ANCIENT CENTRAL ASIAN NETWORKS. RETHINKING THE INTERPLAY OF RELIGIONS, ART AND POLITICS ACROSS THE TARIM BASIN (5TH–10TH C.)

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TIBETAN DOMINION OVER DUNHUANG AND THE FORMATION OF A TIBETO-CHINESE COMMUNITY

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Abstract

The Tibetan dominion over Dunhuang (786–848) had an inevitable influence on the social life of the Chinese inhabitants. The manuscripts, both Chinese texts written in Tibetan script and Tibetan texts recognized as being for use by Chinese people, indicate the existence of a ‘Tibeto-Chinese community’ in Dunhuang. This assertion can be supported by Chinese poems, transcribed in Tibetan script, as well as by association (Chin. she 社) documents and texts on the Chinese Five Surnames theory written in Tibetan. This article puts its focus on when and how this Tibeto-Chinese community was formed, and how long it had lasted. The Tibeto-Chinese community remained in existence even as far as the Guiyijun period (from 848 until the beginning of the 11th c., 歸義軍), which can be observed through two-time varying systems of Tibetan transcription of Chinese characters—one is the dialect of Chang’an (長安) and the other is the local dialect of Dunhuang (敦煌), a variety of the North-Western dialect of Chinese. As a supplementary material to reinforce this argument, the author also presents the Chinese text Yuan xinlang (願新郎 [Prayer for the Groom]—a text to be recited for wedding ceremonies) written in Tibetan script which can be dated to the Guiyijun period.

1. Introduction

As is well known, Dunhuang fell into Tibetan hands in 786 after a long and painful siege. Their dominion lasted until 848, when Zhang Yichao (r. 851–867, 張議潮), the leader of a powerful local clan, recovered the territory. During this period, Tibetan rule had an inevitable influence on the social life of the Chinese inhabitants. We can say that this was the first time they had come into close contact with the Tibetan language and script. Before that, Dunhuang people had the opportunity to hear the language, but did not pay much attention to it. We do not know what impression they had of the Tibetan language and script. However, it does
not seem that they had any prejudice against them. Sinocentrism had not yet arisen in the Dunhuang society of the time.

In the Dunhuang documents of the Tibetan period, we often come across signatures in Tibetan script that were used by the Chinese inhabitants. Let us see an example (fig. 1). On the left of figure 1 we see an enlarged portion of a Chinese contract document of the Tibetan period (P. 3394). At the end of the contract, one of the witnesses (Chin. baoren 保人) Cang Zhir-hing (Chin. Zhang Rixing 張日興) gave his signature in Tibetan script. We can find a number of similar examples in the documents of the Tibetan period. There is no doubt but that the Tibetan language and script spread into Chinese society in Dunhuang and that some of these Chinese inhabitants, while under Tibetan rule, used the Tibetan language, at least when necessary.

There is no absolute proof that a Tibetanized community existed in Dunhuang before the 11th century. Nevertheless, we can find various kinds of interesting manuscripts that suggest such a community existed. These are Chinese texts written in Tibetan script and Tibetan texts which can be recognized as obviously being for use by Chinese people. These texts certainly provide strong circumstantial evidence.

Below we will examine these typical examples which illustrate the Tibetanized Chinese community in question.

2. Chinese Texts Written in Tibetan Script

We currently know of five Chinese Buddhist sūtras written in Tibetan script: (1) 金剛經 $= \text{Vajracchedikā}$ (IOL Tib J 1404, C 129)\(^2\) (fig. 2); (2) 阿彌陀經 $= \text{Sukhāvatīvyūha (Amitābhasūtra)}$ (C 130);\(^3\) (3) 天地八陽神呪經 [The Divine and Magical sūtra of the Eight Lights of Heaven and Earth], an apocryphal sūtra (P. T. 1258); (4) 般若心經 $= \text{Prajñāpāramitā hṛdaya}$ (P. T. 448); and (5) 法華經普門品 [Guanyin sūtra] $= \text{Saddharmapuṇḍarīka, Samantamukhaparivarta}$ (P. T. 1239 verso)\(^4\)

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\(^4\) We have another manuscript of the Chinese Fahuajing pumenpin (P. T. 1262), in which each character of the first four lines is given a pronunciation in Tibetan script.

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Figure 2. The Chinese Jin’gangjing (金剛經, Skt. Vajracchedikā) in Tibetan script. IOL Tib J 1404, C129, BL.

