

# The Good Word

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WITH THE BLESSING OF BISHOP AUXENTIOS OF ETNA AND PORTLAND



## ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY IN CHINA, PART I

BY DR. SERAPHIM STEGER

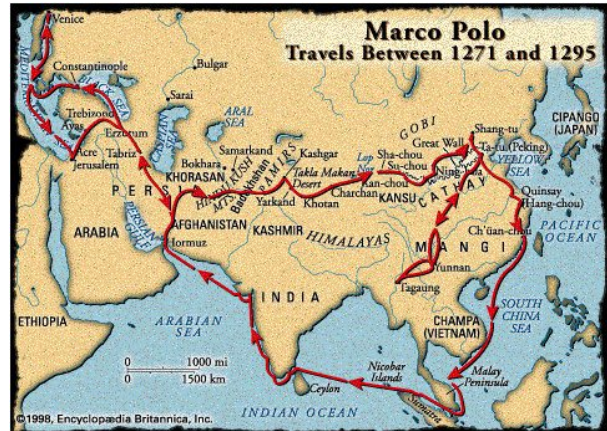
My wife, whose family is from Shanghai, once asked me why the apostles never came to China. I had no good answer for her until about 20 years ago when I decided to read the *Travels of Marco Polo*. Since then I have been able to give her a most remarkable answer, “They did!”



DRAWING: MARCO POLO (C. AD 1254-1324)<sup>1</sup>

An Orthodox Christian reading the *Travels* by Marco Polo would be awestruck by a passage that is a very clear description of primitive Orthodox Christianity having reached China in the 1st century A.D. During his travels across western and central Asia, Messer Marco described many Nestorian churches throughout Asia. However, the particular group he described in the following passage was markedly different from his descriptions of the Nestorians. Their worship was structured around the Psalter. They claimed that three of the lesser apostles had brought the faith to China and

even revealed having pictures (i.e., icons) of those three apostles. The timing of the encounter was sometime between A.D. 1275 (when Marco Polo reached China after a 4 year trip) and 1292 when Marco finished his 17



years in China under the administration and patronage of the Mongol Emperor Kublai Khan (1215-1294).

### A HISTORY OF PRIMITIVE ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY IN CHINA BY MESSER MARCO POLO

“In illustration of this we shall tell you something about it which is reported by Messer Marco and is well worthy of narration. When Messer Maffeo, Marco’s uncle, and Messer Marco himself were in this city of Fu-chau,<sup>2</sup> there was in their company a certain learned Saracen,<sup>3</sup> who spoke to them as

2. Fu-chau=Fuzhou, currently the capital of the coastal Province of Fujian in southeastern China. It was a wealthy and flourishing city in Mangi, a common name for the Song Dynasty 宋朝 (AD 960-1279) on maps of southern China during the Middle Ages. It was located on a major river just a couple of miles from the East China Sea, and was thus a major trade center. It was also the sea port for the Imperial Navy of the Ming Dynasty (AD 1368-1644). Fu-chou underwent a major resurgence in the Song Dynasty as cultural and educational institutions advanced and flourished. For example, a native of Fuzhou topped the imperial examinations 6 times, a considerably large number for such a small city in China. In AD 1279 southern China and the Southern Song Dynasty came under Kublai Khan’s rule -- 4 years after Marco and Maffeo Polo arrived in China. So it is not surprising that they had opportunity to visit this important cultural center.

3. Saracen, in the Middle Ages, refers to any person—Arab, Turk, or other—who professed the religion of Islam. Earlier in the Roman world, there had been references to Saraceni (Greek: Sarakenoi) by late classical authors in the first three centuries AD, the term being then applied to an Arab tribe living in the Sinai Peninsula. In the following centuries the use of the term by Christians was extended to cover Arab tribes in general; and, after the establishment of the caliphate, the Byzantines referred to all Muslim subjects of the caliph as Saraceni. Through the Byzantines and the crusaders, the

1. <http://history.howstuffworks.com/european-history/who-was-marco-polo.htm>. Source: Hutton Archive Getty Image

follows: 'In such-and-such a place there is a community whose religion nobody knows. It is evidently not idolatrous, since they keep no idols. They do not worship fire. They do not profess Mahomet. And they do not appear to observe the Christian order. I suggest that we should go and have a talk with them. Perhaps you will recognize something of their usages.'

"So they went to the place and began to talk to the people and interrogate them, and ask about their usage and their creed. They seemed to be afraid that they were being interrogated with the object of depriving them of their religion. Realizing this, Messer Maffeo and Messer Marco sought to allay their fears with words of encouragement: 'Do not be alarmed. We have not come here to do you any harm, but only for your good and the improvement of your condition.' For they were afraid that their visitors had been sent by the Great Khan to make this investigation in order to get them into trouble.

