of Islam at the end of the fourteenth century.

1.4.2 The first part of my undertaking aims to supplement the studies in this field by demonstrating that the history of Christianity in the Four Regions surrounding the eastern Tian-shan Mountains actually begins at least four centuries earlier than currently believed, before the Uyghurs' migration in the ninth century.

Although there have been studies in this field for over a century, none of the scholarly works that I have encountered have put forward the proposition that East Syriac Christianity existed in the “four regions” surrounding the eastern part of the Tian-shan Mountains as early as the fifth century AD. Thus, it is even less likely that Christianity in this region has been understood as having been prevalent among the native Indo-Europeans in this period. The commonly-held belief and narrative that Buddhism dominated the region, including the whole Tarim Basin, Yan-qi Basin and Turpan Basin from as early as the fourth century, seems to have been the reason for this long-unfilled academic gap (cf. Grousset, 1970: 48-50), which academia apparently regarded this theory as a vacant field to be ploughed, until my paper “Silk Road Christianity in Tarim and Turpan Basins Prior to AD 640 When Tang-China Took Over Kocho Kingdom” was published (Shan, 2021: 26-45).

Even so, demonstrating my aforementioned proposition is not as difficult as it might seem, because the systematically written history of the Chinese court around that time clearly made record of this unknown local religion (i.e., Christianity), which seemed to it to be matched with Buddhism, if not even more prevalent. My proposed thesis will reference these court records and supplemental Syriac records, comparing them to the recorded history of Christianity in other regions, in order to draw out and demonstrate the conclusion that this religion, unknown to the Chinese then, was in fact East Syriac Christianity from Persia.

Not only does my research revealed that Christianity had already been flourishing at the southern foot of the eastern Tian-shan Mountains since the fifth century at least, it will also address the scale at which Christianity spread at the northern foot of the eastern Tian-shan Mountains from the eighth century at the latest and perhaps even earlier because this region was part of the same kingdom and racial-ethnic Tocharian civilisational block with the Turpan oasis, though geographically divided by the mountain range.

In early 2022, a Chinese archaeological paper was published in a journal in China regarding the latest archaeological discoveries. The article, titled “The main archaeological achievements of the excavation in 2021 at the East Syriac Christianity Temple site in Tangchaodun of Qitai, Xinjiang” (Ren & Wei, 2022: 106-113) explained in detail that a relatively complete bishopric or archbishopric-scale residential building complex was excavated at the northern foot of the eastern Tian-shan Mountains. The article caused quite a sensation in the field of ancient Christian studies

in Xinjiang. Prior to this breakthrough discovery, my preliminary research, indicated that there should be an East Syriac Christian archbishopric (metropolitan) residence in this area. This is a supposition based on a Syriac manuscript (Mingana, 1925: 58-76) from the early eighth century, and on Chinese classical texts which supplied enlightenment background information. The current archaeological diggings on the site continue to show the Christian building complex constructed even earlier than the eighth century.

In the meanwhile, another important paper was published by other Chinese archaeologists about another new findings besides the above one, in the ruins of the Christian church site in Turpan Basin. This article, titled “Main Achievements and Preliminary Understanding of the Archaeological Excavation of the Nestorian Church Site Xipang (Shüi-Pang), Turfan, Xinjiang in 2021” (Liu *et al.*, 2022: 74-80), implies the earliest construction on this site might be dated earlier than the seventh century.

1.4.3 This archaeological discovery of 2021-2022 also supports the second part of my thesis, demonstrating that Christianity was still a significant localized religion in the Four Regions surrounding the eastern Tian-shan Mountains from the ninth until the fourteenth century.

This part of my study will comprise a major aspect of my thesis. Several academic studies are still currently being done on the history of Christianity during the era in question, with many ongoing debates and problems being raised.

In this second part, my thesis will address the views of several influential scholars, representing viewpoints from China (Yang Fu-xue, Niu Ru-ji, and Rong Xinjiang) and the West (Nicholas Sims-Williams, Mark Dickens, and Peter Zieme). These scholars, having contributed greatly to the field, contend that, based on a large number of fragments of texts in more than twenty different languages and scripts, during the time after the Uyghurs' westward migration to the former Chinese westernmost frontier (namely to the Yan-qi Basin and Turpan Basin at the southern foot of the Tian-shan Mountains) in the AD 840s, Buddhism and Manichaeism dominated the whole Turpan Basin, Yan-qi Basin as well as the oasis of the Tarim Basin, and the followers of these two religions were mainly the local Indo-Europeans. Additionally, these scholars believe Christianity was practiced as well, but as a minor religion, mainly concentrated among the foreign Sogdian (*Su-te*) merchants and diaspora community and Christian refugees along the Silk Road. They also lay out a time frame: “judging by the few texts which have been reliably dated,

the faith lasted in Turfan from at least the ninth century to the fourteenth century.”³ (Dickens & Zieme, 2014: 292-293; Niu, R. J., 2024: 17)

In contrast to these individuals and others who contend that Christianity’s influence was minor and mainly lasted from the ninth century to the fourteenth century, my preliminary research reveals that East Syriac Christianity was already a prevalent religion in the Turpan Basin, Yan-qi Basin, and also at least the area around the Northeastern Tarim Basin, as early as the fifth century AD. It continued to be so from the ninth century to the fourteenth century. As I will show, the records in some ancient Chinese texts and Syriac texts, in corroboration with the new archaeological discoveries, offer a new version of this historical framework in which the Christianity from the East-Syriac Church in Persia spread over central Asia on a large institutional scale and was well contextualized.

As Chinese archaeologists and linguists continue studying their findings on both the aforementioned ancient Christian sites (the two Sections of Ju-shi kingdom) and excavate more artifacts, a new understanding in macro-scope and micro-pieces of the ancient Christian history in the regions will emerge. Further studies of and discoveries in both archaeological sites should, hopefully, confirm one of my two major theories in this thesis. My first theory is that multi-racial-ethnic Christianity in these four regions existed at the latest in the fifth century and prevailed through the fourteenth century. My second theory will be discussed next.

1.5 Clarifications on major and minor issues

Scholars generally conclude that the Uyghurs, after migrating from the modern-day Mongol Steppes to the Western Regions around the Tian-shan Mountains to become the Kocho Uyghurs in the ninth century, initially remained Manicheans, then converted to Buddhism with Christianity

³ Dickens & Zieme (2014: 292-293) posit that “Although the origins of the Christian community in Turpan are unclear, it may very well be linked with the period of anti-Buddhist persecution in Tang dynasty China, which peaked in the year 845...” in the east and “the steady advance of Islam into Central Asia in the west,...” or “the ongoing mission of the Church of the East to extend its network of bishops and metropolitans throughout Central Asia or perhaps the influence of Christian merchants and traders travelling along the Silk Road, at some point established Christianity in the oasis and, judging by the few texts which have been reliably dated, the faith lasted in Turfan from at least the ninth century to the fourteenth century.”

Niu Ru-ji (2024: 17-38, 155): “A large number of Syriac Christian documents found in Turfan show that from the end of the 9th century to the middle and late 13th century there were community activities of the Eastern Church or East Syriac Christianity in Bulayiq and other places of Turfan within the local region of the Gaochang Uighur Khanate.”

as a minority religion among them. Overlooked evidence, however, reveals that many do not understand that the Gao-chang (Kocho) Uyghurs were mostly Christians who converted from Manichaeism after a period of time and were never officially Buddhists, with perhaps only a handful of Uyghurs actually accepting Buddhism. This is my second major theory. In addition, Uyghur Manichaeism did not disappear, but continued to exist in a highly mutated form through a concealed way (this is one of my minor theories) until the Islamic conquest at the end of the fourteenth century.

A. The religious landscape after the Uyghurs migrated to the regions: Contemporary scholars like Grousset, Zieme, Dickens, Niu Ru-ji, and Yang Fu-xue also generally hold that, during the time of the Uyghur Khanate (744-841), before the Uyghurs' westward migration to the Turpan Basin, urban Manichaeism and rural Zoroastrianism prevailed in the khanate, while Buddhism and Zoroastrianism dominated the Turpan Basin. After the migration, mainly Buddhism and Manichaeism were practiced among Uyghurs. However, the research I have detailed in this thesis indicates otherwise, and the records in various ancient Chinese texts and Syriac texts offer a new version of this history in which Christianity from the East Syriac Church in Persia spread over central Asia, including Yan-qi Basin and Turpan Basin on a large institutional scale.

B. Differentiating the Uyghurs and the Turks in ancient times as different racial-ethnic groups: Uyghurs were descendants of Huns, but Turks were a mixed blood Hu people who were Hunnified and began speaking Hunnic language. Without understanding who the Turks were from anthropological, geopolitical, and historical perspectives, one cannot easily clear confusions around the ethnic and religious history of Central Asia respectively from then to the present time. The lack of such perspectives frustrates those who are striving to formulate narratives or theories unrelated to geo-racial-religious-political correctness. By supplementing those primary materials from various languages and religions in different ages, ancient Chinese court historians presented comprehensive records in systematic detail with surprising accuracy. Based on such understanding of the ancient Turks, one can better understand Turkic Christianity.

C. A More accurate date for the fall of the Uyghur Khanate: Academia generally accepts that the Uyghur khanate fell and its people migrated in 840, as we see in this quotation from the late French scholar René Grousset (1970: 124): "In 840 their capital Karabalgasun was taken, their Khagan slain, and their empire overthrown by those Turks...the Kirghiz of the upper Yenisei..." The prominent contemporary American scholar Valerie Hansen (2012: 226) also states that "[t]he Kirghiz defeat of the Uighurs in 840 prompted the mass migration of the core Uighur populations..." However, relying on thorough comparative textual analysis on related Chinese classics, my research suggests that these events actually occurred in 841.

D. Clarifying further existing concepts and terms: My research suggests that the differentiating of several terms will help refine our definitions, such as East Syriac Christianity vs. Nestorianism, Uyghurs vs. Indo-Europeans, racial civilisation vs. religious civilisation, Indo-European Christianity vs. Turkic Christianity, Sogdian Christianity vs. Uyghur Christianity, Tocharian Christianity vs. Uyghurised Christianity, Central Asian Buddhism vs. Chinese Buddhism, and even intermixed religion vs. contextualized religion, etc. Among them, I coined “Uyghurised Christianity” (as a supplement to “Turpan Christianity”) and to indicate intermixed religion (muted religion), such as hidden Uyghur Manichaeism, preserved by the Uyghurs and discovered by a Pope’s envoy during the 13th century.

There are three types of religious mutations or syncretisation at work in these regions according to my definition: 1. Loss of religious core attributes (supernatural spirituality), such as seen in liberal Christianity; 2. The alienation of internal logic (logos) by other religions or ideologies (for example, Tarim Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, Daoism); 3. Absorption and borrowing from other religions or ideologies, while wearing the cloak of other religions (Uyghur Turpan Manichaeism in the 13th century). Most of these forms and concepts will appear in different chapters to support discussions of the religious phenomena for obtaining deeper understandings.

Syriac-speaking Christianity is a term coined in recent decades from works such as that by Wilhelm Baum and Dietmar W. Winkler, *The Church of the East: A Concise History* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003) as a linguistically related academic term similar to “East-Syriac Church” and “West-Syriac Church.” The church called itself the “Assyrian” Church and many scholars call it the “Church of the East.” I prefer “East-Syriac Church” to differentiate it from the Orthodox Church in the East. The term “Nestorians” was used by “Jacobites” (West-Syriac Christianity) and later by Roman Catholic writers since the thirteenth century and more frequently after the so-called Nestorian Stele was found in China about four centuries ago. In the stele, East-Syriac Christianity is written as *Da Qin Jing Jiao* (i.e., Great *Chin* luminous religion, meaning Great Roman luminous religion). For a theological background of the terms in history, please refer to the addendum at the end of this chapter.

This thesis also clarifies some other enigmatic terms and titles, such as the religion of “serving Heavenly God”, the religion of “weeping to God”, the sect of “idolatry-worship”, Tarsa, Arkagun (Arkowen), Uyghur Monks, Gao-chang Monks, Bei-ting Monks, and Uyghur Idolaters.

E. Clarification on the historical evolvement of racial-ethnic identities: Uyghurs, who originated from the East Asian Steppes, later called the Mongolian grasslands, in 841, are still living in Xinjiang, China today. They are an East Asian grassland race, distinct from the native Indo-Europeans, a Caucasian type white race whose descendants also still live in Xinjiang. In a

roughly millennium-long process, most of the native Indo-Europeans have become Turkified and Islamified via intermixing, which is why they resemble Uyghurs and Turks. Understanding the difference of each ethnic group's origins remains crucial to understanding their religions. For example, when Europeans ruled Africa, Christianity was prevalent among the colonizers, not the natives, with whom folk religions were dominant. Similarly, in the ancient Tarim, Yan-qi, and Turpan Basins at the south of the Tian-shan mountains, Buddhism was prevalent among the natives instead of the ruling Uyghurs.

F. As a minor issue in this thesis, such a mix came about largely due to the fact that racial civilisation in Central Asia was mostly derived from its original civilisation with the impact of Persian dominance and conquests of Alexander the Great, the Macedonian representative of Greek civilisation, from the west. The native Indo-Europeans of Central Asia retained their much-advanced civilisation with excellent science, art, metallurgy, and commerce, instead of their military, for at least a millennium until the invasion and colonisation of the Turks from the east. The religious civilisation, however, was first influenced by Iranian Zoroastrianism, then later Indian Buddhism and Syriac Christianity. The ancient secular civilisation and culture in these regions was similar to that of ancient Europeans, according to the Chinese classics and archaeological discoveries. Religious civilisation added to racial civilisation and later even changed it dramatically through the influx of Islam.

G. Additionally, the progressive development of racial-ethnicities and religions as well as the conception of regional history in Central Asia is impressive. For instance, Indian Buddhism was revised twice in history before it finally contextualized as Zen-Buddhism in China.⁴ First, it was transformed into Hellenized Buddhism among the Indo-European Scythians, who were a similar type of people to southern Mediterraneans. The Scythians occupied the south of the Hindukush Mountains and the western-side regions of the Pamir Mountains north of the Amu River, which were conquered and Hellenized by the Macedonian Alexander the Great. Second, Buddhism was further developed in the Bactria area between south of the Amu River and north of the Hindukush Mountains, and Tarim Basin, as its religious paradise, which is located on the eastern side of the Pamirs, among the native Tocharians who were an Aryan (or Sarmatian, Siberian) type of people.

⁴ The topic of the revised Buddhism as a radical issue in its religious history will not be discussed in this thesis but in my future works.

1.6 Philosophy of History, Formats of Written History, and Research Methods of Constructing History Theory

Scholars of history do not always announce their philosophy of history and historical view. Though sometimes unaware of the need for this, scholars in their ideological perspectives on history shape their basic view of written history, even if subtly. Since racial-ethnic and religious issues remain sensitive to readers, the present thesis applies Hegelian philosophy and formats, with an historical view generated by my research, supplemented by the methodologies of other researchers.

1.6.1 Philosophy and formats of history

G. W. F. Hegel defined world history as the ultimate design of an absolute divine Spirit yet also the image and enactment of a dual reason. Thus, world history for Hegel is a rational process that reflects both divine design and the spirit of human freedom. He also sees history as the realisation and outcome of reason, although it "is not the soil in which happiness grows. The periods of happiness in it are the blank pages of history" (Hegel, 1914: 42, 28, 79, 43, 138). He even views "history as the slaughter-bench."

Indeed, the history of Central Asia, which epitomizes these negative Hegelian definitions of history, is even more curiosity-provoking and stressful. In the over two millennia of the historical process, the human spirit, or the will for power, has been equally exercised among different racial-ethnic groups and nations in a male-dominated design, desiring more land, fortune, and women. In the meanwhile, the religious spirit is carried by a few chosen ones, with stubborn resilience and a willingness to sacrifice, constructing a parallel history of a transcendent spirit, filling the blank pages of history with hope, if not happiness. Unexpectedly, I encountered a few love stories between man and woman, tragedy and comedy, on the margins of the main course of bloody history in these regions.

Hegel also distinguishes three formats of written history: original history, reflective history, and philosophical history. Reflective history has four sub-formats: universal history, pragmatic history, critical history, and specialized history, which focuses on specific historical themes and threads. In this thesis, I will construct a **reflective history**, mainly from anthropological, geographic, and religious perspectives, more specifically a specialized history of ancient Christianity coming to the regions from Persia, spreading among different racial-ethnic groups, indigenizing via multi-languages, and making the geo-political history of God's kingdom on earth

with divine promises beyond those of the national kingdoms of the world. Christians see their history as the true world history, just as other world religions do.

To construct this specialized history better, under the proposition of Hegel's philosophy on history and his defined formats of written history, this thesis introduces a macro-historical view of the regions through which the Silk Road passed: **racial-ethnic immigration to the west, and religions spreading to the east, leading to evolving identity**. As commonly understood, racial-ethnic immigration leads to intermarriage and mixed blood, which changes people's outward identity by changing their physical characteristics. Similarly, the spread of religions leads to a conversion of faith, which changes people's inward identity by changing their spiritual characteristics. The evolution of identity in the regions remains the most important and lasting historical development and outcome of the Silk Road, that is, its historical heritage, or legacy.

Since the historical spirit of Hegel is related to mystical reality and concept, I prefer to introduce a theory of the "genetic structure of history" in both physical and rational realities (i.e., facts and theories). In this structure, history has a genetic function which can pass the consciousness (or spirit) of history to the next age. In this grand process, such an Hegelian consciousness (or spirit) can be referred to as the life of history, memory of history, or coding program of history, and it regenerates or emanates from the current form of history through genetic codes into the future. Thus, history does not repeat itself, but transforms itself and develops through a genetic coding structure in history. The specialized history construction in this thesis has no exception but more vividly reflects the theory of mine.

In addition, in the field of Central Asian studies, one of the dual Hegelian history makers, the human spirit with the power of ambitious will, had to yield to the geographical realities of mountains and rivers, oases and deserts, which uniquely guided and shaped the human historical construction in Central Asia significantly, even each served as a check and balance to the power of the metaphysical spirit.

1.6.2 Research methods of written history in the thesis

This thesis emphasizes multi-discipline research methodologies. The studies on Central Asian history heavily rely on the methods of archaeological and linguistic studies. The methods are valuable, and the achievements are great, yet methods from more disciplines should be involved. For example, anthropological insights on racial-ethnic differences, and theological understanding

play a crucial role in this thesis to clarify significant confusion and misunderstanding on religious history in the regions.

I engage a few methodologies, such as literature (textual) analysis, historical analysis, anthropological analysis, theological analysis, religious analysis, and some archaeological analysis, all of which are commonly used in Christian biblical study and doctrinal research, to find missing information and provide new interpretations for related ancient texts. These methods assist me in figuring out challenging enigmas whose solutions have escaped many scholars for a long time.

Literary analysis is an important method for literary study of the kind I am pursuing, which uses a quantitative approach to qualitative research. It is applied to historical texts, including official history, tablet history, and transcripts through content analysis, thematic analysis, and even discourse analysis. When it comes to intensive reading, Biblical scholars in the West and Chinese sinologists as well traditionally enjoy a textual analysis of classics that directs more attention to the subtle details of each Chinese character and sentence. Such thematic and discourse analyses also utilize an extensive reading of other related classics, including ancient poems and headstone inscriptions with unique historical information. By drawing together smaller details to create a larger picture, this composite methodology can reveal previously-overlooked truths and factual implications. It also includes comparative textual analysis, which refers to detailed word-by-word comparisons of the descriptions of the same events or persons recorded in different classics from different ages to identify key missing information and gain new insight, helping researchers efficiently spot any inconsistencies and even errors in the records.

Historical analysis, another common methodology used by Biblical scholars as well as by this thesis, analyses the different cause-and-effect relationships present in each scenario and the consistency of the different informational pieces and puzzles, fitting them within the larger picture and framework of history. Historical analysis is not only based on textual analysis, but also on other perspectives of disciplines supportive to historical study, such as racial-ethnic identity in anthropology, archaeological discoveries and their interpretations, and even linguistic studies. Regarding racial-ethnic identity, my thesis focuses on the multi-racial-ethnic religious perspective, reflecting a more inclusive label than mere racial and linguistic ones used for the purpose of categorizing national-ethnic boundaries.

Additionally, this thesis conducts anthropological analysis on the racial-ethnic physiological features identified in historical texts, paintings, and archaeological evidence. The detailed construction of the racial-ethnic history of these regions facilitates a clarification of the misunderstood religious history of the regions. This thesis engages seriously with historical

anthropology as an important method which has been neglected in this field, the result of which is confusion about the related religious history, until today. Researching each historical stage, this thesis provides a brief introduction of the racial ethnic background, sometimes with detailed descriptions of the facial features, hair, and complexion colours recorded in Chinese classics.

Finally, religious and theological analysis aims to understand religion from, not only a social perspective, but also a religious perspective, mostly through textual and historical analyses of ancient transcripts and doctrinal codices of the religious tradition. Each ancient religion has its own theological system with sophisticated internal reasoning, logic, and principles. Understanding the “internal logos” of each religion helps effectively solve some of the problems that have long troubled scholars. For example, differentiating Manichaeism and Christianity when studying fragmented manuscripts requires a deep theological understanding of each religion. Similarly, understanding East-Syriac Christian Monasticism and its spiritual formation, including hesychasm, helps this thesis solve a myth in the field. This methodology has generally been overlooked by secular scholars but is adopted intensively by some scholars who study archaeological discoveries of ancient texts, arts, and architecture, such as the linguist Mark Dickens. The prominent Chinese scholar of the Dun-huang research field, Yang Fu-xue, once pointed out in a paper:

“The lack of relevant materials has long plagued the study of the history of Christianity in Central Asia. When the Uyghur *Jing* religious materials were discovered at the beginning of the last century, they quickly aroused widespread attention in the Western academic circle, resulting in the emergence of numerous batches of research experts and their works. Regardless of the size of the fragments and the content, special studies were conducted on almost all of the materials discovered. Looking at our county [China], however, it seems that the academic community on Christian studies there has not paid much attention [to the field]. Judging from the published works in China, the researchers almost all belong to the discipline of Uyghur linguistics study, and not a single Christian study researcher is involved. This situation will inevitably have a serious effect on the quality of their research level. In this century, the situation needs to be seriously updated.”⁵ (Yang, F. X., 2001: 170-171)

⁵ “有关资料的匮乏，长期以来一直困扰着中亚基督教历史的研究。本【上】世纪初回鹘景教资料一经发现，很快即引起了西方学术界的广泛重视，涌现出一批又一批的研究专家和著作，残片不管大小，内容不管多少，差不多都有人进行专题研究。反观我国，似乎并未引起基督教学界的关注，从发表的成

Indeed, one with a religious internal perspective using the methodology of theological analysis can more easily differentiate some ancient manuscripts from Christian ones and Manichean ones than one using a secular perspective, because Christianity and Manichaeism bear great similarities, given that the latter was a heretical branch of the former.⁶

1.7 Conclusion: a map for CROSSING the academic swamp

Just as a map would well-serve travellers adventuring along the Silk Road, an academic map would well-serve scholars as they cross the academic swamp of Silk Road and Central Asian studies. The most significant contribution of this thesis is to provide a map (a more promising framework) of history for studies on the racial-ethnic landscape, Uyghur history, and Christian history of the groups in the regions surrounding the eastern part of the Tian-shan Mountains, also known as the Chinese westernmost frontier prior to the fourteenth century. Though the holistic map is still rough and without many details, scholars can continue to draw more routes on it in accordance with the foundational latitude and longitude provided by this thesis.

ADDENDUM ON CHRISTOLOGY:

The Theological and Geographic Origins of the Branch of Christianity that was Introduced to Central Asia and Flourished

The Syrian Church, or the Syriac-speaking Church, which started in the Kingdom of Edessa (Antioch or Osrhoene) with the background of Assyrian or Syrian civilisation in Asia Minor,

果看，研究者几乎全是清一色的回鹘语言学研究者，而无一位基督教研究人员参与。这种状况势必严重影响我们研究水平的提高，在新的世纪中，这一状况应予以认真改变。”

⁶ Manichaeism is a developed form of Gnosticism founded by the Syriac-speaking Babylonian Mani (AD 216-277) (Chadwick, 1970: 643). Manichaeism is usually considered heretical rather than simply heterodoxical, since its founder Mani, after a few visions of divine revelations, he claimed, considered himself as the twin of Christ. The Manichaean version of Psalm (2), praises Mani saying: “We bless the Pair-companion of Light, Christ, the author of our good.” (Widengren, 1945: 26-27). According to the *Cologne Mani Codex* (21, 25, 51, 53), Mani called Christ “a good and excellent counselor” “my twin” who “belongs to me and is mine”. Sometimes, Mani called himself an apostle of Jesus Christ, but he also claimed to have existed even before the creation of the world.

evangelized the east and split into the two branches of West Syriac and East Syriac, following the Silk Road, and left with the latter a great legacy in the history of world Christianity.

By AD 225, not only had it established more than twenty bishoprics in Mesopotamia and Persia, its diocesan sphere of influence extended even into the Bactria *Yue-zhi* Kushan Kingdom of Central Asia (Mingana, 1925: 298). But later, the East-Syriac Church, which was the major branch of Syrian Christianity that flourished in Persia, endured more than seventy years of brutal persecution from the Persian Empire and was forced to declare its ecclesiastical independence in AD 410-414, calling itself the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East (shortened to Assyrian Church of the East or Church of the East). Although it was not recognized as such by the other patriarchates, it became the de facto fifth patriarchate (called the Patriarchate of the East), after the Patriarchate of Rome, the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Patriarchate of Alexandria, and the Patriarchate of Antioch (Baum, W. & Winkler, D., 2003: 19-20). The Catholicos (Patriarch) of the East Syriac Church was appointed by the king of Persia. The seat of its Patriarchal See was the Persian capital Seleucia-Ctesiphon (later Baghdad). It used the Peshitta version of the Syriac-language Bible, and its sacraments followed the East-Syriac tradition (Zhu, Q. Z., 1998: 41, 43).

After the AD 431 Council of Ephesus, the East-Syriac Church in Persia and its School of Edessa (and later its School of Nisibis) continued to hold fast to the Christology of Patriarchate Antioch's theological tradition, which the Ephesus Council and the AD 451 Council of Chalcedon had condemned as heresy and which was also called "Nestorianism", which had been created to present a powerful challenge to the Mariology doctrine that was then before the Council (Baum, W. & Winkler, D., 2003: 23, 26). It is imperative to clarify the difference between Nestorianism and the Christology of the East-Syriac Church, as many scholars are recognising today.

These are the other names that have also been used for the Christianity spread by the historical East Syriac Church: Persian Christianity, Da-qin *Jing-jiao* (Luminous religion), Tarsa religion, Mishha Christianity, Arkagun religion, religion of the Cross, etc. Today, the Assyrian Church of the East, whose headquarters still remain in Iraq, is generally referred to by academics as East-Syriac Christianity and Church of the East, and is a branch of Christianity, like the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and Protestantism. In 1994, the Roman Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East issued a joint declaration announcing their

reconciliation, confirming their common theological correctness, thus ending the historical debate over Mariology and Christology.⁷

This dispute over Christology began when the Patriarch Nestorius of Constantinople disagreed with the term *Theotokos* and its concept, *God-bearer*, and suggested instead *Christotokos* (Christ-bearer), because Nestorius represented the Antiochian theological view, believing that it was necessary to emphasize at the same time the divine nature and human nature of Jesus Christ. *Theotokos*, he contended, only reflects the divinity of Jesus Christ. In addition to theological accuracy, Nestorius also worried that believers would fall into an idolatry of Mary, especially setting up the possibility of having them become attracted and alienated by the idol of a certain Egyptian goddess (Isis). Nestorius was condemned as a heretic at the Council of Ephesus in AD 431. It should be noted that, when the Assyrian Church of the East in Persia declared its independence officially in 414, not only had Nestorius not yet served in Constantinople and had not entered history, but also the Council of Ephesus would not be convened until about 17 years later. Therefore, calling the Assyrian Church in Persia “Nestorian” is not consistent with historical facts. Furthermore, the Christology of the Assyrian Church came from Antioch-Syriac theology, not Nestorius, whose Christology came from the same source.

To understand Antiochian-Nestorius’ Christology, one needs to refer not only to the ruling documents of the Ecumenical and Chalcedon Councils, but also to Nestorius’s self-defence book, *The Bazaar of Heracleides* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925), as well as the authoritative evaluations of later generations. For example, the Christian reformer Martin Luther once commented on Nestorius’ Christology, explaining that the accusation of Nestorius was not aimed at the right target. He wrote:

...For awhile I myself could not understand just what Nestorius’ error was; in any event, I thought that Nestorius had denied the divinity of Christ and had regarded Christ as no more than a mere man, as the papal decretals and all papal writers say. But their own words, when I really looked at them, made me change my

⁷ Also refer to the following footnote for the official redress of Christological dispute and joint declaration by the Roman Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East, although not a redress of Nestorius who thus remains as a heretic in church history.

Mar Dinkha IV, Ioannes Paulus PP. II. 1994. “Common Christological Declaration of Pope John Paul II and His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East,” Friday, 11 Nov. Vatican City.

“That is the reason why the Assyrian Church of the East is praying [to] the Virgin Mary as ‘the Mother of Christ our God and Saviour.’ In the light of this same faith the Catholic tradition addresses the Virgin Mary as ‘the Mother of God’ and also as ‘the Mother of Christ’.”

mind. They accuse Nestorius of making two persons out of Christ, namely, God and man. Some, who also failed to understand him, thought he taught that Christ was first born of Mary as mere man and then led such a holy life that the Godhead merged with him, and he thus became God, and their writing is so confused that I think they still do not know today how and why they condemned Nestorius.

Luther further stated:

...For it appears that the pope and his followers put the words into Nestorius' mouth that he viewed Christ as a mere man and not also as God, and that he took Christ to be two persons or two Christs. This appears (I say) not only from the histories, but also from the very words and documents of the popes and their writers... Thus Nestorius' error was not that he believed Christ to be a pure man, or that he made two persons of him; on the contrary, he confesses two natures, the divine and the human, in one person-but he will not admit a *communicatio idiomatum*.

However, Luther also agrees with the council that "God was born of Mary" and that "Mary was *theotokos*," so on this point Nestorius "was rightly condemned in the council, and ought to be condemned." For Luther, "This council condemned far too little of Nestorius, for it dealt only with the one *idioma*, that God was born of Mary." Furthermore, "Although Nestorius confesses that Christ, true God and true man, is one person, but does not ascribe the idiomata of human nature to the same divine person of Christ, he is in error, just as much as if he denied the nature itself." (Luther, 1539: 96-97, 99, 100, 104)

As for the Christology of the Assyrian Church of the East, the main reference should be based on the exposition of the theologian and the appointed Catholicos-Patriarch of the Church, Babai the Great (died in 628): "One is Christ, the Son of God, glorified by all in two natures (*kyane*); begotten by the Father without beginning before time; born of Mary in his humanity, united in the fullness of time in one body. His divinity is not of the nature of the mother, nor is his humanity of the nature of the Father. The natures are preserved in their *qnome* (hypostases) in one person (*parçopa*) of the one Sonship." (Royel, A. & Birnie, M., 2024:105; Baum, W. & Winkler, D., 2003: 39)



CHAPTER 2 THE AGE OF INDO-EUROPEAN CHRISTIANITY ON THE CHINESE WESTERNMOST FRONTIER: EARLY EAST SYRIAC CHRISTIANITY FLOURISHES IN THE KARASAH BASIN AND TURPAN BASINS IN THE BUDDHIST TOCHARIAN REGIONS AGAINST AN INFLUX OF HISTORICAL COLONIZATION ALONG THE SILK ROAD (AD 386-640)

2.1 Introduction

The Central Asian segments of the Silk Road consist of ancient routes created by native white inhabitants, or Indo-Europeans as termed in modern linguistics, as early as 1,800 BC. It was officially recorded during the Chinese Han dynasty in the second century BC. In different time periods, the Silk Road was busy for reasons such as trade, immigration, politics, military, and religion.

Historically, not only did different nations and racial-ethnic groups sweep through the Silk Road, but religious groups such as Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity, Daoism, Manichaeism, and Islam did as well. Armies mainly travelled from east to west through the Turpan, Karasahr, and Tarim Basins at the south of the Tian-shan Mountain range, sometimes along the northern foot of Tian-shan, conquering and settling central Asia with bloody contests, while religious groups went from west to east, passing through the three basins and sometimes along the northern foot of the mountain range, to reach China and the rest of East Asia. These religions spread within Central Asia and played historical roles, sometimes mutually tolerant, sometimes in conflict with each other, rising and falling in succession.

The history of the Silk Road, especially of the segments passing through the Turpan Basin, the Karasahr (Yan-qi) Basin, and the Tarim Basin as well as along the northern side of Tian-shan Mountains, is filled with clashes and exchanges between civilizations and racial-ethnic groups. These precipitated long-progressive development of various racial-ethnic groups around the Road as well as the transformation of their conception of identities, mainly caused by pushing the boundaries of their identities through racial-ethnic intermixing, colonisation, and religious conversions. The term “Silk Road” was coined by German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen in his works in 1877 (Hansen, 2012: see PLATE 2-3). From the Chinese perspective, the first section of the Silk Road, which extends from the Han China capital *Chang-an* to the Tarim Basin,

can be called the Jade Road because of the Kun-lun Mountain jade that was so popular and valuable in China, and even in Rome as well.

Researching the racial-ethnic religious history of the Chinese westernmost frontier creates a fascinating academic project, but studying its Christian history remains an adventurous journey. The area consists of the four regions surrounding the eastern section of the Tian-shan Mountain range including the region of the northeastern rim of the Tarim Basin including primarily the Karasahr (Yan-qi) Basin, the region of the Turpan Basin at the south of the mountains, the region of some city-states in the north of the mountains, and the region surrounding Kumul (ancient Yi-wu, present-day Hami) at the easternmost Tian-shan. This four-region area is situated in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in northwest China. This thesis refers to the area as the **“Four-Regions.”**

To clarify the religious landscape of the Four-Regions, due to a significant lack of sources on the Hami (Kumul) region, this thesis focuses primarily on the Kocho-Turpan (Ju-shi) Basin,⁸ the Yanqi-Karasahr (Arshi) Basin⁹ on the northeastern rim of the Jishi-Tarim Basin, and the region on the northern side of the Tian-shan Mountains, before and after the Uyghur Empire fell and its refugees officially migrated to these three regions in AD 841.¹⁰ In order to promote a better understanding of ancient religions in the three regions, research should be primarily based on relevant Syriac and Chinese classics. These shed much-needed light on the racial-ethnic diversity and social-civilisational background in these regions, serving as a key to correct a long-time confusion on the religious landscape in academia. In addition, society in its larger picture provides an important platform for better assembling the puzzle pieces of their religions, especially in the Kocho-Turpan Basin and the Yanqi-Arshi Basin where Buddhism, Christianity, and

⁸ The Tocharian name, which the kingdom in the basin called itself in its Tocharian-C language (Turpan-Loulou block), is *Gu-shi*. Later, it was *Ju-shi* in the Chinese phonetic translation of the Han Chinese court history of the second century BC.

⁹ The Tocharian name, which the kingdom in the basin called itself, is *Ārśi* in their Tocharian-A language, while Yan-qi is the Chinese phonetic translation in the Han Chinese court history of the second century BC based on the etymological form of *Ārke*. In Sanskrit, it is Agni. The later name Karasahr is obviously a Hunnic translation.

¹⁰ The specific year that the Uyghurs Empire fell and officially migrated from the East Asia Steppes, the present-day Mongolian grasslands, to present-day Xinjiang, China was actually 841, and not 840, a date which is generally accepted by academia. The great late French scholar René Grousset states that “In 840 their capital Karabalgasun was taken, their Khagan slain, and their empire overthrown...” (Grousset, 1970: 124). The distinguished contemporary American scholar Valerie Hansen also states that “The Kirghiz defeat of the Uighurs in 840 prompted the mass migration of the core Uighur populations...” (Hansen, 2012: 226).

Manichaeism used to prevail before the conquest of Islam. Among the four regions, there are the most sources for religious study on the Turpan Basin.

To ensure a clear and pleasant understanding while reading this chapter, one must be introduced to the basic geographical knowledge of the four regions and three basins, and the parts of the Silk Road that passed through them. Additionally, it is important to learn about the native racial-ethnic groups and their civilizations, as well as study their other ancient religions. Thus, this chapter will explore facets of their ancient Christianity before the seventh century which have been neglected in this field of study. Happily, Chinese classics as well as ancient writings in other languages (i. e. mainly Syriac) provide a valuable and detailed written history of records for research and study.

As early as the late second century, the missionaries of the East-Syriac Church (or Assyrian Church of the East) ¹¹ (Baum & Winkler, 2003: 19-20) travelled along the Silk Road from the capital of Parthian Persia eastward, crossing the boundary of the Iranian plateau and arriving at the Khorasan Area (the north-easternmost point of Iran as a colony), reaching the Amu River area in the Tocharian kingdom Bactria, which Chinese classics from that time referred to as the *Da-Xia* (pronounced *Du-wo*)¹² kingdom. The Buddhism from India had been present for a couple of centuries. While carrying out their missions in this kingdom, some of the missionaries continued to march eastward, crossing the Pamir Mountains, stepping into the Tarim Basin, moving northward to the Syr River area, then reaching the westernmost region of the Tian-shan Mountains. The Tarim Basin was subject to Tocharian influence, stretching as far as the northeast area of the Turpan Basin. According to the ancient Syriac records and Chinese classics, such as

¹¹ East Syriac Church is a name given by academia in recent decades due to its historically different language traits and theologies from the West Syriac Church. The Church called herself Assyrian Church of the East. In AD 424, the Church held its third Synod and declared that “persecutions and afflictions” had prevented the Western Fathers from “caring for us as they did before.” The Synod of 424 is widely regarded as the year that the East Syriac Church gained official independence, though it had technically achieved that feat in AD 410. Seven years later, the Council of Ephesus condemned the teachings of Nestorius the Patriarch of Constantinople as heresy. Later in history Latin Church tradition inappropriately labelled the Assyrian Church of the East as the Nestorian Church due to its Christology of Antiochean theological traditions, which the Church continually held. The Church had her successful missions in the mid-seventh century in Tang-China, where it was officially recorded as the tradition of *Jing* religion, which lasted until the late fourteenth century.

¹² According to the pronunciation of the Chinese during the age of Han China, which inherited in present-day Shang-hai dialect, instead of *da-xia*, it is *du-wo*, which of a phonetic translation of “Tocharia”. There were other Chinese translations of the name such as *dou-qu-le*, *tu-huo-luo*, *du-huo-luo*, or *tu-huo-yi*, etc.

the *Book of Wei*, these missionaries successfully reshaped the religious history and civilizational identity of the Tocharian people, whose race belongs to the Aryan-Samaritan type.

2.1.1 Chapter Thesis

This chapter will trace through the early history of the two regions in the westernmost Chinese frontier, Yan-qi (Arshi) Basin and Turpan Basin, as recorded in the primary sources of Chinese classics and Syriac materials, to present a contour of the racial ethnic, political, military, and commercial background for constructing a Christian mission and church landscape between AD 386, when the non-Chinese Northern Wei kingdom was established in north China, and AD 640, when Tang-China colonized the Turpan Basin. Contrary to the mainstream view of this field that Buddhism dominated the two basins, this chapter argues that East-Syriac Christianity and Buddhism were the two most popular religions in the two basins (Figure 2. 1 the blue circles). Only with a clear understanding of the diverse racial-ethnic history background can we better understand the religious landscape among the people and nations in these regions, specifically the Christian one. In this historical period, there were no direct records about Christianity spreading to the northern side of the eastern Tian-shan Mountain range and the other region of Kumul surrounding the easternmost Tian-shan (Figure 2. 1 the red circles).

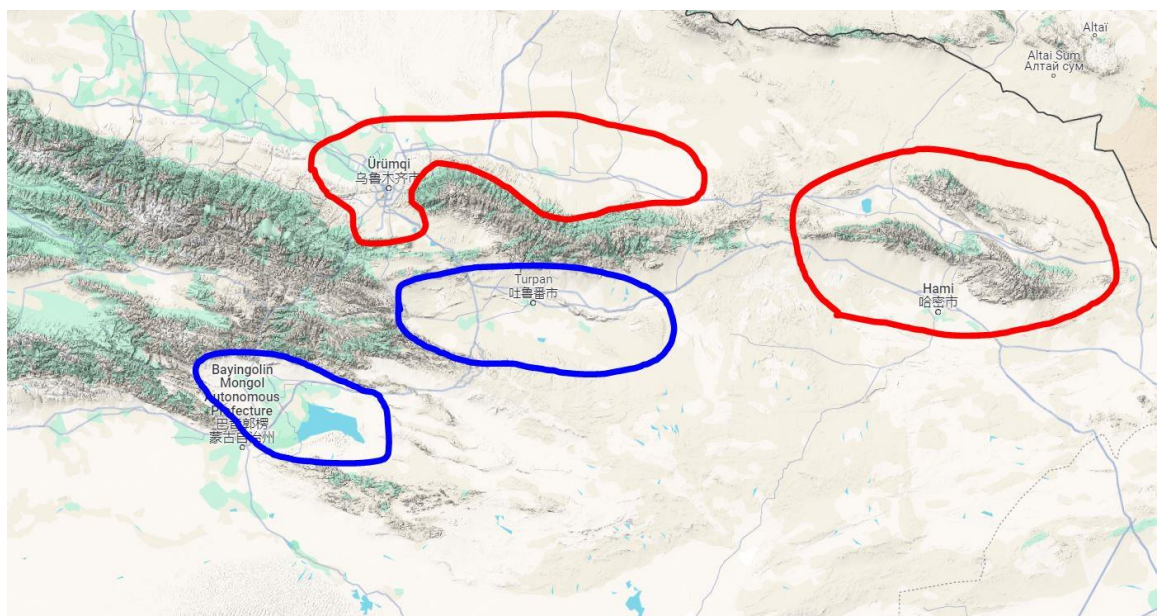


Figure 2. 1: The two of the four regions in the blue circles have Christian presence according to the Chinese records ¹³

¹³ Source: <https://google.com/maps/@42.8618974,89.7675561,7.39z/data=!5m1!1e4?entry=ttu>

2.1.2 The General Historical Background of the Arshi and Turpan Basins

The original inhabitants in the regions south of the Tian-shan Mountains, including the Kumul region in the east and the Tarim Basin in the west, and in between specifically the Yan-qi (Arshi, Karasahr) Basin and Ju-shi (Gao-chang, Turpan) Basin, are not part of the black-hair and yellow-skin race type, but of the white-skin and blond-hair group. The inhabitants were Tocharian people, as recorded in materials of various languages. Their civilization type, during 1800 BC to 200s BC, can be traced from Persian type and even Europe type as the earliest archaeologist discoveries show. In the fourth century BC, the Macedonian King Alexander the Great conquered areas along the Silk Road, reaching all the way to Central Asia. He successfully implanted Macedonian-Greek civilization in the regions of Bactria and *Da-yuan* (later Sogdiana, originating from the Fergana Basin) which had been parts of the Achaemenian Persian colony with Iranian-Persian civilisational influence.

About two or three centuries later, Buddhism spread up from India, crossing the Hindu Kush Mountains and the Kara Kunlun Mountains, and permeated both sides of the Pamir Mountains, beginning with the Amu River areas on the western side and then, from the third century and later on with the area of the Tarim Basin on the eastern side, the Yan-qi Basin, and Turpan Basin. At the same time, the western part of the Tarim Basin remained a Persian civilization, resisting Alexander's colonizing civilization, by holding on to the Persian religion Zoroastrianism for centuries and later adopting Buddhism. After a few centuries, when Buddhism was flourishing in the three basins, East Syriac Christianity arrived hastily and soon caught up peacefully with Buddhism, sharing half of the Tocharian territory, which included the two basins of this chapter and this thesis.

2.2 A brief introduction to the geography of the “Western Regions” as well as to the segments of the Silk Road that pass through THEM

The earliest official Chinese records of the Silk Road come from a period of time during which Han dynasty China was facing invading Huns from the East Asian grasslands in the north. From the end of the third century BC, the Huns followed their leader Mao-dun the *Chan-yu* (Khan, king) westward as he began his conquest of revenge along the northern bank of the Yellow River. Thirsty for foreign fortune, land, and white women, the barbaric nomadic Huns, equipped with fast horses and skilled archery, defeated the native *Yue-zhi* people of the white Scythian type, in the *He-xi* Corridor (in the present-day Gansu Province, China) west of the upper Yellow River and forced them to escape further westward. Thus, the Huns controlled the must-pass section of the

Silk Road from the Chinese Qin dynasty capital, *Xian-yang*, to the “Western Regions”, not only for military purposes, but also for tax collection from business travellers. In the later centuries, East Asian nomadic groups, including the Mongols finally, all followed the pattern of Mao-dun’s conquest.

During the Qin and Han dynasties, when China was at its peak, the Chinese refused to tolerate the Huns’ expansion, invasions of the Chinese border, and jeopardization of Chinese interests. The Chinese emperors swiftly engaged with the Huns in a series of intense wars along the Yellow River. As time passed, the wars continued in the Western Regions, mainly in the four regions of the Tarim, Yan-qi and Turpan Basins, the six cities north of Tian-shan, and the region of Kumul (Hami) on both sides of the easternmost Tian-shan, each people group vying for control of the Silk Road along the southern and northern side of the Tian-shan Mountains, which vertically divide present-day Xinjiang in half. The wars began between the Chinese sedentary peoples and the nomadic Huns at the end of the third century BC and lasted for two millennium, transforming Asian history forever.

2.2.1 The Geo-racial-politics of the Two-Basin Regions and the Chinese Conquests along the Silk Road from the Second Century BC to the First Century AD

The Silk Road, which passed through the vast Western Regions (present-day Xinjiang), was divided at the Turpan Basin by the Tian-shan Mountains into two branches, a northern and southern one. The southern branch was divided into two sub-routes, also northern and southern ones, by the Tarim Basin.

The Turpan Basin, the most important region in this thesis, which rests 300 kilometres northeast of its neighbouring Tarim Basin, is nearly as large as Ireland. Located south of the eastern section of the Tian-shan mountains, surrounded by mountains and highlands, the basin sits at a very low altitude, stretching about 250 kilometres horizontally and 75 kilometres vertically. The climate is similar to that of the Tarim Basin’s, though with little precipitation, and its area includes a portion of the Gobi Desert, oases, small hills, lakes, and abundant underground river waters, producing rich crops and famous grapes and melons. According to Chinese court history, the name of the kingdom in the Turpan Basin was consecutively referred to throughout history as

Gu-shi, *Ju-shi*, Kocho, *Xi-zhou*, Idiquit-sehri, Karahoja, *Huo-zhou*, and Turpan (Chen, 2000: 105-111; Cheng, 2009: 373).¹⁴

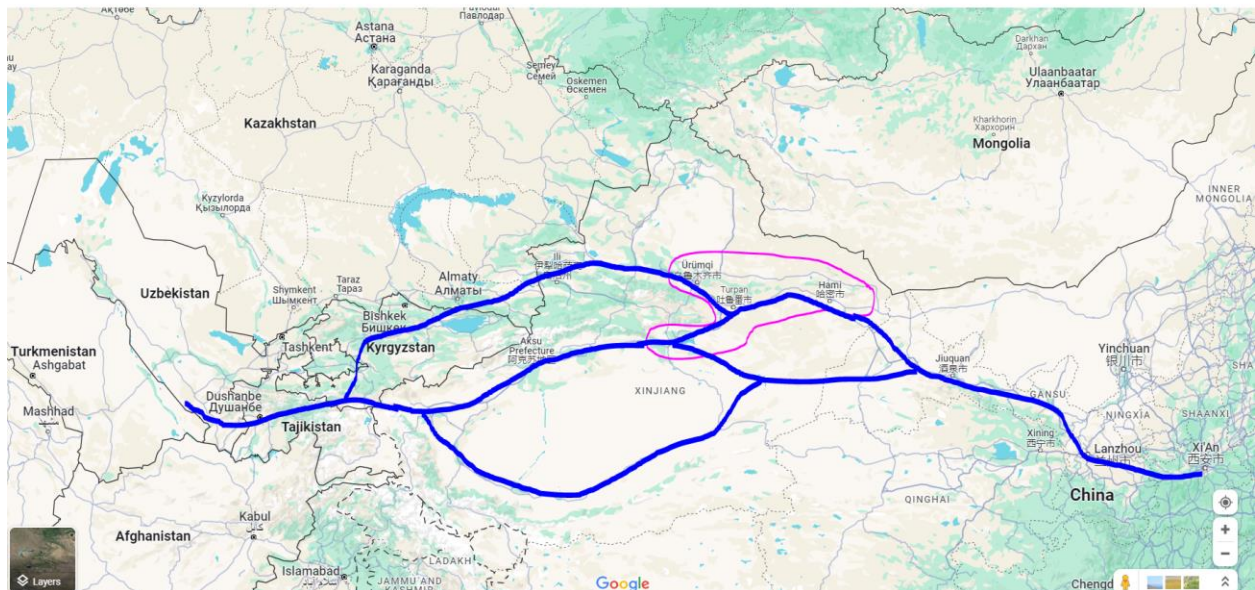


Figure 2. 2: The Chinese westernmost frontier (in purple) and the Silk Road (in blue) in the Western Regions¹⁵

As a result of its unique strategic position, the Turpan Basin became a hot spot that over which the Chinese and Huns fought repeatedly. The highest point of the eastern Tian-shan Mountains, Bogda Peak, is located above the northern border of the basin. A traveller can easily cross over this part of the Tian-shan Mountains northward and arrive at an area with a flat pastureland and abundant waters in the valleys, where six cities by this time were spread along the northern foot of the mountains. By fortifying the mountain pass and the Turpan Basin, the Chinese army was able to prevent the Huns from coming to the south, imposing an effective threat to the northern branch of the Silk Road, which was controlled by Huns, and able to protect from invasion the Tarim Basin and its northern route of the southern branch of the Silk Road. Travelling from the Turpan Basin to the east via the important oasis Hami (Kumul) at the southern foot of

¹⁴ *Gu-shi*, *Ju-shi* and Kocho (*Gao-chang*) were transliterations in Chinese for the name of the kingdom in Turpan Basin since the second century BC during the Han Chinese dynasty. After Tang-China took over the basin in AD 640, the Chinese name *Xi-zhou* (i. e. west prefecture) was given. According to the envoy Chen Cheng of Ming China in 1317, there were five cities in Turpan Basin and they were Turpan, Yaer, Yanze, Karahoja and Lucheng. Idiquit-sehri means City of Idiquit in Uyghur, approximately the “city of the king or prince.” It is also called Dakianusshahri. At the time of Genghis Khan’s Mongols, the city was called Karahoja in Uyghur, probably meaning “great noble”.

¹⁵ Source <https://www.google.com/maps/@42.4816998,88.009972,5z/data=!5m1!1e4?entry=tту>

the Tian-shan, caravans could reach the *He-xi* corridor in the south-east, while travelling to the south from the Turpan Basin, on the path connecting the eastern entrance of the Tarim Basin to the northern and southern routes of the southern branch of the Silk Road.

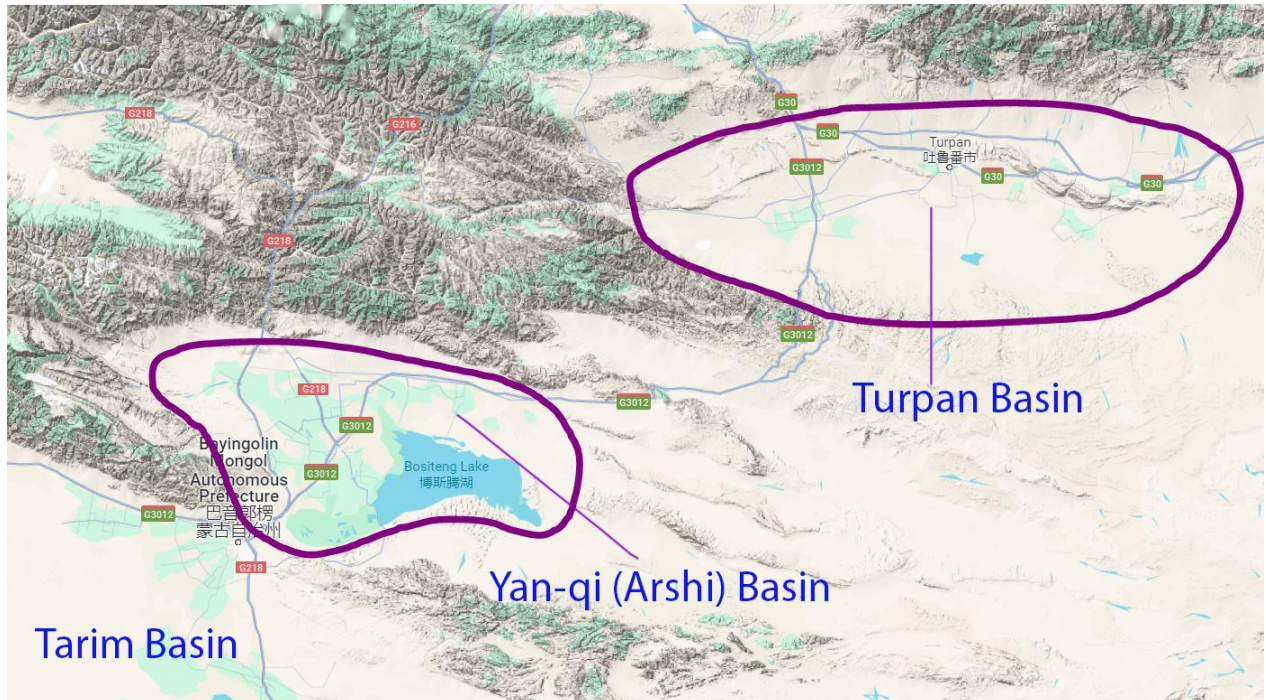


Figure 2. 3: The Geographic Locations of the Arshi and Turpan Basins¹⁶

Traveling to the west from the Turpan Basin along the northern route of the southern branch of the Silk Road at the southern foot of the Tian-shan Mountains, it connects to the region of the Yan-qi Basin about 250 kilometres away. Comparatively, the smaller region of the Yan-qi Basin also plays an important role in this thesis as a part of the Four-Regions, the Chinese westernmost frontier. Yan-qi Basin, named after the kingdom, a Chinese phonetic translation of the “Arshi” in the native Tocharian language, covers about 160 kilometres horizontally and 60-90 kilometres vertically at the northeast rim of the Tarim Basin, with the large Bosten Lake located on the southeast bottom of the Basin. Given its position adjacent to the Turpan Basin and its rich natural resources and civilisational charm, the Yan-qi Basin was destined to be a battleground and troubled place.

In addition, the Tarim Basin, the largest basin compared to the Yan-qi and Turpan Basins, and the connection between the Pamir mountains and our two-basin regions, which is larger than

¹⁶ Source: <https://google.com/maps/@42.6404483,87.6679012,8.19z/data=!5m1!1e4?entry=ttu>

Germany, stretches 1,500 kilometres in a horizontal direction and 600 kilometres in a vertical direction, creating an almond shape. It is surrounded by the Tian-shan Mountains in the north, the Kun-lun Mountains in the south, the Pamir Mountains in the west, and the Altsin (*A-er-jin*, Altun, or Altyn-Tagh) Mountains in the south-east. The western region of the basin is higher than the eastern region, and the vast Taklamakan Desert covers up almost the entire basin. With its temperate climate, the basin remains dry with little rain and lots of sunlight. The water from melted snow on surrounding mountains feeds some of its rivers, the largest being the Tarim (*Ji-shi*) River (Wei, S., 2000: 1534),¹⁷ whose abundant water flows eastward across almost the entire basin. Many beautiful oases are spread along the rims, mostly the northern and southern rims of the basin, lining rivers and lakes, and acting as a paradise for both sedentary and nomadic groups.

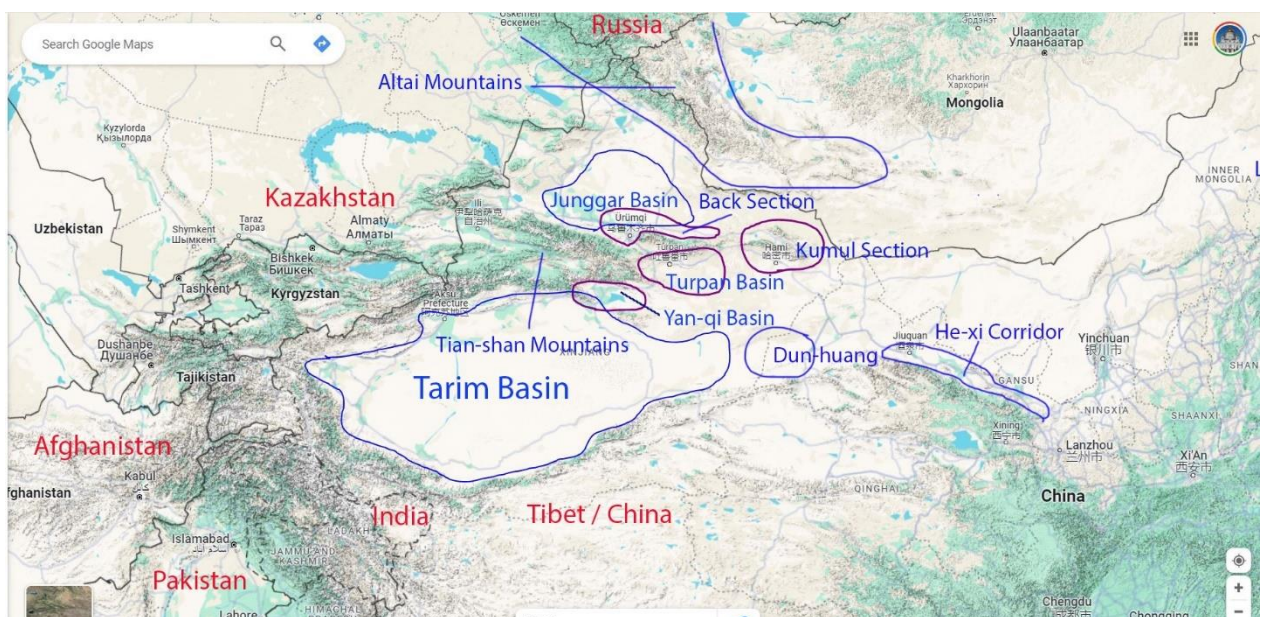


Figure 2. 4: The Geographic Locations of the Four-Regions (in purple) and Related Areas¹⁸

By the time the Han Chinese emperor Liu Heng gained power in 180 BC, the Huns were continuing to push westward along the grassland, gradually taking over the Gobi Desert, the pasturelands around the Altai Mountains, the Junggar Basin, and the northern foot of the Tian-shan Mountains, at whose base the northern branch of the Silk Road passes through. The

¹⁷ In the *Book of Wei*, the river has two Chinese names, Yellow River and *Ji-shi* River which seems to be a phonetic translation from a native name. In its Chronicle 90, "Western Regions": "龟兹国，.....其南三百里有大河东流，号计式水，即黄河也。东去焉耆九百里，....." ("Qiu-ci state,... 300 Chinese miles to the south there is a big river flowing eastward, called Jishi River, which is the Yellow River. 900 Chinese miles to the east of Yanqi...")

¹⁸ Source: <https://google.com/maps/@40.2859053,84.0284281,5.39z/data=!5m1!1e4?entry=ttu>

Scythians, including the *Yue-zhi* nation that was thoroughly defeated in 170s BC and lost their kingdom in the *He-xi* Corridor, continued to retreat to the area around the western end of the Tian-shan Mountains and further regions, including the Zhetysu (meaning seven rivers). Liu Che (156 to 87 BC), the grandson of the Chinese emperor and one of the most powerful emperors in Chinese history, launched a full-scale war against the Huns. With the most advanced technology used for weapons and chariot making, the Han Chinese army drove the Huns away and took over the *He-xi* corridor, thus reconnecting the Silk Road between the Chinese capital and the Western Regions.

Marching westward, the Chinese army arrived at the eastern entrance of the Tarim Basin for the first time and gained control over the region, where the southern branch of the Silk Road begins splitting along the rims of the basin. As sedentary people, the Han Chinese soon built up fortresses, castles, and military bases to safeguard the eastern part of the Tarim Basin. The *Han-wu* emperor Liu Che began to send many delegations of diplomats to the kingdoms along the Silk Road in Central Asia, including that of the Tarim Basin, as well as those of West Asia, thereby establishing international relationships.

After taking the *He-Xi* Corridor from the Huns, the Chinese fortified the eastern rim of the Tarim Basin, while Liu Che continued fighting the Huns for control over the Turpan Basin, where “the land is rich, beautiful, and close to the Huns” (Ban, 1999: 2889).¹⁹ The *Gu-shi* Kingdom in the Turpan Basin was trapped between the two powerful warring nations because of its unique geographical position. Both the Huns and the Chinese wanted the *Gu-shi* as an ally, otherwise, they would become an enemy. As the neighbouring kingdom on the south of the *Gu-shi*, the *Lou-lan* kingdom was situated at the eastern entrance of the Tarim Basin, about 200 kilometres east of the great lake Lop Nur, and 160 kilometres to the west of *Dun-huang*, which was controlled by China. The location of the *Lou-lan* remained strategic as well, sandwiched between the Huns and the Chinese alongside their northern neighbour, the *Gu-shi*.

The Chinese military power's penetration of the three basins south of the Tian-shan Mountains broke the geopolitical balance between the small nation kingdoms and the Huns, who had imposed ally relationships on these twenty-six kingdoms in and around the basins (Ban, 1999:

¹⁹ 【汉】班固：《汉书·西域传第六十六上》【唐】颜师古（注）：“单于大臣皆曰‘车师地肥美，近匈奴，使汉得之，多田积谷，必害人国，不可不争也。’” ([Han] Ban Gu: *Book of Han*, “No 66 The Western Regions” [Tang] Yan Shi-gu (Anno.): “The Chan-yu's ministers all said, 'Ju-shi is a fertile land, close to the Xiong-nu. If the Han Dynasty gets it, it will have more fields and grain, which will definitely harm the country. We must fight for it.'”)

2780).²⁰ The Huns worked hard to secure the allegiances of the kingdoms, sometimes resorting to attacking them. Finally, after two centuries of struggle with the Huns, China, under the reign of emperor *Han-he*, completely conquered three basins when General Ban Chao, the Han Chinese satrap (governor) of the Western Regions, completed the conquest in AD 94 (Grousset, 1970: 46-47).

According to the historian Ban Gu, who was a brother of the satrap (Grousset, 1970: 46-47), General Ban Chao in AD 97 also sent an envoy, deputy general Gan Ying, to the Roman Empire under the name of *Da-qin* or *Li-jian*, according to Chinese court history records (Fan, 1999: 1973; Fang, 2000: 1698). According to my research, the envoy delegation arrived in Antioch at the Seleucia port.²¹ Some historians, both Chinese and Western hold that Gan Ying only went

²⁰ 班固：《汉书·匈奴传第六十四上》：“其明年，单于遗汉书曰：‘天所立匈奴大单于敬问皇帝无恙。……以天之福，吏卒良，马力强，以灭夷月氏，尽斩杀降下之。楼兰、乌孙、呼揭及旁二十六国皆已为匈奴。诸引弓之民并为一家人，北州已定。……’” (Ban Gu, *Book of Han*, “Biography of the Xiong-nu, Volume 64, Part 1”: “The next year, the Chan-yu left a letter to the Han China, saying: ‘The Great Chan-yu of the Xiong-nu [Huns], appointed by Heaven, respectfully asks the Emperor if he is well. ... With the blessing of Heaven, our officers and soldiers are good, the horses are strong, and the barbarians Yuezhi are destroyed, all those who surrender or being killed are conquered. Lou-lan, Wu-sun, Hu-jie and the 26 nearby states have all become part of Xiong-nu. All the people who draw the bow have become one family, and the northern states have been settled. ...”)

²¹ In AD 97 (the *Yong-yuan* 9th year of emperor *Han-he*), General Ban Chao, the Han dynasty satrap in the Western Regions (stationed near modern-day Kucha, on the northern side of Tarim Basin) sent his deputy general Gan Ying as an envoy to *Da-qin* (also called *Li-jian*, that is, the Roman Empire). His delegation arrived on the eastern bank of the Western Sea (the Mediterranean Sea), at the city of Antioch, which was then the provincial capital of Syria in the Roman Empire, visited its harbour Seleucia (where the Apostle Paul had started his first missionary journey 51 years earlier), and then returned home. But one of the traditional accounts among Chinese historians is that Gan Ying only went as far as the Persian Gulf before returning home. This is actually a misunderstanding.

The account in the “Chronicle of Western Regions” in Fan Ye's *Book of the Later Han* (compiled in the middle of the fifth century) explains, “In the ninth *Yong-yuan* year of emperor *Han-he*, the satrap Ban Chao sent Gan Ying as an envoy to *Da-qin*. He reached *Tiao-zhi*. On the shore of the sea that he planned to cross, Gan Ying was told by the sailors of the western border of An-xi: ‘The sea is vast. With favourable winds, the roundtrip takes three months. If the winds are not favourable, it can take up to two years, so those making the journey must have food supplies for three years. On the sea, Sirens make people homesick easily, and they often die.’ Hearing this, Gan Ying stayed out” (Fan, 1999: 1973). *Book of Jin* (compiled in the middle of the seventh century AD, in its “Chronicle of Western Foreigners: *Da-qin*” (Roman Empire), provides a complimentary record to this event (Fang, 2000: 1698).

【南朝·宋】范晔：《后汉书·西域传第78》【唐】李贤等（注）：“和帝永元九年，都护班超遣甘英使大秦，抵条支。临大海欲度，而安息西界船人谓英曰：‘海水广大，往来者逢善风三月乃得度，若遇迟风，亦有二岁者，故入海人皆赍三岁粮。海中善使人思土恋慕，数有死亡者。’英闻之乃止。”

【唐】方玄龄：《晋书·列传第67·四夷·西戎·大秦》：“汉时都护班超遣掾甘英使其国，入海，船人曰：‘海中有思慕之物，往者莫不悲怀。若汉使不恋父母妻子者，可入。’英不能渡。【晋】武帝太康中，其王遣使贡献。” ([Tang] Fang Xuan-ling, *Book of Jin*, “No. 67 Four Types of Barbarians, Western Rong,

Da-qin": "During the Han Dynasty, the Protector General Ban Chao sent his official Gan Ying to his country. When they went to sea, the boatman said: 'There are things in the sea that people yearn for, and those who go there are all sad. If the Han envoy does not miss his parents and wife, he can go in.' Ying could not cross. Emperor Wu of the Jin Dynasty, during the reign of the Tai-kang period, the Da-qin king sent envoys to pay tribute. ")

Here, An-xi refers to Persia, or ancient Iran; its First Persian Empire was the Achaemenid Empire (550-330 BC). At its largest, the Achaemenid Empire stretched west to the Mediterranean Sea, including the whole of modern-day Turkey in Asia Minor, also known as "the western border of An-xi." The Achaemenid Empire was conquered by Alexander the Great of the Macedonian-Greek Empire, and, after Alexander's death, his four generals divided up the empire. One of the four generals, Seleucus, took over the territory from east of the Mediterranean Sea to central Asia, and declared himself king of the Seleucid Empire (312-63 BC, which Han dynasty historical records called *Tiao-zhi*). This is the more accurate account recorded in the *History of the Eastern [Later] Han*, that "An-xi after the war was part of *Tiao-zhi* and was ruled by a great general who also ruled all the neighbouring small cities." The period in which Gan Ying was sent as an envoy to *Da-qin* (Roman Empire) was during the Parthian Empire of *An-xi* a.k.a. Persia (247 BC – AD 224).

Furthermore, the *History of the Latter Han* says, "The capital city of *Tiao-zhi* sits on a hill and its circumference is more than 40 Chinese miles. It overlooks the Western Sea and is surrounded on the south and northeast sides by seawater; the only land route is in the northwest corner, there are no roads to the other three sides." From the capital, the route back home "headed north then east, reaching An-xi after more than 60 days on horseback." The geographic features described here match those of Antioch (the modern-day Turkish city of Antakya), the capital of the Seleucid Empire (*Tiao-zhi*), even though at that time it was part of the Roman Empire. Elsewhere, it says that when Gan Ying arrived, he "traveled 3,400 Chinese miles west from An-xi to A-man country, then an additional 3,600 Chinese miles west to Si-bin country. From there, he journeyed south across the river, and then southwest for 960 Chinese miles to the Kingdom of Luo, which lay on An-xi's westernmost border. From there, going south by ship across the sea, was the route to *Da-qin*." The river mentioned here would be the Euphrates River. The location of the Kingdom of *Luo* would be the Roman province of Syria, of which Antioch was the provincial capital, although based on pronunciation, Luo might refer to the Roman Empire. Therefore, putting all this together, we know that the location where Gan Ying planned to cross the sea should be the Seleucia harbor in Antioch (or modern-day Turkey's Samandağ).

《后汉书·西域传第七十八》：“条支国城在山上，周回四十余里。邻西海，海水曲环其南及东北，三面路绝，唯西北隅通陆道。土地暑湿，出师子、犀牛、封牛、孔雀、大雀。大雀其卵如瓮 (The land is hot and humid, home to lions, rhinoceroses, oxen, peacocks, and large birds whose eggs are as big as jars.). 转北而东，复马行六十余日至安息。后役属条支，为置大将，监领诸小城焉。”

《后汉书·西域传第七十八》：“自安息西行三千四百里至阿蛮国。从阿蛮西行三千六百里至斯宾国。从斯宾南行度河，又西南至于罗国九百六十里，安息西界极矣。自此南乘海，乃通大秦。其土多海西珍奇异物焉。”

According to descriptions of the Silk Road by a Macedonian trader also from the first AD century, Antioch was the westernmost starting point of the Silk Road, which then crossed the Euphrates River at Hierapolis (Menbij), entering Persia's Parthian Empire. The route is the same as Gan Ying's route as recorded in the *Book of the Later Han*. That is to say, the route that Gan Ying took in his travels was the Silk Road, with Antioch—which was on the shore of the Western Sea (Mediterranean Sea)—as the end point of this route. Going further west was a route with which the Chinese people were not familiar. The *Book of the Later Han* also described *Da-qin* (Roman Empire) and praised its location, capital, customs, prosperity and greatness, political system, king, and people, though this was obviously not from the firsthand information.

According to the *Book of Acts* in the Bible, the city of Antioch was of great significance in the history of Christianity. Not only was the first church of non-Jews established here, but this was also the church

as far as three possible places: the Persian Gulf, the Caspian Sea, or the Black Sea before returning home (Yang, 2011: 124, 127, 129; Lin, 1991: 73). But this claim is based on a misunderstanding.

According to Grousset (1970: 40-41), Chinese classics such as *History of Han* (Ban, 1999: 2855) and *History of Later Han* (Fan, 1999: 1970-1971), in their respective “Western Regions” chapters, from an East Asian perspective, recount the Silk Road, or the Eurasia Road, starting from the Chinese capitals *Chang-an* or *Luo-yang* and stretching westward, passing major cities in the *He-xi* corridor such as the last one, *Su-zhou* (present day *Jiu-quan* in Gansu province), where the Silk Road began splitting. The northern path strayed in the direction of *Yi-wu* city (Kumul, or present-day Hami, Xinjiang), heading north from Hami for 40 kilometres to the mountain pass, and crossed the Tian-shan Mountains, turning left towards the Barkul Lake along the northern side of the mountains, while the southern path went directly south-westward toward to the Jade Gate Pass (*Yu-men-guan*) and the Yang Pass (*Yang-guan*), connecting through the Tarim Basin. Despite numerous sub-routes and sub-paths leading in a variety of directions to the Tian-shan Mountains by which the Silk Road divided into two main branches, the northern one and the southern one.

Extending from Kumul along the southern foot of the mountains, the path stretched to the Turpan Basin, where it continued westward into the mountains and became another route. This route, not shown in the map below, via the *Bing-da-ban* mountain pass, arrived at the Narati pastureland in the Kunes River in the Ili River Valley in the Tian-shan Mountains before finally reaching Ili city (*Yi-li* in Chinese), which connected it to the northern branch of the Silk Road. This route in the mountains is in fact a part of the northern branch, and it became an official path during the rule of the Chagatai Mongols when the envoy Chen Cheng from Ming China visited the

that commissioned the first great missionary: the Apostle Paul. The port of Seleucia was where Paul, accompanied by church networker Barnabas, boarded a ship on his first missionary journey (AD 46-48., see Acts 13-14) with Cyprus as the first stop. In the autumn of AD 59, Paul crossed the Mediterranean Sea by ship for Rome, but on the way “a wind of hurricane force, called the Northeaster, swept down from the island.” The ship was destroyed and he floated at sea for 14 days. The passengers overcame many hardships and barely survived. In the spring of AD 60, he finally arrived in Rome (Acts 27-28). Forty years later, what the sailors in Seleucia told the Han envoy Gan Ying was certainly no exaggeration: ‘The sea is vast. With favorable winds, the round-trip takes three months. If the winds are not favourable, it can take up to two years ...’ So Gan Ying looked out over the Mediterranean Sea, heaved a great sigh, and turned back for the Han satrap court, thus bringing to an end the furthest diplomatic mission to the West in Chinese history before the two Uyghur Christian monks journeyed in the late thirteenth century during the Yuan-China dynasty of the Mongol Empire.

khanate in 1414 after a 21-day journey from the Turpan Basin to the bank of the Kunes River (Chen, 2000: 25-26, 37, 39; 54-55, footnote 32).



Figure 2. 5: The Chinese westernmost frontier and the Silk Road in the Western Regions ²²

The vast Tarim Basin divided the southern branch of the Silk Road into a northern route and a southern route. The northern route extends directly westwards along the southern foot of the mountains, i.e. along the northern rim of the basin, passing through Turpan basin, Karasahr, Kucha (*Qiu-ci*), Aksu (*Gu-mo*), and Kashgar, where it finally merges with the southern route, which runs along the northern foot of the Kun-lun mountains, i.e. along the southern rim of the basin through *Lou-lan*, Lop Nor Lake, Khotan, Yarkant, and Shu-le. From Kashgar, the branch once again diverges into two routes, one of them going south through valleys (or via the Tashkurgan kingdom through the Wakhan Corridor in another sub-route) crossing Kunlun, Kara Kunlun, and the Himalayan Mountains before arriving at the Hindu River plains, and the other route continues west through the vast Pamir Mountains before arriving at the Bactria-Amu River regions and connecting with the northern branch, which rose along the northern side of the Tian-shan Mountains before dipping down southwest and crossing the Yili River via the Zhetysu region, or via Issyk Lake, to Chu River, Syr River, before reaching Amu River. Then, the Silk Road continues westward through Persia, west Asia, and the Asia Minor Peninsula in the Roman Empire, also known as *Da-qin* in Chinese (Grousset, 1970: 40-41).

²² Source: <https://google.com/maps/@43.2297362,82.8823664,5.18z/data=!5m1!1e4?entry=ttu>

2.2.2 The Silk Road in Chinese Classics and Macedonian-Greek Classics

The excerpt below is a description of the southern branch of the Silk Road written by Ban Gu (1999: 2855), a Chinese Han dynasty court historian, in his first-century book *History of Han: Western Regions*. Note that it does not mention the Turpan Basin as being part of the southern branch. Later, in the fourth century, the Southern dynasty court historian Fan Ye, in his *History of Later Han: Western Regions* (1999: 1970-1971), copied Ban Gu's records of the Silk Road branch including the Turpan Basin:

Leaving for the Western Regions from the Jade Gate and the Yang Pass there are two routes: The southern route comes from *Shan-shan* [formerly *Lou-lan*] along the northern side of the southern mountains (Altun-Kunlun Mountains); it travels westward to *Sha-che* [Yarkant] along the river [Tarim River]. The southern route then goes out westward through the Great *Yue-zhi* [Amu Darya River] and *An-xi* [Iran or Persia]. The northern route starts at the former capital of the *Ju-shi* kingdom [or *Gu-shi* in the Turpan Basin] and continues along the northern mountains [Tian-shan Mountains]; it travels westward to *Shu-le* [Kashgar] along the river. The northern route then goes westward passing *Cong-ling* [the Pamirs] through *Da-yuan* [Sogdiana in the Fergana Basin], *Kang-ju* [Samarkand region and lower Syr Darya River], and *Yan-cai* [Alans, around Aral Sea] along the way.²³

Ban Gu and Fan Ye also added that the southern route led from the Jade Gate and the Yang Pass to the south via *Shan-shan* (*Lou-lan*) (Ban, 1999: 2866)²⁴ before stretching westward through the eight kingdoms located on the southern route along the southern rim of the Tarim

²³ 班固：《汉书·西域传第六十六上》：“自玉门、阳关出西域有两道。从鄯善【楼兰】傍南山北，波河西行至莎车，为南道；南道西逾则出大月氏【阿姆河流域】、安息【伊朗】。自车师前王庭【吐鲁番盆地】随北山，波河西行至疏勒，为北道；北道西逾葱岭【帕米尔高原】出大宛【费尔干纳】、康居【撒马尔罕—锡尔河下游】、奄蔡【咸海一带】焉。”

(Ban Gu, *Book of Han*, "No. 66 Western Regions": "There are two routes from Yu-men and Yang-guan to the Western Regions. From Shanshan [Lou-lan] along the north side of the South Mountain, along the river goes west to Sha-che is the southern route. The southern route going west to the Greater Yuezhi [Amu Darya River Basin] and Parthia [Iran]. From the former royal court of Ju-shi [Turpan Basin], along the Northern Mountain, beside the River going west to Shu-le, is the northern route; the northern route goes west over the Pamirs [Pamir Mountains] to Da-yuan [Fergana], Kang-ju [Samarkand - the lower reaches of the Syr Darya], and Yan-cai [the area around the Aral Sea].")

²⁴ Ibid. “自玉门、阳关出南道，历鄯善而南行，至乌弋山离，南道极矣。转北而东得安息。”

("From Yu-men and Yang-guan, take the southern route, pass Shan-shan and go south to Wu-yi Mountain, the end of the southern route. Turn north and east to rest.")

Basin (Ban, G., 1999: 2869).²⁵

Additionally, according to Han Chinese court history, emperor *Han-wu* dispatched his army for a long march in order to conquer the *Da-yuan* kingdom in the Fergana Basin on the western side of the Pamirs because the kingdom refused to sell their best horses to Han China. In the summer of 102 BC (the *Tai-chu* third year of emperor *Han-wu*) (Ban, 1999: 2043),²⁶ after the Chinese army failed to conquer the *Da-yuan* kingdom, the emperor once again dispatched his army for the same purpose. The army started off at the *He-xi* Corridor and *Dun-huang*, where it split into two units and separately traveled along the northern and southern route in the Tarim Basin. It seems that the unit traveling via the southern route arrived at *Da-yuan* earlier than the other unit (Si-ma, Q., 2000: 2409).²⁷

According to the Swedish explorer Sven Hedin in 1899, there was a route on the Tarim River beginning from north of Yarkant, that was used to sail across the Basin (Hansen, 2012: PLATE 10),²⁸ and would eventually reach the Lop Nor Lake (or *Pu-chang* sea²⁹), where one could then

²⁵ Ibid. “至成帝时，……敦煌、酒泉小郡及南道八国，给使者往来人马驴橐驼食，皆苦之。”

("During the reign of Emperor Cheng, ... the small counties of Dun-huang and Jiu-quan and the eight states in the southern route who provided envoys with food on horses, donkeys, carts and camels, ill-treated the passengers.")

²⁶ In the first year of the *Tai-chu*, *Er-shi* General Li Guangli led the Han army on a long march to attack *Da-yuan* in the Fergana basin and failed. The round trip took two years. A second expedition was successful and it returned in the spring of the fourth year of *Tai-chu* according to "Chronicle Six of Emperor Wu" (Ban, 1999: 144). The two expeditions together took four years (Ban, 1999: 2870).

²⁷ 司马迁：《史记·大宛列传第六十三》：“初，贰师起敦煌西，以为人多，道上国不能食，乃分为数军，从**南北道**。校尉王申生、故鸿胪壶充国等千余人，别到郁成。郁成城守，不肯给食其军。王申生去大军二百里，俛而轻之，责郁成。”

(Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian*, "No. 63 Da-yuan": "At first, the Han army for expediting Er-shi [Osh] kingdom started from the west of Dunhuang. The [general] considered that there were too many people and that the upper country on the way could not provide food, so he divided his army into several groups and they took the southern and northern routes. The lieutenant Wang Shen-sheng and the former Secretary of the International affairs in Han court, Hu Chong-guo, leading more than a thousand people, went to Yu City separately. Yu City was guarded by a general who refused to provide food for the Han army. Wang Shen-sheng was now 200 Chinese miles away from the main Han army, and he looked down on the city general and blamed the Yu City.")

²⁸ In 1899, Swedish explorer Sven Hedin started out by boat from north of *Sha-che* (Yarkant) on a sub-river of the upper Tarim River and sailed eastward along the river. After 82 days of 1,500 km's journey, he had to give up eventually because of the flowing ice in the river, and he went ashore at a place that was three days' journey away from Korla in the northwest area of the Tarim Basin.

²⁹ Fan Ye, *Book of the Later Han*, "No. 87 Western Regions" (p. 1970): “西域内属诸国，东西六千余里，南北千余里，东极玉门、阳关，西至葱岭。其东北与匈奴、乌孙相接。南北有大山，中央有河。其南

seemingly travel on land through *Lou-lan* and *Dun-huang* to get to the *He-xi* Corridor. Therefore, the river route can be viewed as the middle route of the southern branch through the Tarim Basin, and it is most likely what Ban Gu was referring to when he mentioned “it travels westward to *Sha-che* [Yarkant]” or “*Shu-le* [Kashgar] along the river” which is referred to as the Tarim River or *Ji-shi* River in later Chinese court history. Ban Gu and Fan Ye did not differentiate the middle waterways from the northern route and the southern route through the Tarim Basin.

From a geographic perspective, Ban Gu’s description of the Silk Road is quite general in explaining that the southern branch is split by the Tarim Basin into two routes. The two routes merge before crossing the Pamirs while a path splits at Yarkant from the southern route before it reaches Kashgar and then merges with the other after crossing the Pamirs. Ban Gu also recorded a new short-cut path:

Under the reign of *Yuan-shi*, the Back Section [north of the Tian-shan Mountains] of the *Ju-shi* kingdom discovered a new path that travels to the north of *Wu-chuan* before reaching Jade Gate in the south, this path being a shortcut. So the Chinese army lieutenant general Xu Pu is planning to turn this new path into a high-way in order to avoid the natural hazard of the White Dragon landform...The king of the Back Section of the *Ju-shi* kingdom, *Gu-ju*, thought that the road through his kingdom would require his support for travelers, so he became anxious. Since his territory is connected to the domain of the general of southern Huns,...He then rode and ran hastily out of *Gao-chang* [Kocho] Gorge into the shelter of the Huns (Ban, G., 1999: 2890).³⁰

山东出金城，与汉南山属焉。其河有两源，一出葱岭东流，一出于崑南山下北流，与葱岭河合，东注蒲昌海。蒲昌海一名盐泽，去玉门三百余里。”

("The various countries in the Western Regions, cover more than 6,000 Chinese miles from east to west and more than 1,000 Chinese miles from north to south. They extend to Yu-men Pass and Yang-guan Pass in the east and the Cong mountains [Pamirs] in the west. In the northeast, it borders the Xiong-nu and Wu-sun. There are big mountains in the north and south, with a river flowing between. In the south, the mountain leads to Jin-cheng in the east and is connected to the South Mountain in Han [China]. The river has two sources, one flows out of the Cong Mountains and flows east, and the other flows out of the foot of the Mountain at Yu-tian [Khotan] and flows north, merging with the Cong-ling River, and flows into Pu-chang Sea in the east. Pu-chang Sea is also called Salt Lake and is more than 300 Chinese miles away from Yu-men [Pass].")

³⁰ 班固：《汉书·西域传第 66 下》：“元始中，车师后王国有新道，出五船北，通玉门关，往来差近，戊己【已】校尉徐普欲开以省道里半，避白龙堆之阨。车师后王姑句以道当为拄置，心不便也。地又颇与匈奴南将军地接，普欲分明其界然后奏之，召姑句使证之，不肯，系之。姑句数以牛羊赂吏，求出不得。”

In his passage, Ban Gu also includes the earliest record of the name *Gao-chang* (Kocho), which, in later generations, became the name of the kingdoms in the Turpan Basin. According to *Comprehensive Institutions (Tong-dian)*, the reign of *Yuan-shi*, emperor *Han-ping*, was from AD 1-5 when *Gao-chang* in the Turpan Basin officially became an important part of the new path that connected both branches of the Silk Road together. The *Gao-chang* (Kocho), along with *Bei-ting*, which was north of the Tian-shan, were called the gates for entering the Western Regions. The gates were part of the westernmost frontier area that the Chinese would step into right after entering the Western Regions (Du, Y., 1992: 5194, 5198).³¹

Fan Ye provided more details about the city-state kingdoms in the Tarim Basin, especially during the sixteenth year of *Yong-ping* (AD 72), when emperor *Han-ming* defeated the Huns and took over the agricultural paradise *Yi-wu* (Kumul, Hami) region, located 400 kilometres east of the Turpan Basin, establishing a military agricultural base and appointing a superior official with a lieutenant general rank (Fan, Y., 1999: 1967).³² Chinese occupation of the *Yi-wu* region with a

得。姑句家矛盾生火，其妻股紫陬谓姑句曰：“矛盾生火，此兵气也，利以用兵。前车师前王为都护司马所杀，今久系必死，不如降匈奴。”即驰突出高昌壁，入匈奴。”

³¹ 【唐】杜佑：《通典》卷第 191 边防七“西戎三”。 Volume 191: “Border Defence 7, Western Foreigners 3”.

³² 范晔：《后汉书·西域传第七十八》：“武帝时，西域内属，有三十六国。汉为置使者、校尉领护之。宣帝改曰都护。元帝又置戊己【已】二校尉，屯田于车师前王庭。哀平间，自相分割，为五十五国。王莽篡位，贬易侯王，由是西域怨叛，与中国遂绝，并复役属匈奴。匈奴敛税重刻，诸国不堪命，建武中，皆遣使求内属，愿请都护。光武以天下初定，未遑外事，竟不许之。会匈奴衰弱，莎车王贤诛灭诸国。贤死之后，遂更相攻伐。小宛、精绝、戎庐、且末为鄯善所并。渠勒、皮山为于寔所统，悉有其地。郁立、单桓、孤胡、乌贪訾离为车师所灭。后其国并复立。永平中，北虏乃胁诸国共寇河西郡县，城门昼闭。十六年，明帝乃命将帅，北征匈奴，取伊吾卢地，置宜禾都尉以屯田，遂通西域，于寔诸国皆遣子入侍。西域自绝六十五载，乃复通焉。明年，始置都护、戊己【已】校尉。”

(Fan Ye, *Book of the Later Han*, “No. 78 Western Regions”: “During the reign of Emperor Wu, the Western Regions were annexed by China and had 36 states. The Han China appointed envoys and colonels to lead and protect them. [In AD 60], Emperor Xuan changed [the former the military administrative division in the Western Regions] to Protectorate with the colonels as the Protector General. Emperor Yuan also appointed two colonels, Wu and Ji [or Si], to cultivate land in the former royal court of Jus-shi. During the reign of Emperor Ai-ping, the Western Regions were divided among themselves, and became 55 countries. Wang Mang usurped the throne and demoted the princes and lords. As a result, the Western Regions resented and rebelled, breaking their ties with China and becoming subject to the Xiong-nu again. The Xiong-nu imposed heavy taxes on the states, and they could not bear it. During the reign of Emperor Guang-wu, they all sent envoys to ask for annexation by the Protector General. Emperor Guang-wu did not agree to this because he had just settled the country and had no time to deal with foreign affairs. When the Xiong-nu became weak, the King of Sha-che Xian, conquered all the states [in the western regions]. After Xian's death, the states attacked each other. The States of Xiao-yuan, Jing-jue, Rong-lu, and Qie-mo were annexed by the Shan-shan states. Qu-le and Pi-shan were ruled by Yu-Tian, who took over all their

direct connection to Turpan Basin along the southern foot of the Tian-shan Mountains without a detour from the Jade Gate implied a strategic break-through in control of the connecting point of both branches of the Silk Road, and allowing further successful resistance to the Huns north of the mountains to occur. Similar to the fate of the Turpan Basin, *Yi-wu* became a hot spot that the Chinese and the Huns fought over repeatedly (Fan, Y., 1999: 1970-1971),³³ splitting into the northern section and southern section by the Tian-shan range.

One of the lost Chinese classics, *Brief History of Wei* by Yu Huan, written in the mid-third century, in its only preserved chapter "Western Foreigners," recorded the branches and routes of the Silk Road with detailed descriptions of the geography, names, and cultural customs of the kingdoms along the Road (Chen, S., 1999: 636-637). Its unique information is valuable, though some of it is based on legend.

The most comprehensive and accurate records of the Silk Road remain in the *Book of Sui*, written by Wei Zheng, the Tang-China court historian in the mid-seventh century. In the chapter "Chronicle 32" about General Pei Ju, it notes he was stationed in the *He-xi* Corridor and spent his time interviewing many businessmen from the Western Regions and beyond, and collected many related books. After carefully checking and confirming that the information was accurate, he finally wrote *Geography of Western Regions (Xi-yu-tu-ji)*, which covered over forty kingdoms, and presented it to emperor *Sui-yang*. The book was largely lost, but the remaining parts describe three major routes of the Silk Road on both sides of the Tian-shan, connecting with each other

lands. Yu-li, Shan-huan, Gu-hu, Wu-tan-zi-li were conquered by Ju-shi, and later their states were re-established. In the middle of the Yong-ping reign, the northern barbarians abducted those states to join the attacks on the counties and prefectures in the He-xi regions [of China], causing the city gates were closed during the day time. In the 16th year, Emperor Ming ordered the generals to march north to attack the Xiong-nu [Huns], take the Yi-wu (Hami) lands, set up farming colonels to cultivate the land, and then open up to the Western Regions. Yu-tian and other states all sent their sons to serve the Han China court. But the Western Regions were cut off for 65 years (from China) before they were opened up again. The next year, the Protector General and Wu-si Colonel were then appointed.")

³³ Fan Ye, *Book of the Later Han*, "No. 78 Western Regions: "自敦煌西出玉门、阳关，涉鄯善，北通伊吾千余里，自伊吾北通车师前部高昌壁千二百里，自高昌壁北通后部金满城五百里。此其西域之门户也，故戊己【已】校尉更互屯焉。伊吾地宜五谷、桑麻、蒲萄。其北又有柳中，皆膏腴之地。故汉常与匈奴争车师、伊吾，以制西域焉。"——范晔：《后汉书·西域传第七十八》

(From Dun-huang, going west through Yu-men and Yang passes, across Shan-shan, and going north to Yiwu for more than a thousand Chinese miles, and from Yi-wu to the front of Ju-shi, Gao-chang Gorge, 1,200 Chinese miles journey, and from Gao-chang Gorge to the rear of Jin-man city, 500 miles north. These two places (Yi-wu and Ju-shi) are the gateway to the Western Regions, so the Wu-Si colonel stationed two of the places in turn. Yi-wu is a good place for growing grains, mulberry, hemp, and grapes. To the north is Liu-zhong, which is fertile land. Therefore, the Han China often competed with the Xiong-nu [Huns] for Ju-shi and Yi-wu to control the Western Regions.)

along the way because, inside the kingdoms, “they have their own roads connecting in a south-west direction” (Wei, Z., 2000: 1062).³⁴ Therefore, the Silk Road and the roads in these kingdoms created a grid-like path by connecting with each other in all four directions instead of only horizontally as some scholars have generally assumed.

General Pei Ju emphasized here that *Yi-wu* (Kumul, Hami), Kocho (Turpan) and *Shan-shan* (*Lou-lan*) were the gates through which the Chinese could access the Western Regions. He also pointed out that the Silk Road ended at the Western Sea, also known as the Mediterranean Sea, rather than the city of Rome. The Silk Road only reached as far as the eastern part of the Roman Empire, the eastern shore of the Western Sea, when the empire reached its peak under the reign of the Byzantine emperor Justin I. Pei Ju’s information on the Silk Road stands as a good supplement to the records from the historians in the earlier ages, including Yu Huan, Fan Ye, and Ban Gu.

Based on the above Chinese classic writers, there are four sub-routes of the Silk Road that pass through the Turpan Basin, Yan-qi Basin and the Tarim Basin. Two of the sub-routes, along the northern and southern rims of the Tarim Basin, remain the most important and busiest paths. The other two, including the route from the Turpan Basin westward into the Tian-shan Mountains

³⁴ 【唐】魏徵：《隋书·列传第 32·裴矩》：“发自敦煌，至于西海，凡为三道，各有襟带。北道从伊吾【哈密】，经蒲类海【巴里坤湖】铁勒部，突厥可汗庭，度北流河水，至拂菻国【可能是叙利亚】，达于西海【地中海】。其中道从高昌，焉耆，龟兹，疏勒，度葱岭，又经拔汗，苏对沙那国，康国，曹国，何国，大、小安国，穆国，至波斯，达于西海。其南道从鄯善【楼兰】，于阗，朱俱波、喝槃陀，度葱岭，又经护密，吐火罗，挹怛【嚙哒】，帆延，漕国，至北婆罗门，达于西海。其三道诸国，亦各自有路，南北交通。其东女国、南婆罗门国等，并随其所往，诸处得达。故知伊吾、高昌、鄯善，并西域之门户也。总凑敦煌，是其咽喉之地。”

([Tang] Wei Zheng, *Book of Sui*, "No. 32 Pei Ju": "Starting from Dun-huang, to the West Sea, there are three routes, each with its own networking. The northern route starts from Yi-wu [Hami], passes through Pu-le-hai [Barkol Lake] Tie-le tribe, reaching the court of the Turkic Khan. Going further, it crosses the river flowing to the north, reaching to the Fu-lin Kingdom [probably Syria], and arrives at the West Sea [Mediterranean Sea]. The middle route goes from Gao-chang, Yan-qi, Qiu-ci, Shu-le, crosses the Pamir Mountains, passes through the Bohan, Su-dui-sha-na Kingdom, Kang state, Cao state, He state, Da, Greater and Lesser An Kingdoms and the Mu Kingdom, reaches Persia and arrives at the Western Sea. The southern route goes through Shan-shan [Lou-lan], Khotan, Zhu-ju-bo, and He-pan-tu, crosses the Pamir Mountains, and passes through Hu-mi, Tocharine, Ye-da [Hephthalite], Yun-yan, and Cao Kingdom, to the Northern Brahman, and other states, and reaches the Western Sea. The states on the three routes also have their own roads, connecting the north and the south. The Eastern Women's Kingdom and the Southern Brahman Kingdom also follow their way and reach all places. Therefore, we know that Yi-wu, Gao-chang, and Shan-shan are the gateways to the Western Regions. All of them gather in Dun-huang, which is the hub of all roads. ")

and the route along the Tarim River, are short cuts and are not a priority for armies or diplomats or for business or religious travellers.

Generally, during the time of Han China, the Tarim Basin was comparatively safe because the surrounding mountains acted as natural protection, though they never actually stopped ambitious foreign invasions. As noted, the western end of the Tarim Basin there is a route that connects Kashgar and the Hindu River plain, where the Indo-Europeans lived. At the southern rim of Tarim, ancient Tibetans (Western *Qiang*) reached the bottom rim at the Khotan region via the Kun-lun Mountain pass. At the northern rim, Scythians (Grousset, 1970: 52) came through the Tian-shan Mountains via the Sarmatia pass. Finally, at the eastern rim of the Tarim Basin, the Huns and the Chinese fought continually over control of the Silk Road entrance.

Ptolemy explains in *The Geography* (1991: 33) that agents to describe the Silk Road from a West-Asian perspective were sent by Macedonian trader Maes Titanos in the first century in order to “reconnoiter the route and its principal landmarks” (Grousset, 1970: 40-41). This event seems to have been recorded by Han Chinese historians as well according to contemporary Chinese scholars (Yang, G. L., 2011: 86; Lin, M. C., 1991: 85-86, 88). In addition, *Notes to Things Old and New (Gu-jin-zhu)*, from the third century or the fourth century, and the later *Book of Jin: Music Records* and other classics agree that the first Han Chinese diplomat Zhang Qian brought back “a Macedonian music” from the Western Regions (Yang, G. L., 2011: 77-78).³⁵ In his *Book of Later Han*: Chronicle 78 “Western Regions”, Fan Ye reports that the lieutenant general Gan Ying came back from his diplomatic journey all the way to Antioch in AD 97, and consequently “[t]he remote kingdoms of *Meng-qi* and *Dou-le* all submitted and sent envoys with tributes [to China]” (Fan, 1999: 1968).³⁶ *Meng-qi Dou-le* sounds like the Chinese phonetic translation of Macedonia.

³⁵ 【唐】房玄龄：《晋书·乐志》记载：“张博望入西域，传其法于西京，唯得摩诃兜勒一曲。李延年因胡曲更造新声二十八解，乘輿以为武乐。”又据《古今乐录》：“横吹，胡乐也；张骞入西域，传其法于长安，唯得摩诃兜勒一曲；李延年因之更造新声二十八解，乘輿以为武乐。”

([Tang] Fang Xuanling, *Book of Jin*, “Music History” records: “Zhang Bo-wang (duke) went to the Western Regions and spread his learnings in the western capital [Chang-an], with only one piece of music mo-he-dou-le [Macedonia]. Li Yan-nian created 28 new tunes based on the piece of Hu music and used it as military music.” According to “Records of Ancient and Modern Music”: “Holding [flute] horizontally and blowing air is from Hu music. Zhang Qian went to the Western Regions and spread his learnings in Chang'an, with only one piece of music mo-he-dou-le. Thus Li Yannian created 28 new tunes based on it and used it as military music.”)

³⁶ 范晔：《后汉书·西域传第七十八》：“【和帝永元】九年，班超遣掾甘英穷临西海而还。皆前世所不至，《山经》所未详，莫不备其风土，传其珍怪焉。于是远国蒙奇、兜勒皆来归服，遣使贡献。”

(Fan Ye, *Book of the Later Han*, “Records of the Western Regions, 78”: “In the ninth year of Emperor He's Yong-yuan reign, Ban Chao sent his official Gan Ying to explore the Western Sea and returned after

Fan also recorded in Chronicle 4 “Emperors *Xiao-he* and *Xiao-Shang*” that, in the *Yong-yuan* twelfth year of emperor *Han-he*, which was AD 100, the year Ptolemy was born, “In November of the winter, the two kingdoms of *Meng-qi* and *Dou-le* from Western Regions sent envoys to submit and their kings were rewarded with golden stamp with purple ribbon [by the Han emperor]” (Fan, 1999: 128).³⁷

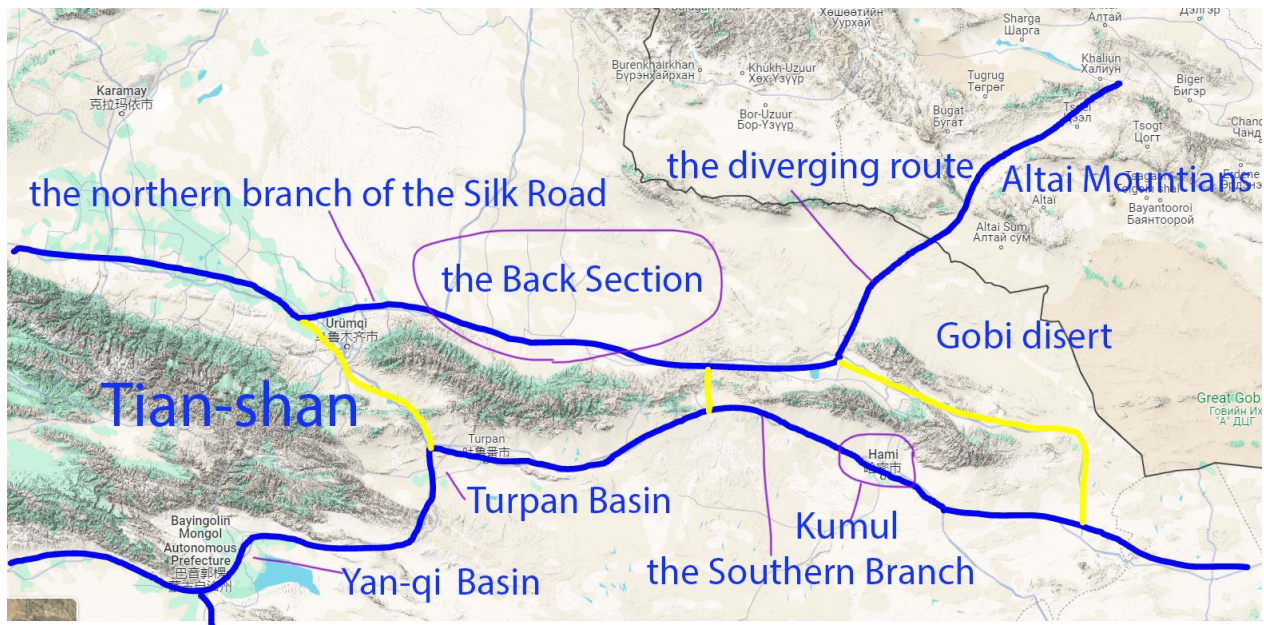


Figure 2. 6: The diverging route connecting the northern branch and the grassland through the Altai Mountains ³⁸

The Silk Road, according to a Macedonian trader and his delegation, starting from Antioch (*An-du* in Chinese classics according to Zhu, 1998: 28), the capital of Syria in the Roman Empire, crosses the Euphrates River at Hierapolis (Menbij), entering the Parthian Empire of Persia, before passing through Ecbatana (Hamadan). Then, it goes through Rhagae, also known as Rai (located

reaching [the Sea]. These were places that had never been visited before, and places that were not detailed in the *Shan Jing*. Gan Ying described the local customs and about the rare and strange things. As a result, the distant countries of *Meng-qi* and *Dou-le* came to submit and sent envoys to pay tribute [to China].")

³⁷ 范晔：《后汉书·孝和孝殇帝纪第四》：“【汉和帝永元十二年】冬十一月，西域蒙奇、兜勒二国遣使内附，赐其王金印紫绶。”

(Fan Ye, *Book of the Later Han Dynasty*, “Volume 4: Chronicles of Emperors Xiao-he and Xiao-shang”: “In the eleventh month of the winter of the twelfth year of Emperor He’s Yong-yuan reign, the two kingdoms of *Meng-qi* and *Dou-le* in the Western Regions sent envoys to submit to [Han China], and their kings were granted golden seals and purple ribbons.”)

³⁸ Source: <https://google.com/maps/@43.6225127,92.1036944,7.19z/data=!5m1!1e4?entry=ttu>

close to present-day Teheran, India), Hecatompylos, Merv, and the city of Balkh in Bactria (*Da-xia* in Chinese classics). Finally, the Silk Road arrives at the valley of the Kyzyl-Su River in the Pamir Mountains before entering the Kashgar River valley.

From Kashgar, the Silk Road splits into two routes; the northern route goes through Kucha, Karasahr (*Yan-qi*), *Lou-lan* (Lop Nor), and the Jade Gate, before finally reaching *Dun-huang*; the southern route passes along the lower edge of the Tarim Basin, Yarkant (*Sha-che* in Chinese), Khotan (*Yu-tian* or *He-tian* in Chinese), Niya (in the Niya State), and Miran in the *Lou-lan* State. The two routes rejoin at *Dun-huang* via the Jade Gate. The Silk Road then continues to present-day *Jiu-quan* and *Zhang-ye* in the Gansu province and ends at either capital *Chang-an* (*Xi-an*, the capital of present-day Shaanxi province) or capital *Luo-yang* (in present-day Henan province). Ptolemy referred to China as Serica, the country of silk, and its capital *Chang-an* as Sera Metropolis (Ptolemy, 1991: 145-146).

From this description, we know that the Silk Road or the Eurasia Road had two trunk roads in the northern and southern sides of the Tian-shan Mountains. The location of the Turpan, Yan-qi, and the Tarim Basins were very advantageous.

Zhang Qian, the first Han Chinese envoy for the Western Regions from capital *Chang-an*, travelled via the northern branch of the Silk Road along the northern foot of the Tian-shan Mountains and arrived at the Bactrian Tocharian kingdom in the Amu River region as well as the Scythian *Da-yuan* kingdom in the Fergana Basin. When he returned, he travelled eastward through the Pamir Mountains along the Wakhan Corridor and arrived at the southwestern rim of the Tarim Basin (in the present-day Tashkurgan county of Xinjiang, China). Then, taking the southern route of the southern branch of the Silk Road, he went along the southern rim of the Tarim through Khotan, *Lou-lan*, and *Dun-huang*, before going back to *Chang-an* via the He-xi corridor, or more likely the southern root of the Qi-lian mountains along the northern edge of Tibet to avoid the Huns who were controlling the corridor.

Later, in the seventh century, Tang-China Buddhist monk Xuan-zang followed the same route that Zhang Qian travelled, using it to return to China. During the rule of the Mongol Empire in the late thirteenth century, two Uyghur Christian monks from Beijing travelled the southern route in the Tarim Basin as pilgrims to Jerusalem. Marco Polo also travelled the southern route when he passed the Tarim Basin to go to China. During the age of Tang China at the latest, the northern branch of the Silk Road provided a diverging route away from Tian-shan to the northeast, connecting the north section of the Kumul-Barkul region and present-day western Mongolian grasslands. This route provided travellers passage through the southwestern end of the Altai Mountains from both directions, west of the Gobi Desert.

2.3 The Tocharian Natives in the Arshi-Yanqi-Karasahr basin, the *Jushi-Kocho-Turpan Basin*, and the kumul-hami section Prior to AD 640 when Tang-China Took over the Kocho Kingdom

According to my research, the original inhabitants south of the Tian-shan Mountains were Aryan-type Indo-Europeans, and the Tarim Basin actually used to be part of what I refer to as the Bactria-Tocharian civilization block. This block also extends to link the Yan-qi Basin, the Kocho Basin, and the Kumul region, consisting of three of the Four-Regions. Today, only a very small number of them still live in the regions, mostly in remote isolated places around the Tarim Basin and in the Pamir Mountains. These are the people whom Greek historians called “Sarmatians type” or “Bactrian type” and Chinese historians called *Da-xia* and *Tu-huo-luo* or *Du-huo-luo* (“Tocharians” as a Germanic translation). Noted by the geographer Ptolemy as the *Thagouri* people, they were also known in Greek as Tokharoi and Sanskrit Tukhara (Grousset, 1970: 28). These were mighty warriors (before embracing Buddhism) and the lance was their characteristic weapon (Grousset, 1970: 15).

