

Tang Taoism and the mention of Jesus and Mani in Tibetan Zen: a comment on recent work by Rong Xinjiang

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The contributions of Rong Xinjiang to the study of Tang civilization, and particularly of external influences upon it, have already rapidly mounted up to a considerable number, so the appearance of a volume collecting many of his essays together in one place is much to be welcomed.¹ Though the focus in this collection is almost exclusively on matters of interest as much to students of Inner Asian languages as to sinologists, the latter will ignore these studies at their peril, for they often throw a new light on questions of longstanding debate even among those whose horizons are limited linguistically to the Chinese world. For example, one essay reprinted here deals with the problem of how knowledge of Manichaeism and Christianity reached Tibet, building on the notion that the Chan (Zen) text known as the *Lidai fabao ji* may have played some part in this by adding to existing knowledge of that West Chinese work and its influence in Tibet some further details culled from Dunhuang manuscripts relating to the same textual tradition, earlier identified by R. Tanaka in Japan, and by Rong himself.² To this is further added documentation in some detail on the way in which an awareness of these two religions could have reached West China.

It is not my purpose here either to recite the full evidence for his arguments, or still less to contradict them, for they add up to a plausible account of an intriguing episode of cultural transmission. Rather, the following remarks are addressed to one remaining piece of evidence that is not incorporated by Rong into his overall picture, and that for reasons that will become clear is somewhat difficult to evaluate. It has been known for over ninety years that the names of Jesus (as in Rong's sources, 'the Messiah') and of Mani are apparently linked in a Taoist source of the eleventh century, which as a whole was suspected of reflecting information current during the eighth century.³ The word 'apparently' is used advisedly in the case of Mani, since in the text in question though the term for 'Messiah' is written conventionally enough, the latter name is written 'Modi'.⁴ What I had not appreciated—any more, it seems, than anyone else—is that this same terminology can be confirmed directly for the Tang or Five Kingdoms period by a Dunhuang manuscript,

¹ For a full bibliography of Rong Xinjiang's work to circa 2000 see *Nairiku Ajia gengo no kenkyū* 15 (2000), 179–80; the following remarks relate, however, to a new work not mentioned there, *Zhongguo Zhongguo yu wailai wenming* (Beijing: Sanlian, 2001), which gathers together fifteen of his essays and eleven book reviews.

² 'Lidai fabao ji zhong de Mo Manni he Mishehe', in *ibid.*, 343–68. The passage in question in the *Lidai fabao ji* has been rendered into English on the basis of an earlier mention in French by R. A. Stein on p. 161 of David Scott, 'Buddhist responses to Manichaeism: Mahayana affirmation of the Middle Path?', *History of Religions* 35/2, 1995, 148–62. I do not know what part, if any, the passage plays in the doctoral research of the 1998 Stanford dissertation by Wendi Adamek, but a general description of the text and some initial findings on its Tibetan influence translated from the writings of Yanagida Seizan by Carl Bielefeldt may be found in Lewis Lancaster and Whalen Lai, *Early Ch'an in China and Tibet* (Berkeley: Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series, 1983), 13–49.

³ E. Chavannes and P. Pelliot, *Un traité manichéen retrouvé en Chine* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1913), 291–2.

⁴ Jia Shanxiang, *Youlong zhuan* 4.8a (*Daozang* edition, Schipper no. 774).

S. 6963, which provides a fuller text concerning the two heresies than that of the eleventh-century transmitted source, but retains for Manichaeism—if that is what it is—the same variant transcription. The text proclaims itself to be the second fascicle of the *Laozi huahu jing*, the polemical account of Laozi's supposed conversions of the barbarians that seems to have circulated in the Tang in a ten-fascicle form.⁵ The Messiah, as in the later text fiftieth in a total of ninety-six heretics discomfited by Laozi on his legendary travels beyond China, is described as having 'twelve hundred demons as his retinue. They enter into human bodies and if their hosts give way to the five desires, they can cause misdeeds. They are able to control all sorts of perversity, and those who serve them long enough end up in this perverse sect'.⁶ This slightly Gadarene concept of demon possession is, however, not unique to the entry of Christianity but also extended to all the ninety-five (actually ninety-seven) other heresies, which are, one supposes, largely imaginary, even if inspired by earlier Buddhist lists.

