Mar Iazed-buzid, the Great Donor: Part 5D

Luminous Teaching Stone of China

In 781 the beneficent Mar Iazed-buzid raised a Monument to commemorate the mission of the Luminous Religion in China, as well as his own part in its restoration. (*See* Supplement 24) The task of forming the characters of the Inscription and etching them into stone was granted to the young calligrapher Lu Yen. (*See* Supplement 25) The young Chinese calligrapher, who held a prestigious title but no office, and was quite likely unemployed at the time (he had been engaged formerly as a personnel manager of requisitioned labor on the east coast), yielded to his humble, careful task: to inscribe the

characters of his native language onto stone that was paid for by a Turkic benefactor in order to formulate a tract composed by a Persian father. He thereby created a document that would become, a millennium later, the single most valuable testament to the existence of the Luminous Religion in China.

On February 4, 781, (*See* Supplement 26) a Sunday during the patriarchate of the Great Catholicos Mar Timothy I (*See* Supplement 27)—five days after New Year in the second year of the Chien-chung period under Emperor Te-tsung and the last day of the Great Cold before Spring's beginning—the sacristan of the monastery, at the order of the abbot, summoned the congregation out of doors for the raising of the stone. (*See* Supplement 28) When the boards cracked the icy winter air, human chatter stilled, and churchmen from the monasteries of the four quarters took their places in ceremonial array. The distinguished abbot Ye-li led the elders: the country-bishops Mar Iazed-buzid, from the region northwest of Chang-an, Mar Sergius, from southwest of the capital, Mar Gabriel, head of the church of the two capitals, and the Persian father Ching-ching, who had written the long preface and mediocre verses that commemorate the diffusion of the Luminous Religion in the Middle Kingdom. (*See* Supplement 29) These and other gray presbyters were followed by the priests Ling-pao, Hsing-tung, and Sabran-Yeshu, who had aided in the raising of the Monument, and by the youths the deacon Adam, Mar Iazed-buzid's son, and the calligrapher Lu Yen. Perhaps among them also were the seventy other missioners whose names were carved in the Stone: bishops in white turbans holding pastoral staves; priests in black turbans and cassocks; monks in tunics girded in leather and adorned only with a cross, their tonsured crowns covered with black turbans and in their hands the staves of the ascetic. (*See* Supplement 30)

When we read between the lines of the Syriac that commemorate Mar Iazed-buzid, we come to recognize I-ssu, and the story of the Asian mission that is written in the Inscription is

brought to completion for us. We see the distinguished presbyter Mar Iazed-buzid, kind and gracious, provisioning the orphans and the poor at the monastery for fifty days, just as he had provisioned imperial guests daily at the imperial table of the palace as the young and wealthy I-ssu. Each year he laid that table ready at all times with good, substantial food, as much for the stranger who came there as for the brothers who were appointed; the sick were given holy water to drink, and disciples were healed according to monastic custom – by touch and word, without medicines or drugs.

As the courtier I-ssu, Mar Iazed-buzid had been a man of great power and influence in civil and military affairs; (*See* Supplement 31) here at the monastery, among the white-robed scholars of the Luminous Religion, he wore the purple clerical robe. Mar Iazed-buzid had secured his fate in this transitory and conditional life by cultivating himself and awaiting his allotted time. Now he walked through the doors of the lovely pavilion to keep an appointment within the walled enclosure when the boards were struck at the hour of repast. The meals came from the kitchen cooked and served by the brothers; the wine stores in the pantry were emptied from their skins for the banquet table. Here there were no civil robes, no pendant badges of rank. Only rows of monks and churchmen, assembled silently at long tables on each side of the hall, before their simple meal of bread and vegetables. Novitiate brothers sat and ate together with their prestigious guests and with the ascetics, who had come from their separate cells away in the hills to the commons on this feast day. The abbot, too, sat with them in the assembly on this day. The hearts of the guests were purified. All annoyance was stilled. When the sacristan rose up to beat the board for evening office, black night had already enclosed the courtyard.

< PART 5E: IN THE LIGHT OF THE SETTING SUN >

SUPPLEMENTS

Supplement 24:
The Original Location of the Monument Stone

There are two possibilities for the original location of the Monument Stone:

Position of the monument
before its removal in 1907

(1) the monastery at I-ning Ward where it stood for 500 years until the Danish explorer Frits Holm found it in 1907. (According to Dr. Kuwabara's report from the 1930s, which is reprinted in Saeki's book, the Buddhist monastery where the monument stood from 1625 to 1907 corresponds exactly to the old site of I-ning Ward of Chang-an; that is to say, the Buddhist monastery that Frits Holm visited in 1907 was the site of the 638 Ta-chin monastery at I-ning Ward.)

Postcard of Ta-chin (Daqin) Tower and replica of the monument stele

(2) at Wu-chun, the Ta-chin monastery on the slope of South Mountain in Chou-chih, where it is believed that I-ssu retired (The location of Wu-chun is not far from the spot where the Stone was unearthed in 1625 at one of the seven post towns that existed then between Chang-an and Chou-chih).

Supplement 25:
The Calligrapher Lu Yen

Sculpture of Lu Yen (755-805 CE) as the immortal Lu Dong Bin. By 892 CE his visage was carved into the Caves of Baishan, located in the Dazu region south of Chang-an (presentday Xian). The influence of the Persian Church of the East figures in the angel wings rising from his back and the solar cross on his chest. PHOTO Dale A. Johnson

Although Lu Yen's beautiful writing, even in the abnormal form of some of its characters, had been quoted as a model of good form in Chinese cursive style since the discovery of the Stone in 1625, the Chinese themselves record the name of Lu Hsiu-yen nowhere else among calligraphers. But if we accept the suggestion of more than one mystic sinologue, this same Lu Yen gained renown as a poet and calligrapher some years after the raising of the Monument and, as the Taoist founder of the Golden Elixir of Immortality Religion (*Chin-tan-chiao*), received, however partially, the knowledge that the Apostle

Thomas is said to have transmitted seven centuries before to the enlightened schools of China.

Supplement 26:
The Founding Date of the Monument

Luminous Teaching Stone of China

February 4, 781, was the date according to the Old Style, or Julian, calendar. The Gregorian date was Sunday, February 8, 781.

Supplement 27:
The Discrepancy of Dating by Patriarchate

James Legge (1815-1897), Congregationalist missionary to China and first professor of Chinese at Oxford University.

The Syriac of the Inscription says: *In the days of the Father of Fathers, Mar Hananishu, Catholicus, Patriarch.* No two authorities agree on the date of Hanan-Ishu's death, whether it was 778, 779, or 780. On the other hand, we are told by Dr. Wright and others that eight months elapsed between the death of Hanan-Ishu and the final election of his successor, Mar Timothy. If Hanan-Ishu died sometime in October or November of 780, the closest possible date to the date of the Inscription, the consecration of Mar Timothy could have been as late as May 781. The missionaries in China could not possibly have known of Hanan-Ishu's death at the end of 780, when the stone was finished and waiting for the day of unveiling.

James Legge, the distinguished nineteenth-century professor of Chinese language and literature at the University of Oxford, explained this discrepancy in a footnote to his translation of the Inscription:

> *This is an important note of time, and occasions some little difficulty. We know from he Bibliotheca Orientalis Celementino Vaticana of J. S. Assemani that this Hanan-Yeshu' was created Patriarch of the Nestorians at Baghdad in 774, and died in 778; whereas here is this monument erected in 781. But is not this discrepancy rather a proof of its genuineness? The news of the patriarch's death had not reached them at Chang-an. In fact, according to Assemani (vol. iii I, 347), the canon for communication between the more distant metropolitan sees and the patriarchate required the interchange of messages only once in six years.*

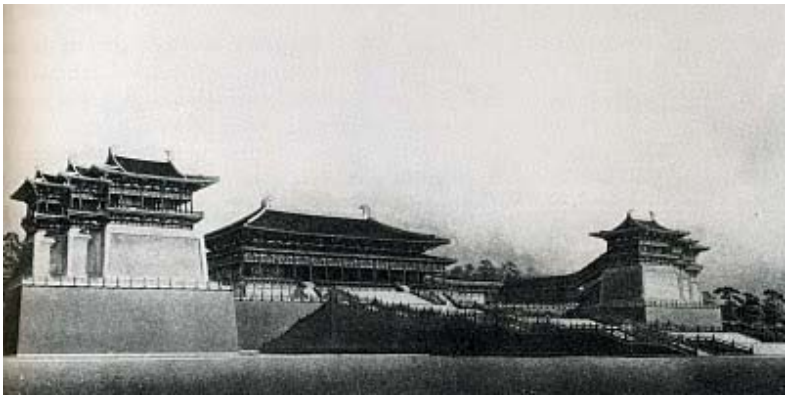
Mar Timothy I, whose name has already appeared in our narrative, was elected Patriarch after Hananishu, serving from sometime in 779 or 780 to sometime in 820.

Supplement 28:
The Passing of Ko Tzu-i

Birthday reception for Duke Kuo Tzu-i Qing Dynasty porcelain vase

In the same year as the unveiling, Ko Tzu-I (himself suspected by historians of being an adherent to the Luminous Religion) retired from office and passed away at the advanced age of 85, still clear-headed and respected. Though many tried to injure his character, none ever dared question his loyalty. His eight sons and seven sons-in-law all held high government offices, and, at the time of his death, three thousand of the family that had grown around him recognized him as their head.

Supplement 29:
The Imperial Office of Abbot Yeh-li



Hypothetical reconstruction of Hanyuan Hall at Daming Palace, where many state ceremonies were conducted.

The Chinese Inscription identifies Abbot Yeh-li as assistant supervisor of the erection of the tablet and "*t'ai-ch'ang-ch'ing* by examination, granted the purple clerical robe." This secular title is the common official designation for the office of Chamberlain for Ceremonials. He, a chief minister or chamberlain (*ch'ing*), passed the government examination to be Minister of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices and was ranked 3a, as I-ssu had been. The agency for which he was ranked, and in which he may have served, was one of the Nine Courts in the central government, and the foremost in prestige. The unofficial title of his office literally evokes his image as standard bearer and the imperial decoration of the sun, the moon, and the dragon.

The court was generally responsible for the conduct of major state sacrificial ceremonies according to the regulations prescribed by the Ministry of Rites. Through its several subordinate agencies, the Court of Imperial Sacrifices was responsible for the rite of ritual slaughter, especially at the Imperial Ancestral Temple and the imperial mausoleums. Through its four minor agencies, all staffed by state slaves, the court maintained the ceremonial implements of imperial sacrifice: *hu* battle gear captured in battle, treasures of good omen for display, the emperor's apparel, and all musical instruments, grains, and utensils.

All responsibility for the ritual and for the agents of imperial sacrifice – the provision of imperial fifes and drums and dancing, the provisions of living grains and animals to be sacrificed, the preparations for the imperial rites and their conduct at national altars and at the temples of the dynastic capital, all the forms of sacrificial divination (including the use of tortoise shells and the ancient divination text, the I-Ching) – were under the court. The court was also responsible for suggesting posthumous titles of emperors, such as those that appear in the preface and verses of the Inscription.

Supplement 30:
The Seventy

Seventy Syriac names in rows on the narrow sides of the stone with corresponding Chinese characters

Scholars till disagree on the significance of the catalogue of seventy names that cover the edge of the stone, but the East Syrian Bible, the Peshitta, records that Jesus appointed the same number.

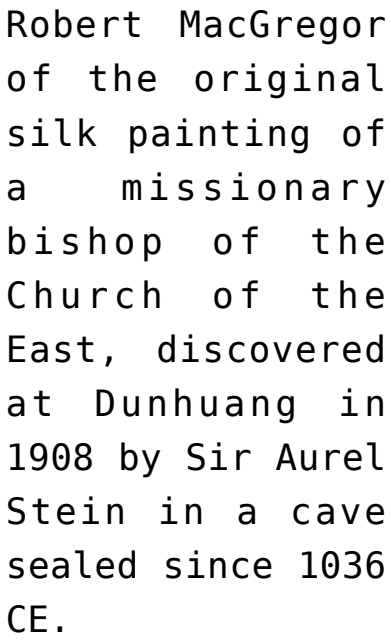
Supplement 31:
A Note on the Imperial Office of Monastics

Tang officials
Artist unknown

This is not unprecedented in Chinese history, especially during the Tang era; even among the monastic orders there were many instances of priests serving as soldiers or secular officials.