Beginning in about the third century BC, many of them appeared on the Russian steppes, pushing out the Scythians (Grousset, 1970: 15-16) and settling there in their stead. They may have later become Russians along the Caspian Sea and the Volga River. Modern archaeological discoveries suggest, however, in ancient times, many Sarmatians also lived in the regions of the Bactria-Tocharian civilization block bordered by the Syr River on the north, the upper Hindu River (south of Hindu Kush Mountains) on the south, the eastern Iran Plateau on the west, and on the east what would become today’s Xinjiang of China, south of the Tian-shan mountain range and the Tarim Basin, along the Silk Road from Kashgar to Kucha and to Khotan, through Kocho (present-day Turpan Basin) (Grousset, 1970: 28-29, 125; Gao, Y. J., 1997: 31) and *Dun-huang*, and even to Kumul (present-day Hami) (Mallory & Mair, 2000: 14-16).

During China’s Han dynasty, many of them lived in the Bactria and as far as the Sogdiana Basin, which included both sides of the Amu Darya River (or Oxus Darya River), and the Tarim Basin, stretching all the way to *Dun-huang* in the east to the entrance of the *He-xi* Corridor in today’s Gansu province, China. Due to the unique and natural geographical protection provided by the Tarim Basin, Yan-qi Basin, Turpan Basin, and Kumul region, which was surrounded by large mountains and the Gobi Desert, the Tocharian-Aryan Indo-Europeans living there were able to preserve their civilization and culture for the longest amount of time.

In addition, another group of green-eyed Tocharians at the lower Syr River by the Aral Sea, “Alans” in Chinese classics, were also Sarmatian type. Their kingdom by the Don River later fell in AD 370s at the hands of the Huns who migrated west to the region next to the Alan kingdom

after being defeated by the Chinese a few centuries ago (Fan, Y., 2000: 1976; We, S., 2000: 1536).³⁹ They later joined Byzantine Orthodox Christianity during the tenth century or so and became known again in the age of Genghis Khan Mongol. It seems Sarmatians in Central Asia gradually lost their honourable title of “mighty warriors,” at least in the Bactrian regions along the Amu River, and were even degraded to “weak soldiers afraid of fighting” according to the records of the Chinese envoy Zhang Qia who visited the regions in 130s BC. The reason for this remains unknown, but it might have been due to their acceptance of Buddhism (Wei, Z., 2000: 1243),⁴⁰ or maybe enjoyment of prosperous and highly civilised urban life for too long.

2.3.1 The Linguistic, Archaeological, and Anthropological Studies of the Blue-Eyed (and Green-Eyed) and Blonde Tocharians

The origin of the Tocharian language has been the source of considerable debate and confusion among scholars. My hypothesis is that it was the language of the Tocharians, the people of the Bactria-Tocharian civilization block. It is the traditional language of the native Aryan type Indo-Europeans who were known as the *Da-xia* (Bactrian) people by the Chinese Han dynasty.

Some scholars have suggested the language should be named after the three places where

³⁹ 范晔：《后汉书·西域传第七十八》：“奄蔡国改名阿兰聊国，居地城，属康居。土气温和，多桢松、白草。民俗衣服与康居同。”

(Fan Ye, *Book of the Later Han*, “No. 78 Western Regions”: “Yan-cai State was renamed Alan-liao State, located in Di city, belonging to Kang-ju. The soil is mild-warm, with many pine trees and white grass. The folk customs and clothing is the same as that of Kang-ju.”)

魏收：《魏书·列传第九十西域》：“粟特国，在葱岭之西，古之奄蔡，一名温那沙。居于大泽，在康居西北，去代一万六千里。先是，匈奴杀其王而有其国，至王忽倪已三世矣。……高宗初，粟特王遣使请赎之，诏听焉。”

(Wei Shou, *Book of Wei*, “Chronicle 90: Western Regions”: “Sogdia is located west of the Pamir Mountains. It was called Yan-cai in ancient times and was also called Wen-na-sha. It lived in the Great Marsh, northwest of Kang-ju, 16,000 Chinese miles away from Dai state. Before that, the Xiong-nu killed its king and took over the country. It had been ruled by King Huni for three generations. ... At the beginning of Emperor Gao-zong's reign, the King of Sogdia sent an envoy to ask for release of his people, and the emperor granted his request.”)

⁴⁰ Wei, Zheng, *Book of Sui*, Chronicle 48, “Western Regions”: “吐火罗国，都葱岭西五百里，与挹怛杂居。都城方二里。胜兵者十万人，皆习战。其俗奉佛。”

(“The country of Tocharia, whose capital is 500 Chinese miles west of the Pamir Mountains, is inhabited by the Ida [Hephthalites] people. The capital perimeter extends two Chinese miles. There are 100,000 strong soldiers, all of whom are trained in warfare. Their custom is to practice Buddhism.”)

it was originally discovered, that is, the Kucha-Karasahr/Turpan (*Jushi-Kocho*) language, instead of Tocharian. The research of British scholar D. Q. Adams and American scholar J. P. Mallory led them to write: “Surprisingly Tocharian seems to share more vocabulary with Germanic than with any other Indo-European language branch and its general lexical and morphological closest kin seems to be the western Indo-European languages rather than those of the eastern rim” (Mallory & Adams, 1997: 591). This insight uncovers a rather important piece of linguistic evidence, supporting the view that the Tocharians were Aryan-type Indo-Europeans and of the same race as Germanic-type Europeans, even though they were not from Europe but had been living in this area for several thousand years. Furthermore, the fact that modern Indo-European linguists in the West call the native Indian language groups of the Punjab (which was part of Bactria or the Tocharian Region and which straddles present-day Eastern Afghanistan, Pakistan, northwest India, and the Tarim Basin) “Indo-Aryan” is another convincing piece of linguistic evidence (Masica, 1993: 17-18, footnote 64 on p. 20).

Archaeological breakthroughs in Xinjiang by Chinese and foreign scholars in the past forty plus years, supplemented by the further research conducted by British and American scholars into the Tocharian language provide proof that the original inhabitants of South Xinjiang, mainly including the Tarim Basin, Yan-qi Basin, and Turpan Basin, were Indo-European whites, specifically, those Tocharians whom I call the Aryan Indo-European, or simply Sarmatians.

Chinese archaeologists began in 1978 to excavate many ancient mummies from the Tarim Basin and its adjacent eastern regions at the east along the southern foot of the Tian-shan Mountains to Hami, where they were well-preserved by the dry Gobi Desert. Surprisingly, their physical characteristics were those of Western people, including the Germanic European type. In the summer of 1988, Victor Mair, a sinologist and Indo-European linguist from the University of Pennsylvania, visited the Urumqi Museum and saw many of these mummies, which date from 1800 BC to 1200 BC, with most from around 1000 BC (Mallory & Mair, 2000: 8, 10).

Mair, along with some Chinese and other international archeologists, traveled that same year to Kizilchoka near Kumul (Hami), south of the Tian-shan Mountains range at the eastern end, a connecting point of the northern and southern branches of the Silk Road divided by the Tian-shan Mountains. This is where the “blue eyed, red-headed” *Wu-sun* people used to live, according to Chinese Han dynasty court history. At the excavated ancient (c.1200 BC) graves, Mair began to study and identify their contents and was shocked by the facial characteristics of the mummified remains of these local residents who had lived approximately during the time of China’s late Shang dynasty when the oracle bones of Chinese written language started. He described himself as being “awed by the sight of the bodies...preserved for over three millennia” and by how “they

are clearly of Caucasoid/Europoid extraction (long noses, deep-set eyes, blondish, light-brown or red hair, and so forth)" (Mallory & Mair, 2000: 14, 16). DNA testing and preliminary evaluation of several mummies showed that some were typically European, some of them more typically European than others (Mallory & Mair, 2000: 247). These were the earliest mummies to be excavated in the Hami area of East Xinjiang, and were discovered by Chinese archaeologist Wang Binghua in 1978 with the help of a local Uyghur, called Imit. By 1991, experts had excavated 113 graves (Mallory & Mair, 2000: 13-14).

The leading Chinese physical anthropologist Han Kangxin made an essential contribution to the study of Xinjiang inhabitants when he "analyzed 300 skulls assigned to the period 1800 BC to AD 300 and demonstrated that the oldest skulls in the series, those of the Gumugou burial ground (1800 BC) [in the eastern area of the Tarim Basin along the rivers and lakes] belonged to the Caucasoid type, which had a western origin but had remained there to a much later time, being present in the area of Hami in the Yanbulaq burial ground (dated by C¹⁴ to 1300-500 BC), and in later sites (Khotunsumbul, Alwighul, and Miran)" (Mair & Kuzmina, 2008: 91). Khotunsumbul (at Hejing county or Korla region, *Ying-p'an*) is located at the Yan-qi Basin. Alwighul (at Toksun county) is part of the Turpan Basin. Miran sits at the southeast corner of the Tarim Basin. All of their ancient ruins are found in the oases along the Silk Road.

Han Kangxin described "the arrival of a second population" in the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age (c.750 BC in Europe, 600 BC in China), and in the age of Saka (c.600 BC). He noted this group was "also Caucasoid and Western by origin and belonged to the East Mediterranean type." (They were the aforementioned Scythians from the north who moved south.) These people also spread into the area in present-day Xinjiang of Tashkurgan and southwestern Tarim Basin, extending east to Lop Nor Lake and north to Alwighul (Mair & Kuzmina, 2008: 91). In the Saka age, a third group of European whites arrived in Xinjiang; they were of the Pamiro-Ferghanian type, with the physical characteristics of the Kazak Scythians. They were represented "by the skulls from the burial grounds of Alwighul (sixth to first centuries BC) in Turfan [Turpan Basin] and Mongghul Kura (first century AD) at the border of Semirechye [Zhetysu], etc." (Kuzmina, 2008: 91). Since they are Kazakh Scythians, they should indeed have the characteristic round faces of Kazakhs today and belong to the Alpine race, the third type of European race.

Furthermore, a woolen tapestry has been excavated from the ancient cemetery of the village of Sampul of the third-to-second century BC, located on the southern rim of the Tarim Basin, in Lop county near Khotan (ancient name: *Yu-tian*.) "A centaur occupies the top panel, while a soldier with Western-looking facial features stands below" (Hansen, 2012: 202; see plate 13 and jacket of the book). The soldier depicted in this artwork has big blue eyes, a typical Northern

European feature, and his clothing is of a Grecian style from the period of the colonisation of the Macedonian-Greco-Bactria kingdom. The soldier carries a lance, which is a characteristic Sarmatian weapon. This suggests that this Sampul soldier was a Tocharian, the Aryan-type Indo-European Sarmatian of the Tarim Basin. So, it would seem that the earliest inhabitants of the area around the Tarim Basin, Yan-qi Basin, and Turpan Basin in South Xinjiang were Aryan Indo-Europeans who belonged to the ancient Germanic European type.

Furthermore, a ninth or tenth century fresco in one of the Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Caves near the Turpan city in the Kocho-Turpan Basin adjacent to the Yan-qi Basin and the northeastern rim of the Tarim Basin, shows two monks, one a Tocharian and the other an East Asian. The indigenous Tocharian monk has red hair, blue eyes, and fair skin. An early sixth century depiction of “knights with long swords” found in the Kizil Buddhist caves in Bai-cheng county, about 70 kilometers west of Kucha (*Qiu-ci*) which is the western neighbour of Yan-qi, on the northern rim of the Tarim Basin and at the southern foot of the Tian-shan mountain range, likewise shows these knights with light-colored skin, hair, and eyes. The cross-shaped hilts suggest they might be Christians. In other frescoes from the Kucha (*Qiu-ci*) Buddhist caves that date from about AD 700, “the benefactors [are] depicted as Caucasoids with blond or red hair...the women wear tight bodices over long flowing skirts” and “...the figures are identified as the nobility of the people who left us the Tocharian documents” (Mallory & Mair, 2000: 24, 172-175). One shows a blonde or red-haired noblewoman on the left who is a benefactress; on the right is a painter with a sword. Their appearance and adornments are both typical of the ancient Greek culture style. The hair style of the knights matched the description from the *Book of Jin*: Chronicle 67, “Four kinds of foreigners” which states: “In the kingdom of *Qiu-ci*...both the men and women cut their hair to be hanging around their necks. The palace is magnificent, like a divine residence” (Fang, X. L., 2000: 1697).⁴¹

These refer to indigenous people of the Tarim, Yan-qi, and Turpan Basins, as well as the Hami region, the Tocharians, or Da-xia people, that is, Aryan-type Indo-Europeans. The elegance and confidence of the woman’s demeanor in the presence of the man brings to mind the impression the Han dynasty-Chinese had toward the Macedonian-Greek civilized Indo-European

⁴¹ 【唐】房玄龄：《晋书·列传第六十七·四夷》：“龟兹国……人以田种畜牧为业，男女皆翦发垂项。王宫壮丽，焕若神居。”

([Tang] Fang Xuanling, *Book of Jin*, “Chronicle 67: Four Types Barbarians”: “In the kingdom of Qiu-ci...People are engaged in farming and animal husbandry. Both the men and women cut their hair to be hanging around their necks. The royal palace is magnificent, shining like the residence of gods.”)

locals when Zhang Qian was sent as emissary in the second century BC to the Western Regions, especially in *Da-yuan* (later Sogdiana, where Scythian type Indo-Europeans dominated) kingdom: "Women are highly respected. What the wife says, the husband strictly follows" (Ban, G., 1999: 2870-2871). Such an elevated status for women in Saka society, assumably part of the colonisation legacy traced to Alexander the Great, was a shock to the Han-Chinese, who were already under the influence of male-dominated Confucianism.

2.3.2 The Chinese Classics Study of the Blue-Eyed (and Green-Eyed) and Blonde Tocharians

In addition to evidence from archaeological, anthropological, and linguistic research, there is also material from ancient Chinese historical records showing the same type of Aryans at both sides of the Pamirs. According to Tang Chinese classics, residents were "blue-green-eyed" in *Shu-le* (present-day Kashgar region), the eastern side of Pamirs (Wang, G. W., 2004: 609-610).⁴² At the borders of Afghanistan and China, a group of blue-eyed white natives are still living in the present-day Xinjiang's Tashkurgan Tajik Autonomous County connected through Wakhan Corridor in the Pamirs to Afghanistan. The Buddhist master Xuan-zang, who did a pilgrimage to India in the 630s from Tang-China, mentions in his *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*: vol. 12, "Twenty-Two States" (Xuan-Zang, 2016: 393),⁴³ that residents were "blue-green-eyed" in *Hu-mi*, and that their facial features were similar to the people of Persia, a finding which matches with the records of the Tang-China classics (Wang, G. W., 2004: 609-610). *Hu-mi*, according to

⁴² 王国维：《观堂集林》（上）：“西域记及唐书皆言疏勒护蜜人并碧瞳，均与波斯大秦人相似。”

(Wang Guowei, *Guan Tang Ji Lin* (Volume 1): "Records of the Western Regions and the Book of Tang both say that the people of Shu-le and Hu-mi have blue eyes and are similar to the Persian people.")

⁴³ 【唐】玄奘：《大唐西域记》（辩机撰，董志翘译注），卷第 12：“二十二国”：“从此东北，登山入谷，途路艰险，行五百余里，至达摩悉铁帝国。亦名镇侃，又谓护蜜。达摩悉铁帝国在两山间。睹货逻国故地也，东西千五六百余里，南北广四五里，狭则不逾一里。临缚刍河，盘纡曲折，……眼多碧绿，异于诸国。”

([Tang] Xuan-zang, *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions* (written by Bian Ji, translated and annotated by Dong Zhi-qiao), Volume 12: "Twenty-two Countries": "From here, we climbed the mountain and entered the valley in the northeast. The road was dangerous and arduous. After walking for more than 500 miles, we arrived at the Da-mo-xi-tie Kingdom. It is also called Zhen-kan and Hu-mi. The Da-mo-xi-tie Kingdom is located between two mountains. It is the former site of the Tu-huo-luo Kingdom. It is more than 1,500 to 1,600 Chinese miles from east to west and four or five Chinese miles wide from north to south. At its narrowest point, it is no more than one Chinese mile. It is next to the Fu-chu River, which is winding and tortuous... Most of the eyes are blue and green, which are different from other countries.")

Xuan-zang's topo-geographical descriptions, calling it part of "the homeland of *Du-huo-luo* state" (Tocharian kingdom, Bactria) is situated at the western side of the Pamirs. Xuan-zang also stated that there are more than ten Buddhist temples, but with very few monks.

Furthermore, due to the fact that the Buddhist master Xuan-zang stated that the "blue-green-eyed" state-empire was part of the former Tocharian kingdom and was located by the Amu River (Oxus River), and the current state name means "iron gate" in the Iranian language. This suggests the state was located at the upper Amu River Valley and its southern bank, and also between the "two mountains," according to additional geographical features that Xuan-zang included. The "two mountains" are the Pamir Mountains in the north and east, and the Hindu Kush Mountains in the south. At about 120 km north of the river is the famous Iron Gate which goes through the western wing of the Pamir Mountains. About 70 km south of the river is the former Tocharian capital Bactra, which was known as *Lan-shi* or *Jian-shi* city, according to the Chinese Han dynasty court history. It was located at approximately present-day Balkh at the northern tip of Afghanistan. Xuan-zang also gives more detailed description about the former Bactria-Tocharian kingdom which, at the time, was divided into twenty-seven states (Xuan-zang, 2016: 24).⁴⁴

Therefore, based on the two references by Xuan-zang, we can confirm that the "blue-green-eyed" *Hu-mi* state that Xuan-zang visited was situated at the eastern end of the former Bactria-Tocharian kingdom close to its former capital Bactra which was west of the Pamir Mountains. The original Aramaic documents in the Khalili collection, 30 of which were written on leather and 18 of which were inscribed wooden sticks, dated in "a period of less than thirty years, from 353 to 324 BC," the main part of them presumably "belonging to the satrap of Bactria and Sogdiana in Bactra (Balkh)". These were "letters sent to, and documents related to Bagvant, who served as governor" in Khulmi, revealing the accuracy of the conclusion that *Hu-mi* city was Khulmi, later

⁴⁴ 【唐】玄奘：《大唐西域记》（辩机撰，董志翘译注），卷第1：“三十四国”：“出铁门至睹货逻国旧曰吐火罗国，讹也。故地，南北千余里，东西三千余里。东厄葱岭，西接波刺斯，南大雪山，北据铁门，缚乌大河中境西流。自数百年王族绝嗣，酋豪力竞，各擅君长，依川据险，分为二十七国。”

([Tang] Xuanzang, *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions* (written by Bian Ji, translated and annotated by Dong Zhi-qiao), Volume 1: "Thirty-four Countries": "Leaving the Iron Gate to the country of Du-huo-luo [Tocharian], formerly pronounced as Tu-huo-luo which is not accurate. The old land [of the kingdom] is more than a thousand Chinese miles from north to south and more than three thousand Chinese miles from east to west. It is bordered by the Pamir Mountains in the east, the Bolas [Persia] in the west, the great snow-covered Mountain in the south, the Iron Gate in the north, and the Fu-chu (Oxus or Amu) River flowing west in the middle of the country. Since the royal family died out a few hundreds of years ago, the chiefs have competed for power, each claiming to be the leader and lord, and they have divided into twenty-seven countries based on rivers and terrain [natural geographic borders].")

Tashkurgan, and, finally, in present-day Afghanistan, Khulm (80 km east of Balkh), the readopted form (Naveh & Shaked, 2012: 16, 17, 18).⁴⁵

The genius Chinese scholar Wang Guowei in his research work “Studies on the Western *Hu*,” published in the early 1920s, quotes the Tang dynasty records confirming that “*Yu-tian* and *Tu-huo-luo* are the people of the same ethnicity.” In “Further Studies on the Western *Hu*” (Wang, G. W., 2004: 613, 617), he quotes from the *History of the Northern Dynasties: Yu-tian Chronicles*, suggesting that only the people of *Yu-tian* did not have the “deep-set eyes and prominent noses” of the people in all the kingdoms west of Kocho (Turpan); instead their facial features were more like the Chinese (Li, Y. S., 2000: 2130).⁴⁶ Note that these are the characteristics that differentiate some northern Europeans (Scandinavians) and western Europeans (British, French, Germanic) from Mediterranean Europeans.

The strong Macedonian-Greek civilization and culture that Han Chinese envoys first encountered in the second century BC in the *Daxia*-Bactria kingdom can be traced back to Alexander the Great, who conquered the Bactria-Tocharian regions and further colonized the regions through one of his generals by promoting the splendor of the Greek-Macedonian civilization on the foundation of Iran-Persian civilization, which first impacted the regions. “The Bactrian satrapy also incorporated the territory of Sogdiana” (Naveh & Shaked, 2012: 15), which the Han Chinese envoys called the *Da-yuan* kingdom (based in the Fergana Basin), west of the Pamirs and north of the Amu River. Sogdiana, which Alexander conquered with much effort and in which he established many colonist cities, finally became the experimental model of Macedonian-Greek civilization which diluted the Persian civilization and native Scythian tradition (Holt, 1988: 69, 81). Zhang Qian’s impression of the *Da-yuan* kingdom affirmed the high status of native women and endorsed the will, spirit, and success of Alexander and his heirs, though

⁴⁵ According to Naveh & Shaked (2012: 16), “Khulmi can be quite confidently identified as a place near the town which is nowadays called Khulm. In the late mediaeval period it was called Tashkurgan, but the old name Khulm was re-adopted in the twentieth century. To be precise, above the modern town of Tashkurgan there are ruins called ‘old Khulm’, where the ancient town may be located.” In the Turkic languages, “Tashkurgan”, “Tashkorgan”, “Tashkurgan”, or “Taxkorgan” means “Stone Fortress” which in Chinese is “石头城”. One should not confuse the Tashkurgan in Afghanistan with the Tashkurgan in present-day Xinjiang China.

⁴⁶ 【唐】李延寿:《北史·列传第 85·西域》:“自高昌以西诸国人等,深目高鼻,唯此一国,貌不甚胡,颇类华夏。”

([Tang] Li Yan-shou, *History of the Northern Dynasties*, “Chronicle No. 85·Western Regions”: “The people of all the countries west of Gao-chang have deep eyes and high noses, but this country does not look very *Hu*-type but rather resembles the Chinese.”)

Iranian-Persian civilization never surrendered.

Before the Huns (*Xiong-nu*) instigated the great migrations of the Scythian *Yue-zhi* and Aryan *Wu-sun* on the East Asian plateaus during the 170s BC and until the Uyghurs migrated and dominated these regions beginning in the mid-ninth century, the three natural barriers of the magnificent Tian-shan mountain range—the Syr River, the mighty Amu River, and the Hindu Kush-Kunlun Mountains—had long protected the Aryan Indo-European residents of the Kumul region, Tarim Basin, Yan-qi Basin, and Bactria and greatly slowed the mix of their Aryan blood and the disintegration of their Outer European, Outer Iranian, and Outer Grecian-Macedonian civilizations.

To summarize, the eastern border of ancient Bactria prior to and during the time of Tang-China was not, as commonly believed, the natural barrier of the Pamir Mountains but rather extended along the eastern side of the Pamir Mountains, stretching deep into the area southeast of the Tarim Basin between Khotan and Charchan. Contrary to popular belief, the journey to Kashgar from the west along the Silk Road is not too difficult, which means the Tarim Basin, this paradise where the Aryan-Tocharians-Sarmatians resided for centuries, is not as isolated as one might think. Therefore, it is reasonable for the Tarim Basin to have been part of Bactria, given the fact that the residents were of the same race and culture and likely spoke the same language as the Tocharians, as well as an eastern Persian-Iranian dialect related to present-day Tajiks. In addition, Iranian-Persian Zoroastrianism prevailed on both sides of the Pamirs for centuries until the Islamic conquest. If the *Wu-sun*, “as blue-eyed, red-bearded people”, described by Han dynasty Chinese historians (Grousset, 1970: 29; Ban, 1999: 2875),⁴⁷ are included in the Bactria civilization block, then the extent of the Bactria territory in the time of the Chinese Han dynasty would have stretched east to the Yanqi-Karasahr and Kocho-Turpan Basins, the Hami (Kumul) region, the *Loulan-Dunhuang* area, and even further east. The Tocharian world and its civilization were well-maintained until the arrival of the Turks in the sixth century, followed by the westward-migrating Uyghurs in the ninth century.

Such an understanding can facilitate the logic behind the claim that, since the people who lived on both sides of the Pamirs shared the same Zoroastrianism and Buddhism because of the same geographical, racial, and civilization block, so it is not hard to accept that they later shared

⁴⁷ Also Zhang Shoujie of Tang-China annotated in *Records of the Grand Historian* (by Si-ma Qian from the Han China), “Chronicle 63, *Da-yuan*”, that *Yue-zhi* people who were originally living in *He-xi* Corridor (present-day Gan-su province of China) were “red-white color [skin],” which is the feature of a Mediterranean type of white Europeans, “reddish face and white skin.” (Si-ma, 1999: 2398).

the same Christianity.

By the time of Tang-China in the middle of the seventh century, the eastern border of Bactria seemed to retreat to Kashgar-*Shule* and its territory reduced by about one-third, though the native Tocharian population still dominated the whole Jishi-Tarim Basin, Yanqi-Karasahr Basin, and Kocho-Turpan Basin. About 200 years after the Buddhist monk Xuan-zang passed through the Western Regions, the steppe Uyghurs from present-day Mongolian grasslands formally entered westward the Bactrian-block area in the Tarim Basin, Yan-qi Basin, and Turpan Basin and began the process of Uyghurising this whole area of the Western Regions, first in the Yan-qi Basin, then the Turpan Basin, the Back Section, and finally the Hami region.

2.4 A Brief colonisation History of Kocho-Turpan and the Arshi-Yanqi Basin Prior to the Mid-Seventh Century and the Variety of Immigrating People Groups Setting up Conditions of Religious Diversity

The history of the kingdoms in the Kocho-Turpan Basin prior to the mid-seventh century was becoming racial-ethnically diverse, though its adjacent regions, including the Arshi-Yanqi (Karasahr) Basin and the northeastern rim of the Jishi-Tarim Basin still remained Tocharian. Since this chapter only found historical records for Christianity in the two basins and not in the other two regions (the Back Section and Kumul-Hami region), this section only provides research on the two basins.

The Kocho-Turpan region was a basin with abundant natural resources, including a surplus of water from the Tian-shan Mountains, fine fruits, especially grapes, due to the hot dry weather, and a mild temperature in the winter. Both the agriculture and livestock benefitted from the environmental resources, so it was a paradise for the residents, mainly the Tocharian who enjoyed a splendid flourishing civilization. The Arshi-Yanqi Basin was not immune from battle and colonisation because it was an important kingdom on the northern route of the southern branch of the Silk Road, a beautiful and charming oasis full of natural resources and a charming urban lifestyle, including famous music. Comparatively, it suffered to a lesser degree due to its location further west of the Turpan Basin and further away from the hot spot of military competitions.

2.4.1 The Rival Colonisations of the East Asians including Huns, Chinese, and *Rou-ran* (Jurchen) (110s BC-AD 550)

Kocho-Turpan region first appeared officially in the court history of China as *Gu-shi* (soon after as *Ju-shi*) kingdom in the second or the third year of *yuan-feng* (109 or 108 BC) during the reign of *Han-wu* (aka. *Xiao-wu*) emperor Liu Che in the first stage of the Han dynasty of China. According to the *Records of the Grand Historian*: Chronicle 63, “*Da-yuan*”, dating around 91 BC, the emperor sent a regiment of over 700 cavalry from the *Jiu-quan* military base at the western gate of *He-xi* Corridor (in today’s Gansu province of China), and defeated *Gu-shi* in the Turpan Basin and its neighboring state *Lou-lan* kingdom, the eastern entrance of the Tarim Basin, in the south. By taking over their capitals, arresting one or both kings, and forcing both states to surrender, the emperor ensured that no more Chinese envoys passing by on the Silk Road to visit those states in central Asia and Persia would be obstructed by the Huns or their allies (Si-ma, Q., 1999: 2405, 2251).⁴⁸ *Xiao-wu* emperor sent a few armies to attack the Huns in 90 BC, the third year of *Zheng-he*, and one of the armies took over and held the people of the royal city of the *Ju-shi* kingdom captive on the way to attack the Huns north of Tian-shan (Ban, G., 1999: 2795).⁴⁹ The captives were later released after the war.

The geographical location of the *Gu-shi* or *Ju-shi* (Turpan) Basin remained strategic since it is situated south of the Tian-shan Mountains and the northeastern entrance of the Tarim Basin. Before its surrender to Han China, *Gu-shi* kingdom had submitted to the Huns whose tents were set up north of Tian-shan. Both the Huns and the Chinese wanted to control *Gu-shi* and *Lou-lan*, because they were at the hub of the Jade-Silk Road connecting East Asia and Central Asia, which included the Tocharian regions in both the Tarim Basin and west of the Pamir Mountains, through Persia all the way to Asia Minor. Collecting taxes at the hub and subjecting those states remained a great interest for both the Huns and the Chinese.

⁴⁸ 司马迁:《史记·大宛列传第六十三》:“其明年, 击姑师, 破奴与轻骑七百馀先至, 虏楼兰王, 遂破姑师。”

(Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian*, “No. 63 Da-yuan”: “The next year, he attacked Gu-shi, defeated Xiong-nu and more than 700 light cavalry who arrived first captured the King of Lou-lan, and then defeated Gu-shi.”)

⁴⁹ 班固:《汉书·匈奴传第六十四上》:“是时, 汉恐车师兵遮重合侯, 乃遣闾陵侯将兵别围车师, 尽得其王民众而还。”

(Ban Gu, *Book of Han*, “No. 64, Part 1: Chronicle of the Xiong-nu”: “At that time, the Han Dynasty feared that the Ju-shi troops would block the Marquis Chong-he, so the court sent the Marquis Kai-ling to lead troops to besiege Ju-shi separately, and captured all, its king and people, and returned.”)

The succeeding emperors of Han China went further west and militarily controlled the states along the northeastern rim of the Tarim Basin at the southern foot of Tian-shan Mountains, which included the *Qiu-ci* (Kucha) kingdom, located near the mid-northern rim of the basin, that was conquered by general Chang Hui in 71 BC, the third year of *Ben-shi* in Han China, according to the *Book of Han*: Chronicle 66 II, "Western Regions" and Chronicle 40, "Chang Hui" (Ban, G., 1999: 2878, 2885, 2256-2257). From this point forward, the name *Ju-shi* would be used instead of *Gu-shi*. In 68 or 67 BC, the second or the third year of *Di-jie*, the united army of the kingdoms in the Tarim Basin, led by Chinese general Zheng Ji, attacked and defeated the *Ju-shi* kingdom as punishment for allying with the Huns (Ban, 1999: 2801, 2889).⁵⁰ Afterwards, the Han Chinese army settled in and established military farms in the *Ju-shi* Basin (Ban, G., 1999: 2801). After its defeat, *Ju-shi* kingdom was divided into two sub-kingdoms known as the "Front Section" in the Turpan Basin and the "Back Section," which included six city states located on the northern side of Tian-shan Mountains (Ban, G., 1999: 2856; Chen, S., 1999: 639).⁵¹ The Huns dominated the

⁵⁰ 班固:《汉书·匈奴传第六十四上》:“壶衍鞬单于立十七年死,弟左贤王立,为虚闾权渠单于。是岁,地节二年也。……其明年,西域城郭共击匈奴,取车师国,得其王及人众而去。单于复以车师王昆弟兜莫为车师王,收其馀民东徙,不敢居故地。而汉益遣屯士分田车师地以实之。”

(Ban Gu, *Book of Han*, "No. 64, Part 1: Chronicle of the Xiong-nu": "Chan-yu [king] Hu-yan-di died seventeen years after he came to power, and his brother Left Prime Prince came to power as Chan-yu Xu-lyu-quan-qu. This year was the second year of the Di-jie reign of the Han dynasty. ... The next year, the city states in the Western Regions attacked the Xiong-nu together, captured the Ju-shi Kingdom, captured its king and people, and left. The Chan-yu again made Dou-mo, the brother of the Ju-shi King, the King of Ju-shi, the [new] King of Ju-shi, and gathered the remaining people and moved them eastward, not daring to live in their old place. The Han Dynasty sent more soldiers to settle the land of Ju-shi to fill it with a military farming system.")

班固:《汉书·西域传第六十六下》:“地节二年,汉遣侍郎郑吉、校尉司马熹将免刑罪人田渠犂,积谷,欲以攻车师。至秋收谷,吉、熹发城郭诸国兵万余人,自与所将田士千五百人共击车师,攻交河城,破之。”

(Ban Gu, *Book of Han*, "Volume 66 Part 2: Western Regions": "In the second year of Di-jie, the Han Dynasty sent the Minister Zheng Ji and the Colonel Sima Xi to lead the pardoned criminals to farm the land of Qu-li state to store grain, preparing to attack Ju-shi. In the autumn harvest, Ji and Xi mobilized more than 10,000 soldiers from various city states, together with 1,500 military farmers under their command, and attacked Ju-shi, capturing Jiao-he city.")

⁵¹ 班固:《汉书·匈奴传第六十四上》“至宣帝时,遣卫司马使护鄯善以西数国。及破姑师,未尽殄,分以为车师前后王及山北六国。时汉独护南道,未能尽并北道也,然匈奴不自安矣。”

(Ban Gu: *Book of Han*, "No. 64 Xiong-nu": "During the reign of Emperor Xuan, Wei Sima was sent to protect several states west of Shan-shan. When the Gu-shi was defeated, it was not completely destroyed, so it was divided into the former and latter kings of Ju-shi and the six states north of the mountain. At that time, the Han Dynasty only protected the southern route and were unable to annex the northern route completely. But the Xiong-nu felt uneasy about standing aside.")

northern branch of the Silk Road and China controlled the southern branch of the Silk Road which goes through the "Front Section" in the *Ju-shi* (Turpan) Basin which was south of Tian-shan (Ban, G., 1999: 2856).

Due to their unique geographical position, *Ju-shi* and other neighboring states were stuck between the overwhelming Huns and Chinese. From then on, they also suffered aggressive immigration in waves from different ethnic and racial groups. In the fourth century, the *Rou-ran* (*Ru-ru*) people, who were likely the ancestors of the later Jurchen Manchurian people, dominated the East Asia steppes after the Huns and the *Xian-bei* (Siberians). According to the *Book of Wei*: Chronicle 90, "Western Regions: *Gao-chang*," "*Ju-shi* Kingdom" (Wei, S., 1999: 1517, 1532), in the middle of the fifth century (AD 442-450), the *Ju-qu* people, who were likely Scythian *Yue-zhi* type Indo-Europeans in *He-xi* corridor, moved west and took over the *Ju-shi* kingdom (Rong, X. J., 2007: 4). Then, at the first year of *He-ping* (about 460) of the Northern Wei, the *Rou-ran* Khanate Empire conquered the *Ju-shi* kingdom, and, five years later, the *Gao-che* people rebelled against *Rou-ran* and took over the *Ju-shi* kingdom (Rong, 2007: 4; Wei, S., 1999: 1238). At the same time, the name Kocho (*Gao-chang*) appeared in the *Book of Wei* as the former name for the basin kingdom, or an old Han Chinese city in what is called "Back Section" of *Ju-shi* kingdom, so, from then on, Kocho and *Ju-shi* became interchangeable names for the kingdom. According to the *Book of Wei*: Chronicle 42, "Foreign Regions II: *Gao-chang*", Kocho kingdom had eight cities (Wei, S., 2000: 1517) and increased to sixteen cities, according to the *Book of Zhou*: Chronicle 42, "Foreign Regions II: *Gao-chang*" (Ling-hu, 2000: 620), then expended to eighteen cities over the course of more than two centuries until the time of the *Book of Sui*: Chronicle 48, "Western Regions: *Gao-chang*" (Wei, Z., 2000: 1239).

About the Arshi-Yanqi Basin, according to the research done by the Chinese scholar Duan Lian-qin (1988: 218-219), based on Chinese classics such as the *Book of Wei* and the *History of the Northern Dynasties*, in AD 487, about a few hundred thousand people from the *Fu-fu-luo* tribe of *Gao-che*, the red-faced white people (Di-type Scythian Indo-European type), led by A-fu-zhi-

【晋】陈寿：《三国志》，“魏书”三十：“乌丸·鲜卑·东夷传第三十”，【南朝宋】裴松之注解（北京：中华书局，1999），其中引用《魏略·西戎传》：“北新道西行，至东且弥国、西且弥国、单桓国、毕陆国、蒲陆国、乌贪国，皆并属车师后部王。”（第 639 页）

[Jin] Chen Shou, *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, "Volume 30 Book of Wei: No. 30 Chronicle of Wu-huan, Xian-bei and Dong-yi", [Southern Song] Pei Song-zhi's annotations (Beijing: Zhonghua Book, 1999), which quote "Wei Lue, Chronicle of Western Rong": "The new Northern Road went west to Eastern Qie-mi, Western Qie-mi, Shan-huan, Bi-lu, Pu-lu and Wu-tan, all of which were under the jurisdiction of the King of the Later Ju-shi." (p. 639)

luo, escaped from *Rou-ran* Khanate and migrated to the northwest Kocho region and established the *Gao-che* kingdom (or *A-fu-zhi-luo* Kingdom). Later the kingdom expanded further southwest to the area around Yan-qi (Karasahr) and Bosten Lake, east to the *Shan-shan* area which was the former *Lou-lan* kingdom, north to the present-day Urumqi area, and also subjugated the Kocho kingdom (Duan, L. A., 1988: 226-227, 232-233) in AD 488 (Rong, X. J., 2007: 4). It seems that more than 300 years later when Uyghurs migrated west to the regions, they first copied the kingdom map of *Gao-che*.

According to the *Book of Wei* "Western Regions" (see also *History of the Northern Dynasties* and *Book of Zhou*, etc.), the Yan-qi kingdom with its capital Yan-qi (Wei, S., 2000: 1533)⁵² had an abundance of treasures and enjoyed peace for a long time, being famous for its wine and music. It had nine cities. The founding emperor (AD 408-452) of Northern Wei sent General Zhou Wan-du to attack the Yan-qi kingdom because it often robbed passing envoys sent from the emperor. After an intense battle, General Zhou defeated the king of Yan-qi (Karasahr) and sacked the royal city. The kingdom and its neighbors submitted to Northern Wei. The general also attacked and defeated Qiu-ci (Kucha), 900 *li* [ca. 370 km] west of Yan-qi along the Tarim northern rim (Wei, S., 2000: 1534). In Yan-qi, only men cut their hair (Wei, S., 2000: 1533),⁵³ which is different from Qiu-ci where both men and women cut their hair.

⁵² 【北齐】魏收：《魏书·列传第 90·西域：焉耆》：“恃地多险，颇剽劫中国使。世祖怒之，诏成周公万度归讨之，约赍轻粮，取食路次。度归入焉耆东界，击其边守左回、尉犁二城拔之，进军向员渠。鸠尸卑那以四五万人出城守险以拒。度归募壮勇，短兵直往冲，鸠尸卑那众大溃，尽虏之，单骑走入山中。度归进屠其城，四鄙诸戎皆降服。”（第 1533 页）

[Northern Qi] Wei Shou, *Book of Wei*, "No. 90 Western Regions: Yan-qi": "Relying on the many dangerous places, they often robbed Chinese envoys. Emperor Shi-zu was angry and ordered duke Zhou Wan-du-gui to return and attack them, asking his army to bring light food and forge food along the way. Wan-du entered the eastern border of Yan-qi, attacked the border-guarding cities Zuo-hui and Wei-li, captured them, and then marched towards Yuan-qu. Jiu-shi-bi-na led 40,000 to 50,000 people out of the city to defend the dangerous places. Wan-du recruited strong and brave men and charged directly with the foot soldiers. Jiu-shi-bi-na's army was greatly defeated, and they were all captured. Jiu-shi-bi-na fled into the mountains alone. Wan Du-gui entered the city and slaughtered the people, and all the ethnic groups in the four border areas surrendered." (Page 1533)

⁵³ 【北齐】魏收：《魏书·列传第 90·西域：焉耆》：“丈夫并翦发以为首饰。”（第 1533 页）

[Northern Qi] Wei Shou, *Book of Wei*, "No. 90 Western Regions: Yan-qi": "Men cut their hair as a decoration." (p. 1533)

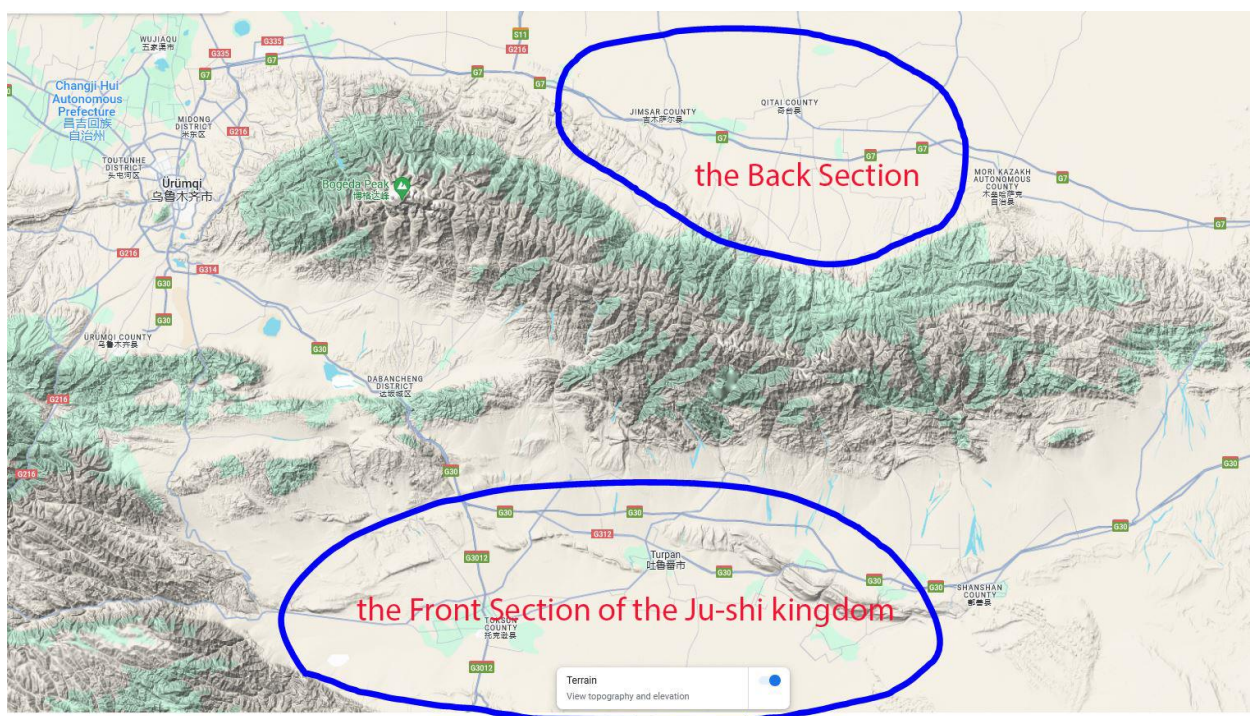


Figure 2. 7: The Front Section and the Back Section of the Ju-shi Kingdom in the 2nd century BC ⁵⁴

The Yan-qi (Arshi, Karasahr) kingdom was first mentioned in the *Book of Han* (Ban, G., 2000: 2886) in Chinese court history as a typical city state with a civilian population of thirty-two thousand and one hundred and military population of six thousand soldiers in the first century AD. The blue-eyed Wu-sun people migrated from the Kumul-Hami area, which consisted of the Kumul Kingdom south of the easternmost Tian-shan and Kumul Back Kingdom in the north, before splitting into a dual kingdom of Greater Kumul and Minor Kumul, the latter a nomadic neighbor for both Yan-qi and Qiu-ci in the north inside the Tian-shan Mountain valleys and basins (Ban, G., 2000: 2879, 2881, 2886, 2887). Note that these Tocharians of Wun-sun, Yan-qi, Qiu-ci, and other kingdoms south of Tian-shan lived peacefully in the same geo-racial-civilisational block, but were helpless in the face of the militant Huns, powerful Chinese, and other Scythian type Indo-Europeans such as the Yue-zhi, Gao-che, and Hephthalites who took turns invading the two basins, and the Kumul area.

For example, Yan-qi and Ju-shi had a close allegiance through court marriage, but they were still subjugated by the Huns (Ban, G., 2000: 2889).⁵⁵ In another case, Wu-sun royalty married

⁵⁴ Source: <https://google.com/maps/@43.4611074,89.1184259,9.04z/data=!5m1!1e4?entry=ttu>

⁵⁵ Ban, Gu, *Book of Han*, "Western Regions II": "昭帝时，匈奴复使四千骑田车师。宣帝即位，遣五将兵击匈奴，车师田者惊去，车师复通于汉。匈奴怒，召其太子军宿，欲以为质。军宿，焉耆外孙，不欲

Han Chinese princesses, and one daughter of the princess married the king of the Qiu-ci kingdom, located in the west of the Yan-qi kingdom (Ban, G., 2000: 2877). Generally, the location of Yan-qi was strategic for both military and trading endeavours as a gateway in the northeast corner of the Tarim Basin along the northern route of the Silk Road south of Tian-shan, and its abundant tax-collection was attractive. Before the Chinese took over this area, the West Huns set up a military delegate in the Yan-qi and its neighboring states, and they enjoyed governing and collecting taxes from the kingdoms in Tarim Basin (Ban, G., 2000: 2856).⁵⁶ In AD 94, after the Han Chinese Protector General of the Western Regions Ban Gao, who set his military-administrative base in Qiu-ci, defeated Yan-qi and its two allying kingdoms, all or more than fifty kingdoms in the Tarim Basin, Turpan Basin, and other regions south of Tian-shan submitted swiftly to the General (Fan, Y., 2000: 1066).

Based on the above review of the history of the Kocho-Turpan Basin and its neighboring Yan-qi Basin at the northeastern rim of Tarim Basin by the time of the fall of Wei China (380-550), especially with the information about the influx of the Tocharian natives and other immigrants such as the Scythian Indo-Europeans, in the next section (2.5), one can easily understand how different religions spread from west of the Pamirs all the way along the Silk Road through the Tarim Basin to the Yan-qi and Kocho-Turpan Basins, all the way to Kumul-Hami, especially among racial and ethnic groups with the same or similar languages and most importantly among the people in the same Iranian-Macedonian-influenced Tocharian civilization. The overwhelming natural geographical barriers in these regions can easily confuse us with a distorted historical

质匈奴，亡走焉耆。车师王更立子乌贵为太子。及乌贵立为王，与匈奴结婚姻，教匈奴遮汉道通乌孙者。”

("During the reign of Emperor Zhao, the Xiong-nu again sent 4,000 cavalrymen to Ju-shi. When Emperor Xuan ascended the throne, he sent five generals with troops to attack the Xiong-nu. The Ju-shi farmers were frightened and left, and Ju-shi resumed communication with the Han Dynasty. The Xiong-nu were angry and summoned their crown prince Jun-su to be held as a hostage. Jun-su was the royal grandson of Yan-qi, and he did not want to be held as a hostage by the Xiong-nu, so he fled to Yan-qi. The King of Ju-shi appointed his son Wu-gui as crown prince. When Wu-gui was made king, he married a Xiong-nu princess and instigated the Xiong-nu to block the Han Road connecting Wu-sun.")

⁵⁶ Ban, Gu, *Book of Han*, "Western Regions I": 西域诸国大率土著，有城郭田畜，与匈奴、乌孙异俗，故皆役属匈奴。匈奴西边日逐王置僮仆都尉，使领西域，常居焉耆、危须、尉黎间，赋税诸国，取富给焉。

(The Western Regions were mostly inhabited by indigenous peoples, who had cities, farmlands and livestock, and had different customs from the Xiongnu and Wu-sun, so they were all [unvolunteered] subject to the Xiong-nu. The Xiong-nu's western Ri-zhu king, appointed a native servant commander to lead the Western Regions, who lived between Yan-qi, Wei-xu, and Wei-li, and levied taxes on the various states, taking their wealth to support themselves [and the Huns].)

picture based on the assumption that these people and their many kingdoms were foreign to each other in civilization and cultural perspectives, when in fact it is otherwise.

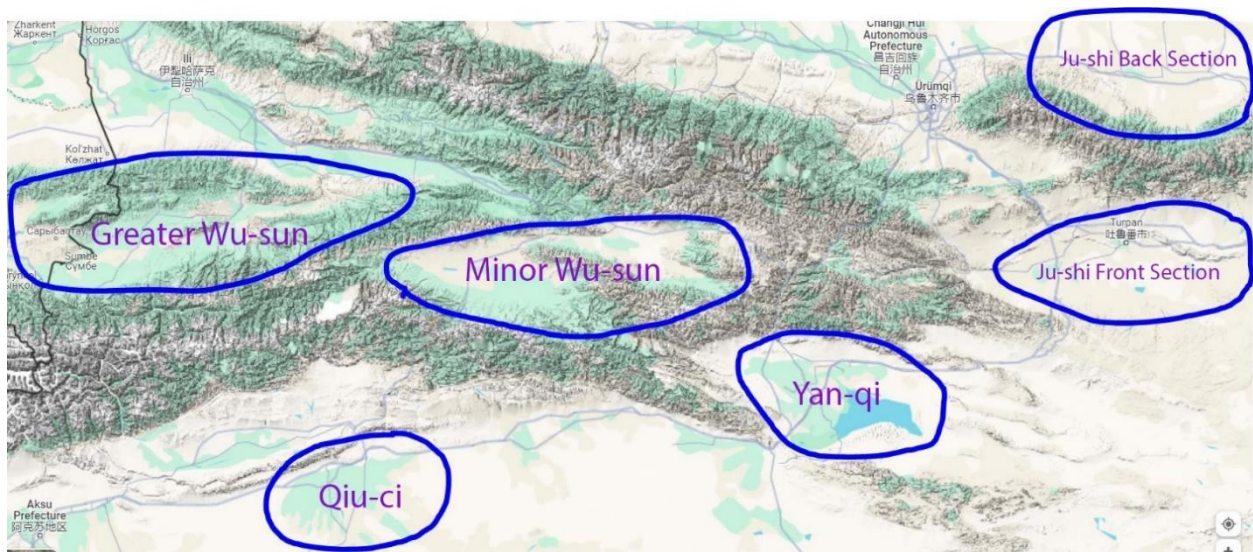


Figure 2. 8: The Allying Block of the Qiu-ci, Minor Wu-sun, Yan-qi, and Ju-shi kingdoms ⁵⁷

2.4.2 The Rival Colonisations of the Mediterranean Scythians *Gao-che* and Hephthalites, East Asian *Rou-ran*, the Mixed-Blood *Hu* Turks, and the Chinese

In the beginning of the sixth century, the *Ye-da* (or *Yi-da*, *Yi-tian*, *Hua*)⁵⁸ Empire, which originated from the Altai Mountains region (the northern border of present-day Xinjiang), established by Hephthalites (Yeptailtha), the so called “white Huns,” expanded southwest to the Bactria-Sogdian regions, then eastward along the Tarim Basin, which includes *Yu-tian* or Khotan, at the southern tip (Wei, S., 2000: 1541-1542), and took over the Kocho Kingdom (Turpan) from the hand of the *Gao-che* people in AD 479, Yan-qi (Karasahr) and present-day Urumqi-Jimsar regions north of Tian-shan mountains during 497-509, and even further eastward subjugated some Rou-ran people at the north of Dun-huang in 522 (Litvinsky, 1996: 144). During the time of the Yan-qi’s defeat by the Hephthalites (*Yi-da*), the Kocho king sent his second son to be the king of Yan-qi as requested, and this new king led Yan-qi to strength (Wei, Z., 2000: 1238). In 541, the Rou-ran khanate attacked and destroyed the *Gao-che* kingdom (Duan, L. Q., 1988: 252). In 552, the Turks who congregated at the Altai Mountains under the rule of Rou-ran rebelled against and defeated

⁵⁷ Source: <https://google.com/maps/@42.6883866,84.6676366,7.6z/data=!5m1!1e4?entry=ttu>

⁵⁸ These are different transliterations in Chinese classics.

the Rou-ran Empire which was impaired from its civil war (Grousset, 1970, 81-82), and established the Turkic Khanate according to the *Book of Sui* (Wei, Z., 2000; 1249).

Turks were mixed-blood *Hu* people according to the Chinese classics, and they were not the later Uyghurs who are not ethnically Turks or Turkic (or even Mongolic) yet many have wondered about the term for over a century with much confusion, likely misled by Byzantine sources and later Islamic sources since ancient times and the modern Turkish narrative, although the ethnical name for Uyghurs was changed from “Turk” to be “Uyghur” officially in the 1930s by the local Chinese government, based on the discovery noted above of Soviet Russian scholars and its wide acceptance among Uyghur elites (Hansen, 2012: 226; Millward, 2007: 208; Rudelson, 1997: 7, 149; Li, S., 2003: 39).⁵⁹ Therefore, in the late sixth century, ethnical and racial diversity among minorities in the Kocho Basin naturally existed, as the majority were the native Tocharian type people, the Aryan Indo-European, and the Yue-zhi type people, the Scythian Indo-European. As a partial result of the *Rou-ran* invasion and conquest of the Turpan Basin, the Chinese became the largest minority with over ten thousand households in AD 460 living in the Turpan Basin (Litvinsky, 2003: 258 in the Chinese version or 1996: 300 in the English version), with the *Rou-ran* people as another influential and ruling minority who were “looking like *Gao-li* [ancient Korean] people with braid hanging on their back”, according to the Tang Chinese historian Li Yan-shou (Li, Y. S., 2000: 1322).⁶⁰

In AD 590, the tenth year of *Kai-huang* in Sui China, when the Turks took over four cities of the Kocho kingdom, the Kocho king with the royal family name *Qu* died and his son *Bo-ya*, whose mother was the princess of the Turkic Khan, succeeded to the throne. In AD 608, the fourth year of *Da-ye*, the king *Bo-ya* paid tribute to Sui China and in the following year visited the Chinese capital *Luo-yang*, and even followed the Chinese army to attack the *Gao-li* (Korea) kingdom, therefore being awarded marriage with the Chinese *Hua-rong* princess of the *Yu-wen* family and

⁵⁹ Hansen mentions “In 960 Muslim chronicles record that ‘200,000 tents of the Turks’ converted to Islam.” Contemporary American scholar James Millward mentions the official name change for Uyghurs in 1930s-1940s by Uyghurs and the local Chinese government. According to the founding father of contemporary Uyghur study, American scholar Justin Jon Rudelson, the ethnic name from “Turk” changed to be “Uyghur” by the local Chinese government in 1934. Contemporary Chinese academia has now begun to challenge the narrative which also prevails in Chinese academia such as holding Uyghur and Turks are the same race and ethnicity. Li Sheng, ed. Historical and Current Xinjiang, China (Urumqi, China: Xinjiang People, 2003) 39. 厉声主编：《中国新疆历史与现状》（乌鲁木齐：新疆人民出版社，2003）

⁶⁰ 【唐】李延寿：《南史·列传第六十九·西域诸国》：“面貌类高丽，辫发垂之于背。”

returning to Kocho in 613 (Wei, Z., 2000: 1239).⁶¹ In AD 640, the fourteenth year of *Zhen-guan*, Tang-China mustered its army and took over the Kocho kingdom's twenty-two cities, then set up a military base with over a thousand soldiers and renamed the kingdom *Xi-zhou* (Western Prefecture) of China, according to the *Old Book of Tang*: Chronicle 148, "Western Rongs" (Liu, X., 2000: 3603-3604, 3607). Thus, the struggle between China from the east and nomads from the north over control of the Turpan Basin and Silk Road continued for over 700 years beginning with the *Han-wu* emperor.

The Tang army attacked Kocho along with other western kingdoms including *Yan-qi*, which had been attacked by Kocho eight years previously in the sixth year of *Zhen-guan* (632), and then again two years later in the twelfth year of *Zhen-guan* (638), due to a dispute over the control of the Silk Road (Wei, Z., 2000: 3603; Ou-yang & Song, 2000: 4727). The Western Turks, who were the overlords and allies of Kocho, gave up without supporting Kocho and retreated westward when Tang-China's army arrived (Liu, X., 2000: 3603). Therefore, the name of the Kocho kingdom symbolically ended after lasting a total of 180 years from AD 460, while the name *Ju-shi* kingdom ended in AD 450 (Rong, X. J., 2007: 4).

It is worth noting that within about two centuries, between the *Book of Wei* and the *Book of Zhou*, the Kocho kingdom increased from eight to sixteen cities, seemingly due to waves of colonization and immigration. Additionally, in just a few decades between the *Book of Zhou* and the *Book of Sui*, the Kocho kingdom increased by two more cities from sixteen to eighteen, seemingly due to a large flow of immigrants since the time of Sui China, and, after a few decades, to twenty-two cities when Tang China took over in 640. Such a rapid urban development during ancient times was very impressive. Following that influx, other racial-ethnic groups, such as the Sogdians, Tibetans, Uyghurs, Khitans, Mongols, and again the Manchurian-Chinese, continued immigrating from all directions in the following millennium.

⁶¹ 【唐】魏徵：《隋书·列传第 48·西域：高昌》：“炀帝嗣位，引致诸蕃。大业四年，遣使贡献，帝待其使甚厚。明年，伯雅来朝。因从击高丽，还尚宗女华容公主。八年冬归蕃，……”（第 1239 页）

([Tang] Wei Zheng, *Book of Sui*, "No 48 Western Regions: Gao-chang": "When Emperor Yang succeeded to the throne, he attracted the various tribes. In the fourth year of Da-ye, he sent envoys to pay tribute, and the emperor treated them very well. The next year, Bo-ya came to pay homage. He participated in the attack on Gao-li and after his return he married the daughter of the Sui royal family, Princess Hua-rong. In the winter of the eighth year, he returned to his native land,..." (page 1239))

<i>Book of Wei</i> (AD 551-554)	“The kingdom [of Kocho] has eight cities, all of which have Chinese [inhabitants]....The weather is warm, the land is great and fertile, grain and wheat are harvested twice annually, friendly for silkworm breeding, and abundant fruits of five kinds....There is much wine....Herding sheep and horses in secret places only known to the nobles in case they are stolen.” [p. 1517] “The Kingdom of <i>Yan-qi</i>....has nine cities...Marriage is similar to Chinese-Xia....Men cut their hair as decoration....Their scripts are the as same as Sanskrit....The weather is cold, the farmland is good and fertile, producing rice, millet, beans, and wheat, and animal husbandry of camels and horses. They have silkworm but not for silk thread, instead using it as cotton. Their customs value wine and loves music.” [p. 1533]
<i>Book of Zhou</i> (AD 636)	“The [Kingdom] of Kocho, ...the kingdom has 16 cities in total....Men’s clothing follow Hu style while women dress similar to Chinese-Xia... using both Chinese and <i>Hu</i> as their written language. They have [Chinese classics] of Mao Commentary of Poetry, the [Confucian] Analects, Filial Piety, and are taught in a government educational system. They study all the [Chinese] classics in Hu language. Taxation uses silver or linen.” [p. 619-620] “The Kingdom of <i>Yan-qi</i>...has nine cities...[Same as the <i>Book of Wei</i>]” [p. 621]
<i>Book of Sui</i> (AD 636)	“The Kingdom of Kocho, ...the kingdom has eighteen cities. ...much wine. [Similar to the <i>Book of Wei</i>].” [p. 1239] “The Kingdom of <i>Yan-qi</i>...has nine cities...” [p. 1241]
<i>History of the Northern Dynasties</i> (AD 659)	“The kingdom [of Kocho] has eight cities, all of which have Chinese [inhabitants].... It had eighteen cities during the time of Sui China. There is much wine. ...[Same as the <i>Book of Zhou</i>]” [p. 2132] “The Kingdom of <i>Yan-qi</i>...has nine cities[Same as the <i>Book of Zhou</i>]” [p. 2134]

Table 2. 1: The background of the Kocho Kingdom and Yan-qi Kingdom over two centuries

Based on the above review of the history of the Kocho-Turpan Basin and its neighboring Yan-qi Basin at the northeastern rim of Tarim Basin by the time of Sui China (581-618), especially with the information about the influx of the Scythian Indo-Europeans and other East-Asian immigrants such as the Rou-ran, Turks, and more Chinese, one can easily understand in the next section how various religions and ideologies not only spread from west of the Pamirs all the way along the Silk Road through Tarim Basin to Kocho-Turpan Basin, but also from the east to the Turpan Basin and Yan-qi Basin including East Asian Steppe Shamanism and Chinese Daoism and Confucianism, especially among the same racial and ethnical groups with the same or similar languages and most importantly among the people in the same Iranian-Macedonian-influenced Tocharian civilization. The complexity of the colonising foreign groups and rivaling control of the regions, together with their more complex international relationship, can easily confuse us with a distorted historical picture and a fragmented framework based on the assumption that the native Tocharian and Scythian population disappeared, when in fact other racial-ethnic groups were the minorities until the invasion of Uyghurs about two centuries later.

2.5 East-Syriac Christianity and Buddhism in the Kocho-Turpan Basin and Ashir-Yanqi Basin Prior to the Mid-Seventh Century, Highlighting the “Custom to Serve [Worship] the Heavenly God” and the “Foreign Religion from Persia”

Drs. Dickens and Zieme have well described an origin narrative for Silk Road Tarim-Turpan Basins Christianity read by many in academia: during the time of the Uyghur Khanate (AD 744-841) before the Uyghurs' westward move to Kocho, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism dominated all of the areas of the Kocho Basin and the oasis of the Tarim Basin, and their followers were mainly the local Indo-Europeans. In addition, Christianity was also practiced, but it was a minor religion, mainly concentrated among the foreign Sogdian (*Su-te*) merchants and diaspora community and Christian refugees along the Silk Road (Li, S., 2003: 90, 101-102; Dickens & Zieme, 2014: 292-293).⁶² However, the records in some ancient Chinese texts about religious phenomenon offer a different and older version of this history in which Christianity from the East Syriac Church in

⁶² Dickens & Zieme says: “Although the origins of the Christian community in Turpan are unclear, it may very well be linked with the period of anti-Buddhist persecution in Tang dynasty China, which peaked in the year 845...” in the east and “the steady advance of Islam into Central Asia in the west,...” or “the ongoing mission of the Church of the East to extend its network of bishops and metropolitans throughout Central Asia or perhaps the influence of Christian merchants and traders travelling along the Silk Road, at some point Christianity was established in the oasis and, judging by the few texts which have been reliably dated, the faith lasted in Turfan from at least the ninth century to the fourteenth century.”

Persia spread over central Asia, including our two basins of Arshi-Yanqi and Kocho-Turpan in a large scale.

2.5.1 The Records in Chinese Classics for an Unnamed Religion

The *Book of Wei* from the mid-sixth century is a record of the history of the Northern Wei and Eastern Wei dynasties (380-550) in China. “Chronicle 89: Kocho” (Wei, S., 2000: 1517-1518) clearly explains Kocho’s geography, local conditions, social relationships, and religion:

Kocho is the state of the former kingdom of *Ju-shi* “Front Section King” that was the “Front Section” of Han-China. From east to west, it is 200 *li*, and from south to north 500 *li*, and is surrounded on all sides by many mountains...The kingdom has eight cities, all of which have Chinese [inhabitants]...There is much wine. Their custom is to serve [worship] the heavenly God, and they also believe in Buddhism... There is a red rock mountain, and 70 *li* [north] of it is the *Tan-han* Mountain [Bogda Peak of Tian-shan Mountains], which is snow-covered [even] in summer. North of this mountain is the border with the *Tie-le* [Huns-Uyghurs].⁶³

Note that the reference to wine culture shows that the subjects here were still the native Indo-European whites, and that “they also believe in Buddhism” is also easy to understand. But how should readers understand “their custom is to serve [worship] the heavenly God,” which was always mentioned first, before “they also believe in Buddhism”? Even though this is but a passing mention, nevertheless, it is worth getting to the bottom of it.

The *Book of Wei*: Chronicle 90: Western Regions (Wei, S., 2000: 1533) has this passage:

The Kingdom of *Yan-qi* [Arshi, Karasahr] is to the south of *Ju-shi*, its capital is the city of *Yuan-qu* [another phonetic translation of Yan-qi], it is 70 *li* south of the White Mountain [Tian-shan] and was formerly a state of Han-China....This region has nine cities....The script is the same as Sanskrit. Their custom is to serve [worship] the

⁶³ 【北齐】魏收：《魏书·列传第 89·高昌》：“高昌者，车师前王之故地，汉之前部地也。东西二千里，南北五百里，四面多大山。……国有八城，皆有华人。……多葡萄酒。俗事天神，兼信佛法。……北有赤石山。七十里有贪汗山，夏有积雪，此山北铁勒界也。”（第 1517-1518 页）【注：铁勒或特勒，即匈奴—回鹘的过渡民族形态。】 *Tie-le* or *Te-le* is the transitional ethnic status from Huns to Uyghurs according to Chinese classics, including *Book of Tang*.

heavenly God, and they also believe in Buddhism....Their custom is a love for wine and music. Heading south more than 10 *li* is the sea [Bosten Lake], which is abundant in fish, salt and flowering reeds. Heading east, Kocho is 900 *li* away, and heading west 900 *li* is *Qiu-ci* [Kucha]; everything in between is desert.⁶⁴

Some other later ancient Chinese historical records also mention Kocho and the Yan-qi religion of “serve [worship] the heavenly God.” The accounts of Kocho in Chronicle 48 of the *Book of Sui* from the mid-early seventh century are more or less similar to that of the *Book of Wei*, but with an increased record of ten cities including, “The Kingdom of Kocho, ...the kingdom has 18 cities. ...much wine. Their custom is to serve [worship] the heavenly God, and they also believe in Buddhism” (Wei, Z., 2000: 1238-1239).⁶⁵ Furthermore, there is more detailed information here, for instance, explaining that Kocho had been conquered in succession by the Han-Chinese, the *Ru-ru* (*Rou-ran*) people, the *Gao-che* people, later *Ye-da* the Hephthalites also took *Yan-qi* (Wei, S., 2000: 1541-1542; 1518),⁶⁶ and finally the Turks. In addition, Chronicle 42 of the *Book of Zhou* from the mid-early seventh century states, “The Kingdom of *Yan-qi*, 70 Chinese miles away from

⁶⁴ 【北齐】魏收：《魏书·列传第 90·西域》：“焉耆国，在车师南，都员渠城，白山南七十里，汉时旧国也。……国内凡有九城。……文字与婆罗门同。俗事天神，并崇信佛法。……俗尚葡萄酒，兼爱音乐。南去海【波斯腾湖】十馀里，有鱼盐蒲苇之饶。东去高昌九百里；西去龟兹九百里，皆沙碛；东南去瓜州二千二百里。”（第 1533 页）

⁶⁵ 【唐】魏徵：《隋书·列传第 48·西域》：“高昌国者，则汉车师前王庭也，……国内有城十八。……多蒲陶酒。俗事天神，兼信佛法。”（第 1238-1239 页）

⁶⁶ The *Book of Wei*, chapter “Western Regions” categorizes *Ye-da* the Yeptailtha (Hephthalites) as a sub-racial-ethnic group of *Gao-che* people. “嚙哒国，大月氏之种类也，亦曰高车之别种，其原出于塞北。自金山而南，在于阗之西，都乌许水南两百馀里，去长安一万一百里。其王都拔底延城，盖王舍城也。……其人凶悍，能斗战。西域康居、于阗、沙勒、安息及诸小国三十许皆役属之，号为大国。”“及蠕蠕主伏图高车所杀，嘉又臣高车。初前部胡人悉为高车所徙，入于焉耆，焉耆又为嚙哒所破灭，国人分散，众不自立，请【高昌】王于嘉。”注：《隋书》此处言“属焉耆为挹怛所破”，“挹怛”即“嚙哒”。

(“The Hephthalites were a branch of the Greater Yue-zhi, also known as a branch of the *Gao-che*. They originated from the northern region over the Chinese frontier. From the Golden Mountains to the south, they are west of Yu-tian, with their capital more than 200 Chinese miles south of the Oxus River and 11,000 Chinese miles from Chang'an. Their king's capital was Ba-di-yan, which probably means “royal city”... Their people were fierce and good at fighting. Kang-ju, Yu-tian, Sha-le, Parthia and about 30 other small countries in the Western Regions were all subject to them, and they were called a great nation.” “When the Rou-ran leader Futu was killed by the *Gao-che*, Jia became a vassal of the *Gao-che*. At first, all the Hu people in the front were moved by the *Gao-che* and brought to Yan-qi. Yan-qi was then destroyed by the Hephthalites. The people were scattered and could not reestablish themselves, so they asked Jia to be the King of *Gao-chang*.” Note: *The Book of Sui* agrees “Yan-qi was destroyed by Yi-da”, and “Yi-da” is “Hephthalites”).

the White Mountains at the north...their custom is to serve [worship] the heavenly God, and they also venerate and believe in Buddhism” (Ling-hu, 2000: 621).⁶⁷ Chronicle 85 of the *History of the Northern Dynasties* from the mid-seventh century also says in its “Traditions of the Western Regions,” “The Kingdom of *Yan-qi*...their custom is to serve [worship] the heavenly God, and they also venerate and believe in Buddhism” (Li, Y. S., 2000: 2134).⁶⁸ Apparently, all these records were following the corresponding account in the *Book of Wei*.

<i>Book of Wei</i> (AD 554)	“The kingdom [of Kocho] has eight cities, all of which have Chinese [inhabitants]....There is much wine. Their custom is to serve [worship] the heavenly God, and they also believe in Buddhism....” [p. 1517] “The Kingdom of <i>Yan-qi</i>...has nine cities...their custom is to serve [worship] the heavenly God, and they also venerate and believe in Buddhism.” [p. 1533]
<i>Book of Zhou</i> (AD 636)	“The Kingdom of <i>Yan-qi</i>...has nine cities...their custom is to serve [worship] the heavenly God, and they also venerate and believe in Buddhism.” [p. 621]
<i>Book of Sui</i> (AD 636)	“The Kingdom of Kocho, ...the kingdom has 18 cities. ...much wine. Their custom is to serve [worship] the heavenly God, and they also believe in Buddhism.” [p. 1239]
<i>History of the Northern Dynasties</i> (AD 659)	“The kingdom [of Kocho] has eight cities, all of which have Chinese [inhabitants]....It has eighteen cities during the time of Zhou [dynasty]. There is much wine. Their custom is to serve [worship] the heavenly God, and they also believe in Buddhism....” [p. 2132]

⁶⁷ 【唐】令狐德棻:《周书·列传第 42·异域下》:“焉耆国在白山之南七十里, ...俗事天神, 并崇信佛法。”(第 621 页)

⁶⁸ 【唐】李延寿:《北史·列传第 85·西域》:“焉耆国, ...俗事天神, 并崇信佛法也。”(第 2134 页)

	“The Kingdom of <i>Yan-qi</i>...has nine cities ...their custom is to serve [worship] the heavenly God, and they also venerate and believe in Buddhism.” [p. 2134]

Table 2. 2: The records of “serve [worship] the heavenly God” in different Chinese classics

Summarizing the above descriptive records in the ancient Chinese court historical texts and their contexts, it is evident that the “serve [worship] the heavenly God” religion in Kocho was the main religion and that Buddhism was secondary, while in Yan-qi (Karasahr), even though the “serve [worship] the heavenly God” religion also was the main religion, Buddhism was a stronger force than in Kocho. Some scholars (Lin, W. S., 1987: 89)⁶⁹ think “serve [worship] the heavenly God” referred to the heavenly God of Zoroastrianism, but this argument was questioned by the prominent Central Asia scholar Lin Wu-shu, who points out that a very important proof lies in the fact that extremely few religious cultural relics related to Zoroastrianism have been unearthed in the Kocho area, so it does not represent the major religion of this area, while “Buddhism, which had merely a ‘complementary faith’ position actually left behind massive numbers of historical remains” (Lin, W. S., 1987:89-90).

I agree that calling Zoroastrianism into question is logical and sound. To date, both a great many Buddhist cultural relics, including texts, that can be traced back to the eighth century have been discovered, and a significant number of archeological discoveries unearthed in the Kocho area have included cultural relics, including texts, that are related to East-Syriac Christianity and Manichaeism, most of which date to the ninth century and later. Scholars in the field have acknowledged the existence of Christianity in the ancient Kocho area but often neglected to recognize the existing data earlier than that of the ninth to the fourteenth centuries. Therefore, they speculate Christianity was just a small-scale religion incomparable to Buddhism as the dominant mainstream. Their neglect is mainly due to ignoring the related texts in the above Chinese classics and supportive Syriac records, and the larger historical religious context in the Western Regions from the Turpan, Yan-qi and Tarim Basins all the way to Persia, thus lacking a comprehensive understanding.

⁶⁹ The late great Chinese scholar Chen Yuan and the late great Japanese scholar Toru Haneda both asserted the “heavenly God” in Kocho was the Zoroastrian God.

2.5.2 The East-Syriac Christianity of “Serving the Heavenly God,” Prevailing in the Karasahr (*Yan-qi*) Basin and Turpan (*Gao-chang*) Basin

Based on the above questions, I go a step further to say that the “serve [worship] the heavenly God” religion is, in fact, East-Syriac Christianity. “*Tian shen*” means Christian heavenly God, similar to the modern translation used by the Catholic Church of *tian zhu* (“heavenly Lord”) for God. Of course, if this can be confirmed and proved, it would certainly be a light at the end of the tunnel for the study of the religious history of Kocho, Yan-qi and other cities along the northwestern rim of Tarim that Christianity dominated the areas together with Buddhism instead of only the latter. This is at least three centuries earlier than what the academic community has identified about Christian history in the regions so far.

Of first importance is to note that Chinese historical materials also use “heavenly God” (*tian shen*) when referring to the object of worship by the Shamanist peoples of the steppes. In the same Chronicle 42 of the *Book of Zhou*, we read this about the Turkic Khanate: “The khan’s permanent residence is in the [sacred] *Yu-du-jin* [Otuken] mountain, and his royal yurt opens to the east, to venerate the direction of the sun’s rising. Every year, leading noblemen go to caves to worship their ancestors. And, in mid-May, [they] collect water from the people to worship with sacrifice the heavenly God” (Ling-hu, 2000: 617).⁷⁰ The characters used in this description for “worship with sacrifice the heavenly God” are “*bai ji tian shen*,” with “worship with sacrifice”, conveying the distinguishing feature of Shamanism, with the unique Tengrism of the East Asia steppes.

The *Book of Wei* and the *History of the Northern Dynasties* (Li, Y. S., 2000: 2173) also recounts the Shamanistic rituals of the *Gao-che* people: “Five *Gao-che* tribes gathered together to sacrifice [to worship] heaven, with several tens of thousands in attendance. In this big gathering, people rode horses and slaughtered cattle to be sacrificed, they circumambulated while joyfully singing. It was said there had never been such a large scale gathering in former generations” (Wei, S., 2000: 1563).⁷¹ The characters used in this description are “*ji tian*” (meaning

⁷⁰ 【唐】令狐德棻:《周书·列传第 42·异域下·突厥》:“可汗恒处于都斤山,牙帐东开,盖敬日之所出也。每岁率诸贵人,祭其先窟。又以五月中旬,集他人水,拜祭天神。”(第 617 页)

⁷¹ 【北齐】魏收:《魏书·列传第 91·高车》:“高宗时,五部高车合聚祭天,众至数万。大会,走马杀牲,游绕歌吟忻忻,其俗称自前世以来无盛于此。”(第 1563 页)“来岁秋,马肥,复相率候于震所,埋杀羊,燃火拔刀,女巫祝说,似如中国祓除,而群队驰马旋绕,百匝乃止。人持一束柳棣回,竖之,以乳酪灌焉。”(第 1561 页;《北史》第 2172 页)

“sacrifice to worship [sky] heaven”), and they highlight the Shamanist characteristic of sacrificing animals.

But, the Chinese characters for “their custom is to serve [worship] the heavenly God” used in the same Chronicle of the *Book of Zhou* to describe the religion of Kocho are clearly different from the “worship with sacrifice the heavenly God” and “sacrifice [to worship] Heaven” used for Shamanism. If a further comparison is made with Buddhism, the completely different verbs used to describe religious “belief” in these three religions of Christianity, Shamanism-Tengrism and Buddhism are evident: “serve” (*shi*), “sacrifice” (*ji*), and “believe” (*xin*), respectively. The adoption of the hermeneutic methodology with thematic and discourse analyses here helps in providing valuable deductive logic and inductive insight.

East-Syriac Christianity	“to serve [worship] the heavenly God” (<i>shi tian shen</i>)
Buddhism	“to believe in Buddhism” (<i>xin fo fa</i>)
Shamanism.	“to worship with sacrifice the heavenly God” (<i>bai ji tian shen</i>) ; “sacrifice [to worship] heaven” (<i>ji tian</i>)
Zoroastrianism	“to serve [worship] the fire God” (<i>shi huo shen</i>)
Islam	“to worship heavenly God” (<i>bai tian shen</i>)

Table 2. 3: Comparison of the verbs used by the different religions in the Chinese classics

Next, in the same *Book of Wei: Western Regions* (see also *History of the Northern Dynasties: Western Regions*), after saying of Kocho and Yan-qi that “their custom is to serve [to worship] the heavenly God” and that they also believe in Buddhism, the text also makes special mention of the Persian situation in the same chapter and says of the religion of the Persians, “their custom is to serve [worship] the fire God and the heavenly God.”⁷² The words in this description are very specific and significant because they provide crucial information: “Serve [worship] the fire God” here clearly by word choice and context is a Zoroastrian characteristic, underscoring, therefore,

⁷² 【北齐】魏收：《魏书·列传第 90·西域》：“俗事火神、天神。文字与胡书异。”（第 1537 页）

that the mention in the earlier descriptive record of “their custom is to serve [worship] the heavenly God” could not in any way be about Zoroastrianism. So to which “God” does this refer?

After a deductive analysis of the Chinese classics on circumstantial evidence, an inductive analysis on Syriac Church classics sheds light on the outcome. Note that the *Book of Wei* was completed in the mid-sixth century (AD 551-554). At this time, the East-Syriac Church had grown quite large in Persia, posing a challenge to traditional Zoroastrianism. Its believers were numerous, including many who had abandoned their commitment to Zoroastrianism and converted to Christianity. For instance, the East-Syriac Church Catholicos Aba I (AD 540-552), a powerful leader, was originally a high-ranking leader of Zoroastrianism who held the post of secretary to the governor of Beth Garmai in the province of Persia (Baum & Winkler, 2003: 33-34). So, since at this time in Persia the main religions were Zoroastrianism and Christianity, “serve [worship] the heavenly God” here can only refer to Christianity, and, therefore, “serve [worship] the heavenly God” in Kocho and Yan-qi would also refer to Christianity.

Note also that, in the middle of China’s Tang dynasty, when the Chinese classics mention that Arabs in Persia “worship heavenly God five times a day,” the reference is to Muslims. The verb used is “*bai*,” in other words, “worship,” relating to those Muslims who identified pious martyrdom with “killing enemies to be blessed” (Ou-yang & Song, 2000: 4749).⁷³

Finally, after introducing Persia, the *Book of Sui: Western Regions* (and *History of the Northern Dynasties: Western Regions*), offers this description as its introduction of the Kingdom of Cao: “The Kingdom of Cao is located north of the Pamirs and in the time of Han-China was called the Kingdom of *Ji-bing*. The family name of its king was *Zhao-wu* as surname and Shunda as first name, and his ancestors were from the Kingdom of *Kang*. ... Their custom is to have luxurious temples” (Wei, Z., 2000: 1245).⁷⁴ This kingdom was situated north of the Pamir

⁷³ 【宋】欧阳修，宋祁：《新唐书·列传第 146 下·西域下·大食》：“大食，本波斯地。男子鼻高，黑而髯。

女子白皙，出辄鄣面。日五拜天神。银带，佩银刀，不饮酒举乐。有礼堂容数百人，率七日，王高坐为下说曰：死敌者生天上，杀敌受福。”（第 4749 页）

（“The *Da-shi* [Tarzi, i.e. Arab Caliphate] occupies what was originally the land of Persia. The men have high noses, dark complexions and heavy beards. The women are very fair and cover up their faces when they go out. [They] worship the heavenly God five times a day, wear silver belts, carry silver knives, and do not drink or engage in entertainment. Their worship hall can accommodate several hundred people. Every seven days, the king sits on his throne and speaks to his people below, saying ‘Those who are killed by the enemy will live in heaven, and those who kill the enemy will be blessed’.”）

⁷⁴ 【唐】魏徵：《隋书·列传第 48·西域·漕国》：“漕国，在葱岭之北，汉时罽宾国也。其王姓昭武，字顺达，康国王之宗族。……其俗淫祠。”（第 1245 页）

Mountains, and it belonged to the “nine tribes of *Zhao-wu*”— which entails the line of the descendants of the Greater *Yue-zhi* Scythians. The meaning of “their custom is to have luxurious temples” is that they held luxurious and extravagant churches in high esteem. The next part says, “In the Pamirs are a people who are obedient to the heavenly God, whose rituals and institutions are extremely luxurious, with houses made with gold and silver and the ground paved with silver. More than 1,000 people worship in the church each day. In front of the church is the backbone of a fish, its [bones form a] hole [large enough for] a horse and rider to pass through [to go into and leave the church].”⁷⁵

The references of “north of the Pamirs” and “in the Pamirs”, in addition to the kingdom’s family name which was “Zhao-wu” suggest that the people here also included the Aryan descendants of former Bactria (*Da-xia*) who became vassals of Greater *Yue-zhi* Scythians. Their location should be somewhere in the valley of the Pamirs near the capital of the former Bactria. Earlier in this chapter, we noted that the region was mentioned by the Tang Buddhist traveler Xuan-zang as the homeland of the former Bactria kingdom, now identified as the “blue-green-eyed” people’s *Hu-mi* (Khulmi) state, a depressing situation for Buddhism. From the *Book of Wei* and other Chinese historical materials, we learn that, from the Kocho area to west of the Pamir Mountains, though likely the majority of the Indo-European states were Buddhists, some of them were still Zoroastrian, and some were both Christian and Buddhists. This realization raises the question: How far did Christianity spread within the Kocho and Yan-qi regions (i.e., the Turpan Basin and Yan-qi Basin)?

Christianity was a widespread religion and even the dominate one at least in *Yan-qi* (Karasahr), Kocho, and likely in *Cao* kingdom as well. Therefore, since the *Book of Wei* recounts the history of the Northern Wei and Eastern Wei dynasties of China, it is reasonable for us to speculate that East-Syriac Christianity had already arrived in the Kocho and Yan-qi regions and prospered by at least the mid-sixth century when the Book was published by means of the Silk Road after crossing over the oases around the Tarim Basin and also likely along the north side of the Tian-shan mountain range (i.e., the northern branch of the Silk Road). Even a quick examination of the historical materials of the East-Syriac Church reveals that its own records of this period and the Chinese historical materials are consistent and in agreement. As we will see shortly below, the very same Zoroastrian-converted-to-Christian Catholicos Aba I sent a bishop to the Hephthalites (white Huns) who ruled the north-easternmost frontier of Sasanian Persia,

⁷⁵ 【唐】魏徵：《隋书·列传第 48·西域·漕国》；“葱岭山有顺天神者，仪制极华，金银鑠为屋，以银为地，祠者日有千余人。祠前有一鱼脊骨，其孔中通，马骑出入。”（第 1245 页）

Central Asia-Xinjiang area (Wilmschurst, D., 2011: 77). During this time, Christianity was already widely spreading among the indigenous Indo-Europeans of Central Asia. A bishopric church institution had newly formed, and it later spread among the Western Turks.

Old Book of Tang notes that, during the time when Tang-China conquered the Turpan Basin, Yan-qi Basin, and the north-eastern rim of Tarim Basin, at the southwest regions of Tarim Basin (mostly consisting of the *Shu-le* kingdom), “their custom is to serve [worship] the Zoroastrian God.” Of *Yu-tian* kingdom, at the mid-south regions of the Tarim Basin, we read they “serve [worship] the Zoroastrian God fervently and venerate Buddhism” (Liu, X., 2000: 3609).⁷⁶ It seems the eastern Iranian language and Persian civilization dominated the regions while other parts of Tarim Basin were dominated by Tocharian language and civilization. It is very likely that Persian civilization has been passed down partly and mainly in cultural forms until today among Tajiks who have been Islamified in later centuries at both sides of the Pamirs. This conclusion matches what the Tang Buddhist Monk Xuan Zang recorded, that, from *Yu-tian* eastwards were regions of the Bactrian block (Xuan-Zang, 2016: 414).⁷⁷ Therefore, the Persian civilization, though comparatively less influential, situated along the Wakhan Corridor in Pamirs to the western part of the *Yu-tian* kingdom (including the present-day Khotan region) and along another route of the Silk Road through the Tashkurgan region in the Pamirs to *Shu-le* (including present-day Kashgar

⁷⁶ 【后晋】刘昫：《旧唐书·列传第 148·西戎·疏勒》：“疏勒国，即汉时旧地也。西带葱岭，……俗事祆神，有胡书文字。贞观九年，遣使献名马，自是朝贡不绝。……于阗国，西南带葱岭，与龟兹接，……好事祆神，崇佛教。”（第 3609 页）

[[Later Jin] Liu Xu, *Old Book of Tang*, “No.148 Western Rong: Shule”: “Shu-le State is the old land of the Han Dynasty. It is bordered by the Pamir Mountains in the west... The people worship the Zoroastrian God and use Hu characters. In the ninth year of Zhen-guan, Shu-le state sent envoys to offer famous horses and has been paying tribute since then. ... Khotan is bordered by the Pamir Mountains in the southwest and borders Qiu-ci... They serve [worship] the Zoroastrian God fervently and venerate Buddhism.” (p. 3609))

⁷⁷ 【唐】玄奘：《大唐西域记》（辩机撰，董志翘译注），卷第 12：“二十二国”。Xuan-zang recorded that, after travelling about 180 kilometres more westward after he left the city of *Ni-rang* (Nina, in the present-day Min-feng county of Xinjiang, China), he arrived at the former Tocharian state. The state was forsaken for a long time and its cities all were deserted with no explanation given by him. This record has confused academia since scholars generally hold that the former Tocharian state should be only west of the Pamirs as the annotator mentions here. But Xuan-zang continued to travel northeast about 450 kilometres to arrive at the former land of *Lou-lan*. What Xuan-zang recorded was not a mistake because it matches what I discovered, based on my research, that the Bactria civilizational block stretched from west of the Pamirs all the way eastward through Tarim Basin to Turpan Basin, *Dun-huang* and *Hami*. Nevertheless, the Iranian-Persian civilization dominated the south-west Tarim Basin in the Khotan Kingdom as a wedge in the Bactria civilizational block.

“行四百余里，至睹货逻故国。国久空旷，城皆荒芜。……复此东北行千余里，至纳缚波故国，即楼兰地也。”（第 414 页）

region), occupied about one-third of the Tarim Basin at the west. This huge region was dominated by Zoroastrianism and Buddhism and contributed a civilizational and religious diversity, though these descendants belong to the same “blue-green-eyed” Aryan-type Iranianised-Tocharian people.

In summary, by analyzing the phrase “serve [worship] the heavenly God” in the contexts provided by the Chinese classics, and taking note of the different verbs used for differentiating the competing concepts of God and differing types of “worship” among serial religions vying for prominence, we can see that Christianity prevailed in the Pamirs and the Chinese westernmost frontier, including the Yan-qi and Ju-shi kingdoms, sharing the field with Buddhism and Zoroastrianism.

2.6 Persian East-Syriac Christianity in Central Asia—Its Spread in the *Jushi-Kocho* (Turpan) Basin and the Yanqi-ashir (Karasahr) basin

As early as AD 225, as the Persian Sassanid dynasty was beginning to replace the ancient Parthian dynasty, the East-Syriac Church already had “more than 20 Bishoprics in North Mesopotamia and in Persia,” including in Dailams (or Deylem), on the southern edge of the Caspian Sea, in the present-day Iranian province of Gilan (Mingana, 2010: 298). And Christianity already had spread to the kingdom of the Bactria (*Da-xia*)] people by no later than AD 196 (Mingana, 1925: 7), according to the *Book of the Laws of Countries* (Philippus, 2007) by the Christian thinker Bardaisan of Edessa (AD 154-222/3, who was later declared a heretic).⁷⁸ That Christianity spread so far so fast demonstrates once again its mission spirit originated from the legacy of the Antioch Church and how greatly the Silk Road facilitated East-West civilizational exchanges in the continent of Asia.

⁷⁸ Philippus, *Book of the Laws of the Countries: Dialogue on Fate of Bardaisan of Edessa*, the English version translated and published in 1965 by J. W. Drijvers who in the Introduction wrote: “Under that title [Book of the Laws of Countries] it was preserved in the Syrian Church, as a result of those very Laws of Countries, which attracted interest in later centuries, when Bardaisan had long been declared a heretic by the Syrian Church. // A number of his views which did not agree with those of the later Syrian orthodoxy, are persevered in this treatise.”

2.6.1 East-Syriac Persian Christianity among the Scythians and the Tocharians

In his book, Bardaisan compared the law and ethics of the various ethnic groups of his time, ultimately highlighting how entirely different the practice of Christian law and ethics was from non-Christian ones—surprisingly to our modern mind—far surpassing the civilizations of that era in those regions. This also shed a light on how Christianity transformed and upgraded the native civilisations. He wrote:

For behold, we all, wherever we may be, are called Christians after the one name of the Messiah. And upon one day, the first of the week, we gather together and on the appointed days we abstain from food. And our brothers who live in Gaul do not marry with men, and they who live in Parthia do not marry two women, and in Judea they are not circumcised. Our sisters among the Geli and the Kushanians do not have intercourse with foreigners, and they who live in Persia do not marry their daughters. Those who live in Media do not flee away from their dead, nor bury them alive or throw them for food to the dogs. Those who live in Edessa do not kill their wives or sisters who have committed adultery, but have nothing more to do with them and leave them to the judgment of God. And those who live in Hatra do not stone thieves. (Philippus, 2007: 61)

The “Kushanians” here refers to the people of the kingdom founded by the Greater *Yue-zhi* (Grousset, 1970: 29, 32), including the Bactria (Tocharia) area occupied by them, that encompasses both banks of the Amu River. According to information earlier in Bardaisan’s book, it had been in keeping with the local ethics and traditions for Kushanian and Geli women to have intercourse with foreigners (guests, travelers) (Philippus, 2007: 45, 47). Such a unique Tocharian culture in Kumul-Hami lasted to the time of Genghis Khan Mongols. Furthermore, the illustrations in this section of the text about the incestuous customs of the Persians are also confirmed by Chinese historical materials. The *Book of Wei* says of the Persians: “Their custom is to serve [worship] the God of fire [Zoroastrianism] and the heavenly God. Their script is different from *Hu* script. Many took their sisters as wives and concubines” (Wei, S., 2000: 1537). According to Christianity’s moral principles about marriage and according to Bardaisan’s account, those who “took their sisters as wives and concubines” certainly were not Christians whose “custom is to serve [worship] the heavenly God”.

Thus, it would seem that, by at least the end of the second century, Christianity had, via the Syriac-speaking church, extended east beyond the borders of Persia to Central Asia, including the region of Bactria (*Da-xia*, *Torcharin*) civilization west of the Pamirs, in the domain of Kushan the Greater *Yue-zhi* Empire, which also practiced Zoroastrianism as mentioned earlier (in the

Book of Wei). The archaeological discovery of the first century AD Kushan Adsho Carnelian Seal, seemingly an aristocratic or even royal one, shows a person riding on a horse holding a cross up high in his hand (Gawroński, G., 2018: 222). According to the Chinese scholar Li Min-ju, a legendary record about a *Yue-zhi* diplomat that most likely visited China between the third and the fifth century states that the *Yue-zhi* kingdom in central Asia tried to present Christianity to the Chinese emperor (Li, M. J., 2004: 12-13).⁷⁹ Li states that the record bears similarity to the *Xi-an* Tablet which recorded the spread of East Syriac Christianity in Tang-China from the mid-seventh century onward. If the argument of Mr. Li proves to be correct, then it would be the first record of Christianity presented in the Chinese court.



Figure 2. 9: Kushan divinity Adsho (carnelian seal). British Museum (2005)

Based on the archaeological discoveries and Li's research and speculative analysis, I found complementary support for the possible event and its time from the *Book of Jin* which records that the founding emperor of the *Jin* dynasty of China, Si-ma Yan the *Wu-di*, sent his envoy Yang Hao to the *Da-yuan* kingdom, later Sogdiana, in the Fergana Basin west of the Pamirs where

⁷⁹ In his footnote 3, Li Minju mentions that the record was probably written in the time of the Wei-Jin dynasties (AD 220-420) and later revised in the time of the Southern dynasty (AD 420-589).

Alexander the Great suffered a most serious loss in his otherwise glorious military career and also imposed his most successful colonisation and Graecisation afterward, and honored the king Lan Yu in the sixth year (AD 285) of *Tai-kang* reign (Fang, X. L., 2000: 1697).⁸⁰ In addition, Chinese Wei-Jin court history records that Kushan *Yue-zhi* king Vusadeva 1st once sent an envoy to visit the Wei State of north China, arriving in the beginning of AD 230 at the eve of the first Sassanid Iranian king Ardahir's conquest (Harmatta, J., *et al.* 1994:471), according to the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (Chen, S., 1999: 73).⁸¹ This one sentence record does not describe the background of the visit which might have been for the purpose of seeking an alliance with Wei State. Nevertheless, this might be the event that generated the legendary record of a *Yue-zhi* Christian diplomat. Either way, it happened in the third century AD. It is worth noting that the *Book of Jin* does not mention Kocho, but does mention Yan-qi and Qiu-ci.

The Kushan Empire, founded by the Greater *Yue-zhi*, collapsed around AD 244 due to an attack from the second Sasanian ruler of Iran, Shapur I (Litvinsky, 1996: 167), and the western parts of the empire, which included its capital Bactra, became the vassal states of Sasanian Iran (Harmatta, J., 1994:483). Therefore, *Da-yuan* became independent from the Kushan Empire as the Greater *Yue-zhi* states were at the south of *Da-yuan*. This might be why Jin China dared to send a diplomat all the way to the *Da-yuan* kingdom "to honor the king *Lan-yu* as the king of *Da-yuan*," without fear of the *Yue-zhi* Kushan empire who ruled *Da-yuan* for nearly four centuries.

Si-ma Yan ruled Jin China from AD 266 until his death in 290. Therefore, the *Yue-zhi* diplomat who visited *Jin* court and met the *Wu-di* Jin emperor presumably arrived in 279, as the

⁸⁰ 房玄龄：《晋书·列传第 67·大宛国》：“太康六年，武帝遣使杨颢拜其王蓝庚为大宛王。蓝庚卒，其子摩之立，遣使贡汗血马。(Fang Xuan-ling, *Book of Jin*, “No. 67 *Da-yuan* Kingdom”: “In the sixth year of *Tai-kang*, Emperor Wu sent an envoy, Yang Hao, to appoint the king Lan-yu as the King of *Da-yuan*. After Lan-yu died, his son Mo-zhi ascended the throne and sent an envoy to offer blood-sweating horses as tribute.)

As the Han Chinese emperor Liu Che launched a war against *Da-yuan* for its finest horse, Si Ma-yan obtained this kind of horse as tribute from *Da-yuan* through diplomatic means only. The same chapter in the section of “*Da-qin*” (Roman Empire) records the *Da-qin* King sent an envoy with tributes to the Chinese Jin emperor Si Ma-yan.

“武帝太康中，其王遣使贡献。”(第 1698 页) (“During the *Tai-kang* reign of Emperor Wu, the [*Yue-zhi*] king sent envoys to pay tribute.”)

⁸¹ 陈寿：《三国志·魏书·明帝纪第三》：“葵卯，大月氏王波调遣使奉献，以调为亲魏大月氏王。”(第 73 页)

(Chen Shou, *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, “*Wei Shu*, Chronicle of Emperor Ming III”: “In Kui Mao, the Great *Yue-zhi* King Bo Diao sent envoys to pay tribute, and Diao was honored with the title of Great *Yue-zhi* King who was close to Wei.” (p. 73))

envoy said it took thirteen years for his arrival, instead of during the reign of the *Wu-di* Han emperor in the first century BC in the account. By then, the *Yue-zhi* Kushan empire had fallen into two parts, which would explain why the Chinese court no longer paid enough attention to the tributes of their envoys. The *Yue-zhi* envoy boldly pointed out that the Chinese emperor did not value spiritual things and failed to recognize the value of the two tributes, which were the essentials for people's salvation, transformation, and peace.⁸² The disappointment of the *Yue-zhi* envoy might also have been derived from his failed political mission to seek an alliance with *Jin* China against Iranian Persia, just, as 400 years earlier, Han China *Wu-di* sent Zhang Qian to seek an alliance with the *Yue-zhi* kingdom in Sogdiana against the Huns but was rejected.

In AD 424, the East-Syriac Church held its third synod, the Synod of Dadyeshu, and announced that it was leaving the Latin Church system and establishing an independent Church of the East. According to Alphonse Mingana's research, among the bishops in attendance were those from four large cities in the Amu (Oxus) river area: Ray, or Rey, Shahr-e-Ray, Arsacia, present-day northeast Iran; Naishabur (Nishapur), present-day northeast Iran; Herat, in present-day Afghanistan; and Merw or Merv, known in Chinese histories as *Ma-lei*,⁸³ and other names, known as city Mary in present-day Turkmenistan (Mingana, 2010: 298). "Between the third and fifth centuries, the capital of the Merv oasis was still ancient Antioch in Margiana" and on the site of the ancient town near Old Merv, besides the Buddhist building complex, archaeologists also found "a Christian monastery which was probably functioning from the third century" (Harmatta, J., 1994: 473). Buddhism and Christianity side by side south of the Amu River resembles what Chinese classics recorded of the religious landscape in Yan-qi and Kocho Basins in the south of Tian-shan. Merv, formerly known as Alexandria (a name also for Kandahar, the current capital of Afghanistan in ancient time), before it was named Antioch, is situated at the northern bank of the Amu River (Oxus River).

Therefore, by the beginning of the fifth century, East Syriac Christianity already existed and developed in the Central Asia-Kushan/Bactria-Yuezhi area in the form of a mature institutional

⁸² 【前蜀】杜光庭：《仙传拾遗·月支使者》“夫此二物者，实济众生之至要，助至化而升平，岂图陛下乃不知贵乎！”

([Former Shu] Du Guang-ting, *Xian Zhuan Shi Yi*, "Yue-zhi Envoy": "These two things are indeed the most important to help all living beings, and help to bring peace and prosperity. How could Your Majesty not know their value?")

⁸³ Different Chinese phonetic translation : *Ma-lei*, *Ma-lu*, *Mu-lu*, *Ma-lan*, etc. (马雷、马鲁、木鹿、马兰, 等)

structure: the Merv diocese, largely located in the southern regions of Amu River. According to the *Book of the Later Han*: “Western Regions,” the city sits at the eastern board of *An-xi* (Sassanid Persia), which was known as *Mu-lu* (Merv), with a title of minor *An-xi* (Fan, Y., 1999: 1973).⁸⁴ Thus, Merv, at the southern bank of the Amu River, as the seat of the bishop within the domain of north-easternmost Persia, the Khorasan regions, is politically convenient and secure for the Church. The two banks of this river can be referred to as the western and eastern banks or the southern and northern banks, depending on one’s geographic perspective: when looking from west to east from the Persian base, they are the former, but from the perspective of Central Asia-Bactria, they are the latter.



Figure 2. 10: Christian ossuary at Afrosiab (Samarkand), Uzbekistan, dated ca. AD 300–AD 400
(Source: Samarkand, Archaeological Museum of Afrosiab)⁸⁵

Further, the cities at the northern regions of the river, dominated by the Graeco-Macedonian civilization that Alexander and one of his successors, General Seleucus, imposed, must have been the intensive Christian missionary outreach posts for Sogdiana, also known as Transoxiana (“Land beyond the Oxus River”, i.e. the Amu River), with the city of Samarkand (formerly known

⁸⁴ 范晔：《后汉书·西域传第 78》：“安息国居和椶城，去洛阳二万五千里。北与康居接，南与乌弋山离接。地方数千里，小城数百，户口胜兵最为殷盛。其东界木鹿城，号为小安息，去洛阳二万里。”

(Fan Ye, *Book of the Later Han*, “No. 78 Western Regions, Volume”: “The country of An-xi is located in He-ju City, 25,000 Chinese miles away from Luo-yang. It borders Kang-ju in the north and Wu-yi-shan-li in the south. It has an area of several thousand Chinese miles with a few hundreds of small cities. It has a large population and a large number of soldiers. Its eastern border is Mu-lu City, known as minor An-xi, 20,000 Chinese miles away from Luoyang.”)

⁸⁵ Source : <https://www.livius.org/pictures/uzbekistan/samarkand/afrosiab-christian-ossuary/>

as Maracanda, in present-day Uzbekistan) as its center, covering the overlapping area of present-day Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, and Fergana Basin proper. The archaeological discovery of a Christian ossuary dated to the fourth or fifth century in the ruins of Samarkand offers a side proof (Figure 2. 9). In the next century, when the Christian missions among the western Turks began, Samarkand City became the center of the East-Syriac Church's fruitful missions at the northern side of the Amu River, and extending even further north, to the regions around the Syr River (Syr Darya), and sooner or later beyond to those beautiful valleys located in the westernmost Tian-shan, including the Talas River, Chu River, and Yili River valleys.

In the mid-fifth century, the Hephthalites, whom Byzantine historians called White Huns or Ephthalites and whom the Persians called Hayathelites and in the *Book of Wei* were called *Ye-da* or *Yi-da* ⁸⁶ and labeled as another kind of *Yue-zhi* or *Gao-che* people (Wei. S., 2000: 1541),⁸⁷ reached out westward from the area of the Altai Mountains. I maintain that they were native to the Altai Mountains, but by then were living in *Kang-ju*, that is the lower reaches of the Syr Darya River, and then the Hephthalites expanded in three directions, east, west and south, occupying present-day northern Xinjiang and the adjacent area of Kazakhstan, including the large area of Zhetysu region from the Ili River valley to Lake Balkhash, and as far as the northeastern part of Iranian Persia, Sogdiana, and Bactria, covering all of the former *Yue-zhi* Kushan Empire, while even further expanding south-eastward to the Tarim, Yan-qi, and Turpan Basins.

The Eastern Roman scholar Procopius of Caesarea in the sixth century wrote this about the Hephthalites: "They alone of the Huns are white-skinned and are not ugly."⁸⁸ Among the Hephthalite envoys depicted in a mural (or murals) in the Samarkand court, some have white faces and some have ruddy faces.⁸⁹ The Hephthalites, therefore, were Hunnified Indo-

⁸⁶ Wei, Zheng, *Book of Sui*, Chronicle 48, "Western Regions": "属焉耆为掘怛所破，众不能自统，请主于嘉。嘉遣其第二子为焉耆王，由是始大，益为国人所服。" (第 1238 页)

("Yanqi was defeated by Yi-da, and the people could not rule themselves, so they asked Jia to be their lord. Jia sent his second son to be the King of Yan-qi, and from then on, the kingdom became more powerful and was increasingly respected by the people." (p. 1238))

⁸⁷ 【北齐】魏收：《魏书·列传第 90·西域：嚙哒》：“嚙哒国，大月氏之种类也，亦曰高车之别种，其原出于塞北。” (第 1541 页)

[Northern Qi] Wei Shou, *Book of Wei*, "No. 90 Western Regions: Hephthalites": "The Hephthalites are a kind of the Greater Yue-zhi, also known as a different kind of Ga-oche, and they originated in the north of the Great Wall." (p. 1541)

⁸⁸ B. A. Litvinsky, 'The Hephthalite Empire' in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia, Vol. III: The crossroads of civilizations, A. D. 250-750* (Paris: UNESCO, 1996) 138-165, citing 139.

⁸⁹ Ma Dong and Wu Hong-lin, 'Kuai-hu and Ye-da' in *Research of the Western Regions* (Urumqi: Xinjiang 104

Europeans, more likely belong to the Alpine race, the third type of European race with round face which similar to the face shape of Huns, though reddish faced Di-type Scythian Indo- European were among Hephthalites as well.

By AD 440, the Hephthalites, who were predominately Zoroastrians, conquered Sogdiana, and part of Bactria and Persia (Grousset, 1970: 67-68). They then crossed the Hindu Kush and invaded Kabul valley, reaching the Punjab in northwest India (Grousset, 1970: 69). Northwest India used to be part of the white Saka-Bactria civilisational block, including the Tocharians, just as the Macedonian Ptolemaic colony used to be part of the Greek civilization block in Egypt. Between 436 and 451, the Hephthalites annihilated the Scythian *Yue-zhi* Kushan kingdom south of the Amu Darya River and occupied all of the Bactria civilizational block, including about half of the Tarim Basin. In 479, they took over the *Jushi-Kocho* (Turpan) Basin. In 484, they defeated Persia's Sassanid dynasty, killing its king Peroz, and occupied some territory in Persia's northeast Khorasan. According to the *Book of Wei*, they "set their capital *Ba-di-yan*" and "it was located at more than 200 *li* south of Oxus (Amu) River" and "the city was more than 10 *li* of circumference" (Wei. S., 2000: 1541-1542).⁹⁰ Therefore, most likely, the city was in the present-day Balkh area of Afghanistan, which was *Lan-shi-cheng* (or *Jian-shi-cheng*) the capital Bactra of former Bactria (*Da-xia*), of which Han China envoy Zhang Qian had visited and reported. They gradually transitioned to an urban, settled lifestyle. Thus, all of Central Asia became part of the Hephthalite Empire, which likely brought forth a restoration of Persian civilization in the highly Macedonian-Graecized regions.

This degree of expansion would have exposed the Hephthalites in this area, who believed in Zoroastrianism (Gao, Y. J., 1997: 47-48; Yu, T. S., 1996: 145), to come in contact with East-Syriac Christians. Chinese researcher Yu Tai-shan notes that, while the Hephthalites were still in

Academy of Social Science, No. 4 of 2005) 61-67, citing 63.