Could this passage have any relevance for the materials examined by Rong Xinjiang, providing for example their proximate source, rather than direct contact between the Zen lineage celebrated in the *Lidai fabao ji* and devotees of the religions themselves? One possible reason for hesitating to affirm this would be the lack of date to the manuscript, which may be later than the mid-to late eighth century focus to the materials he describes. It is true enough that another portion of the same text concerning the travels of Laozi, the first fascicle, has been found at Dunhuang in a copy (S. 1857) which has been assigned, on the basis of a name at the end of the text referring to its copyist (or owner) that is attested elsewhere in a dated manuscript, to early in the eighth century, and this portion, too, asserts the superiority of Taoists over Manichaeans. But it uses an entirely accurate transcription for the term—though curiously enough, one that has been deliberately distorted by a second hand—and mentions Christianity not at all, so the two manuscripts could be of different dates and reflect different recensions.⁷ Neither transcription, for that matter, matches these in Rong's materials.

What to make of all this is something of a puzzle, though it clearly has bearings on the contacts between Taoism and Tang Christianity pointed out earlier in the *Bulletin*. If it is impossible to place all the materials mentioning Jesus and Mani into a single chain of filiation, might some other pattern account for the manuscript variations, such as common dependence in the case of Rong's materials and S. 6963 on a lost recension of the *Laozi huahu jing*, not necessarily that of the early eighth century, but earlier than the materials he uses? Such a recension would then date to *circa* 740, about the time when I would suggest that Christianity and the hagiography of Laozi were

⁵ There is a good general description of the history of scholarship on this troublesome text as reflected in the Dunhuang manuscripts in the collectively edited series volume *Kōza Tonkō*, Volume 4, *Tonkō to Chūgoku Dōkyō* (Tokyo: Daitō shuppansha, 1983), 97–117, by Yamada Toshiaki.

⁶ A photograph of the passage in question is most readily (if not entirely legally) available in Huang Yongwu (ed.), *Dunhuang baozang* 54 (Taipei: Xinwengfeng 1981–86), 177, at the end of the second frame.

⁷ Lin Wushu, 'Laozi huahu jing yu Mani jiao', *Shijie zongjiao* 18, November 1984, 116–22, provides an overview of the ongoing relationship between the successive recensions of the text and Manichaeism as far as can be deduced from other sources, but does not to my eye mention S. 6963, though he does touch on another portion of fascicle one, P. 2007, which has the name Mani written accurately in the form originally given in S. 1857. For my remarks on S. 1857 and its date, I follow Ofuchi Ninji, *Tonkō Dōkyō: Mokuroku hen* (Tokyo: Fukutake shoten, 1978), p. 322; for the passage in question, see Huang, *Dunhuang baozang* 14, p. 176, where, however, the name at the end is illegible.

brought into some kind of relationship in the official Tang Taoist ideology.⁸ The deliberate mutilation of the transcription for Manichaeism, however, might indicate interference with an original recension at some later date. One possibility is that during the ascendancy of Taoism and of dynastic rule in the early eighth century both Manichaeism and Christianity could comfortably be described as heresies subordinated by Laozi, but that later dynastic dependence, after 756, on Manichaean Uighur troops made it impolitic for texts declaring the subordination to Taoism of the religion of these turbulent though vital allies (but not of Nestorianism) to survive without modification.⁹

This hypothesis can obviously only be of value if other possibilities can be shown to be less likely, and I am not sure that such is the case. But given the intrinsic interest of tracing the spreading awareness of both Christianity and Manichaeism across Asia at this time, some further research into this matter would seem to be merited.

⁸ See my note 'Buddhism, Taoism, and the eighth-century Chinese term for Christianity', in *BSOAS* 65/3, pp. 555–60.

⁹ The role of the Uighurs after 756 is summarized in Denis Twitchett, ed., *Cambridge History of China*, Volume Three, Part One (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 480, 483, 608–10.