"But Maffeo and Marco attended the place so regularly day after day, familiarizing themselves with these people and inquiring about their affairs, that they discovered that they did indeed hold the Christian faith. For they possessed books. And Maffeo and Marco, poring over them, began to interpret the writing and translate it word by word from one language to another, till they found that they were the words of the psalter.<sup>4</sup>

"Then they inquired from what source they had received their faith and their rule; and their informants replied: 'From our forefathers.' It came out that they had in a certain temple of theirs three pictures [icons] representing three apostles of the seventy who went through the world preaching. And they declared that it was these three who had instructed their ancestors in this faith long ago, and that it had been preserved among them for 700 years; for a long time they had been without teaching, so that they were ignorant of the cardinal doctrines. 'But to this we hold fast, which we have received from our forefathers; we worship in accordance with our books and do reverence to these three apostles!'

"To this Maffeo and Marco replied: 'You are Christians, and we also are Christians. We advise you to send to the Great Khan and explain to him how you stand, so that he may grant you recognition and you may be able to keep your faith and your rule freely.'

"But because of the idolaters they did not altogether dare

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name spread into western Europe, where it was long in general use and has survived until modern times.

Source: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Saracen>

4. "And from olden times Israel has declared the praises of our true God with psalms and hymns found in that book of the Old Testament called the 'Psalter.' Our Saviour Himself and the Holy Apostles used them and chanted them (cf. Mark 14:28). Therefore, it was only natural that the first Christians from the nations who were grafted onto the stock of Israel should have prayed with the same voice as the fathers of old. Actually, the first services of the Church in New Testament times were composed almost exclusively from the psalms, which were chanted in the Hebraic manner in the translation used for generations by the Hebrews in the diaspora, the *Septuagint*. Till this day, there is no service of the Church which is not replete with psalms: the Hours, Vespers, Compline, Matins, even the Divine Liturgy itself; all begin and end with the psalms." *Forward, The Psalter According to the Seventy of St. David, the Prophet and King, Together with the Nine Odes and An Interpretation of How the Psalter Should be Recited Throughout the Whole Year*, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, MA 1987, pp. 9-10

to proclaim or practice their religion openly. So they sent two of their number to the Great Khan. Acting on the instructions of Messer Maffeo and Messer Marco, these emissaries first presented themselves to a certain person who was head of the Christians at the Great Khan's court, so that he might broach their business in his master's presence. What more shall I say? There in the Khan's presence was this man who was head of the Christians, asserting that they were Christians and ought to be approved as such in his empire.



PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG KUBLAI KAHN  
BY ANIGE, A NEPALI ARTIST IN KUBLAI KHAN'S COURT

"And he who was head of the idol-worshippers, being apprised of the matter, put in a counter-plea, claiming that this ought not to be, because the aforesaid persons were and always had been idolaters and as such they were accounted.

"So there was great disputation about the matter in the Khan's presence. At last he grew angry and dismissing everyone summoned the two emissaries before him and asked them whether they wished to be Christians or idolaters.

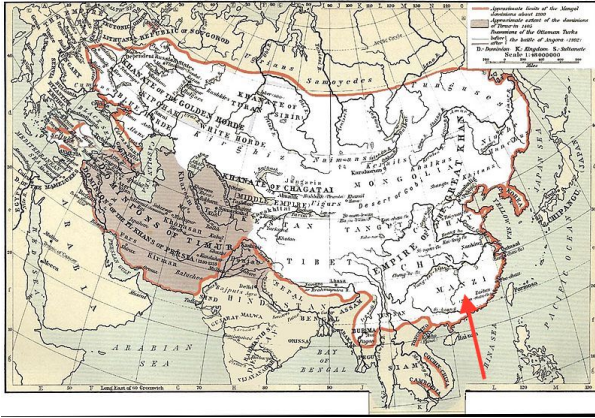
"They answered that, if it pleased him and was not inimical to his sovereignty, they wished to be Christians as their forebears had been. Then the Great Khan ordered that they should be granted privileges whereby they should be acknowledged as Christians, and the status accorded to Christians should be applicable to all who professed their rule. And it was found that throughout the province of Manzi,<sup>5</sup> here and there, there were more than 700,000 households who adhered to this rule."<sup>6</sup>

So just what happened to these primitive Orthodox Christians that lived in the province of Manzi? That is a very important and interesting question for which there

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5. N. China was called *Cathay*, S. China *Mangi*. However, the name *Manzi* often appears in documents/maps of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty.

6. Marco Polo, *The Travels*, Penguin Books, London, England, 1958, pp. 235-7.



MAP OF THE MONGOL EMPIRES (AD 1300-1405) SHOWING THE PROVINCE OF MANZI IN SOUTHEAST CHINA<sup>7</sup>

is no conclusive answer. It is lost in history. Kublai Khans’s records from the Yuan Dynasty (AD 1279-1368) should have had them registered as Christians. Were they later exterminated or assimilated into the pagan culture around them? We don’t otherwise hear of “Orthodox Christians” arriving in China until the 1680s. But there are a few clues to what may have happened to them based on what happened to the Roman Catholics and Nestorians<sup>8</sup> in the Ming Dynasty.