⁹⁰ 【北齐】魏收：《魏书·列传第 90·西域：嚙哒》：“嚙哒国，大月氏之种类也，亦曰高车之别种，其原出于塞北。自金山而南，在于阗之西，都乌许水南二百余里，去长安一万一百里。其王都拔底延城，盖王舍城也。其城方十里余，……”（第 1541-1542 页）

In this context, we should remind ourselves of a quotation we introduced earlier in the [Northern Qi] Wei Shou, *Book of Wei*, No. 90 Western Regions: "Hephthalites" : "The Hephthalites were a branch of the Greater Yue-zhi, also known as a branch of the Gao-che. They originated from the northern region over the Chinese frontier. From the Golden Mountains to the south, they are west of Yu-tian, with their capital more than 200 Chinese miles south of the Oxus River and 11,000 Chinese miles from Chang'an. Their king's capital was Ba-di-yan, which probably means "royal city"..." (pages 1541-1542))

Central Asia, they were influenced by *Jing* Christianity (Yu, 1996: 146). According to the *Book of Liang*, dated AD 636, which records the history of *Liang* dynasty from 502-557, the Hephthalite Empire conquered Persia in the west and the Tarim Basin in the east, including the Yan-qi Basin (Yao, 2000: 562). The Hephthalites “serve [worship] the heavenly God and fire God, stepping out of house daily to worship God and eat afterward” (Litvinsky, 2003: 118; Yao, S. L., 2000: 562-563).⁹¹ Here, “heavenly God” refers to East-Syriac Christianity and “fire God” refers to Zoroastrianism, which likely highlights that they were part of the Persian civilization. The thematic wording order indicates that Christianity was the primary religion for these Hephthalites.

According to the journal by Song Yun, a native Dun-huang, the envoy of Northern Wei visiting the states in the western regions including the Hephthalite Empire, the Tocharian regions “do not believe in Buddhism, but mostly serve foreign God [or Gods]” (Litvinsky, 2003: 118).⁹² What a surprise! In the *History of the Southern Dynasties*, dated AD 659, which records the history of four dynasties from 420-589, we find the same thing about the two religions among the Hephthalite (Li, Y. S., 2000: 1323).⁹³ “Tocharian region” means the former Tocharian land west of the Pamir Mountains along the Amu (Oxus) River, where Buddhism was formerly the dominate religion, spreading to the Tarim Basin and even impacting as far as China.

As a scholar, Khodadad Rezakhani, firmly pointed out, Sogdiana became the most influential region in Central Asia from the sixth to tenth century, surpassing its former rival Bactria, and “Buddhism appears to have been a failure in Sogdiana,” which originated from the Bactria region, while Zoroastrianism still dominated as the local native religion (Rezakhani, K., 2017: 153-154). These valuable records confirm that neither Scythians north of the Amu River nor the Tocharians south of the Amu River in this age were dominantly Buddhists, as academics have held for over a century. The report of Song Yun matches the depression state of Buddhism in the Bactrian region (Tocharian region) written in the travelogue of the Tang monk Xuan-zang a century later.

⁹¹ 【唐】姚思廉：《梁书·列传第四十八·诸夷：西北诸戎》：“滑国者……事天神、火神，每日则出户祀神而后食。”

⁹² “不信佛法，多事外神。”（第 118 页）

⁹³ 【唐】李延寿：《南史·列传第六十九·西域诸国》：“滑国者……事天神、火神，每日则出户祀神而后食。”（第 1323 页）

（[Tang] Li Yan-shou, "History of the Southern Dynasties, No. 69 Western Regions": "The Hua State [Hephthalites] serve [worship] the heavenly God and fire God, stepping out of house daily to worship God and eat afterward".” (p. 1323))

Litvinsky suggests that, though there is no proof to know what the religions were among the Hephthalites, it is quite possible that they belonged to Iranian religions (Litvinsky, 2003: 118). I hold the “foreign Gods” here refer to Christianity and Zoroastrianism, because this view matches the record in the *Book of Liang*. Christianity and Zoroastrianism were also practiced among the *Zhao-wu* people, the descendants of the *Yue-zhi* (Ou-yang & Song, 2000: 4737),⁹⁴ as the foreign ruling class who were a Scythian type that immigrated from the East about seven centuries ago and became indigenized. Such a religious dynamic necessarily spread among the native Aryan Tocharians, where the region was then part of the Hephthalite Empire. A similar situation to the *Yue-zhi* people was repeated among later Khitans who embraced both East-Syriac Christianity and Chinese-related Buddhism and immigrated to Central Asia, which will be discussed in a later chapter of the thesis. In the Tocharian land, at this time, Manichaeism existed as well, though as a marginalized religion.

2.6.2 Hephthalite Scythians, Turks and China Embrace East-Syriac Persian Christianity

How the Hephthalites, *Ye-da*, or White Huns, gained access to Christianity remains unclear; however, because of the increased threat of Hephthalite expansion that was going on at this time, the local churches and the bishops south of the Amu River regions would have sent missionaries across the river to initiate mission work among the Hephthalites and the mother Church might have used the emissaries’ status as missionaries to engage them in diplomatic efforts on behalf of the Persia. This dual role of mission work and diplomacy will be evident later during the Tang-China and Mongol Empire times. In addition, the previously predominate Zoroastrianism among the Hephthalites at least helped share a sense of common identity with the Persian civilisation which generated the Zoroastrian religion a millennium previously in the Bactrian area, which still remains a large base for the religious community in present-day Afghanistan.

In 549 (Mingana, A., 2010: 304), the following account in the Syriac text *Histoire De Mar Jab-Alaha* details the Christian influences in the region among the Hephthalites (Mingana, 2010: 304):

⁹⁴ 【宋】欧阳修，宋祁：《新唐书·列传第 146 下·西域下·康》：“康者，……君姓温，本月氏人。……世谓“九姓”，皆氏昭武。……尚浮图法，祠祆神，……” (第 4737 页)

([Song Dynasty] Ou-yang Xiu and Song Qi, *New Book of Tang*, “No. 146 Western Regions·Kang”: “Kang people, ... their king’s surname is Wen, and he is from Yue-zhi. ... They are called in history the ‘Nine Surnames’, all of which are with the title Zhao-wu. ... They worship Buddha and worship the Zoroastrian God, ...” (page 4737))

After a short time Haphtar [the Syriac name for Hephthalites] Khudai sent a priest as a messenger to the King of Kings (Chosrau Anushirwan), and the Haphtraye, who were Christians, wrote also a letter to the holy Patriarch (Aba I.) requesting him to ordain as Bishop to all the kingdom of the Haphtraye the priest who was sent from their country. When the priest saw the King of Kings, and the latter learned the nature of the mission on which he was sent, he was astonished to hear it, and amazed at the power of Jesus, and at the fact that even the Christian Haphtraye counted the Patriarch as their head and administrator. He therefore ordered him to go and adorn the Church as was customary on such occasions, and to ordain Bishop the man whom Haphtar Khudai had sent to him. On the following day the Church was adorned, and the Haphtrian priest was ordained Bishop for the Haphtrians, and joy increased with the people of the Lord.

Thus, East-Syriac Christianity had by this time already become the state religion of the Hephthalites, whose king had even taken the initiative to send a request to the Catholicos (Patriarch) to appoint a bishop for them. The city for the Bishopric seat remains unknown, but it is possibly in the upper Syr River close to present-day Tashkent (Mingana, A., 1925: 322). This event also confirms the strategic importance of the metro-city Samarkand, at the north of the Amu River in Sogdiana in the domain of the Hephthalites who were officially Christian now, for the Christian missions. The glorious status of the city as a Christian metropolitan archbishopric seat will be established in the coming age when Turks become the hegemon of Central Asia, which is to be discussed in the next chapter of the thesis.

This conversion of the White Huns from Zoroastrianism to Christianity was a dramatic change that occurred under the leadership of a monarch and is a classic event in the religious history of the steppes, just as is the later Uyghur conversion from Shamanism to Manichaeism in the eighth century. Even though the exact process of the conversion of the Hephthalites is unclear, the formerly Zoroastrian Catholicos Aba I, mentioned in the above record, should have been able to impact them effectively on faith matters. The fact that, before their occupation of northeast Persia, the Hephthalites had wantonly destroyed the local Buddhist civilization, when they conquered the Scythian *Yue-zhi* Kushan (Bactria) kingdom (Grousset, R., 1970: 70), might have had something to do with their Zoroastrianism faith. In short, that the Hephthalites, who were called the White Huns and were a Hunnified “Pamiro-Ferghanian type” of round-faced-white-Indo-European people, were the first kingdom in the Central Asia-Xinjiang region to accept the Christian faith as a national religion is of great significance and had far-reaching impact, propelling the later spread of Christianity to other racial-ethnic groups of the East Asian grasslands, including the Turks and the Uyghurs.

The event recounted in *Histoire De Mar Jab-Alaha* of the Hephthalites “White Huns” asking for a bishop to be dispatched to them, we noted, occurred in AD 549, while the earliest Chinese records of the popularity of Christianity among the Aryan Indo-Europeans of Kocho (Turpan Basin) and Yan-qi (Karasahr Basin) was in the *Book of Wei*, which started to be compiled in AD 551 and was completed in AD 554 (Wei, S., 2000: Publishing Note, 1). The agreement of these dates is intriguing. By no later than the first half of the fifth century (AD 424, when the Synod Declaration of Independence was held by the East-Syriac Church in Persia), Christianity was already organizationally established in the Central Asia-Bactria area, and, by the time of the appointment of a bishop among the Hephthalites, the Kocho and Yan-qi regions already had the “custom to serve [worship] the heavenly God.” It would seem then that the Hephthalites became Christians by 549 on the eve of their fall imposed by the rising Turks, Christianity from the Bactria area west of the Pamirs had already spread along the Tarim Basin to Karasahr (*Yan-qi*) and Kocho, and this was even happening as early as the fifth century or even before. Since many scholars seem to favor promoting the prominent influence of Buddhism in these regions, however they may, consequently, be apt to ignore the similar or even stronger influence of East-Syriac Christianity.

Before the split of the Western Turkic Khanate in 581, Christianity had already spread among the Turks of the Central Asia-Xinjiang region, and maybe also among the Hunnic descendants, the *Te-le* or *Tie-le* groups, the ancestors of later Uyghurs. The Chinese classics’ records and East Syriac church reports corroborate that the fifth and sixth centuries were the golden early age for Persian East-Syriac Church missions in central Asia, including Yan-qi and Kocho, and other regions along the Silk Road in present-day Xinjiang, China.

The growth of East-Syriac Christianity in Central Asia entered its golden period from the mid-sixth century to the mid-seventh century. During the time of Catholicos Ezechie (AD 570-582), the Persian Empire expanded south to the Arabian Peninsula and occupied Yemen. So East-Syriac Christianity at this time had already spread to the Arabs in Sana and even to the island of Socotra before Islam existed, and they were under the administration of the Christian bishops (Baum & Winkler, 2003: 34). Its success in the Far East was also impressive. East-Syriac Christianity officially spread into the Tang-China capital Chang-an in 635 and won the support of the emperors. According to the Jing-Jiao Stele’s celebration of the Tang emperor Gao-zong (649-683), who had overthrown the Western Turkic Khanate, during his reign “Church buildings have been erected in every prefecture... the doctrine has spread to ten regions [of China] and church buildings fill a multitude of cities.” The growth of East-Syriac Christianity in China had reached its first peak.

2.7 Chapter Concluding Remarks

To understand religions in the ancient Kocho-Turpan Basin, its adjacent Yan-qi Basin, and the regions of northwest Tarim Basin all the way to the other side of the Pamirs correctly, one needs to seek their origins and shifting contexts. In this chapter, considering the geo-racial-ethnic civilizational and cultural pieces in history, such as the influx of immigrants, conquests, the attractive influence of dominant urban civilizations, fills out the larger historical-societal puzzle and clears up long-term misunderstandings.

In discussing the main religions in ancient Kocho-Turpan, Yan-qi, and adjacent regions before the Uyghurs migrated in AD 841, one should focus on Christianity and Buddhism. If one talks about the racial-ethnic groups in these regions, the dominant one was native Tocharian and Scythian white people, and the minorities were mostly Chinese, *Rou-ran* people, and Turks.

We might have noted that in the other two regions, the Back Section of the *Ju-shi* Kingdom in the north of Tian-shan and the Kumul area surrounding the easternmost Tian-shan, there were no Christian records from them. Nevertheless, that by no means entails that Christianity had not spread here. As part of the same racial-civilisational block of Tocharians, it is hard to imagine that the prevailing Christianity in the Turpan and Yan-qi Basins would not be present in these two regions, and their adjacent regions of other Tocharian neighbours as well, including Lou-lan (Shan-shan) at the entrance of the Tarim Basin from the east, next to Dun-huang.



CHAPTER 3 THE AGE OF THE TURKIC CHRISTIANITY ON THE CHINESE WESTERNMOST FRONTIER: UNDER THE RIVAL COLONISATIONS OF THE WESTERN TURKS, TANG CHINESE, AND TIBETANS (AD 640—841)

3.1 Chapter Thesis

After the age of Indo-European Christianity (mainly among *Yue-zhi* Scythian, Bactrian-Tocharian, Aryan-Samaritan, and the Hephthalites “White Huns”) in central Asia, the Persian East-Syriac Church’s missions moved further forward to the age of Turkic Christianity, starting officially in about AD 644 first among the Western Turks. In addition to considering the physiological anthropology perspective, studying the geographic perspective in this chapter of the Silk Road’s history, centred as it is, around the eastern Tian-shan Mountain range, or the Chinese westernmost frontier, helps reconstruct the reflective history of Christianity in this age. These key perspectives of ethnogeography toward understanding Turkic Christianity while avoiding certain confusions caused by its historical complexity, shed light on the history of its racial-ethnic religious background.

Definition: Turkic Christianity is a broad term entailing an institutionalized religious tradition among Hunnic-Turkic language speaking groups, including the original Turks who established the Turkic Empire (western Turks and eastern Turks) and other racial-ethnic groups Turkified through colonisation. The diverse racial-ethnic groups of Turkic Christians approximately consist of three types: native Indo-European, mixed-blood groups of East Asian and Indo-European, and East Asians.

Methodologies: The main approach in this chapter seeks, through qualitative research, to present some missing pieces to fill in blanks that still remains, in the larger picture of the Turkic Christianity in this age. The methodology engaged includes historical analysis and textual analysis mainly based on Syriac and Chinese classics with deductive logic vertically and inductive summarizing horizontally based on information gathered from ancient texts and contemporary archaeological discoveries. Based on unifying the fragmented pieces of the information, this chapter aim toward drawing a holistic picture of Turkic Christianity. The united picture will provide a hermeneutic for error checking and correction. Overall, the chapter constructs a grounded theory as an inductive model of reflective-specialized history of the age of Turkic Christianity.

3.2 Framework: A map of history with geo-political-national longitudes and racial-ethnic-religious latitudes

The taking over and colonising of the Turpan Basin in AD 640 by Tang-China was, by no means, a single event of its military conquest. Rather, it continued the geopolitical legacy of Han China, which had started in the second century BC. As a further move to secure the Silk Road passes at the westernmost frontier against the rise of the Western Turkic Khanate, after China dismantled the Eastern Turkic Khanate at the north of the Great Wall in AD 630 with a series of battles in the seven years' war, China defeated the western Turks and the subsequent colonisation by China spared the Turpan and Tarim Basins from Turkification. Based on Hegel's philosophy of history, one can see how the freedom of the human spirit, a Chinese one specifically at this time, made a new history along the Silk Road in central Asia.

Since AD 552, when Turks established their Khanate empire, for the first time in history, the Tocharian Indo-European regions at both banks of the Amu River on the western side of the Pamirs and at the Tarim, Yan-qi, and Turpan Basins, along with the eastern side of the Pamirs, faced the deep penetration and large-scale colonisation by the East Asian-type immigrants of the Turks and of the Chinese in AD 640 (eight years after the founder of Islam died). Meanwhile, the Islamic Arabic Caliphate (kingdom) was rising and expanding rapidly in west Asia, especially after the Umayyad Islamic Caliphate was established in AD 661 with Damascus as its capital. Consequently, alongside these political shifts, the geo-political and racial-religious landscape was reshaping significantly in western and central Asia, including the regions around the eastern Tian-shan range. The Persian East-Syriac Church utilized these changes as a new dawn for its missions, by reaching the coloniser Turks who migrated to Central Asia, and going even further to East Asia to proselytize the nomads in the Siberian regions at the northern side of the Great Wall and the sedentary Chinese at the south.

Based on the success of its first stage of expansion in central Asia since the early third century, the Persian Church reached its peak of missions by the seventh century, specifically with the Scythian-type Hephthalites at the western side of the Pamirs and with Aryan-type Sarmatians in the Tarim Basin at the eastern side of the Pamirs along the Silk Road on the southern side of the Tian-shan Mountains covering the Yan-qi and Turpan Basins. Stepping into the seventh century, the East-Syriac Church was ready for a greater harvest eastward, while the Christology of the Church reached its theological maturity, "as it had developed during the course of the last half century of the Sasanian Empire, a little before the Arab invasions and the advent of Islam in the Middle East" (Birnie, 2024: vii). The theologian and the leader of the Church, Babai the Great

(died AD 620), formulated systemically this theology, based on the Antiochian-Nestorian tradition beginning two centuries ago.

Between AD 635 to 643, the Chinese capital Chang-an was made a metropolitanate and, therefore, had the authority to ordain bishops (Mingana, 1925: 351, 367).⁹⁵ It is not certain if the conquest of the Turpan Basin, Yan-qi Basin, and the north Tarim Basin by Tang China in AD 640s involved the help of any Christian missionaries, as was the case for Tang China about a century later in a war against the rebels from the groups on the northern borders of China inside the Great Wall, as recorded by the famous Xi'an Stele erected in AD 781 in Chang-an, the capital of Tang China. In about AD 644, a large community of Turks from the eastern bank of the Oxus River in Central Asia converted to Christianity, thus officially starting the age of Turkic Christianity.

During this historical period, the task of assembling a Christian mission picture of the "Four Regions" surrounding the eastern part of the Tian-shan Mountains, which had comprised the Chinese westernmost frontier off and on since the second century BC, remains challenging. Though the general historical background of Christian missions in this age stands out, it lacks significant details, having made the assembling of the content in the present chapter like an academic adventure, until a couple of new groundbreaking archaeological discoveries in these regions by Chinese archaeologists in 2021 through 2023 confirmed as facts previously what had only been regarded as my theories.

In this historical stage (AD 640-841), the demographic structure of the four regions started transforming ethnographically at a more rapid speed as the dominant nations of Turks, Chinese, and later Tibetans invaded and colonised the regions. Though these new inhabitants settled down and became locals, native Indo-Europeans remained the majority and still prevailed as the host civilization. In addition to the geographical "router" in this section of the Silk Road, the regions around the eastern Tian-shan Mountains also became a melting pot of cultures, religions, and civilizations attached to the racial-ethnic and national groups.

Without understanding who the Turks were from anthropological, historical and geographical perspectives, one cannot easily clear away confusions surrounding the racial-ethnic, geopolitical,

⁹⁵ Mingana's supplementary note on page 367 of his "The Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East" says: "SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE (TO PP. 323 AND 325) According to Ibn at-Tayib who died in 1043 (see Vat. MS. Borgia 153 fol. 198b in Sachau's *Ausb.*, p. 24) the Bishoprics of Meru, Heart, Samarkand, India, and China were elevated to the rank of Archbishoprics at a much earlier date: Mery by the Patriarch Isaac (399-410) and the rest by the Patriarch Isho-Yahb (628-643). China and Samarkand might have been, therefore, the seats not only of Bishops but of Archbishoprics more than a century before the time that we were disposed to assign to them."

and religious history of Central Asia respectively from then to the present time. The lack of such understanding frustrates those who are striving to formulate correct narratives or geo-racial-religious-political theories. By supplementing information collected from primary materials derives from various languages and religions in different ages, ancient Chinese court historians presented comprehensive records in systematic detail with surprising accuracy. Basing on such understanding of the ancient Turks who were called *Tu-jue* in the Chinese classics, today's scholars similarly, can understand more accurately Turkic Christianity in this ancient age.

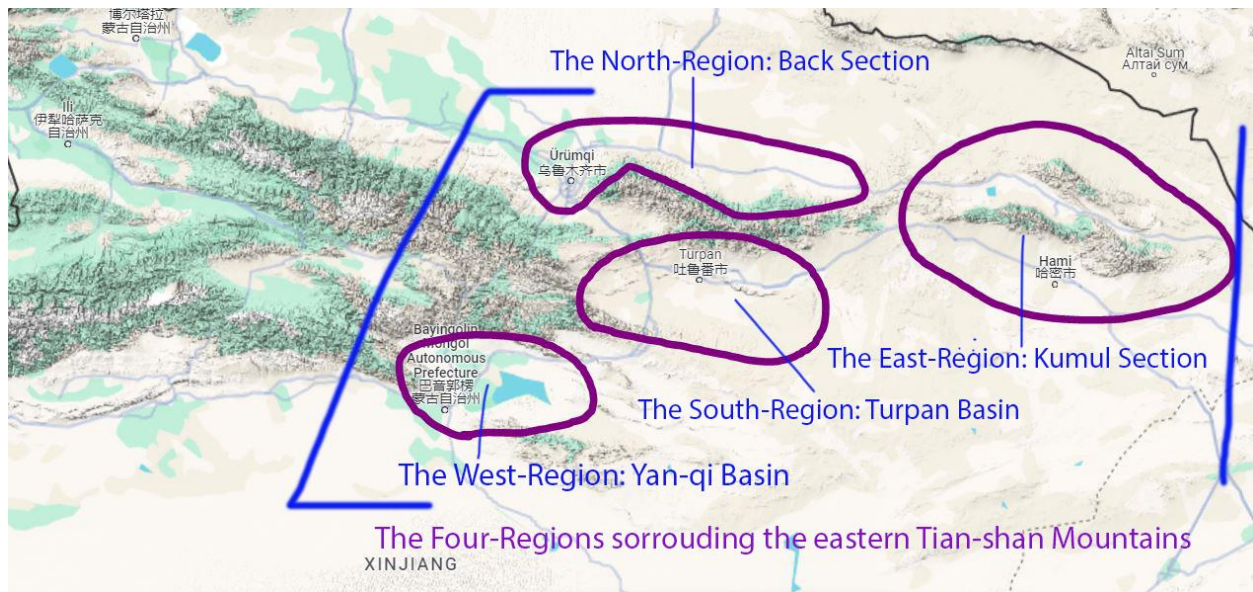


Figure 3. 1: A Close-Up of the Geographic Locations of the Four Regions ⁹⁶

3.3 A Brief Historical Background about the Origin of the Turks (*Tu-jue*) and Their Dual Khanates

Turks, the main players in this historical and geopolitical stage, helped Christianity spread to East Asia, and skilfully Turkified (or Hunnified) some of the native Indo-Europeans with Turkic language and culture, making the aboriginal map complex and harder to study for historians, similarly to the challenges facing those exploring the historical interactions of Great Britain and its colonies. Nonetheless, Christianity utilized the “linguistic bridge” of the Turkification and spread Christianity through the Turkic-speaking Indo-European communities to the Eastern Turks and other Huunic-

⁹⁶ Source: <https://google.com/maps/@43.7652188,89.1711561,6.54z/data=!5m1!1e4?entry=ttu>

Turkic-speaking east Asian groups. The historic leap from a white Christianity to non-white Christianity occurred during this stage from Central to East Asia.

In 552, the Turkic hero Bumin (*Tu-men*) defeated the *Rou-ran* people, the ancestors of the Jurchen, or later *Jin* (gold) people, and eventually the Manchurian East Asians (not to be confused with a branch of “blond-headed Jurchen”, or blond Siberians who shared the same language). As a result, Bumin became the khan of both the eastern and western Asian steppes (Grousset, 2002: 81). That same year, Bumin died, and his son Muqan (*Mu-gan*, reigning from 553-572) became the ruler of the East Asian (later called Mongolian) grasslands with Tang-China as its neighbor to the south. This was the Eastern Turkic Khanate. Muqan’s younger brother Istami (*Shi-dian-mi*, reigning from 552–575) was given the areas of north-central Asia, including those of the present-day north Xinjiang region of China, which covered the northern side of the Tian-shan Mountains (later Tian-shan) “together with Dzungaria, the country of the Black Irtysh and of the Imlil, and the basins of the Yulduz, Ili, Chu, and Talas” , thus formed the Western Turkic Khanate (Grousset, 2002: 82), while at this time the Hephthalites still holding Fergana-Sogdia, Bactria and Merv, and the Tarim Basin.

The khan of the Western Turkic Khanate, Istami employed the title *Yabghu* (Grousset, 2002: 83). This title means “vice khan”, equivalent to the Prime Minister of a modern British Commonwealth country, was first used by the provincial governor (viceroy) of the Kushan kingdom at the western side of the Pamirs in the two-river regions of the Amu Darya River and Syr Darya River, founded in the second century BC by the *Greater Yue-zhi*, a Scythian Indo-European.⁹⁷ “Vice khan” reflects the fact that the two branch khanates were still one Turkic kingdom, a dual empire (Grousset, 2002, 82, 84, 87). The ambitious new vice khan Istami made a treaty with his neighbor in the west, the Persian king Chosroes I Anoshirvan, by marrying one of his daughters to him (Grousset, 2002: 82).

As part of the deal, in 565, the Western Turkic Khanate and the Persian Sassanid Empire formed an alliance and launched a pincer attack from the southwest and the north on the Hephthalites and vanquished its Khanate, gaining revenge for Persia on Hephthalites’ previous invasion of their territory and assassinating their king (Grousset, 2002: 82). The Hephthalite, as the major player in the age of Indo-European Christianity, used to have a bishop ordained by the Church Court in Persia in 549. In 567, Istami sent an envoy to Constantinople to form an alliance with the Byzantine emperor Justin II, to execute a converging pincer attack on the Persian

⁹⁷ *Yue-Zhi* people migrated to the regions of Central Asia from present-day Gan-su province of China after their kingdom being defeated and destroyed by Huns from the north in the second century BC.

Sassanid Empire that was located between their two territories aimed at “keeping its monopoly of the sale of silk in the Byzantine Empire” (Grousset, 2002: 83-84). In the next year, Istami received a Byzantine envoy at his summer court, at the bank of Yulduz River close to the Yan-qi Basin (Arshi, Karasahr) at the deep southern root of the eastern Tian-shan Mountains, northeast of the Tarim Basin (Grousset, 2002: 84).

Around the year 590, western Turks from the north crossed the Amu River and took over “Tokharistan north of the Hindu Kush”, which is Bactria (*Da-xia*), from their erstwhile allies, the Sassanid Persians who took the region from the Hephthalites not long ago (Grousset, 2002: 82, 83, 85). According to Byzantine envoys, the Turks “hold fire in very extraordinary honor”, which clearly was from “the influence of Iranian Mazdaism”, (i. e. Iranian Zoroastrianism), which matches records in the literature collection in Song China (*Taiping Guangji*),⁹⁸ or, likely mixed with Shamanism because they “venerate air and water also” (Grousset, 2002: 84). East Syriac Christianity was also influential in Persia in these times, competing with their national Zoroastrianism, especially after the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451).

The western Turkic domain at this time was vast, covering areas north of the Altai Mountains, south to the Tocharian area north of the Hindu Kush Mountains, and from east in Kumul (Hami), around the easternmost Tian-shan Mountains, to the west in the area of the Caspian Sea and eastern Persia (Grousset, 2002: 83, 85), the Khorasan area. That is to say, present-day Central Asia, including the whole Xinjiang region with the Four Regions, was part of its territory.

According to a Tang Chinese court historian, in 627, the newly crowned emperor Tai-zong received an envoy from a Central Asian kingdom and announced that “The western Turks had surrendered, so merchants could pass through [the western regions]”, and all of the *Hu* (Indo-European) delegations from Central Asia were very glad upon hearing this (Wang & Song: *New Book of Tang*, 2000: 4738).⁹⁹ In 628 (or 630), the Tang Chinese Buddhist monk Xuan-zang, on

⁹⁸ “突厥事袄神，无祠庙，刻毡为形，盛于毛袋，行动之处，以脂苏涂，或系之竿上，四时祀之。”
<https://ctext.org/taiping-guangji/480/tujue/ens>

(“The Turks worship Zoroastrian God, but they have no temples. They carve felt into shapes and put them in woolen bags. They smear the shapes with fat or tie them to poles and worship them at all times.”)

⁹⁹ 《新唐书·西域下》：武德时，【安国】遣使入朝。贞观初，献方物。太宗厚尉其使曰：“西突厥已降，商旅可行矣。”诸胡大悦。

(*New Book of Tang*, “Western Regions Part 2”: During the Wu-de period, [An State] sent envoys to the court. At the beginning of the Zhen-guan period, they presented local products. Emperor Tai-zong

his pilgrimage journey to India, traveling along the northern branch of the Silk Road and arriving at the western Turk's court at Suyab (*Sui-ye*) city in the Chu (Suyab) River valley, via the short-cut route of Issyk Lake (Xuang-zang, 2016: 14, 15),¹⁰⁰ met the western Turkic Khan Tong *Yabghu*, who was then busy receiving the envoys from Gao-chang kingdom in the Turpan Basin and China. A few months later, the Western Turkic Khanate disintegrated due to civil war in its confederation (Grousset, 2002: 93, 94), and their Khan had been murdered.

In 657 (the second year of *Xian-qin*'s reign of Tang China), the Western Turkic Khanate fell under a series of Tang-China military assaults, first on the western bank of the Irtysh River area, right below the Altai Mountains, then further south-westward to the Yi-li River, the Shuang River (literally meaning two rivers¹⁰¹), the Suyab (Chu) River, and, finally, at the Su-duo city in Shi kingdom (in present day Uzbekistan capital Tashkent area) (Liu, X., 2000: 3528).¹⁰² These attacks

treated the envoys with great respect and said, "The Western Turks have surrendered and trade and travel are possible." The various Hu peoples were very pleased.)

¹⁰⁰ 玄奘在《大唐西域记》记述：“自凌山行四百余里至大清池……清池西北行五百余里至素叶水城，城周六七里，诸国商胡杂居也。”

Xuan-zang recorded in The Great Tang Records on the Western Regions: "From Ling Mountain, we travelled more than 400 Chinese miles to Great Clear Lake... We travelled more than 500 Chinese miles northwest of the Lake to Suyab City. The circumference of the city was 67 Chinese miles, and merchants from various countries lived together."

¹⁰¹ 《通典·边防九》：“石国，隋时通焉。居于药杀水，都柘折城，方十馀里。东与北至西突厥界，西至波腊国界，西南至康居界，南至率都沙那国界。王姓石。……国中有二水，一名真珠河，一名质河，并西北流。”

(*Tong-dian*, "Border Defense 9": "Shi kingdom was connected [to China] during the Sui dynasty. It lived by the Yao-sha River, with their capital at Zhe-zhe City, which perimeter was more than ten Chinese miles. To the east and north, they extended to the border of the Western Turkic Khanate, to the west to the border of the Po-la Kingdom, to the southwest to the border of the Kang-ju Kingdom, and to the south to the border of the Shuai-du-sha-na Kingdom. The king's surname was Shi. ... There were two rivers in the country, one named Zhen-zhu River and the other named Zhi River, both flowing northwest.")

¹⁰² 《旧唐书·突厥下》：“显庆二年，遣右屯卫将军苏定方，燕然都护任雅相，副都护萧嗣业，左骁卫大将军、瀚海都督回纥婆闰等率师讨击，仍使右武卫大将军阿史那弥射、左屯卫大将军阿史那步真为安抚大使。定方行至曳咥河西，贺鲁率胡禄居阙啜等二万余骑列阵而待。定方率副总管任雅相等与之交战，贼众大败，斩大首领都搭干等二百余人。贺鲁及阙啜轻骑奔窜，渡伊丽水，兵马溺死者甚众。嗣业至千泉贺鲁下牙之处，弥射进军至伊丽水，处月、处密等部各率众来降。弥射又进次双河，贺鲁先使步失达干鸠集散卒，据栅拒战。弥射、步真攻之，大溃；又与苏定方攻贺鲁于碎叶水，大破之。贺鲁与啜运欲投鼠褥设，至石国之苏咄城傍，人马饥乏，城主伊涅达干诈将酒食出迎，贺鲁信其言入城，遂被拘执。萧嗣业既至石国，鼠褥设乃以贺鲁属之。”

(*Old Book of Tang*, "Turks: Part II" records: "In the second year of Xian-qing, the general of the Right Military Farming Defense, Su Ding-fang, the Protector General of Yan-ran, Ren Ya-xiang, the Deputy

took place seventeen years after Tang-China took over the Gao-chang kingdom in Turpan Basin. After annihilating the Western Turkic Khanate, Tang-China's power in Central Asia reached its peak. This prominent status lasted for a century until the rise and challenge of Islamic Arabic forces in 751. In the meantime, domestic prosperity and peace of Tang China lasted for two centuries from its founding until the northern foreign alliance rebelled with invasions in 762.

Sadly for the Turks, their ambition collided with the desires of China's Tang dynastical powerful peak. The Eastern Turkic Khanate (or Northern Turkic Khanate), which had fallen into disarray after suffering heavy losses in 630 at the military hands of China, re-established itself in 683 (the last year of the reign of Tang-China emperor Gao-zong), according to the *Book of Tang* (Liu, X., 2000:3509, 3514).¹⁰³ Reestablishing itself as the Second Turkic Khanate, and lasting until 744-745 (the third year and fourth year of the Tian-bao reign of Tang China), it was then overthrown by its three original vassal khanates—Basmyl, Uyghur, and Karluk—who rebelled and helped destroy the Turkic Khanate, according to both the Uyghur Moyan Chor inscription (also referred to as the Shine-usu inscription) erected in about 759 and the *New Book of Tang* (Geng, S. M., 2002: 193-194; Ou-yang, 2000: 4609).¹⁰⁴ The three Hunnic-*Tele* groups then united and

Protector General Xiao Si-ye, the General of the Left Xiao-Wei and the Governor of Han-hai (Western Sea), Uyghur Porun, and others led the army to attack, and the general of the Right Military Defense, Ashina Mishe, and the general of the Left Military Farming Defense, Ashina Bu-zhen, were sent as ambassadors of pacification. When Ding-fang arrived at the west of the Yi-di River, Helu led Hu-lu-ju, Que-chu and more than 20,000 cavalry to line up and wait. Ding-fang led the deputy general manager Ren Ya-xiang and others to fight with them, and the "bandits" [enemy] were defeated, and the leader Duda Takgan and more than 200 others were killed. Helu and Que-chu fled on horseback and crossed the Yili River, and many soldiers and horses drowned. Si-ye arrived at Qian-quan [Thousand Springs], the Helu's base. Mi-she advanced to Yili River, and Chuyue, Chu-mi, and other tribes led their people to surrender. Mi-she then advanced to Shuang Rivers. Helu first sent Bu-shi-da-gan to gather the scattered soldiers and led them in a defence position. Mi-she and Bu-zhen attacked them and defeated them. They also attacked Helu at Suyab River with Su Ding-fang and defeated him completely. He-lu and Di-yun wanted to seek protection from the king Shu-nuo-she. When they arrived at the city of Su-duo in Shi Kingdom, the soldiers and horses were hungry and tired. The city lord Yi-nie Takgan pretended to send wine and food to welcome them. Helu believed his words and entered the city, but was arrested. When Xiao Si-ye arrived at Shi kingdom, Shu-nuo-she took Helu and handed him over to Xiao.)

¹⁰³ 《旧唐书·突厥下》：“【贞观四年二月】，靖乘间袭击，大破之，遂灭其国。”

(*Old Book of Tang*, Turks" records: "[In February of the fourth year of Zhen-guan], [General] Jing [Li] attacked them and defeated them, thus destroying their country.")

¹⁰⁴ Ou-yang, *New Book of Tang*, Turks II: “天宝初，其大部回纥、葛逻禄、拔悉蜜并起攻叶护，杀之，尊拔悉蜜之长为颉跌伊施可汗，于是回纥、葛逻禄自为左右叶护，亦遣使者来告。……三载，拔悉蜜等杀乌苏米施，传首京师，献太庙。……明年，杀白眉可汗，传首献。毘伽可汗妻骨咄禄婆匐可敦率众自归，天子御花萼楼宴群臣，赋诗美其事，封可敦为宾国夫人，岁给粉直二十万。”

(At the beginning of Tian-bao reign, most of the Uyghurs, Karluks, and the Basmyl attacked Yabghu and killed him. The leader of Basimyl was honoured as Jie-di Yishi Khan. Then the leaders of the

established the Uyghur Khanate and won the recognition of Tang-China (Liu, X., 2000: 3537).

Before the present chapter proceeds, however, it is necessary to clarify who and what the Turks were from a racial-ethnic and geographic-national perspectives, based on the Chinese classics, which have solid systematic records. The historical identity of the Turks has always been a sensitive and confusing issues in politics, religion and academia. If we clarify their identity, we will receive a much-needed enlightening for our later interpretations. We will also clear away some historical complexity as we construct the thesis of the chapter. How will this goal be achieved? Identifying the origin of the ancient Turks from racial-ethnic (physiological anthropology), ethno-geographical, and geo-political perspectives will hopefully facilitate an understanding from a missiological perspective, answering such question as why Turks were the first non-white group in central Asia and east Asia to convert to Persian Christianity and how such a conversion became a stepstone for Christian missions into East Asia.

3.3.1 The argument of my grounded theory: The ancient Turks (*Tu-jue*) were Hunnified mixed-blood Hu originally, whose core clan may have been of *Gao-che* and *Rou-ran* blood.

The construction of the history (theory) in this chapter about the historical origin of the ancient Turks and their nation is grounded on three basic matters: their racial-ethnicity, their geography, and their nationality. There are three main theories on their origin according to the records of the Chinese court history, the most systematic classics. In addition, the first theory of the racial-ethnicity of the Turks needs support from genetic analysis by biologists.

The First Theory: The *Book of Sui: Turk* (AD 636) explains, “The ancestors of the Turks were the mixed-blood *Hu* people from the *Ping-liang* region [the present-day Gansu province of China] with their surname being Ashina [meaning gold]. After [emperor] Tai-wu of Later Wei [dynasty] destroyed the *Ju-qu* clan [kingdom], Ashina led five hundred fleeing families to *Ru-ru*. [Ever since] they have lived at the Golden [Altai] Mountain for generations and are good at iron work. The Golden Mountain is shaped like a *dou-mou* [military helmet in Chinese]; the custom was to call

Uyghurs and Karluks self-assigned the titles of the left Yabghu and right Yabghu and sent envoys to report. ... Three years later, the Basmyl and others killed Wu-su-mi-shi (Ozmish) and sent his head to the [Chinese] capital to offer to the imperial temple. ... The next year, they killed Bai-mei (Kulun Beg) Khan and sent his head as their offering. Bilge Khan's wife Gu-duo-lu Po-fu Khatun led her people to China. The Chinese emperor with all his ministers held a banquet in Hua'e Tower. He also wrote a poem to praise the event, and named Khatun the Lady of the State of Bin-guo, with an annual allowance of 200,000 [copper coins] for her cosmetics.)

the helmet 'turk', so it became their title." (Wei, Z., 2000: 1249)¹⁰⁵

We also note that the *Book of Wei* confirms this historical event of the defeat of the *Ping-liang* kingdom in its records (Wei, S., 2000: 1489, 1491-1493),¹⁰⁶ that in 439 (the seventh year of the *Cheng-he* or the *Yong-he* reign of the *Bei-liang* kingdom and the fifth year of the *Tai-yan* reign of the Northern Wei or Later Wei dynasty), the emperor Tai-wu of Northern Wei or Later Wei took over the *Bei-liang* kingdom (Northern *Liang*; *Ping-liang*) and forced its king *Ju-qu Mu-jian* to surrender. The *Ju-qu* family was part of the *Lu-shui Hu* people (probably descending from the remnants of the native *Yu-zhi* type Indo-Europeans). Right before the defeat, the *Ju-qu* king asked for help from the *Rou-ran* khanate to no avail. The problem is that the *Book of Wei*, completed in 554, does not mention the Turks and the khanate they established two years prior in 552. Nevertheless, its records side-supports the *Book of Sui* to construct a theory of *Ping-liang* people migrated as war refugees to the Altai Mountain area as some of the ancestors of the Turks.

The Second Theory: The *Book of Sui* continues: "Or, another version says their ancestors' kingdom was at north to the Western Sea [Bosten Lake], and the kingdom was destroyed by a neighboring kingdom...The Mountains were northwest of *Gao-chang* [Kocho] with a cave at the foot...arriving at a flat land with abundant grass stretching for more than 200 *li*" (Wei, Z., 2000: 1249).¹⁰⁷ Or, according to the *Book of Zhou*, the grasslands stretched "a few hundred *li*" and, according to the *History of the Northern Dynasties*, they were "surrounded by the mountains" (Ling-hu, 2000: 615; Li, Y.S., 2000: 2181).¹⁰⁸ Based on the geographic features described here, it is likely that the valley of the Tian-shan Mountains lies between present-day Urumqi and *Da-ban-cheng*, or even more likely the valley in the mountains north of the Yan-qi Basin (Bosten Lake), where the land of Minor Wu-sun used to be, in present-day He-jing county of Xinjiang.

The Third Theory: *Book of Zhou: Turks* (AD 636) not only includes the second theory, but also provides the third theory on the origin of Turks as it states: "Another version is that the

¹⁰⁵ Wei Zheng, *Book of Sui*, "Turks": "突厥之先, 平凉杂胡也, 姓阿史那氏。后魏太武灭沮渠氏, 阿史那以五百家奔茹茹, 世居金山, 工于铁作。金山状如兜鍪, 俗呼兜鍪为 '突厥', 因以为号。"

¹⁰⁶ Wei Shou, *Book of Wei*, Chronicle 87, "Lu-shui Hu Ju-qu Meng-xun" (卢水胡沮渠蒙逊) .

¹⁰⁷ Wei Zheng, *Book of Sui*, "Turks": "或云, 其先国于西海之上, ...其山在高昌西北, 下有洞穴, ...遇得平壤茂草, 地方二百余里。"

¹⁰⁸ Ling-hu De-fen, *Book of Zhou (Zhou-shu, 636)*, "Foreign regions II: Turks": "周回数百里"; Li Yan-shou, *History of the Northern Dynasties (Bei-shi, 659)*, "Turks; Tie-le: "四面俱山。"

ancestors of the Turks came from the Kingdom of *Suo*, north of the Huns” (Ling-hu, 2000: 615).¹⁰⁹ The people of Turkey seem to favor this most ambiguous latter explanation. Notably, “North of the Huns” here clearly rules out the possibility that the Turks were racial-ethnically a part of the Huns. The *Book of Zhou: About Yuwen Ce* also states that, prior to 542 (the eighth year of the Western Wei dynasty’s the *Da-tong* reign), the Turks advanced every year from the west and crossed the frozen Yellow River to invade the northern border area of the Western Wei (Ling-hu, 2000: 307; Ma, C. S., 2006: 1).

In addition, the *History of the Northern Dynasties: Turks* (659) includes all three theories and adds some details to the second theory: “The ancestors of the Turks lived to the right of the Western Sea and were their own tribe, probably another racial type of Hun, surnamed Ashina”(Li, Y.S., 2000: 2181).¹¹⁰ Both *Book of Zhou* (pp 615-616) and the *History of the Northern Dynasties* (pp 2181-2182) include another detail to the legendary account of the first-generation mother-wolf legend, that the second generation of their ancestral mothers were daughters of the summer god and the winter god.

In summary, the Chinese classics provide three theories on the origin of the Turks, and share these five points in common:

1. All mention the Turks as originating from the Ashina clan.

2. All say that the Turks are the descendants of a she-wolf impregnated by a human. Although this is clearly not credible, it is the source of the Turkic tradition of the wolf totem. Another ethnic group with a similar traditional legend is the *Gao-che* people, according to the earlier court history,

¹⁰⁹ Ling-hu De-fen, *Book of Zhou*, “Turks”: “突厥者，盖匈奴之别种，姓阿史那氏。别为部落。……或云突厥之先出于索国，在匈奴之北。”

¹¹⁰ Li Yan-shou, *History of the Northern Dynasties*, “Turks; Tie-le”: “突厥者，其先居西海之右，独为部落，盖匈奴之别种也。姓阿史那氏。……与狼合，遂有孕焉。……狼匿其中，遂生十男……或云突厥本平凉杂胡，姓阿史那氏。魏太武皇帝灭沮渠氏，阿史那以五百家奔蠕蠕。世居金山之阳，为蠕蠕铁工。……又曰突厥之先，出于索国，在匈奴之北。”

(The ancestors of the Turks lived on the right of the Western Sea and were their own tribe, probably another racial type of Hun, surnamed Ashina ...mated with wolves, and then the wolf became pregnant. ... The wolf hid in, and then gave birth to ten boys... Some say that the Turks were originally mixed-blooded Hu people from Ping-liang, and their surname was Ashina. When Emperor Tai-wu of Wei destroyed the Ju-qu clan, Ashina fled to Rou-ran with 500 families. They lived on the south side of Golden (Altai) Mountain for generations, and were iron-smiths for Rouran. ... It is also said that the ancestors of the Turks came from the Suo Kingdom, which was north of the Xiong-nu.)

3. Since they originated from the eastern Tian-shan Mountain range northwest of Gao-chang, the Western Sea referred to in the *Book of Sui* and the *History of the Northern Dynasties* can only be the Bosten Lake in the Korla region of present-day Xinjiang, located in the *Yan-qi* (Karasahr) Basin at the southern foot of the eastern Tian-shan range.

4. After the fall of their nation (or tribe), the Turks became the vassals of the *Rou-ran* Khanate of the *Ru-ru* people, lived in the Golden Mountain area, and worked as blacksmiths for the Khanate. The *Ru-ru* of the *Rou-ran* Khanate called them “slave blacksmiths”. This location also matches the records in the *Book of Zhou*, geographically stating that the Turks crossed the frozen Yellow River from the west yearly (in the dawning of the Turks’ rise) to invade western Wei, a sinicised white *Hu* kingdom on the land of north China.

5. They got the name “Turk” because the Golden Mountain is shaped like a military helmet from that period; the custom was to call the helmet “türk” in a local language,¹¹¹ so “türk” became their title (“türk” is pronounced “toork”). There are, of course, diverse claims about the origin of the title “Turk” in the scholarly field. Since the title is an important factor in constructing a theory on the historical identity of the Turks, a further articulation on the meaning of the title is provided below.

“Golden Mountain” refers to the Altai Mountains. From a bird’s eye view, the shape of the entire mountain range does look like the helmets that were worn in the Northern Wei and late Sui dynasties by Han Chinese and by Turkic soldiers and those of other ethnic groups of the same period, the kind of helmet that covers and protects both ears.¹¹² In essence, the original meaning of the name “Turk” was derived from the nickname for this kind of helmet, and not what some people commonly believe today, which is that it might have later evolved into the meaning for “strong and powerful” after the Turks established their khanate (see Geng, S. M, 2005: 1).

The famous French Sinologist and Orientalist scholar Pelliot believes that “Turk” comes from “Türküt”, the plural form in the ancient *Rou-ran* language, meaning “strong” (Grousset, 1970: 80-81). This makes obvious sense, even if the common belief today is that it came from the Scythian

¹¹¹ It is impossible to know whose language is referred to here for “turk” because in the Chinese text it remains vague.

¹¹² The helmets worn by 7th century Turkic funerary statues of warriors that have been excavated in Kazakhstan are no different in appearance from those worn by funerary statues of Chinese warriors of the Sui-Tang dynasties. Both are this ancient type of helmet that resembled a kind of cooking pot that was used at that time.

“Turkut” (Geng, S. M, 2005: 1). My view is that it was likely the *Rou-ran* who first gave this somewhat mocking nickname to their “slave blacksmiths” the “Turks”, just as the Han Chinese gave the rather derogatory nickname “Ru-ru” to the *Rou-ran* people. There is a theory that the surname Ashina also originated in the *Rou-ran* language. This also makes sense, because, in the modern Manchurian and Sibo languages the adjective *aishinia*¹¹³ for “gold/golden” can be phonetically translated as “ah-shi-na” into Chinese, which uses the same characters as the word “Ashina”. The name “Ashina” is presumably also derived from the Golden Mountain and means “Golden Family”. The noun *aishin* for “gold” can be phonetically translated into Chinese as “ai-xin.” The “jin” (gold) character is in the name of the later Jurchen *Jin* nation, which conquered the northern part of Song China, and is also a part of the Aisin Gioro name of the imperial clan of the Jurchen Manchus who ruled Qing China (in the present-day Sibo language, the imperial name was “*jin-zhao-li*” in Chinese, which means Golden Colander), both titles having come from the word *aishin*.

After this exploration of the original meaning of the title “Turk,” let us return to the discussion on the three theories (or narratives) of the Turkic origin, which is the main subject of this chapter’s section.

In view of the widely known academic rigor of the history *Book of Sui*, which was 35 years in the writing, and the fact that the *Book of Tang* begins its “Chronicle of the Turks” by citing the *Book of Sui* as its primary source, I am inclined towards the First Theory that the ancestors of the Turks were “mixed-blood *Hu* from the *Ping-liang* region” originally belonging to the Northern Liang kingdom, that is, mixed-blood or biracial *Hu* from the ancient Gansu region (a province of present-day China). In this way, the Ashina tribe was Hunnified mixed-blood *Hu*, which is “another racial type of Hun”¹¹⁴ originally from the *Ping-liang* region. After their kingdom was destroyed, some of the mixed-blood *Hu* led by the Ashina family submitted to the *Ru-ru* (Rou-ran Khanate) and settled in the Altai Mountains, likely becoming *Rou-ran*-ized and growing stronger, while maintaining their Hunnic language. This would also explain why they became a part of and served the *Rou-ran* kingdom and yet were looked down upon, likely because of the common negative view of “bastards” and/or war refugees in ancient times. Nevertheless, the other two theories about the origins of the Turks should not be ignored.

Regarding the **First Theory** of the mixed-blood *Hu* being from the *Ping-liang* region, one

¹¹³ In the Sibe (*Xi-bai*) language as it is spoken today in Xinjiang, the pronunciation is closer to *ai-ri-nia*.

¹¹⁴ “Another type of Hun” probably means they speak a Hunnic language which is a logical step for a Hunnified group.

needs to note, that, when Chinese historical materials of this period mentioned "*Hu* people", they were referring to the white Indo-European ethnic groups. For example, the *Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance* says, An Lu-shan, the leader of the rebellion against Tang-China, is "a mixed-blood *Hu* from *Ying* Prefecture" (Si-ma, G., 1976: 6816),¹¹⁵ and the *Old Book of Tang* explains, An Lu-shan was a "mixed-blood *Hu*". An Lushan himself said, "My father is *Hu*, my mother is Turk" (Liu, X., 2000: 2178).¹¹⁶ Please note that the *New Book of Tang* points out that "An Lu-shan was a *Hu* person from the Liu city of *Ying* prefecture", without mentioning his mixed blood from the Turks, and only specifying his physical features as "great and white", meaning big, tall, and white (Ou-yang & Song, 2000: 4853).¹¹⁷ This shows that "mixed-blood *Hu*" refers to those who are part *Hu* and part non-*Hu*, the latter of course includes the Huns, *Rou-ran*, Han Chinese, etc. The *Book of Sui* also mentions that the Turkic khan had sought marriage with the imperial family of its suzerain state, the *Ru-ru* (*Rou-ran*), who rejected the proposal harshly (Wei, Z., 2000: 1249), and the *Book of Sui: About Pei-ju* notes there were "many large groups of *Hu*" among the Turks (Ma, 2006: 38; Wei. Z., 2000: 1063).¹¹⁸

According to the prominent sinologist Guo Moruo's *Chinese History*, in the waning years of the Eastern Han dynasty, large numbers of Huns migrated south and settled in present-day Gansu, Shaanxi, Inner Mongolia, Shanxi, and other areas: "In the time of the Jin dynasty's Emperor Wu, four large migrations into China took place, with several hundreds of thousands [of Huns] being settled in Bing, Yong and other prefectures. At that time, there were also *Hu* people of an ethnic group that was different [from the Hun] who were called mixed-blood *Hu*, the most famous branch of which were the *Lu-shui Hu*" (Guo, M. R., 1979: 64). As mentioned earlier, the king's family of Northern *Liang* was *Lu-shui Hu*, therefore, "Ping-liang mix-blooded *Hu*" was also related to the *Lu-shui Hu*. The Chinese *Jin* dynasty's emperor Wu Di reigned from AD 265 to 290.

Guo here also says that those "mixed-blood *Hu*" were a different anthropological group than the Huns. There is another passage in the *Book of Sui* that should not be overlooked: "In the chaos of the final years of the Sui dynasty, countless numbers of Chinese fled [to the Turks, so the Turks] gradually grew in power, becoming a harassing force in Central Xia [Zhong Xia, basically includes the regions north of the Great Wall (the Siberian areas), and Chinese

¹¹⁵ Si-ma Guang, *Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance* : "安祿山者，本營州雜胡。"

¹¹⁶ Liu, *Old Book of Tang*, "Ge-shu-han": "我父是胡，母是突厥；公父是突厥，母是胡。"

¹¹⁷ Ou-yang & Song, *New Book of Tang*, "Rebellious ministers: I": "營州柳城胡也"; "偉而晰".

¹¹⁸ Wei, *Book of Sui*, "About Pei-ju": "其内多有群胡".

westernmost frontier]” (Wei, Z., 2000: 1258).¹¹⁹ That is to say, the Turkic Khanate became very large and powerful at this time because of the large influx of Han Chinese. In this process, the introduction of large amounts of Han Chinese blood into the Turks was clearly inevitable. According to this record, what entails in this historical period is that the non-*Hu* blood of the Turks was mainly infused from the Han Chinese blood, even among their royal line as a later section of this chapter will mention.

Three Theories about the Origin of the Turks	
The First Theory (<i>Book of Sui</i> , AD 636)	1. Racial-ethnicity: the mixed-blood <i>Hu</i> people [<i>Hu</i> is Indo-European] 2. Geography: <i>Ping-liang</i> region [present-day Gansu, China] 3. Nationality: <i>Ju-qu</i> royal clan [kingdom]
The Second Theory (<i>Book of Sui & History of the Northern Dynasties</i> , AD 659)	1. Racial-ethnicity: probably another racial type of Hun. 2. Geography: at north or right to the Western Sea [Bosten Lake], a grassland in the eastern Tian-shan mountains at the northwest of Kocho 3. Nationality: independent tribe destroyed by a neighboring kingdom
The Third Theory (<i>Book of Zhou</i> , AD 636 & <i>History of the Northern Dynasties</i>)	1. Racial-ethnicity: probably another racial type of Hun. 2. Geography: North of the Huns 3. Nationality: Kingdom of Suo
Common points from the three classics	1. Turks are originated from the Ashina clan 2. Turks are the descendants of a she-wolf impregnated by a human 3. From the regions south of the eastern Tian-shan Mountain range 4. The Turks later became the vassals of the Rou-ran Khanate of the Ru-ru people, lived in the area south of the Altai Mountains, and worked as slave blacksmiths for the Khanate. 5. The name “Turk” generated from “the Altai Mountain range is shaped like a military helmet”.

Table 3. 1: Comparing the three theories about the origin of the Turks

¹¹⁹ Wei, *Book of Sui* :“隋末乱离，中国人归之者无数，遂大强盛，势陵中夏。”

Regarding the Second and Third Theories about the origins of the Turks, what needs to be mentioned is that the *Gao-che* are another racial-ethnic group from the east Asian Grasslands [later called the Mongolian grasslands] who also have a legend that they originated from the mating of a woman and a wolf, similar to the legend of the Turks. Further, *Gao-che* was located close to the Huns, which is also similar to the Turks who were north of the Huns as noted earlier in the Third Theory. This information is recorded in the *Book of Wei*. Regarding the racial-ethnic attributes of the *Gao-che* people, those need to be explored in detail here. Although this additional consideration increases the complexity of exploring the origins of the Turks, it is an issue not only worthy of further study, but necessary if we are to identify most correctly the racial-ethnic heritage and composition of these people key to our study.

3.3.1.1 The racial-ethnic attributes of *Gao-che* people and their relation to Turks

On the one hand, the *Gao-che* people were Hunnified Indo-Europeans according to my research based on Chinese classics. The common academic view is that the *Gao-che* were the forefathers of the Uyghurs, but I see this as a misunderstanding. The *Records of the Grand Historian* says that the Huns (*Xiong-nu*) of Mao Dun *Chan-yu* (king) conquered the five kingdoms in the north, including the *Ding-ling* kingdom around 200 BC. According to the Chinese historical materials and the archeological discoveries by the Russians, beginning in the late 1920s (Kiselev, S. V., 1985: 48-49, 118), the *Ding-ling* lived in the area of Lake Baikal and the Yenisei River. After they were conquered, they lived to the left of the Huns, subject to the jurisdiction of the Hun chancellor. The Indo-European *Wu-sun*, who had also been subjugated by the Huns, were living to the right of the Huns. They were the “right arm” of the Huns, the direct threat to the Silk Road passing through the Four Regions, under the jurisdiction of the vice chancellor (*you-xian-wang*), which China’s Han dynasty wanted to break in seeking a possible ally from the *Yue-zhi* people.

The *Book of Wei: Gao-che* explains with an important clue, “The *Gao-che* might be remnants of the descendants of the ancient Red *Di*. Originally, they were called *Di-li*, and in the north they are called *Chi-le* while all of *Xia* groups calls them *Gao-che* and *Ding-ling*. Their language is generally the same as the *Xiong-nu* (Huns), with certain minor differences. Their ancestors are said to be the nephew of the *Xiong-nu*” (Wei, S., 2000: 1561).¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Wei, *Book of Wei*, “*Gao-che*”: “高车，盖古赤狄之余种也，初号为狄历，北方以为敕勒，诸夏以为高车、丁零。其语略与匈奴同而时有小异，或云其先匈奴之甥也。”

This information points out that the *Gao-che* people were not really, as the *New Book of Tang* misleadingly states (Wang & Song, 2000: 4649),¹²¹ the forefathers of the Uyghurs (from the bloodline of Huns-Tlugh), even though, having been colonized, their language was basically the same as that of the Huns as a result of their Hunnification. Rather, they are the descendants of the *Chi-di* (red-*di*, i.e., ruddy-faced white people), that is, they are of the white Scythian Indo-European ethnic group and are also called the *Di-li* or *Ding-ling* and the *Chi-le* (or *Ki-le*). What this would mean is that their forefather was the nephew of the Huns, which means that, after acknowledging their allegiance to the Huns, a political marriage took place between their royal family and a Hun princess. This, in a way, lines up with the legend in the *Book of Wei* about the *Gao-che* being born from the mating of a wolf and a Hun princess. Moreover, the *Book of Wei* notes that “these people loved to sing in loud, high-pitched voices, like a wolf’s howl” (Wei, S., 2000: 1561),¹²² which aptly describes the *Gao-che* people’s penchant for bursting into song. For instance, the famous “*Chi-le* Shepherd’s Song”¹²³ from the mid-sixth century that was quite popular among the Han Chinese should be accredited to the *Gao-che* people (*Chi-le*).¹²⁴

The main reason for the misunderstanding of that the *Gao-che* were the forefathers of the Uyghurs, who are racial-ethnic descendants of *Te-le* (Tlugh) and of Tlugh’s Hun forefather who

¹²¹ Wang & Song, *New Book of Tang*, “Uyghur I”: “回纥，其先匈奴也，俗多乘高轮车，元魏时亦号高车部，或曰敕勒，讹为铁勒。”

(The ancestors of the Uyghur people were the Xiong-nu [Huns] people, and they often rode on high-wheeled carts. During the Northern Wei age, they were also called the *Gao-che* tribe, or *Chi-le*, which was mis-pronounced as *Tie-le*.)

¹²² Wei, *Book of Wei*, “*Gao-che*”: “故其人好引声长歌，又似狼嗥。”

¹²³ 《敕勒歌》歌词原为鲜卑语，译为汉语：“敕勒川，阴山下。天似穹庐，笼盖四野，天苍苍，野茫茫，风吹草低见牛羊。”

(The lyrics of the “*Chi Le Song*” were originally written in the Xian-bei [Siberian] language and translated into Chinese: “*Chi Le* River, under the Yin Mountains. The sky is like a dome, covering the four directions of the wildness. The sky is vast, the wilderness is vast, the wind blows the grass low and you can see cattle and sheep.”)

¹²⁴ 《乐府诗集·卷八十六·杂歌谣辞四》：《乐府广题》曰：“北齐神武攻周玉壁，士卒死者十四五。神武恚愤，疾发。周王下令曰：‘高欢鼠子，亲犯玉壁，剑弩一发，元凶自毙。’神武闻之，勉坐以安士众。悉引诸贵，使斛律金唱《敕勒》，神武自和之。”其歌本鲜卑语，易为齐言，故其句长短不齐。

(*Collection of Yuefu Poems*, “No. 86 Miscellaneous Ballads 4”, “*Yue-fu Guang-ti*” said: “Northern Qi Shen-wu attacked Zhou Yubi, and forty to fifty percent of the soldiers died. Shen-wu was furious and sick. The King of Zhou issued an order, saying: ‘Gao Huan is a rat, he attacked Yubi himself, one shot of sword and crossbow will kill the culprit.’ When Shen-wu heard it, he tried hard getting off his bed and sat down to comfort the soldiers. He summoned all the nobles, and asked Hulu Jin to sing “*Chi Le*”, and Shen-wu sang along with it himself.” The song was originally in the Xian-bei language, which was changed to the Qi language, so the length of its sentences is uneven.)

will play an important role as discussed in the next chapter of my thesis, is because that one of the clans of the *Gao-che* was called the “hu-gu” (Wei, S., 2000: 1561),¹²⁵ which is another pronunciation translation of “Uyghur”. According to the *Book of Tang*, the Uyghurs during the Later Wei (Northern Wei) dynasty “leaned and relied on the *Gao-che*; subjects of the *Tu-jue* [Turks]”. Furthermore, as will be noted in my next chapter, there was a branch of Uyghurs (Sari Uyghurs) who were white Indo-Europeans. Just this fact alone could explain who the Uyghurs among the *Gao-che* were: they might have been Uyghur Indo-Europeans who are racially the same as the *Gao-che*. My research shows that, in the history of the East Asia grassland, it was common for the East Asian groups to subjugate some Indo-European people groups and assimilate them with their language and cultures, or sometimes vice versa.

On the other hand, the Turks, who are the mixed-blood *Hu* originally from *Ping-liang* and who also have a legend tracing their origins to a wolf according to my research, may have an interesting relation to the *Gao-che* and their *Hu* blood might have primarily come from the *Gao-che*. Also, at this time (the mid-sixth century), the *Gao-che* and the Turks both lived around the Altai Mountains, and the geographic conditions were conducive to a further mixing of bloodlines. In addition, the geographic location of the *Ding-ling*, the forefathers of the *Gao-che*, before they were conquered by the Huns, tallies with the *History of the Northern Dynasties* which reports that the forefathers of the Turks came from the *Suo* Kingdom north of the Huns (Li, Y.S., 2000: 2181). Worth mentioning, the descendants of *Gao-che* (*Chi-le*, *Ki-le*) became a famous Christian nation later in history and dramatically impacted the Genghis Khan Mongols.

In addition, the *Book of Wei* adds another detail that “*Gao-che* later migrated to the place over a hundred *li* [a Chinese mile] northwest of *Lu-hun* Sea and was strong, often standing against *Ru-ru* [Rou-ran] (1562).” The *Lu-hun* Sea is likely today’s Ga Shunnao’er Lake in west inner Mongolia, about 600-700 kilometers east of Kumul (present-day Hami). This location better explains the later migration of the *Gao-che* people south-westward, according to research by the Chinese scholar Duan Lian-qin, based on the Chinese classics, such as the *Book of Wei* and *History of the Northern Dynasties*, which records that, in 487, about a few hundred thousand people of the *Fu-fu-luo* tribe of *Gao-che*, led by *A-fu-zhi-luo*, escaped from the *Rou-ran* Khanate and migrated to the northwest *Gao-chang* region (Turpan Basin), where they established the *Gao-che* kingdom (or *A-fu-zhi-luo* Kingdom) (Duan, L. Q., 1988: 218-219). Please note that this observation confirms

¹²⁵ Wei, *Book of Wei*, “*Gao-che*”: “其种有狄氏、表纥氏、斛律氏、解批氏、护骨氏、异奇斤氏。”

(Their tribes include the Di clan, the Biao-he clan, the Hu-lyu clan, the Jie-pi clan, the Hu-gu [Uyghur] clan, and the Yi-qi-jin clan.)

a high possibility of mixed-blood between the *Gao-che* and the ruler of the *Rou-ran* people.

Later, the kingdom of *Gao-che* expanded further southwest to the area around Yan-qi (Karasahr) Basin and Bosten Lake, east to the *Shan-shan* area, north to the present-day Urumqi area, and also subjugated the local *Gao-chang* kingdom in Turpan Basin (Duan, L. Q., 1988: 226-227, 232-233). It seems that 300 years later, when Uyghurs migrated west to this location, they copied the kingdom map of *Gao-che*. In 541, the *Rou-ran* [Ru-ru] khanate attacked and destroyed the *Gao-che* kingdom (Duan, L. Q., 1988: 252). This historical fact indicates that the Second Theory of the origin of the Turks, which claims “their ancestors’ kingdom was in the north to the Western Sea [Bosten Lake], and the kingdom was destroyed by a neighboring kingdom” is not a fabrication but rather matches the description of the *Gao-che* kingdom in this area. The *History of the Northern Dynasties* states that Ashina Turks escaped from the *Ping-liang* region and migrated northwest seeking shelter under *Ru-ru* [Rou-ran], at the southern side of the Altai Mountains (Li, Y. S., 2000: 2181).¹²⁶

Therefore, we can conclude that the Turks as a group of war refugees congregated at the Altai Mountains under the rule of *Rou-ran* Empire after 541. They consisted of the mixed-blood *Hu* who would be related to the Indo-Europeans from these two geographic locations: the descendants of *Yue-zhi* people from the *Ping-liang* regions and the *Gao-che* people from Bosten Lake and Turpan Basin, at the southern side of the eastern Tian-shan. Thus, the latter group can trace its roots back to the *Suo* kingdom north of the Huns. Both *Yue-zhi* and *Gao-che* belong to the same type of Indo-Europeans, the *red-di*, with ruddy face feature. Therefore, all **three theories** about the origins of the Turks from the *Book of Sui*, *Book of Zhou* and *History of the Northern Dynasties*, discounting their legendary parts, are based on true historical facts recorded in the Chinese classics.

The description in the *Book of Zhou* of the strange facial features of the Turkic Khanate’s third khan *Yan-du* explains that “his face is very broad and ruddy, and eyes are like glass” (Ling-hu,

¹²⁶ Li Yan-shou, *History of Northern Dynasties*, “Turks, western Turks, Tie-le”: “或云突厥本平凉杂胡，姓阿史那氏。魏太武皇帝灭沮渠氏，阿史那以五百家奔蠕蠕。世居金山之阳，为蠕蠕铁工。金山形似兜鍪，俗号兜鍪为突厥，因以为号。”

(The ancestors of the Turks were the mixed-blood *Hu* people from the *Ping-liang* region [the present-day Gansu province of China] with their surname being Ashina [meaning gold]. After [emperor] Tai-wu of Later Wei [dynasty] destroyed the Ju-qu clan [kingdom], Ashina led five hundred fleeing families to Ru-ru. [Ever since] they have lived at the Golden [Altai] Mountain for generations and are good at iron work. The Golden Mountain is shaped like a dou-mou [military helmet in Chinese]; the custom was to call the helmet ‘turk’, so it became their title.)

2000: 616).¹²⁷ These are clearly the distinct characteristics of the Scythian Indo-Europeans. In addition, this passage in the *Old Book of Tang*: “Turk I”, tells us that the two Khans of the eastern Turks, “*Shi-bi* and *Chu-luo* [not the eastern Turkic Khan *Chu-luo*] deem that he [their minister *Si-mo*] in appearance looks like the *Hu* rather than the Turks, so it is doubtful that he is of the Ashina clan...,” thus, the khans never promoted him (Liu, X., 2000: 3512).¹²⁸ It should be no surprise that trust between racial groups often lacks, even today.

Regarding the east Asian features of the mix-blood *Hu* Turks, the western Turkic Ashina clan is no exception. The *Book of Sui* states that the western Turkic *Chu-luo* Khan's mother, lady *Xiang*, was a Chinese woman who married the grandson of the third Khan of the Turkic Empire, who was also the fourth khan of the western Turkic Khanate (Wei, Z., 2000: 1258),¹²⁹ Mukan (Ashina *Yan-du* or *Si-jin*) had obvious Scythian-type Yue-zhi people features with his very broad and ruddy face and his eyes like “glass”. It is obvious that, even though the Ashina, the core Turkic tribe, were biracial *Hu*, their features were still different from the original white *Hu* people. The facial appearance of the *Xiong-nu* (Huns), *Rou-ran* (early Jurchen, Manchurian, Tungusic-type northeastern Asian) and their Chinese characteristics might have been obvious.

This theory of mine has been confirmed through the genetic study of a group of Chinese biologists based on the skeletal remains of Empress Ashina (AD 551-582), who was one of the daughters of Mukan Khan (who at least had one Chinese wife), married to the Northern Zhou emperor Yu-wen Yong (Ling-hu, 2000: 96). The study revealed her “northeast Asian origin” of 97.7% Northeast Asian ancestry and 2.3% West Eurasian ancestry (Yang, X. M., Meng, H. L., Zhang, J. L., 2023: 5).¹³⁰ Nevertheless, my theory also indicates that the Turkic tribe members,

¹²⁷ Ling-hu, *Book of Zhou*, “Foreign Regions II”: “科罗死，弟俟斤立，号木汗可汗。俟斤一名燕都，状貌多奇异，面广尺馀，其色甚赤，眼若琉璃。”

(When Koro died, his younger brother Shijin succeeded him and was called “Muhan Khan”. Shijin was also known as Yan-du. He had a very strange appearance. His face was very broad and ruddy, and eyes were like glass.)

¹²⁸ Liu, *Old Book of Tang*, “Turks I”: “始毕、处罗以其貌似胡人，不类突厥，疑非阿史那族类，……”

¹²⁹ Wei, *Book of Sui*, “Western Turks”: “大逻便为处罗侯所执，其国立鞅素特勤之子，是为泥利可汗。卒，子达漫立，号泥撅处罗可汗。其母向氏，本中国人，生达漫而泥利卒，向氏又嫁其弟婆实特勤。”

(After the Western Turkic Khan Da-luo-bian was captured by the Eastern Turkic Khan Chu-luo-hou, the Western Turkic Khanate established the son of Yang-su Teqin, who was Nili Khan. After his death, his son Daman was inaugurated and was called Niju Chu-luo Khan. His mother Xiang was originally Chinese. She gave birth to Daman. After Nili died, Xiang married his younger brother Poshi Teqin.)

¹³⁰ “In summary, we have unveiled the first genomic profile of the ancient Türkic royal family. Our genomic analyses of Empress Ashina revealed Göktürk's Northeast Asian origin (97.7% Northeast Asian ancestry and 2.3% West Eurasian ancestry), refuting the western Eurasian origin and multiple origin

as a whole, were mainly of Scythian-*Hu* blood (mostly likely of the *Yue-zhi* and *Gao-che* who were possibly a Christian nation even before AD 451, as noted in Chapter Two), along with being infused with Hun, *Rou-ran* and Chinese blood.

The *History of the Northern Dynasties* also mentions that the Turks' "script resembles *Hu* script" (Li, Y. S., 2000: 2183),¹³¹ although their language was undoubtedly Hunnic, which was also the language of the *Te-le-Uyghur* people then. Modern linguists commonly refer to the Turk's language as the "Turkic language", mainly because the Turkic Khanate was the first to erect steles with inscriptions in this language discovered by modern archaeologists.

3.3.1.2 Ancient original Turks were mixed blood *ping-liang Hu* and *Gao-che Hu* people who were Hunnified culturally with Indo-European and Asian features

The record about the physical features shows that the Turks first originated from the mix-blooded *Hu* people (Indo-Europeans), thus having their primary features from the *Hu* people and supportive features from East Asians. Certainly, this is not the case for every Turk because the intermixed feature varies across individuals and different social classes. The Chinese classics defined them as a Hunnified group, primarily due to their language and some of their cultures, yet it will be mentioned later that their *Hu* cultural features were strong.

Therefore, their sense of identity was inclined towards one of the *Hu* people groups, which corresponds with all three versions of their origins, especially the last two versions which seem to be compromised of narratives from the Turks themselves. So, the implication is that they were primarily white *Hu* people, intermixed with non-*Hu* (Huns, Chinese, and *Rou-ran* etc.), which aligns them with their three possible origins according to the Chinese classics. At the same time, they strongly exhibited the characteristics of the *Hu* civilization, which reflected upon their sense of identity. That is why, as mentioned earlier, there were "many large groups of *Hu*" among the Turks. Their *Hu* identity was most likely related to the *Ping-liang Hu* and *Gao-che* from the *Gao-che* kingdom and originally the *Suo* kingdom.

hypotheses. We found Ashina shared most genetic affinity with post-Iron Age Tungusic and Mongolic Steppe pastoralists, such as Rouran, Xianbei, Khitan, and Heshui_Mohe, and showed genetic heterogeneity with other ancient Türkic people, suggesting the multiple sources of the Türkic Khanate populations." ----"Ancient Genome of Empress Ashina reveals the Northeast Asian origin of Göktürk Khanate," in Hongzhi Kong and Hong Ma (eds.): *Article in Journal of Systematics and Evolution* (Beijing: Institute of Botany, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Volume 61, Issue 6, 2023)

¹³¹ Li, Yan-shou, *History of Northern Dynasties* :“其书字类胡”。

Also, the Kul Tegin stele erected by the Turks announces this of the first two khans who founded the Turkic Khanate: "After they ascended to the throne, they founded the nation and established the legal system of the Turks.... They ruled the Kok Turk between heaven and earth" (Geng, S. M., 2005: 121). "Kok Turk" or "Blue Turk" is also transliterated into Chinese as "*ge-tu-jue*", which might have been another name that the Turks called themselves; or a term for some special kind of Turk. The meaning of "blue" here is unclear. It could mean "blue eyes" (if yes, that would be the Turkified Avars, not to be confused with Rou-ran, as some scholars do), as we will see in later history, where "yellow Uyghur" means "Yellow Head Uyghur" (or blonde Uyghur). There is also a "blonde Jurchen"¹³² which will be mentioned briefly in a later section of the chapter.

Therefore, Turks carried in themselves the mixed blood of Indo-Europeans and eastern Asians. As time went on, the male western Turks further intermarried with the local Indo-European *Hu* women in Central Asia, leaning to identify themselves more with the white *Hu* civilization and alienating themselves from the eastern Turks, even gradually becoming enemies with them: "The western Turks and the northern Turks [eastern Turks] were from the same ancestors, ... then became enemies against the northern Turks" (Liu, X., 2000: 3523, 3524).¹³³ This refers to the eastern Turks as "northern Turks" because they were all in the north from the perspective of China. The *Hu* civilizational impact on western Turks led them more easily to accept Indo-European Christianity which flourished in Central Asia, reaching to the Chinese western frontier. Unavoidably, some Turks also accepted the Indo-European Buddhism as well, though it remained as a minor religion compared to their widespread Turkic Christianity.

¹³² The famous poet during Song China, Lu You, mentions "Yellow Head Jurchen" in one of his poems.

“黄头女真褫魂魄，面缚军门争请死。”——陆游：《中夜闻大雷雨》

(The yellow-headed Jurchens laid out their souls and pleaded to die [in battle] in front of the military gate with their faces lining up." - Lu You: "Hearing a Heavy Thunderstorm in the Middle of the Night.)

¹³³ Liu, *Old Book of Tang*, "Turks II": "西突厥本与北突厥同祖。.....射匱可汗者，达头可汗之孙也。既立后，始开土宇，东至金山，西至海，自玉门已西诸国皆役属之。遂与北突厥为敌，乃建庭于龟兹北三弥山，寻卒。弟统叶护可汗代立。"

(The western Turks and the northern Turks [eastern Turks] were from the same ancestors,. ... She-kui Khan was the grandson of Da-tou Khan. After he came to power, he began to expand his territory, east to Golden Mountain and west to the sea. All the countries west of Yumen [Jade Gate Pass] were vassalized by him. They then became enemies against the Northern Turks and built his court in the northern San-mi Mountain of Qiu-ci. He died soon after. His younger brother Yabghu Tong Khan took over.)

3.4 The Conversion of Turks to Christianity and the Indigenization of the Turkic Church

In 657, the Western Turkic Khanate fell under a Tang-China military assault. The Eastern Turkic Khanate, which had descended into disarray after suffering heavy losses in 630 at the hands of China, re-established itself in 682 as the Second Turkic Khanate, which lasted until 744-745, when it was overthrown by the Uyghurs and their allies. The Uyghurs then founded the Uyghur Khanate. During this period, East-Syriac Christianity, building on its mission breakthroughs in central Asia and northern Tang-China, went further and reached the eastern part of the East Asian steppes north of the Great Wall.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, Christianity had spread from Persia along the Silk Road, wending its way through Bactria, and the Pamir Mountains, though likely more often along the southern branch around the Tarim Basin, Kashgar, Kucha or Khotan, Turpan or Dun-huang, by the sixth century, and reaching to Chang-an of China by the seventh century. Christian mission trips along the northern branch of the Silk Road, from Bactria up to the north crossing the Syr River, Chu River, and Yili River or Issyk Lake, then westward along the north of the Tian-shan, were active by eighth century. Also, during the early twelfth century Christianity prospered along the northern branch through the age of the western *Liao* Khitans. Official historical materials of the Persia East-Syriac Church record clearly and in detail the circumstances of the mission work and of the diocese on the eastern bank of the Amu River from the fifth century through the twelfth century. (The two banks of this river can be referred to as the western and eastern banks or the southern and northern banks, depending on one's geographic perspective. When looking from the Persian base from west to east, one would choose the former designation, but from the perspective of Central Asia-Bactria, another would prefer the latter.)

After the 431 Council of Ephesus that split the Church into east and west, the East-Syriac Church, headquartered in Ctesiphon, began to grow in Persia. As a result of enthusiastic mission efforts along the Silk Road eastward, the diocese on the west bank of the Amu River flourished and Merv became the Christian center of Central Asia along the Silk Road. In the fifth and sixth centuries, when central Asia experienced the rule of the Hephthalites and western Turks successively, the east bank of the Amu River became an institutionally mature diocese. By the seventh and eighth centuries, during the period Tang China defeated the western Turks and eastern Turks successively, Samarkand at the east bank nearly replaced Merv on the west bank to become Central Asia's center of Christianity. This shows the swift progress and steady growth of Christianity on the river's eastern bank as it aimed itself at east Asia.

While the East Syriac missionaries from Persia enjoyed an abundant harvest of conversions as the Turks enthusiastically embraced Christianity in this period, in 751, Arabic-Persian Islamic

troops defeated Tang Chinese troops in the Battle of Talas (River), and the Chinese forces retreated to the western end of the Tian-shan Mountains and east of the Pamir Mountains. This retreat reveals that, during this time, Islamic troops not only invaded the area north of the Amu River, they also continued north and crossed the Yili River, stepping into the westernmost regions of the Tian-shan range, thus occupying the whole of Central Asia, besides the present-day Xinjiang area.

The defeat of the Chinese forces also marked the start of the decline of China Tang dynasty power. Despite such grim circumstances, East Syriac Christianity reached its climax in China at this time as the Xi'an Stele erected in AD 781 records. In central Asia, facing militarily aggressive Islam, the spread of Christianity among the western Turks continued to flourish and expand toward and into the steppes of the Far East and into east China. The accounts below show that, in the post-Second Turkic Khanate period, East-Syriac Christianity along the northern branch of the Silk Road penetrated deeply into the grasslands of East Asia, with the first four Turkic-Tatar groups converting to Christianity, including the Onguds, who later became the branch of the Uyghurs who were exiled south after 841.

3.4.1 The first three stages of Christianity in Central Asia and East Asia among the Turks and other nations

According to Alphonse Mingana's research, based on abundant primary Syriac sources, both East Syriac and West Syriac (Jacobites) writers provided valuable records related to East Syriac missionaries and their successful missions among the Turks. These records show that the Christian mission among the Turks went through three important stages:

1. Ground-breaking conversion namely in the mid-sixth century west of the Pamir Mountains.
2. Large communities accepting Christianity in the mid-seventh century west of the Pamir Mountains.
3. Institutionalized Christianity in the mid-eighth century around the Tian-shan Mountains and on the east Asia grasslands.

Please note that the Christian mission success among the western Turks in the first two stages was accomplished by the institutionalized local Church of Indo-Europeans. The age of Indo-European Christianity discussed in the previous chapter reveals the missions' success among native Indo-European white ethnic groups in the whole of Central Asia, from the western

side of Pamir Mountains (later Pamirs) in the regions of Amu River and Syr River, to the eastern side of the Pamirs in the regions of the three basins, the Tarim Basin, Yan-qi Basin, and Turpan Basin. In the age of Turkic Christianity, the native Indo-European Church carried out missions and served as the base for missionaries from Persia, targeting the western Turks first, and then reaching out to the eastern Turks.

The first stage (AD 500s):

Ground-breaking conversion among the western Turks in the mid-sixth century

A piece by a well-informed Jacobite (west Syriac tradition) in AD 555 provides a detailed record of the first stage of the groundbreaking mission among the western Turks who were actively colonising the Tocharian-Sogdian regions on the western side of the Pamirs, in mid-western central Asia. Please note that here the writer calls the western Turks “the Huns”, recognizing the point argued in my last section that the Turks were a Hunnified group, and there were other Hunnified ethnic group such as Indo-European Hephthalites as well:

The Huns more than twenty years ago learned that art of writing in their own language. I shall record the occasion of this event, which has been inspired by God, as I heard it from reliable people: John of Resh’aina, who was in the monastery of Ishakonai, near Amed, and Thomas the tanner, who forcibly joined in the flight of Kawad from Persia into the country of the Huns, a little more than fifty years ago. They remained there more than thirty years, and married and had children there. They returned in our time, and in a vivid speech they narrated what follows. (Mingana, 2010: 303)

Here Mingana footnotes that “Huns” was the “Old Syriac name of the Western Turks” (Mingana, 2010: 303). The Persian Sasanian king Kawa, i.e. Kavadh I, reigned from 488 to 531 and his father, Peroz, was killed by the Hephthalites. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in approximately 498, Kavadh I twice sought refuge with the Hephthalites, and the Christians there helped him win back his throne (Mingana, 2010: 302).

According to the supplemented account by the West-Syriac writer, the two Christian refugees in the king’s group, John and Thomas, married and had children, returning to Persia only after thirty years had passed. They also stated their missionary endeavors there: Karadusat, the bishop of Arran (present-day Azerbaijan), and four priests, as well as John of Resh’aina and Thomas the Tanner formed a seven-man missionary team and went into the kingdom of the Turks to serve the Turks and their Byzantine captives. These were the Persian missionaries of the East Syriac Church who lived among the Turks for seven years and helped the Turks create their own written

scripts in the Turkic language. This information matches the description of the Turks and their scripts in the *Book of Zhou*: “Their written scripts is a kind of *Hu* scripts.” (Ling-hu, 2000: 617).¹³⁴ John reports they preached the Gospel to “a considerable number” of Turks and baptized them (Mingana, 2010: 303; Zacharias, 1899: 329-331).

It is important to note that these historical records also reveal that missionaries of the East-Syriac Church helped to create the earliest Turkic written language in about AD 550, and the scripts’ system impacted all of the Hunnic language groups in central Asia and east Asia, including the Uyghurs, and later the Kirgiz, Kazaks, and other ethnic groups all the way down their history to the Mongols and Manchurians.

The account continues: At that time, the Byzantine emperor Justinian I (483-565) sent an envoy, Probus, to the Turks to carry out a special mission. This envoy saw with his own eyes all that the missionaries had done and was thoroughly astonished (Mingana, 2010: 303-304; Smith, R. P., 1860: 425).¹³⁵ So, on his return, he sent from the Persian city closest to the Turks thirty mules carrying food, textiles, and church supplies to the missionaries. A short while later, a practical and competent Armenian bishop joined the ranks of these seven missionaries and taught the Turks how to plant vegetables and corn. At the time the Jacobite author was writing the accounts of these events, this bishop was still living among the Turks. The Persian King Kavadh I was also moved by Christianity and not only gave up eating unclean meat but also deeply revered Joseph the doctor who later became the East-Syriac Catholicos in 552 (Mingana, 2010: 303-304; Zacharias, 1899: 329-331).

In short, before the independence of the Western Turkic Khanate in 581, Christianity had already spread throughout the Hunnified Turks of the Central Asia region. This corroborating information matches well the Chinese classics’ reports quoted in Chapter Two, confirming that the fifth and sixth centuries were the golden early age for East-Syriac Church missions in Central Asia, including present-day Xinjiang province of China, especially among those who lived on both sides of the eastern part of the Tian-shan Mountains. Our next chapter will mention briefly that in

¹³⁴ Ling-hu, *Book of Zhou*, “Foreign Regions II: Turks: “其书字类胡……” During this time *Hu* people refer generally to the white Indo-Europeans in the Tarim basin and the west of Pamir mountains.

¹³⁵ According to the East-Syriac Church historian John of Ephesus, in the seventh year of his reign (534), Justinian I sent his first envoy to the Turks. They arrived a year later. Perhaps because diplomatic relations were established with the Turks during this visit, this resulted in the Western Turkic khan Istami sending an envoy to Constantinople in 567 to establish an alliance with Byzantine emperor Justin II to launch a pincer attack on the Persian Sassanid Empire that lay between them. (*The Third Part of the Ecclesiastical History of John Bishop of Ephesus*)

the mid-ninth century, as a group of Uyghurs were moving into the area west of the Pamirs, some Christian Ghuzz tribes, especially the Seljuk Ghuzz, the forefathers of modern Turkish people, showed up in the historical records. These Christian Ghuzz tribes would most probably be the descendants of the Christian Turks (Western Turks or Ten Arrow Turks) of Central Asia.

Compared with the settled Indo-European peoples of the Central Asia region, these mixed-blood *Hu*, the Hunnified Turks, were still all-out nomadic barbarians, though admiring the advanced sedentary civilization of Tocharian-Iran-Greek traditions. The Turks of this period were already powerful and would soon overthrow the *Rou-ran* Khanate and establish the East and West Turkic Khanates. They would first jointly launch a north-south pincer attack allied with the Persians and crush the Hephthalite Khanate with Christianity as their national religion, then form another alliance with the Byzantine Empire to attack and defeat the Persians from the east and west, becoming the hegemon of the Central Asia and East Asian steppes.

The second stage (AD 600s):

A western Turkic king and his people accepted Christianity in the mid-seventh century

In this stage, just as in the first stage among native Tocharians and Scythians, Christian missions among the western Turks achieved further success. A piece of Syriac text written in AD 680 states that, in AD 644, the metropolitan of Merv (Merw, Maru) Elija converted a king, a large number of his fellow Turks, and other nations to Christianity “beyond the border line” (the Amu River) in Central Asia (Wilmschurst, D., 2011:120). About ten years prior to this event, Christianity officially came to China in AD 635. This valuable piece of text, which was written in about AD 680, states (Mingana, 1925: 305-306; Ignatius, 1903:28-29):

And Elijah, Metropolitan of Merw, converted many of the Turks and other nations to the faith. And Merw is the river from whose name the city and the region took their name. They say that within the walls they extend to twelve leagues, and that within the outer wall there are many cities and towns, wheat and barley fields, gardens and paradises. It was built by Alexander the son of Philip, who named it Alexander; Alexander, when he had subdued many nations in the east, and reduced them to surrender...¹³⁶ (Ignatius, 1903:28-29)

¹³⁶ Translated from the Latin version.

Notably, the Metropolitan of Merv also converted “other nations to the faith.” The texts continue on about the legacy of the Metropolitan Elijah:

About Elijah, Metropolitan of Merw, it is related that when traveling in the countries situated beyond the border line (of the river Oxus) he was met by a king who was going to fight another king. Elijah endeavored with a long speech to dissuade him from the fight, but the king said to him, ‘If thou showest to me a sign similar to those shown by the priests of my gods, I shall believe in thy God.’ And the king ordered the priests of the demons who were accompanying him, and they invoked the demons whom they were worshipping, and immediately the sky was covered with clouds, and a hurricane of wind, thunder, and lightning followed. Elijah was then moved by divine power, and he made the sign of the heavenly cross, and rebuked the unreal thing that rebellious demons had set up, and it forthwith disappeared completely. When the king saw what Saint Elijah did, he fell down and worshipped him, and he was converted with all his army. The saint took to a stream, baptized all of them, ordained for them priests and deacons, and returned to his country. (Mingana, 1925: 305-306)

As mentioned earlier, the western Turkic Khanate disintegrated due to civil wars in AD 630 and fell apart into small nations. The Turkic king in AD 644 had a war with another king, reflecting a chaotic Central Asia in this period. Therefore, the other nations referred to here might mean other Turkic nations, or other Turkified nations, and most likely not those nations of the ancient *Yue-zhi* people, native Iranians, and Hephthalites which had long embraced Christianity. Since the Metropolitan converted a king of Turks with his army, baptized them, and “ordained for them priests and deacons,” this historic event in AD 644 should be treated as the official start for the Age of Turkic Christianity.

One should not ignore a very important reason behind the break-through mission among the Turks from a physiological perspective of anthropology. As mentioned earlier, Turks, especially western Turks, were highly blood-mixed *Hu* people, which means they were white people and non-white intermixed. As a power minority colonizing central Asia, the Hu’s bloodline of the western Turks, or Ten Arrow Turks had been further mixed with that of native Tocharians and Scythians. Presumably, there would consequently be many bi-lingual speakers in the second and third generation of the Turks and of the native Indo-Europeans, who were familiar with the local Tocharian-Scythian, Iranian-Persian, and Greek-Macedonian cultures. Therefore, more specifically, from a missiological perspective, the biological and cultural mixing well prepared the Turks for their conversion to the Persian version of East Syriac Christianity and elevated them to

be “locals.” In later ages, the mission history repeated itself with similar success to the second and third generations of the Genghis Khan royal families who intermixed with white people.

One should also note that the designation “Turks”, used here in Syriac and Byzantine materials as an established general umbrella term, refers to all the Hunnic-Turkified ethnic groups of the Central Asian and East Asian steppes, not specifically to the authentic colonizer Turks who established the Turkic Empire (consisting of the eastern and western khanates) in the mid-sixth century. Also, the western Turkic Khanate, of all the nomadic ethnic groups of the Central and Asian steppes, were first to establish diplomatic relations with Persia and the Byzantine Empire. Thus, the name “Turks” came to be used worldwide as a shorthand to refer to all the Hunnic-speaking people of the East Asian steppes, that is, the Turkic-speaking racial-ethnic groups.

The third stage (AD 700s):

Institutionalized and Indigenized Christianity among eastern Turkic-speaking groups and other east Asian nations in the mid-eighth century

In the third stage, according to the accounts of other valuable Syriac manuscripts, Christianity achieved a new historic success by becoming contextualized and institutionalized among Turkic speaking groups in the eastern Turks’ domain, which was traditionally a Hunnic domain (previously Siberian) called *Zhong-xia* in contrast to *Zhong-hua* (China) in the Chinese classics. At the same time, the Christian mission movement along the Silk Road reached its peak through Central Asia all the way to East Asia, including Tibet and China.

In 1909, a transcription was made of the valuable copy of a Syriac-language text hand-written on vellum that gives a detailed account of the conversion of the eastern Turkic-speaking groups to Christianity and notes their highly indigenized institutionalized faith practice. According to Mingana’s analysis, this document was probably written sometime between 730 and 790. The basis for calculating this approximate time frame is its reference to a Turkic envoy coming to Ctesiphon (the seat of the East-Syriac Church) asking for the ordination of a new archbishop to succeed the deceased archbishop (Mingana, 1925: 349-350). The document “was composed by a Jacobite writer after the Arab invasion”, and the Jacobite writer (that is, a member of the West-Syriac Church) lived in Baghdad (Mingana, 1925: 349). Mingana in his *The Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East: A New Document* presents the full text of this hand-written document and its English translation.

According to the West Syriac writer, these Christian eastern Turks were fundamentalist, pious, and adhered to the (Persian) East-Syriac tradition of doctrine and theology.

These Christian Turks eat meat and drink milk. They do not put any difference between lawful and unlawful food, but eat everything in good and pure conscience. By such acts they are believed by outsiders to be unclean, while in reality they are not. All their habits are clean, and their beliefs are ordination from the Nestorians, they do it bona fide, while unaware of their guile, falsehood, and wickedness. They believe in one glorious nature in the Holy Trinity, and like us they hold to three adorable Persons, and profess that the Divine Word, one of these three Persons of the Holy Trinity suffered, died, and was crucified, and by His death and His resurrection He saved us. This is their true faith. (Mingana 2010: 363)

Note the West Syriac Church (also called Jacobites) traditions, were non-Chalcedonian with a Christology of miaphysitism, so they were condemned both by East-Syriac tradition and pro-Chalcedon tradition with dyophysitist Christology. Since Jacobites were also part of Syrian Christianity, together with the East-Syriac tradition (which called Nestorians), the schism between the two traditions was inevitable. The writer continues:

Any one they see circumcised like pagans they kill immediately, and they carry with them their sanctuaries anywhere they depart after their halts. Their feasts they celebrate with great pomp, and they love more than any other people the commemorations of saints and martyrs. They do not learn nor do they accept any other script besides our own, and in the language of us Syrians they write and read the Books of the two Testaments: the Old and the New, and the writings of the Orthodox Fathers. In their gatherings they translate the above Books into their Turkish language, while they never venture to change into the Turkish language the adorable name of our Divine Lord Jesus Christ nor that of Mary, the mother of God, but they pronounce them as they are in our Syriac language. As to the rest of the words and names they render them into the Turkish language, in order that all their congregation may understand what is read. (Mingana 2010: 366)

From the above description, it is obvious the writer affirmed the Turks' Christian faith was genuine and orthodox though they had a "Nestorian label". As he mentioned earlier, these "unsophisticated" Turks were deceived by the cunning Catholicos of the Nestorian tradition, "while they were unaware of their deception, and of the falsehood of their abominable beliefs." (Mingana, 2010: 361-362) Interestingly, their tradition affirms the adorable name of Mary, the mother of God, with which the Constantinople Patriarch Nestorius disagreed and, therefore, he was condemned. This happened twice to Nestorius, in the Council of Ephesus and Council of Chalcedon.

Therefore, as mentioned in the Introduction of my thesis, East-Syriac Christianity is not Nestorian because it had a very different view of Mariology and Persian Church tradition.

In the days of the holy Lent they do not eat fresh and new meat, but meat that is dry like wood; and they fast from evening till evening, and they make the wafers of the Holy and Divine Sacrament from bread of pure wheat. They bring from other countries, with great care and diligence, pure flour from pure wheat, and they store it up for the purpose; so also they fetch from remote regions the raisins from which they make the wine used for the Holy Communion. (Mingana 2010: 366)

How pious these Turks were! They lived from the northern side of the Great Wall to the regions of the westernmost Chinese frontier and observed Holy Lent and fasting so strictly. From that alone, one can see that the Turks' Christianity had been highly indigenized, after probably two centuries long embracement and practice of the East-Syriac Christianity. After literary analysis, including textual and thematic analyses, as well as historical analysis, especially from the next passage of the manuscript, I lean toward thinking they were not authentic Turks ethnically, but a group of highly Turkified Indo-Europeans due to colonisation, as the following section will prove.

In their dresses they do not differ from the Turks who are pagan. All the people of the town speak another language called Yabatai, and their script is in their own language. From there Eastwards, to the distance of two months' journey, there are many towns that contain pagan Turks who worship idols, and have script in their own language. The border town is called Karagur[am], and the name of its King is Idi-Kut. Five days journey from there lies the habitat of the Turks who are Christians and of whom we spoke above. (Mingana, 1925: 364)

Please note that they wear the same dresses, though they speak different languages in both oral and written form from the Turks. In addition, they are the people of the town. What is necessary is to understand who these people were and where their town was, for a better understanding of their Christianity. To carry out this task, it is imperative to determine the locations of the Yabatai-speaking town and the border town of Karagur. It is also necessary to note the comments below from Mingana who provided valuable primary sources from different ages in Syriac writings on Christianity spreading in central Asia and east Asia. Regarding the second Syriac manuscript we have quoted, he calls it "a new document" and comments about the Syrian author:

Nearly all the historical data furnished by him have, on verification, proved genuine and correct in every important detail, but the confidence with which the document thus

inspires us will be strengthened by the knowledge that all the names of kings and towns mentioned in it are found in Chinese sources which we were unfortunately unable to consult at first hand. (Mingana, 1925:54)

As we can see, it is hard to do textual research on the specific geographic locations referred to here because they come from a single source, as Mingana stated with great academic insight by pointing out that one should consult Chinese sources for solving those puzzles. The following sections aim to engage in this approach and supplement Mingana's excellent study of the manuscripts. In addition, the supplement also includes ancient texts in the Turks' language by the Turks themselves.

3.4.2 The location of the “Yabatai town” and the possible descendants of the “Back Section” of the *Ju-Shi* Kingdom in Turpan Basin

Necessary to establish first is that this text was indeed written in the eighth century, when the mission work of East Syriac Christianity had achieved historic results among the Turks after about two centuries of efforts. The names of the two cities are the key. Establishing the location of one makes it possible to infer the location of the other. Mingana suspects in his footnote that the language of the first city, Yabatai, is a Chagatai language (Mingana, 1923: 70). As for the second city, Mingana believes that “Karagur” might have been a copying mistake and should have been Karaguram, also spelled Karakorum.

However, the Chagatai language and Karakorum are both from the era of the Mongol Empire. The Chagatai language was the official language of the Uyghur people in Xinjiang during the Mongol Empire. Occurring in approximately the 13th century, Karakorum was already the capital of the Mongol Empire, having been established in the 12th century. The royal city (i.e., *ordu-baliq*) that the Uyghur people established in the eighth century was called Kara Balgasun (*kara* means “great” here, so the city name is “great tiger”). Both cities are in the Orkhon valley, but their exact locations are different. My hope is that corresponding eighth century city names can be found and compared, and that important information and clues can be discovered in Tang-China historical records and in Turkic language inscriptions from the same era on steles in the east Asia grasslands (later called the Mongolian grasslands).

The Tonyuquq Stele unearthed in 1897 in Bain Tsokto, Mongolia (hence, also called the Bain Tsokto inscriptions), was erected in approximately 716-725 to laud the outstanding meritorious service of Ton-yu-quq or Tonyuquq, imperial strategic adviser in the Second Turkic Khanate (the

latter Eastern Turkic khanate). Tonyuquq was a founding minister of the Second Turkic Khanate who had given outstanding service while assisting three generations of khans. The inscription is written in Turkic script in the first person. It starts out this way: “I myself, wise Tonyuquq, lived in Tabgach [Chinese] country. [As the whole] Turkic people was under Tabgach [China] subjection... as Tengri gave me intelligence, I was the one who rose (put, announced, acknowledged) the qaghan [khan]! I, the Wise Tonyuquq Boila Baga Tarkhan, in alliance with Eltarish kagan, killed a lot of Tabgaches in the south, in the east a lot of Khitans, in the north – Oghuzes. It was I who became his wise advisor! [At that time] we had chosen the place (lived in) Kuz Chugai qara qumugh [“Black sands”]” (Geng, S. M., 2002: 94-96).

This inscription shows that, after the Eastern Turkic Khanate was destroyed, the Turks became subjects of Tang-China, which tallies with Chinese historical materials. This Tonyuquq, who calls himself Boila Baga Tarkhan, supported Ashina Qutlugh to become the Ilterish (or Elteris) Khan, thus establishing the Second Turkic Khanate. Some scholars believe that Tonyuquq is the Ashide Yuan-zhen (Geng, S. M., 2000: 193) mentioned in Chinese historical texts (Geng, S. M., 2000: 108-109). Looking at Chinese historical materials, we see that Qutlugh Khan founded the Second Turkic Khanate in 682 in the city of Black Sands (north of the present-day city of Hohhot, Inner Mongolia) and established himself as khan. In corroboration, the *New Book of Tang: Turks I*, reads: “They defend Mount Zong-cai [Chughay] and govern *Hei-sha* [Black Sands] city. They number 5,000. They steal the cattle and horses of the Toquz Oghuz [nine Uyghur tribes]. After they became somewhat stronger, he declared himself khan...(Ou-yang, 2000: 4601)”¹³⁷ The *Old Book of Tang*, reveals the Black Sands city was the southern court of the Turks (Liu, X., 2000: 3515),¹³⁸ while the location of their northern court remains unknown in the mountains in the north.

¹³⁷ Ou-yang, *New Book of Tang*, “Turks I”: “骨咄祿，頡利族人也，云中都督舍利元英之部酋，世襲吐屯。伏念敗，乃嘯亡散，保总材山，又治黑沙城，有众五千，盗九姓畜马，稍强大，乃自立为可汗，以弟默啜为杀，咄悉匍为叶护。”

(Gu-duo-lu (Kutlugh) was a member of the Jie-li clan, the chieftain of She-li-yuan-ying, the governor of Yun-zhong, and a hereditary Tutun. After Fu-nian was defeated, he fled and fled, and they defended Mount Zong-cai [Chughay] and governed Hei-sha [Black Sands] city. These [Later Turks] number 5,000. They steal the cattle and horses of the Toquz [Oghuz; Nine Uyghur tribes]. After they became somewhat stronger, he declared himself khan, and assigned his brother Mo-chuo as military minister, and made Duo-xi-fu the Yabghu.)

¹³⁸ Ibid. “行至黑沙南庭，默啜谓知微等曰：‘我女拟嫁与李家天子儿，你今将武家儿来，此是天子儿否？我突厥积代已来，降附李家，今闻李家天子种未总尽，唯有两儿在，我今将兵助立。’”

(When they reached the southern courtyard of Black Sands, Mo-chuo said to Zhi-zheng and others: “My daughter is ready to marry a son of (the “Heavenly Son”) Emperor Li, but you have sent a son of Empress Wu. Is he a son of Heavenly Son? We Turks in generations submitted to Emperor Li’s

Valuable information and clues about this are also found in the Moyanchur inscription, also called the Shine-usu inscription, discovered in 1900 and 1909 in Shine-usu, Mongolia. This stele was erected around 759 and is written in the first person using Turkic-Uyghur script. It mainly praises the achievements of Moyanchur Khan ¹³⁹ (the second khan of the Uyghur Khanate) (Geng, S. M., 2005: 193). This is part of the inscription on the stele: "I caught up [to them]. They crossed the *Qaraqum* ["Black Sands"]. At *Kogur*, *Komur tagh* [mountain], and *Yar* river [were] Turkic people of *Uch Tughliq* [the Three Banners]... [The Turk] Ozmis Tigin became khan" (Geng, S. M., 2002: 195). *Qaraqum* and *Kogur* here appear to be very close to *karagur*. From Chinese historical materials we know that in 741, when the imperial court of the Second Turkic Khanate was in internal chaos, allied forces of the Karluks, Basmyls and Uyghurs attacked the Turks, and in 742 killed their khan, Qutlugh Yabghu. After that the Turks made the son of Kul Tigin the Ozmish Khan (in Chinese, *Wu-su-mi-shi*).

The two inscriptions discussed above both mention "Black Sands" (*Hei-Sha*). Adding the meaning of "kara" in Turkic, the term can mean "black desert" or "great desert", which could also be a place name. Putting together the information from various Chinese historical materials about Tang-China, we know that this place name is the city of Black Sands, the capital city of the Second Turkic Khanate. The aforementioned West-Syriac text also says that that was an imperial city, whose king was called *Idi-Kut* (which is also *Idi-qut* or *Idu-qut*). Therefore, we can conclude the following: Karagur would be the city of Black Sands, that is, the southern capital city of the Second Turkic Khanate, that is, *Nan-ting*, the counterpart to the northern capital, *Bei-ting*, established on the Khangai Mountains. Please note, in the regions of the eastern Tian-shan Mountains, the Hunnic descendants continued the two capitals tradition, with Gao-chang in Turpan Basin as the southern capital at the southern side of Tian-shan and *Bei-ting* (present-day Jimsar), north of Tian-shan.

Thus, from the content of the hand-written Syriac text from about 730-790, the city (town) in which the Yabatai language was used was a distance of two months of travel west of the city of Black Sands—so this location of the town ought to be at the western border of the Second Turkic Khanate. From the Chinese classics, we know that the dividing line between the Eastern and Western Turkic khanates lies at the Dzungarian Basin between the Altai Mountains and the Tian-shan Mountains. To be specific, from the Altai in the north to the regions around the eastern Tian-

family. I heard the seeds of Emperor have not all died, but two sons are left. I will lead my troops to help them taking back the royal house. ")

¹³⁹ The Uyghur title is "Ay Tengrida Qut Bolmish or El Etmish Bilga Qaghan".

shan Mountains in the south, including the Chinese westernmost frontier, everything belonged to the western Turks. The *Book of Sui* states that the western Turkic khans stayed in the former Wu-sun homeland (probably of the Greater Wu-sun Kumul), or the Chinese westernmost frontier (Liu, X., 2000:).¹⁴⁰ During the time of the fifth western khan *She-kui* (AD 611-618 during *Sui*-China time), this khan established his court in the mountain at the northwest of Qiu-ci (present-day Kucha) (Liu, X., 2000: 3524),¹⁴¹ where Han China general Ban Chao used to set his military controlled administrative center for the “Western Regions.”

However, the easiest way to get to present-day northern China and the southern part of Inner Mongolia is via the northern branch of the Silk Road (north of the Tian-shan Mountain range) through the Chinese westernmost frontier, or even earlier, the former Wu-sun Kumul homeland surrounding the easternmost Tian-shan Mountain range. Therefore, this Yabatai-speaking town could have been a city at the northern side of the eastern Tian-shan, and, because the inhabitants did not speak Turkic, that means it is very possible they were an Indo-European language group who, according to the Chinese classics, lived in this region during this time and used the *Hu* language. The Basmyl kingdom at that time was located in the northern side of the eastern Tian-shan range, at Beshbalik (meaning five cities, *Bei-ting*, Jimsar) and the *Gu-cheng* area (present-

¹⁴⁰ Liu, *Old Book of Tang*, “*Turks II*”: “初，木杆与沙钵略可汗有隙，因分为二。其国即乌孙之故地，东至突厥国，西至雷蜚海，南至疏勒，北至瀚海，在长安北七千里。自焉耆国西北七日行，至其南庭；又正北八日行，至其北庭。铁勒、龟兹及西域诸胡国，皆归附之。其人杂有都陆及弩失毕、歌逻禄、处月、处密，伊吾等诸种。风俗大抵与突厥同，唯言语微差。”

(At first, Mugan was at odds with Sha-bo-luo Khan, so the [Turkic Khanate] split into two. Mugan's country was the former land of Wu-sun people, east to the [Eastern] Turkic country, west to the Lei-zhu Sea, south to Shule, north to the Han-hai [Vast Sea], 7,000 Chinese miles north of Chang'an. From Yanqi country, seven days are required to travel northwest to its southern court; and another eight days to travel due north to its northern court. Tiele, Qiuci and other Hu countries in the western regions all submitted to him. His people included Du-lu, Nu-shi-bi, Karluks, Chu-yue, Chu-mi, Yi-wu and other ethnic groups. Their customs were similar to those of the [Eastern] Turkic people, but their language was slightly different.)