Mar Iazed-buzid, the Great Donor: Part 5C

Restoration by



Robert MacGregor of the original silk painting of a missionary bishop of the Church of the East, discovered at Dunhuang in 1908 by Sir Aurel Stein in a cave sealed since 1036 CE.

When I-ssu put aside his cap of gauze and came to live under new vows, he bowed his head for Rabban to replace his official top knot with the tonsure of “wheel and crown.” Whether it was in middle life or in old age, (*See* Supplement 14) after the period of probation, he must have served for some time as head priest of a city or large town, with several priests as his assistants, before he became Mar Iazed-buzid and was elevated to the dignity of country bishop, first by election of his future parishioners and then by confirmation with the laying on of hands, and only later could he have received his staff of office to become chorepiscopos of Khumdan (Chang-an).

As chorepiscopos, Mar Iazed-buzid was second only to metropolitan bishops in the rank of church dignitaries. His province at the time of the raising of the Monument extended north of the capital to the city of Ling-wu, the same northwest district of yellow clay and dust where he had once commanded an army. Mar Iazed-buzid employed clerks, readers, and deacons (among them, no doubt, his son) in numbers proportionate to the size of the several parishes in his ecclesiastical pasture and according to his own needs as governor of his province. (*See* Supplement 15) At that time he,

like Mar Sergius, mentioned in the Inscription, had functions identical to those of Mar Gabriel, the archpriest in the capital, and all three exercised episcopal functions in the absence of a regular bishop. Each day Mar Iazed-buzid conducted the morning service, then followed his daily routine of civil duties in bearded state and in the black cloak and turban of his predecessors. With the responsibilities of a regular bishop, his office as chorepiscopos was of extreme importance and delicacy: he had to deal directly with the uneducated and illiterate.

Over a period of more than seven centuries – first in Egypt and Syria, then in Mesopotamia and Persia – countless men before I-ssu had put aside their noble birth or station and laid in their wealth to take on the religious life of service. (*See* Supplement 16) Not unlike his predecessors, and even superseding them, I-ssu had distributed his riches over the entire region of the Western Capital. (*See* Supplement 17) The Inscription tells us that the mythic pheasant of five colors spread its wings (*See* Supplement 18) in flying eaves and roofs of colored tile when this generous patron of the Luminous School enlarged the worship halls and ornamented walls and galleries to restore the old monasteries with the noble adornments of their former condition. (*See* Supplement 19) In our own time the monasteries are all in ruins or simply erased from the face of the earth, but we may partially remember their images in the images of others preserved for us in ancient journals: the Pearl Tower built by men of Ta-chin in Szechuan province at its capital of Cheng-tu, where, a medieval passage tells us, the ten rooms of the gate tower all had blinds made of strings of pearl and blue jade; (*See* Supplement 20) the tiles of the temple at Wu-chun, "dazzling in the golden rays of evening"; (*See* Supplement 21) the splendor of I-ning monastery, whose buildings "shone forth like the light of the sun"; the vermillion tablets that hung high in the air above the monastery gates inscribed with Dragon-writing in kingfisher green; (*See* Supplement 22) the

faithful portraits of the sacred emperors copied on the walls of the monastery at I-ning to “confer great blessing” and “illuminate the church.” (*See* Supplement 23)

Original silk painting of a missionary bishop of the Church of the East, discovered at Dunhuang in 1908 by Sir Aurel Stein in a cave sealed since 1036 CE.

< PART 5D: IN THE LIGHT OF THE SETTING SUN >

SUPPLEMENTS

Supplement 14:

The Office of the Ascetic

Ascetics could be solitary brethren who lived in a monastery or else bishops and metropolitans.

Supplement 15:

The Religious Provinces

Map of modern province of Shensi (Shaanxi) outlined in purple.

What are called dioceses in the West were called provinces in the Church of the East.

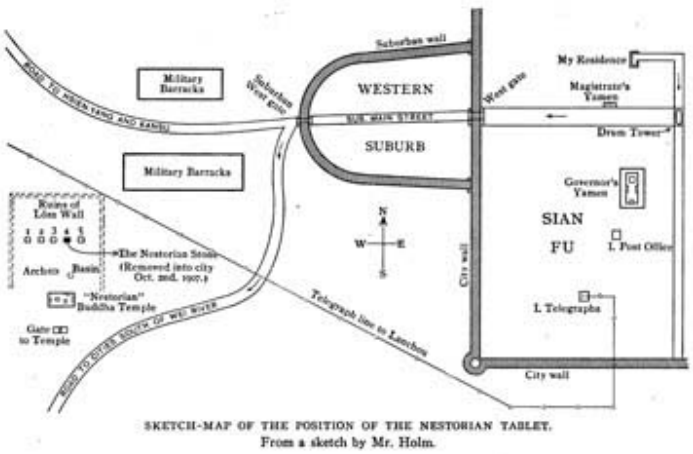
To Professor Saeki it seems that if Mar Iazed-buzid were chorespiscopos of Khumdan (Chang-an), he must have been bishop of the northwestern portion of the modern Chinese province of Shensi. If we accept this determination of Professor Saeki, the size of Mar Iazed-buzid's province was great.

Mar Sergius, listed among the seventy, must have been chorepiscopos of the southeastern portion, according to Professor Saeki. In the southeast of Shensi, in what was Mar Sergius's province, is the temple dedicated to the originator of the Golden Elixir of Immortality religion, Lu Yen. This temple is commonly known as the "Monastery of the Purple Door." In the eighth century, it might have been a temple of the Luminous Religion and Lu Yen its consociate.

Supplement 16:
The Religious Candidate

It was both noteworthy and commonplace for a monk to make large gifts to the monastery upon entering it and to bequeath to the monastery all his inheritance of the house of his fathers.

Supplement 17:
The Ta-chin Monasteries of Tang



SKETCH-MAP OF THE POSITION OF THE NESTORIAN TABLET.
From a sketch by Mr. Holm.

Position of the monument before its removal in 1907

Tang city annals record the locations of several Ta-chin monasteries up to I-ssu's time. The earliest monastery of the Luminous Religion of Ta-chin in Tang times stood two blocks west of the imperial palace at Chang-an, on the northeast corner of I-ning Ward, not far from the place where the Monument was resurrected in modern times and remained until the beginning of this century. The city wards (*fang*) were large rectangular blocks of buildings east and west of the Imperial City of Chang-an, divided by cross streets into four parts. The wards themselves were spaces between the streets. I-ning ("Righteousness Repose") Ward was in the extreme west of the city, two streets down from the imperial palace. The monastery seems to have been in the northeast angle of the cross formed by the two main streets. Moule, in 1930, says: "It ought to be possible to identify the site within a few yards, but I am not aware that this has yet been done." City records of the time referred to it as a "foreign monastery of Persia." The founding of another Persian monastery at Chang-an, this one for Manichees or Mazdeans, was recorded in 631. Emperor Tai-tsung built the monastery in I-ning Ward for the sturdy Persian "monk of great virtue" A-lo-pen in 638. At the end of the next century it was also the home of the monk Ching-ching, translator of books and in 781 the author of the monument Inscription that commemorates the emperor, the monk, and the erection of the monastery itself.

According to an old tradition, the monastery at Wu-chun was formed by a company of five brethren who partook of the Immortals' food and from whom a new brotherhood arose. Another old tradition has it that Emperor Tai-tsung, who welcomed Rabban A-lo-pen in 635, built the White Tower of the Ta-chin temple on the grounds adjacent to Wu-chun. If these traditions are true, the monastery at Wu-chun was connected to the western lands from very early times and must have been built around the same time as the first monastery in I-ning Ward, perhaps earlier than those at Loyang and Ling-wu. In 1444 the Ta-chin monastery near Wu-chun was in a place called the

village of Ta-ku in the Yu-hsien section of the district of Chou-chih. According to the epitaph still in existence there in 1932, this same monastery had been called the Ta-chin-ssu ever since the Tang dynasty. There is no longer any trace of the Tang village of Wu-chu. The tower is called *Chen-hsien-pao-ta* ("Guarding Immortals' Treasure Tower").

The tenth paragraph of the Inscription tells us that the decrees of Emperor Kao-tsung (650–683) caused monasteries of the Luminous Religion "to be founded in every prefecture." In 627 Kao-tsung's father, Tai-tsung, had divided the whole empire into ten prefectures (*shih tao*). This imperial favor had already been granted to the Buddhists for many years under Tai-tsung's reign. In 666, the Taoists received this privilege for the first time under the reign of Kao-tsung. Under Kao-tsung, it says the "True Religion gained the proper elegance and finish" and the Law of the Luminous Religion spread throughout the ten prefectures. Annals also record that in 677 the king of Persia, Pi-lu, made a request to build a Persian monastery in the Li-chuan Ward. (In 708, during the unstable and embarrassingly intriguing period of imperial strife during the Ching-lung years, AD 707–710, the building was moved to Pu-cheng Ward.) There is reference to a Ta-chin monastery being built in the city of Chaun-chou in Min during the sixth year of Hsuan-tsung's reign, which may indicate either 718 or 747, depending on whether the reference is to the sixth year of the first period if his reign or the second period. (The same monastery was called the Shui-lu monastery in 1638.) Sometime before the An Lu-shan rebellion in 755, a monastery was also built in the northwest at Ling-wu.

Sometime after 638 there was a monastery built in Hsiu-shan Ward of the eastern capital of Loyang (called "Sarag" in the Inscription), one other than the Persian Zoroastrian or Manichean temple already there, and another in Cheng-tu, capital of Szechuan, in the south.

Supplement 18:
The Pheasant Spreads Its Wings

Chinese or golden pheasant

Professor Legge points out that the phrase “till they appeared like pheasants on the wing” is a direct quote from the ancient *Shih Ching*, a narrative poem on the completion of a palace titled “Sze Kan” (Part II, Book iv, ode v, verse 4).

Supplement 19:
The Restoration of the Monasteries at Ling-wu and Wu-chun

Emperor Tai-tsung (Taizong)
Color on silk from hanging scroll

The Inscription also tells us that Emperor Su-tsung (756–762), under whom I-ssu served as a general and palace director, restored the monasteries at Ling-wu and Wu-chun. Su-tsung must have rebuilt the monasteries at Ling-wu and Wu-chun following the rebellion, soon after he entered the capital, because the Inscription says the God of Spirit *continued* to assist Su-tsung after the two monasteries were rebuilt and his reign began anew. The monastery at Wu-chun, where I-ssu's influence became strong, seems to have been the center of all the four monasteries located in or near the western capital by I-ssu's time. Wu-chun literally means "five prefectures" and is the proper name of a place within the district of Chou-chih. During the reign of Emperor Hsuan-tsung, the monastery at Wu-chun was destroyed by an earthquake. It exceeded in grandeur

and rank the monastery at Ling-wu and was in fact the model for rebuilding Ling-wu. It was said that the White Tower, and the monastery itself, were originally built in accordance with the imperial order of Tai-tsung (627–649), patron of the first missioner of the Luminous Religion, Rabban A-lo-pen. According to the Inscription, the emperor made the monastery at Ling-wu "equal to" the grand monastery that already existed at Wu-chun. I-ssu might have been the overseer of this imperial work, whether after an early retirement to monastic life or while still in government service.

Supplement 20:
The Stone Bamboo Shoots

The poet Tu Fu. Anonymous artist's conception.

The poet Tu Fu (712–770) wrote a poem on the stone bamboo-sprouts at Cheng-tu *(Poetical Works of Tu Fu*, vol. 7). The verses by Tu Fu do not mention the monasteries themselves, but the commentary on the verses does. All the medieval

commentaries on Tu Fu's poem were notes on the single line: "When a heavy rain falls people often find *she-she*."