EARLY ROMAN CATHOLICISM IN CHINA AND THE EXPULSION OF ALL “CHRISTIANS” FROM CHINA IN THE MING DYNASTY

“Giovanni of Monte Corvine (1246 – 1329), a Franciscan missionary, arrived in the capital, Da Du (today’s Beijing) in 1294 A.D. Commissioned by Pope Nicholas to Father China, Monte Corvine had timing on his part. The Mongol emperor was tolerant to all forms of religion, Christianity included. Chinese society was finally enjoying peace and stability after years of turbulence. As a result, Monte Corvine was able to build churches around the capital and convert at least six thousand Chinese and Mongols.

“His success so pleased the Pope that Clement V appointed him as Archbishop of Peking, and sent more missionaries to support him. Under Giovanni’s leadership, sizable Catholic communities thrived in the capital and in the southern port city of Quan Zhou.<sup>9</sup>

“... The Nestorian tradition, which had strong presence in Asia as attested by Marco Polo, co-existed with Catholicism and there seemed to be intense competition.

“Like previous efforts, this round of missionary work was forced to stop. The short-lived Mongol Empire was crumbling with internal power struggles. Nearly a century of Mongol rule

7. <https://www.historyonthenet.com/mongol-empire-timeline/>

8. The Nestorians originally migrated to China along the Silk Road. A Nestorian Stele written in both Syriac and Chinese, erected in AD 781 in the Xi-an region of China, documents the Nestorian Christian missionary Olopen/Alopen arriving in China with icons and sacred writings in Syriac and meeting with the Tang Dynasty Emperor Taizong in AD 635. The city of Xi-an marks the starting point for Chinese caravans leaving for the west along the Silk Road.

9. Quan-Zhou (today’s Quanzhou) was a large costal city and major port in southeastern China across from Taiwan.

brewed anti-foreign bitterness among the Chinese population, who were treated as second-class citizens in their own land. Christianity was largely perceived as a foreign religion, with support from the Mongols and Rome. Therefore, as rebellions against the Mongols spread across the country, Christianity became a target. Moreover, **the ruling Mongols, who were once favorable to Christians, were increasingly being converted to Islam. So one year after the establishment of the Ming dynasty by Han Chinese in 1368 A.D., all Christians — both the Catholics and Nestorians — were expelled from China.**”<sup>10</sup>

Consequently, it is possible that the primitive Christians in Manzi, recorded by Kublai Khan as “Christians” and not as “Idolators” in his Imperial Annals, may have fallen under that same forcible expulsion at the beginning of the Ming Dynasty (assuming of course, that they were not assimilated into the pagan Confucian Chinese society or exterminated). Other early evidence of Pre-Nicene Christianity in China is scant.<sup>11</sup>

HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX MISSION IN CHINA 1683-1900

My next clue to the presence of Orthodox Christianity in China came quite unexpectedly and shortly thereafter from reading *St. Innocent, Apostle to America* by Paul D Garrett, in which the author describes St. Innocent of Alaska (1797-1879) coming across a remote village of Orthodox Christians who had been displaced from their home of Albasin on the Amur River<sup>12</sup> a couple of centuries earlier by the Manchus:

BISHOP INNOCENT OF ALASKA ENCOUNTERS RUSSIAN ORTHODOX REFUGEES FROM ALBASIN IN 1845

“Even so, his travels were not yet over, for in Ayan<sup>13</sup> he learned that it was not considered safe to visit yet another Russian settlement some 250 miles south on the very border of China. Reasoning that the roundtrip could easily be completed in time to catch the first ship to America, he decided to go. On June 6 [1846] Innocent and his retinue set out in large multi-seat kayaks (or umiaks) laden with Company cargo to supply that isolated region. In six days’ travel they encountered no particular difficulties, but on June 11, with heavy ice flows near shore and in unfamiliar waters, they were forced to seek refuge on land. Strong onshore winds lashed them for four days, preventing them from pushing on even to search for more convenient shelter. Only towards evening on June 15 did the tide carry the ice out and allow the party to resume its way. ‘The Lord helped us,’ Bishop Innocent declares. ‘And this I say in the literal sense, for as we passed a certain cape

10. *History of Christianity in China*, by Christians in China, 2018, at <http://www.christiansinchina.com/history-of-christianity-in-china/>

11. Wei-Fan Wang, *Tombstone Carvings from AD 86*, at <http://www.clechina.org/tombstone-carvings-from-ad-86-did-christianity-reach-china-in-the-first-century/>

12. The Amur River forms the boundary between Russia, China, and Mongolia. See map next page.

13. Ayan is on the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk. See map next page.



our umiak was in grave danger of being dashed against the ice by a strong current.' One smaller kayak in their flotilla, however, somehow unhampered by the ice, managed to forge ahead to bring to the people of Udsk news of their bishop's coming. Hearing this, the priest and a Cossack sergeant immediately set out to meet him and accompany him in. On June 17 the bishop's entourage reached the mouth of the Uda River and at floodtide was able to enter the estuary to begin the trip upstream, aided by winds which happily turned favorable about that time. Towards dusk on June 19 Bp. Innocent reached his destination, almost twenty-four hours later than expected.