¹⁴¹ Liu, *Old Book of Tang*, “*Turks II*”: “射匮可汗者，达头可汗之孙也。既立后，始开土宇，东至金山，西至海，自玉门已西诸国皆役属之。遂与北突厥为敌，乃建庭于龟兹北三弥山，寻卒。弟统叶护可汗代立。”

(She-kui Khan was the grandson of Da-tou Khan. After he came to power, he began to expand his territory, from the Golden Mountains in the east to the sea in the west. All the countries west of Yumen [Jade Gate Pass] were under his rule. He then became an enemy of the Northern Turks and built his court in the San-mi Mountain, north of Qiu-ci. He died soon after. His younger brother Tong Yabghu Khan took over.)

day Qi-tai county), with the Karluks their neighbors to the west and north, and the Second Turkic Khanate their neighbors to the east.

That being the case, this city very likely is present-day Balikun (Barkul, Barkul) at the northern foot of the eastern Tian-shan or Hami (Kumul) at the southern foot, which then was a western border town of the Second Turkic Khanate. Note that the second city mentioned in the text, the city of Black Sands, is also located on the border, that is the eastern border of the Second Turkic Khanate. Going east further from there, it is a “five days’ journey” to the territory of those Christian Turks, so it is clearly a different country, even though they are all called “Turks.” In traveling along the northern branch of the Silk Road, the city would be on the northern side of eastern Tian-shan.

In the meanwhile, we should not overlook the fact that, in AD 640, when Tang-China took over Gao-chang Kingdom in Turpan Basin at the southern side of the Tian-shan, for the purpose of further controlling the areas along the Mountain’s northern foot, China established *Pu-Lei* (Barkul) county as a military administrative town, named after the *Pu-lei* Lake (today’s Barkul Lake), located at present-day *Qi-tai* County old city. (Please note, the present-day Barkul county city has moved to a different location about 300 kilometers east of Qi-tai.) When China set up military controlled administrative centers to enlarge its westernmost frontiers, it meant to control the important passes along both branches of the Silk Road, primarily for the purpose of national security, and for tax-collection.

For over a hundred years, the Tang Chinese continued to set up counties westward. In AD 648, China also set up four military administrative towns west of Turpan Basin along the southern branch of the Silk Road around the Tarim Basin, and they were: Yan-qi (Arshi), Qiu-ci (Kucha), Shu-le, and Yu-tian. Along the northern route of the Silk Road, westward Chinese set up military towns such as by the *Sui-ye* (Suyab) city in AD 679, which used to be the principal capital of the Western Turkic Khanate, locating in present-day Kyrgyzstan, and Lun-tai County since AD 771 (Ou-yang, 2000: 688),¹⁴² whose ruins are now located at Urumqi city suburb.

In the late 60s BC, a Han Chinese general, leading the united army of the Indo-European kingdoms in the Tarim Basin, defeated the *Ju-shi* kingdom in the Turpan Basin as punishment for its disloyalty to Han China, by allying with the Huns. After the defeat, the *Ju-shi* kingdom was

¹⁴² O-yang, *New Book of Tang*, “Geography”: “轮台，下。有静塞军，大历六年置。”

(Lun-tai, small city. There is Jing-sai Army, established in the sixth year of Da-li reign [of Tang China].)

divided into two sub-kingdoms as the “Front Section” in the Turpan Basin with *Jiao-he* as its capital and the “Back Section” on the northern side of the Tian-shan range, including six city states, with the king’s court set in the *Wu-tu* valley (Ban, 1999: 2888; Wang, 2016)¹⁴³ (probably in the present-day *Wu-tang* valley about 40 kilometers northward to Jimsar). As an outcome of this war, the Huns dominated the northern branch of the Silk Road which goes through the “Back Section” and China controlled the southern branch through the “Front Section”.

Building on my research resorted in Chapter Two, we note the natives of the *Jun-Shi* kingdom were still Indo-Europeans when the Turks began to dominate the regions in the sixth and seventh century. Therefore, the Chrisitan people mentioned in the second West Syriac manuscripts living in the town speaking the Yabatai language, were possibly not authentic Turks, but more likely the Hunnified or Turkified local native Indo-Europeans, descendants of the *Ju-Shi* kingdom. In chapter four, we will see in the tenth century, when the envoy from Song China visited Jimsar (Bei-ting), the people here were still white natives, and their culture and civilization were Indo-European.

Therefore, we can speculate that the Turks speaking the Yabatai mentioned by the west Syriac writer, were very possibly local Indo-Europeans. Though Hunnified after eight centuries of colonisation by the Huns and their descendants, including the mixed blood Turks, they still maintained their *Hu* language. (The Yabatai-speaking town is most likely today’s Jimsar or Qi-tai,

¹⁴³ 班固《汉书》记载：“车师前国，王治交河城。……车师后国，王治务涂谷，……”

(Ban Gu's "Book of Han" records: "In the former state of Ju-shi, the king ruled Jiao-he City. ... In the latter state of Ju-shi, the king ruled Wu-tu Valley, ...")

王瑟《寻找失落的王庭》：“巫新华说，从地势上看，吾塘沟地势平坦，四季河水不断，草场面积大，适合放牧，而三面环山、南部大坂极为凶险，易守难攻，只要守住山谷北部沟口，整个山谷牢不可破，而且吾塘沟内风景优美，气候温和，是车师后国王庭牙帐绝对首选之地。// 据巫新华推断，这里可能就是古车师后国王庭牙帐所在地。”《光明日报》（2016年11月14日05版）

(Wang Se, "Searching for the Lost Royal Court": "Wu Xin-hua said that from the perspective of topography, Wu-tang Valley is flat, with continuous rivers all year round and large grasslands, which are suitable for grazing. It is surrounded by mountains on three sides and the southern part is extremely dangerous, making it easy to defend but difficult to attack. As long as the northern entrance of the valley is guarded, the entire valley will be unbreakable. In addition, Wu-tang Valley has beautiful scenery and a mild climate, making it the absolute first choice for the royal court of the Ju-shi Kingdom. // According to Wu Xinhua's inference, this may be the location of the royal court of the “Back Section” of the ancient Ju-shi Kingdom." Guangming Daily (November 14, 2016, p. 05))

the two cities being only 40 kilometers apart, might have been considered to apart of Beshbalik, the five-city region, or as the sixth city).

3.5 Figuring out The Four Turkic-Tatar kingdoms

In this section, consulting to Chinese sources as a supplement to the Syriac manuscripts facilitates our determination of the names of locations, places, town, kings and racial-ethnic groups, just as Mingana predicted. In addition, Mingana also speculated the presence of discrepancies in the accounts: "This second part of the document, which concerns the Christian Turks, seems to be only loosely attached to the first part which deals with Christian heresies, and it is possible that it was pieced together with it by an ancient copyist from a totally different MS [manuscript]." (Mingana, 1925:54)

In the second part of the manuscripts, there is also an obvious discrepancy as if being "pieced together from a different manuscript." After describing in detail the daily pious activities of those Turkic Christians, a new paragraph begins: "In their dresses they do not differ from Turks who are pagans," and here it entails they are Christians, not pagans, yet indicating they might differ in someways. Then the second sentence states a difference: "All the people of the town speak another language called Yabatai, and their script is in their own language." The initial understanding would be that these Christians in the town have same dresses with other Turks, yet they speak a different language with its own scripts. Then the paragraph states two month and five days' journey from this town eastward to reach the place where the "Turks who are Christians and of whom we spoke above." Therefore, this raises a seemingly contradictory and ambiguous question: Do the "Christian Turks" include the people in this town speaking Yabatai?

In my opinion, the answer is yes. Because as discussed in the previous section, we have figured out the residents of this town belonging to the Indo-Europeans who have long been Hunnified and have their own Indo-European language. Since they appear to have been Turkified on the surface and are far away from the Turkic Christians at the far East, the Syriac copyist might be confused and uncertain whether to include these people as part of the Christian Turks. Another clue can also support the way of my opinion and understanding. Two paragraphs earlier it mentions that "anyone they [the Chrisian Turks] see circumcised like pagans they kill immediately." Minganna firmly believes in his footnote that "the document was written after the Arab invasion, and the mention of Circumcision refers here to Muslims" (Mingana, 1925: 363). I agree and further believe that during this period, Islamic forces had already entered Central Asia, threatening the interests of Christianity (and Buddhism), and initially spread mainly along the

northern branch of the Silk Road along the northern foot of Tian-shan, so the Christians in this town speaking Yabatai had opportunities to see Muslims and kill them. As it was two months and five days' journey eastward from this town, those Christian Turks in the far East were unlikely to have opportunity to see Muslims in this historical stage.

Therefore, the travel records in this paragraph are obviously unclear, seemingly “pieced together from a different manuscript” or compromised by the copyist. Nevertheless, the whole picture and overall accounts are still understandable and somewhat consistent.

3.5.1 The nationalities and locations of the four Christian Turkic-Tatar Kingdoms in the West-Syriac manuscripts

From the unknown Christian town (Indo-European town of the Back Section of ancient Ju-shi kingdom according to my conclusion), the Jacobite writer continues his travel records, moving eastward from the Yabatai town. After two months' journey, he arrives at Black-Sands city, presumably by horse, before continuing eastward for five days more and finally arriving at the Christian domain following the guide of the West Syriac manuscript. The description in the piece above by the Jacobite writer gives even more information to help us determine the specific relational location and ethnicity of these Christian Turkic Tatars. These are different from the Turks speaking Yabatai who reside in the town as sedentary people because the new groups of Turks he is describing dwell in tents, ride horses, and wander from place to place as nomads:

They are true believers and God- fearing folk, and they dwell under tents, and have no towns, no villages, and no houses; but they are divided into powerful and great clans, who journey from place to place. // They have many possessions: sheep, cattle, camels, and horses. Each camel of theirs has two humps like a Salm (?) They have four great and powerful kings, each one living farther from the other, whose names are: the first Gawirk, the second Girk, the third Tasahz, and the fourth Langu. They have a name common to all: Tatar, and the name of their country is Sericon. It is said that each one of these kings has with him four hundred thousand families, when they congregate at the time of their halts. Their country is broad and reaches as far as Magog, the city of the pagans, and beyond them everybody is heathen. But the Christian Turks of whom we have spoken receive ordination from the Bishop whose see is in that large town of the pagans which has five big churches. (Mingana, 2010: 364-365)

As I see it, the first of the four powerful tribal kingdoms, the Gawirk, sounds like the Gok [Turks], i.e., “*kok turk*”, the “blue Turk” (Geng, S. M., 2005: 121), according to the Kul Tigin inscription erected by the Turkic Khanate, these are some Turks or a group of Turks ruled by the Ashina clan of the Turkic Khanate, who were the leading tribe (Han, R. L., 2000: 327, 330). The second tribal kingdom, the Girk, might be the “*Cik*” mentioned in the Shine-usu inscription erected by the Uyghur Khanate in the mid-eighth century, which refers to them as an unknown group (Geng, S. M., 2005: 198-199), but Girk here more likely refers to the Kyrgyz people. In the Turkic language, “Kirk” means 40 (tribes), which is represented in its modern national flag by 40 rays of sunshine. It is unclear who the third tribal kingdom, the Tasahz, are. The fourth, the Langu, sounds like the early Onguds, a branch of the Uyghurs. Mingana expresses his difficulty in identifying the four kingdoms, though insightfully points out that one of them should be Uyghur (Mingana, 1925: 352).

The hand-written Syriac text continues, “They have a name common to all: Tatar, and the name of their country is Sericon.” The phonetic translation of “Sericon” sounds similar to the *Si-qin* found in Chinese historical records from the Northern and Southern dynasties (AD 420-589) and the *Si-jin* from the Tang dynasty, which was translated as *Yi-li-jin* during the Khitan period (Liao kingdom) (Ren, A. J., 2007: 66). Combining the latter two, we get *Si-li-jin*, which matches Sericon more precisely in a sound-translation-wise form from Chinese. *Si-li-jin*, probably meaning “wisdom”, was the title of the Turkic tribal leader. The earliest usage of this term can be traced back to the era of the *Rou-ran* (and *Xian-bei*) people, and later the Khitans, who also used this title (Han, R. L., 2000: 366-368). Finally, the “Magog” here obviously corresponds phonetically to the Mongol people. At that time, those living at the easternmost edge of the Mongolian grasslands were the ignorant and backward Mongols who believed in Shamanism.

Furthermore, according to the Tonyuquq Stele of Turks, the people living to the east of the Turks were the Khitans, who were enemies of the Turks (Geng, S. M., 2005: 96). Also, the Shine-usu (or Moyun-chur) Inscription (Stele) of Uyghurs has this text: “That year in the autumn, I sent troops east. I punished the Tatars for their sins” (Geng, S. M., 2005: 198). This tells us that the people east of the Uyghur Khanate in its early years—the first half of the 8th century (around 750) (Geng, S. M., 2005: 193)—were the Tatars. Both the Tatars and the Khitans belonged to ethnic groups with somewhat ambiguous historical and ethnic attributes that scholars are still struggling to clarify. These two steles show, at least, that the Tatars and Khitans were players on the steppes earlier than were the Mongols. Another Stele of the Turks, the Bilge Khan Inscription in the eighth century, mentions “thirty-surnames of Tatars,” Khitans, and Xi (Tatabi) (Geng, S. M., 2005: 152),

¹⁴⁴ which indicates Tatars were a very large tribe and nation, and possibly composed of white Siberians. During the time of the Mongol Empire, Westerners initially called the Mongols “Tartars,” but the Mongols themselves disliked this name because it is a twisted form of the correct spelling, “Tatars,” and carries a negative connotation (Morgan, D., 2009: 16).¹⁴⁵ The Tatars, then consisting of four tribes, had been their enemy and had assassinated Genghis Khan’s father before the Mongols finally wiped them out (Grousset, 2002: 207-208).

According to this history, it is clear that the Syriac text was correct in distinguishing between these two: Tatar and Magog. From China’s late Sui dynasty and early Tang dynasty to the first half of the eighth century, the Confederation of Eight Khitan Tribes had the tradition of electing a *Si-li-jin* every three years from the *Da-he-shi* family. Since the core tribe of the Khitans was the *Da-he-shi*, historians also called the confederation the *Da-he-shi* Confederation (Ren, A. J., 2007: 67-68; Li, G. Z., 1996: 11-12). The *New Book of Tang* says this about the Khitans: “Their king is *Da-he-shi*,¹⁴⁶ and he had forty thousand battle-winning soldiers divided into eight tribes; they were subjects of the Turks, whom they regarded as *Si-jin*” (Ou-yang, 2000: 4687).¹⁴⁷ So, considering the Khitan tradition of these triennial elections and the closeness in the pronunciation of *Da-he-shi* and *Tasahz*, it’s possible to conclude that the *Tasahz* are the Khitan people of the *Da-he-shi*. The time frame lines up as well. The *Da-he-shi* confederation lasted from the time when the Tang dynasty (618- 907) of China was established until 730 (Li, G. Z., 1996: 15). The aforementioned hand-written Syriac text describing the conversion of the East Asian Turks to

¹⁴⁴ Geng, *Turkic Inscriptions*: “(作为) 吊唁者从前面, 从日出之方, 有莫离 (βοκλι) 荒原人、唐人、吐蕃人、阿瓦尔 (apar) 人、拂林 (πυρρυμ) 人、黠戛斯人、三姓骨利干人、三十姓鞑靼人、契丹人、奚 (ταταβι) 人, 这样多的人民前来吊唁。他们是那样名声显赫的可汗。之后, 其弟做了可汗, 其子也做了可汗。之后, 弟不像兄, ”

(From the front, from the direction of the rising sun, came the people of the Bokli wilderness, the Tang, the Tibetans, the Avars, the Purums, the Khyagas, the three surnames of the Guligans, the thirty surnames of the Tatars, the Khitans, the Tatabi; so many people came to pay their respects. They were such famous khans. Afterwards, his younger brother became khan, and his son also became khan. Afterwards, the younger brother was no longer like the older brother.)

¹⁴⁵ The name is spelled in transliterated form: *ṭarṭar*, or “Tatar” in the Moyun-chur Inscription and Bilge Khan Inscription. “Tartar”, as a corruption of the Turkic term for the barbarian Mongols, is “apparently derived from Tartarus, the Latin term for the Hell of Classical mythology”.

¹⁴⁶ In the *Book of Liao* by Tuo-tuo, volume 63, “genealogy” (p. 583), it says during the times of Sui and Tang [China], the title of Khitan king was *Da-he-shi*. (“隋、唐之际, 契丹之君号大贺氏。”)

¹⁴⁷ Ou-yang, *New Book of Tang*, “Northern Di”: “其君大贺氏, 有胜兵四万, 析八部, 臣于突厥, 以为俟斤。”

(The ruler of the tribe, the Dahan clan, has 40,000 victorious soldiers, divided into eight tribes, and is a vassal of the Turks, serving them as Serikon [the federal government].)

Christianity is believed by Alphonse Mingana to have been written about 730-790 (Mingana, 1925: 349). In this way, the problem of the identity of these four ethnic groups is resolved.

Archeological discoveries provide complementary evidence for the above interpretation. In 1936, seven East-Syriac Christian headstones shaped like Noah's ark were discovered in the graveyard of the Khitan Ye-lyu family at "Kings Tomb Ridge" (*Wang-mu-liang*) in the western part of Inner Mongolia's Dorbod Banner (Niu, R. J., 2008: 21). Also discovered at the same time was the famous "Tablet on the Spiritual Way of Lord Ye-lyu",¹⁴⁸ which has an inscription that shows that lord Ye-lyu Chu-cai's forefathers were the Western Regions' Tarsa people (*Tie-lie-xue-si*), also translated "*Die-xie*" and "*Da-suo*" in Chinese (this term will come up again in Chapter Five), which were alternate ways of referring to East-Syriac Christians and monks. Seventeen headstones were unearthed, of which twelve had inscriptions in the Syriac language (Niu, R. J., 2008: 21), indicating that these graves probably were of clerics sent out by the East-Syriac Church and of the "merchants and secretaries of the kings, who had penetrated as far as those places for the sake of commerce and of affairs of state" and "went deep inland to the farthest end of the East" that are mentioned in the East-Syriac Church's court historical materials—and who witnessed the fruits of the church's missionary efforts in East Asia (Mingana, 1925: 307). In the time of the Mongol conquests, the Ye-lu Khitan Christians and the Ongud Uyghur Christians served in Genghis Khan's court, continually making outstanding contributions to the Mongol Empire.

From the reference dates in the above Syriac text, it would seem that the Turkic Christians in the written account by this Syrian Jacobite author were from a period before the collapse of the *Da-he-shi* tribal confederation, which would be before 730 (Liu, G. Z., 1996: 8-11). From dynastic histories of Tang-China and the Turkic-language steles, we know that the Karluks were on the western end of the East Asian grasslands, northwest of Bei-ting and west of the Altai Mountains (Ou-yang, 2000: 4669-4670).¹⁴⁹ During this period of the Second Turkic Khanate (or Latter East Turkic Khanate), to their (Karluks) east were the Basmyls, and continuing eastward were, approximately in this order: the Kok Turks, the Kyrgyzs, the Eastern Turks, the Khitans, the

¹⁴⁸ The Chinese title of the tomb inscription is: 《中书令耶律公神道》

¹⁴⁹ Ou-yang, *New Book of Tang*, "Uyghurs II": "葛逻禄本突厥诸族，在北庭西北、金山之西，跨仆固振水，包多怛岭，与车鼻部接。"

"The Karluks were originally one of the Turkic tribes, located northwest of Bei-ting [Northern Court] and west of the Golden Mountains, straddling the Pu-gu-zhen River, covering the Duo-da Mountain Range, and connecting with the Che-bi tribe."

Tatars, and the Mongols, and across the Greater Khingan Mountains were the non-white *Xian-bei* (ancestors of Manchurians) and *Gao-li* (early Korean). During this period, the Tlugh (*Te-le*) Uyghurs lived in the north-central steppes, in the Selenga River area.

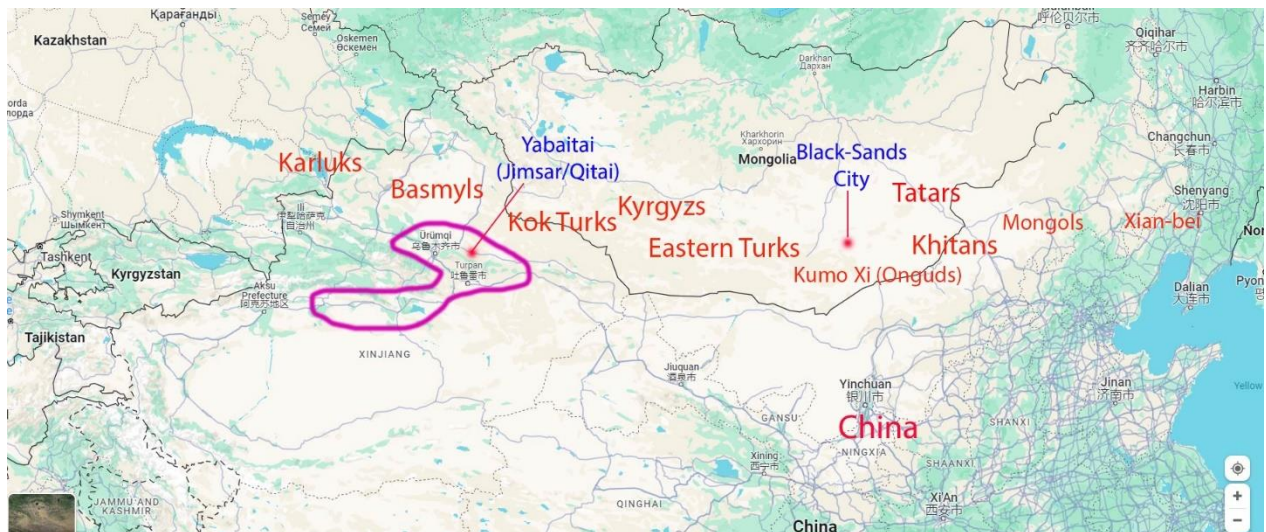


Figure 3. 2: The locations of the national ethnic groups on the east Asian steppe in the first half of the eighth century¹⁵⁰

According to the inscription on the stele Kul Tigin, there was yet another ethnic group with the Khitans called the *Xi*. The *Book of Wei* states, before the seventh century, the Khitans were the eastern neighbor of the Kumo Xi, and they were “different races but of the same type” with the latter belonging to the *Di* race (Wei, S., 2000: 1503-1504).¹⁵¹ Kumo Xi was likely an Indo-

¹⁵⁰ Source: <https://www.google.com/maps/@44.2985561,94.9564497,5.15z?entry=ttu>

¹⁵¹ Wei, *Book of Wei*, Chronicle 88, “Kumo Xi, Khitans”: 库莫奚国之先，东部宇文之别也。……登国三年 [388 年]，太祖亲自出讨，至弱洛水南，大破之，……帝曰：“此群狄诸种不识德义，互相侵盗，有犯王略，故往征之。……”契丹国，在库莫奚东，异种同类，俱窜于松漠之间。登国中，国军大破之，遂逃迸，与库莫奚分背。

(The predecessor of the Kumo Xi [Tatabi] State was the branch of the Yu-wen clan State in the east. ... In the third year of Deng-guo [388 AD], Taizu [the founding emperor] personally went out to fight against the Kumo Xi. When he reached Ruo-luo River, he defeated them severely. ... The emperor said: "These Di tribes do not know morality and justice. They invade and rob each other. They violate the king's strategy, so I went to conquer them. ... " The Khitan State is located to the east of the Kumo Xi. Its people are of different races, but the same type. They all move around the northern boarder [of China]. During the reign of Deng-guo, the national army defeated them severely, and they fled and separated from the Kumo Xi.)

European *Di* group¹⁵² living in the Siberian regions who were famous for making automobiles and musical instruments. The Khitans and the Xi (Kumo Xi) were located east of the Second Turkic Khanate (Geng, S. M., 2005: 128), which entails Kumo Xi being between the Turks and Khitans. In the first half of the eighth century, Tang China had a series of wars with the Khitans and the Kumo Xi, winning victories in 712 and 714, though their locations basically remained the same within the Hunnic-Turkified culture block (Liu, X., 2000: 3639, 3642).¹⁵³ The two nations always fought each other when they did not face a common enemy.

Therefore, the *Book of Wei* and the inscriptions on the steles are in agreement with regard to the specific relational locations of the two ethnic groups: the *Kumo Xi* and Khitans. According to the Syriac text, east of the Second Turkic Khanate were the *Da-he-shi* (Khitans) and the Onguds, and then the Mongols. It appears that the Onguds in the Syriac text correspond to the

¹⁵² 唐朝著名诗人杜甫，获悉唐朝官军再次（756年）惨败于安禄山军队，悲愤赋诗《悲青阪》，其中一句是：“黄头奚儿日向西，数骑弯弓敢驰突”。这里的黄头奚，应该就是安禄山的漠北“群胡”联军中的库莫奚族，据信由奚人李归仁将军统领，堪称勇猛之师。

(Du Fu, a famous Tang Chinese poet, wrote a poem "Bei Qing-ban" [Lamentation on the Defeat at Qing-ban] when he learned that the Tang China army was defeated by An Lu-shan's army again (756). One of the lines is: "The yellow-headed Xi people are heading west, and a few riders are brave enough to charge forward with bows drawn." The yellow-headed Xi here should be the Kumo Xi people in An Lu-shan's army drawn from different groups of Hu people. It is possible that they were led by the Xi general Li Gui-ren, and they were a very brave army as the poet pointed out.)

¹⁵³ Liu, *Old Book of Tang*, "Northern Di": 契丹，居潢水之南，黄龙之北，鲜卑之故地，在京城东北五千三百里。东与高丽邻，西与奚国接，南至营州，北至室韦。……其君长姓大贺氏。胜兵四万三千人，分为八部，若有征发，诸部皆须议合。不得独举。猎则别部，战则同行。本臣突厥，好与奚斗，不利则遁保青山及鲜卑山。……其风俗与突厥同。……太宗谓曰：“契丹、突厥，本是别类，……”

(The Khitans live south of the Huang-shui River and north of the Huang-long River, where was the former land of the Xian-bei [Siberians], 5,300 Chinese miles northeast of the [Chinese] capital. They border Goryeo to the east, the Xi Kingdom to the west, Ying Prefecture to the south, and Shi-wei to the north. ... Their chieftain is from the Dahez clan. They have 43,000 soldiers, divided into eight groups. If there is a call for troops, all groups must discuss and unite. They cannot act alone. They hunt in separate groups, but fight together. Originally, they were vassals of the Turkic and like to fight the Xi. If they are not successful, they will retreat to Qing [Blue-black] Mountain and Xianbei Mountain. ... The rest of their customs are the same as are those of the Turkic. ... Emperor Tai-zong said to them: "The Khitan and the Turks are originally different groups...")

“奚国，盖匈奴之别种也，所居亦鲜卑故地，即东胡之界也，在京师东北四千余里。东接契丹，西至突厥，南拒白狼河，北至靺鞨。……风俗并于突厥。……其人善射猎，好与契丹战争。”

(The population of the Xi [Tatabi] Kingdom is a different tribe of the Xiong-nu [Huns]. They live in the former territory of the Xian-bei [Siberians], which is a border of the Donghu [Eastern Hu]. Their territory is more than 4,000 Chinese miles northeast of the [Chinese] capital and borders the Khitan in the east, the Turks in the west, the Bai-lang River in the south, and the Xi Kingdom in the north. ... Their customs are similar to those of the Turks. ... Their people are good at hunting and fight the Khitans.)

Xi on the stele and to the *Kumo Xi* (and *Xi*) in the Chinese text, as the neighbor of Khitans, though their locations should be switched based on the records. In addition, the name “Kumo Xi” comes from the *Xian-bei* (Siberian) language, meaning “sands” or “desert” in the Mongolian language. For Onguds, Chinese classics recorded them as a group of Turkified *Sha-tuo* (Shato) or *Chu-yue*, meaning “sand hills” or “desert” (Rybatzki, V., 2004: 271; Ou-yang, 2000: 4677).¹⁵⁴ Therefore, it is most likely that the Onguds in the Syriac text were the *Kumo Xi*, or *Xi* in Chinese classics, and they were highly civilized in manufacturing technology and developing artistic culture.

However, the geo-location problem here is that the Syriac text says that these four kings were separated by great distances, with a population of up to 400,000, and that their kingdoms were vast. Putting together the information about geographic locations from Chinese historical materials and the Turkic language stele inscriptions, the suggestion is that the Kok Turks and the Khyagas were west, not east, of the Second Turkic Khanate, while the Khitans and the Onguds were east of the Second Turkic Khanate. But what is recorded in the Syriac text is that all four ethnic groups lived east of the Idu-qut's khanate; this is where the problem of identifying precise locations lies. That being the case, there are two possibilities: all four ethnic groups were Christians, or, only the *Da-he-shi* (Tasahz) Khitans and the Onguds were Christians. By the time of the Mongol Empire, people discovered that the Onguds (a branch of Uyghurs) of Shanxi were devout Christians, and the descendants of the Kok Turks and the Khyagas (whose forefathers were the Aryan *Wu-sun* people originally from the easternmost Tian-shan Mountain range, the later Chinese westernmost frontier) had also established powerful Christian khanates. The Khitans seemed to be at least partially Christian represented by the Da-he-shi tribe, and the Christian tradition lasted to the period of the Western Liao (Kara Khitai empire) represented by the Ye-lyu royal clan. So, the Syriac text is accurate in saying that these four ethnic groups were Christians but is insufficiently precise in the details as to the geographic location and distribution of these four ethnic groups.

¹⁵⁴ Ou-yang & Song, *New Book of Tang*, “Sha-tuo”: “沙陀，西突厥别部处月种也。……处月居金娑山之阳，蒲类之东，有大碛，名沙陀，故号沙陀突厥云。”

(Sha-tuo is a tribe of Chuyue, a branch of the Western Turkic people. ... The Chu-yue lived in the south of Jin-suo Mountain and the east of Pu-lei [Sea]. There was a large desert called Sha-tuo, so they were called Sha-tuo Turks.)

The location and national-racial-ethnicity of the four Christian Turkic-Tatar Kingdoms in the West Syriac manuscript	
Gawirk	1. Location: two months and five days' journey eastward from "Yabatai" town 2. National ethnicity: Gok [Turks], i.e. " <i>kok turk</i> ", the "Blue Turk", ruled by the Ashina clan of Turkic khanate 3. Race: Scythian type Indo-European; "White Tatar" (likely indicating a light skin color in comparison to a brown skin color of "Black Tatar" designated for Mongols)
Girk	1. Location: eastern neighbor of the "Blue Turk" (Gawirk) 2. National ethnicity: Kirk, refers to Kyrgyz people 3. Race: Aryan type Indo-European; descendants of <i>Wu-sun</i> ; "Raw Tatar" (likely indicating a pale skin color)
Tasahz	1. Location: eastern neighbor of the "Girk" (Khirgiz) 2. National ethnicity: Khitan people of the <i>Da-he-shi</i> 3. Race: East Asian grassland people intermixed with Siberian white people; "Ripen Tatar" (likely indicating a yellow skin color)
Langu	1. Location: eastern neighbor of the "Da-he-shi Khtians" (Tasahz) 2. National ethnicity: Onguds, a branch of the Uyghurs 3. Race: East Asian grassland people; "Ripen Tatar"

Table 3. 2: The location and national-racial-ethnicity of the four Christian Turkic-Tatar Kingdoms in the West Syriac manuscript

As for the Kok Turks, considering their timeframe and the duration of their geographic location, factored in with the information we presented in Chapter Two, it is possible that they are the descendants of the Scythian (northern *Di*) Indo-Europeans in this region, while the Khyagas are the descendants of the Aryan (Tocharian) *Wu-sun* people who sought refuge with the Huns. For instance, the third khan of the Turkic Khanate, Mu-kan (Mu-han) of the Ashina family, obviously had Scythian people features, whether pure-blooded or mixed is unclear, based on the way Chinese historical materials described him, as we cited: "The physical appearance of the Si-jin, also called Yan-du, is strange and unique, his face is very broad and ruddy, and eyes are like glass." The *Da-he-shi* and the Onguds were also likely Turkified Indo-Europeans whose ancestors likely were the *Bei-di* (northern *Di*) which consisted of *Bai-di* (the white Siberian type) and *Chi-di*

(the ruddy-faced Scythian type) from either side of the Tai-hang Mountains during the Spring-Autumn and Warring States periods (770-221 BC) of China, of the mix-blooded whites and non-whites.

According to the *Book of Tang*, at this time, one of the *Shi-wei* groups who were the Uyghurs' neighbors to the west was "a different type of Khitan", called by the Tang and Song dynasties the "Yellow-head *Shi-wei*" (Liu, X., 2000: 3644).¹⁵⁵ They were classified as Jurchens but belonging to the "raw Jurchens"¹⁵⁶—"those who live in the north are not originally from Khitan" (Toqtoa, 2000c: 1).¹⁵⁷ This name change of the *Shi-wei* into the Jurchen in the Song dynasty is very much like the *Da-he-shi* later being classified as Khitans and the Onguds being called the Uyghurs. It should be mentioned here that the maternal grandmother of the Tang-China emperor Tai-zong, Lady Dugu, was a Christian and a *Xian-bei* whose ancestral home was today's Shanxi region (Mingana, 1925: 351). Her family might have been early members of the *Da-he-shi* or Ongud; but the latter is more likely (Hansen, 2000: 199).

¹⁵⁵ Liu, *Old Book of Tang*, "Northern Di": "室韦者，契丹之别类也。居獠（Náo）越河北，其国在京师东北七千里。东至黑水靺鞨，西至突厥，南接契丹，北至于海。……又云：室韦，我唐有九部焉。所谓岭西室韦、山北室韦、黄头室韦、大如者室韦、小如者室韦、婆芮室韦、讷北室韦、骆驼室韦，并在柳城郡之东北，近者三千五百里，远者六千二百里。"

(*Shi-wei* is a different kind of Khitan. They live in the north of Nao-yue River, and their country is 7,000 Chinese miles northeast of the capital. They are bounded by the Hei-shui [Black River] Mohe in the east, the Turks in the west, the Khitan in the south, and the sea in the north. ... It is also said that the *Shi-wei* had nine tribes during the Tang Dynasty. They are the *Shi-wei* in the west of the ridge, the *Shi-wei* in the north of the mountain, the yellow head *Shi-wei*, the Greater Ru-zhe *Shi-wei*, the Minor Ru-zhe *Shi-wei*, the northern mountain *Shi-wei*, and the camel *Shi-wei*. They are all in the northeast of Liu-cheng County, the closest one is 3,500 Chinese miles away, and the farthest one is 6,200 Chinese miles away [from the Chinese capital].)

¹⁵⁶ Various clues in my research suggest that "Raw Jurchens" most likely refers to the paleness of their skin, like unbaked bread. A similar metaphor appears in an Arabic material from the early tenth century that describes the skin of the Iraqis as "a pale brown color" that is "neither half-baked dough nor burned crust, but between the two." Bernard Lewis (tr., ed.), *Islam, from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople*, volume II: Religion and Society (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) 209.

¹⁵⁷ Toqtoa, *History of Jin*, Volume I, "Shi-ji" [Genealogy]: "五代时，契丹尽取渤海地，而黑水靺鞨附属于契丹。其在南者籍契丹，号熟女直；其在北者不在契丹籍，号生女直。生女直地有混同江、长白山，混同江亦号黑龙江，所谓"白山黑水"是也。"

(During the period of the Five Dynasties, the Khitan took over all lands around the Bo Sea, and the Black River and Mo-he became subordinate to the Khitan. Those living in the south are originally from the Khitans, called ripen Jurchens, and those at the north are not originally from the Khitans, raw Jurchens. The raw Jurchens' land included Hun-tong River and Chang-bai Mountain. Hun-tong River was also called Hei-long-jiang River, which is the so-called "white mountain and black water".)

I lean to believe that the *Xian-bei* Lady Du-gu was more likely a Siberian type (a type of later Russian) of a white lady, because *Xian-bei* was the Chinese translation designating the white *Hu* people living on the northern side of the Great Wall (Siberian regions), which was called *Zhong-Xia*, corresponding to China's *Zhong-hua*. The *Xian-bei* were the ancestors of the white Jurchen, a type of white Siberian (different from the Far Northeast Asian Rou-ran, Jurchen, the Manchurian), and, according to Chinese historical materials, those Jurchen had "thick blonde hair and beards and yellow or green eyes, and are called Yellow Head Jurchen" (Xu, M. S., 2018: 401; Ye, L. L., 2024: 276),¹⁵⁸ i.e. blonde Jurchen. In literary works, these Jurchen were derogatorily described as "yellow-headed *Xian-bei* lackeys" and "red-headed blue-eyed old *Xian-bei*".¹⁵⁹ In the later chapters, we will see a few white Christian women became the mothers of East Asian kings and nobles and more efficiently advanced Christianity by their instruction and influence than many missionaries.

To sum up, it was no coincidence that in the West-Syriac manuscript, the so-called "Turks" who descended from the Turkified Indo-Europeans (Gok Turks and Kyrgyz) and the mixed-blood (Khitans and Onguds) were the first of the grasslands of East Asia to become Christians, because they were more receptive to missionaries from Persia and Syria with whom they shared similar racial characteristics and because they might have viewed Christianity as the religion of the whites. In the previous chapter, we saw that the conversion to Christianity of the Hephthalite Huns had a great impact on the development of Christianity in Central Asia. As for the ripened Tatar Onguds ("ripened" here indicates yellow skin, as if cooked perfectly), we will see in Chapter Five that Ongud Uyghur Christian monks played an important role in Euro-Asian geo-political and religious communications during the time of the Mongol Empire.

¹⁵⁸ Xu Meng-shen (徐梦莘), *Editorial Collections of the Three Royal Reigns and their Treaty Alliance* (*San-chao-bei-meng-hui-bian*, 1194): "又有极边远而近东海者, 则谓之东海女真, 多黄发髯, 皆黄目睛绿者, 谓之黄头女真。" (There are also those who are extremely far away and close to the East Sea. They are called the East Sea Jurchens. Most of them have blonde hair and yellow eyes with green pupils. They are called the Yellow-headed Jurchens.)

[Southern Song China] Ye Long-li, *Qidan Guo Zhi* (*Chronicles of Khitan Kingdom*) (Beijing: Zhonghua Book, 2024), 276. "髭发皆黄, 目睛多绿, 亦黄而白多。" "The beard and hair are all yellow, the eyes are mostly green, and yellow with white."

¹⁵⁹ Su Dong-po, one of China's most famous Song dynasty poets, in a poem commenting on a painting by Tang-China painter Han Gan wrote about the "red-bearded, blue-eyed old Xian-bei" ("赤髯碧眼老鲜卑"). A Tang dynasty poet, Zhang Ji, referred to "Yellow Head Xian-bei entering in Luoyang" ("黄头鲜卑入洛阳"), and another Tang dynasty poet, Cen Can, in a poem about the *Hu* people spoke of their "purple beard and green eyes" ("紫髯绿眼胡人").

3.5.2 A more specific range of time when the West-Syriac manuscript was written

As cited, according to this Syriac text, these Turkic Christians “receive ordination from the Bishop whose see in that large town of the pagans”, a city that had “five big churches” (Mingana, 1925: 365). Mingana believes that this reference likely refers to Baghdad. But, if that were so, the Syriac author of this text should have been very familiar with this city of Baghdad and would not be so vague in his description to the point of not even naming it. My analysis suggests that the big city mentioned here refers to Tang-China’s capital Chang-an (present-day Xi’an), because it matches well with the references of its ecclesiological status, time scope and geographical conveniences.

First, based on Syriac materials, from 635 to 643, Chang-an was made a metropolitanate.¹⁶⁰ In the Second Turkic Khanate period (682-745), the area on either side of North China’s Tai-hang Mountains was basically under the control of the people of the grasslands, so Chang-an was a northern border city of Tang-China, not far from the Onguds and the *Da-he-shi* Tribal Confederation Khitans. According to the Xi-an Jing-jiao Stele, Tang-China at that time had established churches in the “five cantons” under its jurisdiction, including Chang-an. Chang-an had been mainly Buddhist and Taoist and had persecuted Christians a number of times, so it was without question a big pagan city. Concerning how Christianity came to China’s capital Chang-an, the big pagan city (with a population of half a million), the Xi-an Stele has provided valuable wholistic records. Nevertheless, to interpret thoroughly the rich text of the stele has proved to be a difficult task.

The Syriac author also said more specifically that the *see* of this pagan city had ordained priests and deacons for these Turks (Mingana, 1925: 362). At the first look, the *see* here assumably refers archbishop or metropolitan site. However, the Chang-an seemingly voided its metropolitan status at a later time, or at least suspended it due to persecution. During this period (698-763), according to the *Xi-an Jing-jiao* Stele, the Persian East-Syriac Christian Church of Tang-China was persecuted in turn by Buddhists during AD 698-700 and Daoists (certainly with permission and even support from the Tang court) in 713,¹⁶¹ and churches (archdiocese) were closed. It was not until 756 when Tang emperor Su-zong ascended the throne at Ling-wu where Tangut Metropolitanate was established about a few centuries later, or after the An Lu-shan

¹⁶⁰ Mingana, *Christianity*, 351, supplementary note on 367.

¹⁶¹ “圣历年，释子用壮，腾口于东周。先天末，下士大笑，讪谤于西镐。”

(During the years of the Sheng-li reign [Tang China], the Buddhists were raising their voices to suppress Christianity in the eastern Capital [Chang-an]; at the end of the Xian-tian reign, the Daoists ridiculed and slandered Christianity in the western Capital [Luo-yang].)

Rebellion had been put down in 763 that the churches of the five cantons were restored, as the Xi-an Stele stated.¹⁶²

Second, besides the issue of ordination in Chang-an the big pagan city, we should note the issue of ordination in Ctesiphon as well, because the description provided by this Syriac author presents an obviously vague and contradictory problem. He first writes: “At that time some men from the Turks who are Christians came to Ctesiphon from the remote countries in order to elect a Metropolitan for themselves, and have him ordained, as was their wont; because it was in Ctesiphon that the consecration of their metropolitans used to take place. Each one of their countries had one Metropolitan, after the ordination of whom they returned to their land” (Mingana, 1925: 360-361). It is not very likely that the capital of each Turkic-Tatar nation had a resident Metropolitan, as is written in this text. However, it should be that every Turkic khanate had a bishop.

A bit later in the text, the Syriac author again explains, the Turks “received ordination from the Nestorians, and they were given a Metropolitan from the Nestorians by false pretences, while they were unaware of their deception, and of the falsehood of their abominable beliefs. And this habit is handed down to them to the present day, because any time their Bishop dies they come to the Nestorians, and take another one to replace him from Ctesiphon. The see (of their Bishop?) is in the pagan town which we have mentioned above, and it is he who ordains for them priests and deacons” (Mingana, 1925: 362). It is clear that the practice described here of receiving **a new bishop** obviously contradicts the previous description of the practice for receiving **a new metropolitan**.

How, then, do we resolve this problem of a contradiction in the manuscript? According to modern research discoveries, we know that, in the latter half of the eighth century, Northern China and Persia exchanged diplomatic missions in 701, 719, 732 and 742 (Mingana, 1925: 350), neatly corresponding to the age of the Second Turkic Khanate (AD 682-745). As for why it was called Northern China, Chinese historical records provide an identical explanation. Kapakhan Khan, younger brother of the first khan of the Second Turkic Khanate, based his court for a long time at the foot of the *Hei-sha* (Black Sands) Mountain and later succeeded the second khan. According to the *Old Book of Tang*, the Second Turkic Khanate during Kapakhan Khan’s reign was strong

¹⁶² “肃宗文明皇帝，于灵武等五郡，重立景寺。元善资而福祚开，大庆临而皇业建。”

(The civilized emperor Su-zong rebuilt the Christian churches in Ling-wu County and four other places. The initial donations brought great blessings while the great celebration started for laying the foundation of the royal establishment.)

and powerful, and “the Khitans and the Xi [Tatabi (Geng, 2005: 152)], after the Shen-gong reign [of the Empress Wu Ze-tian, 697-705], were often subjugated by [the Second Turkic Khanate]; its lands from east to west [cover] 10,000 *li*, and it has 400,000 soldiers” (Liu, X., 2000: 3518).¹⁶³ This may be where the figure of 400,000 households in the Syriac text originated. (Mingana, 1925: 365)

During this time, the Second Turkic Khanate invaded the south, occupying present-day Hebei, Gansu and Ningxia provinces, causing the Tang-Chinese endless headaches. Later, because they had helped the Tang defeat the Khitans, the Tang ceded to them present-day Inner Mongolia and Shanxi. As a result, these Turks occupied a large area of North China. This is also why the journey from the first city to the second city took two months, because “along the way are many towns and cities inhabited by pagan Turks who worship idols”. This likely was referring to the eastern Turks and other Turkic speaking groups in the Hexi Corridor (the corridor west of the Yellow River), the southern part of the *Song-mo* region (that is, the Mongolian steppes) and North China, where sedentary life style dominated, because, even though this area was ceded to the Second Turkic Khanate during Kapakhan Khan’s time, its Buddhist tradition had begun back in the Northern Wei dynasty, and it had long been under Tang-China’s colonisation and assimilation, so the Buddhist culture in this region was still dominant. Or it might simply entail those Shamanist idols among the Turks.

Therefore, the deduction is reasonable that, during the time when the Chang-an archdiocese was closed, the new bishop of the Turks could not be ordained there, so a Turkic delegation went to Ctesiphon for ordination of bishops. So, the practice that the Syriac text describes came into being: when a bishop died, Turkic Christians came to Ctesiphon to fetch a new bishop. The ordination of priests and deacons could still be carried out in Chang-an, indicating that the East-Syriac Church in Chang-an did not cease to function and it might have been only that its archdiocese rank fell to be diocesan. After the end of the An Lu-shan Rebellion in 763, and before 781, the rank of Metropolitan of Chang-an was restored,¹⁶⁴ but the Second Turkic Khanate had

¹⁶³ Liu, *Old Book of Tang*, “Turks I”: “契丹及奚，自神功之后，常受其征役，其地东西万余里，控弦四十万，自颉利之后最为强盛。”

(The Khitan and the Xi [Tatabi] have been subject to constant conquest since the time of the Shen-gong reign [of the Empress Wu Zetian]. Their territory is more than ten thousand Chinese miles from east to west, and they have 400,000 [archers] cavalry. They have become the most powerful since the time of Jie Li [king].)

¹⁶⁴ The Xi'an *Jing Jiao* Stele (Nestorian Stele) said the Tang Su-zong Empire restored the five parish cantons around 756-757. Mingana's *Christianity*, 306, claims in 781 in the letter from Catholicos Timothy mentioned the death of the Metropolitan of China.

ceased to exist, and these Turkic Christians no longer needed to go from North China to Ctesiphon, because the Metropolitan in the Chinese capital Chang-an was much closer.

Finally, based on a summary of the above analysis, it is clear that the author of this Syriac text was writing during the Second Turkic Khanate and was writing about the Turkic-speaking Christians of that time, approximately 691 (when Khapaghan Khan was the second khan) to 745 (when the last khan, Kulun Beg, was killed). More precisely, the date of composition of the Syriac text was probably between 711 and 745, because 711 was when Khapaghan Khan became a vassal of Tang-China through marriage, and this may be how the title *Idu-qut* originates, just as later the leader of the Gang-chang (later Kocho) Uyghurs was also called *Idu-qut* to acknowledge China as the “royal uncle”. Based on the 730 collapse of the *Da-he-shi* Tribal Federation mentioned earlier, we can further conclude that this alliance of the Turkic speaking Christians and the Tatars very probably occurred between 711 and 730, during the period when the West-Syriac piece was written. More specifically, we can further narrow the written time between **714 and 730** when considering the time of the second wave persecution which caused Chang-an archdiocese to close and the last year of the Xian-tian reign by the Tang emperor Xuan-zong which ended in AD 713.

Moreover, another layer of inconsistency in the Syriac manuscripts still needs to be clarified. The Syriac text cited earlier does clearly mention that those Turks “were given a Metropolitan from the Nestorians.” This significant factual record is by no means a typo or simply a misunderstanding. In consulting the synod records of the East-Syriac Church, the location of the No. 10 metropolitan for Turks in the late eighth century remains unknown, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. So the problem is, since the Turks had their own Metropolitan, they could ordain their bishops without coming to Ctesiphon or Chang-an. In addition, the West-Syriac manuscripts also clearly states that these Turkic-Tatar Christians did not have fixed domiciles but lived completely nomadic lifestyles with portable tents as their churches. That means the metropolitan *see* was either in a portable format among them or in a Turkic city somewhere else.

Overall, I lean to speculate that the Metropolitan site for the Turks, would be in the eastern part of Central Asia (present-day Xinjiang), along the northern branch of Silk Road at north of Tian-shan, rather than the East Asian Steppes at this time, given the Christian mission and ecclesiastical, and geo-political, and racial-ethnic conditions. If that is the case, my theory reflects that the metropolitan site would be in the town where the “Turks” spoke the Yabatai language, mentioned by the west Syriac writer, and they were very possibly Hunnified local Indo-Europeans, which the Syriac writer was not able to differentiate from authentic Turks. Following this thread, the town is most likely today’s Jimsar or Qi-tai. However, this theory of mine that Jimsar or Qi-tai

was the metropolitan site lacks confirmation and evidence, first of all, from the same West-Syriac piece. A potential explanation would be the manuscripts were pieced together from different material by different copyists, as Mingana pointed out and confirmed by the discussions earlier, so the metropolitanate location-related key information was left out unexpectedly.

Nevertheless, my theory has been backed up providentially by recent archaeological discoveries, as the next section shows, that the metropolitan seat for the Turks would be at the town of Barkul (Qi-tai) or Jimsar, at the latest when Uyghurs moved to the regions in AD 841. That also can explain why Turpan was not a metropolitanate seat (yet) though the Christianity there was prevalent by the time of Tang-China's conquest in 640. At the southern side of Tian-shan Mountains, as discussed in Chapter Two, among the Indo-European city states at northeast Tarim Basin, Yan-qi Basin and Tupan Basin, Christianity was prevalent along with Buddhism and even more prevalent than Buddhism in some regions. I will discuss in the next chapter that the East-Syriac Christian Church in 781 established a metropolitanate for the "Turks" (Mingana, 2000: 306), but again it is unclear where that was situated.

3.6 The multi-racial-ethnic Kingdom of Heaven on the Earth: Turkic Christianity, Tibetan Christianity and Chinese Christianity around the Eastern Tian-Shan Mountains

Though in this historical period of AD 640-841, Turkic Christianity was the major player in Central Asia and North Asia, Tibetan Christianity and Chinese Christianity were also phenomenal in East Asia, yet without many materials present in the records of the Syriac language to reflect this development. From the perspective of the East-Syriac Church in Persia, based on the solid foundation of indigenized Christianity among the native Indo-Europeans in Central Asia, which had been built in the fifth and sixth century, a few more centuries of missions finally had a great harvest among the Hunnic-Turks. In this historic process, the Turkified-Indo-Europeans served as the anthropological mission bridge for spreading Christianity in the regions of the six cities (later eight cities) along the northern branch of the Silk Road north of the Tian-shan Mountains. These cities, due to their unique geographic features, first became the hub of the westernmost frontiers of Huns and of Chinese, then of Siberians, Rou-rans, Turks, Tibetans, and later Uyghurs, Khitans, Mongols, and Manchurians.

3.6.1 The archaeological discovery in ancient Barkul (Qi-tai), Bei-ting (Jimsar) and Kocho (Turpan) in 2020-2021 proves the above research on Indo-European and Turkic Christianity

As discussed earlier, the ancient Barkul County town, or Gu-cheng (meaning “ancient city”), known today as Qi-Tai County and mentioned in the West-Syriac manuscripts, would be the metropolitan town of the Turkified Indo-European Christians. However, another option for that town could be the ancient capital of Ju-Shi kingdom “Back Section,” Bei-ting, or Beshbalik, present-day Jimsar (which might have meant “eternal faith”) which was also an ancient Indo-European Christian city. Chinese archaeologists dug out Christian relics in the two sites in 2020 and 2021 and are continuing with their digging. The two sites are about 40 kilometres away from each other in the east and west directions.

According to an article by Chinese historian Guo Wu in 2020, “New Archaeological Progress of Beiting Ancient City Site Ruins”, Chinese archaeologists had made new discoveries in the ancient site of Jimsar, not only related to Buddhism, but also Christianity: “The ancient city of Bei-Ting is currently the largest and best-preserved ancient city site in the northern foothills of the Tian-shan Mountains... A bronze cross of *Jing-Jiao* (Persian Christianity) was discovered. There were detailed human figures carved on both sides of the cross, indicating the existence of Jing-Jiao elements in the ancient city of Bei-Ting in history (Guo, W., 2021).”¹⁶⁵ The site has been visited by archaeologists from different countries over the past 100 years, including teams of Russian, Japanese, German, Swedish and Chinese nationalities. Jimsar was once the capital city of the Indo-European Ju-Shi Kingdom’s “Back Section”, and later the northern summer capital of the Turkic Khanate, and even later of the Uyghurs. It was also the major military administrative centre of Tang China in the north of Tian-shan.

In 2021, archaeologists made a ground-breaking discovery in Qi-tai County of a whole site of Christian building complex. In “The Main Archaeological Achievements of the Excavation in 2021 at the Jing-jiao Temple Site in Tangchaodun of Qitai, Xinjiang,” the archaeologists Ren Guan and Wei Jian states (translated from Chinese to English by Mark Shan):

In 2021, archaeological excavation at the Tang-chao--dun Ancient City Site found and cleared a Jing-Jiao temple site in the central northern part of the city site. The main

¹⁶⁵ “北庭故城是目前天山北麓最大、保存最为完整的一处古代城市遗址。.....在距离 6 号高台佛殿遗址西侧约 100 多米的探沟中, 发现了景教的铜十字架, 十字架两面刻画有精细的人物图案等, 说明历史上景教因素在北庭故城的存在。”

structure sits east and faces west, with distinct structural features. It includes two groups of buildings in the north and south, consisting of a central hall, an altar, several rooms, a back corridor, etc. The main period is the Gao-chang Uyghur period, and it has undergone a complex process of construction, repair, destruction and reconstruction. A large number of precious murals were unearthed in the temple site, including images with crosses on their heads, sceptres, palm branches, Uyghur inscriptions, and the title "*Ye-li-ke-wen*," reflecting the exchange and integration of Eastern and Western cultures on the Silk Road. (Ren & Wei, 2022)

This article also mentions, "In addition, we collected multiple carbon-14 dating samples from the walls, murals and other locations, and conducted systematic carbon-14 dating. The corrected dating results show that the architectural structure within the temple ruins was first built in the first half of the eighth century, with the main construction date being the early tenth century. It was repaired many times between the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and was destroyed around the thirteenth century."

The prominent Chinese historian Rong Xinjiang added in a conference in July 2023 that "the *Jing-Jiao* temple discovered at the ruins of the ancient city of Tang-chao-dun was probably a branch church site affiliated with the Bei-Ting [Jimsar] bishopric and a place of hesychasm practice for priests and monks."¹⁶⁶ I basically agree, because, a few years before the discovery, my research had already led me to think the metropolitan site should be in Barkul county or in Kumul (Hami). If Rong is right, then the Yabatai-speaking town discussed in the last section should be Bei-ting, present-day Jimsar. The problem is that, since the city was a royal city, the West-Syriac writer should have mentioned that fact. Therefore, it would be Qi-tai, the ancient Barkul county town established by Tang China, as I have contended despite confusion caused by the location of the present-day Barkul county town. The scale and integrity of the multi-function site itself also promised at least a bishop site. In addition,

¹⁶⁶ 新疆天山网刊登《近百名专家学者齐聚奇台 共话考古新发现》，其中提到“北京大学教授荣新江认为，唐朝墩古城遗址发现的景教寺院很可能是附属于北庭主教区的一个分支教堂，是一个隐修地，便于教士们隐修。” 2023-07-08 00:30:49

Xinjiang Tianshan Mountains Net published an article titled "Nearly 100 experts and scholars gathered in Qitai to discuss new archaeological discoveries", which mentioned, "the Jing-Jiao temple discovered at the ruins of the ancient city of Tang-chao-dun was probably a branch church site affiliated with the Bei-Ting [Jimsar] bishopric and a place of hesychasm practice for priests and monks." 2023-07-08 00:30:49

来源：天山网-新疆日报原创 (Originally posted by Tian-shan Mountains Net and Xinjiang Daily)
https://www.ts.cn/xwzx/whxw/202307/t20230707_14561631.shtml

the bishop or even a metropolitan site established here adjacent to a Tang-China military administrative center could enjoy a protection for its safety, both from the assault of Islamic forces or by other pagan Turks.

Among the six cities at the northern side of the Mountains, Christianity was prevalent, though not much evidence exists for this logical probability. But we do have the testimony of the West-Syriac manuscripts and the archaeological discoveries in recent years in China. During Genghis Khan's Mongol conquest, a bishop site had been in Kumul (present-day Hami city), speculatively with a long history of the diocese probably back to the eighth century. Thus, it was reasonable to establish a metropolitanate seat at Barkul or Jimsar, just as in Kashgar. It is also reasonable to speculate that a see existed in the Turpan Basin for Tocharian Christianity which prevailed as early as in the fifth century, as discussed in the previous chapter. In a later chapter, this historical and ecclesiological suspense will come up again.



Figure 3. 3: The main structure of the Christian building complex evacuated in Qi-tai, Xinjiang¹⁶⁷

Please note: the Qi-tai article also affirms the *Jing-jiao* Church (East-Syriac Church) complex site was originally built in the first half of the eighth century. Similarly, section 3.5.1 of this present

¹⁶⁷ Source: Ren & Wei, 2022; The Western Regions, (3): page 107, picture 2.

chapter of my thesis, through the application of my textual analysis, historical analysis and literature thematic analysis of the qualitative research, concludes in a grounded theory that the written date of the West Syriac manuscripts should be between AD 714 and 730. Therefore, we can conclude that the Christian ruins site was first built at the Yabatai-speaking town (present-day Qi-tai) during that time or even earlier (as Indo-European Christianity probably prevailed at the northern side of Tian-shan since the fifth or sixth century according to my theory based on Chinese classics), and later became a metropolitan seat, if not in the eighth century, at the latest, after Uyghurs migrated to the regions in 841.

Furthermore, even during the time of the worldwide pandemic of COVID-19, Chinese archaeologists were busy and enjoying their abundant work, discovering more Christian relics around the eastern Tian-shan Mountain range. In 2021, further archaeological excavations in Turpan Basin on the *Jing-Jiao* Christian church building were also fruitful. The site had been visited by archaeologists from different countries over the past 100 years and many religious manuscripts were found, including some very important Christian ones, though only consisting of a small portion of all. However, the new discoveries in 2021 provided an enormous amount of Christian relics. In the introduction of “Main Achievements and Preliminary Understanding of the Archaeological Excavation of the Nestorian Church Site Xipang (Shūi-Pang), Turfan, Xinjiang in 2021”, the archaeologists Liu Wensuo, Wang Zexiang and Wang Long reveals (translated from Chinese to English by Mark Shan):

The Xipang *Jing-jiao* Monastery Site is located on a hillock at the southern foot of the Huoyan Mountain in Turpan. The architectural remains are divided into two parts: the top of the hillock and the slope of the hillock. The archaeological excavation in 2021 basically completed the comprehensive exposure of the buildings in the hillock area and unearthed more than a thousand important cultural relics such as Syriac and Uyghur documents, mural fragments, and pottery, wood, copper, iron, and fabrics. The nature of the Xipang site as a Jing-Jiao monastery was confirmed, and it was preliminarily judged that it had been used for at least three periods. It may have been originally built in the Tang Dynasty, and the main period was the Gao-chang Uyghur period. (Liu, W. S., Wang, Z.X., & Wang, L., 2022: 74)¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Liu Wen-suo, Wang Ze-xiang, Wang Long: “Main Achievements and Preliminary Understanding of the Archaeological Excavation of the Nestorian Church Site Xipang (Shūi-Pang), Turfan, Xinjiang in 2021.”

In a later section of the article, the authors note the first stage of the architecture probably might have reflected the age of Tang-China. The analysis here seems vague because, before Tang-China conquered the region in AD 640, Christianity was here already, as discussed in our previous chapter. Therefore, the first stage of the construction of the church building should be earlier than AD 640, or earlier than the time when the Christian envoy Alopen, from the Church Court in Persia, visited the Tang-China capital Chang-an in AD 635, bringing the Bible and Icons with him. Furthermore, Christianity among the local Indo-Europeans would have been spread on both sides of the eastern Tian-shan range, including the Four Regions of this thesis, even before the Council of Chalcedon took place in AD 451.

Worthy of note is that the result of carbon-14 dating testing was omitted in the paper of the Turpan Christian ruins. Nevertheless, the paper does provide a hint and clue by saying literally, “the year Xipan site was built may have entered in the Tang times”¹⁶⁹ (Liu, W.S., Wang, Z.X., & Wang, L., 2022: 80), subtly indicating the date was before the Tang Chinese occupation and administrative control initiated here in AD 640. The most important new discovery from Turpan is a large amount of Christian manuscripts written on paper, a find that is very meaningful and significant to this chapter of my thesis:

The unearthed relics excavated in 2021 are rich in variety and quantity. After field numbering and preliminary indoor sorting, there are 1,041 important cultural relics (small items), including 497 documents (sets), 186 murals (numbered)... The documents are all in paper form. Except for a small number of Chinese documents, the vast majority are not in Chinese. Based on the documents previously discovered from the site and the results of their interpretation, it is preliminarily determined that they are mainly in Syriac and Uyghur and may also contain documents in other

“西旁景教寺院遗址位于吐鲁番火焰山南麓一处丘岗上，建筑遗存分岗顶和岗坡两部分。2021 年的考古发掘基本完成了对岗顶区域建筑的全面揭露，出土了叙利亚文、回鹘文等文书残片、壁画残块及陶、木、铜、铁、织物等重要文物千余件。确认了西旁遗址的景教寺院性质，并初步判断其至少存在三期以上使用过程，可能始建于唐，主体年代为高昌回鹘时期。”

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. “根据建筑布局及出土遗物的分析，我们认为前两期建筑均具景教寺院性质。具有吐鲁番阿斯塔那墓地唐墓木器特征的联珠纹彩绘木杯、唐代风格壁画残块的出土显示了西旁遗址的始建年代可能已进入唐代；宋代钱币、朱书“乙未年孙上(?)”十曲花口漆碗、回鹘风格人物壁画及回鹘文文书等，表明遗址的主体年代应为高昌回鹘时期。”

languages. They may mainly be documents of *Jing-Jiao*. (Liu, W.S., Wang, Z.X., & Wang, L., 2022: 78) ¹⁷⁰

Finally, we are told that “research on the discovered documents and murals needs to be put on hold until after their restoration and preservation.” Based on my 20 years of research, I am confident that the future study of these manuscripts will affirm my long-term argument that Christianity was one of the two prevalent religions along with Buddhism in these regions of the Tian-shan and Tarim Basin, flourishing at the latest, from the sixth century among the native Indo-European kingdoms through the 13th century, during the age of the Genghis Khan Mongols.

In addition, it would be helpful to name this Christianity north of the eastern Tian-shan, in the Chinese westernmost frontier, as “Jimsar-Barkul (Qi-tai)-Kumul-oriented urban Christianity” and the Christianity south of these Mountains as “Yanqi (Karasahr)-Jushi (Turpan)-oriented urban Christianity”. Note the “Tocharian language of Kuche-Yanqi-Turpan” as a term in linguistic studies provides further proof the regions belonged to the same native white Tocharian civilizational block south of the Tian-shan, while the native white Scythians (with Tocharian *Wu-sun* and *Ju-shi* added later) civilizational block was north of the Tian-shan. Such a differentiation in the geography of Christianity may help readers and scholars balance an over-emphasis on “Turpan Christianity”, just because there used to be more archaeological discoveries on Turpan Christianity. While those findings remain available, today increasing discoveries on Barkul (Qi-tai)-Jimsar Christianity have been being unearthed. Helpful for my qualitative research, archaeologists now have new findings from fresco and manuscript analysis providing new possibilities for more accurate interpretation of the nature and dating of early Silk Road Christianity in the regions.

A reassessment of Christian missions, traced back to the fifth century at the latest in these regions, is now possible. The new discoveries would possibly affirm a Christian Empire, which originated in the Altai (Golden) Mountains region (the northern border of present-day Xinjiang), being established in the mid-fifth century by the Yeptailtha or Hephthalites (or *ye-da*, *Yi-da*, *Yi-tian*, *Hua*),¹⁷¹ the so called “white Huns,” who expanded southwest to the Bactria-Sogdian regions,

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. “2021 年度发掘的出土遗物种类丰富且数量众多，经过田野编号和初步的室内整理，其中重要文物（小件）计 1041 件（组），包括文书 497 件（组）、壁画 186 件（编号）、陶器 12 件、钱币 16 枚、木器 161 件（组）、非文书纸类文物 58 件（组）、骨角器（6 件）、金属器 23 件、皮革织物 53 件（组）、其他文物（漆器、石器、玻璃器、带题铭的陶片和葫芦片等）29 件。……文书皆纸质，除少量汉文文书外，绝大多数文书为非汉文文书。结合以往从遗址发现的文书和释读结果，① 经初步判断，主要是古叙利亚文（Syriac）和回鹘文（Uyghurian）文献，可能还包含有其他语文，它们可能主要属景教的文献。”

¹⁷¹ These are different pronunciation translations in Chinese classics.

then eastward along the Tarim Basin, to *Yu-tian* or Khotan, at the southern tip (Wei, S., 2000: 1541-1542). They took over the Gao-chang Kingdom from the hand of the *Gao-che* people in AD 479, as well as *Yan-qi* and the present-day Urumqi region north of the Tian-shan during 497-509. From there, they expanded even further eastward, subjugating some *Rou-ran* people at the north of *Dun-huang* in 522 (Litvinsky, 2003: 112). Also according to Syriac materials,¹⁷² by AD 549 (Mingana, 1925: 304), East-Syriac Christianity had by this time already become the state religion of the Hephthalites, who had even taken the initiative to send a request to the Catholicos-Patriarch Aba I in Persia to ordain a Hephthalite priest as Bishop for them. Therefore, the so called “White Huns” played a role fortifying, if not spreading further, Christianity in the regions around the eastern Tian-shan range.

The further breakthrough of Christian missions among Turks and other non-white immigrant groups in the white Indo-European regions (or at least with their close contact) was a propitious achievement continued from advances on the western side of the Pamirs, first along the Amur River banks from the Persian border, then eastward across the Pamirs, arriving in the Tarim Basin along the southern route of the Silk Road and finally reaching the Yan-qi Basin and the Turpan Basin. Some braver Christian missionaries might have chosen the northern branch of the Silk Road without crossing the Pamirs but instead marching northward to the Tian-shan and travelling eastward along the northern foot of the Mountains, finally reaching the six cities’ regions, including the Jimsar-Qitai. In the eighth century, Muslims also took the same route for their proselytization.

In addition, the archaeologist discoveries a century ago in Turpan basin revealed a multiple-racial-ethnic local Christianity. What’s surprising is that the longest of the Christian texts discovered in Turpan is in the Chinese language. This was a spiritual formation handbook that missionaries could carry with them, with excerpts from the Syriac Bible, ceremonies and rites, and prayers for worship. The text says that the handbook was copied in 1064 of the Greek calendar, 134 of the Islamic calendar, which was AD 752. The text also mentions that the metropolitanate of Nisibin at that time was Cyprian (Mingana, 1925: 337). At this time, the Uyghurs had yet to move west to Kocho but were enjoying their newly founded khanate on the grasslands north of the Great Wall, so what is the significance of such a thorough and detailed Chinese-language East Syriac Christian handbook? First, the *Book of Sui* said that “the kingdom has eight cities, all of which have many Chinese”, while the *History of the Northern Dynasties* said of the Kingdom of Kocho “they use both Chinese and *Hu* as their written language”. So both the native people of Kocho and the localized Chinese could have used Chinese-language texts. Second, it

¹⁷² Mingana cited the paragraph from the *Histoire de Mar Aba*. (ed. P. Bedjan), pp.266-269.

confirms once again that the religious faith of the natives and locals of this area discussed in previous chapter was “**to serve [worship] the heavenly God.**”

Therefore, when Christianity reached the Front Section and Back Section of the *Ju-shi* Kingdom, it stepped into the geo-political frontier of Indo-Europeans, Hunnic groups, Chinese and Tibetan populations, competing through military colonisation and political negotiations for the loyalty of the native Indo-Europeans. From this geo-political hub or commercial-religious router of the Silk Road, Christian missions spread further eastward to China and east-northward to reach nomads on the present-day Mongolia grasslands, and also southward to the Tibetans. In later centuries, even probably reached Java and established a metropolitan see in present-day Indonesia (Mingana, 1925: 322; West, A. J., 2020),¹⁷³ along the Maritime Silk Road.

3.6.2 A Metropolitan for Tibetans and Historic Chinese Chang-an Christianity

In 795 to 798, the Patriarch-Catholicos Timotheus (Timothy) wrote to his good friend Raban Sergius of Elam. Raban means priest or monk (Grousset, 2002: 300). Originally, the title meant Rabi, teacher. The Biblical kingdom of Elam (Ilam) is present-day southwestern Iran (Gao, Y. J., 1997: 280; Baumer, C., 2006:174). The Catholicos's letter clearly stated that, “In these days the Holy Spirit has anointed a Metropolitan for the Turks, and we are preparing to consecrate another one for the Tibetans” (Mingana, 1925: 306; Baumer, C., 2006: 174).

How was the Church able to install a Metropolitan in among ancient Tibetans (or Tubo in their Chinese name)? Where was the metropolitan city exactly?

Ancient Chinese historians have indirectly provided the answers. As it is generally known, the Tibetan (Tu-bo) State was the southern neighbor of the Tarim Basin in Xinjiang. In 665 the Tu-bo invaded the Tarim Basin and occupied four strategic places in the Chinese westernmost frontier: Karasahr (present-day Yan-qi Basin), Kucha, Khotan and Kashgar. They also continued marching northward through the Mountains and took over cities at the northern foot of the eastern Tian-shan Mountains. It was not until 692 and 694 that they were driven back by the Tang-China

¹⁷³ A. J. West: “TEXT وهذا نصارى نساطرة و الحال فيها كذلك و هى التى يصل منها الكافور وهذا
“الصنف ينبع من الخشب وهذه المدينة بها بيعة واحدة على اسم ستنا السيدة العذرى الطاهرة مريم

(Translation ‘Fahṣūr — Here there are several churches, and all the Christians here are Nestorians; and that is the condition of things here. It is from this place that camphor comes, and this variety flows from the timber here. In this town there is one church dedicated to our Lady, the Pure Virgin Mary.’ Abū al-Makārim’s book is usually referred to as *The History of Churches and Monasteries* (تاريخ الكنائس والأديرة).

army under the Empress Wu Ze-tian (Grousset, 2002: 103, 107). In 700, another war erupted between the Tibetans and the Tang-Chinese for control of the Tarim Basin. In 750, Tang General Gao Xian-zhi defeated and expelled the Tibetans (Grousset, 2002: 118-119). In 755, exploiting the armed rebellion led by An Lu-shan and Shi Si-ming, which was aimed at toppling Tang-China, the Tibetans again invaded the Tarim Basin.

The *Book of Tang* records that in 764, after the An Lu-shan Rebellion against Tang-China, Tibet invaded Tang-China along the Hexi Corridor (the corridor west of the Yellow River), and the Uyghurs took advantage of the situation and brought in their troops as well, planning to attack China. The famous Tang Chinese general Guo Zi-yi led troops to resist the Tibetans and achieved great victories. Later, the Tibetan troops withdrew, and the Uyghurs asked for peace talks. Guo Zi-yi rode alone on horseback to the Uyghur barracks to accuse them of treachery. Ashamed, the Uyghur generals accepted Guo Zi-yi's proposal, and the two sides signed a treaty of alliance that re-established the friendly relations between the two states. When it was done, the ranking Uyghur general said happily:

On the day we dispatched our troops, two sorcerers were ordered to come, and they said: "This expedition will be a great one, but do not engage the Tang army in battle. As soon as you see a great man, you should return." Today we led the army and saw you, the duke. And without hesitation, you removed your armor and, astride your horse, you rode out alone to meet us. Who has such heart and such courage! Indeed, we did not fight but saw a great man, just as prophesied by the sorcerers. We were joyful for a while. Zi-yi patted him on his back. The leader rewarded the sorcerers with equal portions of money and silk, and asked all the generals to attack *Tu-bo*. Zi-yi agreed. (Liu, X., 2000: 3542)¹⁷⁴

Five days later, allied Uyghur-Tang troops attacked the Tibetans who were occupying the Hexi Corridor region (present-day Gan-su) and scored a great victory. Before attacking the area that is present-day Ling-tai county in eastern Gansu province, the Uyghur generals ordered the Shamans accompanying them to work their magic: a night-time snowstorm. By morning, the Tibetan troops were so frozen they had lost all fighting strength, and the Uyghur-Tang troops

¹⁷⁴ Liu, *Old Book of Tang*, "Uyghurs": "初发本部来日，将巫师两人来，云：‘此行大安稳，然不与唐家兵马斗，见一大人即归。’今日领兵见令公，令公不为疑，脱去衣甲，单骑相见，谁有此心胆！是不战斗见一大人，巫师有征矣！"欢跃久之。子仪抚其背，首领等分缠头彩以赏巫师，请诸将同击吐蕃，子仪如其约。"

enjoyed an easy victory, thus ending the war (Liu, 2000: 3542). From this Shamanic success, it is clear Uyghurs were not Christians then (that entails the Christian Onguds mentioned in the West-Syriac manuscripts discussed in the last section do not represent Uyghurs as a whole), but only accepted Christianity about two decades later in 781, according to the research in next chapter. Japanese scholar Toru Haneda quoted another scholar (and missionary) stating that the Tang Chinese general Guo Zi-yi was a Christian (Saeki, P. Y., 1928: 54-55).¹⁷⁵

In 790, the Uyghurs who helped suppress that armed rebellion collaborated with Tang China, but in 789 and 790 the allied forces were defeated twice by the Tibetans at Bei-ting (Jimsar). Then in 791, the Uyghurs alone dispatched troops, defeated the Tibetans, recaptured Bei-ting and Xi-zhou (Turpan) and lifted the siege of Yan-qi (Karasahr) and Qiu-ci (Kucha). However, the Tibetans still controlled the southern tip of the Tarim Basin with Khotan as their center (Li, S., 2003: 31-32).¹⁷⁶ Informative materials in Chinese and Tibetan show that it was not until 866 that the Tibetans withdrew from the regions completely (Gao, 1997: 216, 219). The main reason for withdrawal was that the Uyghurs, who had migrated westward to the regions and established their second khanate in exile, banished the Tibetans.

Historically, when the Catholicos Timotheus mentioned that he would install a metropolitan (archbishop) for Tibetans, the Tarim Basin was under Tibetan occupation. Hence, the metropolitan was most probably sent to Khotan. At that time, Buddhism had been in Khotan for centuries among the native Indo-Europeans (mostly Aryan Tocharian with their Chinese-looking facial features according to Chinese court historians) whose language was replaced by Sanskrit. Since a Metropolitan seat was needed, there must have been a remarkable number of Christians in the southern end of the Tarim Basin, in spite of Buddhism being most probably the leading religion in that region. Future archaeological discoveries may prove this point.

Nevertheless, there is another possibility for the Tibetan Metropolitan location. According to research provided in Christoph Baumer's book *The Church of the East*, there is a free-standing

¹⁷⁵ P. Y. Saeki, *The Nestorian Monument in China*: "...The famous general, Kwo Tsze-yih (郭子儀), the prince of Fên-yang (汾陽王) in Shansi, became a believer in the Nestorian religion, and he lived A. D. 697-781..."

¹⁷⁶ As books of Chinese contemporary history do not mention Uyghurs helping the Tang China, put down the armed rebellion of An Lu-shan and Shi Si-ming, so the reference does not mention, why Uyghurs sent troops to help the Tang resist the Tu-bo (Tibetans). The three wars were fought by the allied forces of the Tang and Uyghurs, mainly because the Tu-bo already controlled eastern Xinjiang and western Gansu, cutting off the Gansu Corridor so that one who traveled on the Silk Road would no longer be able to pass through. The four Chinese military towns of strategic importance in the west were isolated without communication with Tang-China.

rock along with some smaller ones in Tanktse, in eastern Ladakh, Kashmir. This area belonged to the Tibetan Kingdom from 644 to 842 and is located on a route (branch) of the (southern) Silk Road. Carved into the rock were 3 large crosses and 8 small ones in Maltese style, one bird similar to a dove and words in Tocharian, Sogdian, Chinese, Arabic and Tibetan. One relatively long line in Sogdian reads: “In the year of 210 (of the Arabs- i. e. 825/826) we sent Caitra of Samarqand, together with the monk Nosfarn, as ambassadors to the Tibeta king”. “Another shorter Sogdian inscription, placed above a cross, may mean *Yisaw*-that is, Jesus”. This archaeological discovery indicates that in 825 or 826 an East-Syriac monk, accompanied by a Sogdian merchant, went to the Tibetan king (Baumer, C., 2006: 175-176). (See Picture 3. 4). The route via eastern Ladakh shows the delegation would have gone to proper Tibet where the king would still reside, also puts his domain having extended to the Tarim Basin at the south.



Figure 3. 4: The free-standing rock in Tanktse, in eastern Ladakh, Kashmir ¹⁷⁷

In 635, the Zhen-guang ninth year of Emperor Li Shi-min, five years before Tang-China took over both the former ancient “Front Section” and “Back Section” of the *Ju-shi* kingdom on both sides of the eastern Tian-shan Mountains, the Persian Sassanid Empire (224-651) was threatened by Islamic Arabs who were called “Da-shi”, a translation of the Persian name “*Tazis*” in Chinese (Zhu, Q. Z., 1998: 63-64). The Persian Empire Church’s missionary Alopen (Olopen)

¹⁷⁷ Source: Christoph Baumer, *The Church of the East*, 2006: 175-176.

came to the Tang China capital Chang-an and was welcomed by Emperor Li Shi-min (Chen, H. Y., 2003: 14; Yue, F., 2003: 33). Christianity thus formally spread to China and was called “*Jing-jiao*,” which in Chinese means “luminous religion,” probably based on the New Testament book of John where Jesus said to the people, “I am the light of the world” (Zhu, Q. Z., 1998: 15). A parallel in Chinese classics *Wei-nan Collection*, is calling Manichaeism “Ming-jiao,” meaning “bright religion.”¹⁷⁸

This enthusiastic reception of Christianity occurred during the most successful Emperor Li Shi-min’s reign (626-649), entitled “Zhen-guan”, a term from the *Classic of Changes* which means “showing the way of truth.”¹⁷⁹ As we have noted, the grandmother of the emperor was an Indo-European Christian. The Golden Years of the Zhen-guan Reign were marked by peace, prosperity, openness and efficient government. Emperor Li Shi-min practiced a policy of religious tolerance, and though he himself enthusiastically patronized Buddhism (Hansen, 2000: 196-197).

During the following emperor Gao-zong’s reign (650-684), *Jing Jiao* Christianity flourished: “*Jing-jiao temples can be seen in every province, and its creed spread in many regions and a hundred cities*”,¹⁸⁰ according to Tang-China’ records (Fang, H., 1936: 864). It became the religion proclaimed throughout the country. During emperor Xuan-zong’s reign (713-755), the dynasty paid closer attention, and this gained more promotion to *Jing-jiao* and it experienced

¹⁷⁸ 陆游《渭南文集》卷第五，“条对状”：“淮南谓之二禳子，两浙谓之牟尼教，江东谓之四果，江西谓之金刚禅，福建谓之明教、揭谛斋之类。名号不一，明教尤盛。至有秀才、吏人、军兵亦相传习。其神号曰明使，又有肉佛、骨佛、血佛等号。白衣乌帽，所在成社。伪经妖像，至于刻版流布。”

(Lu You's *Weinan Collection of Essays*, Volume 5, "Articles and Counterparts": "Huai-nan region calls it [Manichaeism] 'Er-jian-zi', Zhe-jiang region calls it 'Mou-ni' religion, Jiang-dong region calls it 'Si-guo', Jiang-xi region calls it 'Vajra Zen' ('Jin-gang-chan'), Fu-jian province calls it 'Ming-jiao', 'Jie-di-zhai', etc. The names are different, and 'Ming-jiao' is particularly popular. Even scholars, officials, and soldiers also practice it. The god is called Ming-shi (bright angle), and there are also names such as Flesh Buddha, Bone Buddha, and Blood Buddha, etc. They wear white clothes and black hats, and they form communities wherever they go. Their false scriptures and demonic images are even engraved and circulated.")

¹⁷⁹ 《易·系辞下》：“天地之道，贞观者也。” “The Way of Heaven and Earth showing the way of truth.” (*Book of Changes*, Xi-ci II)

¹⁸⁰ “高宗大帝，克恭缙祖，润色真宗；而於诸州各置景寺，仍崇阿罗本为镇国大法主。法流十道，国富元休；寺满百城，家殷景福。”——《大秦景教流行中国碑》

(Emperor Gao-zong, who was able to follow his ancestors with respect and embellish the teachings of Emperor Zhen-zong, established Jing churches in various states and still venerated Alopen as the senior priest and as the guarding [saint] of the country. The Jing religion spread to ten administrative regions, and the country was prosperous; churches filled hundreds of cities, and families were prosperous and blessed by the Jing religion. "——"The Great Qin Jing Religion Spread in China")

unprecedented prosperity. During emperor Dai-zong's reign (763-779), the emperor even celebrated Christmas. This expansion of Christianity experienced its first prosperity in the history of China, though the scale was not to the extent of that of other traditional religions in China such as Buddhism and Daoism (Zhu, Q. Z., 1998: 73).

On January 7 or February 4, 781, the *Jian-zhong* second year of Tang Emperor De-zong, the "*Stele about the Spread of Christianity in China*" (better known as the Nestorian Stele) was erected by the East-Syriac Church Missionary Yazdhozid (Zhu, Q. Z., 1998: 74-75, 223-230). In the summer of the same year, the suspected Christian Tang general Guo Zi-yi died at age of 75 (Liu, X., 2000: 2354). Alphonse Mingana researched the Syriac texts on the stele as well as the Syriac classics and argued the year should be 779 "the very year of the death of the Patriarch Hnanisho" (Mingana, 1925: 333), while Chinese scholars preferred 781, since it corresponded to Tang *Jian-zhong*'s second year. The latter choice seems more accurate.

The Persian Church missionary Jing-jing, whose Syriac name as Adam, gave an oral account of the spread of Christianity in China and the court adviser Lyu Xiu-yan wrote it down. In addition to the Stele's title, there are altogether 1,780 Han Chinese characters in its inscription, of which 1,695 characters comprised the main text. The names of 82 Christians are recorded, some on both sides of the stele and 63 Chinese names of these have corresponding names in Syriac. There are also 19 Syrian names that have no corresponding Chinese names, so they were probably names of missionaries from Persia. About 1623 or 1625, or the *Tian-qi* third or fifth year of the China Ming dynasty, the stele with its preserved clear calligraphy was unearthed in the vicinity of Xi'an city, the capital Chang-an of Tang China (Zhu, Q. Z., 1998: 74-75, 223-230).

The first part of the Stele describes the basic doctrine of its Christianity, including "the wonderful Trinity, the Allah, the true Lord without beginning", creation of heaven, earth and humans, the Christian Lord Messiah as one person of the Trinity, that divine person becoming a man born from a virgin lady in the Roman empire. It records Persians seeing the glory in the night and coming to pay tribute. It mentions the Bible has twenty-seven books and states the Holy Spirit of the Trinity establishing the new religion. It lists seven times for the ritual services per-day and a one-time liturgy on the seventh day, and more. Highlighted in the inscription's second part, the missionary Alopen, from the Roman empire (meaning Eastern Rome), presenting a Bible and icons in the capital of China, and articulating the doctrine.

However, 64 years after the erection of the stele in 845, during the reign of Tang Emperor Wu-zong, the Hui-chang fifth year, influenced by Daoist priest Zhao Gui-zhen's consultation, the emperor issued an imperial edict that all Buddhist temples should be destroyed, and monks and nuns resume secular life. The spearhead was mainly directed at Buddhism and other foreign

religions. Therefore, Christianity, Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism all were also banned. Altogether over 2,000 Christian (monks and clergies) were ordered to resume secular life and foreigners were deported. Christianity began to decline in China. Of course, compared with 265,000 Chinese Buddhists ordered to do the same (Chen, H. Y., 2003: 16; Zhu, Q. Z., 1998: 75; Yue, F., 2003: 33), silencing Christian influence on the public made less impact. While as a major religion, Christianity had not yet realized localization to the extent Buddhism had in China proper. However, only two years later, in 847 the new Emperor Xuan-zong lifted the ban on Buddhism, but not on Christianity, Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism, which were still prohibited (Hensen, 2000: 242).

Because of the royal ban, modern scholars generally believe that Christianity died out in China from 845 on. Considering the legacy of the missionaries sent by the East-Syriac Christian Church, it would not have been so easy for Christianity to step out of Chinese history, especially since it is clear that in East Asia, during this time and after, the Han-Chinese capital city of Chang-an was still a metropolitanate, upheld by the Persian Church court in Baghdad (the former Ctesiphon). For example, the Patriarch Theodose still mentioned the archbishop (Metropolitan) of China being active during his reign (852-858) (Mingana, 1925: 325).

According to the historical book *Collection of Edicts of the Tang Dynasty*, missionary Alopen was originally a Persian who came from afar “to China’s capital to introduce Bible Religion” (Zhu, Q. Z., 1998: 195-196). Another edict says, “Persian Religion of the Bible was introduced from *Da-qin* and it has long been practiced in China”, and it adds that, when its church was built, it was first called the Persian temple, but, after tracing the religion’s origin, it was changed to “*Da-qin*”(Roman Empire) temple (Zhu, Q. Z., 1998: 195-196). The edict that ordered the change was issued in 745, which was September of the Tian-bao fourth year of the Tang China. Tang records also call the Christian temple the *Da-Qin Hu* Temple and refer to clergy as Persian-*Hu* monks, i.e., *Hu* the white people. The Islamic Arabic conquest of Persia started one year after Alopen arrived in Chang-an. For the Turkic influence of Islam in Persia, it only started in the eleventh century and mostly in the Turkish area (Zhu, Q. Z., 1998: 195-196). The impression these missionaries gave to the Tang China seems to be that they represented the Roman Empire’s Christianity, although they came from Persia. At that time in China, Christianity was called “Persian Religion”, “Bible Religion”, and “*Da-qin Jing-gjiao*”. During the Mongol China Yuan dynasty, Christian churches were also called “cross temples” (Zhu, Q. Z., 1998: 199).

Until 1943, only as ten copies of the East Syriac Christian theology translations were unearthed in China, mostly in Dun-huang, Gan-su province. Only one or two copies had been compromised by later alterations. They included “*Da-qin Jing-jiao Doxology, Creed of the Christ,*

Monotheism, Sutra of Hearing the Messiah, The Sutra of Ultimate and Mysterious Happiness, Da-qin Jing-jiao Sutra on the Genesis, Da-qin Jing-jiao Praise of the Holy Son's Transfiguration, and Da-qin Jing-jiao Sutra on the Origin Genesis (Zhu, Q. Z., 1998: 114-115).¹⁸¹ *Sutra of Diptych* recorded thirty five titles of Christian theological books and indicated that there were as many as 530 Theological classics in Syriac, over thirty of which had been translated into Chinese by the missionary Jing-jing (Adam), who gave the oral account of the *Stele* in Chang-an (Zhu, Q. Z., 1998: 271-272). All these works were eighth century theological books and are a testimony to the abundance of Christian theological teachings in Tang China. In addition, those Christian missionaries brought to China the knowledge of advanced medical science, astronomy and machine engineering (Zhou, J. B., 1994: 36).

3.7 Chapter Concluding Remarks

The Western Turkic Khanate, the Tang-China, and the Tibetan period supposedly produced a time (552–866) of stable Christian mission development in the present-day Xinjiang area of China. When the Tang China military ruled Central Asia (640-751), Christianity thrived in the regions. An abundance of classic Tang Chinese Christian texts were discovered in Dun-huang, Gansu, which is next to the Tarim Basin to the west. Such Christian literature proved that, around eastern Tian-shan Mountains, the Chinese westernmost frontier, Christianity remained prevalent continually. Still, there is no doubt that another prevalent religion that flourished in the Tarim Basin, Yan-qi Basin and Turpan Basin in the eastern section of Tian-shan and further east to Dun-huang was Buddhism. Archaeological discoveries in Xinjiang and Dun-huang also testify to this fact, unearthing to this date even more artifacts than Christian ones and more Buddhist references in the manuscripts produced in that time. Still both were major religions, Christianity simply being the newer arrival and Buddhism being the older and more entrenched. My research shows that these two major religions thrived side by side in this age, just as about three centuries ago in the Chinese westernmost frontier, according to Chinese classics.

¹⁸¹ Zhu, Q. Z., *Jing-jiao*. Doxology (大秦景教三威蒙度赞), Creed of the Christ (尊经), Monotheism (一神论), Sutra of Hearing the Messiah (序听迷诗所经), The Sutra of Ultimate and Mysterious Happiness (志玄安乐经), Da-qin Jing-jiao Sutra on the Genesis (大秦景教宣元本经), Da-qin Jing-jiao Praise of the Holy Son's Transfiguration (大秦景教大圣通真归法赞), and Da-qin Jing-jiao Sutra on the Origin Genesis(大秦景教宣元至本经).

Christianity in the Chinese western frontier was not a lone phenomenon. Its expansion was a part of the large picture of mission success, and it was indigenized in Central Asia, North Asia and East Asia. Because of a strategic geopolitical position, the homeland of the ancient *Ju-shi* kingdom became a hub or router for Central Asia and East Asia for Christianity, as the faith spread further into East Asia and North Asia. As I noted in Chapter Two, the Aryan Indo-European *Ju-shi* kingdom originated in the Turpan Basin at the southern foot of the Tian-shan Mountains, then more passively enlarged to the northern side of the Mountains as its Back Section for survival in the midst of the wars that lasted for centuries between the Chinese and the Huns in the regions.

As shown in Chinese classics, Syriac manuscripts, and archaeological discoveries, the age of Turkic Christianity in the Chinese westernmost frontier from 640 to 841, in the land of the former *Ju-shi* kingdom on both sides of the eastern section of the Tian-shan Mountains along the northern branch and southern branch of the Silk Road, was splendid. Based on the Indo-European Christianity described in Chapter Two, East-Syriac Christianity reached eastward to the non-white people groups, including Turks, Chinese, Uyghurs, other Hunnic groups, Tibetans, and other nations, also including white groups. The permeation of Christianity transformed the cultural identity of the multiple racial-ethnic groups, uplifting their civilizations, reshaping their religious identities and histories, and even constructing the geopolitics and ethno-religious course of history along the Silk Road forever.

We may interpret the reasons behind the mission's success and its religious-civilizational meaning from many perspectives. From the perspective of the East-Syriac Christian missionaries in China, as the Xi'an Stele points out, since Christianity is the form of the Divine Truth through Spiritual emanation, the world which embraces it undergoes a good transformation: "Now without divinity, truth cannot become expanded; without truth, divinity cannot become magnified; but with truth and divinity united as the two parts of a signet, the world becomes civilized and enlightened."¹⁸²



¹⁸² “惟道非圣不弘，圣非道不大。道圣符契，天下文明。”

CHAPTER 4 THE AGE OF THE UYGHUR CHRISTIANITY ON THE CHINESE WESTERNMOST FRONTIER: UNDER THE REIGN AND COLONISATION OF THE GAO-CHANG UYGHUR KINGDOM (AD 841—1130)

4.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, Tang China took over the “Back Section” region in AD 657-658 at the northern foot of the eastern Tian-shan Mountains, after taking over the “Front Section” at the Turpan Basin at the southern foot of the eastern Tian-shan Mountains in AD 640. The military control and colonising administration of these regions imposed by Tang China mirrored the map of the Chinese westernmost frontier during Han China, about six centuries previously. In 665, the Tibetans marched north as a new military power playing on the Silk Road stage and took over both “Sections,” fighting China for a century with gains and losses until being expelled permanently from the middle and eastern Tian-shan in 791 and 821 by China’s ally, the Uyghurs. As a result, the Uyghurs stepped into the Chinese westernmost regions “legitimately”, and officially migrated there in 841 after their khanate was invaded and destroyed, further replicating the map traced by of their ancestors, the Huns, and even moving beyond the limits of that map soon after.

While the spirit of the geo-political competitive legacy continues to construct the history of these regions further, so too does the spirit of the geo-religious legacy of East Syriac Christianity. As a result of several ground-breaking missions, first with the white Indo-Europeans in the first age (AD386-640), then in the following age (640-841) among the mixed blood Hu, the Hunnified Turks (half-white), and then the non-white Chinese and Tibetans, East-Syriac Christianity stepped into the age of Uyghur Christianity. Instead of Hunnified white groups, such as Hephthalites, Kyrgyz and Tatars, or Hunnified half-white groups such as Turks, Khitans, and *Xian-bei* Wei people, Uyghurs were direct descendants of the Tlugh (*te-le*, *tie-le*) who were of the ancient Huns.

A common understanding among mainstream scholars about the Christianity among the Gao-chang (Kocho) Uyghurs is well-represented by Dickens and Zieme: “The Uyghurs, who had fled south after the collapse of their empire based in Mongolia, were originally Manichaeans but gradually converted to Buddhism. There was also a minority Christian community amongst them which adhered to the Church of the East, whose presence in the area only ceased with the end of Mongol rule in the late 14th century.” (Kiraz, 2012: 347) Additionally, the research and summary of Sims-Williams reflects an insightful conclusion (confirming one of my arguments in this chapter

and the next) that, “Although Sogdian was likely the lingua franca of the early Christian community, it is clear that by the Mongol era (13th–14th centuries), most Christians were Uyghur native speakers.” (Kiraz, G. A., 2012: 349)

By adopting an historical anthropology framework, my research created a five-dimensional system of geography, history, ethnicity, religion, and civilization, in constructing an identity model as a progressive organism to explore the historical changes and transformation of the Uyghur ethnic identity, especially in its relation to East Syriac Christianity. The paradigm sheds much-needed light on racial-ethnic diversity, as well as on the social and national backgrounds mixed in these regions. This model serves as a key to correct the long-time confusion about the religious landscape around the eastern Tian-shan Mountains, the Chinese westernmost frontier. In addition, society as a larger picture provides an important platform for better assembling the puzzle pieces of religions in the regions, where Christianity, Buddhism, and Manichaeism coexisted in this age from 841, when Uyghurs migrated here and started systematic colonisation, to 1130, when the Khitans were conquered and the Uyghurs had basically accomplished Uyghurisation.

4.2 Chapter thesis

What is puzzling is, that, to date no account has yet been found in Chinese historical materials and the Turkic-Uyghur language inscriptions on the steles from the Mongolian steppes of the spread of Christianity among the Turks and Uyghurs of the steppes. Providentially, the Syriac historical materials make up for this lack to a good degree. Nevertheless, in AD 781, according to textual, historical, linguistic, and archaeological analyses based on circumstantial evidence (direct evidence being still lacking), the East-Syriac Church court ordained a metropolitan possibly for the Uyghurs.

Understandably, throughout more than a century, studies on the ancient religions of the Turpan Basin, Yan-qi Basin and the Tarim Basin of Central Asia in northwest China have heavily relied on historical journals and collections of ancient transcripts discovered in the Turpan Basin (and Dun-huang) early last century to conclude that the Uyghurs, after migrating from the modern-day Mongol Steppes to the “Western Regions” around the Tian-shan Mountains to become the Kocho Uyghurs in the mid-ninth century, initially remained Manicheans, then converted to Buddhism, with Christianity as a minority religion among them.

I argue, however, that overlooked evidence reveals that the Kocho Uyghurs were mostly Christians who converted from Manichaeism after a period of time and were never officially Buddhists. Only a handful may have truly accepted Buddhism. Buddhism was still mainly prevalent among the native Indo-Europeans, who had been Uyghurized in a speedy way (Shan, 2021: 26). The present chapter reiterates the fact that archaeological discoveries from recent years in the Turpan basin and present-day Qi-tai and Jimsar have provided enough information to understand Uyghur Christianity better after these Uyghurs' immigration in 841.

Theorizing Christianity as prevalent among the Uyghurs after they moved west to the former Chinese westernmost frontier is confirmed by a few Chinese and Syriac historical materials and strong archaeological discoveries. In partial agreement with Grousset, I suggest that, after the Uyghur Christians settled in Turpan, Yan-qi (Karasahr) and Bei-ting (Jimsar), they assimilated into the local Indo-European Christian community and, through sharing the attributes of Christianity, melded their Uyghur steppes civilization with the far more advanced native Tocharian-Sogdian civilization. They eventually dissolved the Tocharian civilization through colonisation and Uyghurisation, transforming the Gao-chang Uyghur kingdom civilization with its strong Christian attributes and forming from it a Uyghur language-oriented Christianity, which ultimately shone brilliantly during the era of the Mongols, as we will discuss in our next chapter (Grousset, 2002: 125-126).

Abstract of the Chapter

In AD 841, after the Uyghurs fled westward to the eastern part of the Tian-shan Mountains, they established a new Uyghur Khanate, which was soon called a kingdom, known in history as the Gao-chang Uyghur Khanate or Kingdom. In the first century or so, two major historic constructions were accomplished in these regions through powerful colonization and imposed assimilation by Uyghurs.

First, the kingdom's territory expanded along the southern foot of the Tian-shan Mountains, from the Yan-qi Basin, Turpan Basin, westward to the Pamir Plateau, eventually coming to occupy the entire Tarim Basin. Simultaneously, it also expanded along the northern foot of the Tian-shan Mountains, from Kumul and the Barkol Lake area, westward to the Ili River valley, that is, the mountain bifurcation area between the western Tian-shan and northern Tian-shan, that compromised the Ili River Valley. The Uyghurs ruled multi-racial-ethnic nations and groups within their territory, and the main residents were still the indigenous Indo-European peoples, primarily the Tocharian Aryan type and Sogdian Scythian type. In addition, the Uyghurs in *Sha-zhou* (*Dun-huang*), *Gan-zhou* (*Zhang-ye*), and the *He-luo-chuan* River (*Kara-Khoto*, *Hei-shui*) areas, who

were the eastern neighbours of the Gao-chang Uyghurs, claimed allegiance to the Gao-chang Uyghur Khanate, even though they had their own Khans and were independent and autonomous.

Second, the local Indo-European Christianity in the regions around the eastern Tian-shan range (i.e., the former Chinese westernmost frontier) was first Sogdianized and then Uyghurized. This Uyghurisation was mainly achieved through the governmental promotion of the official Uyghur language. Before the arrival of the Uyghurs, the local Indo-European Christianity in the southern side of the Tian-shan Mountains mainly of the Tocharian branch, including local Manchurian and Chinese Christianity, and, in the northern side of Tian-shan Mountains, mainly of the Scythian branch, including Hephthalite and Turkic Christianity. Therefore, the highly localized Christianity that had existed in the regions for about four or five centuries, under the influence of the colonial Uyghur regime, formed a multi-racial-ethnic Christian community with its East Syriac religious language as a sacred canopy, the dominant Uyghur language as a yurt roof, the Sogdian language as the ground, and the Tocharian language and other minor languages as the vessels in the Christian social temple of the Kocho Uyghur Kingdom.

4.3 The General Historical Background of the Uyghurs

This section will begin with an examination and correction of extant historical understandings.

The ancestral home of the Uyghurs was the East Asian steppes, better known as the Mongolian steppes. The historical and geographic identity of the mainline Uyghurs went through four major stages: 1) proto-Uyghurs before AD 744, 2) Orkhon Khanate Uyghurs (748-841), 3) migrated Uyghurs (841-866), and 4) Kocho-Uyghurs (841-1130). Migrated Uyghurs consisted of two branches, southward and westward branches, with the latter dividing into three sub-groups: the Hexi Corridor Uyghurs, the Kocho Uyghurs, and the Kara-Khanid Uyghurs. Of all the Uyghur groups, only the Kocho-Uyghurs living in the regions around the eastern Tian-shan Mountain range were able to maintain their Uyghur identity before they were Islamified and Turkified centuries later. They were also the ones who preserved their culture and elevated civilisations the longest and the ones who became the comparatively more authentic Uyghurs of present-day Xinjiang, China.

These Uyghurs are descendants of what the ancient Chinese called the *Xiong-nu* people. Ancient Chinese historians documented the lives of the *Xiong-nu*, long a troublesome neighbour, whose history can be traced back to as early as 1200 BC. It is commonly agreed that the earliest records about the Huns are in ancient Chinese historical sources. In non-Chinese historical

records, the Romans and Indians called the *Xiong-nu* “Huns”, or also “Hunni” or “Huna” (Grousset, 2002: 19), all titles likely derived from the phonetic translation of the same name. The tenth century Chinese historical record *Old Book of Tang* clearly explains the origins of the Uyghur racial-ethnic identity, their ancestors were the Huns (*Xiong-nu*), later the *Tie-le* and *Te-le* (I recommend a translation of “Tlugh”¹⁸³). They were originally from the steppes on the northern side of the Great Wall, the later Mongolian steppes, but in 841, after the destruction of their khanate, they went into exile and resettled in present-day Xinjiang (Liu, X., 2000: 3535).¹⁸⁴

The following can basically be proved by putting together the information from ancient Chinese historical sources: the earliest Huns originated from Northeast Asia, or, the region of the Greater Khingan Range, the Ussuri River and the lower Amur River (*Hei-long-jiang* River), just as the later groups who were also of Northeast Asian ethnicity—the *Rou-ran* (earlier Jurchens), the Khitans, the *Jin* (Jurchens), the Mongols, and Manchus (later *Jin*-Jurchens)—all of whom originated from this same area. In other words, none of these ethnic groups were the earliest inhabitants of the Mongolian steppes, where proto-Siberian whites dominated.

The pronunciation of the name “Uyghur” in the Uyghur language is approximately “*wei gu er*” or “*wei hu er*” to a Chinese ear, and today the name means “unity” or “solidarity”; the original

¹⁸³ According to the *Old Book of Tang* and *New Book of Tang*, Ye-hu, the eldest son of the Uyghur khan Moyan Chor, came to the aid of Tang-China in 756, launching a joint military operation with the famous general Guo Ziyi to crush the An Lu-shan Rebellion. In 758, the Uyghur prince “gu-chuo-te-le” led troops to the aid of the Tang dynasty, again in a joint military operation with General Guo. The seventh line of the inscription on the eastern face of the Uyghur Moyan Chor stele says, in the first-person voice of his father Moyan Chor, “I gave my two sons the titles Yabghu and Shad.” And the inscription on the north face of the Uyghur Terkin stele says in the third line, “I, the Tangri Khan, and my sons Bilga Tarqan and Qutlugh Bilga Yabghu”. ¹⁸³ (Note that he uses the princes’ titles here rather than their names.) Putting together the information in the historical materials in the two languages, it’s clear that the same prince is being referred to, that is, the eldest son of Moyan Chor, who twice led troops to the aid of Tang-China, and on both occasions was accompanied by Chancellor and General Di-de. The “-tlugh” in the prince’s name in Chinese is also transliterated “Te-le”, the same phonetic translation as the name of the ethnic group. This likely is not a coincidence. I, therefore, suggest that the English phonetic translation of the “Te-le” people’s name be “Tlugh”.

¹⁸⁴ Liu Xu, *Old Book of Tang*, “Uyghurs”: “回纥，其先匈奴之裔也。在后魏时，号铁勒部落。其象微小，其俗骁强，依托高车，臣属突厥，近谓之特勒。……自突厥有国，东西征讨，皆资其用，以制北荒。……特勒始有仆骨、同罗、回纥、拔野古、覆罗步，号俟斤，后称回纥焉。”

(The Uyghur tribe is a descendant of the Xiong-nu [Huns]. During the time of the Northern Wei kingdom, they were called the Tie-le tribe. They were small in image, but brave and strong in customs. They relied on the Gao-che ethnic group [high chariots] and were subordinate to the Turks. Recently, they were called the Tele tribe. ... Since the Turks established their own country, they have used the Uyghurs to conquer the east and west to control the northern wilderness. ... The Tele tribe originally included Pu-gu, Tong-luo, Uyghurs, Ba-ye-gu, and Fu-luo-bu, and they were called Shijin [Sericon]. Later, they were called Uyghurs.)

meaning being “to join together and help” (Thackston, W. M., 1998: 74), or possibly just a name without specific meaning. In China’s historical records, Uyghurs and their ancestors were called by various names in Chinese. In the Chinese court records of various dynasties, they were called *Xian-yun* in the Chinese Zhou dynasty (1046-256 BC), *Xiong-nu* in the Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), *Tie-le* in the Wei dynasty (386-550), and *Te-le* in the Sui dynasty (581-619). The use of the name Uyghur began in the Tang dynasty (618-907), when it was rendered as *Hui-he* and *Hui-gu* (Liu, X., 2000: 3535), and as *Wei-wu* and *Wei-wu-er* in the Mongol Empire era (1206-1250). Beginning in 1450, at the height of the forcible imposition of Islam (in present-day Xinjiang) by the Mongolian Eastern Chagatai Khanate, the use of the name “Uyghur” ceased for nearly 500 years (Rudelson, J. J., 1997: 5).