The stone bamboo-sprouts were a pair of stone pillars outside the west gate of Cheng-tu. In 1930 it was reported that the bamboo-sprouts were still there. The north one was 16 feet high and 9 feet around; the south one, 13 feet high and 12 feet around. On the site where the stone bamboo-sprouts stood, the stone that once belonged to the attached pavilion also remained. In Tu Fu's time, whenever it rained, people picked up pearls, gold, blue jade, and other rare things (*she-she*). Some of the small pearls there, with the appearance of greenish-yellow millet, had lobes in them through which silk thread might be passed.

The Sung scholar Wu Tseng (960–1127), who recorded and corrected other earlier scholars, tells us that long ago foreigners came to this place and built a monastery named Ta-chin monastery, whose gate tower had ten rooms, every one of which had a blind made of strings of pearls, blue jade, and white gems; later, he said, the tower was broken to pieces and fell to the ground. The scholar explains that what the people called the stone bamboo-sprouts were not the Pearl Tower itself but that the tower was built very close to the site where the stone bamboo-sprouts stood. Wu Tseng's article concludes: "It is said the Kingdom of Ta-chin produces precious stones like jasper, pearls, and night-shining stones. From this place the water canal-way leads to Yung-chang-chun, I-chou of Shu province, where many rare things are produced; that is why this monastery was built by the people who came from the Kingdom of Ta-chin. But the scholar Tu Tien, quoting from a book called *Yu-yang-tsa-tu*, said that the city of Shao-cheng in Shu province was beautifully decorated with gold, gems, pearls, and blue jade, and that General Huan Wen got angry at such luxurious decorations and burned down the city so that the people would have nothing more to do with the Ta-chin people. But what Tu Tien said was entirely wrong."

Supplement 21:
The Tiles of Wu-chun Temple

Buildings with traditional imperial yellow roof tiles

General Yang Yung-I, in a poem written in 1200 upon the occasion of his visit to the Wu-chun temple, described the tiles of the temple at Chou-chih in this way.

Supplement 22:
The Dragon Writing on the Monastery Gates

Emperor Hsuan-tsung. Tang Dynasty; source unknown.

The twelfth and thirteenth paragraphs of the Inscription establish the later reign of Hsuan-tsung (745–755) as the time when the Luminous Religion began to become clearly again a state-protected religion. In these paragraphs it is reported that in 744 Emperor Hsuan-tsung himself composed the official monastery names that appeared on the monastery gates, and the front-tablets bore the inscription in the emperor's own handwriting. The official, or monastery, name of the Ta-chin monastery at I-ning Ward, *Ta-chin-ssu*, originated in 745, although the monastery had been built in 638. Prior to 745, it had been known simply as the Persian monastery. According to Professor Saeki, nearly every monastery had a "mountain title" (such-and-such *shen*) and a "monastery name" (such-and-such *ssu*) as every Buddhist monastery did. Although Saeki was not able to ascertain any of the mountain titles, the fact that the monasteries of the Luminous Religion had a monastery name (*-ssu*) indicates that the church was a state church under imperial patronage.

Supplement 23:
The Imperial Portraits at the Monastery of I-ning Ward

Emperor Tai-tsung (Taizong) Color on silk from hanging scroll

Sometime during the first two years of Hsuan-tsung's later reign (742–743), he decreed that the likenesses of the five sacred emperors were to be placed in the original monastery of I-ning Ward at the capital as a mark of favor, along with gifts of silk. His wording of the Inscription suggests that the adherents of the Luminous Religion could from this time on expect the protection of the emperor's bow and sword.

The eighth paragraph of the Inscription records that the monastery at I-ning Ward was adorned with the portrait of the reigning emperor, Tai-tsung. Immediately after the monastery was built in 638, officials were ordered to take a faithful portrait of the emperor and have it copied on the walls of the monastery "in variegated colors" and "with dazzling splendor." That the monastery was built and supported by the government is indicated by the force of the term "attached to it" and its official name: *Ta-chin-ssu*.

Mar Iazed-buzid, the Great Donor: Part 5B

Zhongnan Mountain, south of Chang-an (Xian)

I-ssu, married to both a worldly church and a dissipating empire, traveled the 130 *li* across the fertile plain between Chang-an and South Mountain at least once – when he sought retreat at the monastery of Wu-chun. (*See* Supplement 8) On this plain in 617, the founder of Tang gained his foothold to march on the capital with his son, who later became Tai-tsung. A-lo-pen in 635 and Bishop Cyriacus in 732 might have passed through this same western district on their way to the capital. (*See* Supplement 9) Now I-ssu was crossing the field again, but his way led away from the capital, toward the monastery at Wu-chun. Perhaps, as he approached South Mountain

in his tall official carriage, he had already developed the understanding that the world is only a place for redemption and that the Church is its vehicle. From the valley road, he would have seen the towers of the Ta-chin monastery and of the famous temple of Lao-tzu. In the same neighborhood, they were separated only by the small walled village of Wu-chun. (*See* Supplement 10) The Taoist tower rose up tall at the foot of South Mountain. To the west, and further up the slope, on the heights of a precipice, the Ta-chin temple stood, (*See* Supplement 11) overshadowed by cedar forests, beneath the line of pines. (*See* Supplement 12) Around it were hills, deep dark green, covered with flowers and trees and barley grain growing on the mountainside. From there, where peasants came to draw water from the springs, the grand snow-born rivers and little streamlets all flowed north, toward the capital, to join the waters of the Wei. An inspired visitor of the tenth century tells us that the Ta-chin temple, seen through the evening air, seems to take the shape of a mountain deer, its hind legs resting on the cliff above as it bends to drink the clear water below. As I-ssu rode up precipitous heights along the mountain paths, past Lao-tzu Temple and through town, he could see to the north the distant, high walls of Chang-an and below him a gentle ocean of fields and farms, spacious and calm: a fertile plain full of peasant villages, with silkworms feeding in the mulberry groves and, only a few *li* away, bamboo growing along the river in the Imperial Garden of Chou-chin. One of these images – the deer, the landscape, or the past – might have entered the mind of I-ssu as he passed.

If I-ssu had received his bishop's staff while he was still in service to the emperor, he might have made this same trip many times, and even come to live at Wu-chun with his wife and son, somewhere past the cells of the solitaries, in the outer circle of the monastery that had grown like a little village around the central temple and coenobium, and there built a modest home where he and his wife could raise their son for the priesthood. (*See* Supplement 13) If not, then it might have

been that I-ssu made this trip only once, when as a solitary dweller he retired and sought rest.

< PART 5C: IN THE LIGHT OF THE SETTING SUN >

SUPPLEMENTS

Supplement 8:
The Religious Retreat of Mar Iazed-buzid

Dr. P.Y. Saeki

With Professor Saeki, we assume, for the sake of circumstance, that I-ssu passed his last years cloistered here at this monastery in the neighborhood of the Four Forts, the Chang-an suburb frequented by Turkic and Indian mercenaries like those who had inhabited I-ssu’s youth.

Supplement 9:

The Western District of Chou-chih

Tang Dynasty Uighur Khagan

The name Chou-chih (*chou*, mountain-bend, and *chih*, river-bend) describe a town that occupied the headland of the delta formed by the Wei-ho and Tsao-ho Rivers, noted from early times for its beautiful scenery.

Since the outbreak of the rebellion in 755, the western district of the Imperial City was an important strategic point in the defense of the capital. Chou-chih was made the outpost headquarters of the imperial army for 26 years (758–784). During these years there was no civilian life in the city, and the army left the town in ruins for many years thereafter. Chou-chih was a military town when the Monument was erected.

In 781 the district of Chou-chih was occupied by foreign mercenaries; among the soldiers were Turkic, Uighur, and Persian adherents of the Luminous Religion, Mongols, and Indians. The mercenary army, known as the Shen-tse (God-grant-strategem") army, was outposted in the western frontier of the capital. The entire southern suburb of Chang-an was filled

with Tibetans and I-ssu's old comrades in arms, the Uighurs or *hui ho*, now the affluent *nouveau riche* at the capital.

Supplement 10:
The Monastic Village of Wu-chun

Postcard of Ta-chin (Daqin) Tower and replica of the monument stele

The Ta-chin temple at this location, which stood only one *li* from the village, might have been the center of the four monasteries mentioned in the Inscription. In 1444 another village, called Ta-ku, grew up around the temple. Not far from present-day Sian (once ancient Chang-an), the grounds that

once surrounded the ancient temple presently hold an old town. The monastic village of Wu-chun is no more.

Supplement 11:
The Taoist Mecca of Chou-chih

Entrance to the Louguantai
Taoist temple today

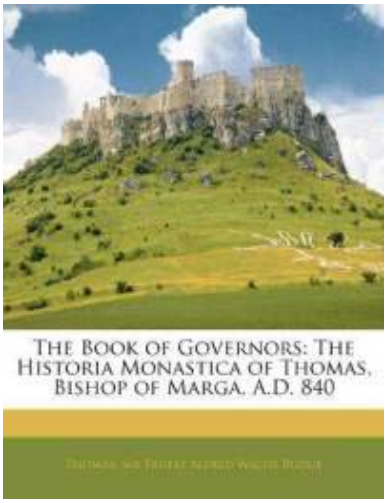
The district of Chou-chih was the Taoist Mecca, where Taoists and Christians came into closest physical contact. Here were the great temple of Lao-tzu and the house of Yin Hsi, where Lao-tzu is supposed to have spoken his last words of instruction.

Supplement 12:
The Monastery Tower

View of Ta-chin (Daqin) temple pagoda

Within the premises of the temple ground was the Guarding Immortals' Treasure Tower *(Chen-hsien-pao-ta*), the White Tower of the temple, which was reported by Japanese scholars to be still standing in 1932. East of what once was the monastery, about 40 feet from the modern village, the eight-cornered tower of seven stories stood 70–80 feet high.

Supplement 13:
A Picture of the Monastic Village of Wu-chun



Front cover of 2010 Nabu Press edition of The Book of Governors, a monastic history written by a monk of Beth Abhe, Thomas of Marga, in the first half of the 9th century A.D. The actual title of Thomas' book is The Book of Excellent Histories and Stories Concerning the Holy Men and Monks who Lived, Generation after Generation, in the Holy Monastery of Beth Abhe. The monastery of Beth Abhe,

located northeast of Mosul, was founded at the end of the 6th century A.D. and became an important center for education and missionary work for the several hundred years of its existence. Thomas gives a detailed history of the remarkable members of this community during the first 300 years of its existence as well as narratives of important events in the history of the Church of the East during this period.

The monastery of Beth Abhe had been founded as a result of the confusion following a reform in western Persia in the year 484 that disallowed monastic marriage. Before the reform we have from fifth-century Persia the picture of at least one monastic settlement as a village in the mountains where monks and nuns lived together and raised families with children. One hundred years later, celibacy was enforced. By 628 a strict celibacy rule was in place.

Perhaps, as the founder of Beth Abhe had done in 570, the founder of the Chinese mission, A-lo-pen, continued the older rule in the Chinese missions when he arrived in 635, and now, in the eighth century, I-ssu was still allowed to live as

presbyter in such a monastic village, where a priest might marry and those who took a monastic vow could obtain a dispensation to leave monastic life without disgrace or difficulty.

If anything can be known about he layout of the monastic village at Wu-chun, it is that it followed the tradition of Persia. If the Wu-chun monastery was modeled after the famous Persian monastery at Beth Abhe, from which China's metropolitans, and perhaps all its missionaries, had been sent, it looked as follows:

For 80 monks, a worship hall or temple 70 feet by 50 feet and, gathered close around it, the other buildings: a kitchen attended to and cleaned by those assigned to it on a weekly basis, and near the kitchen, the butler's pantry where those who set tables retrieved their supplies, a wine cellar where wine was stored in skins, and other domestic offices; a refectory; the common-room where brethren sat and ate together and on feast days were joined by the ascetics who lived in separate cells; a library; a guest chamber reserved for the entertainment of strangers; a special cell reserved for the abbot; common sleeping accommodations for novice brothers; and , near the gate, an apartment for the porter. The large garden of the community at Beth Abhe included groves of fruit trees.

