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In May-June 2015, I was invited by the Confucius Institute and the Beijing Normal University to conduct research on the spread of Nestorian Christianity in China, and I was asked by the Beijing Normal University to give a lecture on the subject. That invitation was the earliest stage of links woven between the Faculty of History at Beijing Normal University (now one of the top five universities in China) and the History department of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Balamand. Close cooperation between the two universities is underway with the enthusiastic support of the Dean, Prof. Georges Dorlian, having in view, among other things, to encourage the exchange of students and teaching staff between our two respective universities. A delegation from a Chinese university was sent to UOB for the first time in April 2016. The delegation was composed of five professors from Beijing Normal University: two of its faculty members agreed to give two lectures on topics chosen jointly by the responsible of the two universities and which were of great significance for both. One was on the history of the Silk Road and the other on the origins of Christianity in China. We are pleased to present these two texts.

The first text, “History of the Silk Road”, is a lecture by Prof. Ning Xin, a renowned specialist in the history of the Tang Dynasty and the Silk Road; Dr. Liao assisted him. The lecture acts as a general reminder of this fundamental theme, and a historical example of the dialogue of civilizations, of the exchanges of goods and ideas. As I had already written\(^1\), it was the trade along the Silk Road that allowed the expansion of Nestorian Christianity to China, as well as, in a second phase, of Islam. But exchanges took place, of course, in both directions. It is well known that the Arabic language was the vehicle that brought to medieval Europe the scientific and philosophical writings of ancient Greece. The role of

\(^1\) See the article I published in *Chronos* 12 (2005), “L’évangélisation de la Chine et des Mongols par l’Église nestorienne”.

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Nestorian translators and initiators in the transmission of this knowledge had been equally fundamental. What is much less well known is the importance of the contribution of Chinese knowledge to the "scientific heritage of mankind", that is to say, the major and universal inventions which contributed to the progress of science and technology, and their diffusion into the Arab world and for some of them to the West, partly thanks to the role of the Nestorians.

Silk was of great interest to both the Asiatic and Byzantine worlds. Historical tradition tells us that it was during the reign of Justinian that two Syrian monks, who went to China to bring the faith to the inhabitants, returned with seeds of silkworms in their cane. This long-preserved secret spread and became for the Byzantines a source of production and valuable gain. Equally, during modern times, the silk was for Mount Lebanon and parts of Syria a source of production and wealth. It allowed the production and export (especially towards Lyon in France) of the raw material of the silk thread. The raw material was unwound in the spinning mills of the Lebanese Mountains.

The Silk Road was instrumental during the reign of the Abbasids in Persia and the Tang Dynasty in China in introducing the Chinese scientific works into the Arab world, an endeavor often carried out by Nestorians. Another interesting fact, but not yet sufficiently detailed, was the question concerning Chinese Buddhism in Persia at that time. It seems that Chinese Buddhist monks, Uighurs and Tibetans came to settle in Persia, building temples decorated with paintings and statues. There may also have been an influence of Chinese Yuan painting on later Persian miniatures. Here, it is noteworthy that the University of Balamand has one of the rare manuscripts, entitled Barlaam and Joasaph; it is the Christianized version of the life of Buddha, and a proof of the existing exchanges at that time. This manuscript was remarkable to the extent that colleagues at our university are currently working on its edition and translation. The interest in the history of Buddha's life was not the monopoly of Christians; among the works of Muslims scholars, there was one published by Daniel Gimaret who gave us a version of the life of Buddha embracing Islam.

This influence was not limited to art and literature, but it seems to have spread to religious beliefs. Several sects of Islam adopted ideas from the Far East, especially ideas of the reincarnation of the soul after death.
Moreover, this lecture was not just an opportunity to deepen academic exchanges: the study of the history of the Silk Road makes it possible to make a link with the project of “the new Silk Road” for the current Chinese government, aiming, among other things, to institute a vast modern communication network between China and Europe in order to reinforce exchanges, especially via the “conduits” of Lebanon. This project is of particular interest to the Lebanese government: it has signed several cooperation agreements with the Chinese in pursuit of this goal in recent months.

A logical extension of this text is the text of the lecture by Professor Liu Linhai, a renowned Chinese specialist in the history of Christianity, who discusses the history and recent findings on Christianity in China, and that of the Orthodox Church, a specialty that is still lacking in research. Thus, for example, new research has highlighted a strong presence of the Melkite Orthodox in Tashkent where, according to Greek sources, a diocese was established there. These Byzantine Christians, who settled in Central Asia, were formerly hostages taken by the Persian kings during the wars fought between the Byzantine (Eastern Roman) Empire and the Sassanid Empire of Persia. These populations would, according to Professor Perry, originally trade paper with the Arabs and eventually transmit it to the West.

The advent of the Oriental Orthodox Church in China came later, following the onset of the foreign relations between the Russian and Qing empires, a subject that can specially interest the readers of Chronos...

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