It was not until the 1920s that use of the name “Uyghur” resumed, first in 1921 at the Soviet Communist-sponsored (Millward, J. A., 2007: 208) meeting in the Uzbek capital of Tashkent, followed in 1925 in the publications in Zhetysu (Semireche in the Soviet Union, *Qi-he* or Seven-Rivers region in Chinese) and Moscow (Brophy, D. J., 2016: 220, 222). In 1934 (Rudelson, 1997: 7, 149) the use of the name “Uyghur” was officially resumed in Xinjiang province, under the Soviet-influenced Chinese government of Sheng Shi-cai, to differentiate the Uyghurs from other Turkic-speaking ethnic groups (Millward, J. A., 2007: 208; Rudelson, 1997: 149). Prior to this time, the Uyghurs were generally referred to in English with the understandable misnomer of “Turks”, to distinguish them from the Kazakhs, the Kyrgyzs and other ethnic groups, while the Han-Chinese called the Uyghurs “Turbaned Head” (*Chan-tou*, means “wrapped head”) (Millward, J. A., 2007: 208). Before 1934, the Uyghurs called themselves “Turk” or “Turki” (Millward, J. A., 2007: 209), “Muslim”, or names derived from specific locales (Brophy, D. J., 2016: 141), such as Kashgaris (Altishahri Uyghur), Taranchis (Jungharian Uyghur) (Brophy, D. J., 2016: 179, 199.), or Turpanese¹⁸⁵ (Kocho-Uyghur).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, after the Second Turkic Khanate was overthrown in 742 by its vassal nations—Basmyl, Uyghur, and Karluk, in 744-745 the Uyghur and Karluk nations defeated Basmyl, establishing the Uyghur Khanate and winning the recognition of Tang China (Ou-yang, 2000: 4609).¹⁸⁶ Thus, the nomadic Uyghurs lived in the regions of the Selenga and

¹⁸⁵ I have come up with this new term to recognize the Turpan-Urumqi-Hami Uyghurs as descendants of the ancient Gao-chang (Kocho) Khanate Uyghurs.

¹⁸⁶ Ou-yang Xiu & Qi Song, *New Book of Tang*, “Turks II”: “天宝初 [742]，其大部回纥、葛逻禄、拔悉蜜并起攻叶护，杀之，尊拔悉蜜之长为颉跌伊施可汗，于是回纥、葛逻禄自为左右叶护，亦遣使者来

Orkhon rivers after being ruled by the eastern Turks for fifty years. Eventually they supplanted the second Turkic Khanate, according to the Moyan Chor inscription (often referred to as the Shine-usu Inscription) erected in about 759 (Geng, S. M., 2005: 193-194), and establishing the Uyghur Khanate, also known as the Orkhon Uyghur Khanate, on the present-day Mongolian steppes, occupying the same territory of their ancient ancestor Huns (Ou-yang, 2000: 4651).¹⁸⁷ The Uyghurs were aided in this process by the Karluks (*Ge-luo-lu*) from the south of the Altai Mountains and the Emil River (or Emin River; in Xinjiang's Tarbagatay or *Ta-cheng* Basin), later migrated to the Ili River basin and Lake Balkhash. They were assisted also by the Basmyls (*Ba-xi-mi*) from the northern side of the eastern Tian-shan Mountains with their capital at Bei-ting (Jimsar) (Liu, X., 2000, 3519).¹⁸⁸ Soon after, however, the Uyghurs and Karluks defeated the Basmyls.

告。……三载 [744]，拔悉蜜等杀乌苏米施，传首京师，献太庙。……而回纥、葛逻禄杀拔悉蜜可汗，奉回纥骨力裴罗定其国，是为骨咄禄毘伽阙可汗。明年 [745]，杀白眉可汗，传首献。”

(At the beginning of the Tian-bao period [AD 742], most of the Uyghur, Karluk and Basmyl tribes rose up together to attack Yehu and killed him. They honored the leader of Basmyl as Jie-di-yi-shi Khan. Then the Uyghurs and Karluk tribes became the left and right Yabghu and sent messengers to report [to the Chinese court]. ... In the third year [744], Basmyland others killed Usumish and sent his head to the capital to offer as a sacrifice to the imperial temple. ... Then the Uyghur and Karluk tribes killed Basmyl Khan and supported the Uyghur leader Gu-li Pe-iluo to rule their khanate. He was named Kutlugh Bilge Khan. The next year [745], they killed Kulun Beg Khan and sent his head as a gift.)

¹⁸⁷ Ou-yang Xiu & Qi Song, *New Book of Tang*, “Uyghurs I”: “明年，裴罗又攻杀突厥白眉可汗，遣顿啜罗达干来上功，拜裴罗左骁卫员外大将军，斥地愈广，东极室韦，西金山，南控大漠，尽得古匈奴地。裴罗死，子磨延啜立，号葛勒可汗，剽悍善用兵，岁遣使者入朝。”

(The next year, Pei Luo attacked and killed the Kulun Beg Khan of the Turks and sent Dun-chuo-luo Tarken Tarkhan [general] to report his achievements. Pei Luo was appointed General of the Left Guard, and he conquered more territory, reaching the easternmost part of Shi-wei, the western part of the Golden Mountains, and the southern part of the desert, taking over all the ancient Xiong-nu [Huns] territory. After Pei Luo died, his son Mo-yan-chuo [Bayanchur] ascended the throne and was called Gelei Khan. He was brave and good at using troops, and he sent envoys to the [Chinese] court every year.)

¹⁸⁸ Liu Xu, *Old Book of Tang*, Turks I: “八年冬，御史大夫王峻俊为朔方大总管，奏请西征拔悉密，东发奚、契丹两蕃，期以明年秋初，引朔方兵数道俱入，掩突厥衙帐于稽落河上。小杀闻之，大恐。噉欲谷曰：拔悉密今在北庭，与两蕃东、西相去极远，势必不合。”

(In the winter of the eighth year, Imperial Minster Wang Jun-jun was appointed as the General Manager of Shuo-fang [Chinese northern frontier]. He requested to march west to attack Basimi and east to attack the Xi [Tatabi] and Khitan tribes. He planned to lead Shuo-fang troops from several routes to attack the Turkic court camp on the Ji-luo River in the early autumn of the next year. When Xiao-sha (the khan) heard about it, he was terrified. Tun-yu-gu said: “Basimi is now in Beiting, which is very far away from the two tribes in the east and west. They will definitely not cooperate [against Tang China].”)

The official reigning name of the Uyghur Khanate was Kul Bilga, and its territory extended west to the Altai mountains and east to the Khingan Range. The following year, the Tang-China emperor Xuan-zong conferred with the Uyghur khan Boyla from the Yaghlaqar clan, the core clan of the Uyghur khanate, whose throne title was Qutlugh Kul Bilga Khan, the title of *Huai-ren* Khan (Li, S., 2003: 36), acknowledging the new khanate as China's neighbor to the north. This neighbor would be a source both of aid and of trouble in the following century. The Uyghur Khanate dominated the East Asian steppes for a century, coinciding with the golden age of Chinese history: The Tang dynasty. In terms of civilizational advancement and national power, China far surpassed all others in East Asia. The two most militarily powerful nations, the Uyghur khanate and Tang-China, established close but complex diplomatic relations, surprisingly without any wars. In the process, the relationship between the Uyghurs and the Tang Chinese was sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile, mainly guided by political, economic and even religious interests.

During a century of their khanate, the Uyghurs built upon the civilizational foundation they inherited from the Eastern Turkic Khanate and learned from the civilizations of China and the Sogdians of Central Asia. According to a stele erected in 759, praising the achievements of the second khan, Yaghlaqar Moyan Chor (Moyanchur) Khan, and written in the first person, this Uyghur khan was keen to build palaces. The inscription on this stele, known as the Shine-usu Inscription or Moyan Chor Inscription, reads: "I had people build a palace, people put up palace walls." (Geng, 2005: 198). This khan built palaces in four different locations and in one city which is mentioned specifically on the Inscription: "I had the Sogdian [*Su-te*] and the Tabghach¹⁸⁹ [Tang Chinese] build a luxurious city on the Selenga River" (Geng, S. M., 2005: 203). The first city on the grasslands was reportedly built by the *Rou-ran* (Jurchen) people, situated in the Orkhon River valley. The capital city of Kara Balghasun (meaning "big tiger", also called Ordubaligh, meaning "royal city"), built by the Uyghur khanate in 751, was situated in a river valley on the upper reaches of the Orkhon River. Beginning in 759/761, or 762/763 (Clark, L., 1997: 115, 86), it became the headquarters of Manichaeism in East Asia. Meanwhile, East-Syriac Christianity meanwhile had already spread into Tang-China before this time (635-845), during, and after this time, for a while even gaining the upper hand in the court at Chang'an (the present-day city of Xi'an, famous for its Terracotta Warriors).

In the Uyghur Khanate were many Sogdians (many of whom were Manichaean) who profoundly influenced the politics of the khanate. This was also the principal way in which the Sogdian civilization, including Sogdian Manichaeism and Christianity influenced the Uyghurs. In

¹⁸⁹ Chinese phonetic translation is *Tao-hua-shi* (桃花石).

the next section, we will explore Sogdian and Uyghur Christianity in the Turpan Basin, reflected by archeologically discovered Christian manuscripts. Many Uyghurs also went to study in Tang-China and took up government posts there, becoming conversant with Tang Chinese civilization. For example, the Kara Balghasun Inscription, on a stele erected in 814 and discovered in the ruins of the capital of the Uyghur Khanate in 1889 by a Russian explorer, is written in three languages: Uyghur, Chinese and Sogdian.

The Uyghur Khanate's powerful military profoundly impacted the geopolitics of East Asia. We know from the fragmentary records of the Shine-usu Inscription, the Tez Inscription (761-762), and the Terkhin Inscription (756-757) and by combing through their translations, probably between 754-755, the Yaghlaqar Moyan Chor Khan (Chinese title: *Ying-wu* khan) led the Uyghurs on a westward expedition in the Junggar (Dzungarian or Zungarian) Basin, north of the Tian-shan mountain range. There, the Uyghurs defeated their former allies along the northern branch of the Silk Road at the territory of "the Basmyls [inhabiting] the environs of Beshbalik in the eastern Tianshan" region and the Karluks "west of the Basmyls and south of the Altay, bordering on the territory of the Yagma people", which resulted in the Karluks fleeing west to the Zhetysu region, including Lake Balkhash (Clark, 1997: 107, 109-110), while the whereabouts of the Basmyls after their defeat is unknown. In 755-756, the khan sent his two sons, one of whom would later be the Tengri Bogu Khan (Chinese title: *Ying-yi* khan), to attack the cities of the Tarim Basin at the foot of the south side of the Tian-shan mountain range—that is, the area on the southern branch of the Silk Road—attacking the Yagmas, the Tang Chinese, and the Sogdians (Clark, 1997: 112-113). As a result, the Uyghurs controlled the use of the Silk Road and tax collection around the central-eastern Tian-shan regions. In 755, when the An Lu-shan Rebellion (or the An-Shi Rebellion as it is called in Chinese history) erupted in Tang-China, the Uyghurs swiftly sent its army and helped the Tang court to squash the uprising successfully in the first round.

In politics and diplomacy, Tang-China also inherited and carried on the effective strategy of China's Han dynasty by using the political marriages of its royal princesses to ally with and win the loyalty of the Uyghurs. This Tang-China strategy was employed not just with the Uyghurs but also with the Tibetans. Beginning in the mid-seventh century until the 820s, the Uyghur Khanate and the Kingdom of Tibet (*Tu-bo*) were frequently at war, fighting over the part of the Silk Road cities around the eastern part of the Tian-shan mountain range, with the Uyghurs sometimes carrying out military attacks against the Tibetans on behalf of Tang-China. According to the *Old Book of Tang*, in 764 (the second year of *Guang-de* reign), the allied troops of the Uyghurs and Tang-China defeated the Tibetans, and in 791 (the seventh year of the *Zhen-yuan* reign), Uyghur troops alone defeated the Tibetans and the Karluks, sending many captives to the Chinese court

in Chang'an (Liu, X., 2000: 3542, 3545).¹⁹⁰ In 821 (the first year of the *Chang-qing* reign), the new Uyghur khan married a Tang Chinese princess Tai-he, and, as an expression of gratitude and loyalty, the khan, on his own initiative, sent his troops to attack the Tibetans in the Bei-ting (Beshbalik, present-day Jimsar) region and in the Turpan (An-xi) Basin as a way to welcome the Tang princess (Liu, X., 2000: 3542, 3546).¹⁹¹ Over the course of the Tang dynasty, three princesses were married off to Uyghur khans.

Concerning the date of the fall of the Uyghur Khanate, the common belief among scholars that the Uyghur khanate fell in 840, but adopting this specific year is actually an error. According to the *Old Book of Tang*, "In the first year [of the reign of Emperor *Wu-zong*], the *Xia-ga-si* [Khyagas] defeated the *Hui-gu*, capturing Princess Tai-he". (Liu, X., 2000: 3547)¹⁹² This is a reference to the killing of the Uyghur khan by the descendants of the Tocharian Wu-sun people, the nomadic Khyagas (*Xia-ga-si*, also known as Kyrgyz), from northwest in the Siberia along the Yenisei River in the first year of the Tang dynasty *Hui-chang* reign (841). Scholars might be confused with when "the first year [of the reign of Emperor *Wu-zong*]" was. Tang emperor *Wu-zong* Li Yan ascended the throne in 840, but that official court year was still the fifth year of the *Kai-cheng* reign of the previous emperor, *Wen-zong* Li Ang, while the official opening year of his *Hui-chang* *Wu-zong* reign would have been the following year: 841. Therefore, this is the year when Tang princess Tai-he captured by the Kyrgyz, who had been married for many years to the Uyghur khan, and the overthrow of the Uyghur khanate that had dominated the Mongolian

¹⁹⁰ Liu Xu, *Old Book of Tang*, "Uyghurs": "广德二年秋, ...又五日, 朔方先锋兵马使、开府、南阳郡王白元光与回纥兵马合于泾州灵台县西五十里赤山岭, 共破吐蕃等十余万众, 斩首五万余级, 生擒一万余人, 驼马牛羊凡百里相继, 不可胜纪, 收得蕃落五千余人。.....[贞元]七年八月, 回纥遣使献败吐蕃、葛禄于北庭所捷及其俘畜。"

(In the autumn of the second year of the Guang-de reign, ... and on the fifth day, Bai Yuan-guang, the vanguard of the Shuo-fang army, the chief minister, and the Prince of Nan-yang, joined the Uyghur army at Chi-shan Ridge, 50 Chinese miles west of Ling-tai County, Jing Prefecture, and defeated more than 100,000 Tubo [Tibetans] and other people, beheaded more than 50,000 people, captured more than 10,000 people alive, and brought camels, horses, cattle and sheep one after another for hundreds of Chinese miles, too numerous to count, and recruited more than 5,000 people from the tribes. ... In the eighth month of the seventh year of [Zhen-yuan], the Uyghurs sent an envoy to offer the victory over Tubo and Karluks in Beiting, as well as the captives and livestock.)

¹⁹¹ Liu Xu, *Old Book of Tang*, "Uyghurs": "长庆元年.....回鹘奏: "以一万骑出北庭, 一万骑出安西, 拓吐蕃以迎太和公主归国。"

(In the first year of Chang-qing... the Uyghurs reported: "We have sent 10,000 cavalymen out of Bei-ting [the northern court] and 10,000 cavalymen out of An-xi to deconstruct Tibet for welcoming Princess Taihe to the Uyghur Khanate.)

¹⁹² Liu Xu, *Old Book of Tang*, "Uyghurs": "初, 黠戛斯破回鹘, 得太和公主。"

steppes for a century.

The *New Book of Tang* also corroborates the fall of the Uyghur empire as happening shortly after the Tang emperor *Wu-zong* ascended the throne (it uses the term *e'er*, which means “very soon”) (Ou-yang, 2000: 4662),¹⁹³ but it does not specify whether it was that same year of his ascendance or the following year. In the *Old History of the Five Dynasties*, however, this historical event is clearly described as happening in the first year of *Hui-chang*: “In the first year of *Hui-chang*, its kingdom was invaded by the *Xia-ga-si*, the tribes created disturbances, and moved their encampments to between *Tian-de* and *Zhen-wu*” (Xue, J. Z., 2000: 1276-1277).¹⁹⁴ The Great Persecution against foreign-religions took place in the fifth year of the *Hui-chang* reign, that is, in 845 as commonly agreed and not in 844, which means 840 was not the first year of the *Hui-chang* reign. Therefore, **the more accurate conclusion is that 841** should be the correct year for the fall of the Uyghur Khanate.

The *Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance* states, “Since the invasion and decline that began in the fourth year of the *Kai-cheng* reign [839], Uyghurs from many tribes have been moving west”. (Lyu, S. M., 2009: 318) This makes clear that Uyghurs were already moving west in 839, but the large-scale official westward migration did not formally begin until after the fall of the khanate in 841. After their khanate fell, the Uyghurs were forced to migrate south and west. According to the *Old Book of Tang*, “The Uyghur Chancellor *Sa-Zhi* brought six men, that is, his nephew *Pang Te-qin* and his five sons, including *Nan-lu* and *E-fen*, and led 15 tribes that fled west to *Ge-luo-lu*, one branch headed for *Tu-bo*, another branch for *An-xi*. There were also 13 tribes that were close to the khan court and had accepted *Wu-jie* the *Te-qin* as their khan; they headed south and became subjects of the Han-Chinese”. (Liu, X., 2000: 3547) ¹⁹⁵ The *Ge-luo-lu*

¹⁹³ Ibid.: “武宗即位，以嗣泽王溶临告，乃知其国乱。俄而渠长句录莫贺与黠戛斯合骑十万攻回鹘城，杀可汗，诛掘罗勿，焚其牙，诸部溃其相駸职与庞特勒十五部奔葛逻禄，残众入吐蕃、安西。”

(When [Tang] *Wu-zong* ascended the throne, he called *Si-ze* Prince *Rong* to report to him, and then he knew that the khanate was in chaos. Very soon, the [Uyghur] brigadier general *Ju-lu-mo-he* [led] the *Khyagas*. With a combined cavalry of 100,000, they attacked the [capital] city of the Uyghurs, killed the Khan, executed the [minister] *Jue-luo-wu*, burned their court, and all the Uyghur tribes were defeated. The chancellor, *Zhuo-zhi* and *Pang Te-le* [*Te-qin*] led the fifteen Uyghur tribes to flee to the *Karluks*, and the remaining people entered *Tubo* [Tibet] and *Anxi*.)

¹⁹⁴ Xue Ju-zheng, *Old History of the Five Dynasties*, “No. 2 Chronicle of Foreign Nations”: “会昌初，其国为黠戛斯所侵，部族扰乱，乃移帐至天德、振武间。”

¹⁹⁵ Liu Xu, *Old Book of Tang*, “Uyghurs”: “有回鹘相駸职者，拥外甥庞特勒及男鹿并遏粉等兄弟五人、一十五部西奔葛逻禄，一支投吐蕃，一支投安西，又有近可汗牙十三部，以特勒乌介为可汗，南来附汉。”

are the Karluks; the *Tu-bo* are the Tibetans; *An-xi* means Protectorate General to Pacify the West; *Te-qin*, i.e. “Tegin” means commander or prince.

Of these, the southbound Uyghurs entered the territory of Tang-China, settling down in the area of present-day Shanxi province, mostly in the Da-tong Basin at the foot of the Tai-hang Mountains. Other than a small group that stayed behind in the *Gan-zhou* (Zhang-ye) in Gansu province and the Khara-Khoto area in western Inner Mongolia, the rest of the 15 Uyghur tribes, comprised of about 100 thousand people who made up the main Uyghur force, headed west under the leadership of *Pang-le* the *Tegin*, coming to the area of Beshbalik, including entering *Bei-ting* (Jimsar) and Gu-cheng (Qi-tai) at the northern foot of the Tian-shan, and invading the *Gao-chang* in the Turpan Basin and Yan-qi at the southern foot (Li, S., 2003: 45). Thus, the area around the eastern Tian-shan mountain range, the hub of the Silk Road which used to be known as the Back and Front Sections of the Tocharian *Ju-shi* kingdom, and the former westernmost frontier of Tang China, was carried into the age of Uyghurs and Uyghurisation.

In 842 and 843, ten of the thirteen tribes that followed the 14th Uyghur khan Uge migrated south, surrendered to and became part of Tang-China, while two tribes “sought shelter west with the Tibetans”, meaning they joined the *Gan-zhou* Uyghurs. The last tribe sought shelter with the great *Shi-wei* people in the northeastern steppes (Li, S., 2003: 42-43).¹⁹⁶ Uge Khan was assassinated by Uyghur aristocrats. According to the *Old Book of Tang*, “The people led by Uge Khan surrendered in the first year of the *Da-zhong* reign [847] in the *You-zhou* region [Beijing area]. Aimless wandering, starvation and freezing temperatures had reduced the 100 thousand people to fewer than 3,000” (Liu, X., 2000: 3548).¹⁹⁷ In the spring of the second year of the *Da-zhong* reign, the last of the khans, En-yan Khan, and “nine others rode west on horseback” in the

¹⁹⁶ Liu Xu, *Old Book of Tang*, “Uyghurs”: Note that the *OBoT* says 13 tribes followed Uge Khan, but its list of all the tribes totals 14, including two tribes that sought shelter with the *Shi-wei*. Therefore, if 13 is accurate for the total number of tribes, then the number of tribes that sought shelter with the *Shi-wei* might have only been one tribe, not two.

¹⁹⁷ Liu Xu, *Old Book of Tang*, “Uyghurs”: “会昌三年，回鹘尚书仆固绛到幽州，约以太和公主归幽州，乌介去幽州界八十里下营，其亲信骨肉及摩尼志净等四人已先入振武军。……乌介部众至大中元年诣幽州降，留者漂流饿冻，众十万，所存止三千已下。”

(In the third year of Hui-chang, the Uyghur Shang-shu [minister] Pu-gu-yi arrived in You-zhou and agreed to take Princess Tai-he back to You-zhou. Uge set up camp 80 miles from the border of You-zhou. His close relatives and four people including the Manichean Zhi-jing had already joined the Zhen-wu Army. ... The people led by Uge Khan surrendered in the first year of the Da-zhong reign [847] in the You-zhou region [Beijing area]. Aimless wandering, starvation and freezing temperatures had reduced the 100 thousand people to fewer than 3,000.)

night and disappeared in history. The Khyagas captured all the remnants of the Uyghurs living with the *Shi-wei* as refugees and brought them back to the desert at the north (Liu, X., 2000: 3548).¹⁹⁸

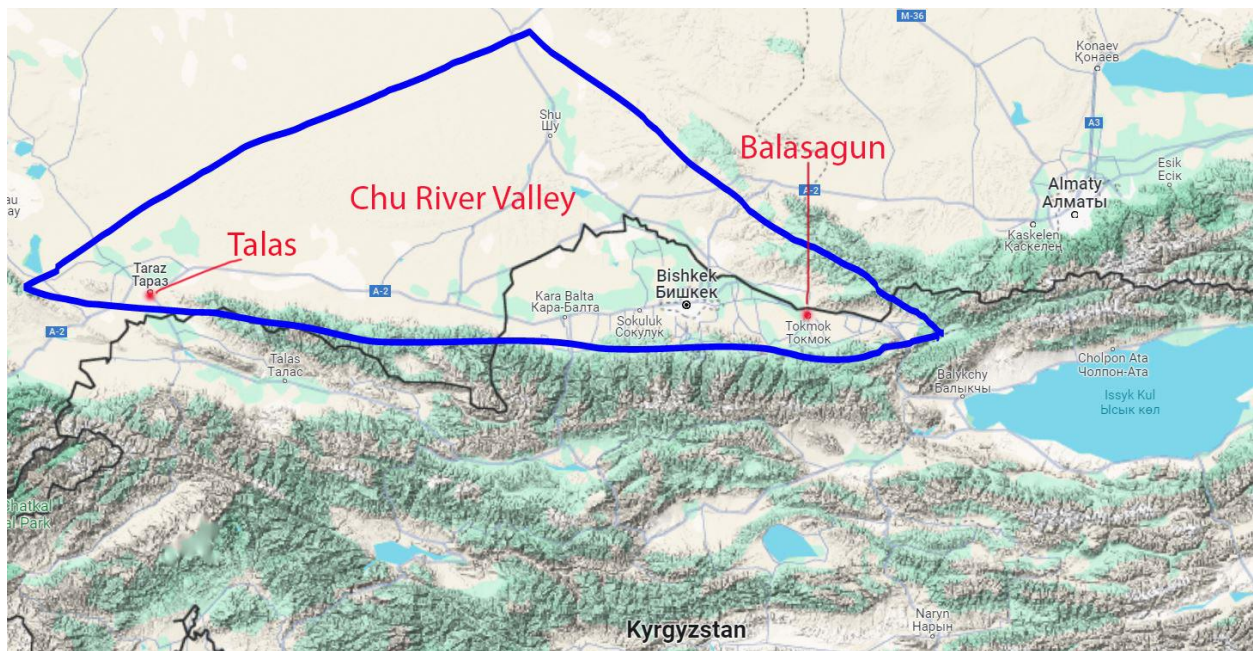


Figure 4. 1: The Chu River Valley and the western Uyghur Capital Balasagun¹⁹⁹

Therefore, we can conclude that it was the year 848 that marked the complete destruction of the Uyghur regime on the steppes. This was a highly significant year for China: it was the definitive conclusion to a millennium of threats and wars from the Huns in the north and their *Te-le* (Tlugh) descendants that began in the Han dynasty. However, in close succession, the Khitans and the *Jin* (Aisin) subsequently emerged on the grasslands to become even more powerful

¹⁹⁸ Liu Xu, *Old Book of Tang*, “Uyghurs”: “.....遏捻等惧，是夜与妻葛禄、子特勒毒斯等九骑西走，余众奔之不及，回鹘诸相达官老幼大哭。室韦分回鹘余众为七分，七姓室韦各占一分。经三宿，黠戛斯相阿播领诸蕃兵称七万，从西南天德北界来取遏捻及诸回鹘，大败室韦。回鹘在室韦者，阿播皆收归磧北。在外犹数帐，散藏诸山深林，盗劫诸蕃，皆西向倾心望安西庞勒之到。”

(E-nian [En-yan Khan] and others were afraid, so that night with his wife Gelu, son Teledus and nine others, he rode west on horseback. The rest of the people could not catch up with them, and the Uyghur ministers, officials, old and young cried. The Shi-wei divided the remaining Uyghurs into seven parts, and each of the seven surnames of Shi-wei took one part. After three nights, the Khyagas minister Abo led 70,000 foreign soldiers from the southwestern to the northern border at Tian-de to take En-yan and other Uyghurs, and defeated Shi-wei. Abo took all the Uyghurs in Shi-wei back to the north of the desert. There were still a few tents outside, scattered in the mountains and deep forests, stealing and robbing the foreign tribes, all heading west with eager hope for the arrival of Anxi Pang-le [the Tegin].)

¹⁹⁹ Source: <https://google.com/maps/@42.6897239,74.2020364,7.8z/data=!5m1!1e4?entry=ttu>

enemies of China.

Among the westbound Uyghurs was another group that continued west, cutting across the Ili River valley at the westernmost Tian-shan Mountain range then moving south until they arrived in an area south of the Karluk Khanate and entered the Kyrgyz grasslands west of the Tian-shan Mountains and later also of the Pamir Mountains. They remained under Pang's khanate for some years, but later established the Kara-Khanid Khanate (kara or *ka-la* commonly means "black", but here the translation should be "big" or "great") principally between the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers, copying the map of the Bactrian-Tocharian kingdom. Its ruling center was initially Balasagun (present-day Tokmok, Kyrgyzstan) and later Kashgar (Li, S., 2003: 47-48). I also call this newly established kingdom the Western Uyghur Khanate. It ultimately became Uzbekistan.

The capital Balasagun was a famous political and trading center, a Sogdian city on the northern branch of the Silk Road located at the Chur River valley in the bifurcation located in the westernmost Tian-shan Mountains range, about 60 kilometers east of modern-day Bishkek and about 10 kilometers west of modern-day Tokmok, which was then the famous ancient Sogdian city Suyab, at the southern bank of the Chu River. About 350 kilometers west of Balasagun, along the northern root of the southern branch of the westernmost Tian-shan mountain range, is another famous ancient city, Talas (Taraz) by the Talas River. On the northern side of the northern branch of the westernmost Tian-shan was the Zhetysu region of the Yili River valley-Balkhash Lake, the domain of the Karlukuks, a Hunnified group of probably another type of mixed blood *Hu* people, being a group who could not get along with Uyghurs. The Chu River valley is similar to the Yili River valley, both being rich in natural resources and famous for their beautiful living environments, and for their lovely cities Suyab and Yili (Ili, Alimalik).

Some historic events happened in the triangle region of the Chu River Valley, such as the migration there of the Scythian Yue-Zhi people in the second century BC, followed by the arrival and revenge of the Aryan Wu-sun people, the establishment of a military center in the mid-seventh century by Tang China at Suyab, and Talas (Taraz, Auliya-ata) by the Talas River at the western end of this triangular region where Tang China was defeated in 751 by the Arab-led Abbasid army and Karalukuks, thus demolishing the dividing line of **southern Islam** and **northern Christianity**. The Khitans, after being defeated in the 12th century on the east Asia steppes, migrated west and set up the capital at Balasagun. I refer to the Chur River Valley as the history-making center of Central Asia, geopolitically, racial-ethnically, and religiously.

The majority of the Uyghurs, however, stayed initially in the regions around the eastern Tian-shan range, and became the Kocho-Uyghur Khanate, which I call the Eastern Uyghur Khanate. Pang the *Tegin* became the khan of Kocho Khanate with the title of "Nine Surname Uyghur Uluy

tängridä qut bulmıš alp külüg bilgä Huai-jian qayan” according to Chinese court history, and he set his court first at Yan-qi (Karasahr) (Rong, X. J., 2013: 129).²⁰⁰ By the agreed title of “Bilga,” Pang, the new khan, showed that his khanate was the legitimate continuation of the former Uyghur Khanate on the East Asian steppes and was recognized by Tang China in 856-857 (the tenth and eleventh year of Tang Da-zhong’s reign) (Rong, X. J., 2013: 129-130).

Another branch of Uyghurs, relatively small in number, entered the Hexi Corridor (that is, the corridor west of the Yellow River) in present-day Gansu province of China, and in 860 or 866 became established in *Gan-zhou* (Grousset, 2002: 125). The *Old History of the Five Dynasties* records: “The rest of them went west and became the subjects of the *Tu-bo*, *Gan-zhou* is located in *Tu-bo*” (Li, S., 2003: 43; Xue, J. Z., 2000: 1277). (*Gan-zhou* was later called *Kang-zhou* and present-day Zhang-ye city.) *Tu-bo* is Tibet, and, at this time, Tibetans still controlled Khotan at the southern tip of the Tarim basin and the region of the He-xi Corridor between China and its westernmost frontier, until 866. These Uyghurs were known as the *Gan-zhou* Uyghurs, and they were later joined by some Uyghurs who had tried unsuccessfully to migrate south. In 866, together they defeated and expelled the Tibetans a decade after they migrated here, with military aid from Tang China. The *Gan-zhou* or *He-xi* Uyghurs later were called the *Gan-zhou-Sha-zhou* Uyghurs because their khanate expanded west to include *Sha-zhou* (Dun-huang), according to the *History of Song* (Tuo-tuo, 2000: 10890-10891).²⁰¹ They were historically known as the *Gan-zhou*, *Sha-zhou* and *He-luo-chuan* Uyghurs, whose state lasted until 1028 (Liu, X., 2000: 3548-3549; Li, S., 2003: 43-44).²⁰² *He-luo-chuan* means *He-luo* River, i. e. Ejin River, part of the Kara River, or *Ruo-shui* in Chinese).

The *Gan-zhou* Uyghurs maintained contact with the Uyghurs that had migrated south and west, and they mutually supported each other remotely. They also maintained friendly relations with China. For instance, in 980, their Khan Yaghlaqar Bilga, who had the same clan name as the

²⁰⁰ 唐宣宗《(大中十一年)册回鹘可汗文》：“……册命为九姓回鹘嗢禄登里罗汨没密施合俱录毗伽怀建可汗。”

²⁰¹ Tuo-tuo, *History of Song*, Foreign Nations VI, “Uyghurs”: “In the fifth year [of the *Tai-ping-xing-guo* reign (980)], the *Gan-zhou-Sha-zhou* Uyghur khan Yaghlaqar Bilga sent envoys Pei Yi and three others to China’s Song dynasty with gifts of one-humped camels, famous horses, coral and amber.” 五年，甘、沙州回鹘可汗夜落纥密礼遣使裴溢的等四人，以橐驼、名马、珊瑚、琥珀来献。

²⁰² Ibid.: “庞勒已自称可汗，有磧西诸城。其后嗣君弱臣强，居甘州，无复昔时之盛。”

(Pang-le had already claimed himself Khan and had all the cities west of the desert. His successors were weak and the ministers were strong, and they lived in Gan-zhou [Zhang-ye, China], and the prosperity of the past was no longer there.)

founding khan of the Orkhon Khanate established on the steppes in 744, sent a tribute-bearing delegation to China's Song court (Chen, S. L., 1994: 144). In 1028, the *Gan-zhou* Uyghur Khanate were defeated by the west Xia Kingdom, the Tangut people (Grousset, 2002: 125). The survivors, called "Yellow-headed Uyghurs" (blonde Uyghurs) in Song China history books in 1127, fled to Qie-mo County, located at the southeastern rim of the Tarim Basin, in present-day Xinjiang. During the Mongol Empire, they were also called Sari Uyghurs in Chinese historical texts (Sari means yellow, blonde) (Song, L., 2000: 1966; Li, S., 2003: 44; Grousset, 2002: 125), and in the early 15th century they migrated back to the *Gan-zhou* region (Li, S., 2003: 45). A different view of the Sari Uyghurs, with which I disagree, speculates they may have belonged to the Kocho-Uyghur branch (Li, S., 2003: 45).

In this way, the ancestors of the Uyghurs completed the transition from a nomadic to a sedentary lifestyle, which they have maintained to this day. Today, the descendants of the Uyghurs in Gansu province are known as the Yugurs (close in pronunciation to Uyghur) (Li, S., 2003: 45). The Uyghurs who migrated south, living in present-day Shanxi province, were later called the *Wang-gu* (Onguds) during the Mongol Empire. They will be mentioned again in our next chapter because some of them played important roles, both religiously and politically, in the history of Euro-Asian diplomatic activities. The majority of the Uyghurs migrated west, however, and settled in present-day Xinjiang.

4.4 Early Uyghur Christianity: Conversions of Ongut uyghurs and some Orkhon Uyghurs (AD 720s-781-841)

Were the Uyghurs impacted by Christianity before their khanate fell in AD 841? Did Christianity spread among Uyghurs before their migration to the He-xi Corridor and Yanqi-Turpan-Tarim regions? Are these questions even valid? Only a few prominent scholars, such as Syriac-speaking scholar A. Mingana and Japanese scholar P. Y. Saeki, provide positive answers. I agree with their main conclusions and only disagree with regard to certain details.

My analysis of historical texts in several languages shows that, in the early eighth century, before the Uyghur Khanate was founded, one of the Uyghur tribes (the Ongut Uyghurs, who were the first to convert to East Syriac Christianity), along with three other Christian kingdoms on the grasslands, were designated by the Persian East-Syriac Church as jurisdictionally belonging to the specially established metropolitanate for the "Turks" that was likely located in the north foothills of the Tianshan Mountains (now Jimsar county, Xinjiang, China).

In AD 780, Tun Bagha Tarkhan (AD 780-89) forcibly seized power to become the fourth khan of the Uyghur Khanate. Even though Manichaeism was the khanate's state religion, the new khan was hostile to the Manichaeans and Buddhism. In 781, the same year that the Xi-an *Jing-jiao* Stele was erected, Catholicos Timotheos I established a new metropolitanate in East Asia (its location now is unknown) that might have been established especially for the Christian church in the Uyghur khanate. Later, the Chinese Tang emperor "Saint" De-zong, who supported (or believed in) *Jing-jiao*, according to *Xi-an Jing* religion tablet, in other words, East Syriac Christianity, gave one of his daughters in marriage to this Uyghur khan (Liu, X., 2000: 3544).

4.4.1 The earliest spread of the Christianity to the Uyghurs

As discussed in the previous chapter, there were four "Turkic-Tatar" Christian nations under the confederation of "Sericon", recorded in the west Syriac texts dated around 714-730 about the time of the last Turkic khanate's fall and the founding of the first Uyghur khanate. According to my interpretation, the four Christian nations were Gok (blue) Turks, Kyrgyz, *Da-he-shi* Khitans, and Onguds, who were a branch of the Uyghurs that later stepped onto the world stage as a Christian nation during the time of the Genghis Khan Mongols, who will be discussed in the next chapter. Mingana had a hard time identifying the four kingdoms but suggested looking at Chinese sources and pointed out that one of them should be Uyghur, as he quoted from the prominent Japanese scholar P. Y. Saeki who states in his book:

When the news that An Lu-shan had rebelled against the Emperor Hsüan-Tsung in 755 A.D. reached the King of the Uigurs (回鶻), he immediately sent his son, Yeh-hu (葉護) (i.e. Jacob), at the head of four thousand picked men to defend the Imperial person from the arms of the rebels. // Prince Kuang-p'ing, the Emperor's own son, was made Commander-in-Chief, and Kuo Tzŭ -i (郭子儀), of whom we have already spoken, had the command over the men of the Uigur tribes as well as over some other foreign mercenaries from the Western lands.// The mere fact that some of the Nestorian monks were interpreters for the Chinese general who commanded the Uigur army is a sufficient proof that the "Luminous Religion" [*Jing-jiao*, Persian *East-Syriac Christianity*] had already spread amongst the Uigurs.// Sir Aurel Stein, in "Ruins of Desert Cathay" (pub. 1912), describes his discovery of manuscripts in the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas at Tun-huang (敦煌) on the western-most frontier of China proper, which were in a *Uigur script derived from Syriac*. This Uigur script, he says,

was "widely used among the Turkish population of Central Asia, before the spread of Mohammedanism, for the Turki writings." (Saeki, P. Y., 1928: 231-232)

While my analysis in the last chapter on the West-Syriac text agrees with Mingana that the conversion to Christianity of the Uyghur Onguds occurred right before the establishment of the Orkhon Uyghur Khanate, I have to say that the analysis of Saeki stretches a bit much, though I generally agree that Christianity did spread among Uyghurs in their Orkhon khanate. To understand his point better, a brief introduction about the Uyghur prince is necessary.

According to the *New Book of Tang*, "In the first year of the Tian-bao reign [AD 742], Pei-luo declared himself the left *yabghu* and Karluk declared himself the right *yabghu*; they helped the Basmyls to attack and expel the *Wu-su* khan" (Ou-yang, 2000: 4651).²⁰³ This is also probably how the Karluk became the name of the ethnic group and nation. Notably, in the nomadic culture of the grasslands, left is a higher position than right. This recounts the 742 defeat of the Second (or Eastern) Turkic Khanate's Ozmish Khan. Pei-luo is the Uyghur Khan with the founding title of Kul Bilga, whose Chinese title was *Huai-ren* Khan. The deeds recounted in the famous Shine-usu (Moyanchur) Inscription are those of this Uyghur khan who reigned from 744 to 747, and of his son Moyanchur, the second khan.

According to the inscription, the Karluks and the Basmyls at this time were in the west, the former in the Ili River valley, the latter in the region of Beshbalik and *Gu-cheng* (the region of present-day Urumqi to Jimsar and Qitai), while the Uyghurs were in the north centered in the Selenga River valley, the Khitans in the eastern part of the grasslands, and Tang China in the south. These nations executed a four-way pincer attack on the Second Turkic Khanate and overthrew the rule of the Eastern Turks, vying for supremacy over the steppes. The Uyghurs, aided by the Karluks, were the ultimate victors, establishing their khanate in 744 and unifying the grasslands in 745. Then "Pei-luo died and his son Moyanchur succeeded him. His title was *Ge-le* Khan. He was brave and tough, a good military leader. He sent an envoy to the Tang court annually" (Ou-yang, 2000: 4651).²⁰⁴ He reigned from 747 to 759.

²⁰³ Ou-yang, *New Book of Tang*, "Uyghurs I": "会突厥乱。天宝初，裴罗与葛逻禄自称左右叶户，助拔悉蜜击走乌苏可汗。"

(At that time, the Turks had civil strife. At the beginning of the Tian-bao reign, Pei-luo and Karluk called themselves the Left and Right Yabghu and helped Basmyl to drive away Usu Khan.)

²⁰⁴ Ibid. "裴罗死，子磨延礫立，号葛勒可汗，剽悍善用兵，岁遣使者入朝。"

According to the *New Book of Tang*, it was this same khan who readily responded to the request of the Tang emperor Su-zong who had just ascended the throne (in 756) for help in confronting the An Lu-shan Rebellion by sending his son Ye-hu as the head of 4,000 cavalry to aid the Tang China troops (Ou-yang, 2000: 4652). This happened in 756. According to Saeki's study of the "Nestorian Tablet" (Xi-an *Jing-jiao* Stele), "Ye-hu" here is "Jacob", that is, a phonetic translation from Syriac. Saeki wrote in his conclusion: "The mere fact that some of the Nestorian monks were interpreters for the Chinese general who commanded the Uigur army is a sufficient proof that the 'Luminous Religion' [*Jing-jiao*, Persian *East-Syriac Christianity*] had already spread amongst the Uighurs."

However, there is another problem here. "Ye-hu" here might refer to the title Ye-hu (*Yabghu*) of this prince (the two words are written in the same Chinese characters) and not his name. For example, when the prince led a cavalry of 4,000 to aid China, his father the Khan conferred the title of the king of Dun-huang to be "Ye-hu" working with his son the prince Ye-hu (Ou-yang, 2000: 4651-4652).²⁰⁵ In addition, the seventh line of the inscription on the eastern face of the Uyghur Moyan Chor stele states, in the first-person voice of his father Moyan Chor, "I gave my two sons the titles *Yabghu* and *Shad*" (Geng, S. M., 2005: 198). The *Yabghu* is the leader of a sub-tribe or sub-nation and the *Shad* [as *sha* in Chinese translation] is the army leader of a sub-tribe (Shang, Y. B., 1995: 20). The inscription on the Uyghur Terkhin stele gives the full title of the son as Kutlugh Bilga Yabghu and the title of another son as Bilga Tarqan (Geng, S. M., 2005: 211). The *Old Book of Tang* states, "In April in the summer [of the second year of Qian-yuan reign], the Uyghur khan Bilga Kul died. After his eldest son *Ye-hu* was killed, his younger son was installed as the Deng-li [Bogu] Khan with his wife as Khatun."²⁰⁶ (Liu, X., 2000: 3539) The second year of the Tang Qian-yuan reign was 759.

²⁰⁵ Ou-yang, *New Book of Tang*, "Uyghurs I": "肃宗即位，使者来请助讨禄山，帝诏燉煌郡王承寀与约，而令仆固怀恩送王，因召其兵。……帝因册毘伽公主为王妃，擢承寀宗正卿；可汗亦封承寀为叶护，给四节，令与其叶护共将。"

(When Emperor Su-zong ascended the throne, envoys came to offer help in the fight against An Lu-shan. The emperor called the Prince of Dun-huang, [Li] Cheng-cai, to make an agreement, and ordered Pu-gu-huai-en to escort the prince, and then summoned his troops. ... The emperor appointed Princess Bilga as the princess and promoted Cheng-cai to the position of the chief minister of the imperial clan; the Khan also appointed Cheng-cai as a Yabghu with four levels of military power and ordered him to be a general working with the Khan's current Yabghu.)

²⁰⁶ Liu Xu, *Old Book of Tang*, "Uyghurs": "夏四月，回纥毗伽阙可汗死。长子叶护先被杀，乃立其少子登里可汗，其妻为可敦。"

In addition, the *New Book of Tang* says, “Prior to this, the Ye-hu crown prince was put to death for some crime, so the second son Idigen became khan and was called Bogu Khan” (Ou-yang, *New Book of Tang*, 2000: 4653).²⁰⁷ That is to say, this eldest son Ye-hu, when he returned to the khanate court after taking part in defeating the An Lushan Rebellion by taking back the two capitals of Tang China, might have displeased his father and been killed. The details are not clear (Geng, S. M., 2005: 217). Note that, in the *New Book of Tang*, the name “Idigen” immediately follows the characters for “second son”, but, in the *Old Book of Tang*, *Ye-hu* is added before the characters for “crown prince”. In short, whether *Ye-hu* was this crown prince’s name or title is hard to determine. If it was his name, then Saeki’s interpretation would be correct.

Another point that must be mentioned here is that, putting together the accounts in the *Old Book of Tang* and the *New Book of Tang*, in 758 (the first year of Qian-yuan), “Uyghur Prince Gu-chuo-te-le [Kutlugh]” led troops to join the Tang China general Guo Zi-yi in the second round of military aid to Tang China. After the defeat of their allied troops, disappointing, in March, this prince and his followers were in Xi-an being feted and awarded by the Tang emperor Su-zong, “then returned”, that is, they returned to the grasslands, the exact date was “the Geng-yin day of the same month”, that is, in the latter half of March. In combination with the inscription on the Terkhin stele of the crown prince’s title of *Ye-hu*, plus the fact that he had been part of a joint military maneuver with Guo Zi-yi, as well as the fact that on both occasions of aiding Tang China he was accompanied by Chancellor Di-de, we can basically conclude that this is the same prince with two different titles: Uyghur prince Kutlugh or Uyghur prince *Ye-hu*. In that case, this is the prince that was killed after returning to the khanate court, not long before his father passed away, that is in the third or fourth month of the Chinese calendar in 759.

Based on the plot of typical court drama throughout human history, it is also possible the second son Idigen murdered his older brother Ye-hu, who should have been the successor to the khan-ship, at a critical juncture while their father was dying and Ye-hu was unable to control the situation, making Idigen himself the only option for legal succession. If this is what happened, then this story of murder in the khanate court does not end there: the younger brother of this successor who would become the Bogu Khan was killed in 780 by his cousin Dun Mohe Tarkhan, then the prime minister. In addition, a religious factor behind this typical court drama might have

²⁰⁷ Ou-yang, *New Book of Tang*, “Uyghurs I”: “始叶护太子前得罪死，故次子移地健立，号牟羽可汗，其妻，仆固怀恩女也。”

(Prior to this, the Ye-hu crown prince was put to death for some crime, so the second son Idigen became khan and was called Mou-yu (Bogu) Khan, whose wife is a daughter of Pu-gu-huai-en.)

been unpleasantly involved. The younger son who became the khan would greatly benefit the Manichean Sogdian Hu people in the Uyghur Khanate. It was this Uyghur khan in 762 or 763 who led his khanate to accept Manichaeism. After all, it was this khan that sent another brother allying with Tibetans in 764 (the second year of Guang-de reign) with plans to attack Tang China. The brother only gave up after being persuaded by the Tang general Guo Zi-yi at the Chinese border. It was this khan in 780, agitated by the Hu (Sogdian) people in his court, who planned to attack China. Therefore, if the crown prince Ye-hu was a Syriac Christian, then his death is well explained from the perspective of a conflict in religious interest with Sogdian Manichaeism.

In conclusion, although Saeki's proof and reasoning about the name is not sufficiently sound, the argument that the "Luminous Religion" had spread among the Uyghurs based on his "mere fact" is not implausible. That would be because the Christianity practiced by the four powerful Turkic-Tartar groups, including the Uyghur-Onguds, was surprisingly institutionalized and contextualized, as was depicted by the Jacobite Syriac writer mentioned earlier. Thus, a possible impact on other racial-ethnic groups should not be a surprise. Interestingly, this Syriac writer makes no attempt to conceal his criticism of the East Syriac Christians, that is, the Nestorians, even though he accepts that these Turkic-Tatar Christians belong to a true Christian faith.

In addition, according to David Wilmshurst in his work, *The Martyred Church: A History of the Church of the East*, "In the eighth century the Uighurs were Christians before they became Manichaeans, and Nestorian missionaries may already have been working as far afield as Mongolia." (Wilmshurst, D., 2011: 121) Though such a statement agrees with my theory, the author does not put any footnotes referencing his sources.

4.4.2 The possible metropolitan seat of the Uyghur Christianity

In about 781, Catholicos Timothy I (778-823) of the East-Syriac Church wrote a letter to the Maronite Church ²⁰⁸ saying: "The king of the Turks, with nearly all [the inhabitants of] his country, has left his ancient idolatry, and has become Christian, and he has requested us in his letters to create a Metropolitan for his country; and this we have done" (Mingana, 1925: 306). In

²⁰⁸ The Maronite Church, named after Saint Maron (died 410), is a Chalcedonian church that came out of the Antiochian Syriac Church. It is a community of independent eastern churches that has, since the end of the 7th century and the first half of the 8th century, remained in full communion with other Antiochian Syriac Churches and the Roman Catholic see, through her Lebanese and Eastern environments. Maronite Heritage web site <https://www.maronite-heritage.com/LNE.php?page=History>; Date of access: 27Jun. 2024.

approximately 790, in another letter to his friend Rabban Sergius, Timothy also clearly stated that, at that time “many monks crossed the sea and went to the Indians and the Chinese with only a rod and a script”. He also told Sergius that China’s metropolitan had already died (Mingana, 1925: 306). According to Thomas of Marga, this metropolitan of China was named David, and died around 787 (Mingana, 1925: 325).

Is this new Metropolitan for the “Turks” related to the enigmatic one for the “Turks” mentioned in the West-Syriac manuscripts written probably between 714-730 as discussed in the last chapter? There is no certain answer yet. One scholar points out that the Patriarch Timothy I “led the khagan of the kingdom of the Turks to the faith” and consecrated a metropolitan for Berth Turkaye, “the country of the Turks” which is Samarqand (Wilmshurst, D., 2011: 167). For Mingana, based on his research, as early as in AD 549, the Bishopric for Turks existed, but the name of the town for the Bishop remains unknown. I follow the lead of Mingana and further speculate that there was more than one Metropolitan for “Turks” in the eighth century for different kingdoms of different “Turks”. Some racial-groups should not be called “Turks” properly, including those Hunnified Indo-European groups and Uyghurs, Kazaks, Kyrgyz, etc.

These letters of Catholicos Timothy are extremely valuable first-hand historical materials. Note that it was precisely in 781, according to the Chinese text on the monument [Mingana insists it was at 779 instead based on Syriac texts on the monument (Mingana, 1925: 332-333)²⁰⁹ that the “Memorial of the Propagation in China of the Luminous Religion from Da-qin” (more commonly known as the Nestorian Stele, in this thesis referred to as the *Xi-an Jing* Religion Stele) was erected, marking the peak of the status of East-Syriac Christianity (*Jing-jiao* in China, or traditionally called Nestorianism by the western world) in China. Not only was this expression of Christian faith at its zenith, but because China’s influence in East Asia was like that of the Byzantine Empire in Europe and west Asia, this was undoubtedly of great benefit to bringing a Christian influence on the neighbouring nations. This could be called the watershed year in the growth of Christianity in the East Asia. But the data availability still leaves a problem here: Catholicos Timothy did not give the precise location of the city of this metropolitan for the “Turks” (Mingana, 1925: 323). In fact, the location of the Metropolitan’s city has been a mystery in the

²⁰⁹ Mingana says: “This proves without any doubt that in the eighth century the Nestorians of Mesopotamis and the Nestorian Missionaries of China counted the era of the Seleucids as 313 B.C. and not 310 or 311, or even 312, because it is only by subtracting 313 from the Seleucid year 1064 that we get A.H.134. This timely discovery makes the Seleucid year 1092 written on the Nestorian monument to correspond with A.D.779, i.e. the very year of the death of the Patriarch Hnanisho. The year, therefore, of the erection of the Nestorian monument in Si-ngan-fu is 779, and not 781 as hitherto believed, and there is no discrepancy whatever in the date of the monument as compared with that of the death of the Patriarch Hnanisho.”

historical records of the East-Syriac Church. Some scholars think that the Turk's metropolitanate later became the Tangut metropolitanate; in terms of geography, this is likely.

Materials from the synod records of the East-Syriac Church about the roster of the Far East Metropolitans on the opposite shore of the Amu Darya River further away from Persia proper show that in the earliest list of metropolitans, the metropolitan for the Turks counted as No. 10 (created by Catholicos Timothy I?), which entails its higher order "in the rank of precedence" on the list than the metropolitans of Razikaye (No. 11), Herat (No. 12), Armenia (No. 13), China (No. 14) and Java (No. 15) (Mingana, 1925: 322). By the time of the Khitans, according to the semi-official list of the metropolitans compiled by Maris Amri et Slibae in the twelfth century, the metropolitans listed for these areas were: No. 14 China, No. 15 India, No. 21 Samarkand, No. 22 Turks, No. 25 Khanbaliq and Falik, No. 26 Tangut, and No. 27 Kashgar (No. 19 in the time of the Khitans-Mongols) and Nuakith (Mingana, 1925: 323). The problem here is, the exact location of where the metropolitan for the "Turks" resided is not provided; this missing data is what has left historians perplexed. Moreover, the Tangut metropolitan is listed as No. 26 while the "Turks" metropolitan is listed as No. 22, therefore the two clearly are not the same.

The aforementioned valuable Syriac historical document mentions that the four large Turkic-Tatar ethnic groups who were Christians did not have fixed domiciles but lived completely nomadic lifestyles with portable tents as their churches. This then explains the situation: the No. 10 metropolitan for Turks did not have a fixed domicile, rather he moved along with them. But it is unlikely that, by the time of the westward migrated Uyghur' conquests in ninth century, the No. 10 metropolitan still did not have a fixed domicile, because by this time the Turks had already been squeezed out of the east Asian steppes, mostly by Chinese and Uyghurs, and those western Turks on the either side of the Amu Darya River and the present-day Xinjiang region, had long ago transitioned to a Tocharian-Sogdian settled lifestyle. So, the title "Turks" are not related to Turkic khanates anymore, but to other Turkic-speaking and Hunnic-Turkified groups, and the fact that the Syriac historical materials do not give the place of Metropolitan residence of "Turks" is very puzzling.

Mingana thinks that the Tibetan metropolitan that Timothy said was to be ordained probably was stationed in Tangut, because the Tangut parish was elevated to a metropolitanate around 790, so, in terms of timeframe, this is a logical deduction (Mingana, 1925: 324). But I think that, in terms of geography and time frame, Tangut fits better as the residence of the Turks' metropolitan and not of the Tibetan metropolitan. According to the *Xi-an* Stele, the predecessors of the Tangut were the people of Chinese-controlled *Ling-wu* Canton (present-day Ningxia and Gansu provinces), one of the five major bases of Tang-China East-Syriac Christianity. Its church

was forced to close in 713 because of Daoist (and Buddhist) persecution, not to reopen until 763, after the Uyghurs had helped Tang China to put down the An Lushan rebellion.²¹⁰ From 665, Tang-China was at war with the Tibetans (*Tu-bo*) in a prolonged conflict that lasted intermittently until 789 (Grousset, 2002: 103, 107, 119; Li, S., 2003: 32), and even in 866.

In 789-791, the Uyghur Khanate sent troops to aid China on three occasions, winning from the Tibetans the Tarim Basin, the eastern Tian-shan Mountain range, and the major artery of the Silk Road in the western portion of the Hexi Corridor through Gan-su (Li, S., 2003: 31-32). The wars on Tibetans by Uyghurs continued until the middle of the ninth century after the Uyghurs' west migration (Gao, Y. J., 1997: 216-217). Thus, *Ling-wu*, which was controlled by Tibet's enemy, Tang-China, would not have been a suitable place for the metropolitan of Tibet to reside. It would, however, have been a suitable location for the Turks' metropolitan even though *Ling-wu* was part of the Tang-China frontier, not Uyghur territory. Moreover, the Syriac Church's historical materials already made clear that the Turks' metropolitan, and the metropolitan of Tangut were independent of each other, and the Turks' metropolitan was listed before the metropolitan of Chang-an in Tang-China which was elevated approximately in 670 (Mingana, 1925: 325) and the metropolitan of Tangut, elevated in 790. So, the location of the Turks' metropolitan remains unknown.

How then can the identity of this Turkic khan who converted in 781 be determined if there is no location of the metropolitan to which to refer? During his time in office, Catholicos Timothy reformed the church's administrative system and had a good relationship with the Caliph (the Islamic King), setting a foundation for the later successes of the East-Syriac Church in its missions' efforts in East Asia (Baum & Winkler, 2003: 60-61). In terms of timeframe, the Turkic kingdom to which Timothy's letter refers could only have been the Uyghur Khanate as it was the only national representative of the Turkic-speaking people at that time. Also, the "ancient idolatry" mentioned here probably was Shamanism or Buddhism. But the state religion of the Uyghur

²¹⁰ The re-opening of the Ling-wu parish was likely an expression of gratitude on the part of the Tang emperor Su-zong toward the Uyghur prince *Ye-hu* and other *Hu* Indo-Europeans from the Western Regions around the Tian-shan Mountains for their military aid and toward the East-Syriac Christian missionaries who acted as interpreters. Because the Chinese and the Uyghurs could understand each other, the interpreters were mainly translating the language of the Indo-Europeans for the Chinese. Since the Uyghurs had provided the greatest assistance, Tang Su-zong's gratitude should have been mainly directed toward the Uyghurs. Therefore, based on P.Y. Saeki's analysis, the re-opening of the Ling-wu parish as an expression of appreciation would indicate that the Uyghur prince was a Christian or represented the Uyghur Christians.

Khanate prior to this time was Manichaeism, which does not worship idols, so how can this be explained?

Happily, there are some other Syriac historical materials that provide supplementary explanations. According to one writer, Thomas of Marga, this Timothy selected eighty monks, anointed some of them metropolitans, and sent all of them to the Far East to evangelize the pagans. He wrote:

(These Bishops) were ordained by the holy Catholicos Timothy the Patriarch to the countries of the savage peoples, who were devoid of every understanding and civilization. No missionaries and sowers of truth had till then gone to their regions, and the teaching of the Gospel of our Saviour had not yet been preached to them; ...(Mingana, 1925: 307)

As previously noted, as early as the mid-sixth to the mid-seventh century, missionaries were already having historic results in their mission efforts in Central Asia. Therefore, the “countries of the savage peoples” was obviously a reference to the steppes of the Far East (East Asia). Thomas of Marga continues in his account:

...while they had not even received, like the Jews and the rest of the Gentiles (i.e. Muslims), the knowledge of God, Creator and Administrator of the worlds, but were worshipping trees, graven wood, beasts, fish, reptiles, birds and such-like, along with the worship of fire and stars. These were the Bishops who preached the teaching of Christ in those countries of the Dailamites and Gilanians, and the rest of the savage peoples beyond them, and planted in them the light of the truth of the Gospel of our Lord. ...They evangelized them and they baptized them, worked miracles and showed prodigies, and the news of their exploits reached the farthest points of the East. (Mingana, 1925: 307) ²¹¹

The reference is to the Shamanism of the nomadic ethnic groups, showing that the “ancient idolatry” that Timothy talked about was the Shamanistic tradition, “worshipping trees, graven wood, beasts, fish, reptiles, birds and such-like, along with the worship of fire and stars”. He also described the Bishop Shubha-lisho whom Catholicos Timothy anointed as very capable and noted he took up the mission of evangelizing beyond Central Asia, (i.e., East Asia). Further, Thomas of Marga mentions the Bishop preaching the Gospel “among pagans, Marcionites, Manichaeans,

²¹¹ Mingana cited from Thomas of Marga, *Liber Superiorum*, 261-262 (edit. Bedjan).

and other kinds of beliefs and abomination, and he sowed the sublime light of the teaching of the Gospel, the source of life and peace” (Mingana, 1925: 307-308).

In the conclusion of his account, Thomas of Marga explains that these missionaries had gone to a region that only had rice and no wheat or other grains. He even reports that some of these missionaries stayed in this area so long that, when they returned home, they could not re-adjust to eating wheat bread (Mingana, 1925: 308). Also, according to the *Book of the Tower* (*Kitāb al-Majdal*) by the 12th century east Syriac Nestorian (the term used here in correspondence with west Syriac Jacobite) author Mari ibn Suleiman, the missionaries sent by Timothy (Timotheos) journeyed “to the end of the East”, where there were only rice and “dry grain”, no wheat or barley (Baum & Winkler, 2003: 61). This obviously refers to China’s southeastern coastal regions, that is, the area of present-day Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, the farthest point of the Far East mainland, during the reign of the Catholicos Timothy (778-823).

Providentially, the accounts in the *Book of the Tower* give some very important supplemental information about this history. Mari ibn Suleiman writes, “And Timothy converted to the (Christian) faith the Kaghan of the Turks and other kings, from whom he received letters, and he instructed many in Christian doctrine” (Mingana, 1925: 308). It is clear from this statement then that the title for the leader of the Turks is “khan” and not the “*yabghu*” title used by the Western Turks. The Uyghurs at this time had already established their Uyghur Khanate back in 744, so the Turkic khan who converted to Christianity referred to here, based on the year 781 in Timothy’s letter, cannot be anyone other than the Uyghur khan Alp Kutlug Bilga,²¹² that is, Tun Bagha Tarkhan, who killed his cousin the Manichean khan and seized power in the year of 781. He became the fourth khan of the Uyghur Khanate until his death in 789.

Moreover, this Uyghur khan unified and ruled over all the Hunnic-Turkic-speaking peoples including his own Nine Surnames Tribes, that is, the Toquz Oghuz as well as the other ethnic groups of the steppes within the Uyghur empire. These ethnic groups had their own leaders, but there was only one khan, in keeping with the political tradition of the people of the grasslands. Furthermore, according to Chinese materials, this fourth Uyghur khan faithfully maintained the alliance with China, and was rewarded with marriage to a Tang-China princess of the “saint Emperor” De-zong. It was also this khan who changed the Chinese name of his own people from *Hui-he* to *Hui-gu*, a better sounding pronunciation. Besides one theory stating that this khan had led many Uyghurs to convert to Christianity, this khan had also once pardoned a Tang-China

²¹² Tang-China gave him a Chinese title: *chang-shou-tian-qing-ke-han*, meaning “long living heavenly favored Khan”.

envoy even though all the Uyghurs nationwide had wanted to kill this envoy in revenge. This is the explanation this khan gave to the Tang envoy: "Today, if I kill you, it is still just blood washing blood, a vain act that leaves [everything] more tainted with blood. I am using water to wash away the blood, isn't that a good thing? (Ou-yang, 2000: 4656)"²¹³ This statement is consistent with the Christian teaching of forgiveness and not pursuing revenge.

Of course, it is possible that the khan was of Karluk tribe, whose tribe was Hunnic with a self-designated title of "Three Surname Yabghu" located in the Junggar Basin and migrated westward to the Yili River valley and the Zhetysu regions by 750 due to being at odds with their former suzerain the Uyghurs (Ou-yang, 2000: 4669-4670).²¹⁴ Soon they moved further southward down to the bank of Amu River, seemingly following the route of the Yue-zhi people about nine centuries ago. After mutiny in the battlefield against their ally Tang China fighting the Arabic army and defeating the Tang army, the Arabs "rewarded" the Karluks by dislodging them from the Fergana valley. Led by their ruler, the Karluk tribe in 766 took over Suyab and moved their capital to the

²¹³ Ou-yang, *New Book of Tang*, "Uyghurs I": 可汗传谓休曰: "国人皆欲尔死, 我独不然。突董等已亡, 今又杀尔, 犹以血濯血, 徒益污。吾以水濯血, 不亦善乎? 为我言有司, 所负马直一百八十万, 可速偿我。"

(The Khan said to Xiu: "Everyone in the country wants you dead, but I don't. Tud-ong and others are dead. Today, if I kill you, it is still just blood washing blood, a vain act that leaves [everything] more tainted with blood. I am using water to wash away the blood, isn't that a good thing? To fulfil my words, for those horses taken away being worth 1.8 million [Chinese coins], you can pay me back as soon as possible.")

²¹⁴ 欧阳修: 《新唐书·回鹘下》: "葛逻禄本突厥诸族, 在北庭西北、金山之西, ...后稍南徙, 自号"三姓叶护", 兵强, 甘于斗, 廷州以西诸突厥皆畏之。开元初, 再来朝。天宝时, 与回纥、拔悉蜜共攻杀乌苏米施可汗, 又与回纥击拔悉蜜, 走其可汗阿史那施于北庭, 奔京师。葛禄与九姓复立回纥叶护, 所谓怀仁可汗者也。于是葛禄之处乌德鞬山者臣回纥, 在金山、北庭者自立叶护, 岁来朝。.....至德后, 葛逻禄浸盛, 与回纥争强, 徙十姓可汗故地, 尽有碎叶、怛逻斯诸城。然限回纥, 故朝会不能自达于朝。"

(Ou-yang Xiu: "New Book of Tang·Uyghurs II" explains: "The Karluk were originally Turkic tribes, living in the northwest of Bei-ting and the west of Jin-shan [Golden Mountains]... Later they moved slightly southward and called themselves "Three Surnames Yabghu". They had strong soldiers and enjoyed fighting. All the Turkic tribes west of Ting-zhou were afraid of them. At the beginning of the Kai-yuan reign, they came to the court again. During the Tian-bao period, together with Uyghurs and Basimi, they attacked and killed Wu-su-mi-shi (Ozmish) Khan, and then together with Uyghurs attacked Basimi, driving its Khan Ashina Shi away from Bei-ting, fleeing to the [Chinese] capital. The Karluk and the Nine Surnames re-established the Uyghur Yabghu, the so-called Huai-ren Khan. So the Karluk people who lived in Wu-de-jian Mountain became subjects of the Uyghurs, and those who lived in Golden Mountains and Bei-ting established their own Yabghu and came to the court every year... After Zhi-de, the Karluk became increasingly powerful and competed with the Uyghurs for power. They moved to the former land of the Ten Surnames Khan and took over all the cities of Suyab and Talas. However, due to the restrictions by the Uyghurs in between, they could not reach the [Chinese] court by themselves.")

Chu River Valley, using the ruling title of Yabghu instead of khan (Barthold, V. V., 1956: 87). In addition, they were inappropriately treated as a branch of Turks by other native groups in the regions and Chinese historians, but this time they would not be a Christian nation yet obviously by aiding Arabic Muslims. Instead, reportedly they “were naturally the most open to the influence of Muslim culture” and their ruler (775-785) converted to Islam (Barthold, V. V., 1956: 91). Archaeological discoveries in the Karluk domain uncovered Christian artifacts dated from the ninth to tenth centuries, reflecting at least the local Christianity, although it is certain Karluk became a Christian nation by the ages of Khitans and Mongols. Overall, it is less likely they were the “Turks” mentioned by the Catholicos Timothy.

In addition, it seems that more than one kingdom of Turks converted to Christianity in the eighth century. Mari ibn Suleiman, the 12th century East-Syriac Christianity author writing in Arabic, wrote that in about AD 710, while lost on a hunting trip, a king of Turks converted to Christianity together with his two thousand followers after encountering St. Sergius with a dialogue. The son of the king continued to hold Christianity faithfully. Indeed, although the Western Turkic khanate dismantled, Turkic Christianity continued to spread among the ten tribes of the western Turks, with missions carried out by the Church in the regions (Suleiman, 1899: 80).

Therefore, we can look at 781 as the year that Catholicos Timothy of the East-Syriac Church ordained a metropolitan, most likely, in the Uyghur Khanate, and as the relatively logical year that the Uyghurs, representing the non-white Turkic-speaking peoples of the East Asian steppes, converted to Christianity, at least in this period, even though in the half-century before this, some western Turks and the Ongud Uyghurs and some other Tatar ethnic groups (Turkified Indo-Europeans) had already converted to Christianity. In addition, in the 43 years of Timothy’s patriarchy, the mission strategy of the East-Syriac Church clearly shifted its focus from Central Asia to East Asia. The mission work in the Far East (East Asia) was successful, with Christianity experiencing breakthrough growth among both the people of the East Asia steppes and the Han-Chinese.

Though the above analysis may convince readers that before the Uyghur Khanate fell in 841, East-Syriac Christianity already spread among Ongud Uyghurs and Orkhon Uyghurs, more direct proof is still needed, such as archeological discoveries and materials to the Syriac Church, especially for the specific city or town location of the metropolitanate. According to Tang China historical materials, before the destruction of the Uyghur Khanate, Manichaeism was still its leading religion and was still involved in the khanate’s political affairs. For example, in 821, after the death of the Alp Bilga Khan (Bao-yi Khan), the Tang emperor Xian-zong gave his daughter, Princess Taihe, in marriage to the son of the Alp Bilga Khan, the Kuchlug Bilga Khan (Chong-de

Khan). About this event, the *Old Book of Tang* says: “In May, the Uyghur prime minister, governor, princess, Manichean believers and others, 573 people in all, arrived at court to meet the princess, [and the Tang court] arranged for them to stay in the Hong-lu Bureau [government hotel for foreign guests].”²¹⁵

Although this passage does not say how many of the 573 people were Manichaeans, it does make clear that Manichaeans were still participating in the Uyghurs Khanate’s state affairs 20 years before the 841 fall of the khanate and the Uyghurs’ westward migration. A travelogue by an Arab visitor who arrived in the Uyghur Khanate around 800 describes Zoroastrianism as being dominant of in the countryside while Manicheanism was primarily in the cities (Yang, F. X., 2003: 132). Even though the writers of “these Arab travelogues were frequently suspected of blindly copying from each other”, the presence of Zoroastrianism in the Uyghur Khanate is basically verified (Yang, F. X., 2003: 132), which lends credence to this Arab traveler’s description of Manichaeism being in the cities.

4.5 Indigenized Uyghur Christianity in Kocho Khanate (AD 841-1130)

Before the Uyghurs moved west, likely no later than AD 823, Kashgar, at the western end of the Tarim Basin, used to be ruled by a Christian prince in the eighth century (Baum, W. & Winkler, D. W., 2003: 49), had already become the seat of the metropolitanate of the East Syriac Church, with jurisdiction over the East Syriac Christianity of the Tocharian-Sarmatian people and other Persianized Indo-Europeans in the Tarim Basin, at least for the western half of the Basin. After migrating west, Christianity among the Gao-chang Uyghurs developed steadily for about a century and might have been a part of the Jimsar or Qitai diocese (probably a metropolitanate). Uyghur Manichaeism, meanwhile, remained an institutional force, while Buddhism continued to be present mainly among the local Tocharian-Sarmatian people.

During this period, the Christians among the Sari Uyghurs, along with the local Han Chinese and Indo-European *Xi-xia* (West Xia) Christians were all part of Dun-huang Christianity, belonging to the Tangut Metropolitanate. The Christian tribes among the Uyghurs on the west side of the Pamirs were part of Turkic Christianity, including some ancestors of Turkey, and the local Turks, Tocharians, Sogdians, and other Indo-Europeans belonged to the Samarkand Metropolitanate,

²¹⁵ Liu Xu, *Old Book of Tang*, Chronicle 145, “Uyghurs”: “五月，回鹘宰相、都督、公主、摩尼等五百七十三人入朝迎公主，于鸿胪寺安置。”

the Indo-European Christianity. The Christians among the southerly migrating Ongut Uyghurs belonged to the *Datong (Xi-jing)* Metropolitanate.

By the tenth and eleventh centuries, in addition to the Uyghur Christian nations, seven other Christian nations of different ethnicities and races emerged, spread over a vast area from the Altai Mountains in the west to the Da-xing-an-ling (Greater Khingan) Mountains in the east. Islam entered the Tarim Basin at this time. In 1130, the Khitan Liao Kingdom in East Asia was defeated by the *Jin*-Jurchens and moved west, occupying Central Asia, including the Gao-chang Uyghur Khanate, historically known as the Western Liao, which will be addressed in the next chapter.

4.5.1 Chinese classical document accounts of Christianity in the Kocho Uyghur khanate/kingdom

Before the Uyghur people fled from the east Asian steppes and arrived in central Asia, they had maintained close ties with Tang China to the south. Historical records produced by the Tang court, while not necessarily always accurate or objective, contain many firsthand and systematic detailed accounts of the history of the Uyghurs, including their Manichaeism, although reported very briefly and only in relation to diplomatic events.²¹⁶ Regrettably, after the Pang-le, the Tegin led the branch of the Uyghurs that moved west to present-day Xinjiang and Central Asia, due to the distance from here to proper China, the paucity of contact resulted in a sharp reduction of information about the Uyghur people in Chinese historical records.

Providentially, over the past century, more information has come to light: Some steles inscribed by Turks and Uyghurs have been discovered on the Mongolian steppes; some texts written in the Uyghur script have been found in Xinjiang; some Syriac historical materials of the East Syriac Church have also been discovered in Xinjiang; and some inscriptions on the tombstones of Christians from the Xinjiang have been unearthed. These discoveries have to a degree filled in important gaps in the historical materials, especially about Christianity in these regions. But, on the whole, only very limited historical materials are available about the flourishing of Christianity among the Uyghur people and the local Indo-Europeans after the Uyghurs settled in the regions around the eastern Tian-shan mountain range. The historical materials about

²¹⁶ Both the *Old Book of Tang* and the *New Book of Tang* briefly mention Uyghur religions, including Mechanism, which was proved to be a national religion of the Uyghur Khanate by modern scholars. Therefore, a lack of mention of Christianity among the Uyghurs does not rule out the fact that there was a Christian Uyghur community in the khanate, albeit a minor one compared to the Manichean community.

Uyghurs become abundant again in the period discussed in my next chapter, after the conquest by the Mongol Empire. Not only are these materials written in Han Chinese but also in some other languages as well, especially those related to the East Syriac Christianity of the Uyghurs.

In addition, because Central Asia had already fallen into the hands of Islam, Muslims controlled the Silk Road in this region causing contact with Persia and the Byzantine Empire to drop significantly, so related historical materials on Central Asia and China's westernmost frontier from the Persians and the Byzantine Empire are also limited. Providently the modern Russian scholars made great contributions to Central Asian studies given the advantage of Russian control over Central Asia. The Uyghurs themselves, as a developed ethnic group, certainly had rich historical materials; as one Islamic traveler observed: the Uyghur people wrote more books than any other ethnic group (footnote). But, after Islam occupied present-day Xinjiang, only a few books, one of which was the Quran, were left for the Uyghur people, because all the others were destroyed. The situation was even worse for the Indo-Europeans of Central Asia and Xinjiang. Be that as it may, the limited historical materials and modern archaeological discoveries can still help us sketch the framework of a theory for the basic historical facts of this region and its religious landscape. In addition, more archaeological discoveries on Uyghur Christianity have emerged in recent years from the research of Chinese academics.

While the Chinese classics provide basic information about the Kocho Uyghurs from the mid-10th century on, very little can be found of their first century post-exile, that is from 841 to the 950s. China's Song dynasty was established in 960, and, according to the *History of Song* and other historical materials, in 962 (the third year of the *Jian-long* reign) "the military governor of the *Xi-zhou* Uyghurs, [who was named] Ah, along with 41 other people, brought local gifts to pay tribute [to Song China]"; in 980 (the second year of *Tai-ping-xing-guo* reign), "the khan of the *Gan-zhou* and *Sha-zhou* Uyghurs, Yaghlaqar Bilga, sent Pei-yi-de and three other people here to bring and present [gifts of] special camels, famous horses, coral and amber" (Toqtoa, 2000: 10890-

10891).²¹⁷ The *History of Song* explains, “Kocho is also *Xi-zhou*” or West Prefecture (Toqtoa, 2000: 10888).²¹⁸

Take note that this is saying that, more than a century after the Uyghur Khanate moved west, the *Ganzhou-Shazhou* Uyghurs, who were in the present-day Gan-su province of China, bordering their enemy the West Xia kingdom on the east, which was comprised of tall white people centered in Tangut (present-day Ning-xia), were still a political entity with their own khan. In 981 (the sixth year of the *Tai-ping-xing-guo* reign), the Kocho Uyghur king, the Arslan Khan, dispatched an envoy, General Mai Suo-wen, to Song China, and Song emperor Tai-zong immediately sent Wang Yan-de and Bai Xun as envoys to the Kocho Uyghur Khanate. Wang Yan-de and his party left the Song capital of Kai-feng in the spring in 982 and arrived in Kocho the following spring (983) (Toqtoa, 2000: 10887-10888). They set off on their return journey in 984, accompanied by a Uyghur messenger, and arrived in the capital in the spring of 985 (the first year of *Yong-xi* reign) (Toqtoa, 2000: 10890).

²¹⁷ Toqtoa, *History of Song*, Chronicle 249, “Foreign Countries VI”: 建隆三年四月，西州回鹘阿都督等四十二人以方物来贡。乾德三年十一月，西州回鹘可汗遣僧法渊献佛牙、琉璃器、琥珀盏。太平兴国六年，其王始称“西州外生师子王阿厮兰汗”，遣都督麦索温来献。五月，太宗遣供奉官王延德、殿前承旨白勋使高昌。八年，其使安鹞卢来贡。……太平兴国二年冬，遣殿直张璨赍诏谕甘、沙州回鹘可汗外甥，赐以器币，招致名马美玉，以备车骑琮璜之用。五年，甘、沙州回鹘可汗夜落纥密礼遏遣使裴溢的等四人，以橐驼、名马、珊瑚、琥珀来献。

(In April of the third year of the Jian-long reign, the military governor of the Xi-zhou Uyghurs, [who was named] Ah, along with 41 other people, brought local gifts to pay tribute [to Song China]. In November of the third year of Qian-de, the Western Region Uighur Khan sent the monk Fayuan to offer Buddha's tooth, glassware, and amber cups. In the sixth year of Tai-ping-xing-guo, the king began to call himself “Xi-zhou Foreign Born Lion King Ashlan-Khan” and sent the governor Maisowen to offer tribute. In May, [Song China Emperor] Tai-zong sent the attendant official Wang Yan-de and the imperial edict carrier Bai Xun to Gao-chang. In the eighth year, the envoy An Hulu came to pay tribute. ... In the winter of the second year of Tai-ping-xing-guo reign, Zhang Can, a palace guard, was sent to present an imperial edict to the nephew of the Uyghur Khan of Gan-zhou and Sha-zhou, granting him utensils and coins, and took from him famous horses and beautiful jades for the use of [royal] chariots and their decorations. In the fifth year, the Uyghur Khan of Gan-zhou and Sha-zhou, Ye-luo-he Mi-li-e (Yoglaghur Bilga), sent four envoys, including Pei Yide, to offer camels, famous horses, corals, and amber [to the Chinese court].)

²¹⁸ Toqtoa, *History of Song*, Chronicle 249, “Foreign Countries VI”: “高昌即西州也。其地南距于阗，西南距大食、波斯，西距西天，步骆涉雪山、葱岭，皆数千里。”

(Gao-chang is also Xi-zhou (Western Prefecture), which is thousands of miles away from Khotan in the south, Da-shi [Arab] and Persia in the southwest, and from the western world needs crossing the snow-covered mountains and Pamir Mountains in the west by foot or came to be reached.)

According to Wang Yan-de's *A Diplomatic Travelogue to Kocho (or An Envoy's Journey to Xizhou)* (Toqtoa, 2000: 10889), Kocho had:

More than fifty Buddhist temples, all named by Tang China. The Tripitaka, Tang Melody, Jade Book, Sound of Scripture and other (Buddhist scriptures) are stored in the temples. In the spring, groups of residents come and play in these areas. Tourists on horseback shoot arrows as a way of removing misfortunes. There are also buildings to store royal decrees, some of which are from the Tang emperor Tai-zong and emperor Ming-huang [Xuan-zong] in their own handwriting, and they are all locked away in complex ways. In addition [to the Buddhist temples], there are Manichaeian temples and Persian monks, and each holds to its own doctrine. These are what the Buddhist scriptures call the foreign religions. [The kingdom of Kocho] rules large populations of [ethnic groups] the Southern Turks and Northern Turks, Greater and Minor *Zhong-wei*, *Yang-mo*, *Ge-lu* [Karaluks], Khyagas [Kyrgyz], *Mo-man*, *Ge-duo* ethnic group and *Yu-long* ethnic group. In Kocho kingdom, there are no poor people because everyone helps those with no food.²¹⁹

This report provides important information showing that Buddhist and Manichaeian temples co-existed in Kocho. It also mentions Persian monks, whom many scholars consider to be monks of Zoroastrianism, but this is actually a misunderstanding. In the Chinese classics, Zoroastrianism is always called *Huo-xian-jiao* or *Xian-jiao* (which means "religion of fire and sky"), but that name does not appear in this passage, so there is no reason to think these are Zoroastrian monks. A modern expert in Dun-huang studies, Yang Fu-xue, who has researched a Kocho Uyghur khanate document, Scripture S. 6551, dating to approximately the 10th century and unearthed from the scripture depository cave of the Dunhuang Mogao Caves complex (Dunhuang Research Academy Cave 17), concluded that the Persian monks were *Jing* religion (Yang, F. X., 2003: 131), that is, East Syriac Christians.

I agree with Yang because two Chinese classics written in the early Song China provide similar references: Volume 10 of the *Records of Chang'an City* says there were "Persian Hu

²¹⁹ Toqtoa, *History of Song*, Chronicle 249, "Foreign Countries VI": "佛寺五十余区，皆唐朝所赐额，寺中有《大藏经》、《唐韵》、《玉篇》、《经音》等，居民春月多群聚邀乐于其间。游者马上持弓矢射诸物，谓之禳灾。有敕书楼，藏唐太宗、明皇御札诏敕，缄锁甚谨。复有摩尼寺，波斯僧各持其法，佛经所谓外道者也。所统有南突厥、北突厥、大众熨、小眾熨、样磨、割禄、黠戛司、未蛮、格哆族、预龙族之名甚众。国中无贫民，绝食者共赈之。"

temples (*Bo-si-hu-si*) and Zoroastrian temples (*Xian-ci*)” in the capital,²²⁰ and the *Institutional History of Tang* records a royal decree saying the East Syriac Christian missionary “Persian monk Alopen traveled from afar to present the Religion of the Book to the capital” (Wang, P., 1975: 864).²²¹ This royal decree is also recorded on the *Xi-an Jing* Religion Stele, and this is the same

²²⁰ Song Min-qiu, *Records of Chang'an City* (*Chang-an-zhi*, 1076, Chinese Text Project Web site: <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=457321&remap=gb> Date of access: 10 Ap. 2018. “街南之东旧波斯胡寺仪凤二年波斯三卑路斯奏请于此置波斯寺景龙中幸臣宗楚客乐此寺地入其宅遂移寺于布政坊之西南隅袄祠之西”、“西南隅胡袄祠武德四年立西域胡袄神也祠内有萨宝府官主祠袄神亦以胡祝充其职。”

(To the east at the south of the street is the old Persian Hu Temple. In the second year of Yi-feng, the Persian King Peroz III requested to build a Persian temple here. During the Jing-long period, Zong Chu-ke, a favored minister, liked and took the land of the temple into his house territory, so the temple was moved to the southwest corner of Bu-zheng-fang, adjacent at the west of the Zoroastrian Temple. The adjacent Hu Zoroastrian Temple in the southwest was established in the fourth year of Wu-de. The Western Hu Zoroastrian God temple has a Sabao official from the government, who is in charge of the Zoroastrian temple, and sometimes a Hu priest can fill the position.)

²²¹ Wang Pu, *Tang Dynasty Manuscript Compendium, or Institutional History of Tang* 《唐会要》 (AD 961) Vol. 49 “大秦寺：贞观十二年七月。诏曰。道无常名。圣无常体。随方设教。密济群生。波斯僧阿罗本。远将经教。来献上京。详其教旨。元妙无为。生成立要。济物利人。宜行天下所司。即于义宁坊建寺一所。度僧廿一人。”

“天宝四载九月。诏曰。波斯经教。出自大秦。传习而来。久行中国。爰初建寺。因以为名。将欲示人。必修其本。其两京波斯寺。宜改为大秦寺。天下诸府郡置者。亦准此。摩尼寺：贞元十五年四月。以久旱。令摩尼师祈雨。元和二年正月庚子。回纥请于河南府太原府置摩尼寺。许之。会昌三年敕。摩尼寺庄宅钱物。并委功德使及御史台京兆府差官检点。在京外宅修功德回纥。并勒冠带。摩尼寺委中书门下条疏奏闻。”

(Da-qin Temple: In July of the 12th year of Zhen-guan, the emperor issued an edict saying, “The Way has no permanent name. Deity has no permanent person. Teachings are established in different places and they are used to help all living beings. A Persian monk named Alopen brought scriptures and teachings to the capital. The purpose of his teachings was explained in detail. They are wonderful and inactive. They are the key to life. They are beneficial to things and people. They should be promoted by the government everywhere. A temple to be built in Yi-ning-fang was planned and 21 monks were ordained.)

(In September of the 4th year of Tian-bao, the emperor issued an edict saying, “Persian scriptures and teachings came from Da-qin and were spread here. They have been in China for a long time. Therefore, a temple was first built. Thus, it is named after the name of Da-qin. If we want to show the Way to others, we must clarify its origin. Therefore, the Persian temples in the two capitals should be renamed Da-qin Temple. The temples in prefectures and counties throughout the country should also be renamed Da-qin Temple, Manichean Temple: In April of the 15th year of Zhen-yuan, due to a long drought, the emperor ordered the Manichaeus to pray for rain. In the first month of the second year of Yuan-he, the Uyghurs requested to build a Manichean Temple in Tai-yuan provincial capital, He-nan provincial capital. The request was granted in the edict of the third year of Hui-chang: The Manichean temple’s mansions, houses, and money were ordered to be inspected by the meritorious envoys [monastery abbot] and officials from the Imperial Censorate and Jing-zhao [governor of the capital]. The Uyghur monks who made meritorious deeds in the monastery outside the capital were also given

Alopen who is credited in the Xi-an Stele inscription with bringing Christianity (*Jing* religion) to China. So when this Tang-era record refers to him as the “Persian monk Alopen”, it is clear that “Persian monk” is a reference associated with East Syriac Christianity and not Zoroastrianism. And, when Wang Yan-de wrote his travelogue in the Song dynasty, he used the same term, “Persian monk”, to indicate East Syriac Christians. In addition, in the preceding section of the same chapter, the *History of Song* states the Yu-tian kingdom (Khotan) has the “custom to serve [worship] the Zoroastrian [*Xian-jiao*] god” and has a Manichean teacher (Toqtoa, 2000: 10885),²²² which clearly indicates court history could differentiate and recognize the four religions without confusion.

In his introduction, Wang also explains to his Chinese readers that Manichaeism and East Syriac Christianity are what Chinese Buddhism at that time regarded as foreign religions (*wai-dao*). Furthermore, even though he mentions that Kocho had more than fifty Buddhist temples, he also explains that their names were given by the Tang China court, as if to indicate subtly that Kocho’s Buddhism was politically supported by the China rulers. Tang China also promoted Daoism in its westernmost frontier, especially during the reign of emperor Xuan-zong, with Daoist temples built at least in Kumul (Ha-mi), Dun-huang, and Turpan (Liu, Z., 2022: 96-97).²²³ The

a government official’s hat and belt. The Manichean temple entrusted Secretariat-Chancellery to report and submit a memorial to the emperor.)

²²² Ibid., “于阗国，自汉至唐，皆入贡中国。……建隆二年十二月……本国摩尼师贡琉璃瓶二、胡锦一段。……俗事袄神。”

(The Khotan State paid tribute to China from the Han Dynasty through the Tang Dynasty. ... In December of the second year of the Jian-long reign, the Manichean master of this country presented two glass bottles and a piece of Hu brocade as tribute.)

²²³ <http://sino.newdu.com/m/view.php?aid=97845>: 敦煌出土的《沙州伊州地志》残卷中记载，唐代伊州（哈密）三县共有 3 座道观，即伊吾县的“祥麟观”、“大尹观”，柔远县的“天上观”。又据大谷光瑞文书，高昌有“周楼观”、“口汤观”等。

(The fragment of the “Sha-zhou & Yi-zhou Geography” unearthed in Dun-huang records that there were three Daoist temples in the three counties of Yi-zhou (Hami) in the Tang Dynasty, namely the “Xiang-mian Temple” and “Da-yin Temple” in Yi-wu County, and the “Tian-shang Temple” in Rou-yuan County. According to the documents of Otani Mitsuru, Gao-chang had the “Zhou-lou Temple” and “Kou-tang Temple”.)

刘志：《唐代老子经像西传考—敦煌文化与丝绸之路典范探析》：“已知唐代沙州的道教宫观，有紫极宫、神泉观、开元观等，共有八座，也具有一定规模。……天宝年间西州高昌县安西坊建有紫极宫。”

(Liu Zhi: “Study on the Transmission of Laozi’s Sutras and Images to the West in the Tang Dynasty - Analysis of Dun-huang Culture and the Silk Road Case Model”: “It is known that there were eight Daoist temples in Sha-zhou during the Tang Dynasty, including Zi-ji Palace, Shen-quan Temple, Kai-yuan Temple, etc., which were also of a certain scale. ... During the Tian-bao period, Zi-ji Palace was built in An-xi-fang, Gao-chang County, Xizhou [Western Prefecture].”)

most important information here is that Manichaeism and East Syriac Christianity co-existed during this time and that “each holds to its own doctrine”, such wording suggesting that they competed with one another. Happily, a Syriac Christian manuscript excavated in Kocho (Turpan) provides complementary information. This apologetics text denounces Manichean opponents as “those non-Christians who confess two eternal (beings)” (Sims-Williams, N., 2009: 283). However, neither Chinese passage nor Syriac text say how many Manichean or East Syriac church buildings were in the Uyghur capital Kocho city.

Wang makes clear that Kocho was also called *Xi-zhou*, and that many Uyghurs lived in the area. The city of *Jiao-he* (which means “where two rivers merge”) was the capital of the native Indo-European Kocho kingdom during China’s Jin dynasty (265-420) and the earlier ages, but the Kocho kingdom also had a city called Kocho (Gao-chang), which was not the capital. Right before Song China’s founding, the *Old Book of Tang* by Liu Xu in 945 states that “the kingdom has twenty-one cities, and the king set his court in Gao-chang [Kocho] city” instead of *Jiao-he*. So there were twenty-two cities in total in the Turpan Basin (Liu, X., 2000: 3602-3603).²²⁴ After taking over the Indo-European Kocho kingdom, it became part of the Kocho Uyghur Kingdom. According to Wang, the Uyghur king still followed the Uyghur khan tradition of showing reverence by calling China the royal uncle, a practice that dated back to the Tang China marriages of Uyghur khans to Chinese princesses. The king also invited the Chinese envoy to the northern court, *Bei-ting* (Beshbalik, present-day Jimsar), where the king escaped the heat of summer. Wang Yan-de provides this description of the residents of *Bei-ting*: “The people are fair-skinned, proper, skilled craftsmen and expert at smelting and making gold, silver, bronze and iron into vessels as well as carving jade. (Toqtoa, 2000: 10889-10890)” This means that its subjects here were still mainly native Indo-European whites, and that they were good at metallurgy and handicrafts.

²²⁴ Liu, *Old Book of Tang*, Western Rong: “高昌者，汉车师前王之庭，后汉戊己【巳】校尉之故地。在京师西四千三百里。其国有二十一城，王都高昌。其交河城，前王庭也；田地城，校尉城也。[3602] 君集分兵掠地，下其三郡、五县、二十二城。户八千，口三万七千七百，马四千三百匹。其界东西八百里，南北五百里。 [3603]”

(Gao-chang was the former court of the king of Former Section of the Ju-shi kingdom of the Han China and the former site of the Wu-ji [Wu-si] Colonel of the Later Han Dynasty. It is 4,300 Chinese miles west of the capital. The kingdom has twenty-one cities, and the king set his court in Gao-chang [Kocho] city. Jiao-he City is the former court of the kingdom; Tian-di is the [Chinese] colonel's city. [3602] ... Jun-ji king dispatched his troops in different directions, plundered the land, and took over three prefectures, five counties, and 22 cities. There are 8,000 households, 37,700 people, and 4,300 horses in Gao-chang kingdom. Its borders are 800 Chinese miles from east to west and 500 Chinese miles from north to south. [3603])

According to an account in the *History of Song*: “In April of the first year of the Yong-xi reign, a *Xi-zhou* [Kocho] Uyghur, a Brahmin monk Yong-shi, and A-li-yan, a Persian follower of a foreign religion, came to offer tribute to the court.”²²⁵ The document about the event happened in 984 mentions these three people who were likely Uyghur envoys that Wang Yan-de brought back with him. From our previous discussion on “Persian monks”. What is clear is that A-li-yan is a Christian and that Yong-shi is an Indian Buddhist. The Uyghurs sending Buddhists to the Song Chinese likely was in consideration of the fact that Song China was largely Buddhist, but what’s the meaning of sending a Christian envoy? At a minimum, it shows that the Uyghurs were not sending Manichaeans, as they did to the Tang China court before their move west. In addition, Kucha (in Chinese *Qiu-ci*) is also mentioned here in the *History of Song*. It was ruled by Uyghurs who are called the Qiu-ci Uyghurs and their king’s title was also “lion king”, without mentioning their religions (Toqtoa, 2000: 10896). Somehow Yan-qi is left out in the History of Song for an unknown reason.

In sum, in the early years of Song China (late 10th century), after the Uyghurs arrived, for nearly one and a half centuries, the rulers of Kocho-Karlasahr-Kucha-Beiting around the eastern Tian-shan mountain range were Uyghurs, but their subjects were still predominantly native Indo-Europeans and other non-white groups such as Turks, Karluks and Kyrgyz. The three religions in these regions were Buddhism, Christianity, and Manichaeism (mainly brought over by Uyghurs), instead of only Buddhism and Christianity as in the time of the *Book of Wei*. It seems Buddhism gained the upper-hand over Christianity. The reason for this is unknown because there were many changes after one and half centuries of colonisation and Uyghurisation, as the native Tocharian language disappeared by this time. Nevertheless, the archaeological discoveries in the Kocho and Bei-ting regions establish this fact and also show the institutional existence and contextualization of East Syriac Christianity among the Uyghurs and the others in the regions.

In addition, the reference in the Chinese classics about the religious scenario in Gao-chang and Bei-ting remained unclear or even silenced by the middle of the tenth century, which should be the same or different from the time before AD 640 when Tang China took over the Turpan Basin. The *Old Book of Tang* states that Qiu-ci attached importance to Buddhism, without mentioning Christianity, and does not mention religions in Gao-chang and Yan-qi, although it mentions religions for other kingdoms in the Tarim Basin, such as Zoroastrianism in the Shu-le

²²⁵ Toqtoa, *History of Song*, Chronicle 249, “Foreign Countries VI”: “雍熙元年四月，西州回鹘与婆罗门僧永世、波斯外道阿里烟同入贡。”

kingdom, and both Buddhism and Zoroastrianism in the Yu-tian kingdom (Liu, X., 2000: 3609).²²⁶ The *Book of Song* mentions the religions in the Kocho kingdom from Wang Yande's visit, nearly four decades later after the *Old Book of Tang* was published without mentioning Christianity. The reason for this omission remains unknown. Although the religions of the kingdoms of Gao-chang and Yan-qi were not mentioned, I believe that, based on the proof in the *Book of Wei*, the Christian tradition was still maintained there if not further developed.

Modern and contemporary archaeological discoveries also support the above speculative argument. For example, Sir Marc Aurel Stein (1862-1943), the Hungarian-born Jew who became a British citizen in 1904 and a prominent pioneer archaeologist in Central Asia and Xinjiang studies, commented in his 1912 publication that, during his expedition in the Turpan Basin in November of 1907: "A different religious spirit had prevailed in Uigur times [since 841] ; for among the numerous finds of manuscripts which rewarded the German archaeologists, there were fragments of Manichaeian and even Nestorian texts in early Turki and Sogdian. Other finds, too, in the Turfan region show that Christians and followers of Mani then lived peacefully among a population that was preponderatingly Buddhist." (Stein, M., A., 1987: 359) What Stein mentions here as "preponderatingly Buddhist" seems to be one of the earliest versions of a misleading statement for later scholars about the religious landscape of the Turpan Basin.

4.5.2 Archaeological Proof of Institutionalised Mature Christianity in the Kingdom of the Kocho Uyghurs

A considerable number of Uyghur cultural relics of East Syriac Christianity have been unearthed in archaeological digs in the Kocho (Turpan) area since the beginning of the 20th century. Among these discoveries are churches, monasteries, murals, and texts, mostly from the ninth to eleventh centuries, which were the first two centuries after the Uyghurs moved west. There are also manuscript fragments from the 9th to the 13th centuries (Dickens, M., 2013: 374). Before these discoveries, no one knew or even believed that such a mature and institutionalized East Syriac

²²⁶ Liu, *Old Book of Tang*, Western Rong: "疏勒国，即汉时旧地也。……俗事袄神，有胡书文字。……于阗国，西南带葱岭，与龟兹接，……好事袄神，崇佛教。"

"Shu-le is an old land [of China] during the Han Dynasty. ... The people worship Zoroastrianism and have Hu writing scripts. ... Khotan State is bordered by the Pamir Mountains in the southwest and adjacent to Qiu-ci. ... They are fond of Zoroastrianism and venerate Buddhism."

Christian community existed in this area. But obviously there was one, related to the newly established Uyghur kingdom in this historical period.

In fact, during the ninth to eleventh centuries after the Uyghur migration, because of Islam's military conquest and its cultural revolution, the organizational structure of the traditional civilization of the region's various racial-ethnic groups were under or facing systematic and thorough destruction in order to create a brand new, Islam-centric history. That was the situation east of the Pamirs in the Tarim Basin and in the eastern Tian-shan regions, including Kocho, and especially in what was once Bactria-Tocharian (*Da-xia*) at the west of the Pamirs and the Chu River valley-Zhetysu regions around westernmost Tian-shan. By the end of the 14th century, the magnificent native civilization and its books and even architecture had vanished without a trace, and later generations can only fondly recall this history from a few headstones and inscriptions that have been unearthed (Niu, R. J., 2008: 213). Nevertheless, these have given some scholars further impetus to search for historical facts and related memory.

Moreover, Manichaeism is a heretical form of Christianity, and, in addition to using the Syriac language with some shared vocabulary and even having clerics who wear white robes, it and East Syriac Christianity are superficially similar in terms of theology, practice and rituals. Therefore, if only a few isolated excavated cultural relics or fragments of manuscripts are examined, it is difficult to differentiate Manichaeism from East Syriac Christianity. For instance, the so-called "Fragments of Classical Manichean texts" (Serial number D. 0071) held in a Dun-huang research department in the 1950s was proved in the 1990s to be a passage of Paul's Epistle to the Galatians written in Syriac (Peng, J. Z., 2013: 55). Also, from a literal reading, a prayer for the "Blessed Small Feast Day" that was discovered in the Berlin copy of the Turpan text of the "Confessional-Prayer" of Manichaeism is no different doctrinally from a Christian prayer. The text reads:

"We pray. Oh, Tengri [Heavenly God] ...give Tengri...our sins... forgive us...Jesus Christ ...our souls."

In "The Proclamation of the Crucifixion," the Manichean text reads: "he lost consciousness and died. [two lines free] Thus was the Parinirvāṇa of our Lord, as it is written. And no one should esteem it to be more glorious. [up to six lines missing] Redeem (us) from all these things that have come upon us. It shows that when-as we all know-Jesus Christ, our Lord, was crucified, they seized him like a sinner. And they clothed (him) in a robe and [gave] him a stick in [his hand]. And they venerated him . . . and said, ". . . King, our Christ!" And then they led him to the cross." (Klimkeit, H., 1993: 72)

In comparison, a Christian prayer from a Syriac fragment which is possibly a personal prayer amulet says (Hunter, E., 2012: 87):

1. The anathema of the holy [Quprina]
2. In the name ... forever. Amen.
3. By the prayer of the saint ... who as he was celebrated
4. in this world ... he requested from our Lord Jesus Christ and he gave
5. him his request ... Praise to you God in heaven
6. and on [earth] ... that hangs on him, your servant
7. ... merciful God. Mar ...
8. directed his mind to God. Now
9. ... Yea, Lord

Between 1902 and 1914, four Prussian-German expeditions to the Turpan Basin “brought back approximately 40,000 manuscript fragments in 22 languages and 20 scripts to Berlin” and, although “most texts are either Buddhist or Manichean, more than 1,100 fragments are Christian” (Dickens, M. & Zieme, P. 2014: 303). From the ruins of a Christian monastery in Shui-pang near Bulayiq (Niu, R. J., 2008: 4) in northern Turpan Basin was unearthed a considerable number of Syriac Christian manuscript fragments; a small number of other manuscript fragments were also unearthed elsewhere in the Turpan area, including from Astana, the ruins of the ancient city of Kocho, and other locations such as Qurutqa, and Tuyuq (Niu, R. J., 2008: 6). Germany’s Academy of Sciences Leopoldina now holds a series of approximately 500 East Syriac Christian documents in the Syriac and Sogdian languages in its Turpan collection (Niu, R. J., 2008: 4). According to a prominent scholar Niu Ru-ji in Xinjiang Uyghur studies, who studied some of these documents in 2001:

The main writing used in the Turpan handwritten texts was the East Syriac Christian font of the Syriac language, and what was written was in the Sogdian and Syriac languages. But there were also approximately 40 to 50 Uyghur-language fragments (written in Syriac and Uyghur script), and portions of the Psalms written in several other languages: one uses ancient Persian (Pahlavi script), one uses both Syriac and New Persian, and one even has a line of Greek above the first line of the Sogdian translation. ... Syriac naturally was the main language used in the rituals of the Bulayiq religion. Some Syriac poems, hymnals and prayer books had already been discovered there. (Niu, R. J., 2008: 4-5)

In 1905, Albert Von Le Coq led the second team of German academics to Central Asia and discovered in Turpan, Xinjiang, a Uyghur Christian ruins outside the site of the ruined ancient city of Kocho. The ruins were Christian relics from the 9th to 10th century (Li, S., 2003: 102), the first century after the Uyghurs arrival. One was the ruins of a church outside the city's eastern gate, inside of which were two murals: one depicts people welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem—now part of the collection of the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin-Dahlem and called “Palm Sunday”; the other shows a knight holding a cross. In the ruins of the monastery discovered in Shui-pang (Niu, R. J., 2008: 4-5), a great quantity of Christian literature was also unearthed, such as copies of the New Testament, catechisms (Zhu, Q. Z., 1998: 192), “service books, sermon books, canon, collections of the saying of bishops, prescriptions, etc., written variously in the Syriac, Sogdian, mid-ancient Persian, Pahlavi, new Persian and Uyghur Turkic languages, but most of the literature was in Syriac” (Li, S., 2003: 102).

Currently, most of the ancient texts about East Syriac Christianity written in the Uyghur language and in the Syriac language using Uyghur script were unearthed from a site that “must have been a Christian monastic complex” in the town of Bulayiq, near Turpan's Grape Valley (Dickens, M., 2013: 304). One is a tenth to eleventh century Christian prayer in the Uyghur language, the last two lines of which read, “Most importantly, you are the Redeemer of all sinners. You are God...”²²⁷ Also, a folio written in Uyghur script (fragment SyrHT 124) reads: “The holy gospel of our Lord Jesus (according to) the preaching of Luke, Mark” (Kiraz, G. A., 2012: 348). Another recounts in 80 lines of Uyghur text the three magi worshipping the baby Jesus based on the *Protevangelium Jacobi* of Syriac Christian tradition (Niu, R. J., 2024: 21). It was discovered by German archaeologists and is now with the serial number T II B 29 in a Berlin museum. It probably dates to the eleventh to thirteenth centuries and reads:

As a return gift, Christ briefly left the manger and grabbed a round stone the way one grabs a dough ball and gave to the magi. The magi accepted the stone, but try as they might, they could not move it; they had the pack animals carry it, but they also were not able to carry it. So after discussing it for a while, they pushed the stone down a well they encountered on their way. Shortly after, as they watched, a frightening ring of great light (or fire)²²⁸ rose up from the well. Astonished, they realized they had

²²⁷ Contemporary *Uyghur Christian Bible* (Hongkong, 2005).

²²⁸ I prefer Niu Ru-ji's use in his article “great light” over “great fire” translating in Yang Fu-Xue's article. In Byzantine and Syriac Christian traditions, seeing “uncreated light” of God is one of the most important religious experiences. Therefore, it is quite different from “fire”.

tossed away a treasure. For this reason, even to today, magi are still scared of fire.
(Yang, F. X., 2001: 168; Niu, R. J., 2024: 29)

In Uyghur Christian texts, Jesus is called Missiah King, Missiah God, or Son of Heaven (*tängri oyli*), and even Khan (*ilig khan*), or Doctor (*otači ämči*), as titles for Savior (Niu, R. J., 2024: 29). Niu Ru-ji states in his recently published article that “*The Last Night of the Passion of St. George*, which is also preserved in Uyghur texts, originated from the Syriac tradition. It contains the saint's last prayer before his execution, and it declares the effect of calling his name in times of need.” (Niu, R. J., 2024: 29)

These texts show the kind of contextualization of Christianity found in Uyghur literature. There is even more evidence proving the existence of Christianity among the Uyghurs, although the details of the Christian influence on Uyghur culture cannot be determined. Among the Uyghur-language texts found in 1905 was also a *Nestorian Breviary and Liturgy*, based on its script. It was determined as dating to the ninth or tenth century (Minganna, 1925: 336), though more likely the ninth century. We should recall that the Uyghurs moved to Kocho (Turpan) and re-established their Uyghur Khanate there in the mid-ninth century. These Uyghur-language Christian texts and the established church of this period show the depth of the Uyghur people's Christian faith. The question is, did Uyghurs bring their own Christianity here, or did they convert to the local Christianity not long after their arrival? The first hypothesis seems more likely, since at least one of the Uyghur groups, as I have demonstrated in the precious chapter, embraced Christianity before they came.

Furthermore, Niu Ru-ji recently noted in his article: “Though Syriac [Christian] manuscripts only consist of 3% of the total manuscripts discovered in Turpan, they prove that in Gao-chang Uyghur kingdom existed a prosperous Christian community.” (Niu, R. J., 2024: 18) In a footnote, he also states: “We do not know when Christianity first arrived in Turpan, whether before or after the establishment of local government in the Gao-chang Uyghur Kingdom. Christian texts from Turpan are usually dated between the 9th and 14th centuries, although specific dates have not yet been suggested for all documents.”²²⁹ (Niu, R. J., 2024: 21) In the second chapter of this thesis, I point out that Christianity prevailed in the Turpan Basin in the fifth to sixth century among

²²⁹ “我们不知道基督教是什么时候第一次传到吐鲁番的，不清楚是在高昌回鹘王国地方政权建立之前还是之后。吐鲁番的基督教文本通常追溯在 9—14 世纪之间，尽管尚未对所有文献都能提供具体年代建议。”

the native Indo-Europeans, the Tocharians, although no Tocharian Christian texts have been found yet.