The wide monastic dwelling, including the inner and outer cells, was commonly referred to as a village. The cells of monks and ascetics were situated rather far off from the main body of monastic buildings.

Mar Iazed-buzid, the Great Donor: Part 5A

PART 5: IN THE LIGHT OF THE SETTING SUN

. . . He distributed his rewards and gifts,
laying up nothing in his own house.
He made offering of the crystal granted him by the Emperor;
he dedicated the cloth of gold granted him when he retired and sought rest.
He restored some of the old monasteries to their former condition;
in others he enlarged the worship halls,
elevating and ornamenting their corridors and walls;
roofs and flying eaves with colored tiles
appeared like pheasants on the wing.
He exerted himself beyond measure for the Luminous School;
making benevolence his rule, he dispersed his wealth.
Every year he assembled monks from the monasteries of the four quarters;
the hungry came and were fed;

the cold came and were clothed;
he healed the sick and raised them up;
he buried the dead and laid them to rest. . . .

Bodhisattva leading a woman to the Pure Land, incense burner in his right hand, lotus flower in his left hand. Tang era color on silk discovered at Dunhuang in the "100 Buddha Cave."

After the years of rebellion, half the people had vanished, turned to soldiers' ghosts; the others had risen up and migrated south, leaving whole regions uninhabited. Landed property moved into new hands. Statesmen paid lip service to restoration, but within a few years the government was forced to begin feeling its way toward new institutions. In his

deteriorated empire, Emperor Tai-tsung (763–779) now continued, and even embellished, the religious avocation of his ancestral house: He constructed new Buddhist temples and reached new heights in support of Buddhist practice. When the emperor tied Tang government more closely than ever to the affairs of the Buddhist temple, the champions of secular morality began to criticize him for his spiritual leanings. Later, in 781, when a formidable rebellion broke out in Chih-li, after the new emperor, Te-tsung (779–805), wisely refused to be bound by the promises his grandfather, Su-tsung, had made, I-ssu had been retired from military service for many years and did not help to put it down. (*See* Supplement 1)

In the West, Mar Timothy sat as patriarch in the caliph's new capital of Baghdad, (*See* Supplement 2) the head of one of the richest and most influential communities in the Islamic Empire. (*See* Supplement 3) The office of patriarch had become an important position in the central administration, sometimes through favor with the caliphs themselves, (*See* Supplement 4) and sometimes through bribery and gifts. (*See* Supplement 5) In 781, when the Church was reaching its farthest limits of extension into Asia, (*See* Supplement 6) the patriarch was beginning to look like a civil servant, sometimes sent on diplomatic missions to Constantinople or to Rome, and the Church was growing more ostentatious and worldly from within. (*See* Supplement 7)

< PART 5B: IN THE LIGHT OF THE SETTING SUN >

SUPPLEMENTS

Supplement 1:
The Selfless Emperor Te-tsung

Emperor Te-tsung (Dezong)

Jealousies among the suppressors of the civil war created a new uprising that caused the emperor to flee in terror. Te-tsung, an amiable but weak monarch, in his last acts, showed he had thoughts of ruling well and wisely. Throughout his reign, he had made nothing for himself by his reforms, and when he died, his property consisted of nothing but a few books.

Supplement 2:
The New Patriarchate of Baghdad

Abbasid Baghdad was a walled, fortified city, set among an extensive network of canals. Artwork: spl

In the time of the patriarch Hanan-Ishu, who preceded Timothy I, the patriarchate had been transferred fifteen miles upriver from Seleucia and Ctesiphon, a metropolis then falling into decay, to Baghdad, the flourishing new capital of the Muslim Commanders of the Faithful.

In 747, Abu'l Abbas as-Saffrah, an uncle of Muhammad, had opened the Abbasid dynasty when he raised the black standard of revolt in eastern Persia and two years later pronounced the traditional homily in the mosque at Kufa to become caliph. It is said that he, though an Arab, revived Persian customs and planted the post of vizier (first minister) in a Persian family descended from a high priest of the Buddhist monastery No Bahar near Balkh.

In 775, after the Abbasid caliphs had discarded the old Sassanid metropolis of Seleucia-Ctesiphon and built their own new capital, Patriarch Hanan-Ishu II (774–779?) considered it expedient to move the patriarchate to that city while still reserving the old patriarchal title of Seleucia-Ctesiphon.

Supplement 3:
The New Church Community

Nestorian priests in procession Detail of 7th- or 8th-century wall painting from the caves of Bezelik

Members of the community were accepted for their wealth and power and praised for their business ability. They were accounted the great teachers of Baghdad, the masters of languages; their physicians found their way to the palaces of the caliphs through efficient and honest medical service; individuals among them gained position, wealth, and fame. At the peak of their church's history, they were tempted even to claim full rights of equality with their Muslim fellow-citizens.

Although in times of religious toleration the Church flourished, religion, and nationality had always been closely allied. The old pre-Islamic conviction that to be Persian one must be Zoroastrian now came to be replaced by the notion that to be Persian one must be Muslim. The restless energy of the monks, who were prone to wander, directed itself out of the cramping confines of the caliphate into those regions of the East where they felt free and were gladly received.

Supplement 4:
Mar Timothy I and the Caliph of Baghdad

Caliph Harun al-Rashid 8th- or 9th-century Bronze chess piece from Central Asia

By 781 Mar Timothy I, the patriarch of the Church of the East, had become a favored friend of the caliph of Baghdad, Harun al-Rashid, the monarch made fabulous in the Arabian tales of the *Thousand Nights and a Night*.

Supplement 5:
The Clever Succession of Timothy I

Timothy I of
Baghdad Unknown
artist

It is reported that Hanan-Ishu died in October or November of 778, 779, or 780, and that Timothy was installed as patriarch eight months later.

At his election, Timothy laid at the disposal of his electors heavy sacks to be opened after his success—presumably full of money; when he succeeded to the patriarchate and his supporters opened the sacks, they found them full of stones. When their understandable displeasure reached his ears, Timothy defended himself by retorting: “The priesthood is not to be purchased for money.” The cleverness and perspicacity of Timothy’s ruse, no doubt designed to humiliate the gross expectation of his perverted electors, has since been interpreted as mere trickery and fraud.

The Book of Governors, a monastic history of the Oriental Church written in 840 by a member of the once-renowned but by then already decaying monastery of Beth Abhe, is one of the earliest documents to suggest that Timothy’s possession of the patriarchate was fraudulent. The author says: “And when Timothy saw the face of every man fixed upon our Mar Isho-yabh, he advised him secretly when they were alone together and said to him, ‘Thou art an old man, and thou art not able to stand up and meet the attacks of the envious, Ephraim of Elam, Joseph the son of Mari, and other opponents; but do thou

excuse thyself, and become one of the supporters, and I will make thee Metropolitan of Adiabene'; and to speak briefly, Timothy was appointed catholicos and patriarch, and was proclaimed among the heads of the fathers" (vol. II, p. 383). After a few days, because Mar Maran-'ammeh, metropolitan of Arbela, had died, Timothy appointed and proclaimed Mar Isho-yabh to be bishop of the Church of Adiabene and metropolitan of all his countries.

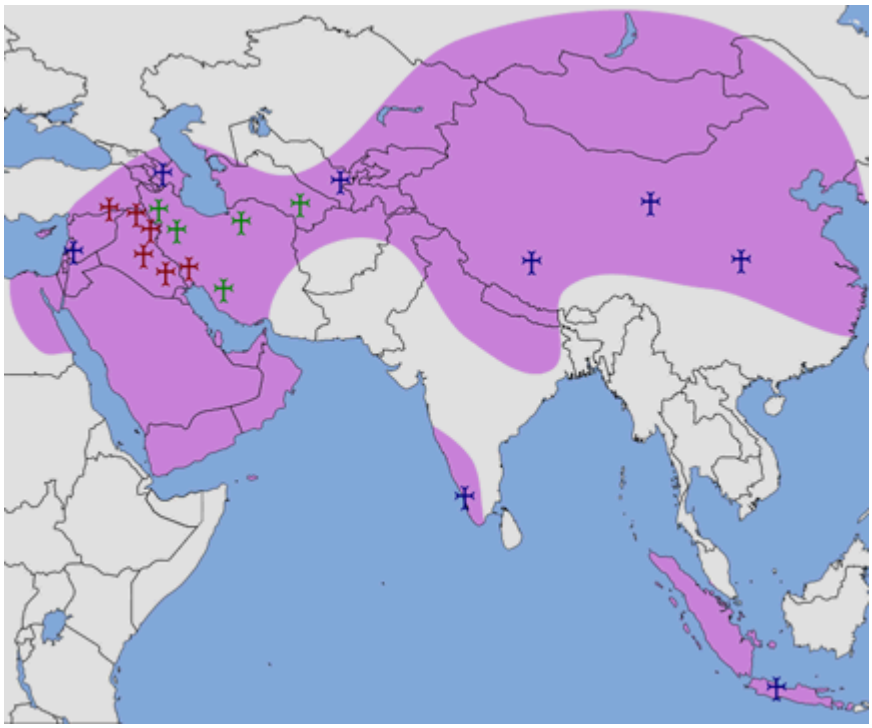
A fuller account of Timothy's succession, which further suggests that Timothy made fraudulent bribes, is given by Bar-Hebraeus in his ecclesiastical chronicles. (The account is reproduced in a footnote in the English version of the *Book of Governors*.) Bar-Hebraeus mentions that Isho bar-Non, Timothy's own successor, maintained a controversy with him during Timothy's time in office and played on his name (Timotheos), calling him "Talematheos" or "God-reviler."

Dr. William Wright, following the line of thought laid out in the *Book of Governors*, explains in his "A Short History of Syriac Literature" that Timothy got himself appointed catholicos through trickery and against much opposition about eight months after the death of Hanan-Ishu II when a formidable opponent elected by a separate Baghdad synod died suddenly. Even after Mar Timothy's succession, Wright says, opposition continued; other synods in Baghdad and in cities further east attempted at least twice to excommunicate Timothy.

Only the modern historian Robin Waterfield exonerates Catholicos Timothy, however slightly. He tells us: "Patriarch Timothy can be said to typify a Persian Church leader of his time. He was extremely worldly and not above giving or taking a bribe. Although he showed small signs of spirituality, he was zealous for the well-being and good name of the Church, which he administered very efficiently."

Supplement 6:

The Outreach of Timothy I

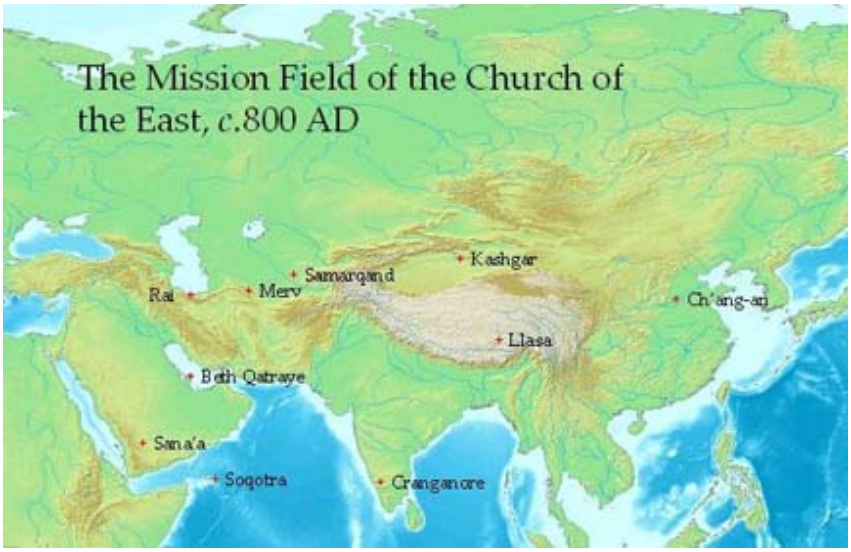


Map of Church of the East metropolitan provinces during the middle ages: red cross indicates Mesopotamia, green cross indicates Persia, blue cross indicates later espansions, violet cross indicates area of missionary activities. Artist: Rafy

This great outreach was made under Catholicos Timothy I by monks from the monastery at Beth Abhe. In 781, about the same time that the principality of Kashkar became Christian, Timothy wrote that “another Turkish ruler” had become Christian, and he mentions both the consecration of a bishop for Tibet and missionary journeys to India and China.