These are very popular sūtras and must have been used by Chinese monks and devotees who were illiterate in the Chinese characters. The second one, Emituojing, is very interesting, as a colophon is attached at the end of the manuscript. According to the colophon, this Emituojing was copied by an officer of the Military Commissioner of Hexi named Kang rje–man, in the country of Kirghiz in the summer of the Year of...
the Tiger (858), together with other sūtras. The man in question may have been a Sogdian naturalised in Dunhuang Chinese society, judging from his surname Kang, typical for a Sogdian from Samarkand. It is quite possible that, although he used Chinese in his daily life, he was not accustomed to using Chinese characters.5

Besides the Buddhist sūtras, we also find various Chinese Buddhist texts in Tibetan script, such as hymns, prayers, and catechisms. Dao’an fashi nianfózan 道安法師念佛讚 [Master Dao’an’s Eulogy to the Recollection of Buddha] (P. T. 1253) is an example of a hymn, and Nantianzhuugo puti damo chanshi guanmen 南天竺國菩提達磨禪師觀門 [Meditation Methods of the Chan Master Bodhidharma from Southern India] (P. T. 1228) an example of a catechism. Another Buddhist catechism, Dacheng zhongzong jianjie 大乘中宗見解 [Cathechism of Mahāyāna-Mādhyamika Doctrine] (IOL Tib J 1773, C), has been studied in an early stage of the study of the Dunhuang Sino-Tibetan texts. In this manuscript, a pronunciation in Tibetan script is given to each Chinese character.6

However, by far the richest source is the so-called “Long Scroll” kept in the British Library (IOL Tib J 1772, C131, fig. 3).7 The scroll is composed of 485 lines in total (Recto 290 ll., verso 195 ll.) and consists of more than thirty texts of various kinds, mainly hymns and catechisms. There is no doubt but that this scroll was owned by an illiterate Chinese

monk. These texts were necessary for him in order to succeed in monastic life. Although he could not read or write Chinese, he could use Tibetan script in an effective manner for writing down Chinese sounds.

Next, let us examine an interesting Tibetan text. It is a she (社) association document. She associations were very peculiar to medieval Chinese society and various types of such associations were also organized in Dunhuang. During the Tibetan period, we find some texts of she association bylaw written in Tibetan. The document IOL Tib J 793 (Ch.73.XIII.18) is an example of such a bylaw (fig. 4). The beginning of

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the text is lacking, but the names of the members of the she (zha-myi)⁹ are listed in the latter part of the document. What attracts our attention is that all the members are Chinese, not Tibetan, judging from their names. Each name is also followed by a mark substituting for a signature.¹⁰ This may imply that the members were illiterate in Chinese characters. As this she association was composed of Chinese members, they would have been expected to use Chinese for running the association. Nevertheless, the reality is that they wrote the bylaw of the association in Tibetan.

Figure 4. A she association bylaw. IOL Tib J 793 (Ch.73.XIII.18), BL.

⁹ Zha-myi is a mixture of the Chinese word zha (she 社 in modern Chinese) and the Tibetan word myi (mi in classic Tibetan form) meaning “man.” In proper Chinese, it was called sheren (社人), which can be found in the Dunhuang Chinese documents. ¹⁰ In the text the mark is called in Chinese ab dzǐ 押字 (yazi in modern Chinese).
The she association text in Tibetan is not limited to this bylaw. P. T. 1103 also seems to be a kind of bylaw text and P. T. 1102 must be a list of food donations that was assigned to supply each member in the Chinese circular written on the verso. The Chinese circular is accompanied by the date “the twentieth day of the second month of the Year of the Monkey,” undoubtedly a document of the Tibetan period.

There is another interesting Tibetan text, the title of which is myI'i rus pa dgu 'yIm gang la gtogs pa'I mdo [Treatise According to which Chinese Surnames are Assigned to Each Note of the Pentatonic Scale] (P. T. 127, verso ll. 15–28; fig. 5). In Tang (618–907, 唐) times, the Five Surnames (Chin. wuxing 五性) theory was widely accepted and often applied in the case of fortune-telling or the like. For the practical use of the theory, people needed to know which surname belonged to which note. This treatise is, as a matter of fact, just a list of the Five Surnames. We may cite here the beginning of the text: “The gong surnames belong to the element Earth, and such surnames as pham (氾), bam (范), "am..."
Generally speaking, such a text was required only by Chinese and the original text must have been written in Chinese. Why, then, was the text translated into Tibetan? We may take it for granted that the users were Chinese and they only understood Tibetan. Therefore, this treatise is another example to support evidence of the existence of a Chinese community in which Tibetan was in daily use.