What needs to be stressed is that the content of the Christian manuscript fragments unearthed from Turpan is basically authentically Christian. Prominent scholars in the study of Turpan manuscripts, Mark Dickens and Peter Zieme, who conducted detailed hermeneutics and textual analysis of these Uyghur Christian manuscript fragments unearthed in Turpan, describe a unique document in the Turpan Collection in Berlin that consists of “nine folios of Syriac written in the Uyghur script, bearing the original signature number T II B 10” (Dickens, M. & Zieme, P. 2014: 293). Folios 1-6 are from the Psalter, and, according to the order it was written, include parts of Psalms 11, 12, 13, 14, 99, 101, 86, 87 and 88. The other three folios are from the hymns (*Teshbhatha*) of Mar Babai, Mar Ephrem and Mar Narsai that are used in East Syriac Christian liturgy (Dickens, M. & Zieme, P. 2014: 295-297, 328). Dickens and Zieme point out: “It is clear that the scribe followed a systematic approach in transcribing Syriac into Uyghur script,...” and though “both the Syriac script and the Uyghur script (the latter via the Sogdian script) have their ultimate origins in the Aramaic script, there were still challenges for the scribe, based on phonological differences between the two languages” (Dickens, M. & Zieme, P. 2014: 298). Also, from a linguistic perspective, these insights indicate that Uyghur-speakers played a role in copying Syriac manuscripts (Dickens, M., 2013: 11). The question here is if the scribe was a native Uyghur speaker, Syriac speaker, or even a Sogdian speaker as we assess the fact that more Sogdian texts are being unearthed in the Turpan rather than the Uyghur language.

In this precious Syriac manuscript written using the Uyghur script, folio 7 is a hand-copied hymn of Mar Babai of Nisibis, a portion of which goes like this:

“(7r1) good and evil according to what they have done. (7r2) May your compassion be an advocate for us and may we not be condemned (7r3) in your just judgement. And in that hour when your mercies shine forth, (7r4) may we go forth to meet you according to your will. ...And may all of us together lift up praise to the Father (7r8) and the Son and the Holy Spirit, to whom (7r9) (be) praise from his worshippers forever (7r10) and ever, Amen and Amen.”

Mar Ephrem Hymn: “...(7v2) joy on the upright in heart. Jesus, our Lord (7v3) Christ, has shone forth on us from the bosom (7v4) of his Father. He has come and brought us forth from (7v5) darkness and has enlightened us with his glorious light. ...”

Folio 8 is a copy of the hymn of Mar Narsai: “(Marg.) The light of the manifestation of Christ has made glad. (8r9) The light (8r10) of the manifestation of Christ has made glad (8r11) earth

and heaven and has chased away darkness (8r12) from his people, who were going astray (8v1) in their sins. ..." (Dickens, M. & Zieme, P. 2014: 326-327)

On the basis of Zieme's research results, Mark Dickens carefully translated and interpreted another manuscript fragment unearthed in Turpan: U338 (Original signature number T II B 41, No. 1). This is a handy prayer booklet "formed of 5 sheets, resulting in 10 folios and 20 sides", which can be divided into five sections: 1. "Syriac prayer"; 2. "Uyghur prayer in Uyghur script"; 3. "Uyghur prayer in Syriac script, including two lines in Syriac"; 4. "Uyghur colophon in Uyghur script" (Dickes, M., 2013: 305-307). The Uyghur prayer in Uyghur script in section 2 reads: "By the heart of love and gratification of God, our Lord Messiah who keeps our bodies healthy and alive, who rescues our souls, who has mercy with all creatures of Adam's lineage (who has mercy with the fiery and flaming people) (blessings may come) upon the holy *ärkiküt* who are praised through the word 'peoples blessed, men praised!'" (Zieme, P., 2009: 178) What needs to be noted here is that the Uyghur word "*ärkiküt*", written only in Syriac script, is from *ärkägün* which is the plural form of Christian during the age of the Mongols. In 2021, the new archaeological discoveries in the Qi-tai County Xinjiang of the Christian complex site included the written term in Uyghur script on the wall. The origin of the term remains unknown and debated (Zieme, P., 2009: 171), and it will come up again in the next chapter.

Comparing the above Uyghur prayer in section 2 with two lines in section 3 of the same prayer written in Syriac reveals how closely the two prayers match: "And through the love, affection (and) heart of our Lord (Khan) Messiah God, the keeper of these our bodies alive (and) healthy (and) the saviour of our souls, (there is) blessing for the Christians, (who are) lifted up by the good name (and) praised by the reputation (of) 'a redeemed people, a glorious race (or congregation)'" (Dickens, M., 2013: 313). Finally, the colophon written in Uyghur reads: "the Cow year, the first month, on the 23rd, I, Bäküz (=Bacchus) have written (it). Its merit may be transferred to my father Yonan [Jonah]. Amen, amen [Zieme, P., 2009: 178]. Writing like this five times, may a boy [or] girl be heard reciting [it] in the house, Amen." (Dickens, M., 2013: 309)

According to my research on Chinese historical materials, before AD 640 when Tang China took over the Turpan Basin, Christianity was the primary religion among Kocho's native Indo-Europeans (mostly Tocharians), who also believed in Buddhism, and these native Indo-Europeans "use both Chinese and *Hu* as their written language". This is why the Christian relics unearthed in Kocho are not only in Uyghur script but also in Sogdian script and Chinese. Remembering this detail will help clarify a common misunderstanding of the so-called Uyghur Buddhism, as will be shown in the next chapter. We have already mentioned that the Sogdian language is a type of Eastern Iranian language, as "one of the middle Persian dialects of Central

Asia" (Mingana, 1925: 336), probably derived from the Scythian (Saka) language, different from the Tocharian languages. In Chinese historical materials, it is also called the *Kang-ju* language, and in the *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions (Da-tang-xi-yu-ji)* was called Sulik (*Su-li*). (Zhu, Q. Z., 1998: 192)

Among the documents that were unearthed from the Turpan Basin was a seriously damaged Christian fragment written in Uyghur that mentions the apostles Matthew and Zebedee. The content is from the Book of Luke but with one more passage than in Luke (Yang, F., X., 2001: 169). During their third Turpan expedition from 1905 to 1907, Germans found Christian documents written in Turkic using the Syriac script. The text of one document discovered in Kurutka and given the serial No. T III Kurutka 1857 is 36 lines written in Uyghur that reads like a wedding prayer asking God to bless the young bride (Yang, F., X., 2001: 170; Niu, R., J., 2008: 9). The text of another prayer includes prayers to the Savior who saves people from suffering and illness and disasters. Similarly, another prayer text speaks of praying to "the only God" and asks that He bless "all the men standing in the church" and liberate people from "worshiping demons". Interestingly, the inscription ends with two handwritten prayer texts in Uyghur and Syriac expressing the hope that the copyist's merits be transferred to other people and to the royal family (Yang, F., X., 2001: 170). All of this demonstrates the mature liturgical and corporate worship practiced by institutional congregations among the Uyghurs and in their culture.

Also found was "Excerpts from the Gospels", without doubt an exciting text. This was used by the local church and its communities. Most importantly, the teachings that the congregation was supposed to recite are exactly the same as those used by East Syriac Christianity's mother church in Persia and Mesopotamia. This text dates to no later than the 10th century and uses letters of the Syriac script to write the Middle Persian dialect of Sogdian mixed with some sentences completely in Syriac. This text quotes sixteen times from the Book of Matthew, nineteen times from Luke, fifteen times from John, and once each from First Corinthians and Galatians. All of the quoted scriptures were identical to the official version of the Bible (*Peshitta*) used by the mother church of East Syriac Christianity. This text was translated in its entirety by F.W.K. Muller and published in 1912 (Mingana, 1925: 338).

From the above-mentioned archaeological discoveries and the textual studies, it's clear from the fact that there were more Sogdian language texts than any other that the Sogdian-speaking community in the local church was proportionately significant. So, once again confirmed is that, before the Uyghurs moved to Kocho in 841, Christianity in the Kocho region was already a mature institutional religious tradition for about three or four centuries as noted in the thesis's second chapter, and that it was evenly matched with and even slightly more popular than traditional

Buddhism, as the Chinese classics also indicated. Also clear is that the writers use “*Hu* as their written language”. In addition, it was not until after the Uyghurs moved west that the Christian relics from the Kocho area suddenly increased. And these relics not only reflected the Christianity of the Uyghurs, they also reflected the Christianity of the native Indo-Europeans. This then confirms our earlier research and deduction: the Uyghurs had already begun to accept Christianity before they moved west, so that, when they arrived in Kocho as the overlords, they spurred the growth of Christianity that was already there, including strengthening such institutional facilities as churches and monasteries.

However, the importance of the influence of Uyghur Christianity on Kocho—or put another way, the fact that large numbers of artifacts sprang up only in the period following the Uyghurs’ move west—does not necessarily mean that the existing Christian tradition among the local Indo-Europeans was lacking in institutional depth. Addressing the reluctance of some in the academic community who cannot conceive of Christianity being popular among the local Indo-Europeans in Kocho before the arrival of the Uyghurs is the appearance in Turpan of large numbers of Sogdian-language Christian documents, which were recorded by ancient Chinese-language historical materials. Still, some have speculated these documents result from missionaries and Christians, especially those diasporic Christians escaping from Islamic suppression from the west, when moving from the Sogdian area and settling in Turpan.

For example, the prominent Turpan manuscripts study scholar Nicholas Sims-Williams, pointed out: “No Christian texts in Sogdian have been discovered in Sogdiana itself, although it is not inconceivable that some of the Christian Sogdian texts discovered in the Turpan oasis may originate there.”(Sims-Williams, N., 2009: 273) Or, as Mark Dickens and Peter Zieme explain: “The Sogdians, originating in what is now Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, established *diaspora* communities throughout Central Asia and China”. (Dickens, M. & Zieme, P. 2014: 293) Obviously, such preconceptions with regard to Christianity in Kocho were formed by overlooking details in Chinese classics that have been waiting to be noticed all along. Of course, future archaeological excavations may find even more relics of institutional Christianity in Kocho that pre-date the Uyghurs’ westward move.

Providentially, in 2021 the rediscoveries by Chinese archeologists on the ruins of the Xi-pang Christian site in the Turpan basin of abundant relics further reveal a highly institutionalized Christianity. Critically, this revelation also indicates that the Christian site might have been

originally built before the Tang era of China (AD 618-907) and mainly used during the Kocho Uyghur kingdom (841-1392).²³⁰ The paper published in 2022 reports in summary:

The Xi-pang site is a fully functional Jing religion temple. In addition to religious ritual buildings, it also includes living facilities such as kitchens, wine cellars, and dormitories. Among them, the three groups of buildings arranged in the north and south have the layout characteristics of the so-called "triple-nave church," which is similar to the layout of Jing religion temples in West Asia and Central Asia. In terms of mural style, techniques, pigments, etc., however, a clear connection is evidenced with the murals of the Gao-chang Uyghur period such as the Bezeklik Grottoes, Tuyugou Grottoes, and the K Temple (Manichean Temple) in the ancient city of Gao-chang. All these reflect that, when Jing religion spread in the Gao-chang Uyghur Khanate, it not only complied with the norms of Jing religion temple architecture, but also carried out localized transformation in combination with local traditions. (Liu, W.S., Wang, Z. X., & Wang, L., 2022: 80)

4.6 Uyghurised Christianity: The racial-ethnically and linguistically diverse Christian communities in the Uyghur Kocho Kingdom

The Christian manuscripts and texts unearthed in Gao-chang (Turpan), Bei-ting (Jimsar), and Qitai include Syriac, Middle Sogdian, Uyghur, Chinese, Eastern Iranian, New Persian, Old Persian (Pahlavi), and Greek. In addition, the unearthed murals of human figures directly explain the existence of Christian communities of different racial-ethnicities and nationalities during this historical period, the age of Uyghur Christianity. This historical landscape of the Christian Church

²³⁰ "Based on the analysis of the architectural layout and unearthed relics, we think that the first two phases of buildings are of the nature of Jing religion temples. The unearthed wooden cups with linked bead patterns and painted with Tang dynasty style mural fragments, which are characteristic of Tang dynasty wooden objects in the Astana cemetery in Turpan, show that the period of the original construction of the Xi-pan site may have entered the Tang dynasty; Song dynasty coins, a lacquer bowl with a ten-curved flower mouth and inscribed with "Yi-wei Year Sun Shang (?)", Uyghur-style figure murals, and Uyghur-language documents indicate that the main period of the site should be the Gao-chang Uyghur period."

“根据建筑布局及出土遗物的分析，我们认为前两期建筑均具景教寺院性质。具有吐鲁番阿斯塔那墓地唐墓木器特征的联珠纹彩绘木杯、唐代风格壁画残块的出土显示了西旁遗址的始建年代可能已进入唐代；宋代钱币、朱书“乙未年孙上(?)”十曲花口漆碗、回鹘风格人物壁画及回鹘文文书等，表明遗址的主体年代应为高昌回鹘时期。”

in multiple ethnic groups, races, languages and national identities unfolds in the process of the Uyghurisation of Christianity in the Kocho Uyghur Kingdom.

Toward the close of the chapter 3, I mentioned two of my theories: 1. The archaeological discoveries in Turpan show that Sogdian-Uyghur Christianity prevailed right after the Uyghurs arrived. 2. Christianity already existed among the local Indo-European groups, mainly the Tocharians before the Uyghurs arrived here. I am more confident in the second theory, but I think the first theory needs further development. In this effort, I propose the term “Uyghurized Christianity” or “Uyghurfied Christianity” to reflect a hypothetical sub-theory based on the first theory. The Christianity discovered in Turpan of the Sogdian language not only reflects a native Christianity in Turpan, but also indicates that the Uyghurs brought with them to the Turpan Basin the Uyghurized Sogdian Manichaeism and possibly a Uyghurized Sogdian Christianity, expressed in Syriac, Sogdian, and Uyghur languages.

This is a creative hypothesis because Sogdian Christianity and Sogdian Manichaeism long existed before Uyghurs migrated west, and, according to Tang Chinese court history, there were many Sogdian-Hu people among the Uyghurs. Since Sogdian Manicheans, merchants and architects served the Uyghur Orkhon Khanate, we cannot rule out the presence of the Sogdian Christians. However, this hypothesis makes the whole picture of Turpan Christianity and Uyghur religions more complex and exciting. However, some Tocharian Christian relics have to be found in the future to justify this hypothesis together with my second theory.

4.6.1 Multi-linguistic Christian groups in the Turpan Basin, Bei-ting (Jimsar), and Qi-tai

As reflected in the study of Sims-Williams, “One of the most interesting aspects of the Christian materials from Turfan is what they reveal to us of the multilingual (and to some degree, multiethnic) state of the Christian community there.” (Dickens, M., 2009: 24) Again, it must be acknowledged that there is quite a shortage of materials related to the Christian faith of the Uyghur people, and that for the materials that are available, there is a lack of detailed descriptions. Nonetheless, the ancient materials that have been discovered so far all abundantly show that the widespread of Christianity among the Hunnic-Turkic-speaking groups, especially among Kocho Uyghurs, was indeed a macro-historical reality even if the micro-details are still lacking. These ancient materials include historical sources left behind by the church (monastery) and government, Christians and Muslims, both in a trail of official records and personal travelogues, and especially in the cultural relics unearthed in the past century.

Christian phenomena in Turpan were not alone, but together a good representative of Central Asian Christianity. The same is true in the Zhetysu river-lake regions (the valley of the Ili River-Lake Balkhash area). According to Sims-Williams, Christianity also flourished in these areas from the eighth to tenth centuries under Karluk rule, and several Sogdian inscriptions have been found here, including a Christian one written in Syriac (Sims-Williams, N., 2009: 273-274).²³¹ Beginning in 1885, Russians excavated approximately 630 headstones of “two Nestorian cemeteries of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries” (Mingana, 1925: 333). Some of these 630 headstones that have been examined and the findings published, the deceased included “nine archdeacons, eight doctors of ecclesiastical jurisprudence and of Biblical interpretation, twenty-two visitors, three commentators, forty-six scholastics, two preachers and an imposing number of priests” (Mingana, 1925: 334). It is obvious from this number of leaders that the institutional scope of the Christian community here was huge, even if the relevant historical materials are similarly lacking. The new archaeological discoveries in the regions have further proved that point.²³²

The ancient Christian manuscripts found in the Kocho-Turpan region, however, are comparatively rich: “most of these manuscripts are thought to date from the ninth and tenth centuries”, were written on paper (Sims-Williams, N., 2009: 272) and were significant and revelatory. According to Sims-Williams, “In 1905, when the Second German Turpan Expedition began to excavate at Bulayiq, the erstwhile existence of significant communities of Sogdian-speaking Christians was hardly suspected. The linguistic and literary importance of the discovery of a large collection of Christian literature in Sogdian was quickly recognized.” (Sims-Williams, N., 2009: 275) The manuscripts were excavated chiefly from a ruined East Syriac Christian monastery at Shui-pang near Bulayiq by the Second and the Third German Turpan Expeditions (1904-1907). These manuscripts were written principally in the Sogdian and Syriac languages, “but here are also forty or fifty fragments in Uyghur Turkish”, as well as in other languages such as Persian, etc. (Sims-Williams, N., 2009: 271) “Certainly Syriac was the principal language of the liturgy at Bulayiq, where several Syriac psalter, hymn-books, and service-books have been found.” (Sims-Williams, N., 2009: 278)

The following Christian texts in the Sogdian language were unearthed in Bulayiq: “Psalms”, “Nicene Creed”, hymn of “Glory to God in the Highest” (the Chinese-language version of this hymn

²³¹ Sims-Williams, *Christian Literature* quotes: “This jar is a container of burnt ashes for the teacher (*malpana*) Yaruq-tegin. May he be blessed, amen and amen!”

²³² Christians of the East - The Untold Story Along the Silk Road, <https://youtu.be/wy5Ub18RCO4?feature=shared>

was discovered in Dun-huang²³³) and “Book of Life”, which was “in commemoration of the saints and other faithful departed, whose names were inscribed on tablets or ‘diptychs’”. The beginning of the Book of Matthew, written in Syriac, was also discovered (Sims-Williams, N., 2009: 276-278), as well as some materials that might have been read out loud in memorial services. In much of the Christian material in the Sogdian language, frequent reference is made to asceticism and religious life, an indication that these materials were part of a monastery library. “Admonitions, homilies, and treaties” about prayer, withdrawal from the world, solitude, and silent contemplation, all clearly show the writings were meant for monks rather than laymen (Sims-Williams, N., 2009: 279).

These Christian monks in Bulayiq “regarded the ancient monks and solitaries of the Egyptian desert as their spiritual ancestors” (Sims-Williams, N., 2009: 280). Other texts translated into Sogdian here were The Acts of the Apostles from the New Testament and a large number of biographies of saints, famous monks and martyrs, including the Martyrdom of St. George “the dragon slayer,” which was also translated into Uyghur. In addition, the fragments of a rare text were also unearthed here. The manuscript, originally written in Syriac and translated into Sogdian, is about Joseph Barsabbas, one of two candidates to fill the failed apostleship of Judas Iscariot, and the legend of Mary the Evangelist. This was a one-of-a-kind discovery, in a worldwide scale of material, the existence of which was hitherto unknown. (Sims-Williams, N., 2009: 279-281)

It is important to note this explanation by Sims-Williams about the Sogdian literature that was unearthed in Turpan: Some of the Sogdian-language materials include the names of the members of the Christian community, of which many are Turkic names but not one could be proven to be a Sogdian name (Niu, R. J., 2008: 219).²³⁴ Put another way, these were all names of Uyghur Christians and other Turkic Christians. Furthermore, “private letters and economic documents make up a significant proportion of the much smaller collection of Christian Turkish manuscripts found at Bulayiq and at the nearby, wholly Turkish site of Qurutqa” (Sims-Williams, N., 2009: 285). Which is to say that the Uyghur language was indeed the language generally used by the local Christians. Sims-Williams further explains: “Almost certainly, the explanation of this fact is that the writers and readers of the Christian Sogdian manuscripts were in many cases Turkish speakers.” In addition, “During the final phase of the monastery’s existence, to which the more

²³³ The Chinese title is *Da-qin-jing-jiao-san-wei-meng-du-zan*, meaning “Hymn of Perfection of the Three Majesties of Roman Luminous Religion”.

²³⁴ Niu, Ru-Ji, *Cross and Lotus*. Because the original version of Nichola Sims-Williams paper in English could not be located, the material after the colon is a translation of Niu’s Chinese-language quotation of Sims-Williams’ text.

ephemeral documents are likely to belong, Turkish was probably the principal language of day-to-day business, although Sogdian evidently retained a place beside Syriac as a language of literature and liturgy.” (Sims-Williams, N., 2009: 285)

This data may well support the dual parts of my first theory, a Uyghurized Sogdian Christianity. It also corroborates what Uyghur steles revealed by using the three official languages of Uyghur, Sogdian, and Chinese before their great migration, and what Turpan Basin people revealed in using both Hu and Chinese as their official languages before the Uyghur arrival.

Nevertheless, my second theory that a native Sogdian Christian community existed before Uyghur arrival and later became Uyghurized remains solid. Based on the above information, my view is that, even though the names are all of Uyghurs (and Turks) and even if these believers and monks may also be predominantly Uyghurs, the large proportion of Sogdian texts and the archaeological discoveries in Turpan actually indicate that, before the arrival of the Uyghurs, Christianity had already become institutionally mature amongst the local Indo-Europeans, as discussed in my previous two chapters. Even Sims-Williams comes to the conclusion, from a linguistic perspective, that the local Sogdian community “had been established in the Turpan oasis for so long that Sogdian had attained the status of a local vernacular. As such, it was evidently employed, besides Syriac, for bible readings and the singing of hymns and psalms” (Sims-Williams, N., 2009: 279). On the other hand, “Although there are comparatively few Uyghur Christian texts from Turfan, the few that we have, along with evidence gleaned from both Syriac and Sogdian texts, suggests that the Uyghurs formed a significant part of the Christian community at Turfan; indeed, it is likely that many of those reading the texts in Syriac and Sogdian were Uyghur native speakers.” (Dickens, M. & Zieme, P. 2014: 293) As I see it, these speakers with Uyghur as their first language are not necessarily only Uyghurs, but also Sogdians, Tocharians, Gao-li like Rou-rans, and others who spoke their own ethnic languages as second or even third languages.

I agree and applaud the conclusion by Sims-Williams that a “local Sogdian community” had been long established in the regions. Nevertheless, he also states earlier that “most of these manuscripts are thought to date from the ninth and tenth centuries.” The question here is why the period of writing (from the ninth to tenth centuries) of a large number of Sogdian texts coincides with the first century when Uyghurs arrived and ruled this area? As discussed in the last two chapters, before the arrival of the Tang Dynasty Chinese, Christianity prevailed in the area with Buddhism. For this question, I make the following analysis and judgment.

First, it is worth noting that, back in the Orkhon Uyghur Khanate before the kara-migration to the west, many Sogdians lived among Uyghurs with great influence on society, including

government, commerce, city-building, and religion, such as Manichaeism and presumably Christianity. When the Uyghurs moved to the western regions, those Sogdians should have migrated with them. Such a speculation is bolstered by Niu Ru-ji, when he states in his newly published article: “Based on the evidence from the extant Christian texts of Turpan [since the ninth century], including spelling errors in many Syriac fragments, it is very obvious that the Christians of Turpan [Basin] were mainly Sogdians and Uighurs.” (Niu, R. J., 2024: 21)²³⁵ This conclusion indicates that the Sogdian Christians working for the Uyghur government pushed to Sogdianize linguistically the native Christianity, even at the expense of the sacred Syriac with basic spelling errors, for the purpose of Uyghurizing Christianity (as a political-religious goal).

Secondly, Tocharian texts have been excavated in Turpan as well as in Yan-qi and Qiu-ci during the last century, but Christian Tocharian materials have not been excavated so far, although I expect it is only a matter of time before they are. Thus, we can logically speculate that the dominant Uyghur refugees brought Sogdians as the best of their minds to this area with them, joined the local Christianity, and colonized and assimilated the local Tocharians, other Indo-Europeans, and a few other immigrant groups who were there before the Uyghur arrival, including the Han Chinese and Rou-ran (who had a similar culture to Gaoli-Koreans). This does not even rule out that there were already a small number of Sogdians who came directly from west of the Pamir Plateau, either for business, Christian missionary purposes, or as religious refugees due to Islamic pressure. This colonial assimilation process implemented by the Uyghurs first promoted the Uyghur language as the official language in their Gao-chang khanate/kingdom, which also led to the local Tocharian language dying out about a century later.

Finally, it seems that the first step in the process of Uyghurizing Turpan Christianity is the Sogdianization of Christianity under the dominant framework of Uyghur colonial assimilation. This process is relatively easy because Sogdian Christianity, as a branch of Indo-European Christianity from the western part of central Asia, and the local Tocharian Christianity, had both institutionally matured centuries ago. In Chapter Two, the Syriac and Chinese materials provided us with some detailed evidence of the whole historical picture. The second step of Uyghurizing Turpan Christianity was to adopt Uyghur as the non-liturgical language of Christianity. Not only that, in the next chapter, we will see that the Uyghur regime also assimilated local Tocharian Buddhism through the Uyghur language. For both Sogdianized Christianity and Uyghurized Christianity, the status of Syriac as the sacred language of Christianity cannot be challenged. Therefore, use of

²³⁵ “根据现存吐鲁番基督教文献的证据，包括许多叙利亚语片段中的拼写错误，很明显吐鲁番基督徒主要是粟特人和回鹘人。”

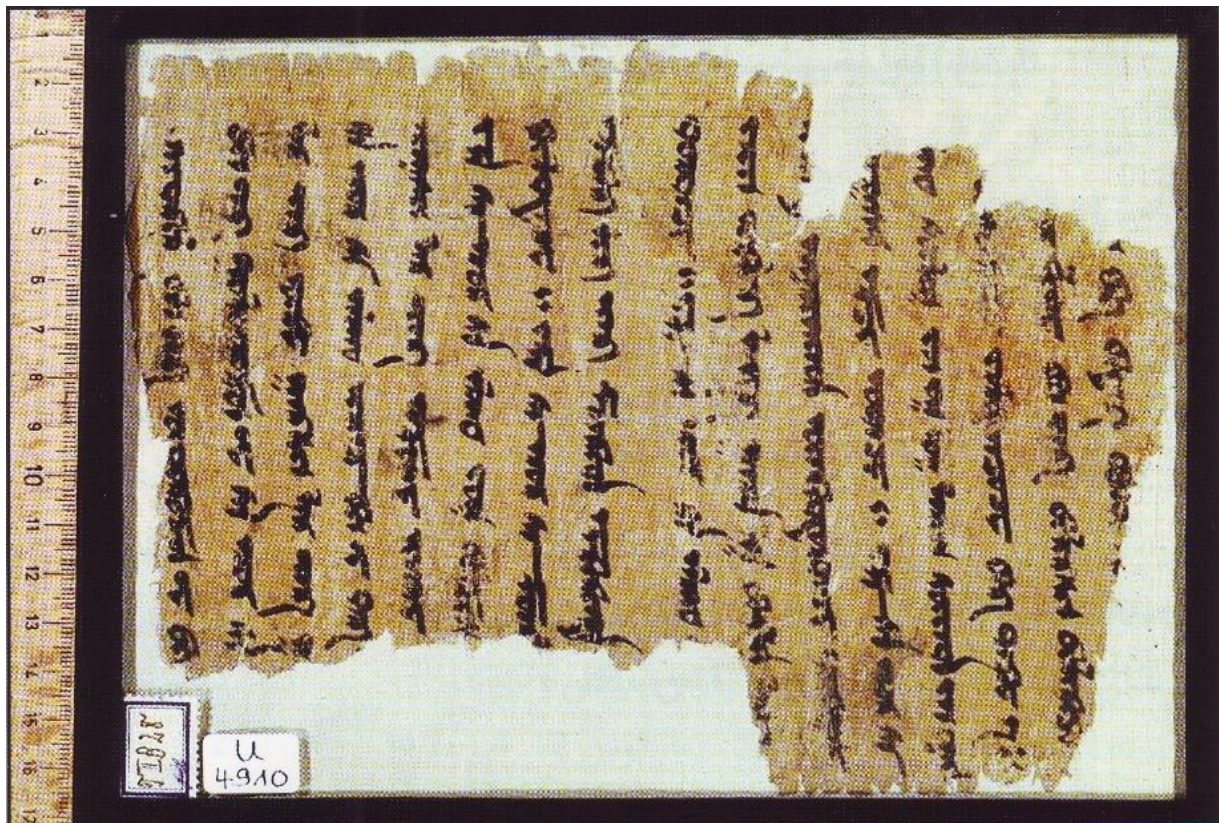
Sogdian and Uyghur languages in the process of assimilating local Christianity remained under the dominance of the East Syriac language.

Regardless of the plausibility of the above speculations, we can at least conclude that the arrival of the Uyghurs expanded the scope of Christianity's social-organizational structure that was already in the regions. In the following first century or so, the localized Christianity here was still predominantly among the native white groups as reflected by the Sogdian texts consisting of the majority of discovered texts. After all, the Uyghurs arrived in the role of rulers, and from then on, the Uyghur language started to become Kocho Kingdom's official language. In other words, after the Uyghurs westward move in 841, Uyghur Christians joined the pre-existing Indo-European Christian community in Kocho and naturally became the core of the church's leadership. Ultimately, the Kocho Uyghurs developed a Uyghurized Christianity that was based on Sogdian, Tocharian, and Chinese languages-based Christianity. This Uyghurized Christianity continues its process in the following centuries and reached its climax during the age of Khitans and Mongols, which will be explored in detail in the next chapter.

Exciting in 202 are the archaeological discoveries on the Christian construction sites of Qi-tai, Jimsar, and Turpan, of a large number of texts and manuscripts (in Turpan alone 497 in total) inscribed in Syriac, Uyghur, Chinese, and other languages such as new Persian. Most of these had Christian contents as well. In 2023, on the same Turpan site discovered a century ago, 379 pieces of paper manuscripts were discovered in Syriac, Sogdian, Uyghur, and Chinese languages. Some of the manuscripts are written on both sides of the paper with Uyghur or Syriac Christian contents on one side and Buddhist or Daoist contents on the other (Guangming Daily, 2024). In the previous chapter, we also mentioned that the longest of the Christian texts discovered in Turpan is in Chinese. That text was a spiritual formation handbook for missionaries, with excerpts from the Syriac Bible, ceremonies and rites, and prayers for liturgy. The handbook was copied in 1064 of the Greek calendar, 134 of the Islamic calendar, which was AD 752, about a century before the Uyghurs migrated west. The discovery matched the research in our Chapter Two that the Chinese became the largest minority with over ten thousand households in AD 460 with the *Rou-ran* (*Juan-juan*, ru-ru), who look like *Gao-li* Korean people, as the ruling minority in the Turpan Basin that "placed a Chinese puppet king, K'an Po Chou, on the throne" (Litvinsky, 1996: 300). The *Book of Wei* states that, during the time of the Northern Wei State (AD 386-534), "the kingdom [of Kocho] has eight cities, all of which have Chinese [inhabitants]."

The pictures below of the multi-language manuscripts unearthed from the Turpan Basin, Jimsar, and Qi-tai present a beautiful history of Christian communities with diversity in the routing regions of the Silk Road, the former Chinese westernmost frontier around the eastern Tian-shan

range. For other parts of the region, specifically Yan-qi on the northeast Tarim Basin, since Tocharian Christianity and Buddhism prevailed before Tang China took over the regions, it should not have disappeared in the age of Tang China and later of Gao-chang Uyghurs. Besides the abundant Buddhist relics discovered in the places of Yan-qi and Qiu-ci, I expect that ancient Christian relics including texts in multiple languages are waiting to reward archaeologists, at least in Yan-qi, just as the Qi-tai Christian site did a few years ago.



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 قىسمى.

Figure 4. 2: A 10th-11th century Syriac Christian prayer in Uyghur discovered in the early 19th century in Bulayiq in northern Turpan. The last two lines are “Most importantly, you are the savior of all sinners. You are God...”²³⁶

²³⁶ Source: Holy Bible in contemporary Uyghur language, 2005 edition.



Figure 4. 3: Syriac fragment from Psalm in Uyghur scripts-- SyrHT 20 ²³⁷



Figure 4. 4: A Christian Glazed Pottery Jar written in the new Persian language ²³⁸

²³⁷ Source: Ru-ji Niu quoted Mark Dickens, "The Importance of the Psalter at Turfan".

²³⁸ Source: Ge Cheng-yong, "A City of Temples on the Royal Road", 2024.



Figure 4. 5: Uyghur scripts on the walls of the Jing religion church (Source: Ibid.)

In addition, as mentioned earlier, among the multi-language Christian texts, Tocharian Christian texts are notably missing. Based on my Chapter Two research on Tocharian Christianity, I expect in the future that archaeologists will also discover Tocharian Christian texts, most likely in the regions of the eastern half of the Tarim Basin, such as Turpan, Yan-qi, Kucha, where the dead language was discovered, including writings in Buddhist and Manichean texts and named mainly after the three places. Additionally, I boldly speculate that discovery of Karluk Christian relics in the future in Turpan is also possible, even though their kingdom was around the westernmost Tian-shan area. In addition, I lean toward thinking that Khitan language Christian texts will also be discovered in the future, especially in the Church-monastery ruins of Qi-tai (or Khitai most likely), which belongs to the next chapter's research.



Figure 4. 6: A collection of Sogdian scriptures from Turpan with Syriac letters in red fonts ²³⁹

²³⁹ Source: Niu Ru-ji quotes from Mark Dickens, Biblical Fragments from the Christian Library of Turfan [...], Fig. 8.



Figure 4. 7: The fragment from the Book of Proverbs in the Bible written in Syriac discovered in Turpan: SyrHT 2 ²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ Source: Niu Ru-ji quotes from Mark Dickens, Biblical Fragments from the Christian Library of Turfan [...], Fig. 4.

Finally, it is commonly agreed that the Uyghurs who migrated westward brought the state religion Manichaeism to the regions. Sogdian Manicheans used to exercise powerful influence in the Orkhon Uyghur Khanate on the court and religious affairs, including serious civil conflicts in the second part of the eighth century. The Manichean manuscript fragments found in Turpan were mainly written in Uyghur and three Middle Iranian languages: Middle Persian, Parthian, and Sogdian. In addition, there is a Manichean text written in Bactrian (Tocharian) and two texts written in Type B Tocharian. These are very important and revelatory discovery which also supports my point above. The research of Chinese scholar Rui Chuan-ming shows that "the [Manichean] confession of the elect is written in Sogdian, and other ritual books for the elect are also mostly in Iranian languages, while the ritual books for the listeners are mostly in Turkic. This shows that in the Manichaeism in Uyghur regions, the Sogdians always played a dominant role and controlled the upper echelons of the church"²⁴¹ (Rui, C. M., 2009: 61). In other words, the documents in these languages reflect the overall situation of the Manichaean community in the Gao-chang Uyghur kingdom, including the basic aspects of the Manichaean doctrine in this area and the basic racial-ethnic composition of the believers. Therefore, this is a quite similar scenario to the overall situation of Christianity in the Uyghur Kingdom.

4.6.2 Multi-racial-ethnic Christian groups in Turpan Basin, *Bei-ting* (Jimsar) and Qi-tai

In the previous section, I explored the different languages that make up the local Christianity in the Turpan Uyghur kingdom. This section will explore the racial, ethnic, and national identities in affiliation with these different languages. Figure 4. 7 below nicely shows a multi-racial-ethnic Christian community existed in the Turpan Basin in the age of Uyghur Christianity. Based on my close observations, with the advantage of being born and living in Xinjiang for twenty years, I present an interpretation of the painting based on anthropological analysis.

The "Palm Sunday" fresco that was found a century ago in the ruins of a Kocho Christian church which is "thought to have been built about the year 900" (Sims-Williams, N., 2009: 271),

²⁴¹ "有关选民的忏悔词是用粟特语撰写的，用于选民的其他礼仪用书，也多为伊朗诸语；而供听者使用的礼仪书却大多为突厥语。这表明，在回鹘人地区流行的摩尼教中，粟特人始终起着主导的作用，并掌控着教会上层；而摩尼教突厥语文书的出现，则是摩尼教逐步向突厥民众普及的标志。"

(The emergence of Manichaeism Turkic language books is a sign that Manichaeism is gradually becoming popular among the Turkic people.)

about sixty years after the Uyghurs' arrival, demonstrates the following facial features and dress of the people:



Figure 4. 8: Palm Sunday Mural in the Ruins of Christian Church outside of Gao-chang City in the Turpan Basin

(Source: Lin, M. C., & Buslig, S., 2007)

The clergyman on the far left has curly hair and looks to be a Byzantine-Syrian style Indo-European. Lined up in front of him are three Christian women. The one on the left is a typical Indo-European woman with big eyes and facial features similar to that of the clergyman, and she appears to have a scarf head-covering over her upswept brown hair. The woman in the middle is a typical Hunnic-Uyghur woman with a round face (large head), small eyes, and rosy cheeks, wearing a black hat that covers her hair. The woman on the right is hatless, has hair that appears to be in a Tang China-style drop-horse knot hairdo, and is slim of face and body, unquestionably a Tang Chinese woman. Note that, from left to right, the Indo-European woman is first, which should be an indication that the Indo-European group is the largest in the church congregation,

followed by the Uyghurs, with the number of Han Chinese the smallest. Also, the hair accessories of the Indo-European woman are similar to those used by Tang China court-maids, and her head-covering is the fine gauze “birdcage veil” that was favored by the Tang emperor Xuan-zong. No wonder the Turkic studies scholar Annemarie von Gabain holds that all of the three women were Han Chinese because of the hair styles.(Chen, H. Y., 1999: 174)

This also conforms with the descriptions of the Chinese court histories (see Table 2.1), the *Book of Wei*, the *Book of Zhou*, and the *History of Northern Dynasties* compiled in the sixth and seventh century, that the native *Hu* women in the Turpan Basin with their “hair styles similar to that of the Chinese.” Furthermore, “Men’s clothing follow Hu style while women dress similar to Chinese-Xia...” and the native *Hu* people here have a tradition of “[using] both Chinese and *Hu* as their written languages”, so along with the Uyghur language, these were the three major languages of this region. The *Hu* language entails the native Tocharian language (and Sogdian language as well after Uyghur arrival and colonisation since the mid-ninth century). Such corroborating, in earlier texts, shows that this fresco of the local church’s worship activities was a very detailed and accurate depiction, correctly reflecting the three language groups of the Kocho Christian church at that time (the use of Syriac, the fourth language, was limited to the clergy and in rituals only), and agrees completely with the situation recorded in the hand-written textual relics and Chinese records. In other words, this fresco depicts the situation in the Kocho Christian church after the Uyghurs’ move west. The Christian manuscripts unearthed from Turpan’s Thousand Buddha Cave includes several Chinese-language texts that are also from the ninth to tenth centuries (Niu, R. J., 2008: 219), indicating that the local Christian communities here also used the Sogdian (*Hu* language, which should also include Tocharian language), Uyghur, and Chinese languages, along with the sacred East-Syriac.

In addition, two other Christian murals (Figure 4. 9) discovered in the Turpan Basin also reflect a multi-racial-ethnic Christianity. According to some scholars’ interpretation, the first mural is a fragment of a silk painting unearthed near the *Jing* Church in Gao-chang, which depicts “Christ riding a donkey with a cross and a female believer,” standing far off, seemingly a scene of the Palm Sunday theme (Lin, M. C., & Buslig, S., 2007). From a physiological anthropology perspective, I interpret that Jesus Christ in the picture clearly has the characteristics of Scythian people, and this is an image of a Sogdian model. Interestingly, the female believer in the distance is a native Rou-ran (proto-Jurchen) person, sharing a similar culture with Gao-li, the ancient Choson-Korean type. According to Chinese court historical materials, there were immigrants here in the fifth century with *Rou-ran* nationality, and they “[look] like *Gao-li* people with braid hanging on their back. [They] wear long robe with small sleeve, Hakama pants, and women's hair is

braided but not hanging down,...”(Li, Y. S., 2000: 1322).²⁴² This mural is obviously an incomplete fragment, but it shows more visual evidence of a multi-racial-ethnic Christian community. For the second mural from the *Jing* Church, some scholars interpret it as a depiction of a woman in red who is repenting (Lin, M. C., & Buslig, S., 2007). Similarly, from the perspective of ethnicity and internal logic of this branch of Christianity, I see this Uyghur young lady, not repenting, but attending a church service such as Vespers, Matin, or liturgy. This is a practice of Byzantine-Syriac Christianity, wherein worshippers stand in the church to focus their minds and eyes on spiritual matters. This practice remains prevalent in Slavic Orthodox Christianity nowadays.



Figure 4. 9: Mural 1: Christ riding a donkey holding a cross scepter with a female believer in the far background; Mural 2: a female Uyghur Christian

(Source: Lin, M. C., & Buslig, S., 2007)

In addition, the existence of Kocho Uyghur Christianity was not an isolated phenomenon. The Christianity of the *Gan-zhou* & *Sha-zhou* (Dunhuang) Uyghurs of the same period also cannot

²⁴² “面貌类高丽，辫发垂之于背。着长身小袖袍、缣袴裤。女子头发，辫而不垂，着锦缣缨络环钏 (Wearing brocade, tassels, rings, net and bracelets)。”

be ignored. As was mentioned earlier, in the century-plus after their migration west, the *Gan-zhou* & *Sha-zhou* Uyghurs remained part of the Kocho Uyghur khanate, despite being administratively independent (Li, S., 2003: 43-44, 46). As in Kocho, Dun-huang has also been the site of archaeological discoveries of Syriac Christian manuscripts, including some Biblical contents and Christian doctrinal transcriptions (Chen, H. Y., 1999: 195) in the four languages of Syriac, Sogdian, Uyghur and Chinese, as well as of a fragment of a silk embroidered portrait of Jesus Christ (Niu, R. J., 2008: 9, 11). Based on my insight, the fragmented portrait in Figure 4.8 possibly shows a facial feature of Tangut people, (i.e., the white Xia people), or even more likely, of white Sari-Uyghurs mixed with Chinese, the later Hui-hui people in China. Of course, these very few discoveries are insignificant compared with the Buddhist ones that have been found in Dun-huang, but they are sufficient to show that Christian communities once existed here, and that there were different language groups in these communities, as was the case in the Kocho-Turpan and Jimsar-Qitai regions. My thesis terms it, “Dun-huang Christianity.” Dun-huang used to be the homeland of some Tocharian natives (including Lou-lan and Wu-sun) and become known in history when Han China set colonial frontiers in the “Western Regions.”

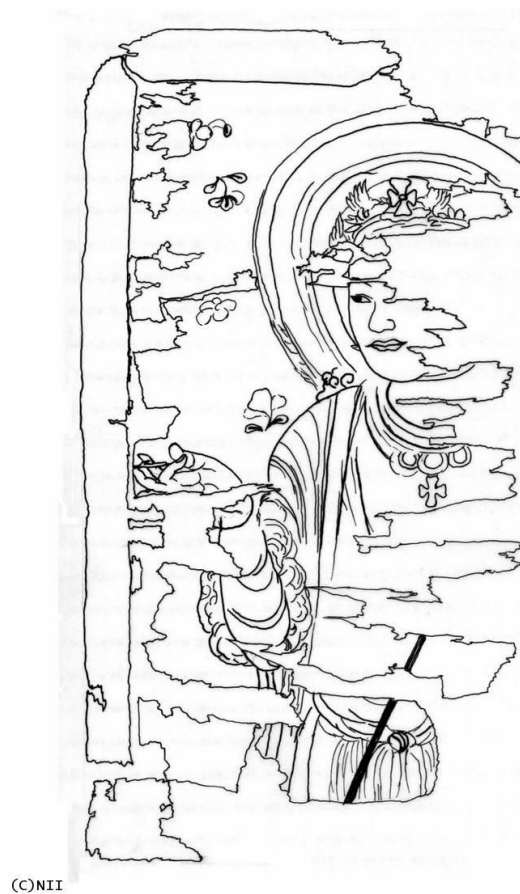


Figure 4. 10: Silk Painting of Christ from the Dunhuang Caves

(Source: Lin, M. C., & Buslig, S., 2007)

We know from the first section of this chapter that a branch of the west-bound Uyghurs had settled in *Sha-zhou* (Dun-huang) at this time and were called the *Sha-zhou* Uyghurs. According to the research of Yang Fu-xue and Niu Ru-ji, some of these *Sha-zhou* Uyghurs and their families were also Christians (Chen, W., 2014: 112). Because the West Xia kingdom (*Xi-xia*, 1038-1227, which copied the map of ancient Indo-European *Yue-zhi and Wu-sun* people) and the *Sha-zhou* Uyghurs went to war. The *Sha-zhou* Uyghurs eventually became the subjects of the West Xia and the Uyghur army was in service in the West Xia (Chen, W., 2014: 112). This information shows that the landscape of race, society and civilization of the *Sha-zhou* Uyghurs region was basically the same as that in Kocho Uyghur kingdom.

A Russian expedition in the early 20th century to the city of Khara-Khoto by the river (where a Uyghur community was called *He-luo-chuan* Uyghurs by Chinese court historians) also discovered East Syriac Christian manuscripts and churches, including texts written in the Syriac and Uyghur languages dating from this same period, that is, the ninth and tenth centuries. This area was the *Ling-wu* parish of the Tang China East Syriac Church, and it became the Tangut archdiocese during the time of the Mongol Empire. Before 866, Tibetans ruled this area, which was inhabited by multiple ethnic groups, including Han Chinese and Indo-Europeans; in 866, the *Gan-zhou* Uyghurs (Yellow or Sari Head Uyghurs) and Tang China defeated the Tibetans, and the *Gan-zhou* Uyghurs took control of this region. After 911, the *Gan-zhou* Uyghurs also controlled *Sha-zhou* after defeating the local kingdom (Li, S., 2003: 44). It seems that, like the Kocho Uyghurs, after this branch of Uyghurs moved first to *Gan-zhou* and then expanded to *Sha-zhou*, the Christians among them joined the local parish, which obviously consisted of local Indo-Europeans.²⁴³ This upgraded, more influential Christian community provides a more than sufficient explanation for why an already existing parish was elevated in 970 to establish the Tangut metropolitanate (Mingana, 1925: 324), which may have extended as far west as Kumul (Hami). Again, the landscape of race, society, and civilization of the *Gan-zhou* Uyghurs region was also likely the same as that in Kocho, and the two kingdoms kept communications especially between Christian communities (Chen, H. Y., 1999: 193, 195, 197).

Moreover, several secular Sogdian texts excavated in Dun-huang (*Sha-zhou*) were about commercial matters, including “a letter [that] was written by a priest named Sargis (Sergius)” from Kocho to his friend El Bars Qutlu Alp Tarxan with his greetings to another monk, named David,

²⁴³ West Xia, founded 1038 as a “tall and white” people’s kingdom, ruled the area of the Tangut archdiocese and the Christians were mainly Khyagas and Gao-che /Chi-le people. This conclusion is not only based on the previously mentioned precious Syriac historical document, but also because this is quite consistent with their geographic location.

and mentions a few acquaintances at Sha-zhou (Chen, H. Y., 1999: 194-195; Sims-Williams, N., 2009: 286). Another letter lists the names of several people “who are presumably Christians” (Sims-Williams, N., 2009: 286). Sims-Williams also infers that “[t]he linguistic mixture revealed by the names is equally characteristic of the texts themselves, which are mainly written in Sogdian, but with many Turkish and Chinese words. The Syriac syntax too contains many unusual constructions, with a proliferation of non-finite verbal forms, suggesting that the writers, even though they wrote in Sogdian, were more accustomed to thinking in Turkish” (Sims-Williams, N., 2009: 287). Clearly the writers of these Sogdian texts were also Uyghur Christians but in a Sogdianized Christian system. Sims-Williams also points out: “In these documents from Dunhuang we can see, even more clearly than in those from Semirech’e [Zhetysu region] and Turfan oasis, the Sogdian Christians in the process of being absorbed and eventually vanishing into the Turcophone population which surrounded them.” (Sims-Williams, N., 2009: 287) This is a very accurate and thorough conclusion, also conforming to my earlier points of Sogdianization and Uyghurization of the region’s Christianity. We can see that those Sogdian Christians themselves, who used to contribute to the cause of Sogdianizing and Uyghurizing Christianity, were not immune themselves to Uyghurisation in the national interest-driven religious agenda of the Uyghur colonisers.

In addition, Sims-Williams also points out: “The Syriac liturgical texts and phrases in Uyghur script that have been discovered amongst the Turfan documents indicate that, although members of the Christian community still needed to recite the liturgy in Syriac, some if not many were no longer able to read the script and so needed it transcribed into a script they were familiar with. As such, these texts probably represent the earliest extant examples of Syriac transcribed into another script.” (Kiraz, G. A., 2012: 349)²⁴⁴ This statement confirms my argument as well, that the Uyghurs as the ruling group were also gradually becoming a major part of the local church community in these Indo-European regions and would prefer Uyghur as the official language in their khanate/kingdom. In addition, Niu Ru-ji pointed out that “there are much more Uyghur Christian manuscripts than other Uyghur manuscripts and fragments known by us so far” (Niu, R. J., 2024: 29). The linguist’s study shows the native Tocharian language disappeared around the tenth century, about a century after the Uyghur colonisation and governing. Thus, the Uyghurisation process of the regions in both society and church prevailed with concrete accomplishments within a century or so.

²⁴⁴ See Sims-Williams, “Sogdian and Turkish Christians in the Turfan and Tun-huang Manuscripts”.

Additionally, the abstract of the article, “The Main Archaeological Achievements of the Excavation in 2021 at the Jing-jiao Temple Site in Tangchaodun of Qitai,” summarizes well the archaeologists perspective, that the main construction of the East-Syriac Church complex dug out in 2021 at Qi-tai (ancient Barkol county), north of the Tian-shan Mountains, in the “Back Section” of the ancient *Ju-shi* Kingdom, dates to a time that coincides with the period of the Uyghur’s first century of colonisation as well as Uyghurization.

The corrected dating results show that the architectural structure within the temple ruins was first built in the first half of the 8th century AD, with the main construction date being the early 10th century. It was repaired many times between the 11th and 12th centuries, and was destroyed around the 13th century. ... The main part of the Jing religion Temple ruins in the Tang Dynasty city ruins that have been cleared up so far dates back to the Gao-chang Uyghur period, which is basically the same as the construction time of the bathhouse ruins and Buddhist temple ruins in the city, which is around the 10th century. It was abandoned together with the city site in the 14th century during the Mongol Yuan Dynasty. At the same time, the Gao-chang Uyghur period *Jing-jiao* Temple ruins were built on the foundation of a high-standard Tang Dynasty building, and the possibility that the lower level of the building during Tang dynasty was already a Jing-jiao Temple cannot be ruled out. (Ren & Wei, 2022: 112)

During “this year’s archaeological work, 469 murals were cleaned and extracted from the ruins of the Jing religion church ruins” (Ren & Wei, 2022: 109). The discovered murals, though fragmented, reflect a multi-racial-ethnic local Christian community in the northern part of Kocho Uyghur kingdom. The picture of Figure 4. 11 and Figure 4. 12 shows a clear portion of a man’s face with a high and sharp nose, which are features of white Indo-Europeans. Another mural in Figure 4.13 shows the faces of a few East-Asian men. The scale and sophisticated structure of the Christian complex indicates the site might be a bishop’s seat of even a metropolitan’s seat.

Similarly to the archaeologists’ report on Qi-tai from 2021, there are also important new discoveries on the Christian ruins in Turpan. According to the article published in 2022, “The main gains and preliminary understanding of the archaeological excavation of the Jing Religion Temple Site in Xipan, Turpan, Xinjiang in 2021,” the site was discovered and dug up a century ago mainly by non-Chinese archeologists mostly from Russia, Europe, and Japan. Yet, astonishingly this time, a large number of relics were found, including 497 pieces of manuscripts and 186 pieces of murals. The preliminarily determined manuscripts are “mainly in Syriac and Uyghur and may also contain documents in other languages. They may mainly be documents of Jing religion.” (Liu, W.S., Wang, Z.X., & Wang, L., 2022: 78)

The archaeological activities have continued on the above two Christian ruins sites. In January of 2024, the Chinese Frontiers Archaeology's Fifth Symposium was held in Beijing. According to media reports on the conference, in 2023 the archeologists found an even earlier *Jing-jiao* church construction under the main site of Qi-tai Christian ruins. Among the new findings, Professor Ren Guan stated that about 15 square meters of murals had been cleared including sacred icons with crosses, horse-riding figures of sacred icons and angels with wings, and so on. He said: "There are twelve figures on the north and south walls in total. We speculate that they may correspond to the twelve disciples of Jesus." (Guangming Daily, 2024) There were also more discoveries on the church site of Turpan in the same year, including a jade cross with a small hole. Professor Liu Wen-suo said: "The cross is made of jade, and the jade is of good quality and carved very elegantly and beautifully" and should be a product reflecting the *Jin* religion in Chinese expression (Li, Y. & Wang, X., F., 2024).



Figure 4. 11: A mural of a high nose-bridge person [possibly belonging to the white Huns (Hephthalites)] in the ruins of Qi-tai Christian site

(Source: Ge Cheng-yong, "A City of Temples on the Royal Road", 2024)



Figure 4. 12: A facial painting of a white Scythian person with a long and high nose in the ruins of Qi-tai Christian site (F9-5: 1)

(Source: Ren & Wei, 2022)



图9 北组中室西墙北侧壁画
(F9-1:2) 中供养人形象

Figure 4. 13: A few Asian faces on a mural in the ruins of Qi-tai Christian site
(Source: Ren & Wei, 2022)



Figure 4. 14: A Christ like figure riding on a horse or donkey in the ruins of Qi-tai Christian site
(Source: Ren & Wei, 2022)



图三 F3 出土的
古叙利亚文文书



图四 PT1 出土的
壁画残块



图五 F10 附属建筑
出土的残木十字架



图六 F9 出土的
彩绘联珠纹木杯

Figure 4. 15: Samples of the discoveries in the ruins of Gao-chang Church site
(Source: Ren & Wei, 2022)



Figure 4. 16: The fresco of a Christian figure with a cross on his head riding a red horse discovered in 2023 at the Qi-tai Christian archaeological site (Source: Yin-Lu, 2024)



Figure 4. 17: A fragment of a manuscript in Chinese and Syriac languages unearthed from the ruins of the Christian monastery at Xi-pang, Tupan Basin (Source: Ibid.)



(C)NII

Figure 4. 18: The map of the Church ruins outside of the ancient Gao-chang city site

(Lin, M. C., & Buslig, S., 2007)

From the research above, what is clear is that, in the 9th to 12th centuries in the ancient Chinese westernmost frontier, with Kocho as its political center, Jimsar-Qi-tai possibly as the Christian metropolitan site, the *Gan-zhou* West Xia kingdom area with Tangut as its center, but especially in the Turpan oasis, the growth of East Syriac Christianity among the Uyghurs who had moved west was already quite institutionally mature in terms of size, doctrines, creeds, liturgy, and especially its monasteries and churches. It is, therefore, only on the basis of these historical facts that a logical explanation can be provided for the reason why, by the time of the Khitan-Mongol conquests, Christianity had already become quite developed among the Uyghurs and other Turkic-speaking peoples and the Uyghurized Indo-European groups, who then went even further to bring about the peak of Central Asia's mission history, in terms of their Christian impact on geo-politics in Asia and even in Europe. However, one point that needs to be clarified is that the Uyghur Manichaean tradition remained a part of Kocho civilization in the beginning but gradually mutated and disappeared while Uyghur Christianity continued to develop. Both Uyghurized Christian and Buddhist traditions continued to be maintained among the native Indo-Europeans and the Han Chinese. As for the southern-migrating Ongud Uyghurs, the security of their geographic location (at the border of present-day Inner Mongolia and Shanxi province of

China, mainly in the Da-tong Basin) meant that their Christian tradition and organizational structure remained intact and experienced continuous growth, which was fully manifested by and during the time of the Mongol Empire.

The multi-racial-ethnic and multi-lingual Christian groups under the Canopy of the Uyghurised Christianity in Kocho Uyghur Kingdom (AD 841-1130)			
Ethnicity	Race Type	Language	Christian History
1. Uyghurs	East Asian Steppe type	Hunnic-Tele-Uyghur	Since ca. 800s
2. Tocharians	Aryan- <i>Hu</i> type (blonde, white)	Tocharian	Since ca. 400s
3. Hephthalites	Hunnified-Scythian- <i>Hu</i> type (round face white)	Hunnic language	Since ca. 500s
4. Sogdians	Scythian- <i>Hu</i> type (<i>Yu-zhi</i> white type)	Sogdian	Since ca. 600s
5. Turks	Hunnified Mixed blood <i>Hu</i> (half white and half Asian)	Hunnic-Turkic language	Since ca. 600s
6. Chinese	East Asian type	Han Chinese	Since ca. 600s
7. Gao-li	East Asian type	Rou-ran Manchuria	Since ca. 600s ?
8. Tibetans	South Asian type	Tibetan	Since ca. 800s

Table 4. 1: The multi-racial-ethnic and multi-lingual Christian groups under the Canopy of the Uyghurised Christianity in Kocho Uyghur Kingdom (AD 841-1130)

4.9 Chapter Concluding Remarks

Historic and phenomenal was the age of Uyghur Christianity on the former Han and Tang Chinese westernmost frontier from the 800s to 1100s, in the land of the former *Ju-shi* kingdom, of the Hephthalites, the Gao-chang Indo-Europeans, and the former Turkic Khanates on both sides of the eastern Tian-shan mountain range along the northern branch and southern branch of the Silk Road. The Gao-chang Uyghurs, unlike their enemies, the Turks, as mixed blood Hu, were typical non-white east Asians, the descendants of Huns, and they completed the historical Uyghurization of the Turpan oasis and its religions of Christianity and Buddhism. In such a process, the intermixing of Uyghur and native Indo-Europeans, Rou-ran, and Chinese, likely in a swift manner, makes the racial-ethnographical landscape more complex and leaves a challenge for contemporary genetic studies.

After the Uyghurs arrived in the region in 841 and joined the local Indo-European dominated Christianity, over the course of a century they not only developed localized Uyghur Christianity, as powerful colonizers and rulers, but also led the formation of Uyghurized Christianity oriented in the Uyghur language. Assimilating the pre-existing Indo-European Christianity in the region, including two major branches of Tocharian Christianity and Sogdian Christianity, as well as Turkic Christianity and Chinese-speaking and Rouran-speaking Christianity as a minority, they created a multi-lingual and multi-racial-ethnic Christian community in the Kocho Uyghur kingdom, while remaining loyal to Syriac, the sacred religious language. They also achieved indigenous communion, which is an admirable phenomenon in the history of world Christianity, as reflected in the Palm Sunday mural discovered in the Turpan Jing church building ruins.

By the time of Genghis Khan's Mongol conquest, the leadership and extraordinary influence of Uyghurized Christianity in Central Asia and East Asia were fully demonstrated. This great religious role by no means emerged suddenly, but rather developed over three to four centuries of cultivation. It was only then revealed under the unique historical scenario of Uyghur Christianity, carried out by a Mongol spirit, emanating a remarkable role, not only on the stage of Asian Christian history, but also in the history of exchanges between Asian and European religious-civilizations. These topics will be discussed in the next chapter.



CHAPTER 5 THE AGE OF KHITAN AND MONGOL CHRISTIANITY ON THE CHINESE WESTERNMOST FRONTIER: THE GREAT IMPACT OF THE KOCHO UYGHUR CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION (AD 1130-1218—1392)

5.1 Introduction

It seems two centuries after the Uyghurs moved west, Uyghurised Christianity prevailed on a larger scale around the eastern Tian-shan range among the native Indo-Europeans, Uyghurs, and other Turkic-speaking groups, Sogdians, Chinese, and possibly Rou-ran as well. In the meantime, by the early 11th century, Christianity also spread and prevailed in much larger areas, such as along the northern branch of the Silk Road, from the westernmost Tian-shan mountains to the Altai mountain range and the Junggar Basin in between, and further eastward to the East Asia Steppes, among the Turkic-speaking nations, Hunnified groups, and Tungus-speaking groups, etc., white or non-white, “baked” or “raw.” From east to west on the central and east Asian steppes, there were at least **eleven** Christian nations/countries including the Kocho Uyghur Kingdom, three other Uyghur nations, and *Da-he-shi* Khitans.²⁴⁵ Such an historic phenomenon of Persian East-Syriac Christianity covering the continent was by no means a sudden appearance, but rather a result of the development of Christianity over centuries among different racial ethnic clans, groups, tribes, nations, khanates, and kingdoms, during the age of Indo-European Christianity (300s-640), Turkic Christianity (640-841), and Uyghur Christianity (841-1130) discussed in the earlier chapters of the thesis.

Since Islamic forces took control of northern Central Asia relatively late, and the Tian-shan Mountains and the Altai Mountains provided natural protection along the northern branch of the Silk Road, the Christian tradition among different groups and nations along the northern grassland highway (the route that later became well-known in the Mongol Empire), connecting Central Asia and East Asia had been relatively well preserved. From west to east, the area includes:²⁴⁶

1. The Oghuz people (a branch of the Western Turks who later became the Seljuks) on the northern bank of the Syr (or Jaxartes) River;

²⁴⁵ Alphonse Mingana identifies five Christian Turkic nations, including the Uriyan-gakit (Onguds, or Wang-gu), but he does not include the Karluk. Alphonse Mingana, *The Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East* (1925), 316-317.

²⁴⁶ Please refer to Figure 5. 1.

2. The Karluk Khanate in the regions of Zhetysu and the western side of the Yili River all the way down south to Tokmok (in present-day Kyrgyzstan) in the Chu River valley;

3. The Gao-chang (Yanqi-Turpan-Beiting) Uyghurs;

4. The Naiman Khanate in western Mongolia (with the Irtysh-Zaisan basin to the west and the Selenga River to the east);

5. The Kyrgyz Khanate, who were the descendants of the Wu-sun people during Han China and of also Xia-ga-si (Khyargas) during Tang China around the Khyargas Lake at northwestern Mongolia and to the Yenisey River and Lake Baikal at northernmost Mongolia;

6. The Ganzhou-Shazhou Uyghurs in the Dun-huang, Hexi Corridor and Hei-cheng area (Kara-Khoto, Yijinaï, by the Ejin River);

7. The Christian Khanate of the Merkits further east (Merkite, also known as Meijiezi, Meriki, Mielig, etc., called Meriki and Mirji by the Liao Khitan Empire)²⁴⁷ in the lower reaches of the Selenge-Orkhun River;

²⁴⁷ The Merkits should be an Indo-European people like the Keraïtes. According to the second appendix of the *New History of the Five Dynasties, the Four Foreign Groups*, written by Ouyang Xiu, they were neighbours with the Yellow-headed Shi-wei, "Their land was rich in copper, iron, gold, and silver, their workers were skilled, their copper and iron utensils were fine, and they were good at weaving woolen brocade." At the same time, referring to the *Book of the Song*, the *Chronicles of Gachang*, "They were fair-skinned and handsome, with a skilled nature, and were good at making gold, silver, copper, and iron utensils and carving jade." "其地多铜、铁、金、银，其人工巧，铜铁诸器皆精好，善织毛锦。"

It can be seen that the Merkits and the Indo-Europeans in the Gao-chang area had similar civilization types. According to the travel notes of the French envoy William of Rubruk, a brother of "Prester John", who was also a nomadic strongman named Unc, ruled the Keraïtes and the Merkits - both were "Nestorians" (Peter Jackson, 2009: 123). Western scholars interpret Unc as "King Khan". In the *Book of Yuan*, the Keraïtes Khan, whom Genghis Khan served, was called "Wang-Han" in Chinese meaning King-Khan, whose name was "Toli" or "Toghrul", the English translation is Tuli, and Persian translation is Toghrul. (Minganna, 1925: 310). *The Book of Yuan*, Chronicle 1: "the founding emperor" says: "The leader of the Kerei tribe, Za-a-gan-bo, came to join [Genghis Khan]. Za-a-gan-bo was the younger brother of the leader, Wang-han. Wang-han's name is Toli. He was granted the title of king by the Jin kingdom, and the pronunciation of the foreign language is heavy, so the king is called Wang-han. ... The emperor [Genghis Khan] respected Wang-han as his father because he was on good terms with the father of [Genghis Khan]." "克列部札阿结孛来归。札阿结孛者，部长汪罕之弟也。汪罕名脱里 [脱斡邻]，受金封爵为王，番言音重，故称王为汪罕。……帝以其与烈祖交好，……尊汪罕为父。" (Song, L., History of Yuan, 2000: 4)

In summary, this Wang-han Toli was the last king of the Christian Keraïtes Kingdom and a descendant of the "Prester John", as the Westerners called him. This can be proved from the letter that Guyuk's wife, the regent, sent later to the West.

8. The Tangut-Xia Kingdom (present-day around Yin-chuan, Ningxia), including the white Tatars in the Kara-Khoto River regions;

9. The southward-migrated Uyghur branch of the Onguds Kingdom from Tang China in eastern Mongolia (now the border between Inner Mongolia and Shanxi) and Da-tong Basin;

10. The northern Khitan Kingdom (different from its southern kingdom over China) in northeast Mongolia;

11. Finally, according to the records of the West-Syriac Church (Wilmshurst, D., 2016: 398), and confirmed by the French envoy William of Rubruk (Peter Jackson, 2009: 123) in the 13th century, the descendants of the ancient Ding-ling, later the Gao-che (Chi-le or Ki-le) people during the age of the Northern-Southern dynasties (420-589) mentioned by Chinese court history, later the Keraites kingdom, dramatically joined the ranks of the Christian Khanate in 1007 (or 1008), completing the great historical process of the conversion of the steppe peoples of Central-East Asia to Christianity.

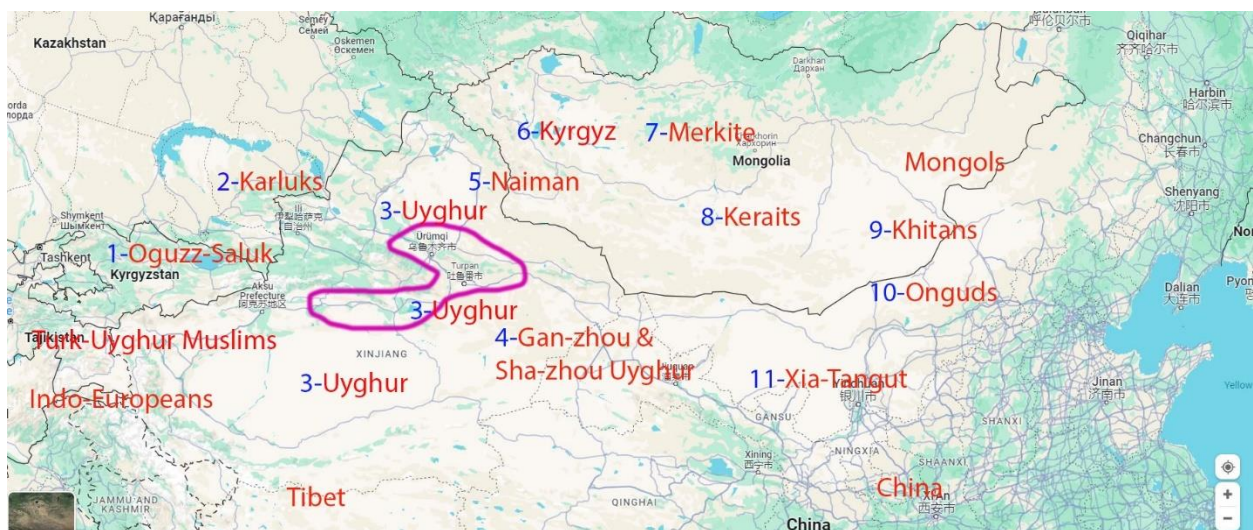


Figure 5. 1: The eleven Christian Khanates/Kingdoms and their approximate locations by the early eleventh century

The Christian tradition among the Hunnified groups, Turkic-speaking peoples, the Turkified groups, native Indo-European groups, and other white and non-white groups was preserved and continued until the Western Liao Empire and the Mongol Empire, forming several Christian geopolitical centers, from west to east, namely Balasagun city by the Chu River, Yili city by the Yili River, and Bei-ting (Jimsar) city. In the south of the Tian-shan Mountains were Kashgar city and Gao-chang city, then Kara-Khoto city in western Mongolia, and Gao-shang city in Eastern Mongolia as well as Beijing.

5.2 Chapter thesis

This chapter discusses the overall situation of Christianity in the Four-Regions surrounding the eastern Tian-shan during the Khitan and Mongolian conquests. Christianity, during this period of the last glorious historical stage in central Asia before the final conquest of Islam, impacted many nation-states in the Central Asian and East Asian steppes, especially the Genghis Khan Mongol Empire. This rare phenomenon in Christian history was carried out mainly in the form of Uyghurised Christianity and constructed a distinctive history. Through this process, some famous Uyghur and Keraite Christian elites stepped onto the stages of East Asia, Central Asia, West Asia, and even Europe, as the best representatives of the East-Syriac Christian spirit, becoming generally accepted and praised by the East and the West.

This chapter puts forward views and theories that have not yet been paid sufficient attention by the academic community and more comprehensively discusses some titles and concepts with which the academic community has been struggling, such as the general appellations designated for East-Syriac Christians, Tarsa, Arkagun (Arkowen), and the specialized titles, such as Uyghur Monks, Gao-chang Monks, the Bei-ting Monks, etc. It also seeks to determine the mysterious locations and names of a few Metropolitan sites. Additionally, it clarifies a misunderstanding that has long confused scholars by establishing Christianity was the main religion of the Uyghurs, followed by Manichaeism, and then Buddhism with the least influence. Furthermore, this chapter explains why academics mistakenly believe that Buddhism was the main religion of the Uyghurs. It also points out the Khitan's long-term Christian tradition as being a part of the northern Khitans, rather than of some southern Khitans who embraced Confucianism and Buddhism.

These discussions, analytical arguments, and viewpoints though generated by careful qualitative research methodologies of literary analysis, including textual (literature), thematic, and discourse analyses, historical analysis and religious-theological analysis. Based on a great amount of data from direct and circumstantial evidence, they present a comprehensive groundbreaking framework. While some in the academic community may find this proof difficult to accept and feel uneasy.

5.3 The Historical Background on the rise of Khitans and Mongols and their colonisation of the Kocho Uyghur Kingdom

In 841, when the Uyghurs fled to the Western Regions (present-day Xinjiang region, China) from the East Asian steppes after the fall of their empire, some Turkic-speaking groups and some

Mongolian-speaking tribes, intermingled with the Uyghur remnant and continued to live on the steppes. Meanwhile, Khitans gradually became the overlords of the steppes and established their Great Liao (Kara Khitan) kingdom in 916 until they were defeated in 1125 by the Jurchen *Jin* kingdom, which replaced them as the new hegemon of the steppes. Shortly thereafter, another steppes group, the ethnic Mongols, whom the West called “Tartars” and the Chinese called Mong-gu and other names, began to migrate from the region of the Erkene River (modern-day northeastern Mongolia) between the Greater Khingan Mountains and the Onon and Kerulen rivers into the East Asian steppes, which will be hereinafter referred to as the Mongolian grasslands, gradually becoming the dominant residents of the steppes and grasslands (Yu, T. S., 1996: 279-280; Grousset, 2002: 193).

5.3.1 The age of Western Liao Khitans (AD 1130 – 1218)

The ancestors of the Khitans, Mongols, Manchurians, and the eastern Xian-bei (non-white Siberian, Si-bo, Sienbi) who were called “Dong-hu” (eastern-*Hu*) in Chinese history books inhabited areas in present day Mongolia and the Khingan (Xing-an-ling) Ranges of present-day northeast China (Grousset, 2002: 53). This means that, although they lived in the regions of easternmost Siberia, they were of an eastern Asian race, which differs from the white Siberians. In AD 947, the successor to Khitan Khan, Ye-lyu family’s A-bao-ji, established the Liao Kingdom. The *Book of Jin* says the name “Khitan” means “Wootz steel” as “strong and tough” (Tuo-tuo, 2000c: 18).²⁴⁸

There are different theories about the origin of the Khitans. In Grousset’s work is one popular theory: the Khitans belonged to the Mongol type and spoke a Mongol dialect, they also learned and practiced Han Chinese culture (Grousset, 2002: 129). The earliest record about the Khitans is in the Chinese court historical annal, the *Book of Wei*, which states, “Originally Ku-mo-xi country was another racial type of eastern *Yu-wen*... [the location of] Khitan country, located to the east

²⁴⁸ Tuo-tuo, *History of Jin*, volume 2, “the Founding Emperor”: “上曰：‘辽以宾铁为号，取其坚也。宾铁虽坚，终亦变坏，惟金不变不坏。金之色白，完颜部色尚白。’于是国号大金，改元收国。”

(The emperor said: "Liao named it Wootz iron because it is strong. Although Wootz iron is strong and tough, it will eventually deteriorate, but gold will not change or deteriorate. The color of gold is white, and the color of the Wan-yan tribe is white." So the country was named Da-jin (Great Gold) and the era name was changed to be Shou State.)

of Ku-mo-xi, were of different races but the same type,"²⁴⁹ and Ku-mo-xi belongs to a type of *Di* race as noted by the Wei Emperor (Wei, S., 2000: 1503-1504). The eastern *Yu-wen* tribe belonged to the eastern *Hu* type people, the white eastern Siberian. The *Old Book of Tang* has additional information stating that the *Ku-mo-xi* (Tatabi) were a different race of Hunnic type and culturally Turkified, and often at war with the Khitans who share many customs with Turks, though they were two "different types" as remarked by the Tang emperor Tai-zong ²⁵⁰ (Liu, X., 2000: 3639, 3642), which contradicts the "same type" description in the *Book of Wei*.²⁵¹ The origin of the customs of the Turks can be traced back to Hunnic culture. The *Book of Sui* provided similar information, which appears to have been copied by the *Old Book of Tang* (Wei, Z., 2000: 1261).

²⁴⁹ Wei Shou, *Book of Wei*, Chronicle 88, "Khitans": "库莫奚国之先，东部宇文之别种也。初为慕容元真所破，遗落者窜匿松漠之间。……登国三年，太祖亲自出讨，至弱洛水南，大破之，获其四部落，马牛羊豕十馀万。帝曰：「此群狄诸种不识德义，互相侵盗，有犯王略，故往征之。……」……契丹国，在库莫奚东，异种同类，俱窜于松漠之间。登国中，国军大破之，遂逃迸，与库莫奚分背。”

(The predecessor of the Kumo Xi [Tatabi] State was the branch of the Yu-wen clan State in the east. ... In the third year of Deng-guo [388 AD], Taizu [the founding emperor] personally went out to fight against the Kumo Xi. When he reached Ruo-luo River, he defeated them severely. ... The emperor said: "These Di tribes do not know morality and justice. They invade and rob each other. They violate the king's strategy, so I went to conquer them. ... " The Khitan State is located to the east of the Kumo Xi. Its people are of different races, but the same type. They all move around the northern boarder [of China]. During the reign of Deng-guo, the national army defeated them severely, and they fled and separated from the Kumo Xi.)

²⁵⁰ Liu Xu, *Old Book of Tang*, Northern Di, "Khitans": 奚国，盖匈奴之别种也，所居亦鲜卑故地，即东胡之界也，在京师东北四千馀里。东接契丹，西至突厥，南拒白狼河，北至靺鞨。……风俗并于突厥。……其人善射猎，好与契丹战争。……契丹，居潢水之南，黄龙之北，鲜卑之故地，在京城东北五千三百里。东与高丽邻，西与奚国接，南至营州，北至室韦。……本臣突厥，好与奚斗，其余风俗与突厥同。……突厥颉利遣使请以梁师都易契丹，太宗谓曰：“契丹、突厥，本是别类，今来降我，何故索之？”

(The population of the Xi [Tatabi] Kingdom is a different tribe of the Xiong-nu [Huns]. They live in the former territory of the Xian-bei [Siberians], which is a border of the Donghu [Eastern Hu]. Their territory is more than 4,000 Chinese miles northeast of the [Chinese] capital and borders the Khitans in the east, the Turks in the west, the Bai-lang River in the south, and the Xi Kingdom in the north. ... Their customs are similar to those of the Turks. ... Their people are good at hunting and fight the Khitans. ... The Khitans live in the south of the Huang-shui River and north of the Huang-long River, which is the former land of the Xian-bei [Siberians], 5,300 Chinese miles northeast of the [Chinese] capital. It borders Goryeo in the east and the Xi Kingdom in the west. It reaches Ying-zhou in the south and Shi-wei in the north. ... The Xi people used to be vassals to the Turks and traditionally fight with the Xi. The rest of their customs are the same as those of the Turks. ... The Turk's khan Jie-li sent an envoy to ask China to exchange the Liang-shi-du for the Khitan. [Chinese emperor] Tai-zong said to him, "The Khitan and the Turks are originally different tribes. Why do they want Khitans when they come to surrender to me?")

²⁵¹ Since the Tang emperor only pointed out that they were different types without mentioning their races, he likely meant two different races.

Based on the theories of scholars and historians, my view further holds that the eastern *Hu* people, or eastern *Xian-bei* (Siberian), had two types: one is the white Scythian *Hu* race (or rubby-faced northern *Di* white race) in the south and eastern Siberia, and the other is the non-white Jurchen (Rou-ran in earlier times) race in the area later called Jin and Manchurian. However, in the lands of the eastern *Hu* also lived the later Mongolian type people. Both Manchurians (small face with slim figure) and Mongolians (round face with medium figure) are short-heighted and of the typical east Asian figure. The *Ku-mo-xi* lived in the regions of former Siberian lands with its border to eastern *Hu* (Liu, X., 2000: 3642), which means they were likely of Hunnified *Di* type with mixed blood, possibly from Manchurians. Since the two types of eastern *Hu* used the same Tungus language, *Ku-mo-xi* was another racial type of eastern Yu-wen, also sharing the culture of Turks as a different race of Huns, likely speaking the Hunnic language. According to the *Book of Jin*, the non-white Jurchens in the tenth century were part of the Khitan nationality (Tuo-tuo, 2000c: 1).²⁵² In addition, the *Book of Tang* also mentions that the Khitan government used to use Uyghur national seal and asked Tang China for a national seal in 842, about a year after the fall of the Uyghur khanate, which was granted.²⁵³

Therefore, Khitans were a different race yet of the same type as the *Ku-mo-xi*, and can not be other but a Mongolian type, likely mix-blooded. Their anthropological features can be confirmed by the paintings below from the times of the Liao Kingdom and Mongol Yuan China. The Khitans indeed have minor facial differences from the Mongols. They claim themselves the descendants of the Yan Emperor (of the Northern *Di*-Scythian white people with rubby faces)²⁵⁴

²⁵² Tuo-tuo, *History of Jin*, volume 1, "the Genealogy": "五代时，契丹尽取渤海地，而黑水。靺鞨附属于契丹。其在南者籍契丹，号熟女直；其在北者不在契丹籍，号生女直。"

(It is important to recall once more what we learned earlier: "During the period of the Five Dynasties, the Khitan took over all lands around the Bo Sea, and the Black River and Mo-he became subordinate to the Khitan. Those living in the south are originally from the Khitans, called ripen Jurchens, and those at the north are not originally from the Khitans, raw Jurchens.")

²⁵³ Liu Xu, *Old Book of Tang*, Northern Di, "Khitans": 会昌二年九月，制：“契丹新立王屈戌，可云麾将军，守右武卫将军员外置同正员。”幽州节度使张仲武上言：“屈戌等云，契丹旧用回纥印，今恳请闻奏，乞国家赐印。”许之，以“奉国契丹之印”为文。

(In September of the second year of Hui-chang, the decree stated: "The new Khitan king, Qu Shu, can be appointed as a general equal to the general of the Right Guard." Zhang Zhong-wu, the governor of You-zhou reported: "Qu Shu and others said that the Khitan used to use the seal of the Uyghurs. Now they earnestly request and ask the Chinese court to grant the seal." The request was granted, with the inscription "The Seal of the Khitan in Honor of the Country" as the title.)

²⁵⁴ Regarding who the Yan Emperor was, refer to my article Identifying the "Yellow Emperor" and "Red Emperor" of Si-ma Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian*: The Origin of the Title "Yan-Huan

and later with the title of the *Xian-bei* tribe, which eventually disintegrated into three sub-groups of *Yu-wen*, *Ku-mo-xi*, and Khitans in the *History of Liao* (Tuo-tuo, 2000b: 583).²⁵⁵ Their king's title was *Da-he-shi* during the time of the Chinese Sui and Tang dynasties, which reminds us of the Christian *Da-he-shi* nation discussed in Chapter Three. The Khitan language likely belonged to the Tungus type, though influenced by Hunnic-Turkic, Manchurian, Chinese, and Mongolian languages (or the Mongolian language that was influenced by the Khitan language).

Today the Daur people living in some regions of China are much likely the descendants of the Khitans, as the *Imperially Commissioned Translations of the History of Liao, History of Jin and History of Yuan*²⁵⁶ translated *Da-he-shi* Khitan positively to be *Da-hu-er* under the Qing China Emperor Qian-long and further confirmed by a contemporary genetic DNA testing project.²⁵⁷ My speculation here is that some of the Daur people today, especially women, should have ruddy facial features with a higher nose bridge than Mongols and Chinese since they are descendants of Khitans who had a portion of blood from the Yan Emperor (Red Emperor) ancestral line, the *northern Di* (a Scythian white type). In addition, the last emperor of the Eastern Khitan kingdom used to seek asylum from the Xia kingdom (Y, L. L., 2024: 152-153),²⁵⁸ and the founding emperor

Descendants”, Han-Sar Academic Journal, Volume I, Issue I, Boston Chinese Academic Institution (Boston: 2023).

²⁵⁵ Tuo-tuo, *History of Liao*, volume 63, “Genealogy”: “庖牺氏降，炎帝氏、黄帝氏子孙众多，王畿之封建有限，王政之布濩无穷，故君四方者，多二帝子孙，而自服土中者本同出也。考之宇文周之书，辽本炎帝之后，而耶律俨称辽为轩辕后。俨志晚出，盖从周书。盖炎帝之裔曰葛乌菟者，世雄朔陲，后为冒顿可汗所袭，保鲜卑山以居，号鲜卑氏。既而慕容燕破之，析其部曰宇文，曰库莫奚，曰契丹。契丹之名，昉见于此。”

(After the Pao-xi clan surrendered, the descendants of the Yan Emperor and the Yellow Emperor were numerous. The feudal system of the king's territory was limited, but the king's government was unlimited. Therefore, those who ruled the four directions were mostly descendants of the two emperors, and those who served in the central part of the country were originally from the same origin. According to the book of Yu-wen Zhou, Liao was originally a descendant of Yan-di, but Ye-lyu Yan called Liao a descendant of Xuan-yuan. Yan's history was late, so it follows the history of Zhou. The descendants of Yan Emperor were called Ge-wu-tu, who were powerful in both the north and the south of the border. Later, they were attacked by Mao-dun Khan, lived in the Xian-bei Mountains and were called Xian-bei. After that, Mu-rong Yan defeated them and divided their tribes into Yu-wen, Kumo Xi and Khitan. The name of Khitan can be seen here.)

²⁵⁶ 《乾隆钦定辽金元三史语解》 <https://www.shidianguji.com/ens/book/SK0734>

²⁵⁷ Li Jin-hui, “DNA Match Solves Ancient Mystery”, 08/02/2001, china.org.cn/english/2001/Aug/16896.htm

²⁵⁸ 叶隆礼:《契丹国志·卷十二·天祚皇帝下》Ye Long-li, *Chronicles of Khitan Country*, vo. 12, “Emperor Tian-zuo li”: “天祚遂强率诸军出夹山，下渔阳岭，取天德军、辽国改丰州也。东胜、宁边、云内等州【一八】，南下武州，遇金人兀室，战于龟曷下水...乃谋奔夏国。”

of Western Liao also had a good relation with the white Tatars in the Tangut area (Tuo-tuo, 2000b: 246).²⁵⁹

Chinese court historians normally differentiate the non-Chinese groups primarily based on their nationalities and cultures, including languages, customs, and sometimes their physiological features including hair and skin color, or facial features. In addition, the mixed blood features of these groups, especially among their kings' royal families and nobles, make their racial-ethnic identity recognition very complex and challenging for the Chinese court historians. In the history of the East Asian Steppes, those grassland nomadics, including the Huns, Turks, Uyghurs, Khitans, Jin-Jurchens, and Mongols, lived between the white Aryan Siberian/Scythian Di people in the north, the Chinese in the south, the nonwhite²⁶⁰ Gao-li (Korean) people in the east, and the Yue-zhi Scythians/Wusun Aryans west. Sometimes, they conquered white neighbouring nations or tribes, such as the white Tatar, Sari Uyghurs, blue Turks, and yellow-headed Jurchens, subjugating them to the non-white nations. At other times, there were groups being conquered and subjected to the white nations, such as the non-white Xian-bei (culturally Siberianized group), Jurchens, Ku-mo-xi, and Khitans.

The Liao Kingdom had occupied a vast area of territory: the Mongol grasslands in the north, Manchuria and North Korea (north of 40° north latitude instead of today's 38°) in the east, Gansu in the west and northern Hebei Province (AD 936), south of the Great Wall, including You-zhou (today's Beijing) and Yun-zhou (present-day Da-tong city in Shanxi Province of China) (Grousset, 2002: 128-129). After forcing the Kyrgyz people from the Orkhon River valley back into the grasslands along the upper reaches of the Yenisey River, the Khtian king Abaoji offered the land

(Ye Long-li, *Chronicles of Khitan Kingdom*, vol. 12, "Emperor Tian-zuo II": "Tian-zuo Emperor then led his troops out of the Jia Mountains, down Yu-yang Ridge, and captured the Tian-de army. The site was renamed the Feng Prefecture of Liao. He also captured Dong-sheng, Ning-bian, Yun-nei and other prefectures [18], and then he went south to Wu Prefecture, where he encountered the Jin people Wu-shi and fought them at the bottom of the Yan-he-xia River...When the Emperor was defeated, he then planned to flee to the Xia Kingdom.)

²⁵⁹ 脱脱:《辽史·卷三十·天祚皇帝四》:“北行三日,过黑水,见白达达详稳床古儿。”

(After traveling north for three days, they crossed the Black River and met the White Tatar Xiang-wen [Duke] Chuang-gu-er.)

²⁶⁰ **Disclaimer:** In the Chinese classics, the authors differentiate racial-ethnic groups by skin and hair colour in their writings and paintings to provide accurate information. In the paintings by Liu Guandao during the Mongol Chinese Yuan dynasty in 1280, shown in Figure 5. 3, it is noted that the facial colour of the lady next to Kublai Khan is bright white, the facial colour of a follower in the middle-right corner is black, and the facial colour of Kublai Khan is ruddy-brown (golden yellowish), which is called the perfectly "baked" colour as mentioned in a previous chapter. Therefore, I differentiate white and non-white facial colours in the thesis to follow their narratives. The facial colour description is helpful for understanding some of the arguments related to the religious history in this thesis.

originally belonging to Uyghurs to the Gan-zhou Uyghurs so that they could restore the Orkhon Uyghur Khanate. The Uyghurs appreciatively declined the offer because they had adopted and prefer sedentary lifestyles to that of their nomadic ancestors (Grousset, 2002: 128-129). The gracious gesture likely shows the Khitans' fidelity to the former Suzerain Uyghurs, and their identifying with Hunic-Uyghur tradition, rather than with the Chinese to the south and *Di* people to the north.



Figure 5. 2: Khitan nobles hunting in the wild by Hu Gui (AD 9th-10th centuries) ²⁶¹

In 1124, tribes of the Jurchid or Jurchen (Nyu-zhen), a type of Tungusic people who lived along the Wu-su-li (Ussuri) River valley, attacked the Khitan Liao and overthrew it in 1125, establishing the Wan-yan clan kingdom with the name of Golden (*Jin* in Chinese, *Ashina* in Manchurian, Sibo and Turkic, and *Alchun* in Tungusic) (Grousset, 2002: 136). In 1127 the Jin Kingdom occupied northern China, while the Song China retreated to the area south of the Chang-

²⁶¹ Source: <https://digitalarchive.npm.gov.tw/Painting/Content?pid=14626&Dept=P>; National Palace Mesuem, Taiwan.

jiang (Yangtze) River and made Nan-jing their capital, starting the Southern Song Dynasty (Grousset, 2002: 137). After the overthrow of the Liao kingdom, the general Yelyu-dashi, who was also a bilingual scholar of Khatian and Chinese (Tuo-tuo, 2000b: 245), and a member of the Liao royal family, led the Liao army survivors in retreat from northern China and broke through to the west (Tian, W., J., 2003: 39). In 1130, Yelyu-dashi arrived and established his rule over the Gao-chang Uyghur kingdom, setting his station at Bei-ting by the Khatun City (not the Khan city?), and claimed his kingship or khanship (Tuo-tuo, 2000b: 246).²⁶² The next year, he occupied Balasagun, the famous Sogdian city in the Chu River valley at westernmost Tian-shan Mountains, the capital of the Kara Uyghur Khanate, and a strategic trading center along the northern branch of the Silk Road, and consequently established the Western Liao Kingdom. This is to say, that both the Eastern and Western Uyghur Khanates/Kingdoms became Western Liao's territory. During this period, the Western Uyghur Kara Khanate was totally Islamized while Eastern Uyghur Gao-chang Kingdom still practiced Christianity, Buddhism, and Manichaeism, all supposedly in Uyghurised forms.

The Western Liao khanate conquered the valleys of the Yili River and Zhetysu region, Chu River, Talas River, regions of Syr River and Amu Darya River, the Pamirs-Tashkurgan-Kashgar region, the entire Tarim Basin, and the eastern Tian-shan regions, including the Yan-qi oasis, Turpan oasis, and “five cities” at the north of Tian-shan. In the present-day this covers Central Asia, including Xinjiang. They ruled Turkic-speaking groups and native Indo-Europeans in the Western Uyghur Khanate, who mainly believed in Islam, and Turkic tribes in the vast area of lower Yili River-Lake Balkhash and Zhetysu, such as Karlaluks who believed in Christianity and Islam, and the Eastern Uyghur Gao-chang Kingdom, including the eastern Tian-shan range regions as their centers, where Christianity, Manichaeism, and Buddhism still prevailed (Tian, W. J., 2003: 39; Grousset, 2002: 233). The Khitans in Western Liao were called Kara Khitans, meaning “Great Khitans” (instead of “Black Khitans”, as is a slippery translation used commonly by scholars). Western Liao set Balasagun as its capital (present-day Tokamak in Kyrgyzstan), which was west of Issyk Kul Lake in the valley along the upper reaches of Chu River. The ruler called himself Gur Khan, meaning “the khan of the world” (Tian, W. J., 2001: 39; Grousset, 2002: 233). The newly established Western Liao Khanate heavily damaged the local Islamic institutional power and its

²⁶² Tuo-tuo, *History of Liao*, “Tian-zuo-huang-di IV”: 《辽史·卷三十·天祚皇帝四》: “北行三日, 过黑水, 见白达达详稳床古儿。床古儿献马四百, 驼二十, 羊若干。西至可敦城, 驻北庭都护府, ……”

(After traveling north for three days, they crossed the Black River and met the White Tatar Xiang-wen [Duke] Chuang-gu-er. Chuang-gu-er offered 400 horses, 20 camels, and a number of sheep. They went west to Khatun City and stayed in Bei-ting Protectorate...) Here the Khatun city would be the Khan city, *Bei-ting*, i. e. Jimsar, or another city nearby.

governing structures in the regions of the western Uyghurs. Indeed, the conquest process was an unexpected historical turn in the advancement of Islam.



Figure 5. 3: Partial painting: Mongol Khublai Khan hunting in the wild by Liu Guan-dao (AD 1280)²⁶³

5.3.2 The age of Genghis Khan's Mongols (AD 1209 –1392)

In about 1175, Temujin the Mongol took the initiative to join the powerful Christian Keraite khanate as a vassal, and used his military talents in service to the khanate, successively conquering the four tribes of Tatars in the east and the Merkits in the north. In 1203, Temujin split from the

²⁶³ Source: <https://theme.npm.edu.tw/khan/Article.aspx?sNo=03009149>; National Palace Museum, Taiwan.

Keraites, and after several victories and defeats, he eventually defeated and subdued the Keraites. This was the beginning of his great undertaking of founding the Mongol Empire (Grousset, 2002: 200, 209, 212). Thereafter, the only independent khanate on the East Asia steppes, the strong Christian Naiman Khanate, which ruled the western part of the steppes was led by Khan Tayan. United with other tribes and khanates who were resisting Temujin, together, they fought the expansion of the Mongol Empire, but were defeated when Tayan died in battle. The remaining Naiman people, led by the princes, were exiled west to the region of the Altai Mountains, the Irtysh River, and the Zaisan Lake. They continued fighting the Mongols there, but were eventually completely defeated. The only surviving prince was Kuchlug, who escaped and hid in the Western Liao with the Khitans (Grousset, 2002: 213-215; Song, L., 2000: 9-10). Note that the aforementioned khanates that were the first to be conquered by the Mongols were all Indo-European white ethnic nations although the Keraites and Naimans had been Hunnic-Turkified.

Temujin, the later Genghis Khan, the son of a white Tatar mother, had experience with serving the white Keraites for 28 years, which proved to be very important for him. Learning from this advanced Turkified Indo-European Christian civilization not only improved his thinking, knowledge, and abilities, this education furthered his transformation from a barbaric Mongol, enabling him eventually to split from the Keraites and be victorious over their khan. He also must have experienced and been familiar with East Syriac Christianity among the Keraites. That is to say, Temujin's leadership was much likely fostered by the Keraite civilization with its strong Christian attributes. Nevertheless, Temujin was either not able to, or did not plan to, remain loyal to the Keraites. When his wings were strong enough, he began to fly toward on his ambition of conquering the steppes and eventually the world. One may note that Temujin did not believe in Christianity and maintained his Mongol identity with its religious attribute of Tengrism, a type of Shamanism. This, however, did not affect his good opinion of Christianity or the Turkic speaking Christian civilisation on the steppes. It is therefore no surprise that Temujin's descendants later converted to East Syriac Christianity and were assimilated by the Uyghur-Keraite civilisation, suggesting that, at a minimum, they had his approval and even possibly his encouragement to convert. Or, the royal family simply had great admiration for this Christian religion and civilisation.

In 1206, at a historic meeting at the head of the Onon River, Temujin, who was born on the eastern bank of this river, became the great khan of the united Mongol-Turkic speaking groups of the steppes. Upon his conquest of the entire steppes, later called the Mongol grasslands, he received a new title of Genghis Khan, which probably meant the "strongest" or "greatest" khan (Grousset, 2002: 202, 216). In 1215, Genghis Khan captured Beijing, the capital of the Jurchens' Jin kingdom (Grousset, 2002: 230) and of the former Khitan Liao kingdom. In 1218, he occupied

the Khitans' Western Liao, and merged central Asia (including present-day Xinjiang) into the Mongol Empire, colonizing the regions with many Mongol immigrants. He distributed to his second son, Jagatai, the territory of Western Liao, including the kingdom of the Kocho Uyghurs and the regions of the Uyghurs west of the Pamir Mountains, covering the Transoxiana region (the lands between the Amu River and Syr River), including Bukhara and Samarkand, and in addition the region of Kashgar on the other side of the Pamirs (Grousset, 2002: 254-255). Genghis Khan also gave Jagatai the non-Uyghur territories of the lower Yili River-Balkhash Lake regions, which is basically the Zhetysu or Semirechye area and was later called Taranchi during China's Manchu Qing dynasty, Issyk Kul Lake, and the west Uyghur territory of the upper part of the Chu River, and the Talas River (Grousset, 2002: 254-255).

Prior to the Mongol conquest, a few kingdoms in the region of modern-day Xinjiang had, on their own, split from the Western Liao and surrendered to the Mongols, thus becoming part of the *ulus*, a confederation of states that were allowed to continue ruling their own territories autonomously under the authority of the Mongols. In 1209, the Kocho Uyghur *Idiqut* Barchuk, became a loyal vassal to whom Genghis Khan awarded and gave one of his daughters in marriage (Grousset, 2002: 329-330; Li, S., 2003: 51; Yu, T. S., 1996: 287). In 1211, the Turkic prince Buzar, the ruler of Alimalik (modern day Huo-cheng county) in the upper reaches of the Yili River, and the ruler of the lower reaches of the Yili River, Arslan Khan of the Karluks with their capital in Cailac or Qayaligh at the valley on the northern root of the westernmost Altai Mountains (modern-day Kapal, Kazakhstan), "likewise repudiated Kara-Khitai sovereignty and acknowledged themselves vassals of Genghis Khan" (Grousset, 2002: 233-234). Jagatai set up his camp on the southern bank of the Yili River and began his rule in 1227, covering the large territory of Central Asia, including present-day Xinjiang, the western side of the Pamirs, and the regions around the westernmost of Tian-shan mountains (Grousset, 2002: 255, 328).

After taking over the territory of present-day Xinjiang, the Mongol Empire did not touch the Kocho Uyghurs' social, political, religious, economic, or other institutions. Because of the Uyghurs' advanced civilisation, many Uyghurs, together with Keraites and Khitans, as the people of the three most civilised nations among Turkic-Mongol groups of the steppes, were entrusted with important positions in the empire's administration. After their conquest by the Mongols, the Uyghurs, Keraites, and other "colourful-eyed" white groups brought Uyghur-Sogdian civilization and East Syriac Christianity to the Mongol Empire. Genghis Khan and his successors were able to establish the administrative system that ran the empire mainly through the advice of their elite Uyghur counsellors who were Christians (Grousset, 2002: 251-252; Yu, T. S., 1996: 287). In addition, because the Mongols did not have their own written language, the Mongols learned the Uyghur script and used it as their own; the scripts of the two are virtually identical (Grousset,

2002: 252). The Mongol Empire continued its military expansion, becoming ever more powerful by conquering through the most barbaric form of non-stop massacres of civilians across the Euro-Asian lands from China all the way to Hungary near Vienna in 1242 (Grousset, 2002: 267-268).

In China, during the Yuan dynasty established by the Mongol Empire, the government classified people into four categories: at the top were the Mongols, then the *Se-mu*, third were the Han Chinese, and at the bottom were the Southerners. The *Se-mu* people, their name literally means “colourful eyes,” were mostly white groups. Southerners were the last to stop resisting Mongol conquest and they were the Chinese people who lived in southern Song China. According to the *History of Yuan*, when national exams were administered, “Mongols, colourful-eyed people, Han Chinese, and Southerners” each had a different test. The test results were published in a poster with “Mongols and colourful eyed people in one column, and Han Chinese and southerners in another column” (Song, L., 2000: 1342-1343).²⁶⁴ The Mongols granted special rights to the colourful-eyed people, which shows that they clearly trusted and even admired them. It is worth noting that the Uyghurs were listed as, or upgraded to, the class of colourful-eyed people, even though Kocho-Ongud Uyghurs generally did not have colourful eyes, though having intermixed with the native white people; the Sari-Uyghurs did. The reason for this upgrade was that the Mongols saw them as the most civilized and trustworthy people (Yu, T. S., 1996: 287). To prevent being assimilated by the larger group of Han Chinese with ever-powerful Confucianism, Mongols in China issued laws forbidding the copying of Han Chinese customs. For instance, an edict issued in 1329 stated, “Government officials mourning the deaths of their parents should follow their own ethnic or regional customs; if Mongols and colourful eyed people emulate Han Chinese customs in these situations, they shall be removed from service.”²⁶⁵ (Song, L., 2000: 1375)

²⁶⁴ Song, *History of Yuan*, Chronicle 31, Xuan-ju 1, Courses: “第三场策一道，经史时务内出题，不矜浮藻，惟务直述，限一千字以上成。蒙古、色目人，愿试汉人、南人科目，中选者加一等注授。蒙古、色目人作一榜，汉人、南人作一榜。”

(The third test is about classics, history and current affairs. The paper should not be pedantic, but be straightforward, with the limit of 1,000 words or more. Mongolians and the Colourful-eyed are willing to take the test on subjects of Han Chinese and [other Chinese] southerners. Those Mongolians and the Colourful-eyed who are selected will be awarded a higher grade. [The test results were published in a poster with] Mongols and Colourful-eyed people in one column, and Han Chinese and southerners in another column.)

²⁶⁵ Song, *History of Yuan*, Chronicle 33, Xuan-ju 3, Quan-fa II: 天历二年，诏：“官吏丁忧，各依本俗，蒙古、色目仿效汉人者，不用。”部议：“蒙古、色目人愿丁父母忧者听。”

(In the second year of the Tian-li reign, the emperor issued an edict: "Officials who mourn for their parents shall follow their own customs. Those Mongolians and Colourful-eyed who imitate the Han people

5.4 Christianity during the rule of the Western Liao Khitans (1130–1218) and the Christian legacy of the Da-he-shi and Ye-lyu Royal line

During their rule over central Asia, the Khitans practiced a policy of religious tolerance which was at odds with Islamic ideology. The East-Syriac Christianity was surviving in Tarim Basin where Islam was the dominating force, while Christianity at the north of Tian-shan range was still maintained in those powerful Turkic-speaking khanates (Li, S., 2003: 102-103). In 1017, the Islamified western Uyghurs, having taken the west half of the Tarim Basin, started a war with the Kocho Uyghurs and only stopped due to the internal split in their Kara-Khanid Khanate in 1041 (Shan, M., 2011: 93). Under such a gloomy situation, according to Syriac historical materials, in the 12th century (Gao, Y. J., 1997: 287) Patriarch Abukhalim Elijah III (1176–1190) even established a metropolitan see in Kashgar (Li, S., 2003: 103) and in 1180 appointed John as archbishop, whose successor was Sabrisho (Zhou, J. B., 1994: 32). There were 25 metropolitan sees in Asia and the Kashgar see rose to 19th in prominence (Gao, Y. J., 1997: 287), having been 27th (Mingana, 1925: 323). Under each metropolitan see there were bishoprics (D'Ohsson, I. M., 2006: 94).

5.4.1 The general background of Christianity among the Western Liao Khitans

It is generally held by scholars that the Western Liao rulers believed in Buddhism (Li, S., 2003: 104; Chen, X. W., 2010: 42).²⁶⁶ This is partially correct, but East-Syriac Christianity was an

shall not be allowed to be official." The Ministry of Internal Affairs also specifies: "Mongolians and Colourful-eyed who wish to mourn for their parents shall be allowed to do so.")

²⁶⁶ DeWoskin, K. G. *et al.* The "barbarians": Tangut, Khitan, and Juchen (China). *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Dec. 1, 2024. "Though honoring the Confucian philosophy, the Liao rulers patronized Chinese Buddhism. Their achievements were generally military and administrative rather than cultural, but they did provide a model for their successors, the Jin, who in turn influenced the Mongols and, through them, succeeding Chinese dynasties." <https://www.britannica.com/place/China/The-barbarians-Tangut-Khitan-and-Juchen>. Accessed on 1 December 2024.

A theory, possibly among non-Chinese in ancient time holds that, "Liao kingdom fell because of their acceptance of Buddhism, and the Jin kingdom perished due to their embrace of Confucianism", according to the Mongol Khan Kublai. 又问：或云辽以释废，金以儒亡，有诸？张德辉答：“辽事臣未周知，金季乃所亲见，宰执中虽用一二儒臣，余则武弁世爵，若论军国大计，又皆不预。其内外杂职，以儒进者三十之一，不过阅簿书、听讼理财而已。国之存亡，自有任其责者，儒何咎焉！” Song Lian, *History of Yuan*, 2552.

([Kublai] asked again: "Some people say Liao kingdom fell because of their acceptance of Buddhism, and the Jin kingdom perished due to their embrace of Confucianism. Is that true?" Zhang De-hui replied: "I don't know everything about Liao, but, I saw the Jin kingdom firsthand. Although there were one or two Confucian officials among their prime ministers, the rest were military officers with hereditary

important Western Liao religion. Liao Khitans originated in the southeastern Mongol grasslands (or today's Re-he River Valley) and later around Ying-zhou (in present-day Liao-ning). In 696 during the rule of China, Tang Empress Wu Ze-tian, Khitans invaded via Shan-hai-guang Pass of the Great Wall from its eastern end to Beijing (Grousset, 2002: 127). In the early 10th century, Yelyu Abaoji (909–926), a Khitan leader, possibly with a half white bloodline, who became Khan, continued war with north China. In 947 his successor affirmed Liao as the Kingdom's title and used those Han officials to civilize Khitans after taking over some territory of north and central China (Grousset, 2002: 128-130).

One should be aware that the Khitans established an advanced dual government system during the reign of their emperor Liao Tai-zong (927-947), setting up the southern court "to govern Chinese by Chinese system", following Chinese traditional culture and customs, while the northern court would still "govern Khitans by the Liao national system" and govern other northern groups on the grasslands (Tuo-tuo, 2000b: 417).²⁶⁷ Therefore, the process of governing the Han Chinese unavoidably led to the Khitan nobles in the southern government accepting the political and religious culture of Confucianism and Buddhism (Grousset, 2002: 165). At the same time, the Khitans under the northern government, especially royal families and nobles, still maintained their traditional religion from the *Da-he-shi* time, Christianity.

During this period, although Islam had become the dominate religion in southwest Tarim Basin and Buddhism was essentially eliminated, Islam was forced to rely temporarily on peaceful proselytization instead of military coercion because of the Western Liao rule. Therefore, the Christian influence originally in the Tarim Basin's southwestern trim or along the southern Silk Road, began to restore momentum. The Western Uyghur Kara Khanate, which used to flourish in Balasagun, Samarkand and Kashgar, had declined to a small Islamic Turkified khanate, subject to the Western Liao Empire (Grousset, 2002: 235), although Kashgar remained a powerful Islamic center politically. The fact that the Persian East-Syriac Christian court still maintained the

titles. The Confucian officials were not involved in military and national affairs. Among the miscellaneous positions for internal and external affairs, only one in thirty was consulted with the Confucian officials. They did no more than reading books, hearing lawsuits and managing finances. Therefore, the survival and fall of the kingdom are due to its own responsibilities. How can Confucianism be blamed?"

²⁶⁷ Tuo-tuo, *History of Liao*, "all government administrations": "至于太宗，兼制中国，官分南北，以国制治契丹，以汉制待汉人。国制简朴，汉制则沿名之风固存也。"

(As for the Tai-zong emperor, he governed China as well, so he divided officials into the north and south. He governed the Khitans with the national system and treated the Han Chinese with the Han Chinese system. The national system was simple, while the Han Chinese system followed the old style.)

metropolitan see at this time in Kashgar did not necessarily mean that Christianity was very prominent. Following a historical Christian trait especially particular to the East-Syriac Church, with unflagging spirit and courage was established a metropolitan see probably to resist Islamic expansion. After all, in the previous 200 years, the Christians had witnessed the powerful challenge of Islam while even the East-Syriac Christian court in Persia, and many churches in the Arabian Empire had been severely persecuted by Islam or suffered great loss under its *Jihad*, followed by *dhimmi*. Similar situations in central Asia and the present-day western part of Xinjiang, was totally different from the earlier peaceful co-existence with Buddhism and Christians who were aware that this was a life-and-death struggle from both a religious and political perspective. Maintaining a metropolitan see in Kashgar was a strategic strategy to maintain a religious bank here against the Islamic turbulence toward the eastern part of the Tarim Basin from the Turkified west Uyghurs.