Supplement 7:

A Note on the Corruption of the Church of the East



Church of the East Exterior Provinces
Artist D.J. Wilms

As early as the latter part of the eighth century, there were reports of corruption in church matters; later, in the end, the elements of decay set in with disastrous consequences.

Mar Iazed-buzid, the Great Donor: Part 4D

Pleasures of the Tang Court by Zhang

Xuan

If we were to approach the life of I-ssu in a more subjunctive mood, is it possible to imagine that his life did not develop a pattern resonant with the court circles that fashioned it, a life like the life of all nobles, charmed with the symmetry of the solar year? Would we not have seen him among the throng, fashionably celebrating new weather on the day of Spring Festival, in the clear brightness after the equinox, when everyone went out walking in their best clothes and picnicked in the open air on some bend of the Crooked River in Chang-an Park, where many of gracious demeanor, men and women, with fine-grained skin and well-proportioned bones and flesh, gathered dazzling at the water's edge, their garments of embroidered silk gauze reflecting light in the sunset month of spring? When the grain rain fell and evening colored the sweet-scented season of the year, would he not have stood on the river belvedere and looked out on the forest flowers, wet with rain that added to their rouge, and on the golden lotuses, stretching their kingfisher girdles, lengthened by the wind? In summer's beginning, would he not have walked along the bends of the Serpentine Lake, past jostling scenes of lighthearted extravagance and lovely ladies whose lyres lay in brocade covers at their sides? On Tuan Wu Day, in the increasing heat of summer, when the emperor presented him with a cool grass cloth robe fashioned by palace women and monogrammed by the emperor's own hand, would he not have celebrated such an afternoon in a pavilion at the river head, sitting with friends and drinking cool wine, far above the Hibiscus Pleasure Grounds that adjoined Prosperous Felicity Palace? In autumn, would he not hunt with crossbow through empty suburbs, or with falcons through vast and grassy parks, rumbling and clattering in a fashionable cushioned carriage, and then come home to a banquet of boiled lamb? And when heat stopped and the equinox turned the dew white with cold, might he not have stopped once upon the city ramparts to watch the setting sun gather on the thick walls around him and seen the

ramparts within ramparts catch between them the evening fog? Then, after the frost's descent became winter's beginning, after slight snows and the solstice cold, when New Year's Eve let no one sleep, and candles shone bright in all the pavilions, why would I-ssu have allowed some shadow of trouble to darken the festivities then universal?

Every primary block of the city of Chang-an was enclosed by walls. Each of the small cities enclosed in these walls held small temples, workshops, and retail establishments. Inside each of these small cities, every residential and official building was also divided by walls. The design imitated the natural system, in which smaller worlds form larger worlds.

In this city, where firewood and food were more dear than pearls and gemstones, I-ssu grew older in public office, serving emperors in a decaying empire. During the time of intrigues at court, the border battles with Khitan rebels in the east, and later, the battles with Tibetans in the west, he waited to retire to monastic life, (*See* Supplement 8) many

years before the reign of Te-tsung. (*See* Supplement 9) In this restless space of time, I-ssu's life held two moments of rejoicing: the first, his marriage, solemnized by the cup, the ring, the cross, and the coronation in colors; the second, the birth of his son. If, on this occasion, I-ssu had already been ordained, the hands of the priest who washed his son at birth, and the prayers that blessed the water, were his own; and again, on the day of the nearest great feast, he would have baptized his son once more, this time elaborately, with the threefold immersion and, with the child facing east, a total anointing with holy oil.

I-ssu did not fight beside the Duke Kuo Tzu-i at his pale victory in Loyang, when it seemed the rebel forces would gain mastery; (*See* Supplement 10) nor was he present at the final scene of the rebels' demoralization. I-ssu did not fight when the Tibetans rose up to take the capital and the emperor fled to Honan; nor did he accompany Kuo Tzu-i on his campaign in 764, when the general emerged from semiretirement to recover Chang-an from the Tibetans after the *hui ho* joined in the rebellion; (*See* Supplement 11) nor when the Tibetans retreated and the *hui ho* left the country; nor later, when the Tibetans resumed their attacks nearly every autumn, and state bureaucracy grew like the trunk of a palm tree.

When I-ssu retired from government service, he received two imperial gifts. The gold-embroidered carpet, according to precedents recorded in official annals, was an award which the empire reserved to military officers upon their retirement from imperial work, somewhat as in our time the United States government rewards the golden years of service of its retiring officers with the Meritorious Service Award or Legion of Merit. The white pearl (*po-li*) (*See* Supplement 12) was a ritual gift. (The symbolism of both the crystal and the carpet might have come from Central Asia.) According to the Chinese *Book of Rites*, the primary authority on ceremonial observances for centuries, an imperial gift conferred symbolic approval or

encouragement to action: When bow and arrows were conferred on a prince, he could proceed to execute the royal justice. When the hatchet and battle-axe were conferred, he could proceed to inflict death. When the libation cup was conferred, he could make spirits for himself; when this cup was not conferred, he had to depend for these spirits as a gift from the Son of Heaven (Li Chi, Royal Regulations 2:19) Thus, it seems that, with the crystal that I-ssu received from the emperor, he received also the emperor's consent to pursue the active principle of virtue.

< PART 5A: IN THE LIGHT OF THE SETTING SUN >

SUPPLEMENTS

Supplement 8:
Administrative Chastity

The Chinese describe inviolate administrative honor as the "great chastity." It is characteristic of the Tang administrative system that a man who disagreed with some matter of policy that he considered vital would voluntarily retire, often becoming a hermit. Scholars who felt that administrative conditions were such that they could not participate in government and yet preserve their honor would retire and say, "I will not allow my white coat to be splashed with black." It is possible that I-ssu left government service under such a condition.

Supplement 9:
Te-tsung

Emperor Te-tsung (Dezong)

Te-tsung is the emperor who sat on the Dragon Throne at the time the Monument was raised.

Supplement 10:
The Illness and Death of Su-tsung

Emperor Tai-tsung (Daizong)

Within two years after recalling General Kuo Tzu-i, Emperor Su-tsung fell ill. The emperor's son, Li Yu, was appointed heir apparent, and the intrepid, jealous, tenacious Lady Chang was appointed empress. To carry out her duties, Lady Chang used the chief eunuch, Li Fu-ku, who overly influenced the ailing emperor. For those two years, the war continued without the guidance of Kuo Tzu-i, until the new emperor, Tai-tsung, returned the duke to his northern command.

Su-tsung died in May, within a fortnight of the death of his father, Hsuan-tsung. Both died tragically: Hsuan-tsung in the virtual imprisonment imposed on him by the Goneril-like behavior of his son; Su-tsung, abandoned on his sickbed while a war to the death was being waged between his hateful empress and his still more hateful chief eunuch, Li Fu-kuo. When the powerful Li Fu-kuo tried to rule over the new emperor, Tai-tsung, as he had over Tai-tsung's father, Tai-tsung sent a body of soldiers suddenly to his residence to put him to death.

Supplement 11:
The Leader Kuo Tzu-i

Kuo Tzu-I receiving homage of Uighurs
Detail of Song Dynasty painting

The story is told that the Uighur tribes, on the verge of revolt, were pacified when they saw Duke Kuo Tzu-i approach on horseback; they all smiled and lay down heir arms at his feet and went over to him again.

Supplement 12:
White Pearl

Sample sphatik
Shiva lingam

“Crystal,” or as Professor Saeki suggests, “white pearl” or “water crystal,” from the Chinese transcription of the Sanskrit word *sphatika*.

Mar Iazed-buzid, the Great Donor: Part 4C

Palace Examination (detail)
Song Dynasty painting

* * * * * * *

The Inscription is emphatic that I-ssu received his high appointment *by examination*. Such a citation indicates that I-ssu was a man of great ability and personal merit. It distinguishes him even further. As a native son of the Northwest, he had sprung from a later generation of the same wild Turkic stock as the mixed breed northern aristocrats who continued to be prominent in the Tang elite. The men of this breed, of the same Sino-Turkic bloodline as the emperors themselves, were hard-drinking, hard-riding fighting men, who hunted with falcons on their country estates and whose women played polo. But in contrast to this race of hardy roisterers, among whom merit meant good breeding alone, I-ssu exhibited as

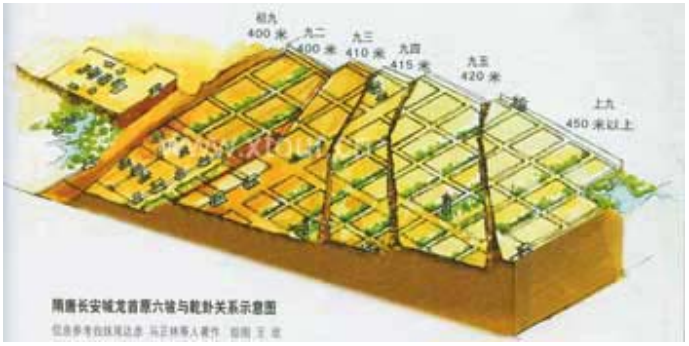
well the strong intellectual and cultural qualities that were the hereditary claims of the sons of Han, the scholarly officials who had descended from the old southern dynasties.

Kuo Tzu-i Anonymous portrait

If the procedure of I-ssu's appointment followed the custom of the age, Duke Kuo Tzu-i, I-ssu's previous superior, had recommended I-ssu as a worthy and talented man to the emperor for direct appointment. Then, in a palace examination, which was regarded as highly as the highest metropolitan examination, I-ssu presented himself. For this high office, I-ssu stood not before a steward of the Ministry of Personnel but before the emperor himself. To show that his learning and his art did not extend carelessly in all directions but was coiled and interwoven, I-ssu appeared for one day before his examiner – the emperor himself – who tested his calligraphy and his ability to compose solutions to practical administrative problems, (*See* Supplement 4) and who judged I-ssu's personal appearance and manner of speaking and checked his dossier for evidence of virtuous conduct, talent, and

zeal. (*See* Supplement 5) Once found acceptable, and exempted by the prestige of his rank from the indignity of three-year review, I-ssu would then have been asked to indicate his preference for appointment from the expected vacancies suitable to his rank and, with the emperor's approval, to assume his new position. It seems to me an irony of I-ssu's religious mission that the last step of his recruitment into government service – the formal pronouncement of his appointment, when he, as an appointee, expressed his thanks in imperial audience before taking up his assigned duties – would have required him to commit the incongruous act of prostrating himself before the emperor and, striking his head upon the ground nine times, to utter respectful words; this, in the same audience hall where his predecessor, A-lo-pen, on his mission to notify the empire of the liberation promised through practice of the Luminous Teaching, had stood.

When the emperor bestowed on I-ssu a new gold seal, dangled from a purple sash, I-ssu fulfilled in himself the Tang ideal. In a military establishment that consisted of citizen-soldiers, he had fought; in the bureaucracy of learned men, who shared a common educational background and a commitment to Confucian principles of government, (*See* Supplement 6) he had taken office. In this imperial community, the emperor was considered the father and mother of the people, and all officials were expected to share his responsibility. The emperor provided a link of communication between this world and the Ruler of the Universe. It was I-ssu's sacred duty to cultivate his natural talents in the hope that he might provide a worthy channel of intercourse between the emperor and the People of the One Hundred Surnames – a service unblemished by thought of self – to serve, to advise, and to regenerate, if renovation was necessary. Following his appointment, I-ssu would have lived the only way of life considered worthy for a man of intellectual ability.