"RIVERS AND SETTLEMENTS IN SIBERIA AND CHINA

"The scene which greeted him as he stepped ashore at Udsk would scarcely have seemed to justify the efforts this trip had required. A handful of wretched huts dominated the backdrop for a welcoming party of thirty-five, many of whom were not inhabitants of the village at all but migrant Yakuts newly-arrived to trade their wares. Nevertheless, the bishop blessed them all and greeted them as warmly as he could through an interpreter -- for it was evident that even the Russians had lived here so long that they could not understand even simple words addressed to them in their native tongue. Indeed, nothing about these people or this place seemed noteworthy, yet tradition held that this village's roots went back almost two centuries.

Confirmation of the historic significance of Udsk came in the St. Nicholas Church. There bishop Innocent venerated three icons -- one of Christ 'the All-Merciful,' one of the Virgin Mary, and one of the patron saint himself -- all evidently quite old yet only recently discovered in the process of constructing a new church building near-by. With this discovery was found the link to the region's past. These icons had accompanied the flight from China of the village's forefathers, driven from their home in Albasin in the Amur River valley by the Manchus<sup>14</sup> in the 1680s.

"For now, time would not permit Bp. Innocent to investigate at any length the history of the region, but seeing the workers determined to finish work before his departure, he remained long enough to consecrate with the full splendor of

14. The Manchus, originating in Manchuria, were composed of the local Jurchen Alsin Gioro clan, Han Chinese, and Mongol elements united by Nurhaci and his son Hong Taiji, who began driving out the Ming Dynasty forces on the Liaodong Peninsula in Manchuria and declared a new dynasty, the Ch'ing, in 1644, after the peasant rebels led by Li Zicheng captured Beijing, the Ming Dynasty's capital.

the hierarchical Liturgy the re-named Church of the All-Merciful Saviour and St. Nicholas on June 22. Soon afterwards his party paddled off down the Uda River to the sea."<sup>15</sup>

#### THE BATTLE OVER FORT ALBASIN IN THE 1680s BETWEEN THE RUSSIANS AND THE MANCHUS

In the 17th century the Russian Empire began expanding eastward and southward from Lake Baikal in eastern Siberia toward and then along the Amur River building settlements and forts as they went. The region became a zone of competition between Russia and China. Bands of musket-bearing Cossacks had been long exacting tribute in furs from the tribes living along the Amur River. But because of increasing incursions as well as new Russian farming settlements and military forts along the Amur, the Manchu rulers of the new Ch'ing Dynasty (1644-1912) became quite concerned over this increasing Russian presence along the Amur River. In 1650 after a Russian fort was built at Albasin, the new Ch'ing Emperor Kang Hsi (reigned from 1661-1722), began sending military forces to repel the Russians. By 1681 Manchu forces had begun to displace the Russians along the Zeya River [a large tributary of the Amur well to the southeast of Albasin]. By 1683 all the Russian forts except for Albasin had fallen to the Manchus. The formal Manchu attack on Albasin began on June 23 in 1685 using 10,000 troops and cannons. Three days later the Manchus set fire to the fort's wooden walls. The Russians soon surrendered. Some 600 hundred defenders were allowed to withdraw to Nerchinsk a couple of hundred miles to the west. The withdrawing Russian troops returned to Albasin that fall after the Manchus left, precipitating the Manchus to return for a second siege of Albasin. That siege was lifted when messengers from Moscow arrived in Beijing announcing Moscow's desire to negotiate. The belated peace settlement, the Treaty of Nerchinsk signed in 1689, flawed as it was in its scanty articles, became the first treaty negotiated between Russia and China:

#### "Treaty of Nerchinsk (1689)


28th year of Kang Xi, 7th month, 24th day [7th September 1689; August 27, O.S.]

"The Great Emperor of China, having appointed as Imperial Border-Defining Commissioners ...

"And the Grand Dukes [Ch: Jun-zhu] JOANN ALEXEEVITCH and PETER ALEXEEVICH, by the Grace of God rulers of all the Russias, Great, Small, and White ...

"The envoys of the two countries having met near Nerchinsk to settle troublesome matters concerning the

15. Paul D Garrett, *St. Innocent, Apostle to America*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1979, pp.196-198.



crossing of the frontiers by hunters of the two Empires in pursuit of game, mutual killings, and **abductions**; and to fix clearly the boundary between China and Russia, with a view to perpetuating peaceful relations between them; have, on the twenty-fourth day, seventh moon, 28th year of Kang Xi, agreed upon the following Articles: —

“Article I. [Deals with the geographical boundaries between the countries using the Amur and Argun rivers and the Da Xing-an-ling mountains.]

“Article II. The fortified town at Ad-ke-sa [Albasin], built by the Russians, is to be completely demolished, and the people residing there, with all military and other stores and equipment are to be moved, unhindered, into Russian territory.

“Those from hunting households of the two Empires, no matter for what reason, are not allowed to cross the fixed boundary at will. If one or two worthless persons, for purposes of hunting or thievery, presumptuously cross the boundary, they are to be arrested and handed back to the domestic officials of their respective sides and, once their case has been clarified, immediately punished according to law. If ten or more [larger groups of] persons cross the boundary and assemble, whether armed for hunting or for killing people and plundering, this must be reported to the Emperors of the two countries and they must be punished with the death penalty for their crime. Crimes and excesses committed by a few [private] persons on the frontier must definitely not be permitted to become the cause for war, even less for bloodshed.