The Western Liao, including present-day Xinjiang area, had been characterized by the co-existence of Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Manichaeism and possibly Zoroastrianism. Both Islam and Christianity majored on proselytization as monotheistic religions. With the decline of the Western Liao, Islam began to expand further along the northern branch of the Silk Road beyond Talas-Chu Rievers northward into areas north of the Tian-shan Mountains or north Xinjiang, from Yili River valley all the way eastwards aiming toward Beshbalik. Christian influence in areas north of the Tian-shan and around the Altai Mountains and the Irtysh River was still extensive especially in those Turkic khanates with advanced civilisation. According to Grousset's research, the Uyghurs who lived in Beshbalik or Beiting (in today's Jimsar County) and Qi-tai (Barkol county town), Gao-chang or Turpan, Karasahr (Yan-qi), Qiu-ci (or today's Kucha), located along the southern root of the Tian-shan range, still believed in Christianity and Buddhism (Grousset, 2002: 233). In my opinion, those believing in Buddhism were very likely still local long-time traditional Indo-Europeans, and they lived among the Uyghurs, or a few Uyghurs had inter-marriage or political ties with the attractive locals. In the regions around the western Tian-shan range, Karluk Kanate, living along the lower reaches of the Yili River and, Zhetysu partially believed in Christianity (Grousset, 2002: 233). In the Naiman Khanate, which occupied the regions around the Altai Mountains and the western Mongol grasslands, there were many Christians (Grousset, 2002: 190, 213).

As mentioned in Chapter Three and Four, scholars have not only unearthed Christian relics in Turpan, but also discovered large amounts of the indigenous Christian gravestones reflecting the existence of a viable Christian community with racial-ethnic diversity in the Zhetysu (or the Seven Rivers area, Semirechie or Semiryetodie) along the Yili River (Zhu, Q. Z., 1998: 172) in both present-day Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Since 2016, a joint team of American and

Kazakhstan archeologists further unearthed more Christian relics in the area of the ancient city Ilibalyk (or Ilanbalyk), located at the lower reaches of the Yili River in Kazakhstan (60 kilometers from the Chinese border).²⁶⁸ A leading scholar, Steven Gilbert, presented in a Zoom meeting that the relics were abundant and astonishing, including a few dozen tombstones and a few pieces of Christian jewelry, such as a four-leaf-rosette cross ring, with the symbol of a cross and inscriptions in Syriac and Old Turkic languages. The relics were from the age of the 12th century, including a Syriac tombstone dated AD 1162. He further commented that this confirms an age of flourishing Christianity, without knowing exactly why. As being noted, during the age the Khitans ruled the regions, they established their capital in Balasagun in the region near Tokmok (in today's Kyrgyzstan) at the mid-eastern part of the Chu River valley on the westernmost end of the Tian-shan Mountains, connecting to the Yili River valley, where the must-pass hub of the northern branch of the Silk Road was. I believe these Khitans supported Christianity from a national perspective because of their royal Christian traditions, and presumably also brought many Christians with them in 1132, reinforcing the local Christian community of Karluks²⁶⁹ and of other racial-ethnic groups such as Indo-Europeans and some Turks.

In addition, during the 1950s to 1980s, Chinese archaeologists (Huang Wen-bi as the most famous one) also discovered Christian relics in the ancient city of Alimalik (Yili, Yili, present-day Yi-ning, Kuldja) in the Yili River valley on the China side, unearthing eight (and more) gravestones carved with a cross and written in Syriac (Niu, R. J., 2004: 1; Zhou, Y. X., 2020: 37). They are now displayed as exhibits in the Urumqi Museum of National Minorities and the Yili Museum respectively (see Picture 5-5). The graves were considered to be 12th -13th century graves from the Christian Naiman Khanate during the Western Liao age (Li, S., 2003: 103; Gao, Y. J., 1997: 287; Luo & Li, 2000: 239). As mentioned, this area belonged to the Western Liao while the lower reaches of the Yili River in the Karluk Khanate were also Christian land. Therefore, the entire Yili River valley seemed to be a Christian sphere of influence.

According to historical records, in 1218, when Genghis Khan sent troops on a punitive expedition against the Western Liao, the khanate, most likely the original Karluk Khanate in the upper reaches of the Yili River (Grousset, 2002: 234), which was led by Buzar, had its capital in

²⁶⁸ "Christians of the East - The Untold Story Along the Silk Road"
<https://youtu.be/wy5Ub18RCO4?feature=shared>

²⁶⁹ Karluks are partially Christians, and in 751 they fought against the Abbasid Muslim army as an ally of the Tang China in the regions of westernmost Tian-shan by the Talas River, but switched sides and joined the Muslim army to fight back against the Tang army, leading to the defeat of the Tang army and rewriting the geopolitical and religious history of Central Asia. This also shows that it would not be difficult for the Karluks to accept Islam later.

the city of Alimalik (Grousset, 2002: 235). Succinctly Christianity prevailed in the Yili River valley and Alimalik was the Christian center for the area. In addition, the western Khitan capital Balasagun, the native Sogdian city (close to present-day Tokmok in Kyrgyzstan) in the Chu River valley, should be viewed as another Christian center in the regions around westernmost Tianshan, which stood as the boundary (red line) between the Christian north and Islamic south, geopolitical-religiously. It is reasonable to suppose a Metropolitan site either in Balasagun or Alimalik, as the Metropolitan of the Turks with its unknown location discussed in the last two chapters. Future archaeological discoveries may shed more light on the hypothesis.



Figure 5. 4: The region of the Zhetysu, meaning "seven rivers" only five of which still exist today ²⁷⁰

In 1203, the Naiman Khanate, which had many Christians, collaborating with many small khanates and the remaining troops of tribes in the Western Mongol grasslands who had been defeated by Genghis Khan, tried to convince the Turkic Wang-gu (Ongud) khanates to resist Genghis Khan's invasion from eastern Mongolia. These Onguds were Christian Uyghurs who migrated southward after 841 to today's Da-tong Basin area in Shanxi Province and to areas north of Sui-yuan, a city in Inner Mongolia. But the Onguds did not agree and instead divulged the information to Genghis Khan (Grousset, 2002: 213). As already discussed in Chapter Three, Christianity thrived in the Turkic-speaking khanates, including the Onguds and other non-Turkic speaking kingdoms north of the Great Wall, with the Christian tradition among Turkic-Tatar

²⁷⁰ Source: NASA, MODIS, a derivative work: Lake Balkhash and the surrounding area viewed from space, 2014. https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Balkhash_labeled_eng.jpg

nations and Indo-European nations which can be traced back to the eighth century.



Figure 5. 5: The region of the Zhetysay, the Lake Balkhash drainage basin ²⁷¹



Figure 5. 6: The Chu River Valley and Yili River Valley along the northern branch of the Silk Road

²⁷¹ Source: Author: Knusser, this file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license. Dec. 2008.



Figure 5. 7: A Naiman or Karluk Christian stone carving in Syriac discovered at Huo-cheng County (Alimalik ruins at Yili River Valley), displayed in the Xinjiang Museum in China.

Translation by Dr. Niu Ru-ji: "Elizabeth, young woman." Photo by HaziiDozen



Figure 5. 8: A Naiman or Karluk Christian stone carving in Syriac at Huo-cheng County (Alimalik ruins in the Yili River Valley), Kashgar Museum, Xinjiang, China. Photo by Dr. Ren Qun-luo



Figure 5. 9: A Naiman or Karluk Christian stone carving in Syriac at Huo-cheng County
Translation by Dr. Niu Ru-ji: "He died and left the world. The Christian Georges in the year of
1667 (=1365A.D.), or 1674 (=1366 A. D.) [year of the Greeks]."²⁷² Photo by Dr. Ren Qun-luo

In 1204, those who collaborated with the Naiman Khanate against Genghis Khan were defeated, and in 1206 Genghis Khan unified the Mongolian grasslands (Grousset, 2002: 125-126). The Naiman Prince Kuchlug fled in the direction of the Irtysh River to the Western Liao or Kara Khitan (Grousset, 2002: 234). The *gur-khan* Yelyu Chihliku was then in the capital Balasagun in the deep Chu River Valley, and personally received and accepted Kuchlug, in the same year, giving Kuchlug his daughter in marriage (Grousset, 2002: 235). This Khitan princess was a devout Christian (Grousset, 2002: 233). Why was there Christian princess in the Western Liao royal family? Why did the Western Liao king accept this sensitive fugitive without reasonable hesitation?

²⁷² Translated by Niu Ru-ji in his paper "Nestorian Inscriptions in Syriac Script Found on Silk Road in China" (2004), 1; and also in his *Cross and Lotus*. 2008: 64-65.

As noted in Chapter Three, *Da-he-shi* Khitan was one of the four pious Turkic-Tatar Christian nations recorded in the Jacobite manuscripts in the first half of the eighth century. In addition, the Ye-lyu Khitan noble family line had a Christian legacy as well. Archeological discoveries provide complementary evidence for the above interpretation. In 1936, seven East-Syriac Christian headstones shaped like Noah's ark were discovered in the graveyard of the Khitan Ye-lyu family at "Kings Tomb Ridge" (*Wang-mu-liang*) in the easternmost part of Inner Mongolia's Dorbod Banner (Niu, R. J., 2008: 21). Also discovered at the same time was the famous "Tablet on the Divine Way of Lord Ye-lyu the Chancellor",²⁷³ which has an inscription that shows that lord Ye-lyu Chu-cai's forefathers were the Western Regions' Tarsa people (*Tie-lie-xue-si*), also translated "*Die-xie*" and "*Da-suo*" (see the discussion of this term in Chapter Four), which was the designated term for referring to East-Syriac Christians and monks. Seventeen headstones were unearthed, of which twelve had inscriptions in the Syriac language (Niu, R. J., 2008: 21), indicating that these graves probably were of clergy sent out by the East-Syriac Church and of the "merchants and secretaries of the kings, who had penetrated as far as those places for the sake of commerce and of affairs of state" that are mentioned in the East-Syriac Christian Church's historical materials—and who witnessed the fruits of the church's missionary efforts in East Asia (Mingana, 1925: 307).

In the autumn of 1208, Genghis Khan thoroughly defeated the remnant of the Altai Mountains Naiman Khanate who held to East Syriac Christianity (Grousset, 2002: 215). When the Naiman Prince Kuchlug fled to Western Liao, he was welcomed enthusiastically by the Khitan ruler. It is reasonable to speculate that the Western Liao Khan Ye-lyu Chihliku gracious acceptance of the fugitive Kuchlug was out of Christian consideration even though initially it seemed extraordinary. The warm reception of the Naiman prince alone was sure to offend the powerful Genghis Khan's Mongol Empire, and since the Naiman Khanate no longer existed, the acceptance had no political advantage but danger. Furthermore, Ye-lyu Chihiku dared to give his daughter, a Christian Princess in marriage to this fugitive (Grousset, 2002: 234). Beyond a doubt, historians have been surprised. Grousset asserts, like many other Naiman Khanate people, Kuchlug had some belief in Christianity (Grousset, 2002: 235; Baumer, C., 2008: 209) or at least he was trained in the Naiman Khanate Christian culture as a successor to the throne.

Towards the end of the Western Liao, Kuchlug, the former Naiman Khanate prince who became the ruler, changed the religious tolerance policy and began to repress Islam harshly (Li, S., 2003: 104-105). In 1211, Kuchlug, from the Altai Mountains and the Western Mongol

²⁷³ The Chinese title of the tomb inscription is: 《中书令耶律公神道碑》

grasslands, staged a coup and successfully toppled his father-in-law, Khitan *gur-khan* Yelyu Chihliku, who became the last Western Liao khan of the Kara Khitan Empire. However, Kuchlug treated his father-in-law well till his death (Grousset, 2002: 235). That same year, the governor Kuchlug sent to Kashgar in the western trim of the Tarim Basin was murdered, so Kuchlug sent troops and laid siege to Kashgar for two to three years until the residents finally surrendered (Grousset, 2002: 235). Since Kuchlug and his wife were Christians, he intended to convert the Kashgar and Khotan Muslims into Christians or Buddhists. Because the Khotan chief imam protested, Kuchlug had him nailed on the door of the imam's Islamic school (Grousset, 2002: 235). Under such circumstances of severe persecution the Kashgar Muslims were forced to be obedient and Kashgar maintained stably its Metropolitan position. It is obvious that Kuchlug and his wife's determination to protect and advocate Christianity was not only for political purposes, but also for religious faith motives. The suppression of Islam undoubtedly provided an advantageous opportunity for the restoration and growth of Christianity in central Asia and present-day Xinjiang as will be seen in the following history.

Finally, in 1218 the forces of Genghis Khan defeated Western Liao and killed Kuchlug near the river Sarikol (in Tashkurgan of present-day Xinjiang near the border of Tajikistan), thus ending the Western Liao khanate (Grousset, 2002: 235-236).

In summary, there were at least five centers of Christianity in the Western Liao Khanate: the capital Balasagun in the northwest, Kashgar in the southwest, Alimalik in the northwest, Beiting-Qitai (Jimsar Khitai) in the northeast, and Gao-chang (Kocho) in the east, which had already been a Christian center as early as possibly the fourth century. During this period of Khtians, Christianity in the Tarim Basin and the western side of the Pamirs was mainly in a state of maintenance and survival, while in the north of the Tian-shan Mountains it was somewhat stable, and in the regions around the eastern Tian-shan Mountain range, it was still powerful around Beiting-Qitai city as a Christian center, very possibly a metropolitan see, and in Turpan Basin certainly.

5.4.2 Determining the Enigmatic Locations of the Metropolitan Sites of Khatai, Khan Balik and Falik, and Kashgar and Nuakith

The present-day county of Qi-tai, used to be an ancient Christian center worthy of in-depth discussion. As the pervious last two chapters of this thesis mentioned that in 2021-2022, Chinese archaeologists excavated the complete ruins of its Christian building complex, uncovering a large number of Christian texts and artifacts and other relics. According to the continued discoveries in 2023, this Christian building complex was first constructed before the eighth century and was

destroyed in the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. Chinese archaeologists preliminarily identified that this site was at least the residence of a Christian bishop. Based on the discussion and analysis of the previous two chapters, I completely agree with the identification of these archaeologists and further believe that this was once the residence of an archbishop (i.e., a Metropolitan site). This status of the Metropolitanate may have begun as early as the eighth century, per the conclusions of the previous two chapters' studies and analyses, and at the latest began in the Western Liao Khitan era, an argument that needs to be processed here.

'Amr ibn Mattá, who in the 14th century provided detailed and valuable Persian Church Court history, chronicles a semi-official list of the Metropolitans beyond the Oxus River and eastern side of the Pamirs in the Tarim Basin, the regions around the eastern Tian-shan range, and even further east, including the northern steppes and China to the south. The prominent Assyrian theologian and Syriacist Mingana studied and quoted 'Amr commodiously but had a hard time figuring out where another Metropolitan would be situated, besides the enigmatic one in 781, for the Turks (or the Uyghurs as my thesis points out). He states: "The principal cities of Central Asia and the Far East, the seats of Metropolitans and might have had according to 'Amr six to twelve Bishops under them, were: Samarkand, Kashgar, Khatai, Tangut, and Khan Balik [and Falik]." (Mingana, 1925: 323) He also contemplated: "From Syriac sources alone we are not able to locate and name with precision the city which was the seat of this North-China Archbishopric; and, if all signs do not mislead us, we do not believe that there was a Metropolitan of Khitai before the eleventh Christian century." (Mingana, 1925: 328)

First of all, Mingana was quite right and insightful in saying there should not be "a Metropolitan of Khitai before the eleventh Christian century" and scholars need to seek supportive information from sources in other languages. I have developed an algorithm to determine the locations of the Metropolitan Khatai and Metropolitan Khan Balik & Falik, in different historical periods. First, we should establish the name of the city as Khatai. Mingana and other scholars agree that Khatai means Khitan, or Kara Khitan who ruled northern China over a century or so. The "name is identical with Khata, Cathay, as North China, or even all China, is designated in some languages" (Mingana, 1925: 328). The problem of the Metropolitan city with this name should be located is unclear, even the name representing northern China or all of China, as it is still in Slavic, Turkic, and other languages today.

In "about 1063, the Patriarch Sabrisho III, sent Bishop George to Sijistan [or Sistan, Segestan, Sakastan, the area at present-day south-eastern Iran and southwestern Afghanistan at the southern side of the Hindukush Mountains and from there to the fourth Nestorian Archbishopric of the Far East: KHATAI, in North China" (Mingana, 1925: 328). During this time, northern China

and even a portion of central China were under the southern government of the Khitan Liao Kingdom, which reached its historical powerful peak. Thus, the Khatai as a city here remains unknown regarding its location, if we do not confuse ourselves about the land of proper China with Khitan Liao as pseudo north China. Nevertheless, the name Khatai is identical with Khitan.

Secondly, we should determine another Metropolitan name of the fifth Metropolitan mentioned in the list by 'Amr, Khan Balik and Falik, ranked as the 25th Metropolitan, after the 22nd of the Turks and before the 26th of Tangut (Mingana, 1925: 323). The "Khan Balik" is interpreted by prominent scholar Bonin as Besh-baliq (Mingana, 1925: 329), an important city in my thesis, the Chinese word for which is "Bei-ting" (Jimsar), and its location was at the northern root of the eastern Tian-Shan range. At the same time, another prominent scholar Sachau interpreted the "Falik" name as the city Alimalik (Mingana, 1925: 329), (present-day Yili, or Yining), where the Christian headstones shown in Figure 5. 5 were dug out. I agree that either Jimsar or Alimalik is attractive as a choice. Jimsar used to be the royal city of the Western Turks called Khan-Fu-Tu (another Chinese phonetic translation of Wu-tu), a city during the age of Sui China, at the end of the sixth century and beginning of the seventh century. More importantly, in the winter of 924 (the third year of the Tian-zan reign), the founding khan/emperor of Liao Kingdom, before he formally announced his new empire in 947, attacked and took over the former Turkic royal city (Tuo-tuo, 2000: 14),²⁷⁴ the earlier Indo-European northern capital, and subjugated other nations westward along the northern root of the Tian-shan, the northern Branch of the Silk Road. This is a valuable piece of historical information that can help determine the mystifying location of the city Khatai.

Finally, as the Uyghurs took over Bei-ting in 791 before their exile and westward migration in 841, the Khitans repeated history by taking Jimsar in 924 before their exile, and coming from the east in 1130 and taking over the Kocho Uyghur Kingdom, then the regions around the westernmost of the Tian-shan mountains, and the western side of the Pamirs. In 983, when the Song China envoy Wang Yan-de visited the Turpan Basin and Bei-ting, a Khitan envoy visited the Uyghur kingdom as well. His report to the Song court shows the city of Bei-ting was the northern royal city of the Uyghurs, not under the Khitan's control. When the Khitans migrated here in 1130, after the fall of their kingdom in the east, they set their court first in Khatun city and

²⁷⁴ Tuo-tuo, *Book of Liao*, volume 2, "The Founding Emperor II": 【天赞三年】冬十月寅朔，遣兵逾流沙，拔浮图城，尽取西鄙诸部。”

([The 3rd year of Tian-zan reign] On the first day of the tenth month in winter, we sent troops across the Quicksand Desert, captured Futu City, and took over all the tribes in the western adjacent areas.)

resided in the Bei-ting governor center(Tuo-tuo, 2000b: 246).²⁷⁵ “Khatun” means “the wife of Khan”, so the city would not be the former Khan Fu-tu city which is called Bei-ting in Chinese, or else the Khtians changed the city name after taking over in 1130. Given these clues, I induce the present-day Qi-tai city, as repeatedly mentioned in this thesis, 30 kilometers east of the ancient Bei-ting (present-day Jimsar), which used to be the ancient Barkol county and possibly Yabatai in the west Syriac writing of the early 700s, has to be considered here as possibly the Khatun city in question. In addition, the name of Qi-tai can phonetically translate to Ki-tai, that is Khitai, or Khatai. Therefore, the unknown location of the Khatai as the Metropolitan site in the age of the western Khitans, would be that of present-day Qi-tai, where groundbreaking archaeological discoveries of a whole Christian construction complex, at least on a bishopric scale as being evaluated by experts, occurred on a large scale in the past few years.

After possibly solving the mystery of the location of the Metropolitanate Khatai, another question remains. Since a large number of archaeological discoveries have proved that the Turpan Basin was a viable and vital center of a multi-racial-ethnic and multi-lingual Christian community, and my research on ancient Chinese historical materials also confirms Christianity prevailed here, as it did in the Yan-qi Basin, dating back to the fifth century, why would a Metropolitan see not be set here, but be placed instead in the more dangerous region north of the Tian-shan? Perhaps it is because the location of *Bei-ting* is more strategic, which would appeal to the many racial-ethnic groups who enthusiastically and positively responded to the Gospel across the entire Mongolian grassland in the east. Such an attraction included the conversion of the famous Keraite King Prester John and his kingdom in 1007 or 1008, as well as many converts in the Junggar Basin and Yili-Valley at the west where Christianity flourishing among Karluks and at north in the regions at the southern foot of the Altai Mountains where the Naiman were Christians.

In addition, since the age of the Uyghur Orkhon Khanates, which had a comparatively stable relationship with China, and given the control for about two centuries of the hostile Tibetans in Turpan Basin, He-xi Corridor, and in the southern Tarim Basin, the northern branch of the Silk

²⁷⁵ Tuo-tuo, *History of Liao*, “Tian-zuo-huang-di IV”: 《辽史·卷三十·天祚皇帝四》: “北行三日, 过黑水, 见白达达详稳床古儿。床古儿献马四百, 驼二十, 羊若干。西至可敦城, 驻北庭都护府, ……”

(After traveling north for three days, they crossed the Black River and met the White Tatar Xiang-wen [Duke] Chuang-gu-er. Chuang-gu-er offered 400 horses, 20 camels, and a number of sheep. They went west to Khatun City and stayed in Bei-ting Protectorate...) Here the Khatun city would be the Khan city, *Bei-ting*, i. e. Jimsar, or another city nearby.

Road had to take a detour²⁷⁶ east of Bei-ting northeastward to cross the southmost Altai Mountains and step on the westernmost (Mongolia) grasslands of Uyghur Khanate. Then it traveled eastward along the “Grasslands High Way” and reached Beijing. From there it turned down south toward the east coast of China. For example, a Buddhist monk who had been a general in Tang China traveled the detouring route back to China in the late eighth century. Later in this chapter, we will see the famous Chinese Daoist monk Qiu Chu-ji who journeyed on this route from China to the Bei-ting area, on his way to meet Genghis Khan. Overall, the area remained as a very strategic station since the eighth century through Khitan-Mongol ages. Therefore, setting up a metropolitan site in Bei-ting or Qi-tai would be strategically necessary to cover all the territory of the Christian God’s Kingdom north of the Great Wall.

Nevertheless, since I see present-day Qi-tai as the Metropolitan city Khatai, the third one in ‘Amr’ list, another Metropolitan city, Khan Balik and Falik, the fifth one mentioned by ‘Amr in his church chronicles, ranked as the 25th Metropolitan, interpreted Khan Balik by other scholars as Bei-ting (Jimsar) and Falik as Alimalik, should at least be including Bei-ting. Bei-ting used to be a Khan Balik (city of Khan), as the northern royal court (Bei-ting in Chinese meaning “northern court”) of the western Turks at the northern root of the Tian-shan, who set their southern royal court (Nan-ting in Chinese meaning “southern court”) at the southern root of Tian-shan close to Yan-qi (Karashra). After Uyghurs migrated here, they copied the former Ju-shi kingdom about a thousand years ago and set up their northern court in Bei-ting and southern court in the Turpan Basin in Kocho city. The nomadic nations who originated from the East Asian Steppes had the tradition of having two capitals, the northern one in summer and the southern one in the winter, from the Huns to the Mongols without exception. In addition, based on the above information, I lean toward interpreting the Falik as Kocho city, instead of Alimalik, not only because it is also a royal city, but also because it was geopolitically and racial-culturally connected to Bei-ting the Khan Balik. Therefore, the location of the 25th dual Metropolitanate, the so-called “enigmatic Khan-Baliq and Al-Faliq” (Dickens, M., 2023: 50), would be in Bei-ting (or Qi-tai) and Kocho according to my speculation.

Similarly, another problem arises, as the city of Qi-tai (Khatai) and Bei-ting (Jimsar) cannot simultaneously be the Metropolitan site. The name of Besh-balik means five cities, but is used as

²⁷⁶ According to the travelogue of Qiu Chu-ji, after crossing the desert and having reached the northern foot of the Tian-shan Mountains, they stayed in an Uyghur city. On the next day they continued traveling westward, and arrived at Beshibalik (Bei-ting, Jimsar) after passing two busy towns. Therefore, the location taking a detour would be likely present-day Qi-tai located 30 kilometres east of the ancient Bei-ting (present-day Jimsar), used to be the ancient Barkol county established by Tang China.

one location in the simplified way, called “Bei-ting” in ancient Chinese (or Jimsar in the present-day). Historically, what the name entails was more complex. The Manchurian China government official and scholar Xu Song, who visited the ancient city ruins of Jimsar and did thorough research in Chinese classics, pointed out five city’s names with Jimsar as the point of reference, without counting Qi-tai at the west about 30 kilometers away. These five cities are: 1) During Han China, the Back Section of the Ju-shi kingdom set its capital in Wu-tu valley, so it should be in the mountain, and later became one of the capitals of the Western Turks for a while; 2) During Han China, a city named Jin-man also was part of the Back Section kingdom and five hundred *li* from the Front Section capital Jiao-he; 3) The Tang China town was about 2.5 kilometers north of Jimsar; 4) Another city, Jin-cheng, located in the mountain, was about 7.5 kilometers south of Jimsar; 5) A Han Chinese city was at south of the city Jin-cheng. Therefore, Besh-balik, as a later name in history probably during the time of the Kocho Uyghurs and, at the latest, the Khitan-Mongol ages, meant “the region of the five cities”, and its administrative center was in the ruins about 12 kilometers north of present-day Jimsar, the county town.

As Mingana pointed out, “[I]f all signs do not mislead us, we do not believe that there was a Metropolitan of Khatai before the eleventh Christian century,” to which I agree. This means the Khan Balik and Falik before the Khitans migrated here would be Bei-ting (Jimsar) and Kocho. In that case, the Khatai city can only become half of the metropolitan site and be consecrated during the age of the western Khitan Liao kingdom, which after 1130 replaced the first half of the Metropolitan site, Bei-ting, while the second half of the site should be still in Turpan without change. Even so, the Church chronicles did not mention it as Khatai-Falik. This might have been because the Khitans were conquerors taking over the Kocho Uyghurs, so geopolitically and racially-culturally they were enemies. The Church court in Baghdad had to choose the side of the ruling nation and leave Falik in Turpan alone, which was presumably degraded to be a Bishop site. That being the case, which I think it is, the Christianity among the western Khitans was strong and aggressive, meaning they maintained their *Da-he-shi* Christian tradition well over a three-or-four century course.

Similarly, by applying my geopolitical algorithm to the puzzle solving, we can understand that the 27th Metropolitan dual site, Kashgar and Nuakith (Nawākath, or Navēkaθ) (Dickens, M., 2023: 50), as the city Kashgar, is well-known, and the location of unknown Nuakith should be geopolitically and civilisational connected. They were not far away from each other for administrative convenience. Scholars have a hard time figuring out where Nuakith should be. The Russian scholar Barthold stated affirmatively about a century ago that “Navakat, or Navikat, was a large commercial centre in the valley of the Chu” (Barthold, V. V., 1956: 88-89). In his recent article, Dickens summarized well, with detailed linguistic research, that the second half of the

Metropolitanate Nawākath as a city is very likely located in the Chu River (or Suyab River) valley in present-day Kyrgyzstan (Dickens, M., 2023: 61-62). Therefore, given the agreement of these two scholars, I lean to agree with them.

However, the problem is that this place in Chu River valley is part of the same geopolitical block as Alimalik historically, but very far from Kashgar across the daunting Pamirs, so it is not likely, though I highly agree that there should be a metropolitan somewhere around the westernmost Tian-shan range, either in Chu valley or more likely Yili valley at further north far enough away from Samarkand Metropolitanate at the south and from Khatai (Qi-tai) Metropolitanate at the east. In Chapter Two of this thesis, the research in Chinese court history from the Sui dynasty (AD 581-618) reveals that in an unknown location in the Pamirs there was a luxurious Christian church building. There were more than 1,000 people worshipping in the church each day. In front of the church is the backbone of a fish, its bones form a hole large enough for a horse and rider to pass through. Such a viable, large scale, and well-constructed luxurious church building could not be anything but a promising candidate of the Metropolitan site.

Therefore, I speculate that this unknown location in the Pamirs where the church was located during Sui China times would be the Nuakith (Nawākath) or Navakat (Navikat), the other half of the metropolitan site with Kashgar, though the name might have been different at that time. The luxurious church building and its bishopric are in the kingdom of Cao (the descendants of the Scythian white Yue-zhi kingdom who had Christians among them) in the Pamir Mountains, as the Chinese classics clearly state. From my research, the classics show the western part of the Tarim Basin was heavily influenced by Iran-Persian civilisation, which was represented by the Yu-tian Kingdom, including present-day Tashkurgan, where native Tajiks still live with little trace of Iran-Persian cultural traditions left after having been Islamified a millennium ago. The famous Silk Road royal city Tashkurgan is in the Pamir Mountains, serving as a routing hub, just like the Kocho city was busy with merchants, diplomats, and religious travelers. From here, journeying about 280 kilometers north, one arrives at Kashgar, another busy Silk Road center, while the distance between Bei-ting and Gao-chang, the dual metropolitanate, was about 200 kilometers. Traveling from Kashgar to Chu River valley would take about three to five times longer. Therefore, the two cities of Kashgar and Tashkurgan are part of the same geopolitical and racial-civilisational block, so they should be the dual Metropolitan sites of Kashgar-Nuakith. Hopefully, future archaeological discoveries will confirm my speculative theory about Tashkurgan where the ancient ruins should remain largely untouched because of its geographical isolation.

In addition, the archaeological discoveries since 2021 in the Qi-tai ruins indicate that the Christian complex site was first built before and during the eighth century, though the main

construction occurred during the early tenth century (after the Uyghurs migrated here), and with renovations a number of times during the eleventh and twelfth centuries²⁷⁷ (Ren & Wei, 2022: 112) (when the Khitans came). The city of Qi-tai with a different name first appeared in Chinese records during the Tang dynasty after AD 640 when China set up the Barkol county government. Tang China possibly chose this place based on the site of the ancient fortress of the military center of Han China to protect the region of the five cities against the Huns from the northeast Gobi Desert. Presumably the site was a monastery originally given its distance from the five cities region. The Christian state kingdom of Yabatai in the early eighth century in the Jacobite writing, was supposed to be the Barkol county started in the 640s by Tang China, which might have been a bishop site under the metropolitan of Bei-ting (Jismar). Afterward, before finally becoming a Metropolitan site during the time of the western Khitans who named the city Barkol (might be the city Khatun then) as Qi-tai (Khitai), it replaced *Bei-ting* as the Christian center on the northern side of eastern Tian-shan.



Figure 5. 10: The four Metropolitan sites from the ninth to eleventh centuries

²⁷⁷ “校正后的测年结果显示，寺院遗址内的建筑结构最早建于公元 8 世纪上半叶，主体修建年代在公元 10 世纪初，公元 11~12 世纪期间存在多次修缮，至公元 13 世纪前后遭到破坏。”

("The corrected dating results show that the earliest building structures in the temple ruins were built in the first half of the 8th century AD, the main construction period was in the early 10th century AD, there were several repairs between the 11th and 12th centuries AD, and it was destroyed around the 13th century AD.")

5.5 How Gao-chang Uyghur civilisation and its Christianity impacted the Mongol Empire

In the mid-eighth century, Islam expanded quickly in West Asia in the wake of the jihads that brought the region, including Persia, under the Islamic rule of the Arabs. According to both Chinese and Arab historical records, in July 751, the founder of the Abbasid Caliphate (which Tang Chinese texts called the “black-robed Tazi”, established in 750), Abu Muslim (a Khorasani,²⁷⁸ possibly of Persian descent), dispatched Ziyad ibn Salih to assemble his troops on the banks of the Talas River by the city to launch a decisive battle with the Tang-China troops of the famous general, ambassador and military governor Gao Xian-zhi (a Gao-li Korean), normally stationed in Qiu-ci (Kucha). Five days later, the local Tang-China allies, the Karluks, defected and joined the Arabs, and their joint pincer attack resulted in a huge Tang defeat (Grousset, 2002: 119-120; Ou-yang, 2000: 3597-3599). A few Chinese classics, in the *Old Book of Tang*, *Tong-dian*, *New Book of Tang*, and *Zizhi Tongjian*, recorded the decisive battle between the Tang China and Abbasid armies, resulting in a great failure of Tang China (Ou-yang, 2000: 3599),²⁷⁹ basically confirmed in the Arabic historical writings. Thereafter, Arab-led Islamic forces began to exercise comprehensive control over Central Asia (Grousset, 2002: 120; Zhang, Y., 2000: Forword 5).

²⁷⁸ It refers people from Khorasan. “Khorāsān, historical region and realm comprising a vast territory now lying in northeastern Iran, southern Turkmenistan, and northern Afghanistan. The historical region extended, along the north, from the Amu Darya (Oxus River) westward to the Caspian Sea and, along the south, from the fringes of the central Iranian deserts eastward to the mountains of central Afghanistan. Arab geographers even spoke of its extending to the boundaries of India”. Editors. Khorāsān. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2024, November 20). <https://www.britannica.com/place/Khorasan-historical-region-Asia>, Date of access: 7 Dec. 2024.

²⁷⁹ Ou-yang Xiu & Song Qi, *New Book of Tang*, Chronicle 60, “Gao Xian-zhi”: “【天宝】九载，讨石国，其王车鼻施约降，仙芝为俘献阙下，斩之，由是西域不服。其王子走大食，乞兵攻仙芝于怛罗斯城，以直其冤。”

(In the ninth year of [Tian-bao], China attacked the Shi Kingdom. Its king Che-bi-shi agreed to surrender. [Gao] Xian-zhi presented the king as a captive to the imperial court where he was beheaded. As a result, the [other states] in the Western Regions refused to submit. The prince of the Shi Kingdom fled to the Arabs and asked for troops to attack Xian-zhi in Talas City to redress the injustice [to his father].)

Si-ma Guang, *Zizhi Tongjian*, vol. 216: “仙芝闻之，将蕃、汉三万众击大食，深入七百馀里，至怛罗斯城，与大食遇。相持五日，葛罗禄部众叛，与大食夹攻唐军，仙芝大败，士卒死亡略尽，所馀才数千人。”

(Hearing this, [Chinese General Gao Xian-zhi] led 30,000 Tibetan and Han troops to attack the Arabs, penetrating more than 700 Chinese miles into the city of Talas, where they met the Arabs. After five days of stalemate, the Karlaluks rebelled and attacked the Tang Chinese army together with the Arabs. Xian-zhi was badly defeated, and almost all of his soldiers died, with only a few thousand left.)

Despite the great victory over Tang China in the battle of Talas, as Barthold has pointed out, "the Muslim conquerors never penetrated beyond the Talas. The peaceful penetration of Muslim culture by means of commercial relations played a far more important role in the destinies of the Turks than the success of Muslim arms" (Barthold, V., 1956: 87-88). During the 700s, Muslim writers witnessed many towns having Christian churches in the land of "Turkestan", mainly in the Chu River valley, and there were even Christians in the Issyk Kul Lake (Barthold, V., 1956: 88). Certainly these Christians included native Scythian type Indo-Europeans of Yue-zhi descents and native Wu-sun Ayan type, and Turkic speaking groups. In addition, besides the Christian resistance, internal conflicts among the Muslims, such as between Shia and Sunni, also slowed down the process of Islamification.

As was mentioned earlier, the Uyghurs migrating to the west established two khanates: the Kara-Khanid Uyghur Khanate at west Central Asia and the Kocho-Uyghur Khanate at east Central Asia. The Chinese Tang and Song courts recognized only the Kocho-Uyghur Khanate as the continuation of the original Uyghur Khanate on the Mongolian steppes. At the age of the western Khitan Liao kingdom (1130-1218), the Kocho-Uyghur Khanate/kingdom (841-1392) controlled the area around the mid-eastern Tian-shan range and the eastern half of the Tarim Basin, and it was centered in the Kocho-Turpan Basin and Bei-ting among the five or six cities north of the Tian-shan. The territory of the Uyghur Kara-Khanid Khanate was mainly the southwestern part of the Tarim Basin and the area west of the Pamir Mountains; and it was centered around Balasagun [a Sogdian city in the Chu River valley, the former capital of the Western Turks (Millward, J. A., 2007: 50), and the current capital of the Khitan khanate], Samarkand, and Kashgar. Under the rule of Khitans, Islam was forced to enter a period of peaceful proselytizing. Kashgar was the center of Islam, which continued to spread eastward along the two sides of the Tarim Basin, but the forces of Christianity-Manichaeism-Buddhism in the Kocho-Uyghur Kingdom were still effective in blocking the eastern spread of Islam. In the 13th century, Islam had begun to spread north of the Tian-shan mountain range into North Xinjiang (Millward, J. A., 2007: 105), when Kara Khitan control became weak in its final stage.

In 1209, the Mongols accepted the allegiance of the Kocho-Uyghurs, which was offered on their own initiative, following which they defeated the western Liao khanate and began their rule of the whole of present-day Xinjiang. In 1227, the year Genghis Khan died, his second son, Chagatai Khan, received from his father the vast territory north and south of the Tian-shan range and a large part of Central Asia and established the Chagatai Khanate. Chagatai died in 1242 (Grousset, 2002: 253-255). The Mongol rulers adopted a tolerant religious policy, so Islam could not spread by military force until the fourteenth century. During the age of Mongol rule, the Kocho Kingdom, with its regions surrounding the eastern Tian-shan and especially the Turpan Basin,

became a safe harbor for Christianity and its multi-racial-ethnic communities, including the diaspora groups, standing as the last beacon in central Asia and radiating into the Mongol Empire.

5.5.1 The Kingdom of Tarsa: The Title of the Kocho Uyghur Kingdom during the Reign of the Mongols (1209-1392) and Its Meaning

Under the rule of the Mongol Empire, East Syriac Christianity continued to grow among the Uyghurs, other Turkic speaking groups, and Indo-Europeans in the Gao-chang Uyghur Kingdom, not only matching the size and scale of its reach during the Khitan Western Liao period (Mingana, 1925: 324-325; Grousset, 2002: 235),²⁸⁰ but developing so forcefully that it reached an historic power peak among other religions. The Venetian Marco Polo's accounts of the Mongol Empire in the 13th century reported the following cities in present-day Xinjiang had famous church buildings: Kashgar, Yarkant, Khotan, Kocho, Hami (Kumul), Alimalik, and Luntai (near present-day Wu-la-bo and close to Urumqi); An Indian traveller in the 1050s said that Kocho-Uyghurs believed in Christianity (Zhou, J. B., 1994: 31-32). In fact, there were so many Christians, especially among the Uyghurs, that even the Armenian historian Hayton (Het'um) of Corycus called the Uyghur kingdom "the Kingdom of Tars" (Hetum, 1307: 3), which means "Kingdom of Christians" or "Kingdom of Christian Monks" (Yu, T. S., 1996: 304). Hetum wrote that there were three provinces in the kingdom, and "the people thereabouts are called Eo'gur (Uyghur)." He also wrote, "In the east the kingdom of Tars is bordered by the above-mentioned kingdom of Cathay; in the west, by Turkestan; in the north, by a [Gobi] desert; and in the south by an extremely rich province called Sune, located between the kingdom of India and Cathay." (Hetum, 1307: 3) Therefore, the geographical details are accurate.

"Tars" by Hayton is also rendered as *Tarsa* (Tarse, Tarsi, or Tarsia). The term appears with a different translation *Die-xue* in *Travels to the West of Qiu Chang Chun* from Mongol China's Yuan dynasty. *Da-suo* is used in the Chinese Tang dynasty-era stele "Propagation of the *Jing* Religion from Da-qin in China" (Da-qin was the Great Roman Empire), better known as the "Nestorian Stele" (Zhu, Q. Z., 1998: 175), and also in other Chinese texts in the Mongol Yuan dynasty, even on the headstone of the famous Khitan genius Ye-lyu Chu-cai, though with another

²⁸⁰ In approximately 1180, during the Western Liao period (1130-1218), the metropolitanate was re-established in Kashgar as ranking No. 19 instead of the former No. 27, indirectly showing the Christianity in Central Asia overall shrunk due to Islamic progress. The last ruler of the Western Liao supported Christianity and openly suppressed Islam.

translation *Tie-lie-xue-si*. Here, *Jing* religion literally means Luminous Religion, and refers to Christianity from Rome; it is not at all a reference to Nestorianism.²⁸¹ “Tarsa” in the Chinese Xi’an stele refers to the East Syriac Christian monks, who are described here as “good character Tarsa”, in contrast with the “white clothed clergy” (Zhu, Q.Z., 1998: 170; Zhou, Z. X., 1993). In other contexts, Tarsa also refers more generally to Christians. According to the journals of Matteo Ricci, the Jesuit missionary sent to China at that time (the beginning of the 17th century), “...here is in China the followers of the ancient cult of the cross are known to them as Terzai. The origin of this term seems uncertain, except that we have learned from a certain Armenian that in Persia the Armenians call the Christian by that same name” (Matteo, R., 1953: 112-113).

Modern scholar Nicholas Sims-Williams has clearly confirmed the meaning of Tarsa: Among “a few Middle Persian loanwords in the Christian Sogdian texts” is “even the term for ‘Christian’ itself: *tarsāk*, that is ‘one who fears (God)’ (cf. New Persian *Tarsā*)” (Sims-Williams, 2009: 270; Āryān, Q., 1991, 339-342; *Encyclopædia Iranica*). In addition, early Christians were also called “Nasara” by Arabs via Syriac form meaning Nazarene (Fortescue, A., 1913: 92), seemingly with a phonetic relation to “Tarsa”. So, because here were so many Christians or Christian monks among the Kocho Uyghurs, the Uyghur kingdom came to be known during the conquest of the Genghis Khan Mongols as the Kingdom of Tarsa. It is no surprise then that two Christian Uyghur monks would emerge in later times to play dramatic roles in world history.

The Armenian prince and historian Hetum’s account supports my thesis that the dominant religion of the Kocho Uyghurs was Christianity, rather than Manichaeism or Buddhism as is still commonly believed by some scholars today. Actually, according to some prominent Orientalists from a century ago, Uyghurs in the 13th century mainly believed in Christianity and also were idol-worshippers (allegedly Buddhism) but were not followers of Manichaeism. This was the conclusion of those earlier scholars based on 13th and 14th century Persian and Western materials, in particular travel diaries. In the early 20th century, however, archaeologists found many Manichean and Buddhist materials but far fewer Christian materials in Turpan (Kocho). The academic world thus revised its views and theory to one that had the Kocho Uyghurs before Islam’s arrival mainly believing in Buddhism and Manichaeism with a small minority believing in

²⁸¹ The first foreigners to view the stele were Catholic missionaries, and they mis-translated its name as the Nestorian Stele even though a direct translation should be “Stele to the propagation in China of the Jing religion of Great Qin” (《大秦景教流行中国碑》) or similar. This mis-translation reflects the Catholics’ traditionally negative attitude towards the Church of the East because of its Antiochian-Nestorian Christology and its refusal to accept the condemnation of Nestorius as a heretic. As a result, this misnomer has thus misled many non-Chinese readers.

Christianity. My theory and thesis, however, is quite different: the material presented in the previous chapters, which was based on comprehensive research of the historical sources including ancient Syriac texts, classical Chinese texts, and unearthed manuscripts and artifacts, can be summarized as **follows**:

After the Uyghurs' exile west, the Kocho Uyghurs mainly believed in Uyghur-Sogdian Manichaeism, and East Syriac Christianity among Uyghurs was secondary with a Sogdian tradition. The native Indo-Europeans in the Kocho Uyghur khanate/kingdom believed both Christianity and Buddhism. In about two hundred years, Uyghurised Christianity became the dominant religion among the Kocho Uyghurs and Manichaeism continued to decline until it muted into a Buddhist guise, as if it disappeared. Buddhism was mainly found among the native Indo-Europeans, but never constituted a major religion among the Uyghurs. The Kocho archaeological discoveries that have continued to be made in the past century-plus, coupled with the historical materials in different languages from the 13th to 14th centuries, overlap as proof of this conclusion. During the time of the Mongol conquest, Uyghur Christianity had reached its climax and deeply impacted the Turks-Uyghurs-Indo Europeans-Mongols' civilisations in Central and Eastern Asia. The materials of this period make no mention at all of Manichaeism, but rather, they frequently speak of the Kocho Uyghurs as a Tarsa and Christian nation. But records describing Uyghurs worshipping idols resulted in the mistaken belief that many Uyghurs were Buddhists, in addition to the large amount of Buddhist manuscripts in the Uyghur language unearthed in Turpan Basin. This was mainly due to an understandable inability to differentiate native Indo Europeans from Uyghurs in the Kocho kingdom, and a superficial understanding of the so-called "idol-worship religion."

According to an 1895 English translation of *The Tarikh-i-rashidi: A History of the Moghuls of Central Asia*, Arabs, invading Central Asia in the 8th century, tried to impose Islam on the Uyghur population, with limited success (Elias, N. & Ross, E. D., 1895: 96). Even though the Uyghurs in the west of the Pamir Mountains later undoubtedly all embraced or surrendered to Islam, the Uyghurs living in the central region (Kashgar-Khotan), continued to believe in Christianity until the late tenth century, while those in the eastern parts (Kocho-Beshibaliq) of the Uyghur territory, continued to hold fast to their Christian belief into the age of the Mongols, all the way to the end of the fourteenth century. According to *The Tarikh-i-rashidi*: "They are spoken of very generally as Tarsi, and according to some authorities, this should be taken to indicate that they were Christians...(Elias, N. & Ross, E. D., 1895: 96)" The translator follows this up by pointing out a strange situation: John of Plano Carpini, sent by Pope Nicholas IV to the Mongol court (John arrived in 1246), wrote in his travel diaries "stating positively" that Uyghurs "were Nestorian Christians, while William of Rubruck, only eight years later, pronounced them, with equal certainty,

to have been idolaters, and he adds that they dwelt in towns together with Nestorians and others (here the others were Muslims). It is possible that the Rubruck may have regarded most of those he saw as Buddhists..." (Elias, N. & Ross, E. D., 1895: 96) The historical misunderstanding starts here.

Finally, the translator emphasizes that "...however uncertain this may be, the name of Tarsi frequently included the Nestorians, though it was ordinarily used, during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, to indicate the Uyghurs as a nation or more particularly the Uyghurs of the eastern Tian Shan [i. e. Kocho Uyghurs]." The text continues with the example that "[it] is in this latter sense that Friar John of Montecorvino, at the beginning of the 14th century, speaks of the Tarsi tongue, for he could not have meant a Buddhist tongue", and according to the notes on this from French Sinologist Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat, the Tarsi tongue refers to the Uyghur language (Elias, N. & Ross, E. D., 1895: 96; Yule, H., 1915: 259). In other words, the "Christian language" title was almost an equivalent substitution to the Uyghur language.

Due to the above confusion caused by the two separate accounts in the 13th century, some scholars wondered if the term "Tarsa" refers only to Nestorian Christians. Overall, the "Tarsa" is most probably originally of Syriac etymology and referred to East Syriac Christian monks, but then was borrowed by Persians and evolved into the name for East Syriac Christians before finally becoming synonymous with "Uyghur" because so many Uyghurs were Christians or Christian monks. The evidence for this is as follows:

The first point, Tarsa means East Syriac Christian, based on the historical timeline, which can be confirmed with some examples. Gong Fang-zhen, an expert in Chinese traditional religions, states that the *tu-suo* in the name Zhai *Tu-suo* on a tombstone from China's Sui dynasty that was unearthed in Henan province is the same as the *da-suo* that appears on the Xi-an Stele (Yang, X. C., 2004: 12; Gong, F. Z., 1983: 3). According to this tombstone, this particular Zhai Tu-suo, who died in 615 (the 11th year of *Da-ye*) in Henan province and was buried there, was a Sogdian from central Asia whose full name was Bao-he-bi-duo, clearly a phonetic translation of a non-Han Chinese name (Gong, F. Z., 1983: 3). Therefore, the ninth century Xi-an Stele was the first to make a distinction between "good character Tarsa" and the "white clothed clergy", both of which likely indicate respected positions in the *Jing* religion, monks and clergy. Furthermore, according to ancient Central Asian historical materials, in 766, when Arab armies attacked the important central Asian city of Sayram, the East Syriac Christian believers there refused to convert

to Islam and raised troops to resist to the death. Their leader said, "I am a Tarsa ... and my faith is true!" ²⁸²

The original Sogdian city name "Sayram" is generated from the Hebrew word "Shalom," still used in present-day southeastern Kazakhstan, east of the Syr River, at the southern foot of the mountain, further southwest from the city Taraz by the Talas River at the northern foot of the mountain where in 751 Tang China was defeated by the Abbasid Muslim army. The defence of the local Christian community against the Islamic force from marching northward along the northern branch of the Silk Road proved religiously brave yet in vain to maintain the Christian historical course, mostly due to the defeat of China which caused dramatic changes to the geopolitical, racial-ethnic and religious landscape in the regions. The native Christianity used to be situated along the line of the Metropolitan Samarkand, most probably still represented by the native Scythian-Sogdian white community, joined by other Turkic-speaking groups, before gradually disappearing under the sword wielded by the descendants of Ishmael.

Among all of the Western materials, *Flower of Histories of the East*, the book by the Armenian historian Hetum, which most likely appeared around 1307, was the first work to call the Uyghur kingdom the "Kingdom of Tars." In the same year, the great Persian history book, *The Tarikh-i-rashid*, was also published and it also states that "[n]ow the tribe of Naiman were mostly Tarsa". (Elias, N. & Ross, E. D., 1895: 290) Based on the fact that the Naimans practiced Christianity, the English translators noted that "[t]he word Tarsa is rendered Christian here." In addition, *The Book of the Secrets of the Faithful of the Cross*, published at about the same time as *The Tarikh-i-rashid*, stated that the Khitan kingdom, conquered by the Mongols, was part of the kingdom ruled by the king of Tarsa. That kingdom was where the Tartars (Genghis Khan Mongols, erroneously called Tartars) had first learned letters and been corrupted to worship idols by the example set by the Tarsas. Despite that corruption, though, the Tartars still chose the immortal God from all the other gods (Torsello, M. S., 2011: 375). Therefore, it is clear that "the Kitan kingdom" refers to the Western Liao Khitans, even though the Uyghur kingdom was ruled by Western Liao, not the other way around, and thus the Uyghur king was a Tarsa.

The Book of the Secrets of the Faithful of the Cross seems to have borrowed its content from the 13th century Syriac world history *Chronicon Syriacum* by Gregory Bar Hebraeus. The *Chronicon Syriacum*, which was published at least two decades before *The Book of the Secrets*

²⁸² "Nasabname, *Book of Generations: Sayram*" (Anon), Academic Dictionaries and Encyclopedias web site (<http://enacademic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/5015018>; accessed May 3 2018)

of the *Faithful of the Cross* and *The Tarikh-i-rashidi*, mentions that the Mongols did not have a written script so “Genghis Khan commanded the scribes of the IGHURAYE (UIGURS), and they taught the children of the TATARS their books, and they wrote the Mongol language with Uigur letters...” (Bedjan, P., 1932: 411-412) This matches what is recorded in the Chinese text *History of Yuan* (Song, L., 2000: 2014, 3021),²⁸³ written around 1369-1370. It is worth noting that *The Book of the Secrets of the Faithful of the Cross* is not historically accurate. *The Tarikh-i-rashidi* and *Flower of Histories of the East*, along with the writings of the two Western envoys John of Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck, are quite accurate even though some details are imprecise and some narratives failed to tell the whole story. Because of its use of court history and the fact that it was written in Persian then translated to Arabic by an author whose writing team consisted of Mongol, Chinese, Indian, and Uyghur scholars, *The Tarikh-i-rashidi* is academically rigorous and is a comparatively reliable historical account. *Bar Hebraeus’ Chronography* is also a sound piece of historic writing even though, for reasons unknown, it does not mention Tarsa as the epithet of the Uyghurs.

Further, Uyghurs are primarily Christians according to Hetum’s “kingdom of Tarz”. However, what Hetum stated in detail about the Kocho Uyghurs is that people in this region were all idol worshipers, “excepting the kin of those kings who came, guided by a vision of the Star to Bethlehem in Judea to worship the birth of the Lord. Even now one may find many grandees and nobles among the Tartars (Mongols) who are descended from that line, and who firmly hold the faith of Christ.” The claim is made here that the three Magi who visited baby Jesus were Uyghurs. This claim, while interesting, is clearly a misunderstanding, because, at the time of Jesus’ birth, this area was the domain of just the native Indo-Europeans, along with a handful of Chinese sent by Han China and a few Huns, the two being possibly the only marginalized minority groups there. If the three Magi were from the Kocho region, they would have had to have been native Indo-Europeans. A Japanese Christian scholar points out that the magi were probably Babylonian

²⁸³ Song, *History of Yuan*, Chronicle 11, “Ta-ta-tong-a”: 帝曰: “汝深知本国文字乎?”塔塔统阿悉以所蕴对, 称旨, 遂命教太子诸王以畏兀字书国言。(The emperor said: "Do you have a good understanding of your nation's writing?" Tatatong'a answered with all his knowledge, which pleased the emperor. The emperor then ordered the prince and other kings to be taught to write their nation's language in Uyghur script.)

Chronicle 89, “Buddhism and Daoism”: 诏曰: “朕惟字以书言, 言以纪事, 此古今之通制。我国家肇基朔方, 俗尚简古, 未遑制作, 凡施用文字, 因用汉楷及畏吾字, 以达本朝之言。……”(The imperial edict declared: "I believe that characters are used to write words, and words are used to record events. This is the common practice from ancient times to the present. Our country was founded in the north, and the customs are simple and ancient, so there is no time to make them. In all cases of writing, we should use Han Chinese characters and Uyghur scripts to express the words of our dynasty....")

astrologers from Mesopotamia, as the three church fathers, Origen, Jerome and Augustine claimed, instead of Zoroastrians from Persia (Yamauchi, E. M., 1996: 481).

Later in this chapter, we will see how some Uyghur Christian elites played a crucial administrative role in the Mongol Empire court. In addition, Hetum also stated that the idol worshipers in this kingdom had these characteristics: "...powerless in arms, but gifted and perceptive in studying the arts and sciences. They possess their own distinct script." (Hetum, 2022: 3) As was recounted in the previous chapters, the Tocharian Indo-Europeans living on the western side of the Parmis in Bactria and around the Tarim Basin were militarily weak and feared battle, which was the impression that both Alexander the Great and the Han Chinese envoy Zhang Qian had of them, but having their own unique advanced civilisation with elements from the Persian and Macedonian-Greek civilisations, they were strong in the arts and sciences. In addition, the reference to "their own distinct script" clearly is to either the Sogdian or Tocharian script or both. Therefore, Hetum's descriptions were of both the Kocho Uyghurs and the native Indo-Europeans, and also of Christianity and Buddhism both prevailing, all inside the Uyghur Kingdom. Both of these descriptions are in line with mid-sixth century Chinese historical accounts of the Northern Wei, as discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

Finally, in the Chinese text *Discerning the False under the Reign of Zhi-yuan in Great Yuan Dynasty*, most likely written by order of Khublai in 1291 (the 28th year of Zhi-yuan) by the Buddhist monk Xiang Mai, rebukes Quan-Zhen (All Truth) Daoism which was represented by Qiu Chu-ji and his apostle-like disciple Li Zhi-chang. The writing mentions that the Great Khan Mongke once spoke to Daoist monks, saying, "Buddhism and Daoism, the two ways do not conflict with each other. Each only promotes its own way and to suppress the other way is not a universal doctrine. Today, you gentlemen say Daoism is the highest, Ruist people say Confucianism is number one, Tarsa people believe in Mishha saying he was born of Heaven, and Dasman [Muslims] cry to the sky and thank Heaven for its gifts. Careful consideration their fundamental natures [show] that none can match Buddhism." (Liu, W. T., 2016: 44) The narrative and statement here obviously favours Buddhism. It is worth noting that "the Tarsa people believe in Mishha" means that the Tarsa people believe in the Messiah (Mishha is Syriac). Once again, this shows that, in the Mongol Empire, "Tarsa" indeed refers to Christians with a Syriac Church background who no longer referred only to the Syriac Christian monks as was the case in the Tang China Xi-an Stele. Mongke here called Muslims "Dasman", which, like the term "Tarsa", was also derived from the Persian language.

Furthermore, at the time of the early Mongol conquests in the 13th century, before the above-mentioned Mongol-era historical materials were written, a Chinese history text had already

mentioned Tarsa in its account of Genghis Khan meeting the famous Chinese Daoist monk Qiu Chang-chun, and also mentioned the term Tarsa in Chinese. In a later section of this chapter, the travelogue with the term Tarsa will be discussed in detail. Overall, we can conclude on the two points being discussed above that the term “Tarsa” means East-Syriac Christians, and the “kingdom of Tarz” entails the Uyghur Christian kingdom.



Figure 5. 11: “Arkagun” in Uyghur scripts unearthed from Qi-tai County Christian ruins in 2021

Additionally, the Mongols had another name for East Syriac Christians: “Arkagun” (Grousset, 2002: 300). Chinese texts from this Mongol period of Chinese history used the phonetic translation “ye-li-ke-wen” to refer to “Christians,” while the Mongols used their phonetic translation of “Arkagun” or “Arka’un”. Various interpretations evolved from that term about its origin, without

common satisfaction. A Chinese scholar explained that “ye-li-ke-wen” was translated by the Mongols from the Syriac term “Allaha” for the Christian God, and means “worshiper of God” (Chen, Y., 1917: 2). According to some scholars, “the Mongols followed Syriac etymology in Syriac in designating Christians by the names of Tarsa and arkagun or arka’un” (Grousset, 2002: 300; Pelliot, P. E., 1914: 636; Mingana, 1925:322),²⁸⁴ and “Persian historians apply to them the epithet Tarsa which...refers to Christians” (Mingana, 1925: 316; Ruysbroek & Giovanni, 1900: 17).²⁸⁵ In addition, the term of “Arkagun” was also discovered in last century’s Turpan manuscript fragment of an Uyghur prayer booklet, as the Uyghur word “ärkiküt” written only in Syriac script, and a few years ago in Uyghur script on a wall discovered from the Qi-tai Christian site ruins (Figure 5. 8).

In the correspondences between the Ilkhan in charge of the Mongol Empire Persia and the Pope regarding on a joint crusade to pincer attack the Egyptian Mumluks, the communication often became entangled on account of the different faith traditions on each side. The core issue is that the Pope expected the Mongols to convert from their East-Syriac faith, which the Catholics called Nestorianism, to the Roman Catholic faith. In the correspondences of the Popes, whenever “Christianity” is used, “Roman Catholicism” is meant. The Mongols called Roman Catholic believers “Christians” while the East-Syriac Church believers were called “Arkaguns”. Chinese historical texts prove this latter point, but few people noticed the use of the term “Arkoun” in Abaqa Ilkhan’s 1268 letter to the Pope. Specifically, Abaqa writes near the end of the letter: “Besides, to your holiness this Arkoun Solomon indeed was appointed as the venerable guard of the church of God in our court, and Nekpei as our messengers we have sent.” (ASV, Reg, Vat. 62, fol. 138v-139r) In Rashid-al-Din Hamadani’s *Compendium of Chronicles*, the term “Arkaoun” was also used (Mingana, 1925: 322).²⁸⁶ In Abaqa’s letter, the Pope and his people are addressed as Christians: “We have certified to you, however, and to most Christians by messengers, that we have sent across our brother Hegei with the multitude of the army for the reinforcement of Christians.” Here it is jointly proved with the Chinese text that Mongols named Catholic believers “Christians” and East-Syriac believers “Arkouns”, showing that in Chinese historical texts the phonetic translation of the term (Ye-li-ke-wen) was very accurate. In 1290, the son of Abaqa, the Ilkhan Argun stated

²⁸⁴ Grousset’s view appears to have been adopted from Paul Pelliot’s paper published in *T’oung Pao* (1914).

²⁸⁵ Mingana was from a Catholic community in Iraq and was fluent in Syriac. He agrees here that the epithet *Tarsa* for Christian was given by Persian historians. See footnote 58.

²⁸⁶ See footnote 1.

in his letter to the Pope that the Mongols had chosen the “religion of Misiqa” (Messiah) to be their religion.²⁸⁷

Actually, when the Mongols first contacted the Franks in 1248, they made clear their opposition to ecumenical discrimination, which Mongol Khan (Guyuk) “has so decreed that in the law of God there be no difference between Latins and Greeks and Armenians and Nestorians and Jacobites, and all those that worship the cross. For all of them are as one to us” (Voegelin, E., 2002: 275-276). This was, in fact, the Mongol Empire’s official stance, calling all Christian denominations, including the Catholics, the “Religion of the Cross” (Feng, C. J., 2002: 210; Shen, S. X., 2013:11). In 1289, Kublai Khan in China established the Chong-fu-si (Worship and Blessing Bureau) to handle Arkagun affairs. According to the *History of Yuan*, “Chong-fu-si is in charge of Mar, Harsia, Rabban, Arkagun, temples of the cross, liturgy and rituals, and other affairs” (Song, L., 2000: 1510). This means that the bureau managed bishops (*Mar*), monks (*Harsia*), priests (*Rabban*), East-Syriac Christians (*Arkagun*), and the church (*Cross temple*). *Harsia* sounds most like another translation of *Tarsia* or *Tarsa*, meaning Christian monks. In 1315 (the second year of Yan-you reign), Buyantu Khan elevated Chong-fu-si to be Chon-fu-yuan (Ministry), governing 72 Arkagun religious sub-bureaus, and after six years to be degraded back to be a Bureau (Song, L., 2000: 1510).²⁸⁸

²⁸⁷ Karl-Ernst Lupprian. *Die Beziehungen der Päpste zu islamischen und mongolischen Herrschern im 13. Jahrhundert anhand ihres Briefwechsels* (Studi e Testi, number 291) (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. 1981) 266; ASV, A. A. Arm. I-XVIII, 1801. The letter was written in the Mongolian language and Uyghur script, translated into French on page 266. The English translation is based on the French version and compared with the version in “Trois documents mongols des Archives secrètes vaticanes”, in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 15, 1952.

²⁸⁸ Song Lian, *History of Yuan*, No. 39 Chronicle: “崇福司，秩二品，掌领马兒哈昔列班也里可温十字寺祭享等事。司使四员，从二品；同知二员，从三品；副使二员，从四品；司丞二员，从五品；经历一员，从六品；都事一员，从七品；照磨一员，正八品；令史二人，译史、通事、知印各一人，宣使二人。至元二十六年置。延祐二年，改为院，置领院事一员，省并天下也里可温掌教司七十二所，悉以其事归之。七年，复为司，后定置已上官员。”

(Chong-fu-si [Worship and Blessing Bureau], ranked as a second level bureau [under provincial administration], was in charge of the managing bishops [Mar], monks [Harsia], priests (Rabban), East-Syriac Christians [Arkagun], and the church’s [Cross Temple] liturgical services and other matters of the Cross Temple. There were four directors, rank 2; two executive directors, rank 3; two vice directors, rank 4; two managers, rank 5; one ground manager, rank 6; one clerk, rank 7; one staff, rank 8; two secretaries, one translator, one messenger, and one stamp holder, and two announcers. This system was established in the 26th year of Zhi-yuan’s reign. In the 2nd year of Yan-you, the bureau was changed [upgraded] to ministry [governed by the central government], and one general director was appointed, managing all bureaus throughout the country with all their affairs

Overall, during Mongol reign, the Uyghurised Christianity in the regions around the eastern Tian-shan remained a prevailing religion and became even more influential given the favour from Mongol royal families and representation by powerful Uyghur figures. Beside the two Christian centres of Gao-chang and Qi-tai, the Kumul at the easternmost Tian-shan, which used to be the capital of the ancient Wu-sun kingdom during Han China, was also a significant Christian sub-centre as a Bishopric. In 1266, as mentioned in Syriac literature, the Bishop John from the town of Kamul (Kumul), came to the East Syriac Church court for the consecration of the Patriarch Dinha (Mingana, 1925: 328-329). It is the town called “Khamil” in Mongolian, “Kun-mo” in ancient Chinese, and “Hami” in modern Chinese.

5.5.2 The legacy of the Uyghur Christians: Tian Zhen-hai (Sawut), Catholicos-Patriarch Markos, and Bar Sauma, Isa, Bolad, Sarah, Elizabeth, etc.

There were many Uyghur Christians serving other Christian and non-Christian nations in important government positions, such as Naiman and Karaites, Khitans and later Mongols in China, central Asia, and Persia. In at least the 11th century, Uyghur Christian elites were serving in the Liao Khitan kingdom and the Jin Jurchen kingdom, and served throughout the era of the Mongol Empire in the 13th century. According to the contemporary historian of Mongol studies Igor De Rachewiltz, more than 900 Turkic-speaking individuals served as high level officials in the Mongol Empire, of whom 600 were Uyghurs (Geng, S. M., 2003: 40).

Among them, was Uyghur Christian Sawut, whose Chinese name was Tian Zhen-hai (1169-1252). One of the most important officials during the formation of the Mongol Empire, he was serving the Keraite kingdom and was honoured as a national counsellor and great master. He followed Genghis Khan from the beginning and successively served three generations of Mongol khans as chancellor and minister. Genghis Khan founded the empire by his sword, but relied on Sawut to govern the empire. Another chancellor and minister Ke-da-ke was also a Uyghur Christian who served the empire. The envoy John of Plano Carpini sent by Pope Innocent IV arrived at Khan Guyuk's court and was received by “Chingay, Kadac and Balha, the aforementioned secretaries, [who] came to us and translated the letter for us word by word.” This letter was from Guyuk Khan to the Pope so Chingay (or Chinqai, Zhen-hai), Kadac (or Qadaq, Ke-da-ke), and Balha (or Bolha, also a Keraite) helped translate the letter word-for-word into Latin

merged into the ministry. In the 7th year, the system was restored to a bureau, and later the officials above were set in place.)

through the aid of translators, thus ensuring that the meaning of the letter was understood clearly and accurately by John (Dawson, C. & Abbey, S., 1955: 63, 66-67). According to John, Chingay and Balha were “protonotaries” and Kadac was “the procurator of the whole empire” (Dawson, C. & Abbey, S., 1955: 63, 66-67).

The second Khan Ogodei’s family and Chingay had a close relationship and were united against Mongke ascending the throne as the fourth Khan, after the death of Guyuk Khan. Because of Mongke’s hatred of Chingay and the Ogodei family, he ordered the execution of Chingay when Muslims from the Kocho East Uyghur region falsely accused him of plotting with the Uyghur *Idikut* (who was later executed a well) to massacre the Muslims in the region, just a few years after Mongke became the great khan, thanks to his Christian Keraite mother Sorqhaqtani’s wise consultation and mentoring. Chingay died at the age of 84 in 1252 leaving behind a great legacy (Song, L., 2000: 1957). Thus, during this time, the Islam in Kocho Turpan showed its strong presence and aggressiveness in social-religious and geopolitical sphere.

In addition to the Uyghur Christian figures mentioned above who made great contributions to the Mongol Empire as well as to Chinese civilisation, there were other Uyghur Christian elites who uniquely contributed to the East-Syriac Church and impacted the Roman Catholic Church, as well as the Mongol Empire.

In *circa* 1278 (Dawson, C. & Abbey, S., 1955: xxviii), the Mongol Empire’s Kublai Khan, founder of China’s Yuan dynasty, sent two Uyghur Christian monks, Rabban Bar Sawma and his student Markos, at least one of them was an Ongud, on a pilgrimage from Beijing to Jerusalem (Budge, E. A. W., 1928: 6, footnote). Rabban Sawma was a Uyghur from Beijing, then the capital (Khan Balik) of Mongols. Since the Mongols’ army was at war with the Egyptian Muslim troops, the two monks were stalled in Baghdad where Mar Dinkha I, who was the East-Syriac Church Catholicos, warmly welcomed them (Budge, E. A. W., 1928: 186-187). In 1281, the Catholicos died and the Uyghur Markos from the Ongud state, then only 36 years old, succeeded him as the new Catholicos-Patriarch,²⁸⁹ with the given name Yahbh-Allaha (“gift of God”; Yahballaha III), remaining in that position for 36 years until his death in Maragha (in Iran) on November 13, 1317, which was the 14th year of the Yan-you reign of the Mongol Yuan Emperor Ren-zong in China (Budge, E. A. W., 1928: 49; Zhu, Q., Z., 189).

²⁸⁹ The title was used in the reconciliation declaration between the Catholic Church and the East-Syriac Church on their *Common Christological Declaration between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East*. 11 Nov. 1994. Libreria Editrice Vaticana website.

During Markos' term as Catholicos, the East-Syriac Church, based in Baghdad, with the support of the Mongol Empire, specifically the Mongol Persia Ilkhanate, attained unsurpassed historical-political prominence. Furthermore, Markos actively tried to bring reconciliation between the East and West-Syriac churches, and for this he was highly praised by the historian Bar Hebraeus, who was his contemporary and a prominent leadership figure of the West-Syriac Church (Wilmshurst, D., 2016: 470 [473]). In addition, the letters he wrote in 1302 and 1304 to Popes reflected his intention to reconcile with the Roman Catholics, as he acknowledged the Pope's primacy. This move was rejected by his own bishops though for being too hasty.

In 1287, in order to launch a converging attack on Islamic Mamluk Syria and Egypt with the allied Western Christian army, Ilkhan Argun [reign 1284–1291 (Grousset, 2002: 296)], the third Mongol khan of Persia, appointed as his ambassador to Europe the aforementioned Uyghur monk Rabban Bar Sawma, who had by now been elevated to be supervising Bishop for the East and who knew several European languages (Zhu, Q. Z., 1998: 188). The Ilkhan also commissioned him to pay his respects to the Pope (Moffett, S. H., 2004: 432-434; Budge, E. A. W., 1928: 37-38; Li, S., 2003: 103). During his meeting with Cardinal Jerome and the other Vatican cardinals, Bar Sawma persisted in holding Antiochean-Nestorian Christology, that is, that Jesus Christ was "two natures (*keyanin*) attached to two persons (*knome*) and united in one entity (*parsopa*)". However, in the debate on the doctrine of the Trinity and the *filioque*, it was Sawma's consummate, orthodox, theological viewpoint on belief and the eloquence and solidness of his theological foundation that amazed the Vatican and won him great respect (Budge, E. A. W., 1928: 94-95). Sawma was also enthusiastically received by the kings of England and France. In 1288, he met Jerome again, who at that time was also known as Pope Nicholas IV, and presented a personal letter to the Pope from Ilkhan Argun and Catholicos Markos the Uyghur. After receiving the Pope's blessing, Sawma returned to the Argun court in Baghdad (Zhu, Q. Z., 1998: 188) and remained there until his death on January 10, 1294. Sawma was about 10 to 15 years older than Markos (Zhu, Q. Z., 1998: 187, 189).

The Syriac writing in the Ilkhanid-Persian language of the Mongols about the two Uyghur Christian Monks, a summary from Rabban Sauma's original travelogue written in Persian but lost (Borbone, P. G., 2008: 222), states that Bayniel, the pious archdeacon of Kawshang, who was located between Beijing and Tangut, 15 days' journey from Beijing, had four sons. The youngest, Makos, born in 1245, later became the Catholicos-Patriarch of the East Syriac Church in Baghdad. Commonly agreed is, that Markos was born and grew up in Kawshang, though this particular text does not say this specifically. Mingana mentions briefly that "Amr, however, says that the Patriarch was born in the Khatai" (Mingana, 1925: 329), that is, the city of Khatai, or later Qi-tai, the metropolitan site at the northern root of eastern Tian-shan, according to my research

and inferences. While no doubt in the Syriac translation or the rewriting of the original Persian version, what 'Amr wrote should not be ignored. After all, the two records have no direct conflict in wording.

First, the name Kawshang (Koshang) sounds almost the same as Gao-chang to a Chinese ear. This place, according to the manuscripts, is undoubtedly in the Ongut Uyghur kingdom (within present-day Inner Mongolia and Shan-xi, including Da-tong Basin), yet readers may wonder if the name is related to the Gao-chang Uyghur kingdom, similarly to how the names of places in the United States were derived from the United Kingdom originally. However, not enough information was given for us to draw this conclusion. Second, many Uyghur elites, Christian and Buddhist, came to Mongol Yuan China and served in the government and churches for nearly a century. Therefore, it is plausible to speculate that the Bayniel family possibly moved to the Ongud region after giving birth to four sons in Khatai, the metropolitan site since western Liao times, for Bayniel was sent by the Metropolitan to the station in the Kawshang of Ongud Uyghur kingdom, and then to Beijing, the Metropolitanate of Khanbalik.

There were other Uyghur Christian elites who played important roles in diplomatic and religious activities between the Mongols and the West. In 1284, with the support of Kublai, Argun, the son of Abaqa the Khan and Mary the Khatun, who led an army that overthrew and executed the Ilkan Tekuder, an Islamic convert. The new Ilkhan restored his father's and grandfather's pro-Christian policy and diplomacy with the West.²⁹⁰ On March 18, 1285, Argun sent a delegation from the capital of Tabriz with a letter to Pope Honorius IV, seeking an alliance to launch a converging attack on Muslim Egypt and Syria from the west and east. His letter was similar in tone to the one that his father, the late Abaqa, had written some years before. The new letter begins with an introduction of his delegation which, it is worth noting, actually included a Turkiman:

The Great Khan [Kublai] did a favor to Ise the Turkiman with gown and frankincense, which as a mixed order from Argun Khan, and the aforementioned Ase Turkiman and Bogagoc and Magilic and Thomas Bachrinus and aforementioned Ugeto Turkiman the ambassadors we mixed for you, will serve their parts for you until days are completed, if it was at the beginning. (ASV, Reg. Vat. 43, fol.128r-v)²⁹¹

²⁹⁰ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Arghūn". Encyclopedia Britannica, 6 Mar. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Arghun>. Accessed 18 July 2024.

²⁹¹ Translated from the Latin to English by Mark Shan.

The Turkimen Ise or Ase was clearly an important figure because Argun mentioned him three times in the letter and pointed out that he was sent by Kublai and Argun. The letter calls him an “Ugeto Turkiman” which means he was a Uyghur, or a Turk-like Uyghur. As was previously mentioned, after he became the Catholicos, the Uyghur Markos also was called “Yahballaha the Turk” by the church. This again shows that the use of the title “Turk” was a reflection of the Turks’ great influence, so much so that the Uyghur identity became mixed up with the Turks’. As was explained and demonstrated in Chapter Three, the Uyghurs are not Turks. In fact, although their languages both belong to the Turkic family of Hunnic languages and their cultures that are Huunic type as well, the two people groups had fought each other since the early seventh century, when they were still people of the East Asian steppes (Liu, X., 2000: 3535).²⁹² Hence, the Pope’s use of “Ugeto Turkiman” in this letter is quite accurate. In addition, West-Syriac Church historian Bar Hebraeus (1226-1286) also identified in writing with great accuracy, Markos as a “Uighur” (Wilmschurst, D., 2016: 462).²⁹³ In the process of making Markos the Catholicos (Catholicos), a local Uyghur king (emir) Ashmut played a crucial role by obtaining a royal edict from the Mongol Ilkhan and organizing the consecration with the Church in Seleucia-Ctesiphon (Baghdad).

This is the same “Isa”, whose name is a phonetic translation of “Jesus” in the Turkic language, that is written about in the *History of Yuan*, which translates Isa as “Ai-xue” in Chinese, and notes that he was “from Fu-lin of the Western Regions”. This Ase or Ise or Isa was a genius mastering astronomy and many languages who served three Great Khans of the Mongol Empire

²⁹² Liu Xu, *Old Book of Tang*, “Uyghurs” says the Uyghurs rebelled against the Turks in 605 (the first year of the Da-ye reign of Sui China) because the Turks killed a few hundred of the Uyghur core leadership. “大业元年，突厥处罗可汗击特勒诸部，厚敛其物。又猜忌薛延陀，恐为变，遂集其渠帅数百人尽诛之，特勒由是叛。特勒始有仆骨、同罗、回纥、拔野古、覆罗步，号俟斤，后称回纥焉。在薛延陀北境，居娑陵水侧，去长安六千九百里。随逐水草，胜兵五万，人口十万人。”

(In the first year of Da-ye’s reign, the Turkic Chu-luo Khan attacked the various tribes of the Te-le and plundered them heavily. He was also suspicious of the Xue-yan-tuo tribe and feared that it might rebel, so he gathered hundreds of its leaders and killed them all. Therefore, Te-le rebelled. The Tele originally had Pu-gu, Tong-luo, Uyghur, Ba-ye-gu, and Fu-luo-bu, called Sericon, and later called Uyghurs. These people lived in the northern border of Xue-yan-tuo, beside the Suo-ling [Selenge] River, 6,900 Chinese miles away from Chang’an [the capital of China]. They followed the water and grass, had 50,000 soldiers and a population of 100,000.)

²⁹³ “While Mar Denha was still alive two Uighur monks came from China on the order of the great khan Khublilai to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem; ...consecrated one of these two Uighur or Turkish monks metropolitan of China, and gave him the name YAHBALLAHA...Mar Denha died. Then the emir Ashmut, a man of the same race as Yahballaha, told the king of kings that the Christians wanted him to be appointed their catholicus... and consecrated him catholicus. Although this Mark Yahballaha was somewhat deficient in the knowledge of Syriac doctrine and writing, he was a man of good disposition, and the fear of God was found in him; and he showed great love to us and our people [west Syriac Christians].”

(Song, L., 2000: 2153). The wife of Tolui, that is, the Christian Keraite princess Sorghaghtani Beki, recognized Isa's genius and appointed him teacher to her son Mongke, who later became a Great Khan. Isa's wife was also a Keraite Christian with the Baptist name "Sarah" and served the wife of the Khan Tolui (Kim, H., 2014: 231), the same Keraite prince Sorghaghtani Beki, whose four sons became four Khans. Isa also later served Kublai Khan. He knew many languages of the Western Regions and was an East-Syriac Christian. The letter from Argun to the Pope clearly shows that Isa was a Turk-like Uyghur and not, as the *History of Yuan* said, from Fu-lin, which referred to the Byzantine Empire including Syrian regions, meaning that the *History of Yuan* considered Ai-xue to be a Syrian Christian from the Eastern Roman Empire. As was mentioned earlier, Ai-xue first served Guyuk Khan and was also the first dean of the Worship and Blessings Bureau established by Kublai. Later the Bolad (Bolod, Bolad Aqa²⁹⁴), Kublai's chancellor, went with Isa in April of the 20th year of the Zhi-yuan reign (1283) to visit the Ilkhanat, arriving within two years, according to Isa's tombstone inscription (Kim, H., 2014: 247-248).

The various traces of information in the materials show Bolad is the Bogagoc mentioned in Abaqa's letter. Bolad was also a general and professional translator for the Kublai court, and it was he who later, after staying in the Ilkhanate court in 1286, provided the information for the Mongol history section of the *Compendium of Chronicles (Jāmi' al-tawārīkh)* by Rashid-al-Din Hamadani (Petrushevsky, I. P., 1983: 63; Feng, C. J., 2002: 585). In short, the khan's letter contains the proof that Isa was a Uyghur, which is not only highly significant but also is in line with the practice of the Mongol Yuan dynasty to put Uyghurs in important positions and consider them in the same social class of the "people with colourful eyes". In light of the discovery of this mistake in the *History of Yuan*, as to the Isa's racial-ethnic background, it would be prudent to re-examine the racial-ethnic backgrounds of all of the figures the *History of Yuan* claims were from Fu-lin and consider why the *History* was confused about the backgrounds of these figures.

With even more zeal and actions than his father and grandfather displayed, Argun continued to push his forefathers' plans for a military alliance with the West to launch a converging attack on the Muslims and recover Jerusalem. Argun wrote another letter to the Pope and sent it with a second delegation, which also included a Uyghur. On April 2, 1288, the new Pope, Nicholas IV, wrote three letters from Rome in reply to Argun the Ilkhan. The Pope's first letter was addressed to Argun and mentions the supervising Bishop of the East, the Uyghur Bar Sawma. The letter said:

²⁹⁴ In Chinese classics, his name is written as 孛罗, 博罗, or 博鲁赤.

(Nicolaus and others) Thanks to Argo, the illustrious King of the Tartars in the present time, which leads to glory in the future. Our venerable brother Bersauma, the bishop in the eastern regions, the noble man Sabadinus, Thomas de Amfufis, and Uguetto the interpreter (laymen), messengers of your greatness, have brought back a message: that if it should happen that the kingdom of Jerusalem is liberated from the hands of the unrighteous, you desire to be reborn in the city of Jerusalem in the baptismal bath. (ASV, Reg. Vat. 44, fol.88r-v)

The Pope's second letter was addressed to the fourth wife of Abaqa, Tucta Khatun, now a widow. He praised the queen as a "dear and beloved daughter in Christ" and greeted her with "apostolic benediction" for helping spread the Catholic faith. At the end of the letter, the Pope wrote, "In the same way, greetings and apostolic blessings to the dearest daughter in Christ, Elegā, illustrious Queen of the Tartars." Elegā, i.e. Olgatai was probably the second wife of Abaqa, or the daughter of Argun and his wife Uruk (who was a Syriac Christian).²⁹⁵

The third letter was also addressed to Argun, and it again mentioned the four-man delegation led by the Uyghur Bar Sawma and a laymen Uyghur translator. In this letter, the Pope again mentions Argun's promise in the "returned message" that stated "if it should happen that the kingdom of Jerusalem is liberated from the hands of the unrighteous, you desire to be reborn in the city of Jerusalem in the baptismal bath". Argun, hoping to encourage the Pope to form the military alliance, had promised to be baptized in Jerusalem once they had liberated it from the Mamluk Muslims of Egypt (and Syria), but the Pope suggested that Argun accept baptism first so that the Lord would easily liberate the Kingdom of Jerusalem. (ASV, Reg. Vat. 44, fol. 90r)

Overall, Uyghurs, especially Christian Uyghurs, played important roles serving the Mongol Empire in the different administrative territories. The *History of Yuan* lacks significant descriptions about the Christian identity of these Uyghur figures. Nevertheless, among the non-Turkic names of the Uyghurs, one can clearly see that they were Christians. Just to name a few, there was Sa-ji-si (Sergius), an important minister who served Mongke Khan (Song, L, 2000: 2149), Yue-he-nai (John), a scholarly official serving Mongke Khan, and his great grandson Zu-chang Ma (from the Syriac, "Mar" as an honorific title for Christian clergy) who was the most famous scholar of his time (Song, L, 2000: 2150-2151). For Uyghur Christian women, the names preferred were Elizabeth, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, etc. In the last century of the Kocho Uyghurs, before their

²⁹⁵ ASV, Reg. Vat. 44, fol. 89v-90r = lib. r ep. cur. r6 (B) - BAV, Vat. lat. 3976, fol. 329v (C, nur Nr. 52) - BAV, Vat. lat. 3975, fol. 286v (D, nur Nr. 52) - ASV, Arm. 31 tom. 72, fol. 367v-368r = n. 3186 (E, nur Nr. 52)

kingdom fell into the hands of the Chagatai Mongols, once the capital Kocho was surrounded and attacked, the Uyghur king had to marry his daughter Elizabeth to the Mongol khan for temporary peace in 1275 (Luo, X. Y., 1997: 74-75; Song, L., 2000:).²⁹⁶ In addition, it is worth noting that, if the *History of Yuan* states that someone is a Uyghur, without mentioning where the Uyghur is from, that normally entails that person is a Kocho Uyghur.

5.6 Clarifying the misunderstanding ABOUT the religious identity of the Kocho Uyghurs

Throughout more than a century, studies on the ancient religions of the modern-day Turpan Basin, Yan-qi Basin, Ha-mi (Kumul), and the Tarim Basin in northwest China, in the eastern part of Central Asia, have relied on historical writings, journals, and collections of ancient transcripts discovered mainly in the Turpan Basin (and Dun-huang) early in the 20th century to conclude that the Uyghurs, after migrating from the modern-day Mongol Steppes to the Western Regions around the Tian-shan Mountains, to become the Kocho Uyghurs in the ninth century, initially remained Manicheans, then converted to Buddhism with Christianity as a minority religion among them. Overlooked evidence, however, reveals that many scholars do not understand that the Kocho Uyghurs were mostly Christians who converted from Manichaeism after a period of time and were never officially Buddhists, with, perhaps, only a handful of Uyghurs actually accepting Buddhism. In addition, Uyghur Manichaeism did not disappear, but continued to exist in a highly mutated form in a concealed manner until the Islamic conquest at the end of the fourteenth century. In this sense, such Uyghurs were syncretistic melding Manichaeism with Buddhism and Mongolian Tengrism.

²⁹⁶ The Idikut Huchihar Tegin of the city of Kocho gave his daughter Elizabeth in marriage to the Mongol Chagatai khan in Xinjiang, Duwa, to end a six-month siege of Kocho by 120,000 of Duwa's troops. This took place in 1275 and was recorded in the *History of Yuan* and the "Tablet in Uyghur Script about the Meritorious Services of Princes of Gaochang".

5.6.1 An Analysis Differentiating the Religious Attributes of Uyghur Monks, Uyghur Idolaters, and Kocho Monks

Having resolved in an earlier section the meaning of “Tarsa” and “Arkagun” and their different phonetic translations in different languages were applied to East Syriac Christians and monks, we still need to clarify a few other puzzling terms and titles in order to achieve a holistic understanding of the religious landscape among the Kocho Uyghurs and in their kingdom at the time of the Mongol conquest in the 13th century, for a better understanding of Uyghurised religions in the kingdom.

According to *Travels to the West of Qiu Chang-chun* (Li, Z. C., 2001),²⁹⁷ Genghis Khan summoned the famous Chinese Daoist priest Qiu Chu-ji (that is, Qiu Chang-chun the Trueman) who was traveling to the Hindu Kush Mountains, for the purpose of discussing immortality with him. In 1220, Qiu Chu-ji set out, from China east, up to the north along the coast, taking the Mongol’s “freeway” through the Mongolian grasslands to the western border, turning south-westward and passing through the Altai Mountains at its south-eastern end before arriving at the former Chinese westernmost frontiers, merging into the northern branch of the Silk Road at Qitai, and then continuing to travel along the northern root of the Tian-shan mountains, all the way west past Alimalik in the Yili River Valley. Then, he turned south along the regions around the western end of Tian-shan, then all the way through to the Yili River, the Chu River, Talas River, Syr River, through Samarkand and crossed the Amu River, finally arriving two years later in May, 1222 in present-day Afghanistan. Genghis Khan had temporarily stayed here during his long expedition of military conquest westward, seemingly copying the conquering route of Alexander the Great, though in an opposite direction. There, Qiu Chu-ji and his retinue met Genghis Khan who was then conquering the Islamic kingdom of Khwarezm in central Asia (Zhu, Q. Z., 1998: 173). Chu-ji the “Trueman” also brought along eighteen of his disciples, including the later famous Li Zhi-chang (Grousset, 2002: 249).

During this long journey, before passing the Altai mountain range towards the Tian-shan mountain range at the south, Qiu’s traveling party was escorted to its destination by the famous Uyghur Christian Chinqai (Sawut, Tian Zhen-hai), who served as the Khan’s chancellor and at this time oversaw the agriculture for the Mongol army’s food production and storage in the region. Upon arrival in Uyghur territory (that is, Kocho Uyghur Kingdom) at “Back Section” at the northern foot of the Tian-shan, the text mentions two things. First, “(Sept) 4th, we stayed overnight at the

²⁹⁷ Published with a preface in 1228 by Sun Xi, also a disciple of Qiu Chang Chun.

east of Lun-tai, and the head of the Tarsa [*Die-xue*] came out to meet and welcome us”²⁹⁸ and second, “(Sept) 9th, we arrived at Chang-balik [*balik* means city, present-day Chang-ji]; the Uyghur king here knew Chinqai before, so he led his people and many Uyghur monks who came far to meet and welcome us.”

As mentioned earlier, “Tarsa” originally meant Syriac Christian monk, used more generally to refer to Christians of the East-Syriac tradition. Because Chinqai was a famous and influential East-Syriac Christian, the Christian head of the city came out, leading a group of Christians to welcome Chinqai. The Christian head here refers to a priest, or more possibly, abbot, the head of the Christian monks. The location was east of Lun-tai ²⁹⁹ (present-day Urumqi), 300 *li* west of the Bei-ting region which was part of the northern Kocho kingdom along the northern side of Tian-shan. Therefore, the Christian head was possibly a Uyghur or Sogdian from a church or more likely a monastery, given the isolated geographical features of Lun-tai. The group continued to travel west and after a five-day journey during which they passed two towns, they arrived at Chang Baliq (present-day Chang Ji city), a Uyghur city, and the Uyghur king and some “Uyghur monks” welcomed them because the king knew Chinqai.

The issue here is identifying these “Uyghur monks”. Since the king led them to welcome Chinqai, a Christian, as a sign of respect, he would not have brought Buddhist monks. The Daoist visitors that Chinqai was escorting would not have been pleased to see Buddhists either. After the Tang dynasty, the conflict between Buddhism and Daoism reached its climax in the late Song and early Ming dynasties. Li Zhi-chang, the apostle-like disciple of Qiu Chu-ji, accompanied his master on this trip and was the author of *Travels to the West of Qiu Chang-chun*. He was a good scholar with superlative writing skills, and he won the favour of Mongol Empire’s Mongka Khan, who made him chief of the Daoists (Grousset, 2002: 275-76). Using his power, he tried to

²⁹⁸ “九月二日，西行。四日，宿轮台之东，迭屑头目来迎。南望阴山，三峰突兀倚天。……名镇北方为第一，无人写向图画看。又历二城，重九日，至回纥昌八刺城。其王畏午儿与镇海有旧，率众部族及回纥僧皆远迎。”

(On September 2, we set out toward the west. On the 4th, we stayed overnight east of Lun-tai, and the head of the Die-xue [Tarsa] came out to meet and welcome us. Looking south, we saw Yin-shan (Tian-shan) Mountains, with three peaks towering against the sky. ... Lun-tai, the famous town is No. 1 in the north, and no one has written it down or drawn it. On the 9th day of the 9th month, after passing through two more cities, we arrived at Chang-balik. The Uyghur king here knew Zhen-hai [Chinqai] before, so he led his people and many Uyghur monks, who came far to meet and welcome us.)

²⁹⁹ According to the *Travels*, Lun-tai is 300 *li* [Chinese miles] west of Beshbalik and north of Yin (Tian-shan) mountain so it is approximately in the same location as present-day Urumqi.

marginalize Buddhism, leading to some serious repercussions. So, the identity of the “Uyghur monks” here is worth exploring.

1. In an earlier passage, Li had written, “on August 27, arriving at Yin Mountain, Uyghurs welcomed us at the suburbs”. “Us” here refers to the Daoist monk party who accompanied Chinqai. The Yin Mountain refers to the northern side of the eastern Tian-shan mountain range because the head of the Uyghurs said, “300 *li* further from the mountain is Huo-zhou and its land is great hot, the grapes are abundant.” The geographical characteristics described here point to Huo-zhou, which is the Chinese translation of Kara-Khoja, another Uyghur name for Kocho that was used around the time of the Khitan western Liao khanate. Kara-Khoja was also sometimes translated phonetically into Chinese as Ha-la-huo-zhou.³⁰⁰ Therefore, being in this part of the Yin Mountain is to enter formally the northern region of the Kocho Uyghur kingdom. Li added, “The following day, we continued west along the side of the mountain...heading west we came to the great city of Besh-balik, where the king, his officials, and several hundred social elites and common people, as well as Buddhist and Daoist monks all came out to welcome us with majestic ceremony. The Buddhist monks were clothed in sorrel, and the clothes and hats of the Daoist monks were very different from that of the Chinese. We lodged in the loft above the vineyards on the west side of the city. The Uyghur king and his tribal leaders toasted us with wine and all kinds of foreign, fragrant fruits ...”³⁰¹

³⁰⁰ Khoja was a loanword from the Persian *Khwaja*, which means “sacred descendants of Islam”. In the Turkic languages, it means “highly respected nobles (or king)”. According to Chinese historical materials, this Uyghur name of Kocho originated in the Khitan Liao Empire and was translated phonetically into Chinese as *ha-la-huo-zhou*, might be suggesting an Islamic background to its origin. Because “Kara-Khoja” might mean “great noble” or “great king”, this place name could mean “city of the great king” or “city of the great noble”.

³⁰¹ “西即瞿思马大城，王官士庶僧道教数百，具威仪远迎。僧皆赭衣，道士衣冠与中国特异。泊于城西蒲萄园之上阁，时回纥王部族劝蒲萄酒，供以异花杂果名香，且列侏儒伎乐，皆中州人。士庶日益敬，侍坐者有僧、道、儒，因问风俗。乃曰：此大唐时北庭端府，景龙二年，杨公何为大都护，有德政，诸夷心服，惠及后人，于今赖之。有龙兴、西寺二石刻在，功德焕然可观，寺有佛书一藏。唐之边城，往往尚存。其东数百里，有府曰西凉。其西三百余里，有县曰轮台。师问曰：更几程得至行在？皆曰：西南更行万余里即是。”

(To the west is the great city of Bie-si-ma [Beshbalik]. A few hundreds of royal officials, commoners, monks and Daoists came to welcome them with great ceremony. The monks all wore ochre clothes, and the Daoists wore clothes that were different from those in China. We are received in the upper pavilion of the grape garden at the west of the city. At that time, the Uyghur king's tribe offered grape wine, exotic flowers, fruits and famous fragrances, and there were also dwarfs and musicians, all from Central China. The nobles and commoners became more and more respectful. Among the attendants were monks, Daoists and Ruists. So we asked about the customs. They explained: This

Besh-balik, which was called Bei-ting by Tang China, and which established a protectorate centre here for controlling the Silk Road north of the Tian-shan mountain range, is present-day Jimsar, about 160 kilometres east of Urumqi. A large number of Daoist monks from this city came out to welcome the visitors, and, at a banquet, “[Buddhist] monks, Daoists, and Ruists were all seated as members of the host’s party.” Dwarf clowns, geishas, acrobats, and musicians, all from central China, performed at the banquet. The hosts explained that because Tang China established this protectorate here, China’s cultural influence was still found in the city. We should note that, even though the city in this passage was a Uyghur city, the term used here is simply “monks” entailing Buddhist monks, rather than “Uyghur monks”. From August 27, when they reached the Uyghur city at the northern foot of Tian-shan and September 9 when they arrived at Chang City, it took them twelve days traveling.

2. When they entered the city of Chang, the Uyghurs hosted a banquet for them. They praised the fruit, saying the melons were so sweet and fragrant that nothing from China could even compare. Li Zhi-chang also mentions that “a monk came and sat with the hosting party. Through the translator, (we) asked: what kind of canon do you read? The monk said: after taking the tonsure and taking the oaths to be a (Buddhist) monk, venerating Buddha as the master.” Here, Li uses just the term “monk” to refer to a Buddhist monk. The monk also told them that “east of here used to be Tang dynasty China (territory), that’s why there are no Buddhist monks or Daoists west of here, because the Uyghurs (to the west) only worship towards the west.”³⁰²

was the Bei-ting that used to be the furthest urban prefecture of Tang China. In the second year of Jing-long [of China], Yang Gong-he was the Grand Protector. He had virtuous policies and the natives were convinced. These benefited future generations and are still relied on today. There are two stone carvings in Long-xing and Xi-si [western temple], with the written merits and virtues of the Protector. The temple has a collection of Buddhist books. The border town of the Tang Dynasty still exists. A few hundred Chinese miles to the east, there is a prefecture called Xi-liang. More than three hundred Chinese miles to the west, there is a county called Lun-tai. Our master [Qiu Chang-chun] asked: “How many more Chinese miles will it take to reach the imperial residence [of Genghis Khan] ?” They all said: “It is more than ten thousand Chinese miles southwest.”)

³⁰² It says that “east of here used to be Tang dynasty China (territory),” indicating the city of Chang, present-day Chang-ji city, used to be the westernmost border of Chinese frontier. Therefore, the first-hand record in the travelogue provides a piece of valuable information for us to understand the geographical boundaries.

“又历二城，重九日，至回纥昌八刺城。其王畏午儿与镇海有旧，率众部族及回纥僧皆远迎。既入，斋于台上，泊其夫人劝蒲萄酒，且献西瓜，其重及秤，甘瓜如枕许，其香味盖中国未有也。园蔬同中区，有僧来侍坐，使译者问：看何经典？僧云：剃度受戒，礼佛为师。盖此以东昔属唐，故西去无僧、道，回纥但礼西方耳。”

(On the 9th day of the 9th month, after passing through two more cities, we arrived at Chang-balik. The Uyghur king here knew Zhen-hai [Chinqai] before, so he led his people and many Uyghur monks, who came far to meet and welcome us. Their Uyghur king had an old relationship with Zhen-hai, so he led all the tribesmen and Uyghur monks to welcome us from afar. After entering, we dined on the

Worshipping towards the west suggests worshipping in the direction of Mecca. This shows that Islam had already reached the north of the Tian-shan mountain range, i.e. the northern part of the region of present-day Xinjiang. In fact, on September 27 when they travelled further west and arrived in Almaliq, which is present-day Yili, “Pu-su-man King”, accompanied by Mongol nobles, met and welcomed them. Pusuman is a transliteration of the Persian word “Mussalman”, which means “Muslim.” The native people of this area were probably from some other Turkic speaking groups whose word for apple was “alma”, from which the name of their city, “Almalik”, was derived, according to Li Zhi-chang.

After the Almalik (present-day Yili), they continued traveling to meet Genghis Khan along the northern branch of the Silk Road. After a long trip down south, they arrived at Samarkand the famous ancient Sogdian-Macedonian city. At that time, Samarkand, was the largest western Uyghur city (after the western Khitans were defeated by Mongols). Its currency was the gold coin which “had Uyghur script carved on both sides”.³⁰³ The city was totally Islamified, as Li describes: “Every dawn and sunset, their priests go up and worship towards the west, which is called confessing to Heaven, and they do not believe in Buddhism or Daoism, but cry out and chant to the above. When every man and woman hears this calling, they all kneel down and worship, giving up the business they are doing.”³⁰⁴ This description shows how strong the influence of Islam was in Samarkand, the former famous Christian Metropolitan see which shared the similar fate to those apostolic churches in West Asia mentioned in the Apostle Paul’s epistles.

3. Qiu Chu-ji and his disciples met Genghis Khan in 1222. Thirty-one years later, William of Rubruck, a Franciscan, was sent by France’s Louis IX to the Mongol Empire (Grousset, 2002: 276), about which he wrote: “First of all there are the lugurs, whose territory adjoins the Organum country, lying in the mountains to the east. All their cities contain Nestorians and Saracens intermingles, and they themselves have spread out towards Persia among the cities of the

terrace, and his wife offered us grape wine and watermelons. The watermelons were very heavy, and sweet melons were as large as pillows with their fragrance unprecedented in China. We were seated at the center of the fruit and vegetable garden. A monk came to sit with us, and the translator asked on our behalf: What scriptures are you reading? The monk said: I have taken the tonsure and venerated Buddha as my teacher. East of here used to belong to the Chinese Tang Dynasty, so there are no monks or Daoists in the west, but the Uyghur people only worship to the west [Mecca].)

³⁰³ “市用金钱，无孔，两面凿回纥字。” (The market circulates golden coins without a hole that had Uyghur script carved on both sides.)

³⁰⁴ “每朝夕，其长登之礼西方，谓之告天，不奉佛、不奉道，大呼吟于其上。丁男女闻之，皆趋拜其下，举国皆然，不尔则弃市。”

Saracens.” (Jackson, P., 1990: 150) The “Organum country” seems to be Yan-qi kingdom, according to the geographical description and its famous music tradition, organum.

The Western world called Muslims “Saracens” at that time. Therefore, what William of Rubruck stated was accurate, since in this historical period, the Eastern Uyghurs (Kocho Uyghurs) mainly practiced East Syriac Christianity, according to my research, and the Western Uyghurs (Kara-Khanid Uyghurs) mainly practiced Islam. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the Buddhist population in the Kocho Uyghur Kingdom was mainly comprised of Indo-Europeans, the white natives, but their numbers by this time certainly had declined significantly, presumably due to an aggressive racial intermix. According to William, the further west towards Persia, the more dispersed the Uyghurs became, living in cities dominated by the Muslim population. In this historical period, East Syriac Christianity had not entirely died out in the Uyghur regions west of the Pamir Mountains. William also mentions that there were idol-worshippers in the Kocho Uyghur region whom he later called “Tuins”, which, based on his description were clearly Buddhists. Furthermore, when he specifically mentions the idolaters who were Uyghurs, he wrote, “First of all, then, let me give you a description of the rites common to all idolaters, and afterwards those of the lugurs, who form a kind of sect distinct from the rest.” (Jackson, P., 1990: 151) That is, he makes a distinction between Uyghur idol-worshippers and Buddhist idol-worshippers.

4. William of Rubruck did a careful field study of this distinct sect of Uyghurs. According to what he saw and heard, the Uyghur idolaters seemed to be Buddhists because of their common rites, but strangely, their doctrine was similar to that of Christianity. William of Rubruck called the Buddhists “Tuins,” so obviously he did not think the Uyghurs were Buddhists; he simply called them “idolaters”. In this writing, William of Rubruck repeatedly mentions Nestorians, Saracens (Muslims), and Tuins (Buddhists) with an accurate differentiation of each. Clearly, he recognized the differences among the three religions and was careful in what he called them. Because he was not able to define the religion of the “distinct sect” of Uyghur idolaters, he frequently visited their temples doing his field research and had discussions with their priests regarding the divinity that they worshiped. The Uyghur idolaters said to him, “We believe in only one God.” William of Rubruck further asked, “Do you believe He is spirit or something corporeal?” and they responded by saying, “We believe He is spirit.” Based on that answer, William questioned them further. “Seeing you believe He is only One and is spirit, how is it that you make statues to Him which have a body, and that there are so many? What is more, since you do not believe He was made Man, how is it that you make Him statues in human form rather than in that of another creature?” To this they replied, “We do not sculpture these images for God: when some rich man among us dies, or his son, or his wife, or someone dear to him, he has an effigy made of the deceased and installs it here, where we revere it in their memory.” William of Rubruck further questioned: “So,

your only reason for doing this is to curry favour with men.” “No,” they said, “to commemorate them.” (Jackson, P., 1990: 155)

William of Rubruck mentioned that the Mongols also belonged to the Uyghur sect since, “they believed in only one God and yet make felt effigies of their dead, dressing them in the most expensive materials and putting them in one or two wagons.” The wagons are left behind to be taken care of by the soothsayers (Jackson, P., 1990: 156) or, as the Mongols called them, the *Chan* (Jackson, P., 1990: 121). *Chan* is another form of *Qam*. At their last meeting, the Great Khan Mongke told William of Rubruck about his personal faith: “We, Mo’als, believe that there is only one God, through whom we have life and through whom we die, and towards him we direct our hearts....God has given you the Scriptures, and you do not observe them; whereas to us he has given soothsayers, and we do as they tell us and live in peace.” (Jackson, P., 1990: 236-237) Clearly, this is a kind of Shamanism, the Mongol Tengrism.

5. Based on its doctrine and rituals, I define the sect that William of Rubruck encountered in the Kocho Uyghur region as a mutated Manichaeism sect that was syncretized by the rituals of Buddhism and Mongol Shamanism. Mongol Shamanism was allegedly influenced and syncretized theologically by East-Syriac Christianity, which was popular among Mongols and royal families during this period. With Tengri as the only God, Chan as soothsayers, and iconic idols, Mongol Shamanism mutated and became monotheistic, Tengrism. William of Rubruck finally concluded: “These lugurs, being intermingled with Christians and Saracens, reached the point—through frequent debate, I assume—where they believe in only one God. They were the first city-dwellers to submit to Chengis Chan, who for this reason gave the king his own daughter” (Jackson, P., 1990: 157). This detail proves that William of Rubruck was indeed talking about the Kocho Uyghurs because of the historical event in which Genghis Khan married his daughter to the king (*Idikut*) of the Kocho Uyghurs. The Uyghur sect he encountered and was puzzled about would have been Kocho Manichaeism in its last stage. Similarly, Manichaeism in China mutated through the syncretism of Buddhism and Daoism in order to avoid persecution and extinction. Kocho Uyghur Manichaeism, originally a heretical form of Christianity and condemned by Christians, chose a way of being syncretized by the rituals of Buddhism and Mongol Tengrism in order to survive, in a dramatic Uyghurised form. This also explains why Manichaeism finally disappeared in Kocho history just as it did in China from the original form.

On the eve of Pentecost (May 30, 1254), William of Rubruck, representing Catholicism, attended a grand religious debate among Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam held by order of Mongke Khan and secretly sided with the “Nestorians”. William debated the Buddhists and the “Nestorians” debated the Muslims. William of Rubruck stated that the opponent, a high-ranking

Buddhist priest from China, presented a doctrine of Manichaeism that specifically addressed the two principles of good and evil. From this perspective, there are clear similarities between Buddhism and Manichaeism so it was indeed easy for Manichaeism to be syncretized by Buddhism, via the common Gnostic way. In other words, it makes more sense for Manichaeism to wear the cloak of Buddhism for survival. William also mentioned that the opponent held the doctrine of the incarnation of the soul, which means that he definitely was a representative of authentic Buddhism. William of Rubruck won his debate, and shortly thereafter the “Nestorians” started their debate with the Muslims. Surprisingly, the Muslims began to praise the Christian faith right away so the debate was dismissed. On this occasion, William again mentioned that “there was present an old priest of the Iugur sect which holds that there is one God but nevertheless makes idols.” Once again, this statement clearly shows that William knew this was not a Buddhist sect, but rather a strange sect about which he was ignorant. The “Nestorians” who were present had a long discussion with the Uyghur (Manichean) priest about Biblical accounts and the Trinity, but no one accepted the Christian faith, including the Muslims who were present and listening attentively to the discussions. Finally, the grand debate ended with the Christian side completely victorious. The Christians sang loudly with the Muslims “while Tuins remained silent, and after that every one drank heavily.” (Jackson, P., 1990: 230-235).