The site of Chang-an had a gentle downward slope from southwest to northwest and, according to geographical altitude, could be divided into six levels. It is said that, following calculations using the I Ching, the order of each of the six areas was ascertained, then the function of each area was decided by the virtue reflected from each. The noblest area was planned for Buddhist and Taoist temples. The second level was planned as the Palace City, a huge courtyard with all the residences and offices of the emperor. The third level was planned as the Royal City, a huge courtyard that included the office space for all governmental officials. The fourth level was planned for two marketplaces. The sixth level was designated to be a royal park. All other areas were residential. The locations of the great temples and markets were convenient for all residents. The Royal City was just south of the Palace City, so officials could

> deliver files to emperors quickly without disturbing the life of ordinary civilians. And everyone had the right and opportunity to enjoy the beautiful urban and natural scenery from the high tower in the park. All the numbers of the blocks and the numbers on the gates in the city were determined by astronomy and the lunar calendar. The entire city was considered a model of the universe.

The emperor – The Above One, The Lord Above, The Lone Man (all terms for the emperor, whose name was never spoken) – lived in the north quarter of the palace enclosure and always sat facing south. One vast quadrangle of the Imperial City was placed to the left of the emperor's seat; the other was placed to the emperor's right. The left government building – with willows by its side and with banners and ceremonial weapons crowded together before it, level as a field of ripe grain – housed the Department of the Left, the Imperial Chancellery. It was this departmental building which I-ssu entered through the Green (east) Gate to serve as a civil officer. Military men occupied the right government building, the less honorable position, to the west.

Master plan of Chang-an in the Tang Dynasty. Purple indicates the Palace City. Dark Blue indicates the Royal City. Green indicates markets. Light blue indicates the lake in the royal park.

No one outside the immediate entourage of the ruler—that is, the palace ladies and eunuchs—slept within the Forbidden City. Robed ministers like I-ssu ascended terraces to their storied houses in guarded places and entered their homes through mansion gateways, halberds waving before their noble gate, by their number telling their rank, and with statues in their yards. By day, I-ssu’s carriage awning and cap of office was one of those that filled the capital; in the evening, he came home to rooms scented with aloeswood, at leisure to inspect his pointed turban at the screen or to sup on fragrant meats by the pool.

Tang era architecture

Of the three titles given to I-ssu in the Inscription, the first, Grand Master of the Palace with Golden Seal and Purple Ribbon (*Chin-tzu kuang-lu tai fu*), a prestige title, assigned I-ssu his status in the capital. (In formal documents, such as the Inscription, this title always took precedence over nominal offices.) As an indication of his rank – the upper class of the third rank in a ranking system of nine degrees – this title afforded him the visible privilege of wearing the golden fish from his waist chain and a certain emolument from the state. For I-ssu, this award would have been an annual stipend of some thousands of bushels, paid to him partly in grain and partly in equivalents of silk or cash. The second title, Associate Military Vice Commissioner (*Tung chieh tu fu shih*) of the Northern Region, identified I-ssu as an officer actively engaged in imperial service. The third title, Director of the Palace Administration (*Tien-chung-chien*) by examination, indicated a duty assignment and his responsibility at the capital. Serving at this appointment, I-ssu, together with a senior do-director of the same rank and a four-man directory staff, regulated the activities of the non-eunuch central government agency, responsible to the Central Office of the Secretariat-Chancellery for provisioning all those within the palace walls through the Six Services. (*See* Supplement 7)

Performance at Imperial Court Tang Dynasty painting

< PART 4D: COURT CIRCLES >

SUPPLEMENTS

Supplement 4:
The Confucian Test of Knowledge

Tang Dynasty drawing of Confucius by Wu Daozi

Confucius once remarked that if one corner of a subject were revealed to a man and he did not understand the whole, he was not worth teaching.

Supplement 5:
The Dossier of Genealogy

Birthday reception for Duke Kuo Tzu-i Qing Dynasty porcelain vase

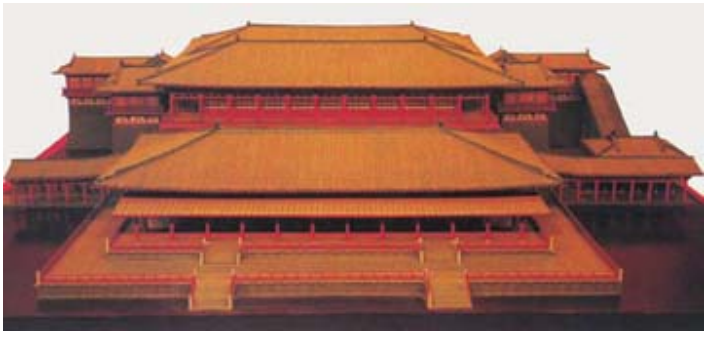
The Chinese, in judging a man, think it is of vital importance to look back at least three generations to examine what the education of the family has been.

Supplement 6:
A Bureaucracy of Learned Men

Tang officials
Artist unknown

There was no other social or economic basis for integrated nationhood. Regional differences were minimized by the rise of this elite class of officials who were recruited nationwide and used their folk heritage as a reservoir from which to constantly renew themselves. Even when linguistic differences made oral communication impossible, educated Chinese everywhere wrote the same characters.

Supplement 7:
The Six Services



Daming Palace, royal residence of the Tang emperors in Chang-an
Unknown artist's conception

Each of the Six Services, supervised by a pair of chief

stewards and several foremen, performed a specific art of functional necessity. One provided the emperor his sedan-chair service with a staff of fifteen unranked bearers, two chief stewards, two foremen, and four unranked supervisors stationed at both the Office and the Court of the Imperial Mausoleum. Another supplied Taoist prescriptions of medicinal herbs and medical supplies. For imperial personnel, the Livery Service managed the use of horses, including those maintained in the Six Stables and the Six Corrals. A fourth service had charge of the emperor's personal quarters in the imperial palace, preparing his baths, making special accommodations for great ceremonial occasions, and providing the tents and other accommodations the emperor required while he traveled away from the capital. The Clothing Service provided and maintained the clothing and accoutrements for the emperor's public appearances, and always involved eunuchs to some extent. This service prepared the emperor's Dragon Robes each day for the morning levee of the imperial court, held before dawn in Southern Fragrance Hall, and court dress when the emperor held audience with councillors, court officials, or envoys of redemption, like Rabban A-lo-pen, who a century before had come to found the mission which I-ssu now, in his own way, continued. The Food Service supplied necessities for the imperial table (including the eight delicacies on which the emperor was supposed to dine: bear's claw, deer's tail, duck's tongue, turbot roe, camel's hump, carp's tail, ox marrow, and gibbon's lips), and often cooperated with central government agencies such as the Court of Imperial Entertainments, eunuchs, and palace women to set out the imperial banquets, banquets that were the scenes of poetry, where groups of educated southern guests, the indigenous beautiful people of the Central Flowery Kingdom, turned their emotional life into verse composed on the occasion, often to a specified rhyme. The stewards of the service were responsible, among other things, for preliminary tasting of the food served at the imperial table, and set the table with chopsticks of rhinoceros horn, a material used as a poison detector and

known for its aphrodisiac and magical properties. The meat carvers, with tiny bells on their knives, executed a kind of ballet as they carved, their green firebird knives cutting the food into strands fine as silk cords. The guests drank wine and delighted in the season’s vegetables, in delicious frosted pears, and in bitter dates and cold melons. Educated and talented courtesans, the “evening orioles” – powdered beauties in glistening sendal robes, with fashionable long, slender eyebrows, the green-black “willow leaves,” brushed close to their eyes, and with hair that black clouds had taught how to pile – served as official hostesses and offered clever entertainment. On holidays, outings were exhibitions of high living where courtly women with delicate complexions and haughty manners sat in gardens with princess thoughts, eating and wasting the rich and expensive food that the Service provided for their conspicuous consumption. Their precious courses were sent to them in succession on flying steeds: badger’s paws and turtle soup, purple camel hump peeking out from the kingfisher cauldron, rows of shining white fish lying on crystal platters clear as water. Palace eunuchs, their mounted couriers, galloped up to the throngs of guests bearing these additions to the feast from the imperial kitchen.

Mar Iazed-buzid, the Great Donor: Part 4B

Testers for imperial examinations. Song Dynasty painting

*

The Inscription is emphatic that I-ssu received his high appointment *by examination*. This phrase leaves open two possible paths toward his life's conclusion **(G** and **H)**, and leaves me uncertain about which path he followed. My uncertainty derives from the two possible interpretations, in Tang usage, of the single word *shih*, which preceded his title as Director of Palace Administration.

(G)

Taken to mean "probationary," *shih* refers to the status of a newly appointed official during his first year of service at an appointment, a dubious honor to be recorded in stone if I-ssu did not ultimately make the grade. Following this interpretation, the word suggests that I-ssu led a short courtly life and held his high administrative position for only one year in attendance to either Emperor Hsuan-tsung or Su-tsung. Here possibility bifurcates again. In one possible version of the story **(G_1)**, I-ssu leaves Balkh as a candidate for examination under Hsuan-tsung as a provincial, but so worthy that he is appointed primarily on his intellectual

merit above thousands of other worthies; he serves the traditional probationary period of one year; during the invasion of 755, he flees the city and follows the Emperor to Ma-wei; there I-ssu joins the army of the heir apparent, who becomes Su-tsung, and is appointed to be a general because of his high standing; he makes war on the rebels; then I-ssu either returns to Chang-an when Kuo Tzu-i is recalled in 760 or else he continues on in a military career until his retirement a few years later. In the second possible version of the story **(G_2)**, I-ssu establishes a military career under Su-tsung at Ling-wu first; he spends a probationary year at his high post under Emperor Su-tsung sometime between 760–763 (that is to say, before Su-tsung's death and before Su-tsung's son, the new heir apparent, overturns the authority of both his empress mother and her chief eunuch, Li Fu-kuo); later, I-ssu retires, or for some reason he is dismissed from his office.

(H)

If we take the prefix *shih* to mean "by examination," we are not required to imagine that I-ssu possessed the almost fantastic ability needed for a candidate from a dreary northern province to move directly into high-level palace work; nor are we required to accept the unlikelihood that a man so gifted would enter a high-level military career before he served at some other post first nor that he would then take an early retirement to live numerous years in nonfunctional obscurity.

Here a third possible story presents itself **(H_1)**: I-ssu wins his position as administrator in the final year of Hsuan-tsung's reign by the usual means of candidacy and examination; while he serves his probationary year (*shih*), the rebellion breaks out; as a close associate of the emperor, and responsible for the transportation and accommodations of the emperor while he traveled, I-ssu follows the emperor's

entourage and guard to Ma-wei; there he witnesses the political assassination of the emperor's consort; I-ssu travels with the emperor's son to Ling-wu, where he receives his military commission under the new Emperor, Su-tsung. This third version of the story clearly embodies one sense of the military title attributed to I-ssu in the Inscription, where he is referred to as an *associate* military vice commander. The prefix *associate* (*tung*), when it does not indicate a shared authority, indicates that the holder of the title is temporarily serving his assignment at the same time that he holds another, usually higher, title. This third version also accounts for the immediacy with which I-ssu's retirement is brought up in the Inscription. A fourth possible version **(H_2)** begins like the third, but includes long years of government service before I-ssu's retirement to the monastery.