“Article III. All the issues which may have occurred prior to this Treaty will be forgotten. But, now that perpetual peace has been established between the two Empires, if in future there are fugitives, neither side will take them in, but must apprehend and return them.

Article IV. Russians presently in China and Chinese presently in Russia, will be treated as in the past.

Article V. From the date of this Peace Treaty, any subject of either nation carrying a passport may come and go across the frontier and may carry on commerce in both markets.

ARTICLE VI. Now that peace has been established, the two countries will forever maintain friendly relations, and henceforward all frontier disagreements will be done away with, for if both sides seriously adhere to the treaty clauses, controversies cannot arise.

The Commissioners of the two countries have each signed and sealed the collated treaty texts, and each retains both an original and a copy.

This treaty will be engraved in the Chinese, Russian and Latin languages in stone, to be set up on the boundary between the two countries, to serve forever as a boundary marker.

Kang Xi 28th year, 7th moon, 24th day August 27th, 1689 by the Russian calendar. Done at Nibuchu [Nerchinsk].”<sup>16</sup>

In essence the Treaty checked Russia’s eastward expansion by removing its outposts from the Amur River basin. Russia lost easy access to the Sea of Okhotsk and Far Eastern markets but secured its claim to Transbaikalia (the area east of Lake Baikal) and gained the right of passage to Beijing for its trade caravans. Importantly, the treaty prevented a Russian

military defeat and gained China’s implied recognition of Russia as a state of equal status, an accomplishment not achieved by other European countries. This hastily drawn treaty with its many shortcomings remained the basis of Russo-Chinese relations until it was revised by the Treaty of Algun (1858) and the Treaty of Beijing (1860).<sup>17</sup>

#### ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FIRST RUSSIAN ORTHODOX MISSION IN CHINA

But how did the conflict between the Russian empire and the Manchu Chinese Empire in the Albasin area of the Amur River basin lead to the establishment of the first Orthodox Christian Mission in China? We can appreciate how the conflict led to the removing of Russians from Albasin to Udsk as mentioned by Bishop Innocent in his aforementioned journal entries from 1845. The origins of the Orthodox Mission are quite unique and actually occurred a couple of years before the first Manchu attack on Albasin. Indeed, it was the result one of those abductions alluded to in the beginning of the Treaty of Nerchinsk. Here is the most detailed and reliable version of that fateful abduction that I have been able to find:<sup>18</sup>

“In the midsummer of 1683, a Russian freebooter [a term for an adventurer, pirate, soldier of fortune] named Grigorii Mylnikov was groping his way through the forest along the Amur River, not far beyond the outermost Siberian garrison of Albazin. **He had with him seventy men and a parish priest from Albazin, Maksim Leont’ev.**


“Mylnikov’s mission, like that of other Cossack parties that summer, was to push Russian power further into the Amur River Valley, where Siberian fur merchants needed protection if they were to make a success of their efforts to collect tribute (or *iasak*) from local Mongol and Tungus peoples. For this Albazin served as a convenient base of operations, situated on the bank of the Amur near the confluence of the Argun, and facing downriver to the Pacific over a thousand miles away ...

“**Quite suddenly Mylnikov’s party came face to face in the middle of the woods with a contingent of Manchus.** No questions needed asking, for Mylnikov knew at once that he was in the presence of a *bogdoiskii* [a term used for the Manchus] detachment, and worse, that he was outnumbered. And if one can impute to him a sense of fascination with his helplessness, perhaps he also knew that his life, and the history that it carried, were about to undergo a dramatic change. **With a number of his companions and Father Maksim, Mylnikov was invited into a clearing to break bread with his opposites.** They entered the Manchu camp and had lunch. **But when the Russians rose to leave they discovered predictably that the Manchu hospitality could not easily be overstayed. Instead they were escorted deeper in to the forest, and several weeks later surfaced in Peking as guests**

16. Treaty of Nibuchu (1689), English translation at [http://www.chinaforeignrelations.net/sites/default/files/1689\\_Nerchinsk\\_\(Russ.\)pdf](http://www.chinaforeignrelations.net/sites/default/files/1689_Nerchinsk_(Russ.)pdf)

17. Article: *Treaty of Nerchinsk*, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, online edition, at <https://www.britannica.com/event/Treaty-of-Nerchinsk>.

18. Other versions have these Russians captured sailing down the Amur River, or captured at the Battle of Albasin.



of the K'ang-hsi emperor himself. Two of them were given new clothes and hats and sent straight back to the frontier to announce the fate that had befallen their expedition.