Therefore, it is clear that the accounts of Li Zhi-chang and William of Rubruck are in agreement: the “Uyghur monks” were “Uyghur idolaters” but they were not Buddhists. This means that the “Uyghur monks” whom the Uyghur king from Chang city led out to welcome Chinqai’s group represented highly syncretized Manichaeism, which existed only among the Uyghurs. That is why Li Zhi-chang used the term “Uyghur monk” to refer to them, while using “monk” as a common term for Buddhists. From this, we can understand that the Uyghur king of Chang city who led the “Uyghur monks” was trying to win the religious favour of the Mongols who believed in Tengrism, which is the mutated Shamanism that was similar to Manicheism. However, Christianity was not official or popular yet among the Mongol royal family.

It is worth noting that William of Rubruck did not mention that there were Buddhists among the Uyghurs. This is strange, but should not be overlooked. It is reasonable to assume that William was aware of the difference between Uyghurs and their native Indo-European subjects, many of whom were Buddhists, while both groups lived in the Kocho kingdom. William’s major concern was the Uyghur sect, which he knew was not Buddhist but which he did not recognize as a mutated form of Manichaeism. As mentioned earlier, according to the Armenian king Hetum, who visited the Mongol court in the same period, possibly in the same year of 1254 after Rubruck left the court, there had been, since ancient times, many idolaters among the Uyghurs of the Tarsa kingdom. Based on Hetum’s descriptions, these idolaters were obviously Indo-Europeans, not

Uyghurs. He also pointed out that these people did not eat meat, drink wine, or kill—characteristics not only of Buddhism but of Manichaeism as well, though not of Christianity. According to historical Chinese texts from the Song and Yuan dynasties, Kocho Buddhism still existed during those ages and was highly regarded. Hetum also recounts that there were many pious Christians among the nobles, clearly referring to the Uyghurs and possibly some of the Indo-Europeans, who were subjects of the Uyghur kingdom and whose population had decreased so significantly through four century Uyghurisation that none of the travellers of this time even mentioned them as a racial-ethnic group.

Eight years before William of Rubruck's trip, John of Plano Carpini was sent as Pope Innocent IV's envoy to the Mongols, and his travel diary clearly states that the Uyghurs were "Nestorians." He wrote, "...the people called Huyri: These men were Christians of the sect of Nestorius. And these also the Mongals overcame, and received letters or learning from them; for before that time they had not the art of writing, and now they call it the hand or letters of the Mongals" (Beazley, C. R., 1903: 115). According to Marco Polo's writing in the late 13th century, even though Islam had dominated the western part of the Tarim basin, there were still East Syriac Christians and Jacobite Christians (that is, West Syriac Christians) present. For example, he recorded that in Cascar (Kashgar), which was part of the Chagatai khanate of the Mongol Empire, the people worshipped Mohammed, yet "there are in the country many Nestorian Christians, who have churches of their own". (Yule, H., 1903: 180-182) In Yarcan (Yarkand), "The people follow the law of Mahomment, but there are also Nestorian and Jacobite Christians." (Yule, H., 1903: 187) Marco Polo also mentioned that Samarkand was part of Sigatay (Chagatai) and the population of Christians there, despite being ten times smaller than that of Muslims, enjoyed a revival after Chagatai Khan became a Christian (Yule, H., 1903: 183, 185).

The Scottish translator of Marco Polo's book, the prominent Oriental scholar Henry Yule, mentions in a footnote that the High Constable of Armenia, Prince Sempad, wrote a letter from Samarkand around 1246 or 1247 saying, "I tell you that we have found many Christians scattered all over the East, and many fine churches, lofty, ancient, and of good architecture, which have been spoiled by the Turks. Hence, the Christians of this country came to the presence of the reigning Kaan's grandfather (*i.e.* Chinghiz) ..." (Yule, H., 1903: 186). It is clear that even after Islam had become dominant west of the Pamir Mountains for several centuries, there were still Turkic speaking Christians (whites and non-whites) in Samarkand, although they might have survived only in the community of *Dhimmi* before the revival or merely restoration. Here, the "East" mentioned in the statement, "Christians scattered all over the East" obviously refers to the East Uyghur Kingdom and all the land heading eastward towards Beijing. It is worth noting that Marco

Polo stated: "Jacobites and Nestorians; Christians indeed, but not in the fashion enjoined by the Pope of Rome, for they come short in several points of the Faith." (Yule, H., 1903: 60).

The *History of Yuan* also mentions the terms "Gao-chang monks" and "Uyghur monks" and uses the term "Arkaguns" for East-Syriac Christians. These groups were often called into the Mongol royal Yuan court to pray and perform religious rituals because they were both accepted by the Mongols. The "Gao-chang monks," according to my research, indicate native Indo-European Buddhists from the Kocho Uyghur Kingdom, or from the capital Kocho. On a day in September of 1328, "the Gao-chang monks were ordered to perform divine rituals in Yan-chun Pavilion. Ye-li-ke-wen [Arkaguns] were also ordered to perform divine rituals in the Palace of Empress Xian-yi-zhuang-sheng" (Song, L., 2000: 480).³⁰⁵ Thus, "Gao-chang monks" are not Christian. Moreover, on a day in December of the same year, "the Gao-chang monks were ordered to perform divine rituals in Bao-ci Palace"; the following year, in October of 1319, "108 Uyghur monks performed divine rituals in Xing-sheng Palace" (Song, L., 2000: 488, 502).³⁰⁶ Evidently, "Gao-chang monks" and "Uyghur monks" are different religious groups, and "Uyghur monks" were Manicheans as we noted earlier. Note that the third mention of as many as 108 "Uyghur monks" entering the palace to perform rituals shows that the power and status of the muted Manichaeism of the Gao-chang Uyghurs, both in terms of numbers and their role in the Mongol Khanate, were quite phenomenal.

According to my research, "Gao-chang monks" entails the Indo-European, white Buddhist monks from the Gao-chang Uyghur kingdom, including the Turpan region and Bei-ting region, that is, the major region of the former westernmost Chinese frontier. Scholars in this field regard these "Uyghur monks" and "Gao-chang monks" all as Buddhists, without awareness to distinguish these Uyghur Manicheans, namely "Uyghur monks," from the indigenous Indo-European white Buddhists in Gao-chang, namely "Gao-chang monks." Note that the above record in the "History of the Yuan Dynasty" also proves that the religious attribute of Gao-chang Uyghur civilisation significantly impacted and educated the Mongol royals and nobles for about a century.

As mentioned before, the Chinese historical records from the Song and Yuan dynasties records that Buddhism in the Gao-chang region (including Beiting) still prevailed and was quite famous during the age of the Mongols, so the "Gao-chang monks" who were mainly Indo-

³⁰⁵ Song Lian, *History of Yuan*, "Genealogy No. 32": "命高昌僧作佛事于延春阁。又命也里可温于显懿庄圣皇后神御殿作佛事。"

³⁰⁶ Song Lian, *History of Yuan*, "Genealogy No. 32": "命高昌僧作佛事于宝慈殿。……甲辰，畏兀僧百八人作佛事于兴圣殿。"

Europeans and believed in Buddhism enjoyed a high reputation. A group of Buddhist celebrities, who appeared during the Mongol Yuan dynasty, were also from Bei-ting, such as An Zang, a famous Buddhist scripture translator, and She-lan-lan, a female Buddhist master who often went in and out of the Yuan royal palace to preach. These celebrities were actually white Indo-Europeans, not Uyghurs, as scholars habitually assume. Of course, there were a few well-known Uyghur Buddhists, likely among the migrated Sari Uyghurs at the southern Tarim rim, who have also appeared in the Gao-chang region, such as the famous A-lu-hun-sa-li, who was a scholar mastering multiple-languages on Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism, and also Chinese philosophy, in charge of Buddhism at Yuan court.³⁰⁷ Most of these Buddhist celebrities from the Gao-chang Uyghur kingdom lived in the palaces in Beijing and served the Yuan dynasty. Nevertheless, Buddhism was a minor religion among Uyghurs, after Christianity and Manichaeism.

Therefore, based on the aforementioned historical materials and the discussions in this section, we can differentiate the enigmatic terms and titles in this summary: Uyghur Monks and Uyghur Idol-Worshippers were of the highly muted Uyghurised Manichaeism. "Gao-chang monks" were Buddhist mostly among the native Indo-Europeans. Additionally, scholars commonly agree that Ye-li-ke-wen means East-Syriac Christians. The three religions were all highly regarded by the rulers of the Mongols, and the monks often went to the Mongolian Khan's court to hold blessing rituals; however, they were all generally referred to as "Buddhist rituals" such as in the

³⁰⁷ The *History of Yuan* does not say he is a Buddhist, but rather a master of Buddhist knowledge and Chinese knowledge. After he was assigned by Kublai Khan to a government position as the general director of Buddhism in China, he recommended that the Khan adopt Chinese Ruist (i. e. Confucian) tradition to better govern China. This indicates he might not have been a Buddhist personally. (Song, L., 2000: 2102). “阿鲁浑萨理，畏兀人。……幼聪慧，受业于国师八哈思巴，既通其学，且解诸国语。世祖闻其材，俾习中国之学，于是经、史、百家及阴阳、历数、图纬、方技之说皆通习之。后事裕宗，入宿卫，深见器重。”

(A-lu-hun-sa-li was a Uyghur. ... He was very intelligent when he was young. He studied under the royal teacher Ba-ha-si-ba. He was proficient in Chinese studies and could understand the languages of other nations. Emperor Tai-zu heard of his talent in mastering Chinese studies, covering the classics, history, the various schools of thoughts, as well as the theories of yin-yang, calendar math, maps with latitude and longitude, and technological skills. Later, he served Emperor Yu-zong and entered the position of court night guards. He was highly valued.")

Gao-chang Uyghurs are also famous for their talent in translating work and were involved in some major translation projects sponsored by the Yuan Khan court and other Khan courts because many prominent multi-lingual scholars were among them. In my opinion, this not only illustrates the advanced Gao-chang Uyghur civilisation, but also the multilingual environment of Tocharian, Hunnic-Turkic, Hunnic-Uyghur, Chinese, Sogdian, Tibetan, Mongol and Sanskrit, and the multilingual education system in the Turpan Basin since the fourth century, which provided a good educational environment for these Uyghur elites, making them not only excellent scholars, but also rare talents proficient in multiple languages.

History of Yuan. Understandably, these religious terms and the Buddhist vocabulary easily confuse or mislead scholars without being sensitive to the substantive differences of each.

Titles and terms	Connotations	Sources
Tarsa, Tarse, Tarsi, or Tarsia	Syriac Christian (monk)	Middle Persian loanword in the Christian Sogdian vocabulary; <i>Da-suo</i> or <i>Die-xue</i> in Chinese Xi-an Jing Religion Stele in AD 781
Arkaguns, Arka'un, or Arkoun	Syriac Christian and Christianity	Mongols followed Syriac etymology in Syriac in designating Christians and Christianity
Religion of Misiga	Syriac Christianity	“Misiga” as a Mongol term from Syriac “Missiah”.
Uyghur monks	Uyghur Manichaean monk	Chinese Daoist records and Mongol Yuan records in the 13th century
Uyghur sect of idolaters	Uyghur Manichaeism	Recorded by French envoy the friar William of Rubruck in the 13th century
Kocho monks	Native Indo-European Buddhist monks from Kocho	Used in the <i>History of Yuan</i>
Bei-ting Buddhism	Native Indo-European Buddhist monks (from) present-day Jimsar	Recorded in Chinese Buddhist classics

Table 5. 1: The titles and terms used for religious bodies in the Kocho Uyghur Kingdom

Finally, the following summary and conclusion can be drawn regarding the religion of the Kocho Uyghurs of the Kocho Uyghur kingdom during the time of the Mongol Empire:

The Uyghurs converted to Manichaeism in the mid-eighth century, when their khanate was still established on the east Asian steppes. After they migrated west to the Four-Regions after the fall of their khanate in 841, the Uyghurs continued to believe in Manichaeism and also embraced local native Tocharian Christianity (possibly with the Sogdianized Christianity they brought with them). After about two centuries of growth, Christianity became the dominant religion among the Kocho Uyghurs while Manichaeism declined and gradually disappeared from the historical record. In addition, the whole multi-racial-ethnic Christianity was Uyghurised in the kingdom. At the time of the Mongol conquest and during the Mongol Empire, the Kocho Uyghurs became a Christian kingdom even though a mutated form of Manichaeism that had been syncretized by Buddhism and Shaman-Tengrism still existed among them. Buddhism was a tradition mainly among the native Indo-Europeans (who also adhered to the Christian tradition since the fifth century at least).

In conclusion, in discussing the main religions of the Kocho Uyghur kingdom in the Four Regions by the time of the Mongol conquest, one should be addressing Christianity, Manichaeism syncretized by Buddhism, and Shaman-Tengrism, and Buddhism, as represented by the “Gao-chang monks”. If one talks about the dominant religions among the Uyghurs, it would have to be primarily Christianity, the Uyghurised Tocharian-Sogdian Christianity. The second most dominant religion among Uyghurs was syncretized Manichaeism, the Uyghurised Manichaeism,³⁰⁸ as represented by the “Uyghur monks”. The specifics of the above statements should be carefully differentiated when discussed. In addition, Mongol Shaman-Tengrism, Daoism, and Confucianism could also be found in the Four-Regions, but they were not mainstream.

5.6.2 "Gao-Chang Uyghurs Converted to Buddhism" is a Misleading Narrative

Here we need to mention a religious event in the history of the Gao-chang Uyghurs, which may have occurred in 983, the year when ambassador Wang Yan-de left Gao-chang and returned to Song China. The official act of destroying the Manichean temple occurred in Gao-chang. According to the Uyghur Manichean document M112v in the German collection translated by prominent Chinese scholar Geng Shi-min, this document was written by a Manichean monk, recording that he restored a Manichean temple in 954, a bit more than a century after the Uyghur great migration, seemingly with the support of the Uyghur Khan (perhaps the Khan who protected the Manicheans in Samarkand); but in 983, under the order of Aslanbijia Khan, a prince named

³⁰⁸ According to my research, just like the highly mutated Tarim Basin Buddhism sinicized by the Chinese in the fifth and sixth century.

Trkan destroyed a Manichean temple and converted it into a Buddhist temple, and removed the decorations of another Manichean temple to decorate the Buddhist temple (Ma, X., H., 2013: 272-273). Therefore, scholars believe that the record of this document shows that Buddhism began to replace Manichaeism and gain power among the Gao-chang Uyghurs in the middle of the tenth century.

This is certainly a reasonable inference, but it still lacks sufficient conditions for judgment, especially based on a single piece of manuscript evidence. First, this official practice of converting Manichean temples into Buddhist temples is not enough to show that Gao-chang Uyghurs began to accept Buddhism. After all, the conversion from monotheistic Manichaeism to polytheistic Buddhism is a rare case in religious history. Perhaps, it was just the practice of this particular Aslanbijia Khan, either from a religious motive or just purely a political one. Secondly, it is a fact that Manichaeism was cracked down on, but there is no sufficient basis for judging whether the Khan was motivated by Buddhist beliefs, although he did help Buddhism. Finally, there is no mention of Manichaeans being persecuted; this Manichaean document M112v recorded these things: "[So] I wrote down the style of this Manichaeism temple, and in order to let future generations understand the situation [in this regard], I wrote this brief report." (Ma, X., H., 2013: 273) From this, it seems that the Manichean group still existed, but the temple no longer existed, so it was being hoped that later Manichaeans would restore the temple.

According to Yang Fu-xue's research, the Indian traveler Gardizzi in the 1150s once recorded that "'The Khan of the Nine Oghuz [referring to the Gao-chang Uyghurs] belongs to the Dinawi sect (Dinawiyka Yaver, a sect of Manichaeism - the author) [i.e. the Dian-na-wu sect]. Every day, three or four hundred Dinawi followers gathered around the khan's court and chanted Mani's works aloud. But he did not exclude other religions. 'In his cities and ruling areas, Christians, Zoroastrians and Buddhists coexisted.'" (Yang, F. X., 2007: 146; M, X. H., 2013: 345) Note that this report not only shows that Manichaeism later regained the support of the Uyghur rulers, but also lists "Christians" first, which seems to indicate that Christians were more powerful than Zoroastrians (mostly among the native whites in the western sphere of the Tarim Basin) and more influential than the Buddhists at the time. If the semantic expression logic here is considered, it means that among the Gao-chang Uyghurs in the middle of the 12th century, Christianity had become the main religion, not Buddhism--which is consistent with the historical records and the view held by this thesis. Moreover, this is clearly an historical developmental phenomenon that presages the period of conquest by the Mongol Empire a century later, when Gao-chang Uyghurs were called a country of Tarsa.

During the Hui-chang period of Tang China, in 843, China persecuted Manichaeism, right after the fall of the Uyghur Khanate who had pressured China to accept Manichaeism, and once "ordered the whole country to kill the Manichaeans, shave their heads, wear cassocks, and kill them in the form of Buddhist monks," according to the writing of a Japanese Buddhist in China (Yuan-ren, 2007: 130).³⁰⁹ It is worth noting here that the officials first shaved the Manichaeans and put on cassocks, dressed them up as Buddhists, and then killed them (Ma, X. H., 2013: 340). This probably shows that the Tang officials regarded Manichaeism as "fake Buddhism" and punished it. Then, the practice of the Gao-chang Uyghur Khan to demolish the Manichaean temple and turn it into a Buddhist one may be the same intention. In short, the background information provided by this Uyghur document helps readers to understand the historical reasons why the Gao-chang Uyghur Manichaeism had to transform into Buddhism.

Johan Elverskog, a prominent scholar who studies the Uyghur Buddhist texts in Gao-chang, points out that, although the Uyghurs had a history of translating Buddhist scriptures for hundreds of years, no Uyghur Buddhist canon has been found so far: "This apparent absence of a canon is surprising when we take into consideration that all of the surrounding peoples (i.e., the Chinese, Jurchens, Tibetans, Tanguts, and Mongols) had Buddhist canons in their own languages and scripts. It is even more remarkable when we consider that the Uyghurs played a fundamental role in the translation and development of Mongolian Buddhist literature, and that individual Uyghurs are listed among those who compiled a new catalogue of the Chinese canon between 1285 and

³⁰⁹ “会昌三年四月中旬，敕下。令煞【杀】天下摩尼师。剃发。令着袈裟。作沙门形而煞之。摩尼师即回鹘所崇重也。” (In the middle of April in the third year of Hui-chang's reign, an imperial edict was issued. It ordered the whole country to kill the Manichaeans, shave their heads, put cassocks on them, and kill them in the form of Buddhist monks. The Manichean master was revered by the Uyghurs.)

In reality, the persecution was mostly targeting on Uyghurized Manichaeism, according to the Song China historical records: "In the third year of Emperor Wu-zong's Hui-chang reign [843], he ordered that all Manichean temples in the country be abolished and their properties confiscated by the government. Seventy-two female Manicheans in the capital were executed, along with the Uyghur Manicheans, who were exiled to various provinces, most of whom died" (Zan, N., 2015: 217). At this time, the Uyghur Khanate on the northern side of the Great Wall was under attack and falling apart. Tang China was liberated to wipe out the Uyghurized Manichaeism imposed by Uyghurs since 768 probably, as political revenge.

“武宗会昌三年，敕天下摩尼寺并废入宫。京城女摩尼七十二人死，及在此国回纥诸摩尼等配流诸道，死者大半。”

(In the third year of the Hui-chang's reign of Emperor Wu-zong, the emperor ordered that all Manichean temples in the country be abolished and brought their fortune into his palace. Seventy-two female Manicheans in the capital were executed, and the Uyghur Manicheans in this country [China] were exiled to various provinces, where most of whom died.)

1287 CE" (Elverskog, J., 1997: 1). The scholar also pointed out that, in the Uyghur Buddhist texts found in Turpan, although some basic Uyghur Buddhist terms were borrowed from Sogdian and several Uyghur Buddhist fragments were written in Sogdian letters, it is still difficult to prove that these Uyghur Buddhist documents were translated from Sogdian documents (Elverskog, J., 1997: 8).

However, Elverskog shows that there is evidence that Tocharian Buddhism was a source of Uyghur Buddhist translations, especially on the title pages of some Uyghur Buddhist texts: "Concerning the Tokharian-Uygur relationship several pieces of evidence indicate that Tokharian Buddhism played a role in the development of the Uygur Buddhist literature. The most convincing evidence for Tokharian influence among the Buddhist Uyghurs are colophons of Uygur texts which state that they were translated from Tokharian into Uygur." (Elverskog, J., 1997: 8-9). By the late tenth or early eleventh century, there is also evidence that "Tokharian was still known and used by Uygur Buddhists during the early period of Buddhist translation activities" (Elverskog, J., 1997: 9).³¹⁰ In addition, from the early eleventh century, Chinese became a source language for Uyghur Buddhist translations in addition to Tocharian, and by the 14th century, Chinese Buddhist texts eventually became the dominant source for Uyghur Buddhist translations. During the Mongol Yuan Dynasty (13th-14th centuries), Tibetan Buddhist texts also became an important source for Uyghur Buddhist translations. It is also worth pondering that "[i]n most cases, the translators of Uyghur texts also are unknown." (Elverskog, J., 1997: 11).

According to Geng Shi-min's research, the Buddhist monk Sheng-guang (Shingqu Sali, 11th-12th centuries,) from Bei-ting (Beshbalik) once translated some Chinese Buddhist works into Uyghur, such as the *Biography of Tripitaka Master of Daci'en Temple in the Great Tang Dynasty*, written by his disciple Hui-li, which records the life and deeds of Xuan-zang in the Tang Dynasty, the 10-volume version of the Buddhist Mahayana classic *Golden Light Sutra of the Most Victorious King* by Yi-Jing in the Tang China times, and *Thousand-armed Thousand-eyed Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva's Great Perfection and Great Compassion Mantra Sutra*, and *Avalokitesvara Sutra* (Geng, S. M., 1990: 66). This master was not only proficient in Chinese, "from the language of his translation, in addition to Chinese, he also understood Sanskrit or the

³¹⁰ "A bi-lingual Tokharian B-Turkic hymn, which is Buddhist in content despite its appearance in the Manichaean Po-thi-Book, probably dating to the late 10th or early 11th century, provides evidence that Tokharian was still known and used by Uygur Buddhists during the early period of Buddhist translation activities. The Buddhist Tokharian influence upon the Uygurs also is evidenced in the Brāhmī, script used occasionally by the Uygurs."

ancient Kucha-Yanqi language that was still in use at the time" (Geng, S. M., 1990: 67).³¹¹ The Kucha-Yanqi language is what linguists call Tocharian, with Kucha (Qiu-ci) as Tocharian A and Yan-qi (Karasahr) as Tocharian B. Some of the Chinese key Buddhist terms are translated from Tocharian, according to the Chinese scholar of this field, Ji Xian-lin.³¹² Based on my preliminary research, I speculate that Chinese Buddhism originated from Tocharian Buddhism, which syncretized with the East Syriac Christianity. This would be a topic for another thesis.

At the same time, Geng Shi-min also pointed out that the *History of the Northern Dynasties* records that the local Hu people "use the same writing as the Chinese, and also use Hu writing" (Geng, S. M., 1990: 70). Before the Uyghurs migrated westward, Kumarajiva (344-413) of Qiu-ci (Kucha) translated Buddhist scriptures into Chinese and had great influence on the spread of Buddhism in China. There was also Pei Hui-lin (737-820) of Shu-le (Kashgar), who wrote Buddhist books in Chinese, and other local Indo-Europeans (Geng, S. M., 1990: 70). These Indo-Europeans were proficient in Chinese, which was undoubtedly the result of bilingual education. After the Uyghurs migrated westward, Uyghur became the official language in the territory (present-day Xinjiang), and Chinese works were translated into Uyghur. Therefore, although it is likely this master Sheng-guang from Bei-ting was a Uyghur, it cannot be ruled out that he was a local white Indo-European, a "Gao-chang monk," as discussed earlier. Later, several famous translators appeared in the Bei-ting (Beshbalik) area during the Mongol regime, translating many Chinese classical masterpieces and some Buddhist literature into Uyghur (Geng, S. M., 1990: 70).

Japanese scholar Takao Moriyasu believes that the main supporters of early Buddhism in the Gao-chang Uyghur Kingdom were "the bilingual or multilingual Buddhists in the eastern Tian-shan region, namely Tocharians and Han Chinese, and possibly some Sogdians, and others who have lived here for a long time. It was they who produced the early Uyghur Buddhist texts" (Moriyasu, T., 2008: 191).³¹³ This is undoubtedly an admirable research result and insight. He also believes that ancient Turkic Buddhism and Uyghur Buddhism should be strictly distinguished,

³¹¹ “从其译文的语言来看，他除汉语外，还懂得梵文或当时仍在使用的古代龟兹—焉耆文。”

³¹² 汉语“沙门”来自吐火罗语 B “samane”;汉语“沙弥”来自吐火罗语 B “sanmir”;汉语“佛”最早来自吐火罗语 B “pud”.

(The Chinese word "Shamen" comes from the Tocharian B "samane." The Chinese word "Shami" comes from the Tocharian B "sanmir." The Chinese word "Buddha" originally comes from the Tocharian B "pud".)

³¹³ **Thesis 2:** Those who supported Buddhism in the West Uyghur Kingdom in its early stages were the bilingual or polyglot Buddhists in the eastern part of the Tian-shan region, i.e. Tokharians and Chinese, (maybe some Sogdians, too) and others who had been living there for a long time. They were the people who produced the early Uyghur Buddhist texts.”

and, in “regards to the origin of Turkic Buddhism and the appearance of the earliest Turkic Buddhist texts, the ‘Tokharian Hypothesis’ should be adopted instead of the ‘Sogdian Hypothesis’” (Moriyasu, T., 2008: 192).³¹⁴ I cannot agree more and even lean to propose a “Tocharian Hypothesis” for the origin of the Uyghurised Kocho Christianity. As mentioned earlier, Elverskog also believes that the influence of Sogdian on Uyghur Buddhism is difficult to prove. In other words, Takao Moriyasu basically believes that the Buddhism represented by the Gao-chang Uyghur language was originally mainly influenced by local Tocharian Buddhism, and also influenced by Chinese Buddhism which is the same as Elverskog's view. This is undoubtedly very close to the partial view held by my thesis, but of course, it is difficult to prove the overall picture only from the perspective of linguistics.

In summary, the research and presentation of the above three scholars, although not forming a complete picture, has touched upon several representative pieces of the puzzle, especially the questions and insights raised by Elverskog, which are frank, honest, accurate, and profound. The problem is that their efforts are still based on a generally accepted misleading propositional framework and habitual narrative that the Gao-chang Uyghurs converted from Manichaeism to Buddhism, and this framework and narrative are also based on an easily accepted assumption that those Uyghur-language translators must be Uyghurs. If we refer to the propositional framework of this thesis, that the Gao-chang Uyghurs converted from Manichaeism to East Syriac Christianity, not Buddhism, and that the native multilingual Indo-Europeans, white Buddhists, played a major role in the early translation works, then these problems will be solved and misunderstandings will be clarified. In Chapter Two, we discussed the indigenous peoples of ancient times from the Xinjiang area, mainly Scythian Yue-zhi type whites to the north of the Tian-shan Mountains, and mainly Tocharian Sarmatian type whites in the Tarim Basin, Yan-qi Basin and Turpan Basin to the south of the Tian-shan Mountains.

When Wang Yan-de, an envoy of Song China, visited in the tenth century, he proved that the winter capital of the Gao-chang Uyghur kingdom, Bei-ting, was still dominated by white people, but seemingly the white ethnic group in the entire region was significantly reduced compared to the historical records of Tang China. Archaeological discoveries have also confirmed this point,

³¹⁴ “Old Turkic Buddhism and Uyghur Buddhism should be strictly distinguished, though all of the extant Old Turkic Buddhist texts are Uyghur texts that were formed in the West Uyghur period. As regards to the origin of Turkic Buddhism and the appearance of the earliest Turkic Buddhist texts, the ‘Tokharian Hypothesis’ should be adopted instead of the ‘Sogdian Hypothesis’.”

showing that the local Tocharian language, as a common written language, was dying out about a century after the Uyghurs migrated westward.

Lacking the perspective of racial-ethnic anthropology, ignoring the theological perspective of East-Syriac Christianity and Manicheanism, short of the insight beyond the assumption of formative narratives, missing the key point of references to breaking academic taboos, forging hypotheses without a creative framework, while overlooking of Chinese and Syriac records, as well as not paying enough attention to archaeological evidence, and, as a result relying upon speculative fallible hermeneutics, provide the reasons scholars wander confused in the academic swamp. The way out to move to solid ground is found in the discussion of the history of the indigenous peoples in present-day Xinjiang of China. This path will set scholars on a more solid footing than sinking into the misleading proposition of Uyghurs becoming Buddhists generally supposed by the academic community. This error can be deconstructed as follows:

After the Uyghurs officially entered the north and south of the Tian-shan Mountains in 841, the main residents of the area were still the indigenous white people, with Turks and Chinese as the largest minority. The main popular language in the Tarim Basin and Yan-qi Basin was Tocharian, while the Gao-chang Turpan area also officially used Chinese along with Hu Tocharian. According to the research of linguists and archaeologists, Tocharian gradually disappeared in the mid-to-late tenth century. In other words, the colonisation and racial-cultural assimilation of the Uyghurs in the Tarim, Yan-qi and Turpan regions led to the disappearance of this language, and the Uyghur language helped unify the region as its official language. Just as British colonizing of the American continent spurred immigrants to use English, regardless of their language and religious background, the Tocharians who believed in Buddhism in the Tarim Basin (also Yan-qi and Turpan Basins), including the relatively small number of Sogdians, began to translate Buddhist classics into Uyghur. This coincides with an interesting point made by A. V. Gabain, as Elverskog states: “An interesting aspect of these translations is that they may have been elaborations of the originals, aimed at audiences among the peoples of the Tarim Basin.” (Elverskog, J., 1997: 12)³¹⁵

³¹⁵ As discussed in Chapter Two, the inhabitants of the Tarim Basin, included aborigines and immigrants such as the Uyghurs. The physiological characteristics of the aborigines were documented in the 1980s, based on the archaeological discovery of a large number of mummies, which also confirmed the records of racial characteristics in ancient Chinese historical materials. In this regard, Victor Mair's contribution was epoch-making. Refer to J. P. Mallory and Victor H. Mair, *The Tarim Mummies: Ancient China and the Mystery of the Earliest Peoples from the West* (2000).

Later, as fewer and fewer people understood Tocharian and Sanskrit, Chinese literature became the main source of translation because the Uyghurs had always maintained the tradition of using Chinese as their second or third official language besides Sogdian. According to Wang Yan-de, there was at least one Chinese Buddhist scripture pavilion in Gao-chang. In short, the large number of Uyghur Buddhist literature cannot directly prove that the Uyghurs accepted Buddhism, but rather a language-Uyghurised Buddhism. Of course, some Yellow-Headed Uyghurs in the present-day Gansu-Ningxia regions later accepted Buddhism due to the influence of the Western Xia tall-white kingdom. There are clear records in the Chinese historical materials, indicating Sari-Uyghurs evolved into the later Hui-hui group after being intermixed with Chinese, which will not be discussed here.

Elverskog clearly expresses his confusion and doubts about this misleading proposition that dominated the field for so long, arguing that, despite the existence of so many Uyghur Buddhist texts: "Nevertheless, the reasons for this dramatic conversion by the Uyghur rulers from Manichaeism to Buddhism are not entirely clear." (Elverskog, J., 1997: 9) Moreover, it is unclear whether the early Uyghur Buddhist tradition was "Nikaya" or "Mahayana" or both, although, according to some Uyghur Buddhist materials, "Pure Land Buddhism" may be their denomination. Finally, Elverskog cites the comments of other scholars to explain how to understand these difficult problems in the history of Central Asian Buddhism: "The surviving information is fragmentary, interpretation is often uncertain, the problems numerous and intractable." (Elverskog, J., 1997: 12) Nevertheless, our task is "organizing those small bits of data that are available into a preliminary framework. Once this has been accomplished, new perspectives may emerge even from materials that have already been examined by modern scholars, and we may find clues for where to look for more information in the sources from adjacent regions." (Elverskog, J., 1997: 15)

I cannot agree more with Elverskog and seek to pursue the task through this thesis, drawing a holistic map and framework. If we realize our limitations from the outset, we can diverge and find a brighter path out of a tunnelled vision. I further suggest that it is necessary not only to find more information in adjacent geographical regions, but also in adjacent disciplines. Moreover, even if the same material is viewed from different disciplinary perspectives, new information will be discovered against the new framework generated in my thesis. The historical research of the Silk Road is itself an interdisciplinary discipline, especially among archaeology, linguistics and religious studies. These three disciplines have intersected with each other through the discipline of history and have achieved fruitful research results in the past century. If we go a step further on this basis, the field of religious studies, for example, can also draw on the internal perspective or even the subjective perspective of a certain religion - that is, the internal logic of religion,

including its doctrines, theology, and practice, rather than just depending on external objective research, or the internal logic and subjective perspective of other research systems, as Chinese scholar Yang Fu-xue pointed out about the research field of Uyghur and Central Asian *Jing* religion, while encouraging Christian researchers to be involved (Yang, F. X., 2001: 170-171).

To study Christianity and Manichaeism in these regions, it is also necessary to introduce Christian theological reasoning, or more precisely, the theological reasoning of Persian-Syrian Christianity; or, to make presupposed inferences and infer conclusions based on the common internal reasoning of religion around divinity and spirituality. For example, when exploring the reasons why the grassland Uyghurs believed in Manichaeism, many scholars have drawn insightful views from external objective aspects such as politics and economy, including Lin Wushu's view. He suggested that politically, after helping Tang China evaluate the An-Shi Rebellion, the internal development of the Uyghur society needed a more comprehensive religion to strengthen its rule. Economically, after suppressing the rebellion, it needed to rely on the Sogdians to help the Uyghur Khanate develop trade with the East and the West (Liu, G., 1991: 98-99). However, if we understand the spiritual welfare or spiritual needs of the Uyghur rulers and Uyghur people for monotheistic beliefs from a subjective and internal perspective on this basis, then we will gain some new insights, understanding the internal reasons for the continued tenacious existence of Manichaeism in the Gao-chang Uyghurs. We will also understand why the possibility of converting from monotheistic Manichaeism to Christianity is far greater than converting to polytheistic Buddhism because, from the perspective of religious studies, monotheistic religions are more advanced than polytheistic religions, as argued by the German Christian theologian Schleiermacher. In other words, from the perspective of both inside and outside the religious system, that is, the dual perspectives of religious studies, it can be seen that the Uyghurs' conversion from Shamanism to Manichaeism, and from Manichaeism to Christianity, is a natural evolutionary process of religious civilisation.

In addition, the academic community should pay more attention to the evolution of ethnic and racial identities along the Silk Road and the biographical research of historical figures, as well as attach importance to combining physical anthropology. As the Chinese saying goes, "a stone from another mountain can be transformed into a jade," leading to a bright future, seeing more details, making more sense of the current evidences, and contributing to figuring out a larger picture to fit into more puzzles. It is through such an interdisciplinary model, with an internal religious perspective, combined with the methods of meticulous textual and historical analyses, guided by a sensitivity to racial-ethnic identities and their boundaries, that we can make some new discoveries and even breakthroughs. Hopefully, there will also be enough new archaeological discoveries of Tocharian Buddhist materials in the future to prove inevitably from the perspective

of underlying facts that the so-called Uyghur Buddhism is basically Tocharian Buddhism in the Uyghur language.

5.7 Chapter epilogue with Concluding Remarks

After marrying his daughter Elizabeth to the Chagatai Mongol khan to secure a peaceful end to the siege of Kocho City in 1275, the Uyghur *Idikut* went to Beijing to seek help from Kublai Khan. During his return, he was killed in an unexpected battle. After the loss of the *Idikut*, the royal family settled in present-day Yong-chang, Gansu province of China (Wang, Z. W., 1989: 111). In 1353, the eastern Chagatai Mongol khan led his army to convert to Islam in Alimalik (Yili). Two years later, they attacked and wiped-out Kucha (Qiu-ci) Buddhism (Li, S., 2003: 55-56, 105). Kocho City became the last non-Islamic Island. It is clear that, even though the Uyghur royal court had migrated east to Yong-chang, it still ruled the Kocho kingdom. This was the case until the kingdom fell in 1392 when the capital Kocho was taken and sacked by Islamified Chagatai Mongols who completed the historic process of the Islamification of the Uyghur kingdom in the present-day Xinjiang area, about 482 years after the conversion of the Uyghur khan to Islam in Kashgar in 910.

Four years after the fall of the Kocho Khanate, and as the Yong-chang Uyghur khanate faced the continuing threat of the eastern advance of the Mongol Muslim troops, the Ming China envoy Chen Cheng was sent to the Sari Uyghur area in approximately 1396 to grant amnesty and appoint local kings, making it China's westernmost frontier defense area. Chen Cheng also described the vast territory of the East Chagatai Khanate, with its capital in Bei-ting (Beshbalik) (Chen, C., 2000: 7). In the Turpan Basin, "there were few cities and residents" and "the old cities are deserted, walls have collapsed and buildings crumbled, everything is desolate and filthy." Terrified of warfare, the majority of residents lived in the mountains (Chen, C., 2000: 103). Obviously, the prosperity of the Kocho Uyghur civilisation, together with their Uyghurised Christianity, Uyghurised Manichaeism, and Uyghurised Buddhism faded and declined, taking their places among the things of the past. From then on, the era of *so/a* Islam in Xinjiang lasted until the end of the 19th century when Western Christian missionaries, specifically the Swedish, arrived.

In summary, although this chapter discusses Christianity in the age of the Khitan-Mongols, the historical theme is still Uyghurised Christianity and its great influence. The Western Liao Khitans' Christianity, or more precisely, the Northern Khitans' Christianity, which originated from the *Da-he-shi* national Christianity in the seventh and eighth centuries and continued during the

Western Liao Khanate, well supported the local Christianity in Central Asia in the face of challenge and suppression from the Islamic political-social system. Due to the invasion of the Genghis Khan Mongols, the Western Liao Christianity, which lasted for more than 80 years in Central Asia, disappeared with the fall of the Western Liao khanate and therefore did not profoundly affect the political and religious history of Central Asia-Xinjiang. For the former pagan Mongols, the Christianity accepted by their second and third generations of royal families and nobles was initially mainly from the Christianity of the Prester John of the Keraites Kingdom. However, because the Keraites were wiped out by the Mongols, their Mongolian Christianity quickly entered the domain of the Uyghurised Christianity.

Surprisingly, in its introduction of Gao-chang (one of the nations of the Western Regions), the *Records of All the Foreign Guests*, written by Luo Yue-jiong and completed in 1585-1591 (Luo, Y. J., 1982: Foreword 6), first mentions that Chen Cheng used to come to Kocho as an envoy of Ming China, followed by this description: "Their facial features are like the Gao-li people, with deep-set eyes and high nose bridges. Their hair is in braids down their back, and their clothes are of embroidered silk. They serve the Heavenly God and believe in Buddhism. Their script is cursive, quite like that of the Tatar, and the pronunciation is often borrowed from Uyghur" (Luo, Y. J., 1983: 69-70). He also includes other information about the local conditions, customs, and practices. This passage clearly was written after consulting the histories of previous dynasties about Gao-chang (Kocho), but the writer seems to have done more than merely copy from or summarize these texts. He has added more information. If this description is an accurate reflection of the situation at the time in the Turpan Basin, it shows that Indo-Europeans were still living in these regions at this time and even still possibly maintained the Christian traditions that were recorded in the *Book of Wei*, a millennium ago, supposedly under *dhimmi* law.

In the religious history of over a millennium in the Xinjiang area by the time of the fall of the Kocho Uyghur Kingdom, Uyghurs played the roles of history makers and religious masters, through wielding government power, colonising, mixing-blood and achieving the dominance of the Uyghur language. Powerfully, they Uyghurised the native culture and civilisation of Indo-Europeans, mostly Tocharian and Sogdians, and also produced a Uyghurised Manichaeism first, then Uyghurised Christianity, and later Uyghurised Buddhism. Islam proved to be particularly exceptional in this Uyghurising process, because the Uyghurs were finally Turkified through Turkified Islam. Therefore, the victory of Turks over Uyghurs was thorough, as the most effective enemy and suzerain of the Uyghurs on the eastern Asian steppes since the seventh century, by the military means of Islamification. Such Turkification and Islamification prevailed all the time in central Asian and west Asian history since the tenth century on.

Facing the Islamic proselytizing by military conquest, Buddhism fell without surprise because of the historical weak spirit of its native white groups, as historians have always noted. Even so, the historical disposition of the multi-racial-ethnic Christianity in central Asia and Xinjiang also appeared weak and helpless, just as Christianity with its apostolic tradition and its Christian Byzantine Empire in West Asia later had long been withdrawn from the stage of history under the swords of the descendants of Ishmael, mostly the Turks, and the best case for a Christian remnant was just a passerby in the background of the Islamic historical march.



CHAPTER 6 CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE MATRIX OF CENTRAL ASIAN HISTORY AND AN ALGORITHM FOR RECONSTRUCTING ITS LOST CHRISTIAN HISTORY

During the first ten years of my research on the ancient Christian history in the Xinjiang area of China, I found myself stuck in the middle of an academic swamp, not able to move forward yet unwilling to retreat. All I hoped for was a map that could guide me towards an invisible shoreline somewhere far ahead. During the latter ten years of my research, while attempting to identify a map of the swamp, I gradually developed an algorithm for processing the matrix of Central Asian studies that reflected on the long-lost ancient Christian history of the four regions surrounding the eastern Tian-shan Mountains, or the westernmost Chinese frontier, which consisted of about five or six city states. This year, 2024, I have crossed the academic swamp after navigating through several bogs like mazes along the way, finally reaching the shore where an abundant oasis of history rewards my weary soul and unwavering mental spirit.

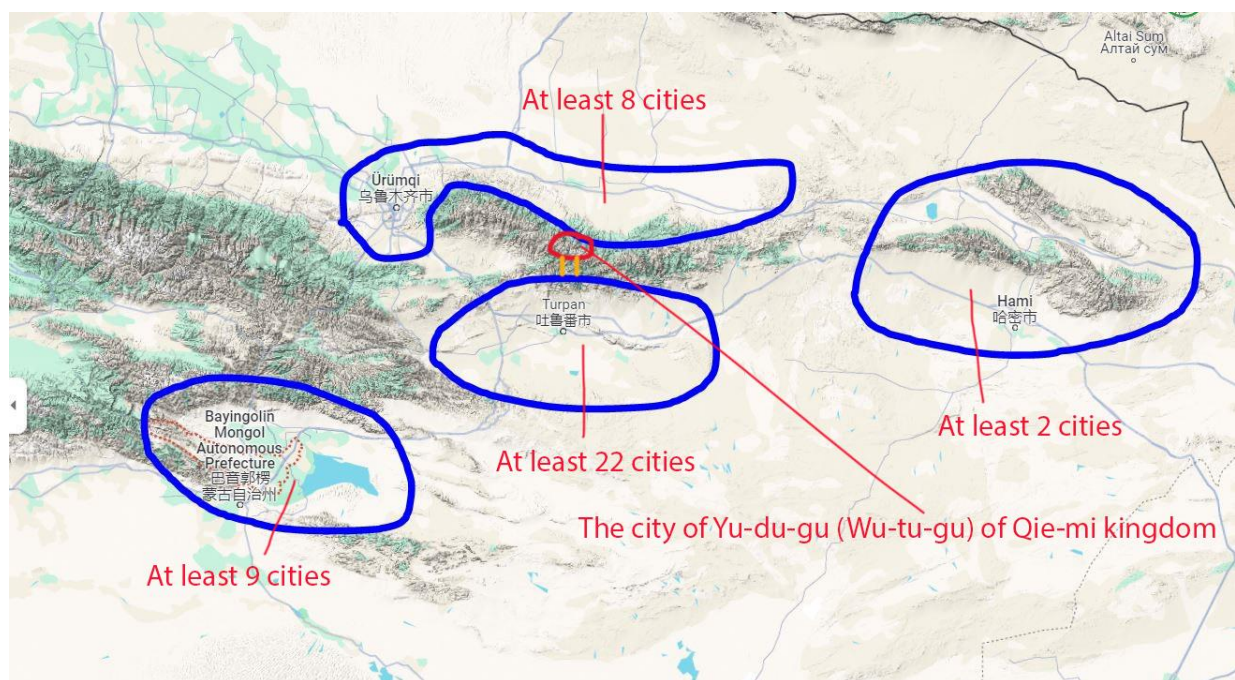


Figure 6. 1: The Four Regions and respective cities surrounding the eastern Tian-shan Mountains by the time of Tang China ³¹⁶

Aided by the methods of literary, historical, anthropological, and religious analyses, this thesis explores four mazes to extract the complicated histories of Central Asia, Xinjiang, and the

³¹⁶ Source: <https://www.google.com/maps/@42.2877168,87.9689794,7z/data=!5m1!1e4?entry=ttu>

westernmost Chinese frontier. The primary sources in Syriac and Chinese classics, long being underused, as Sebastian Brock lamented in 2008 (Siegal, M. B. A., 2018: 146)³¹⁷ and Mingana reminded with great foresight in 1925, provides rich reliable information to my thesis research. From there, qualitative data from thematic and discourse analyses is abstracted to develop an algorithm of a four-module program with twelve variables that can process the Christianity history in this targeted area of four regions.

6.1 The matrix of central Asian history: a quartet- maze of racial-ethnic evolvement, geo-civilizational boundaries and competitions, ever-changing nationalities, and faithful religions

The history of Central Asia (including Xinjiang province of China) is a history of turmoil, full of military and geo-political struggles that resulted from national, civilizational, and racial-ethnic clashes among the native Indo-Europeans and other invading foreign groups in a timeline with non-stop waves of immigrants, including Persians, Macedonians, Chinese, Rou-ran, Turks, Tibetans, Uyghurs, Khitans, Mongols, and Manchurians. It is also a history of different religions vying for dominance against a background of national interests. This amazingly complicated history, as a matrix consisting of four mazes, evolved mainly along the Silk Road.

The four regions around the eastern section of the Tian-shan Mountains, defined as the “Minor Western Regions” in this thesis, used to be the Chinese westernmost frontier on and off since the Han dynasty during the second century BC. As the targeted area of this thesis, although only a small portion of the Xinjiang area is included, this area serves as a microcosm epitomizing the entirety of Xinjiang and Central Asia in terms of geographical traits, racial-ethnic demography and anthropology, religious history, and the segmental function of the Silk Road. My hope is that these facets become more obvious after readers complete this thesis.

In terms of geographical features, these four regions are divided into two sections by the eastern Tianshan Mountains, north and south. In terms of racial-ethnicity, Scythian Indo-

³¹⁷ Siegal, M. B. A., 2018. Judaism and Syriac Christianity. In: *The Syriac World*. 146-156. Daniel King. ed. New York: Routledge. “In a 2008 article, Sebastian Brock laments the fact that Syriac literature is underused by historians in reconstructing the history and theology of Late Antiquity (Brock 2008). Brock specifically notes the disregard for Eastern material in the curricula of Western educational institutions. In Brock’s opinion, this disdain for non-classical languages stems largely from a tendency to associate Christianity with the Roman Empire and the writings of Western church fathers, a tendency greatly abetted by the representation of the history of the Christian church in Eusebius’s *Life of Constantine* and the works of subsequent historians (Brock 1982: 9).”

Europeans dominated the northern section, and Tocharians dominated the southern section. In terms of religious landscape, Buddhism and Christianity prevailed first, followed by Manichaeism as a minority religion, before Islam eventually swept overall. In terms of the function of the Silk Road, this region is the intersection (hub, or “router”) of the northern and southern branches through the Xinjiang area. If the area of the four regions was enlarged to parallel the entirety of Xinjiang, based on these four-term dimensions, it would be completely consistent with it. If it is further enlarged to match the entirety of Central Asia, it resembles it, especially when compared to the Fergana region in the north and the Bactria region in the south, surrounding the western end of the Pamir Mountains.

6.1.1 The first maze: a history of racial-ethnic evolving and identity changes

The history of these regions consists of a long series of large scale racial-ethnic events. This racial-ethnic complexity is the first obstacle faced in studying Central Asian history, but it has been ignored by many scholars, resulting in an inability to sort out crucial historical dilemmas. This thesis fully addressed this problem in its first chapter. What has become common is growing accustomed to considering today's racial and ethnic types as ancient samples, and tending to hold the view that people have not changed much physiologically and genetically. Maybe this is true in some areas, but it is certainly not the case in Central Asia. In the past two thousand years, this area has experienced non-stop waves of multi-racial-ethnic upheavals due to conquests, immigration, colonisation, intermixing, and subsequent assimilation.

The earliest native people of Central Asia were Indo-Europeans, consisting of two groups: the Aryan-type Sarmatians, who were referred to as Tocharian, and the Mediterranean type Scythians, who were referred to as Saka. These residences and civilizations can be traced back to 1800 BC, according to well-preserved mummies and other discovered relics. The earliest invasions in Central Asia on the western side of the Pamir Mountains were conducted by Achaemenid the Persian (550 to 330BC), Macedonian Alexander the Great in 330s BC, and Han China in 100s BC. On the eastern side of the Pamirs, the Huns were responsible for the earliest invasion in the early 200s BC, followed by the Han Chinese who fought the Huns for Silk Road control and national security. After the Year of the Lord, the Huns and the Chinese continued to fight each other in the regions surrounding the eastern Tian-shan for centuries, until the Huns were completely defeated by the Chinese around AD 160 after a three-century long military struggle.

The remaining defeated Huns migrated westward to the border of proto-Russia-Europe. Two centuries later, they attacked some Germanic-Gothic groups, altering the historical course of the Roman Empire and later Europe. A similar history repeated itself when China defeated the Turks in the seventh century and caused them to migrate westward. Their later arrival in west Asia started to change the historical course of the Eastern Roman Byzantine Empire after about three centuries. China was unaware of the international aftermath from these two historic victories.

China enjoyed full control over the westernmost frontier between the defeat of the Huns in the mid-second century and the rise of the Rou-ran (proto-Jurchen and Manchurian, inaccurately called Avor) Khanate in the early fifth century. Soon after, when Turks overthrew the Rou-ran Khanate and established their khanates in the early sixth century, they became the hegemony of Central Asia. Tang China reclaimed the regions with their military in the mid-seventh century, making these the westernmost Chinese frontier. Shortly after, in two decades, Tibetans invaded these regions, fighting Tang China and the Uyghur khanate for about two centuries.

During the periods when the Rou-ran people and Turks colonized the Turpan Basin, a large number of Chinese migrants also settled down in the Basin. Note that the Huns belonged to the East Asian nomadic peoples who had some physiological differences from East Asian sedentary people, the Chinese. The Rou-ran people were the ancestors of the Manchurians with a comparatively smaller and slimmer East-Asian-type figure. The Turks were mixed blood *Hu*, which resulted from an intermixing of Indo-Europeans and East Asians with some Chinese blood, so they had racial features of both groups. After taking over central Asia, the Western Khanate Turks further intermixed with the native Indo-Europeans, thinning out their East Asian bloodline as a result. Though the Turk population was not large, their Turkification through further blood-mixing proved efficient in transforming and localizing themselves quickly, thus changing the genetic map of Central Asia in a significant way. The Tibetans belonged to another unique type of East Asian with a darker skin colour.

The Uyghurs, of the Tlugh group, as the descendants of the Huns, following in their ancestors' and the Turk's footprints, immigrated to the region in the 840s, drove out the Tibetans, and conducted an even more powerful and efficient process of assimilation than the Turks: Uyghurisation. While adopting the advanced civilization of the native Indo-Europeans, Uyghurs intermixed with the natives without hesitation, just as the Turks who migrated here did earlier. After four centuries, Mongol rulers designated the title of "colourful-eyed people" for the Indo-Europeans and Uyghurs. The colonisation of Uyghurs further complicated the ethnographic landscape of the Turpan Basin, which consisted of Uyghurs, Turks, Sogdians, Tocharians, Rou-rans, and Chinese. It seems not long after, the Khitans migrated to the region in the twelfth century,

and the Mongols in the thirteenth century, becoming the last master of Central Asia within the time frame of this thesis. The Khitans and Mongols belonged to a nomadic type of people of the East Asian grasslands with minor yet obvious physiological differences from other nomadic groups.

6.1.2 The second maze: geo-civilizational boundaries and competitions

Central Asia, including Xinjiang, is situated between two great ancient civilisational systems: Persia in the west and of China in the east. Meanwhile the nomadic Scythians and Huns in the north and great mountains in the south cut off the direct geographical connections to India and Tibet. Despite even this impediment, Indian Buddhism spread to Central Asia through the Silk Road, just as the Tarim Basin Tocharian civilizations spread to India along the same path from the opposite direction. The history of Central Asian civilisations is complementary to its complex racial-ethnic religious history and is related to its geographic dimensions as well. Additionally, from the perspective of the geographical boundaries of civilizational systems, the geographic definition of Central Asia is obviously inadequate. For example, the Greater Khorasan, including the northwest regions of Persia or the Iran Plateau, and some areas of present-day Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, with Amu River as the boundary, consist traditionally of four geographically separated regions as being part of the same civilisational block. It is true for our four-regions' civilisational block of this thesis as well.

Given the vastness of such a territory, consisting of many regions (and areas) and the complexity of Central Asia's long history, its culture is more or less an internal detail of each civilisation. Thus, this thesis by passes culture in the process of exploring the attributes, relationships, and competition between the different civilisational systems. As in the whole of Central Asia and Xinjiang, the four regions around the eastern Tian-shan Mountains (the Chinese westernmost frontier), cultivated seven major types of civilisational systems in history from the second century BC through the fourteenth century. These seven types of major civilisations were still attached closely not only because of their racial-ethnicity, but also due to their unique geographical environments.

This thesis repeatedly mentions the two sections (blocks) of the area of the four regions, at the northern and southern sides of the eastern Tian-shan mountains. These two sections hosted seven major types of civilisational systems as well. Based on Chinese classics, these systems, in chronological order, were the Scythian-Beshbalik type (native), the Tocharian-Turpan type (native), the Hephthalite White Huns (fifth century), the Turkic-Altai type (sixth-ninth centuries),

the Chinese-Kocho type (fifth–fourteenth centuries), the Uyghur-Sogdian type (ninth–fourteenth centuries), and the Khitan-Mongol type (twelfth–fifteenth centuries). Among these, the southern section (Turpan Basin) mainly contained the Tocharian, Chinese, and Uyghur-Sogdian types, while the northern section (Beshbalik area) contained the others. It seems the southern civilisations were more fragile in the face of the more aggressive northern civilisations, as similarly reflected across the history of Central Asia and East Asia. Since the second century BC, as a result of struggles between the Huns and Chinese in the regions, the Tocharian *Ju-shi* kingdom split, establishing its northern section (Back Section) and bringing Tocharian civilisation to the northern side of the mountains in the Beshbalik region where the Scythian type dominated. Similarly, the Scythian-Sogdian civilization was brought to the southern section, the Turpan Basin, the Yan-qi Basin, and the northeastern rim of the Tarim Basin by the Uyghur migration in 841.

The history of these geo-civilisations looks complex, but an underlying pattern of geographical dimensions offers an aid to a clearer understanding. Similarly, in the whole of Central Asia, these types of civilisations also attached to their own historical-geographical domains or blocks, covering much larger areas. While there were two geo-civilisational blocks in the Chinese westernmost frontier, on the western side of the Pamirs, or the Persian north-easternmost frontier, there were three geographical blocks divided by major rivers. Between the Amu River and the Hindukush Mountains, the highly civilised Tocharian-Bactria urban civilisation dominated the southern sphere. Between the Amu River and the Syr River, the Sogdian-Macedonian sedentary civilisation prevailed in the transitional area, and the nomadic Scythian civilisation maintained influence north of the Syr River and Zhetysu regions. Like the two blocks of the Chinese westernmost frontier in Xinjiang, the three blocks in Central Asia had to stand against the ever-oncoming flux of other migrating civilisations, such as the following, in chronological order: the Persian-Achaemenid type, the Macedonian-Greek type, the Scythian-Saka type, the Turk-Uyghur type, and the Khitan-Mongol type.

In the two sections surrounding the eastern Tian-shan, there were also other marginalized civilisations, such as the Chinese type, Rou-ran easternmost Asian type, and the Tibetan type, brought here by invasions and colonisation. In the three sections of Central Asia, besides the Persian civilisation, the Aramaic civilisation used to be in Bactria, and the Hunnic influence touched the Zhetysu region west of the Altai Mountains, and later the Arabic civilisation was felt, but its impact was also minor. Notably, the whole area of regions from inside the Pamir Mountains among Scythian-Iranian groups along the Silk Road, to the eastern side of the Pamirs (i.e., the western sphere of the Tarim Basin among the Tocharians) used to be known as the Yu-tian kingdom and the Shu-le kingdom, which belonged to the Persian civilisational block that

maintained Zoroastrianism (Liu, X., 2000: 3609).³¹⁸ In the eastern half of the Tarim Basin along the rim, Tocharian civilisation dominated stably due to natural geographical protection, especially along the oasis of the northeastern rim. The southeast rim faced Tibetan invasions from the south. Among all the types of civilisations in Central Asia, the Tocharian type was the most advanced and unique, but also the most fragile with its weak military tradition.

Understanding the boundaries of these civilisational types and their geographical distributions makes it easier to understand the close relationship between religion and racial-ethnicity and, consequently, to sort out the enigmatic Christian history of this region. For example, such an understanding was facilitated in Chapter Five when we identified the location of the dual-metropolitanate of Khanbalik-Falik to be Beshbalik-Kocho and the dual-metropolitanate of Kashgar-Nuakith to be Kashgar-Tashkurgan. Notably, compared to the civilisational communications along the Silk Road, which were generated by travellers, diplomats, missionaries, pilgrims, and merchants, the military conquests and government promotions brought the most rapid and irreversible changes to the local civilisations and to its residents' national identities.

We can also divide the relevant Xinjiang area into three sections: northwest, south, and east, positioned by the Tian-shan Mountains. This helps us recognize racial-ethnic and geo-national civilisations with their respective boundaries in history.

6.1.3 The Third Maze: Ever-Changing Nationalities with Different Political Spirits

In this thesis, nationality is defined by kingdoms or regional governmental entities in power, instead of by racial-ethnicity or civilisations, which were subject to change. Indo-European civilisations in the Chinese westernmost frontier remained through their advanced city-state system. But this type of urban civilisation by no means reflected Persian or Chinese influences, or Greek or Macedonian influences, but the native ones which developed on their own can be traced back to as early as 1800 BC and they share similarities with proto-European-type civilisations. German scholars by the time of World War II used to think Germanic civilisation

³¹⁸ Liu, Xu, *Book of Tang*, "Western Rong": "疏勒国, 即汉时旧地也。西带葱岭, ...俗事祆神, 有胡书文字。于阗国, 西南带葱岭, 与龟兹接, ...其国出美玉。俗多机巧, 好事祆神, 崇佛教。"

(Shu-le is an old land [of China] during the Han Dynasty, bordered by the Pamir Mountains ... The people worship Zoroastrianism and have Hu writing scripts. ... Khotan State is bordered by the Pamir Mountains in the southwest and adjacent to Qiu-ci. ... The Kingdom produces beautiful jade. People are very ingenious and fond of Zoroastrianism and venerate Buddhism.)

originated from or was represented by the Bactria-Tarim Tocharian civilisation as the highest form. I disagree because I lean towards the theory that holds the common origin of world civilisations came from the Mesopotamia area, a theory is better based per archaeologists' findings including written scripts, such as in Sumer, the "site of the earliest civilisation" in the southern region of Mesopotamia between the two Rivers, called the cradle of human civilisations.³¹⁹

Based on Chinese court history, there were six cities in the northern section since the second century BC and about nine cities in the twelfth century. In the southern section of the Turpan Basin, there were eight cities during the time of Wei China, eighteen cities during Sui China, eighteen cities and forty-six towns during Tang China, and twenty-two cities in the tenth century. In the kingdom of the Yan-qi Basin, there were nine cities during the time Sui-Tang China ruled. The cities in the Turpan Basin were normally under the government of the same kingdom, but the oasis states in the Tarim Basin were different because one city with its surrounding regions could be one state. Chinese Han court records indicate that during the second century BC, there were twenty-six city-states in the Tarim and Turpan Basins (Ban, 1999: 2780), thirty-six states when Han China began to control the regions, and finally fifty-five states during the first century AD (Wei, S., 2000: 1529).³²⁰ When the Huns invaded these regions and set up military representatives, the Chinese followed and set up military bases and towns, together colonising and assimilating through their government systems, which were dramatically foreign to the locals.

The *Gu-shi* (soon *Ju-shi*) kingdom and Lou-lan kingdom, both Tocharian, were wedged between the powerful barbaric Huns and more powerful civilised Chinese, alternating their allegiances to either nation periodically, before eventually splitting into two sections. The northernmost allied with the Huns while the southernmost allied with the Chinese. The *Book of Wei* (Wei, S., 2000: 1533) mentions in one line an easily-overlooked state kingdom, the Qie-mi state, inside the eastern Tian-shan between the two sections of the *Ju-shi* kingdom that formerly belonged to *Ju-shi*. It mentions the capital as *Yu-du-gu*, which is likely the *Wu-tu-gu* referred to in

³¹⁹ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2024, December 8). Sumer. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sumer>

³²⁰ “汉氏初开西域，有三十六国。其后分立五十五王，置校尉、都护以抚纳之。王莽篡位，西域遂绝。至于后汉，班超所通者五十余国，西至西海，东西万里，皆来朝贡，复置都护、校尉以相统摄。”

(When the Han Dynasty China first stepped into the Western Regions, there were thirty-six states. Later, fifty-five kings were established, and colonels and protectors were appointed by [Han China] to incorporate [i. e. colonise] and pacify them. When Wang Mang usurped the throne, the Western Regions were cut off from China's control. In the Later Han Dynasty, Ban Chao had more than fifty countries in contact and diplomatic relationship [with China], stretching as far as the West Sea [Mediterranean Sea]. All of them came to pay tribute, and protectors and colonels were appointed by China to govern them.)

the *Book of Han*.³²¹ Another kingdom, Lou-lan, the southern neighbour of the Turpan Basin at the easternmost rim of the Tarim Basin, the eastern entrance of the Silk Road for the southern route, suffered an even worse fate when it was defeated by the Han Chinese and forced to leave the Tarim Basin, migrating eastward to become the diasporan Shan-shan kingdom.

Evidently, Huns primarily targeted the northern section while the Chinese primarily targeted the southern section. Before their arrival in the four regions, the Huns attacked and defeated the Yue-zhi kingdom in the He-xi Corridor, a red Di type of Scythian group, causing the Yue-zhi to migrate westward along the northern foot of the Tian-shan Mountains all the way to the three sections of Central Asia, where they became hegemonic for a few centuries. In the meanwhile, the Huns subjugated the Wu-sun who were defeated by the Yue-zhi earlier, a Tocharian type of kingdom oriented in the Kumul region. The Huns caused a domino effect in these regions, dramatically changing the geo-political landscape for the first time in history for the native Indo-Europeans who had enjoyed a peaceful life and advanced civilisation for centuries, especially on the southern side of the Tian-shan Mountains. Consequently, different nationalities and related identities started muddying the native racial-ethnic-civilizational identities. Another city state between Yan-qi in the east and Qiu-ci in the west, the Lun-tai kingdom, was wiped out by a massacre executed by a Han Chinese army under the leadership of General Li Guang-li in 101 BC on its expedition to attack the Da-yuan kingdom (which had been a Macedonian colony) on the western side of Pamirs, and noted for best horse breeding.³²²

In the later centuries, national powers of the foreign kingdoms and khanates invaded in waves, vying for Silk Road trading control or simply acting on a will to conquer. As mentioned earlier, there were: Hephthalites, or “White Huns” from the Altai Mountains belonging to an Alpine type of Scythian; the Gao-che, a northern Di type Scythian from northern Siberia; Rou-ran (Avor) and Sibo, both from north-easternmost Asia; Turks, the mixed blood Hu group from the Altai Mountains; Tibetans for about two centuries; Uyghurs who never left; Khitans for a century; and,

³²¹ Wei Shou, *Book of Wei*, chronicle 90, “Western Regions”: “且弥国，都天山东于大谷，在车师北，去代一万五百七十里。本役属车师。”

Qie Mi State, with its capital at Yu-da-gu in the east of the Tian-shan Mountains, is located in the north of Ju-shi, 1570 Chinese miles from Dai State. Qie-mi used to be under the jurisdiction of Ju-shi.

³²² The army sent by Han Emperor Wu for obtaining the best horses in the kingdom located in Fergana Basin conducted the genocide. In the later years at 89 BC, it seems the Emperor Wu regretted the atrocity imposed on the city state of Lun-tai by his army after his own royal family tragedy and issued the famous “Verdict of the Personal Confession on *Lun-tai*” (《轮台罪己诏》), though the content left for today it was not related to the atrocity.

finally, the Mongols for five centuries, all from the East Asian Steppes. After that came Manchurians and Chinese again, which are beyond the historical scope of this thesis.

Notably, among the different nationalities, both native or alien, their influences by no means achieved or equalled similar effects of transformation on native and immigrant racial-ethnic and civilisational identities. Two groups did stand out though: the Turks and Uyghurs. The former accomplished assimilation (historical Turkification) in the three sections of Central Asia at the west, and the latter achieved a similar outcome (historical Uyghurisation) in the three sections of the Xinjiang area at the east, including the four regions in the Chinese westernmost frontier. To leave such a legacy so quickly, both groups made a sacrifice, willingly or even enthusiastically to intermix their own racial-ethnic bloodline with the native Indo-European line, thus assimilating anthropologically. Nevertheless, the two primary ethnic nationalities of Turk (the dominant identity for all groups in Central Asia) and Uyghur (the dominant identity in Xinjiang) remained somewhat stable on and off into the present-day. The Turkification resulted in more powerful and lasting assimilating effects not only because it transformed all of the Indo-European groups, including Kazaks, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, into Turkic groups, but also repeated this process with similar success on a branch of western Uyghurs on the western side of the Pamirs by making them into later Uzbeks.

The success of Turkification did not stop there in the west, but also gradually subjected Uyghurs in the east to the designated national title of “Turks” or “Turkic group,” with “Uyghur” only being restored by chance with the help of the Chinese government and Russian influence in the 1930s. Additionally, Turkification did stop at the western foot of the Pamirs and northern foot of the Hindukush Mountains, thus exempting the two groups living in the mountain regions, the present-day Tajiks and some Afghanises. The Tajiks are descendants of a Saka type of Scythians within the Persian civilisation and the Afghanises are of the Bactria type Tocharians. Afterward, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as the Turks marched triumphantly westward on the best horses bred in the world from Bactria-Sogdiana, they spared the Turkification of Persia mercifully, either because they were familiar with Persian civilisation or just because they were impatient to pause longer in their adventure westward to explore the unknown world.

One should not neglect the fact that religious history is also closely related to national power, and the history of Central Asia shows that religion can have its greatest expansion and better influence with the support of national regimes. Islam is obviously a model in this regard by its aiding Turkification to achieve Islamification, or vice versa for the Turks. For Khitans, Mongols, and later the Manchurians, their governments hardly exercised any assimilation successfully in merely confronting or simply diluting Turkification and Uyghurisation. As an historical result, the

national identities of Khitans and Manchurians disappeared without obvious traces in later history, and the Mongols retreated to their historical beginning. At the present-day, the Chinese government in Xinjiang shows a more resolute spirit by implementing an effective means to create a sinicised nationality among all Turkified and Uyghurised groups who were under the religious system of Islam.

6.1.4 The Fourth Maze: Religious Competition in Peaceful or Aggressive spirits

It is reasonable to view religion as a special branch of civilisation and part of racial-ethnic and national identities. Though the religious maze is not historically stable neither, it has proved a more enduring maze because it works around a deeper level of history, the spiritual level. This thesis treats religion necessarily as a metaphysical system independent from the system of civilisation. From this perspective of religion, Hegel was correct in theorizing that the source code of history is the human spirit and cosmological Spirit. Thus, history has life, especially from the view of apostolic Christian Church,³²³ which seeks its objective beyond the time thus connecting beginning and end, echoing the perspective of God in Christ Jesus, alpha and omega.

Besides Shamanism, the earliest religion that arrived in Central Asia and the areas surrounding the Tian-shan Mountain was probably Zoroastrianism from Iran (later Persia), which is likely the second oldest monotheistic religion behind and impacted by Judaism. In addition to the archaeological discoveries of silver coins with Zoroastrian symbols from Sassanid Persia in the four regions of interest in this thesis, Chinese historians also left us with some written records which corroborate and confirm that Zoroastrianism arrived here along the Silk Road between AD 310 to 590, in the Turpan Basin at least (Gao, Y. J., 1998: 61). According to the *Book of Liang*, the Hephthalites believed in this religion (Gao, Y. J., 1998: 48), and Tang China records indicate that, besides Shamanism, Turks also believed in Zoroastrianism, but without temples (Chen, H., 2020: 135).³²⁴ Both national groups of Hephthalites and Turks ruled the regions in their respective ages from at least the fifth century through the seventh century. Additionally, it is reasonable to

³²³ In the Bible, the second epistle of Apostle Peter says in 3:8: "With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day."

³²⁴ Miscellaneous Morsels from You-yang 《酉阳杂俎》: "突厥事袄神, 无祠庙, 刻毡为形, 盛于皮带, 行动之处, 以脂酥涂之。或系之竿上, 四时祀之。"

(The Turks worship the Zoroastrian God, but they have no temples. They carve a [religious] shape [and image] and put it on a leather belt. They smear it with butter where they move, or they tie it to a pole and worship it at all times of the year.)

speculate that Zoroastrianism, as an historical element in the religious maze, reflected Persian civilizational or even national influences in Central Asia and Xinjiang significantly, especially inside the Pamirs and the western sphere of the Tarim Basin.

Scholars commonly agree that Buddhism spread to Xinjiang in the first century BC, especially in the Tarim Basin and Turpan Basin, although I think it was in the first century AD because there is no confirmation from Chinese records of that time that it was the first century BC, even though China had a strong military government presence in the area. It is reasonable to speculate that Buddhism came from India to the western side of the Pamirs, followed by the eastern side, because both sides were part of the same Tocharian racial-ethnic and civilisational block. This order of its spreading would explain why Tocharian Buddhism reflected a highly muted form of Hellenistic-Macedonian civilisation, featured in a fine arts way. Such a Hellenistic version of Tocharian Buddhism, which was dramatically different both in theology and practice from the original Indian Buddhism, spread to the Tarim Basin and developed, later further syncretized with East-Syriac Christianity in the fourth century before it further spread to China and further east. For example, as Catholic Jesuits arrived in both China and Japan in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they were startled by Zen Buddhism's resemblance to Christian doctrinal "salvation by faith" (perhaps thinking Martin Luther's followers had arrived there earlier). There were other Christian resemblances in Tarim Buddhism as well, such as with temple interior designs and the use of lamps and incense, which cannot be found in Indian Buddhism.

My research first discovered that East-Syriac Christianity, coming from Persia as did Zoroastrianism, became a prevalent religion alongside Buddhism in the fifth century at the latest, according to Chinese court historians. Its earliest arrival time remains unknown, but it would not have been later than the end of the second century, because the Christian historian Bardaisan from Edessa wrote around AD 196 about Christians among the Bactrians (Kushan kingdom) (Philippus, 2007: 61; Mingana, 1925: 301)³²⁵ in the Tocharian region on the western side of the

³²⁵ Philippus. *Book of the Laws of the Countries*: "For behold, we all, wherever we may be, are called Christians after the one name of the Messiah. And upon one day, the first of the week, we gather together and on the appointed days we abstain from food. And our brothers who live in Gaul do not marry with men, and they who live in Parthia do not marry two women, and in Judea they are not circumcised. Our sisters among the Geli and the Kushanians do not have intercourse with foreigners, and they who live in Persia do not marry their daughters. Those who live in Media do not flee away from their dead, nor bury them alive or throw them for food to the dogs. Those who live in Edessa do not kill their wives or sisters who have committed adultery, but have nothing more to do with them and leave them to the judgment of God. And those who live in Hatra do not stone thieves. But in whatever place they are and wherever they may find themselves, the local laws cannot force them to give up the law of their Messiah, nor does the Fate of the Guiding Signs force them to do things that are unclean for them. But sickness and health, wealth and poverty, that which does not depend on their free-will, comes over them wherever they are."

Pamirs governed by the *Yue-zhi* type of Scythians who originated from the present-day Gan-su province of China after being defeated by the Huns in 174 BC. The *Yue-zhi* people first accepted local Bactrian Buddhism and Christianity a few centuries later due to Persian influence before their regime perished at the hands of the Hephthalite White Huns in the sixth century. Therefore, given Mingana's speculation that Christianity spread into Central Asia in the third century, I speculate that the earliest time of Christianity's expansion into the Tarim Basin, Yan-qi Basin, and Turpan Basin would be around the fourth century AD through a Persian racial-ethnic form, and evolved into the Tocharian form one or two centuries later, according to Chinese court history.

Thus, Tocharian Buddhism and Christianity as well as Scythian Zoroastrianism and Christianity coexisted in Central Asia, while in the southern section of the Chinese westernmost frontier, according to Chinese historians writing in the earlier sixth century, Buddhism and Christianity both prevailed in the Turpan Basin and its adjacent regions of the northeastern Tarim Basin and Yan-qi Basin, allegedly in Qiu-ci (Kucha) as well, though without related records. I speculate while getting closer to completing this thesis that using the terms of "Tocharian Buddhism" and "Scythian Christianity" in the Indo-European age of the fifth through seventh centuries would more accurately reflect the historical religious spread related to racial-ethnic identity. More historical phenomena would make sense if we followed this speculation to understand why the *Yue-zhi* type Scythians and Hephthalite type Scythians were the first two countries that accepted Christianity, with Hephthalites even deeming it a national religion. Scholars get easily confused without a differentiation of the two localized religions or points related to the native racial-ethnic and geopolitical civilizations. The historical findings show that initially in the domain of *Yue-zhi*, both Buddhism and Christianity prevailed, and in the domain of the Hephthalites, both Zoroastrianism and Christianity prevailed.

With a differentiation between Tocharian Buddhism and Scythian Christianity, a religious landscape with racial-ethnic dimensions of Central Asia and the Chinese westernmost frontier becomes clearer and more holistic, allowing us to escape slippery interpretations. Persian Zoroastrianism spread among Scythian type groups in Central Asia supposedly before the conquest of Alexander the Great and before Persian Christianity arrived in the first century. Both religions came to the Tarim Basin, Yan-qi Basin and Turpan Basin in a later time along the Silk Road. In a parallel development, following the same timeline, Buddhism spread among the Tocharians, becoming Hellenized before further spreading to the Tarim, Yan-qi and Turpan Basins. In due time along the Silk-Religion Road, some Tocharians converted to Christianity, while some Scythians converted to Buddhism.

In the northern section of our four regions, mainly the Beshbalik region, confirmed by archaeological discoveries and related interpretations, though not so much confirmed by records from historians, both Buddhism and Christianity (supposedly of an Indo-European Scythian type) still prevailed from the eighth century and even through the thirteenth century. In the southern section (the Turpan Basin), the religious landscape was far more delicately complex because of its naturally protected location. After 841, not only did Tocharian Buddhism and Christianity continue to prevail, but also Manichaeism and Christianity in a Uyghurised-Sogdian form through Uyghurisation. Manichaeism was attached to Uyghur nationality with great influence, but favour toward it from Uyghur rulers soon declined. Severe persecution of Manichaeism started no later than the eleventh century, when Uyghur Manichaeism fell off the history books, until the Catholic Franciscan William Rubruck visited the Mongol Khanate court as a Western envoy. This prominent friar documented his carefully pursued scholastic field research on what he considered to be a never known idolatry-religion of “distinct sect” among the Kocho-Turpan Uyghurs (according to the textual, historical and religious analyses of this thesis) as a highly muted form of Manichaeism in the guise of Buddhism and Tengrism of a Mongol-type Shamanism.

I further surmise here that the muted Manichaeism in the Uyghur kingdom was primarily carried forth by the Uyghurised Sogdians, while Uyghurs embraced Christianity and incorporated it into their national identity within the first two centuries after their migration, as they came to be called the Kingdom of Christian Tars by the Armenian scholars in the thirteenth century. The travellers and historians at that time or later were puzzled, and even modern scholars seem confused by the nature of the racial-ethnic, civilisational, and national identity-bound religions that were further blurred by the political kingdoms’ dimensions. In Yan-qi (Krasahr) kingdom, the northwest section of the region, Tocharians dominated. Thus, Buddhism and Christianity prevailed side by side with Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism, as minority religions under the reign of the Uyghurs. It seems Yan-qi Buddhism gradually gained the upper hand based on both Chinese records and archaeological discoveries.

Another similar minority religion was Chinese Daoism, which was brought by the Chinese immigrants into the Chinese westernmost frontier in the fourth century and later promoted by Tang China. Chinese Daoism was also a racial-ethnic, civilizational, and national identity-bound religion, primarily in three of the four regions besides Yan-qi Basin. The locally written history of Tang China recorded the presence of Daoist temples in Kumul (Hami). In addition, the famous Daoist monk records written in the early thirteenth century confirmed that Daoism was in the northern section, the present-day Urumqi area.

Finally, the five world religions attached to the racial-ethnic identity persistently spread in Central Asia and Xinjiang over a millennium, until the arrival of Arabic Islam, which is not discussed here due to the thesis only covering development through the fourteenth century when Turkified Islam achieved its complete triumph, if not yet final victory, in the former westernmost Chinese frontier, especially in Xinjiang, China. According to a page from an Arabic-language historical text in the early thirteenth century, Abu Hanifa of Kufa (AD 699-767), one of the four great imams in Islamic history and a famous eighth century Muslim theologian, during his last pilgrimage to Mecca, grasped hold of the ring of the Ka'ba and prayed, "O God, if my reasoning [ijtihad] is correct and my doctrine [madhhab] is true, give it help. For I have established the Holy Law for Thy sake, O God!" A ghostly voice from the Ka'ba replied, "You have spoken truth, and your doctrine will remain as long as the sword is in the hand of the Turks." (Lewis, B., 1987: 208)³²⁶

6.2 An algorithm: variables in the four-module program for a reflective history of Christianity

Nothing is stable in the history of Central Asia, including the ancient Chinese westernmost frontier in present-day Xinjiang. The aforementioned four mazes have always been restless and reassembling. Religion, including Christianity, is by no means an exception. Nevertheless, as this thesis focuses on Christian history, this final concluding chapter will devote a whole section on the topic to aid our understanding at a more holistic and deeper level.

As this thesis primarily engages in qualitative research, it applies qualitative data produced by literary thematic analysis as quantitative-like variables (such as years, amount of people, numbers of metropolitanate, etc.), or pseudo-quantitative variables from literary discourse analysis (such as concept, titles, terms, etc.), to develop an algorithm with a four-module program in debt to the analytical methodology of the computer science field.

³²⁶ Lewis, Bernard, 'Abu Hanifa and the Turks (Early Thirteenth Century)', *Islam*, 208. This document then says that the Arabs, Persian, Romans, and Russians are all afraid of the sword wielded by the Turks and praises the sultans of the Seljuk line, for they were the ones who greatly supported the training of the scholars of Abu Hanifa's school.

6.2.1 The First Module: The Age of Indo-European Christianity (before AD 640)

The first stage of Christian history in the four regions was the age of Indo-European Christianity, before the AD 640s when Tang China took over three sections of the region: Beshbalik, Turpan, and Yan-qi. In this module, two variables serve as the keys to unlocking the encryptions hidden in the Chinese historical records. These variables represent information remaining unknown or uncertain, with disputable interpretations by scholars, and, once figured out, misunderstandings in the field will be clarified and historical facts will emerge clearly for the reflective-specialized historical constructions in this thesis.

Variable One: The unnamed religion of “serving the heavenly God”

In Chinese court history, the four classics, the *Book of Wei*, written in AD 554 or 555, covering the rule of Wei China (AD 386 to 550), along with the *Book of Zhou*, *Book of Sui*, *History of the Northern Dynasties*, chronicled the little known, enigmatic religion of “serving the Heavenly God” in the three regions surrounding the eastern Tian-shan Mountains. Some scholars have interpreted it as Zoroastrianism from a monastic doctrinal perspective. The *Book of Wei* mentions clearly in the same chapter the Persian Kingdom “serving the God of fire [*Huo-shen*] and Heavenly God.” The last piece of this chapter of the classics introduces the Kang Kingdom performing court judgement in a Zoroastrian temple (*Xian-ci*) and also venerating Buddhism (Wei, S., 2000: 1543).³²⁷ Additionally, however, during this time in Persia, alongside native Zoroastrianism, East-Syriac Christianity prevailed too. Therefore, while “serving the God of fire” would refer to worship of the Zoroastrian God, the religion of “serving the Heavenly God” cannot be a reference to any other religion than Christianity, because “Heavenly God” is the title regularly given to the Christian God, “Tian-Shen”.³²⁸

Variable Two: The racial-ethnic puzzles of the “Four Regions”

The earliest native residents in the four regions were primarily Tocharians in the south and Scythians in the north, while the Kumul (*Yi-wu*) domain on both sides of the easternmost Tian-shan range were remnants of Wu-sun Tocharians in the second century BC, and the Scythian-

³²⁷ Wei, Shou, *Book of Wei*, “Western Regions”: “有胡律，置于袄祠，将决罚，则取而断之。……奉佛，为胡书。”

(There are Hu laws, which are placed in the Zoroastrian temple. When a punishment is to be decided, it is taken and decided. ... They worship Buddha, guided by writings in Hu scripts.)

³²⁸ It is written in Chinese as 天神.

type of Hunnified Gao-che and Hephthalites who migrated to the Turpan Basin as ruling groups in the fifth century. The largest minority besides the native Tocharians were the Chinese, who resided in all of the eight cities in the Turpan Basin during this age. Additionally, the Rou-ran people were a smaller minority from East Asia. Though the ethnographic map in the Turpan Basin was quite complex, because of a few waves of immigrants, the dominant groups were still Tocharians. It seems Huns and Turks did not have a strong presence in Turpan allegedly because they could not bear the hot dry weather.

Alongside the archaeological discoveries and research on the texts of the Tocharian languages in Turpan and Yan-qi, as well as some human mummies and artifacts, Chinese classics also provide general key information regard the immigrations. The *Book of Wei* (Wei, S., 2000: 1518) states that the native *Hu* people (likely Tocharians) of the Front Section of the Ju-shi kingdom in Turpan Basin refused to migrate east, but were forced to migrate west to Yan-qi (a Tocharian city state) by the Gao-che ruling group.³²⁹ Then, soon after the Hephthalites conquered, dismantled, and dispersed the Yan-qi kingdom, some of them presumably went back to the Turpan Basin. Similarly, the Yan-qi people were also taken captive to Turpan during the time of Tang China, before returning after the Turpan kingdom was defeated by a Chinese general (Liu, X., 2000: 3607).

6.2.2 The Second Module: The Age of Turkic Christianity (640-841)

During the age of Turkic Christianity, Syriac classics provided rich information. Chinese classics remained largely silent on Turkic Christianity but not on other Turkic religions such as Shamanism and Zoroastrianism. Some scholars speculate that Turks also accepted Buddhism, but that seems to be a misunderstanding. The history of Turkic Christianity remains complex because of the variables below.

³²⁹ Wei, Shou, *Book of Wei*, "Gao-chang": ".....而高昌旧人情恋本土, 不愿东迁, ...初前部胡人悉为高车所徙, 入于焉耆, 焉耆又为嚙哒所破灭, 国人分散, ..."

(But the native people of Gao-chang were emotionally attached to their homeland and were unwilling to move eastwards...At first, the Hu people of the Gao-chang Front Section were all moved by the Gao-che and brought to Yanqi, which was then destroyed by the Hephthalites, and the people were scattered...)

Variable one: Turks are Hunnified mixed blood Hu

Different narratives on the origin of the Turks have confused Central Asian historians. Without figuring out who the Turks were anthropologically and nationally, it is difficult to differentiate them from the Hunnified Christian groups. Turks were mixed blood Hu people from the Scythian-type people, including Gao-che and Yue-zhi (the Ju-qu Liang people), and the East Asian people, including the Rou-ran and Chinese. Their language and culture were derived from Huns, and later Christian missionaries invented their scripts. Because western Turks ruled Central Asia, they encountered or were reached by the missionaries on the western side of the Pamirs. Since the western Turks further intermixed with local Indo-Europeans, preferably Tocharians, their Christianity was related to Indo-European Christianity. Since their Turkic language served as a linguistic bridge, Christianity further spread to other Turkic-speaking groups and other Hunnified groups (such as Khtians) in East Asia.

Variable two: The location of the town speaking Yabatai

In the eighth century West-Syriac manuscript of Mingana 9 (Mingana, 2010: 346) that provides in great detail rich information about Turkic Christianity, the town that speaks the Yabatai language remains enigmatic. By extensively researching both the Syriac records and Chinese classics, while being sensitive to geographic, racial-ethnic, and national dimensions, this thesis successfully identifies that Christian town was located in the Beshbalik region at the northern foot of the Tian-shan Mountains (either in present-day Jimsar city or Qi-tai city). Related interpretations of archaeological discoveries in these two places since 2021 by Chinese scholars, Ren Guan, Wei Jian, Liu Wen-suo, Wang Ze-xiang, and Wang Long in their two articles in 2022, confirm my establishing of the most important and mysterious variable, which is related to Indo-European Christianity.

Variable three: Factoring the four Turkic-Tartar Christian Kingdoms

My research for the Indo-European Christian town speaking Yabatai follows a geographical point of reference, identifying the locations and names of the four Turkic-Tartar Christian kingdoms on the East Asian steppes north of the Great Wall. With the aid of Mingana's research, I have figured out that these four kingdoms were the blue Turk, the Kyrgyz, the Da-he-shi Khitan, and the Ongud Uyghur. Among the four Hunnified-Turkic kingdoms, two were Indo-Europeans (similar to Tatar) and the other two were East-Asian (similar to Turks). Therefore, Christianity spread to East Asia for the first time among Khitans and Ongud Uyghurs. Once this variable was established, the subsequent history of Christianity among the different racial-ethnic groups of the East-Asian steppes becomes more accessible.

Variable four: Identifying more specific time when the West-Syriac manuscript was written

According to Mingana's research, the West-Syriac manuscript in question was written between AD 730-790. By doing extensive and intensive research of the Chinese classics, refining Mingana's theory, my thesis identified and narrowed the time frame to between AD 714 and 730. By declaring the more accurate variable, this thesis facilitates an understanding of early Uyghur Christianity and Khitan Christianity in the ages that follow. In addition, by clarifying the religious role of the future Turks when they first encountered and embraced Islam, subsequently proselytizing among other East Asian groups. Chinese historians have left a great deal of valuable and systematic records with very accurate details on foreign nations and rich information covering many aspects of this shift in religious loyalty. Further research with the new perspective, map, and algorithm provided by this thesis, will enable scholars to dig out more information connected to the religious history, including the Christian one, in a more promising framework. In the meantime, let us presently proceed with what we can know now.

6.2.3 The Third Module: The Age of Uyghur Christianity

The history of Uyghur Christianity has always had the poorest and most humble presence in Central Asian studies. However, this thesis aims to carve out a piece of splendid jade from a seemingly insignificant stone. With the variables below defined and declared, an astonishing age of Uyghur Christianity stands out in Central Asia history. At the outset, it is important and academically responsible to note that Uyghurs were not Turks, though both spoke a Hunnic type of language.

Variable one: The Metropolitanate in AD 781 for the "Turks"

A letter by the Patriarch Timothy of the Persian Church mentions that the court consecrated a Christian metropolitan for a Turkic kingdom and their king in AD 781, but the location remained unknown. Based on very limited but valuable information, my research of the Chinese classics discovered no other so-called Turkic kingdom existed in that year except the Orkhon Uyghur Khanate. That same year, Dun Mohe Darkan killed his Manichaean Khan and two thousand Sogdian Manicheans who impacted and even interfered with the khanate affairs significantly. With information from the *Book of Tang* about this new Khan, this thesis determined the variable that the Metropolitanate was assigned for the Uyghur Khanate. Such a bold declaration does not stand alone, but sheds light on the trajectory of subsequent Kocho Uyghur Christianity.

Variable two: The Sogdianized Christianity among Uyghurs

The Uyghurs migrated west to the four-region area in the same civilisational block after their fall in 841. The great immigration by no means generated less impact than did the Yue-zhi westward immigration, and its influence reached all the way to the western part of Central Asia. The Indo-European Yue-zhi were exiled because the Huns defeated the kingdom in the second century BC, facilitating the Indo-European Kyrgyz to defeat the descendants of the Huns, the Uyghurs, and to exile them as a result. The Uyghurs brought the Indo-European Sogdian community together with Manichaeism, Christianity, and possibly Zoroastrianism. It seems the Sogdians, however, never accepted Tocharian Buddhism but only Persian religions. Uyghur-Sogdianized Christianity thus joined the native Tocharian Christianity in this geographical block.

Variable three: The Uyghurised multi racial-ethnic Christianity of the Kocho Kingdom

In about two centuries, the ruling Uyghurs completed the process of Uyghurising the people groups in these regions, and also of Uyghurising the Sogdian Christianity, native Tocharian Christianity, and even Buddhism. Uyghurised Christianity dominated the multi-racial-ethnic Christian groups in the kingdom. This powerful talent of the Uyghurs to assimilate the people and religions within their territory can only be compared with that of the previous Turks on the other side of the Pamirs. Interpretation of the frescoes discovered in Turpan, especially the Palm Sunday one, confirms a multi racial-ethnic Christianity in the Uyghur kingdom, or at least in the southern capital of Kocho city. Based on the manuscripts unearthed in the Turpan Basin and the interpretation of those by prominent scholars, Peter Zieme, Nicholas Sims-Williams, Mark Dickens, and Niu Ru-ji, the Uyghurised Christianity among Uyghurs and other groups prevailed, as a splendid and well-carved jade cross.

Variable four: The Persian monks and the sect of “weeping for God”

According to the Song China envoy, Wan Yan-de, Persian monks and Manicheans competed in Kocho city. Contemporary Chinese scholars, such as Yang Fu-xue, Rong Xin-jiang, and Niu Ru-ji, commonly agree that the Persian monks are Christian monks. The Chinese Buddhist manuscript S6551 discovered in Dun-huang mentions that, in the Uyghur Kingdom, interplayed Manichaeism, Persian Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism of course (Yang, F. X., 2007:

145).³³⁰ Other written records in also corroborate and confirm there were four religions active in the Uyghur kingdom.

In addition, the Buddhist piece MS S6551 in the first-person perspective mentions a fifth religion of “weeping for God.” Chinese scholars speculate this religion was Shamanism (Zhang & Rong, 1989: 24, 32; Yang, F. X., 2003: 131). That interpretation seems reasonable, but it is flawed because the use of “weeping” as a gerund cannot be dismissed. In East-Syriac Christianity, there was a sect of monks that paid much attention to tears, venerating crying as an effective way in hesychasm to purify and cleanse one’s heart, with tears as a special water for baptism, which is highly appreciated in the book of John the Climacus as well. Therefore, the religion of “weeping for God” is a special monastic tradition for the East-Syriac Christian monks.³³¹ The internal knowledge provided by Syriac Christianity is the key to decoding this unknown sect, once again illustrating the important role that Christian scholars play and their unique contribution.

6.2.4 The Fourth Module: The Age of Khitan-Mongol Christianity

There are many variables declared in this age for the last module, and they reward the adventure of this academic pilgrimage significantly. This section lists seven key variables which unlock the elevation of this thesis to scan the whole landscape of Christian history with its different dimensional layers in the designated four regions.

³³⁰ “门徒弟子言归依佛者，归依何佛？且不是磨(摩)尼佛，又不是波斯佛，亦不是火袄佛，乃是清净法身、圆满报身，千百亿化身释迦牟尼佛……且如西天有九十六种外道，此间则有波斯、摩尼、火袄、哭神之辈，皆言我已出家，永离生死，并是虚逛，欺谩人天。唯有释迦弟子是其出家，堪受人天广大供养。”

(“When disciples and students say they converted to Buddha, to which Buddha do they convert? Not the Mani Buddha, nor the Persian Buddha, nor the Zoroastrian Buddha, but the purified Body of Law, perfect-reward body, and Sakya-Muni Buddha in billions of transformed bodies... Just as there are ninety-six kinds of foreign religion in the Western World [which means Central Asia, India and Persia], here, in this region, there are Persian religion [Christianity], Manicheanism, Zoroastrianism, those weeping for God, and all types [of monks]. They all say that they have left home [meaning become monks] and forever left life and death behind, but they are all false and deceive people and Heaven. Only the disciples of Sakya-Muni are ordained true monks and are worthy of the great offerings of people and [blessings] of Heaven.” Sakya-Muni means the Wise Teacher of Sakya clan of India to which Gotama or Gautama the Buddha belonged.)

³³¹ In a series of Zoom presentations from December 2020 to January 2021, Professor Baichun Zhang from the Beijing Normal University mentioned this weeping tradition of a Syriac Christian monastic community as a type of hesychasm. With this valuable, unique information, I declared the enigmatic variable.

Variable one: Christianity among the northern kingdom of the Khitans

Scholars generally hold that the Khitans accepted Buddhism because, while they ruled north China, they enthusiastically embraced Chinese civilisation and culture. This is part of the truth. When the Khitan Liao kingdom conquered northern China in the mid-tenth century, it established its southern kingdom with a Chinese system to govern the Chinese, while the northern kingdom governed the Khitans and other groups on the steppes. In this process, the Khitans in the southern kingdom, especially in their second and third generations, assimilated into the Chinese civilisational system Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. In the meanwhile, the Khitans in the northern kingdom still maintained their Christian tradition, apparently, especially among their royal lines and nobles. Unsurprisingly, historians found that Christianity among the later western Liao rulers in Central Asia lasted to the very end of their kingdom, when it was conquered by the Mongols. In addition, the archaeological discoveries in Kazakhstan from a few years ago show a flourishing Christian community residing in the area during the age of the western Liao khanate.

Variable two: Uyghurised Keraite-Mongol Christianity

When Genghis Khan's Mongols conquered East Asia and Central Asia, it seems they copied the government system of the Khitans and Chinese, as well as the civilisations of the Keraites and Uyghurs. Genghis Khan appointed a Khitan Ruist genius and a Uyghur Christian genius to help manage the government of his new empire, which was barbaric. Though the Christianity that first spread among the Mongols originated from the Keraite people and can be traced back to the Keraite King Prester John in 1007 or 1008, Uyghurised Christianity triumphed among the second and third generations of Mongol royalty and nobility. Uyghur civilisation, after being impacted by the Chinese and Sogdians for two centuries before their great immigration in 841, further assimilated into the much more advanced Tocharian system in the Tarim, Yan-qi, and Turpan Basins. Gradually, the Uyghurs ceded from Uyghur-Sogdian Manichaeism and fully embraced the native Tocharian and Scythian Christianity based on their own Sogdian-Turkic version of Christianity, finally generating a unique and splendid Kocho Uyghur civilisation with strong Christian attributes.

The Uyghur influence on those Christian khanates/kingdoms in the northern Tian-shan region and the steppes in the northeast was remarkable. Through promoting exclusively Uyghur as the official language and teaching Mongols to write in Uyghur scripts, Uyghurised Christianity dominated among the multi-racial-ethnic Christian groups and Mongols in the kingdom. This was fully demonstrated in the great roles played by the two Uyghur Christian monks in the thirteenth century, with one of them becoming the Patriarch-Catholicos of the Persian East-Syriac Church

and the other representing the Ilkhanate-Mongol Empire as an ambassador to the Vatican and Europe, meeting both the Pope and several kings.

Variable three: The kingdom of Tars

The Armenian historian Hetum recorded his journey as a travelogue with a designated title for Kocho Uyghurs, “the kingdom for Tars.” Comparing this to Chinese materials such as the Xi-an *Jing* Religion Stele and records from the Yuan dynasty, scholars have concluded that “Tars” here means Christians. Nevertheless, because scholars commonly hold that Buddhism among Kocho Uyghurs prevailed, the identification of the kingdom of Tars as Christian contradicts what the academia has supposed for decades and even today some still hold. Scholars identifying the title “Tars” as Christian confirms my argument that Kocho Uyghurs mainly believed in Christianity, their Manichaeism degraded significantly, and they never officially accepted Buddhism. In addition, I think “Tars” means Christian monks more specifically, which indicates the Kocho Uyghurs were a pious nation, just as Hetum mentioned a legend claiming that the three magi who visited baby Jesus more than twelve centuries ago were ancestors of the Kocho Uyghurs.

Variable four: Arkagun, religion of Misiga, and religion of the Cross

The variable of “Arkagun,” meaning Christian or Christianity, appeared in the historical materials in different languages with different deviations and forms during the Mongol conquest, such as Syriac, Persian, Chinese, Uyghur, and Mongolian. In a letter to the Pope from the Mongol Ilkan of Persia in 1268, the term was spelled in Latin as “Arkoun”. In the most recent discoveries of the Christian constructed ruins in Qi-tai, Xinjiang, the term “Arkagun,” written on a wall in ancient Uyghur scripts confirms the Uyghur Christian presence in the northern side of the eastern Tian-shan. In addition, Mongol rulers also used alternative titles for their own Christianity, such as “religion of Misiga” (or “Messiah” in Syriac form), and “religion of Cross” to include all of the Christian branches, such as the Catholic, West Syriac, East Syriac, Armenian, and Byzantine Orthodox traditions. At the same time, Mongol rulers also believed in monotheistic Tengrism, a syncretized type of Shamanism which dominated the East Asian Steppes for centuries.

Variable five: Uyghur monks

The famous Daoist monk, the true-man Qiu, was summoned to visit Genghis Khan in Afghanistan, arriving in 1222. Escorted by the famous Uyghur Christian Sawut Zhen-hai Tian, the chancellor of the Empire, during the long journey, Qiu and his eighteen disciples arrived in Lun-tai, a suburb of present-day Urumqi. They were welcomed by the head of Tarsa, the abbot of a Christian monastery that belonged to the Scythian-type of Christianity according to my analysis.

The abbot led a group of Christian monks to honour the Uyghur Christian chancellor Sawut. About five days later, traveling further westward, they arrived at present-day Chan-ji City, and many “Uyghur monks” came out with the city-state king to meet the Sawut and Daoist group. Through textual and religious analyses, the present thesis identified these unknown religious monks were a type of Manichaeian monks which the Chinese Daoist monks had no knowledge, although the travelogue differentiates them clearly from Buddhist monks, Tarsa Christian monks, and Daoist monks.

Variable six: The distinct sect of Uyghur idolaters

As noted earlier in this conclusion, thirty-one years after the Chinese Daoist group’s visit, William of Rubruck, the Franciscan friar sent to the Mongol Court by France’s King Louis IX, encountered a “distinct sect” of a religion unknown to him among the Kocho Uyghurs. He called its adherents “Uyghur idolaters.” As a scholastic Friar doing field research, William easily and clearly differentiated other religious groups such as Buddhists, whom he called “Tuins,” Muslims, or “Saracens,” and Christians, or “Nestorians.” Evidently, he did not confuse himself thinking of native Indo-European Buddhists in the Kocho Kingdom as being among the Uyghurs. Rather, he clearly states that all of the Uyghur cities in the territory contained “Nestorians and Saracens intermingled,” that is, Christians and Muslims respectively. It seems Buddhism in the Uyghur kingdom decreased significantly during that age which presents circumstantial evidence supporting my thesis that Uyghurised Christianity was the dominant religion among the Uyghurs and Sogdians, though not necessarily anymore among the Tocharians whose population decreased significantly after four centuries of Uyghur rule and colonisation. Additionally, Islam became the second largest religion besides Uyghurised Christianity in the Kocho Uyghur kingdom at this period.

Through the analysis of the dialogues between William and the priests in the temples of the distinct sect of Uyghur idolaters, and reflecting on religious theological analysis, this thesis finally determined that the sect to which William of Rubruck referred, was a highly muted form of Uyghur Manichaeism in the guise of Tocharian Buddhism and Mongol Tengrism. Based on this conclusion, this thesis further connects them with the so-called “Uyghur monks” observed by the Chinese Daoist visitors (i.e., the Manichaeian monks). Variable six reveals how easy it is for scholars to be misled thinking that Kocho Uyghurs converted to Buddhism.

Variable seven: Kocho monks and Bei-ting Buddhist translators

The *History of Yuan* also uses the term “Kocho monks” in addition to “Uyghur monks” for Manichaeans, and “Arkagun” for Syriac Christians. In this test, according to my analysis, “Kocho

monks” is designated for native Indo-European Buddhist monks, mostly of Tocharian Buddhism. Such a differentiation by the Mongol Yuan court further indicates that Uyghurs were not officially Buddhist, but they Uyghurised the native Indo-European Buddhism through the official Uyghur language for the kingdom. These religious groups often visited the Mongol Yuan court in Beijing to perform their own spiritual rituals. The court history records that, at one time, “108 Uyghur monks” were summoned to the court and performed rituals to bless royal members in a palace. This indicates the influence of the muted Uyghurised Manicheism that won the favour of royal members, most likely due to their Mongol Shaman-Tengrism taste.

Finally, for the last variable, from Tang China to Mongol Yuan China times, in addition to famous Buddhist monks who were primarily Indo-Europeans, some famous translators appeared in Bei-ting (Beshbalik, Jimsar) and provided systematic Buddhist scriptures in Chinese translations. For example, besides a few Buddhist celebrities who appeared in the Mongol Beijing court as early as Tang China, there was the prominent Buddhist Wu-kong, from a *Xian-bei* (Sibo) noble bloodline who might have been an Indo-European. He was a former general of China who converted to Buddhism on a diplomatic journey and translated some volumes of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese in Bei-ting. His travelogue provides an interesting piece of valuable information that corroborates one of my arguments. He states that, in September of the year 789, he travelled with a group of Tang officials from Bei-ting to China, taking the route of the Uyghurs (i.e., the Uyghur Khanate on the steppes). Then, the general monk said, that because the Uyghur *chan-yu* (khan) did not believe in Buddhism, he dared not bring his Chinese translation of the Buddhist scriptures, leaving it instead at the Buddhist temple in Bei-ting, before finally returning to the Chinese capital.³³²

³³² 唐悟空（车奉朝）口述、圆照整理的《悟空入竺记》：“翻经既毕，缮写欲终，时逢圣朝四镇、北庭宣慰使中使段明秀来至北庭。泊贞元五年【789年】己巳之岁九月十三日，与本道奏事官、节庭押衙牛昕，安西道奏事官程锷等，随使入朝。当为沙河不通，取回鹘路，又为单于不信佛法，所赍梵夹，不敢持来，留在北庭龙兴寺，藏所译汉本，随使入都。”

(Records of Wu-kong's Visit to India" narrated by Wu-kong (Che Feng-chao) of the Tang China and edited by Yuan-zhao: "After the translation of the sutras was completed and the copying was about to end, Duan Ming-xiu, the Xuan-wei envoy was sent to the four towns of the divine dynasty and Bei-ting, and arrived at Bei-ting. On September 13th of the year of Yi-si in the fifth year of Zhen-yuan's reign [789], [Wu-kong] accompanied the secretary official of Bei-ting, military court police officer Niu Xin, and Cheng E, the secretary official of the Anxi [Gao-chang] . Because the Shahe River was blocked then, they took the Uyghur Route. Also, because the Chan-yu [Uyghur Khan] did not believe in Buddhism, they did not dare to bring the Sanskrit books [they translated and compiled] with them. They stayed in Long-xing Temple in Bei-ting, hiding the translated Chinese version, and followed the envoy to the [China] capital.)

According to my research in Chapter Four, the Uyghur Khan at that time was the famous Dun Mohe, who killed his cousin khan and 2,000 Sogdian Manichaeans. He was the one according to this thesis that the Patriarch Timothy ordained a metropolitan in 781. This context well explains the concerns of the Tang general monk. That Uyghur khan died in December of 789.

6.3 A coming harvest in the not-so-distant future: other methodologies of future studies in central Asian history and its religious history besides archaeological and linguistic ones

Researching this single topic of the lost Christian history in the four regions surrounding the eastern Tian-shan Mountains for the past twenty years has not only been an adventure but also a pilgrimage for this present scholar of Central Asian studies. Based on the contribution and insight provided by this thesis, I expect more progress shall be made in the field as many scholars continue to research it diligently. More importantly, I recommend working on more variables and coming up with more algorithms to figure out various mazes endemic in this field. The teamwork of great scholars in different specialized areas is desperately needed for us to complete the whole picture in a more accurate framework. We must develop more methodologies to study both already-researched materials and new materials that have come especially from archaeological discoveries of the past few years.

In addition, Central Asian studies require a comprehensive and creative mindset that will push boundaries and even dare to break through commonly agreed narratives and theories. The study must not adhere to political-religious correctness at the cost of seeking the truth. The field of Central Asian studies needs more archaeological discoveries to confirm what we know and guide our next steps, but theory construction can sometimes take a helpful lead in providing more clues and a holistic structure of history that guides archaeologists. Recently, the Chinese archaeologist and sinologist Rev. Min-ju Li distinguished three types of historical facts as basic elements to construct written history in one of his Zoom presentations (Li, M. J., 2024).³³³

- A. Fundamental Element: Archaeological facts from archaeologists – a genuine type of fact closest to the truth, but most easily forgotten.

³³³ Li, Min-ju, "The Jing Religion Spreading East and the Tang Buddhist Monk Traveling West", May 05, 2024 https://youtu.be/j_UlIZLI0cw?feature=shared

- B. Intermediate Element: Written historical facts by historians – an institutionalized type of fact that reflects organized truth, not easy to forget.
- C. Superficial Element: Historical narratives by ancient writers – (literature, songs, poems, oral story accounts, etc) the furthest, perhaps from fundamental fact but most widely-spread and longest-lasting.

This thesis has applied all three of the above elements to construct a written history in reflective and specialized form, against the framework provided by the Intermediate Element, which serves as the major point of reference of this thesis, from the ancient records of the Chinese court historians, with supplements from the Fundamental Element of archaeological discoveries (and interpretations) together with the Superficial Element of historical narratives, including literatures, songs and poems. In addition, it adds a fourth “revelational” element: D. Historical Facts in Religious Books, such as the Christian Bible, Islamic Qur’an, Manichaeian codex, etc. These metaphysical types of historical theories and narratives, although primarily serving their respective doctrines, stand as revelational elements which are seen as the inerrant or infallible truth-facts within each religion in terms of their constructions of history and unique philosophy and views on history. This matches the Spirit of History in Hegel’s theory.

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_____, ASV, Reg. Vat. 37, fol. 209v.

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