The characters or selves which I-ssu plays in his public life are the same in all four versions of the story: bishop, warrior, high government official. Only the sequence and duration of these roles change. In one story, I-ssu wins a high position by great personal ability and learning according to the rite of imperial candidacy and examination; he lives the life of a noble for less than a year and the life of a warrior for four years; he retires early from government service, perhaps disillusioned, but with imperial gratitude for his service; he continues his existence for many years in a monastery temple. In the second version, I-ssu arrives as a learned but provincial monk; he serves a short time in palace service; during the rebellion, he wins enough renown as a military leader to recommend him later to high imperial office; he serves in that office for many years; later, he retires with gifts of imperial gratitude. The third and fourth stories share the thematic elements of the first and second versions. All four stories are possible. Only one is true. Without the gratuitous invention of extraordinary personal circumstances, only one accounts for I-ssu's lasting wealth, his quick rise to high station, and the show of imperial

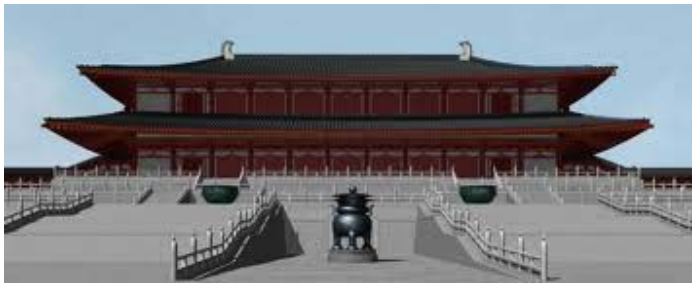
gratitude. The argument and plot of this story, more lively and more likely than the others, is the one followed in this narrative.

< PART 4C: COURT CIRCLES >

Mar Iazed-buzid, the Great Donor: Part 4A

PART 4: COURT CIRCLES

. . . Grand Master of the Palace with Golden Seal and Purple Ribbon,
Associate Military Vice Commissioner of the Northern Region,
Director of the Palace Administration by examination . . .



Tang Dynasty Imperial Palace: "The Red Court" Artist's conception

The final lines of the Inscription substantiate I-ssu’s illustrious existence in Chang-an imperial circles, but only the words of historians and chroniclers can substantiate the existence of those circles, and only the words of poets can substantiate their diminishing splendor. These I have read, not only to discover what is immediately apparent but also to draw out from their words (the only material I have to work with) the typical figures that will appear in this narrative. I have made no attempt to place them into I-ssu’s personal life, where his relationships can be only a matter of conjecture, but into those nodal zones that still can be remembered, where life merges with custom, institutions, and law; that is to say, his public life. Although there was some risk of getting lost in such a project, I have attempted to yield as much specific detail as possible.

"Traveling in Spring" Tang Dynasty painting by Zhan Kigian

Rivers and mountains survive broken countries. In spring, four months after the new emperor’s return, the city grew lush again. Su-tsung insisted that possession of the palace signified restoration; defeat of the insurgents, he believed, was only a matter of time. On the fifth day of the second moon of the third revolution of Chih Te (759), while Kuo Tzu-i, and perhaps I-ssu with him, were awaiting their orders anxiously at Hsian-wei, Emperor Su-tsung changed the period name to Heavenly Origin (Chien Yuan), abandoned the term “revolution,” which his father had instated, and reintroduced the term “year”; and the ancestral temple burned down by An Lu-shan he restored. Five months later, Su-tsung sent off his fourteen-year-old daughter to become the bride of the *hui ho* qaghan to cement the alliance of their peoples. In the city, the people already looked down upon those whom they had praised as heroes only months before. Proverbially among the sons of Han, when an educated person visited the home of a lowly person, he was said to “brighten the room.” Now the educated southerners said the palace was “darkened” with the comings and goings of the sons of the Northern Regions, the *hui ho*, whose arrogance reached to the skies, who gashed their faces as an earnest of sincerity (and who smelled because they wrapped themselves in

furs and gorged themselves with flesh food), who were overbearing to the last degree, and who, on top of everything, recently revived their custom of dashing across the frontier to seize the harvests of the sons of Han in high autumn when their barbarian horses were sleek and fat.

Uighur princesses Wall painting from Bezeklik caves

Uighur princes in robes and headress Wall painting from Bezeklik caves

Perhaps on one of those days after the emperor had recalled the war hero Kuo Tzu-i to sit at court in the capital, where he might be watched and not influence the events taking place on the frontier, the valiant-hearted duke rode out of the gates of the capital to weep alone by funereal trees. For him the rebellion in the north had stained the blue sky. His Dragon Sword cried out, yet he was left there idle to shake his sleeves and stroke his cross guard. Kuo Tzu-i knew that the maze of women's gates and eunuch pavilions (*See* Supplement 1) around the jade towers of the Vermillion City prevented him from explaining to the emperor the gravity of the situation. On this day the visible symbol of the duke's high rank, the golden fish he wore on a chain from his waist, swung slowly to the gait of his horses, while the eunuch commanders, the powdered-lady generals, were riding under the fiery banners. He knew the iron horsemen of the Northeast could smell from afar the ornate arrows in their perfumed quivers when they called for their own metal lances; on the frontier, thoroughbreds were eating cold weeds, while the useless nags he saw row on row in the high-beamed palace stables were stuffing themselves on green grass and drinking white water.

Just as it is not certain whether I-ssu **(C)** had continued on to the East with Kuo Tzu-i in the autumn of 757, after the capital had been restored to Tang, neither is it certain whether I-ssu returned in 760 with the pacified commander or at some earlier or later date. But it is certain that when the

Court returned to Chang-an, from that time forward, the physical facilities, personnel, and supply of the forbidden districts of the palace were entirely in the hands of eunuchs, and in these surroundings I-ssu learned the Confucian honor of service.

The phrasing of the Inscription, in combination with my ignorance of exact Tang usage, leaves me uncertain about I-ssu's life during the next several years. However, the phrasing leads me to believe that I-ssu **(E)** received his official honors and awards from Su-tsung, who reigned for only three years after the Tang restoration of the capital, until 763, and not **(F)** from Su-tsung's successor and son, Tai-tsung. The time frame of the events mentioned in the Inscription is vague. (Perhaps the vagueness is intentional, to avoid the embarrassment of mentioning I-ssu's many years of diligent but uninspiring government service. Delicacy requires that timeless official inscriptions praise only the extraordinary.) The Inscription's narrative sequence of events, as much by what it says as by what it does not, suggests Emperor Su-tsung's high favor of I-ssu and the likelihood that I-ssu led the common life of an imperial noble for many years before he retired to monastic life.

Buddhist Diamond Sutra Tang Dynasty print

(E)

By the time I-ssu appeared in court circles to offer himself for government service, the shocks of repeated rebellion had begun to crack open the Tang social order, and powerful popular forces were already rushing in. The egalitarian traditions of the nomadic Eastern invaders had wedged in and countered the vigorous efforts of the northern aristocracy, the settled descendants of invaders from an earlier dynasty, to expand their political control. The emphatic compassion of the people was beginning to wash away the ruling sentiments that had marked them for ill treatment for centuries. The people, whose influence rose as the influence of their religion rose, now accepted gratefully the Buddhist offering of a secure and respectable status outside the established hierarchy, and in such great numbers that decades later the government would restrict the growth of religious establishments. The civil service, by weakening the rigid shell of the traditional titled class through procedures of social engineering, allowed a fresh new respect for individual human dignity to emerge and ultimately to become the prominent characteristic of the age. Even Buddhist monasteries, through their social welfare program, educated promising young men in the Confucian classics so they might compete in the civil service examinations.

In this heartbreaking and melancholic age, a man of value who wished to dedicate himself to government service had only two paths open to him. Following one, a man became a candidate for years, seeking recruitment through a series of recommendations and examinations in a long and symbolical ritual of state. (*See* Supplement 2) I-ssu, like the ancestors of the northern elite who had founded the dynasty of Tang, took the other path: He rose swiftly through the ranks of military service to a generalship by his personal powers alone, (*See* Supplement 3) and when he entered civil service, the prestige of his rank transferred with him.

< PART 4B: COURT CIRCLES >

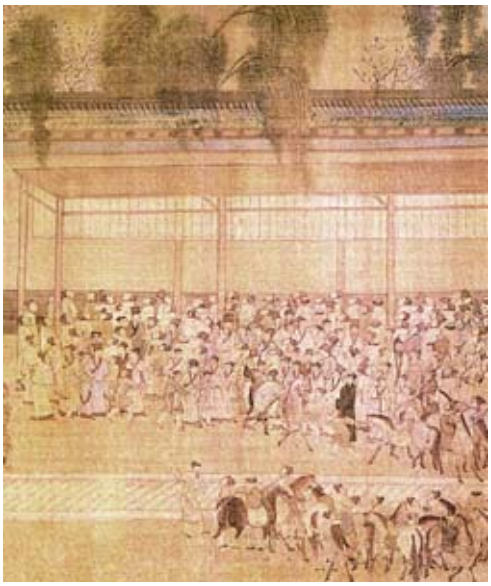
SUPPLEMENTS

Supplement 1:
The Rising Status of Li Fu-kuo

Empress Chang (Zhang)

At Ling-wu, money had been scarce; to pay the troops, the new government resorted to the fatal method of *mai kuan*, selling official ranks. To the great annoyance of the ministers, men of rank then mingled with undersecretaries, and eunuchs appeared in positions where no eunuchs should have been. At Ling-wu Emperor Su-tsung had recognized the talents of the eunuch Li Fu-kuo by making him chief administrator of the armies on campaign. Now Li Fu-kuo busied himself in affairs of state. By the time the imperial armies reached Feng-Hsiang, Lady Chang ruled the emperor, and the eunuch Li Fu-kuo had grown arrogant. When Li Fu-kuo assumed the duties of secretarial chief of staff in the palace at Chang-an, his personal status rose even higher.

Supplement 2:
The Ritual of Government Recruitment



Scholars wait for results of civil service exam. Handscroll attributed to Qiu Ling (c. 1530)

The ritual begins with a recommendation given by the official of the candidate's district and success on the district and provincial exams, continues with the recommendation of the prefect of his province and acceptance for study in the national university, and ends with the completion of one of the metropolitan degree examinations held each autumn at the capital. The highest degree was given for literary talent, the next for classical scholarship or one of the other less-esteemed degrees in law, calligraphy, or mathematics. Success in one of these selection examinations assigned a man an official status and a rank through the government's Ministry of Rites and qualified him for appointment through the government's Ministry of Personnel but guaranteed him nothing.

Far more men prepared for examinations than passed, and far more became qualified than were ever employed. One in ten gained a government post; the others languished in the large pool of unemployed inside the capital, from which a few were drawn out now and then to be used in education or administration at the local level. A candidate might spend twenty years or more reaching the selection examination. Half of those who succeeded were already gray-haired men.

Supplement 3:
Rising Through the Ranks of Military Service

The poet Tu Fu. Anonymous artist's conception.

The renowned poet Tu Fu, whose talents had been rewarded by the government with tedious posts and a minor rank, observed that, whereas study and the arts of peace should bring the most highly coveted awards, under the condition of strife, the ambitions of men are best realized by military success.

Mar Iazed-buzid, the Great Donor: Part 3C

Portrait of Duke Kuo Tzu-i.
Unknown artist

Chang-an fell quickly. Problems arose when the spoils of the city promised to the *hui ho* were denied them. They were asked to continue on with the regular army to Lo-yang. The *hui ho* qaghan publicly embarrassed the Heir Apparent. In response, the Heir Apparent bribed him handsomely with the spoils of the eastern capital to soothe his feelings. (Here I-ssu might have somehow affected the negotiations, since he acted with them as lieutenant general.)

Three days after the invasion, the loyal troops were on the march toward the eastern capital. On their way out, the army defeated the rebels at what is now Shen-chou; their corpses

spread out over thirty *li*. One hundred thousand heads were collected. During the tenth moon, the imperial armies entered the eastern capital of Lo-yang and took it. Two Chinese divisions, one commanded by Kuo Tzu-i and the other by Li Kuang-pi, struck a frontal attack; the third, made of the *hui ho,* led by their qaghan, and perhaps assisted by I-ssu, took a roundabout route to surprise the rebels in the rear. The rebel army, led by An Lu-shan's son (and assassin), came out of the city against Kuo Tzu-i, and did well until the arrows of the *hui ho* fell on them from the rear and the *hui ho* themselves, with savage faces and loud, discordant cries, came at them on the run and panicked them, scaring them off. The *hui ho* were again dissatisfied. They had consented to the booty of Lo-yang instead of Chang-an, but too many who knew the hiding places as well as they had gone before them. Shu, the Heir Apparent, paid them off with one hundred thousand rolls of silk and sent them away with Kuo Tzu-i and I-ssu to battle at Chu-wo.