“One of the letters they carried was from a companion, now marooned in Peking. It was addressed to his liege in Albazin [Albasin]:

I, Grishka Stefanov, prostrate myself before my sovereign, friend, my absent benefactor, Ignatii Ivanovich. How merciful is God to you? You were so good to inquire after me, but for my sins the *Bogdoi* have seized me at the River Amur. And now I am living in the Chinese empire under surveillance. I was shod and clothed by the *Bogdoi* tsar, but as for the future, I put my trust in the grace of God. I do not know the duration of this existence of mine ... but I heard from the interpreters that we will never be freed; and now I am quite ruined. The little money I had, about a hundred rubles, and what I had on hand, everything is lost ... As for my arms, take them and sell them ... Only may God have mercy on you, my sovereign Ignatii Ivanovich, do not abandon my children, but be as a father to them. Give Stenka and Orinka each my blessing and prostrate yourself before all my friends. I greet you in the name of Christ ... It was said to us that we were to remain in this kingdom forever. May it please you, my good friends do not abandon my children Stenka and Orinka.

Those like Griska Stefanov, who remained in Peking, were to be provided with food and drink, K'ang-hsi said, ‘in order to show our intention of taking good care of them.’ It was an imperial way of saying that the Albasinian wars had begun.

“K'ang-hsi explained that his benevolence to the prisoners was conceived as an effort to comply with the will of Heaven, perhaps not oblivious of the fact that a man of God was among them. And whatever Father Maksim may have thought about his descent into the middle of Peking, he was now the man to ready the deracinated bunch of Russians for the difficult times ahead. For this purpose he was soon given an old Buddhist prayer house, which he promptly converted into an Orthodox chapel.<sup>19</sup> By late September of 1683, while Manchus and Russians were mobilizing along the Amur, K'ang-hsi and Maksim Leont'ev together had brought to life an institution that would one day become the Russian ecclesiastical mission in Peking.”<sup>20</sup>

The other Albasin captives were received into the Emperor's honor guards and were allowed to practice their faith unhindered. And, as master craftsmen of birch bows, the Albasinians were highly valued by the Emperor and employed in the manufacturing of these weapons for the Manchu armies. Such kindness from the Manchu Emperor facilitated his setting up a diplomatic channel with Russia. After the fall of Albasin and the destruction its fort in 1686, more

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19. Fr. Maksim named the chapel the *Nikolsky* no doubt in honor of St. Nicholas, the Patron Saint of Albasin. An old and wonder-working icon of St. Nicholas had been evacuated by the Cossacks from Albasin and was placed into the hands of Fr. Maksim who placed it into this little church dedicated to the Holy Wisdom.

20. Eric Widmer, *The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Peking During the Eighteenth Century*, East Asian Research Center, Harvard University, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1976, pp. 1-4. [https://books.google.ca/books?id=3ZjnRS1g6zkC&pg=PA35&source=gsb\\_toc\\_r&cad=2#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.ca/books?id=3ZjnRS1g6zkC&pg=PA35&source=gsb_toc_r&cad=2#v=onepage&q&f=false)

Russians turned up in Peking and settled around the makeshift chapel. Ten years later, in 1696, Metropolitan Ignatius of Tobolsk sent Fr. Maksim an antimention for the altar, holy chrism, and documents officially consecrating the chapel to the Holy Wisdom of God. Fr. Maksim then began commemorating the Chinese Emperor and preaching to the Chinese. He reposed in 1712.<sup>21</sup>

“In 1713, [a year] after the death of Leont'ev, the Manchus invited Russia to send more priests to the now languishing émigré quarter; however, it was not until the Treaty of Kiakhta, exchanged in 1728, that the Russian ecclesiastical mission was given its legal underpinnings. The fifth article of the treaty provided for four priests and six students to live in Peking until they felt like returning to Russia, at which time they would be replaced by a new contingent. The mission was to be supported, in various ways, by both countries. In return, it answered a mutual need for continuous contact between the capitals of St. Petersburg and Peking. And the question of tenure in China was therefore not as freely decided as the language of the treaty suggests, for most members of the mission in the demoralized eighteenth century would surely have elected to return to Russia on the morrow of their arrival in Peking. It was not a higher calling but instead the Russian government that had cajoled them into the adventure, and that thereafter refused to retrieve them for approximately ten years.

“Because the missionary traditions of the Orthodox church so actively followed in Siberia, had not yet been transmitted in China, the ecclesiastical mission, once established, was left with little to do except to keep its Albasinian communicants from plunging into that oceanic gloom of heathendom by which they were surrounded. But despite its modest function in Peking, or rather because of it, the mission became the most durable *sinoforeign* institution in modern Chinese history and one that was, after 1738, located in the very center of the Chinese capital. Self-concerned in a religious sense, it did not engage in active proselytization among the Chinese and Manchu populations of the city, and therefore avoided the heroic persecutions that Roman Catholics underwent in the eighteenth century and Protestants as well in the nineteenth.”<sup>22</sup>

“On the whole the hard-working people of *this* first period did much in the way of bringing China and Europe into closer relations with each other and into better mutual understanding. They introduced into Europe a knowledge of the Chinese language and literature, Chinese customs and manners of living, Chinese flora and fauna, Chinese ethnography and medicine. There were 155 Russian missionaries all told during this first period. Each tried to contribute something to the treasury of knowledge on China. Their works consisted mostly of translations. These were sent to the various government

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21. *The Holy Orthodox Martyrs of China, The True Vine*, No. 8, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Roslindale, MA, Winter 1991, pp. 13-15. This is a comprehensive article on the background of Orthodox Christianity in China and the Boxer Rebellion itself. It is also published as a 56 page pamphlet *The Chinese New Martyrs*, by the Holy Orthodox Metropolis of Boston (HOCNA).

