

ZOROASTRIANS IN CHINA

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As noted by the *Cambridge History of Iran* (Vol. 3(2), New York, 1983, p. 1XX ii), the Sogdians “introduced Zoroastrianism in China. The Chinese court recognized Zoroastrianism in the early 6th century, and a number of Zoroastrian temples were put in western China in the early T'ang period. The Chinese were anxious to propitiate the Central Asian peoples at their borders and Zoroastrianism, as one of the religions of the Central Asian people, was spared persecution, until 845, when it fell victim to Xenophobic sentiments in China and its recognition was withdrawn.”

As reported by Antonio Forte of the Italian School of East Asian Studies, Kyoto, Japan in the *Journal of the American Oriental Studies* (116.4, 1996, pp. 645-652), there were many Zoroastrians in China at least until the rebellion of An Lushan. He connects the An country mentioned by the Chinese with Zoroastrianism. “This An Family,” he regrets, “although it constitutes very important evidence for the history of Zoroastrianism in China, had not been noticed up to now.” Even Chen Yuan's “History of Zoroastrianism in China,” January 1923 and Dr. Ishida's “On Zoroastrianism in China” April 1923 do not mention it. Forte mentions An Nantuo acting as Sabao, the chief of Zoroastrians in Kansu circa 526 according to some historians but he claims: “Those who held the office of Sabao then, were not necessarily Zoroastrian. And even if they were, this proves nothing. For there was nothing to impede descendants of a non-Zoroastrian Parthian from becoming Zoroastrian. After an exhaustive review of all conflicting evidence on this subject, Forte concludes: “An family from Wuwei was one of the most outstanding and influential foreign families in China from the fourth century period up to the period of the rebellion of An Lushan in mid-eighth century.”