As he had promised, Su-tsung left Feng-hsiang for the capital on the nineteenth day of the tenth moon and entered the city on the twenty-third day. It is said that when the Emperor returned, great banners rejoiced, hanging rainbow clouds and fluttering phoenix tails, and drums rolled, thunder falling to earth, and for a thousand *li* the earth displayed no smoke from warning beacons to frighten the people. A few days later, the *hui ho* chief and his men returned from the east on their way back to the steppes. A feast of farewell was prepared for them in the Diffuse Government Hall, and gifts were promised.

Our ignorance of the details of I-ssu's life here again produces two possible courses of action for him. After the victory at Lo-yang, he might have either **(D)** returned to the western capital at Chang-an with the *hui ho* and accompanied the Emperor in the festivities, or **(C)** remained with Kuo Tzu-i at the eastern capital at Lo-yang.

(C)

If I-ssu remained with Kuo Tzu-i, these were his circumstances:

From the sixth moon of the first year of Chien-yuan to the seventh moon of the second year, the imperial army assembled in the east under order to wipe out the remainder of the hydra-headed rebel forces. Kuo Tzu-i was appointed, with eight others, to go east. (On the suggestion of a favored eunuch, Su-tsung divided power among the nine leaders in order to keep any one man from becoming too powerful.) At the head of two hundred thousand infantry and cavalry, the nine leaders were sent to assault the main rebel forces in the northern prefecture of Hsian-wei. The patricide son of An Lu-shan, who had come out of Lo-yang against them the year before, had fled there to the city of Yeh.

On the day before the battle, Kuo Tzu-i laid out his formations with three thousand skilled *hui ho* archers concealed inside a rampart. The next day, on approaching the progressive battle, Kuo Tzu-i signaled his lieutenant to feign flight. When the rebels pursued the retreating wing, the *hui ho* archers, who lay in hiding, simultaneously let arrows fly from their bows and transfixed their targets. The rebel forces collapsed. General Kuo ordered his forces to envelop the city and make firm their envelopment by building three rings of dirt walls and moats, with watchtowers. Then he brought in water to pour beneath the city walls and made the water level rise and fill the city wells to overflowing. In time, the people within the city began eating one another. A peck of rice brought over seventy thousand in cash. A single rat was valued at several thousand.

After five months, Shih Ssu-ming’s horde came to the aid of the patricide Ching-hsu. They fought the imperial army at their encampment and forced Kuo Tzu-i to retreat. (*See* Supplement 5) The defeated imperial army raised the siege and fled south. Kuo held his men together, retired across the Yellow River, and severed the Honan Bridge behind him to

defend Ku River. By the twelfth moon of 759, Kuo Tzu-i was headquartered in Lo-yang, the Eastern Capital. The Empire's one large offensive maneuver, led by Kuo Tzu-i, had been an utter fiasco.

Prospects for winning the war diminished as time passed. (*See* Supplement 6) Early in 756, Kuo Tzu-i's first northern command came to an end. After the attack of Shih Ssu-ming, and the disaster of a terrible storm, obliged Kuo Tzu-i to raise the siege at Yen-cheng and retire to Lo-yang, the Emperor replaced Kuo Tzu-i. (*See* Supplement 7) Now their was no unity of command. The spite of a eunuch, one of the imperious government of eunuchs that Su-tsung's reign had inadvertently created, relieved General Kuo of his duty at the most critical time in the nation's history, when it seemed that the Dynasty of Tang would give way to the new Dynasty of Yen.

< PART 4A: COURT CIRCLES >

SUPPLEMENTS

Supplement 5:
The Payment of Ssu-ming

Three days later, the patricide Ching-hsu made a grateful visit to Ssu-ming. Ssu-ming repaid him by strangling him and his four brothers, then withdrew his forces to Fan-yang and assumed the throne of the Greater Yen Dynasty himself.

Supplement 6:
A Debilitating Government Strategy

The straightforward command structure established at Ling-wu had fallen apart as danger lessened. The generals did not follow orders from the Emperor’s son, who was an ineffective commander in chief, nor did they cooperate with one another. The government could not inspire them, and hard cash was getting scarce. The Court could not force their soldiers to be brave and resourceful, and civil officials became actively involved in military affairs. Influential eunuchs made matters worse. After 759 government strategy was confined to a static, debilitating defense.

Supplement 7:
A Note on the Death of Ssu-ming

Later that year rebels again took Lo-yang, and Shih Ssu-ming was killed by his own son with circumstances and excuses remarkably similar to those of the first patricide.

Mar Iazed-buzid, the Great Donor: Part 3B

Chinese regulars. Detail from a Song Dynasty painting.

Early in the tenth moon of 756, before the bitter northwest wind of winter rose up form the Gobi, an imperial army rose up with orders from the Emperor to retake the capital; at Chen-tao Marsh, a site just west of Chang-an, the conventional forces of the imperial army under the command of Fang Kuan suffered disastrous defeat. Sometime later, news of the battle reached I-ssu at headquarters: the leader had imitated the ancient war methods but without “the moment appointed by heaven.” His two thousand ox carts had been flanked by cavalry and infantry, and his chariots had given battle. But the rebels had let fly fire and burned the carts; the men and oxen were thrown into disorder. It was said that drums and bugles at first rang out their violence, cutting the heart; then, above the clash and cries of battle sounded weeping and wailing, the bitter cries of thousands of households and many fresh spirits of the dead; then a crystal sky, a panoramic waste; no dust, no sound of battle; forty thousand dead in a day. Grasslands and forests reeked with war dead. Homes in all ten prefectures had dead sons in armor, mixing water with their blood in the pools of Chen-tao Marsh.

In the capital, swarms of dusty *hu* battalions had returned to the city, their arrows washed in blood. After six months, they were still drinking the deep draughts of victory; drunk in the

markets, they shouted *hu* songs. The citizens, in autumn grief, turned their faces north to mourn; the days, which they had spent conjuring their army's presence, passed into hopeful nights; when they faced the dawn breaking, they faced dust and sand.

In the wintry twelfth moon at the opening of the year, Su-tsung moved from the center of Asia southward to Chang-an. Now, when the face of all northern China became restless and excitable, ruffled by the Gobi winds, rising high and taking to the air in dust storms that filled the world with the darkness of midnight at midday, the Dragon armies moved across the great yellow desert with the black breath of killing. On the hills was snow; on the rivers, ice. Horses drank from holes in mountains.

Following the path of the driven silt, I-ssu moved through walled-off frontier towns with the wind and the Dragon Emperor, namesake of the fabulous animal that controlled the elements. During the first moon of 757, Su-tsung and his army reached the town of Chi. By the second moon, they had reached Feng-hsiang. There the Emperor held council to discuss methods for the speedy recovery of the two capitals.

In spring, emotions fit the season. At Chang-an, flowers brought a rush of tears. From the western mountains, teeming waters streamed on the armied hills. Beacon fires, the feathery signals of armies, overflowed the earth, burning incessantly, their black smoke rising high. The imperial standards, the Kingfisher Glory, massed near the Western Peak. Horns of battle wailed through the mountains and down streams; determined battle cries rang out anew; while in the city, far away, the people moaned. Then news arrived of An Lu-shan's death. The rebel leader had disappeared from the scene in the first moon when his eunuch – made so with a sword by An Lu-shan himself – pierced the corpulent abdomen of his master while he, already blinded and corrupted by disease, lay in bed, the victim of a plot constructed by his son to succeed

him in the new dynasty of Yen.

During the seventh moon of 757, the Emperor Su-tsung, still enveloped in dust far from his capital, his heart given to indecision, one day ceased from drilling his soldiers. Then the tent used as Audience Hall was crowded with black official caps, and the coats of generals shined at the gates of the Outer Precinct. It was determined that the banners of the Son of Heaven would reenter Han Park through the winding hill paths. The army advanced in three grand divisions: Shu, the new Heir Apparent, led the vanguard; Kuo Tzu-i, with four thousand *hui ho* cavalry under the joint command of I-ssu and their chief, held the center; Wen Ssu-li, the rearguard.

On horseback, at the head of the cavalry beside the *hui ho* chief, I-ssu left the Court at Feng-hsiang and pushed eastward toward the capital. Chrysanthemums in the wind scattered autumn petals across the stones scarred by ancient war carts. Mountain berries were ripening to rich reds. After one hundred miles, the armies passed the Jade Blossom Palace — which had been built by Tai-tsung, the founder of Tang, to escape the Chang-an summer heat — now in ruins. Beyond indifference in this time of grief, the clear river Wei flowed away alone. Along the roads, only desolation and loneliness. Hearth smoke was rare; no village untormented anywhere. Each evening, in the sunset light, distant flags and banners flared up and vanished, then jolted and climbed through foothills and cold hollows where the cavalries stopped for water. As each night fell across the rivers throughout these borderlands, drums and horns rehearsed war. In the eighth moon, the armor-clad back-country boys came to attack the town of Feng-hsiang; but repulsed, with great losses, they withdrew and made no more attempt to come west. Soon, garrison drums cut off peoples' travel. There was no mail, and the sound of the solitary wild goose announced the coming of the frontier autumn. During the ninth moon, some days before the battle, the armies crossed the now year-old battlefield of Chen-tao, where chilled white

bones lay still, ill-used and forgotten. Then, like floating clouds, the symbol of restless wanderings, the imperial soldiers assembled on the hills surrounding Chang-an, while *hu* barbarians hid in the Capital City District. Through the long nights, painted longhorns from the army camp wailed mournfully to themselves. The beacon fires of neighboring garrisons smothered ridges and peaks. Miles apart, they were lit each night at the appointed time to signal that the garrisons were still there. For three months, frontier shadows became autumn nights. Perhaps on one of those nights someone recalled, or in a dream remembered, that the first Dragon Emperor of Han, traveling through the marshes, encountered a large snake across his path; fearless, he drew his sword and cut the snake in two.

On the morning of Ting-hai, the Day of the Pig, daybreak passed imperceptibly as the smoke of cooking fires rose over camped armies. The early morning drums and bugles of fifth watch sounded, stirring and sad. In the ice-cold sunrise watch, soldiers blocked the cold frontiers, pressing underfoot the glairy cliffs and deep ravines. Dawn sounded three drum rolls of 333 beats, each followed by twelve blasts on the bugle. The imperial forces assembled. Princes and generals carried their symbols. Kuo Tzu-i, the Supreme Commissioner, with I-ssu, was to control the Leopard Strategy. The armies moved down in array and met the rebels northwest of Chang-an. In one day of fighting from dawn to dusk, the imperial army of Chinese regulars and *hui ho* cavalry, 150,000 strong, met 100,000 rebels. The 4,000 *hui ho* and their qaghan, Yeh-hu, distinguished themselves under Kuo’s command. With I-ssu as joint commander, the4,000 formed the spearhead of the attack. Mounted and standing in their stirrups, which they had introduced from the steppes, they waved arrogant, long spears and short spears polished to the color of snow. They dashed forward with the speed of a passing arrow, keen as falcons who longed to destroy the enemy; their two-edged swords slashing, they dyed their clothes in blood. In the end, sixty thousand

rebels were beheaded that day, their bandit torsos piled in heaps. Blood ran freely; rivers and streams reddened. Grass and shrubs stank of death. The commander of Yen fled to the east. Women and children mingled cries of grief. (*See* Supplement 4) With flying colors, the royal army marched into the capital. On the first day of the tenth moon, the Day of the Snake, Su-tsung issued a decree to announce the recovery of Chang-an and declared that he would return to the capital on the nineteenth day to take possession of the palace.

< READ PART 3C: THE JADE TENT >

SUPPLEMENTS

Supplement 4:
The Chang-an Poems of Tu Fu

The poet Tu Fu. Anonymous artist's conception.

Three poems of Tu Fu, collected under the title *Return to Chang-an* (volume iv, folio 6), would no doubt supply further detail on the imperial strategy and the slaughter that I-ssu,

in the spirit of war, assisted to generate; but the poems are as yet untranslated into English and so are unavailable to me.