22. Widmer, pp. 4-5.

departments concerned, where they were received and reviewed, after which the author was rewarded according to his rank. [Under such circumstances, the missionary efforts of the Mission were greatly hindered and the number of conversions, evident in the small number of baptisms, was not significant.<sup>23</sup>]. If this first period of the Russian Orthodox Mission, extending over 150 years, were to be judged solely by its success in propagating Christianity [among the Chinese], the judgement would not be favourable. In 1860 Beijing was the only important missionary centre, and here the Mission numbered less than two hundred Christians, including the descendants of the Albasin prisoners.<sup>24</sup>

However, the Treaty of Tianjin (Tientsin) signed in 1860 by China after the end of the Second Opium War resulted in a paradigm shift for Russian Orthodox mission by allowing missionaries the freedom to travel within the interior and to actively evangelize.

**“Archimandrite Gury Karpoff, the head of the Mission from 1858 to 1864, took an active part in the famous Beijing Treaty of 1860 by which Russia obtained the Country of the Amur. During his stay in Beijing [as head of the Mission], the diplomatic and religious activities of the Mission were separated. He translated and printed the New Testament in Chinese and this translation later became the foundation of the code of the holy orthodox books. Because of his long study of the Chinese language, Father Gury possessed a wide knowledge of Chinese Literature. He looked through and corrected all the Orthodox books written by his predecessors, many of which had been published in Beijing, having been printed from wooden blocks. He stayed at Beijing, spoke Chinese well and did a great deal of preaching and lecturing in church and in school. His lectures were exegetical in character, being based on various texts in the Bible. During his time, the preaching of the Gospel extended beyond Beijing. In Dongdingan, where thirty heathen were baptized, a church was built by money contributed by Russians. The chief helper of Father Gury was a priest, Isaiah Polikin ... the first to use the Chinese spoken language in the translations of the Holy Books.<sup>25</sup>**

The Englishman John Dudgeon provided a first hand account of the Chinese Orthodox Church in Dongdingan under Fr. Isaiah Polikin:<sup>26</sup>

**“About 100 li from Peking [approx. 30 miles] at a place called Tung-ting-an ... 7 li south from Matou on the Peiho [River], the Russians have a number of Christians. This is the only station out of Peking. This community was founded by Father Isaish in 1863. Formerly in this village there was only one Christian family. Afterwards a large portion of the village expressed the wish to adopt Christianity. A church was built out of funds furnished by the merchants in Kiachta [near Lake Baikal in Siberia]. This little church at present numbers 75 Christians ... Father Isaiah himself was one of the most active and amiable of men ...”**

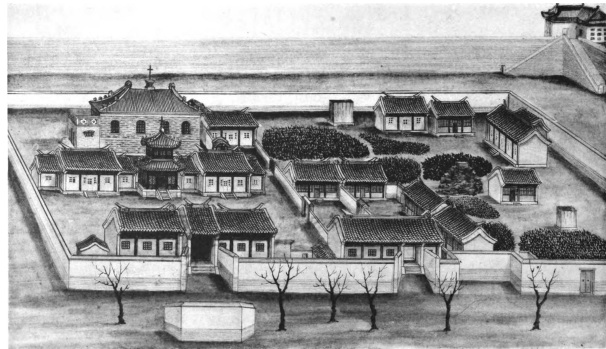
23. [https://orthodoxwiki.org/Russian\\_Orthodox\\_Mission\\_in\\_China](https://orthodoxwiki.org/Russian_Orthodox_Mission_in_China)

24. [http://orthodox.cn/localchurch/1610romc\\_en.htm](http://orthodox.cn/localchurch/1610romc_en.htm)

25. Archimandrite Innocent, *The Russian Orthodox Mission in China, The Chinese Recorder*, Oct 1916, pp. 678-685. [http://orthodox.cn/localchurch/1610romc\\_en.htm](http://orthodox.cn/localchurch/1610romc_en.htm)

26. *The True Vine*, No. 8, p. 19.

Another important missionary in Peking in the second half of the 19th century was Archimandrite Pallady Kaffaroff, who lived 32 years in China, serving from 1849-1859 and from 1864-1878. He was a tireless student of the Chinese language. His chief accomplishments were literary. He translated the *Psalter* and the *Book of Services* into Chinese. He also compiled a Chinese-Russian phonetic dictionary which contained the explanations of 11,868 characters which was published one year after his death. **During his tenure, one new mission for the preaching of the Gospel was established in the city of Urga in Mongolia.<sup>27</sup>**



THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX MISSION IN NORTHEAST BEIJING, 1874,

Mr. Dudgeon also provided a revealing and intimate account of the Russian mission in Peking:<sup>28</sup>

**“The design of the Ecclesiastical mission [in Beijing], according to the directions of the Synod is the maintenance of Christianity among the already existing Christians (Albazines and Russians who live in Peking) and the propagation of the same among the heathen Chinese, but with great caution: only those Chinese are to be received as converts, concerning whom the priests are convinced that they understand the nature of the Christian religion. The quality of the converts is more important than the number [in contrast to the Roman Catholics and German Protestants]. There are from 10-40 Chinese converted yearly in Peking to the Greek [Russian Orthodox] church. The number of the Russo-Chinese Christians in and around Peking is generally speaking about 500. The descendants of the Albazines, who all live in the neighborhood of the Peikwan [NE corner of the Inner City of Peking]... amount at present to 120 [23 families] ... They are at liberty to marry, when they will, either Chinese or Manchu. Their wives permit themselves to be baptized ... There are two Chinese schools at the Peikwan [site of the original mission], one for boys, and the other for girls. The boys about 40 in number are taught the elements of Chinese knowledge, reading and writing as in native schools, and are instructed also in the Christian religion. Heathen boys are not admitted. The girls about 30 in number learn the same and in addition, are taught useful handiwork,**

27. Archimandrite Innocent, *The Russian Orthodox Mission in China, The Chinese Recorder*, Oct 1916, pp. 678-685. [http://orthodox.cn/localchurch/1610romc\\_en.htm](http://orthodox.cn/localchurch/1610romc_en.htm)

28. *The True Vine*, No. 8, pp. 20-22.



## THE GOOD WORD

c/o St. Seraphim of Sarov & St. John of Kronstadt Orthodox Church  
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such as sewing, knitting, embroidery, etc. ... The pupils of both schools are from 8-16 years of age ... **Through means of these schools, all the male Albazines and most of the women can read and write.**... The girls of the Russian school receive legally no dowry, but the mission generally grants them a portion. The priests from their own means help the more deserving, a good deal ... <sup>29</sup>”

### THE FIRST NATIVE CHINESE ORTHODOX PRIEST MITROPHAN

“Chang Yang Ji [*Yang Ji* = 楊吉], was born in 1855, on the 10th day of the 12th month [on the Chinese lunar calendar **into a Chinese Orthodox family associated with the Russian Mission in Beijing**]. He lost his father in early childhood and was raised under the care of his grandmother Ekaterina and his mother Marina; his mother was a teacher at a school for females. At the time he experienced many troubles.

“When Archimandrite Pallady became head of the Mission for the second time [1864-1878], he charged his teacher Jürén, Lóng Yuán (举人隆源) to take great care in educating Mitrophan, in order to prepare him for eventual ordination. Mitrophan was a humble person, very cautious and quiet, peaceful and not impassioned; even when faced with great insults, he did not try to justify himself. [Consequently, before reaching twenty years of age, Mitrophan was appointed to the post of catechist.] ... [However,] **Mitrophan did not want to accept ordination and constantly refused, saying how can a person with insufficient abilities and charity dare to accept this great rank?**

“The successor and assistant of Father Pallady was Father

Flavian (1878-1884). He collected and edited in Chinese everything that had been written by his predecessors, about forty books in all. **He successfully conducted church services in Chinese**, which previously had been conducted in Slavonic, and also organized a choir.”<sup>30</sup> [He also encouraged Mitrophan to reconsider the priesthood.]

“Obedient to [Fr. Flavian’s] urging Mitrophan finally accepted ordination as a priest. As there were no bishops resident near Beijing, Archimandrite Flavian, Mitrophan, and two others as candidates for reader journeyed to Tokyo, Japan in June 1882 to see Bishop Nicholas of the Japanese mission.

“The delegation arrived the month before the meeting of the All Japan Council of 1882 which Archimandrite Flavian and Fr. Mitrophan attended. Prior to the council Bp. Nicholas ordained Mitrophan deacon on June 20 and blessed his fellow travelers, Paul and Eumenius, as readers. **On June 29, 1882, Bp. Nicholas [Kasatkin] ordained Mitrophan as the first Chinese priest of the Orthodox Church.** The ordination was held in the Tokyo Cross Church, that was the church on the second floor of the Bishop’s residence on Surigadai Hill in Tokyo ...

“Under Archimandrite Flavian, Priest Mitrophan assisted him in translating and checking books. For fifteen years, he tirelessly served God, while suffering many hurts and insults both from his own people and outsiders, he finally had a mild breakdown. Sometime after this he spent three years living outside the mission, receiving half of his previous salary. All his life the Priest Mitrophan was not avaricious and many took advantage of this.”<sup>31</sup> [But he was being prepared for something greater as we shall see in our next issue !]

29. *The True Vine*, No. 8, pp. 19-22.

30. [http://www.orthodox.cn/history/martyrs/1\\_en.htm#2](http://www.orthodox.cn/history/martyrs/1_en.htm#2)

31. [https://orthodoxwiki.org/Mitrophan\\_Yang](https://orthodoxwiki.org/Mitrophan_Yang)