We cannot forget that some Chinese poems and songs, which were very popular at the time in Dunhuang, were copied in Tibetan script. In the Tibetan period, a lot of Chinese inhabitants were mobilised to copy Tibetan Buddhist śūtras. For their own amusement, some of them wrote

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15 The identification of the Tibetan transcription "am with the surname 閻 (yan) is only tentative, as the phonetic form is still uncertain.
16 // kung zhes bgyI ba nl / sa'I srog ste // pham / bam / "am / zhlm /...
down these poems or songs on a sheet that was supplied to each copyist to protect against dust.\textsuperscript{17} They are 	extit{Hanshi pian} (寒食篇) (fig. 6, P. T. 1230), 	extit{Dui mingzhu} (對明主) to the tune of Zheng Langzi ci (鄭郎子辭) (P. T. 1235), and 	extit{You jiang le} (遊江樂) to the tune of Fan longzhou (P. T. 1239).\textsuperscript{18}

Figure 6. The Chinese 	extit{Hanshi pian} (寒食篇) in Tibetan script. P. T. 1230, BnF.

Teaching materials such as a historical primer and a multiplication table transcribed in Tibetan script are found as well. An example of the former is the 	extit{Zachao} [Miscellaneous Excerpts], which was used as a textbook for children’s education in Dunhuang Chinese society.\textsuperscript{19} The passage written on the manuscript P. T. 1238 verso preserves only a part of the genealogy of mythological rulers, beginning with Three Sovereigns (Chin. sanhuang 三皇) and Five Emperors (Chin. wudi 五帝). A Tibetan text of the Chinese multiplication table is written on the verso of P. T. 1256 (fig. 7). There is no doubt that these materials were used by Chinese children.


\textsuperscript{19} Takata Tokio 高田時雄, “Zachao yu jiujiu biao [Zachao and Multiplication Table],” in 	extit{Dunhuang, minzu, yuyan 敦煌, 民族, 語言} [Dunhuang, Ethnic Groups, Languages] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), 79–85.
3. The Formation of a ‘Tibeto-Chinese Community’

All the above-cited materials seem to me to indicate the existence of a Chinese community influenced by Tibetan to such a significant degree that they had been accustomed to use Tibetan script for writing their native language, Chinese. I would like to call it a ‘Tibeto-Chinese community.’

When and how, then, was this Tibeto-Chinese community formed? It is clear that the Tibetan dominion over Dunhuang was a trigger. As was stated in the beginning of this article, the Tibetan language had a major influence on the life of Chinese people. We can imagine that a working knowledge of Tibetan was essential for the Chinese inhabitants and those who wanted to get involved in local administration in cooperation with Tibetan authorities had to acquire a much higher competence. Furthermore, large-scale sūtra copying, which operated as a national undertaking of the Tibetan empire, had a considerable influence as well. A number of Chinese inhabitants were mobilised to engage in the sūtra copying and acquired the skill to write in Tibetan script during the course of their work. What is important is that they were not always fully literate in the Chinese characters. It is easy to imagine that those who were illiterate in the Chinese characters seized the opportunity to use the Tibetan script in

Figure 7. A Tibetan text of the Chinese multiplication table written on the verso of manuscript P. T. 1256, BnF.
place of the Chinese characters for writing their language. We need also to take into consideration the low level of literacy of medieval Dunhuang society.\(^\text{20}\) It is a key to understanding how the Tibeto-Chinese community was formed.

Moreover, and very interestingly, the Tibeto-Chinese community remained in existence even as far as the Guiyijun period (from 848 until the beginning of the 11th century).\(^\text{21}\) As a matter of fact, a considerable amount of the materials cited above are considered to belong to the Guiyijun period, judging from the phonetic forms of the transcriptions. Tibetan transcriptions of Chinese characters can be divided into two different systems. One represents the language of the Tang capital Chang’an (長安), although somewhat corrupted due to the local accent, and was used in the Tibetan period. On the other hand, in the Guiyijun period, features of the local dialect of Dunhuang, a variant of the North-Western dialect of Chinese, can be widely observed.\(^\text{22}\) We can decide the date of the relevant texts according to this criterion.

Lastly, I will give an example to illustrate that the Tibeto-Chinese community was still in existence even in the late Guiyijun period in the 10th century. It is also concerned with a Chinese text in Tibetan script (P. T. 1254, fig. 8). So far, no attempt has been made to identify the Chinese original of this text. Recently, however, I was able to identify it as a text to be recited for a wedding ceremony, a practice popular in medieval Dunhuang society. The text is composed of an introductory address, a prayer for the bride, a prayer for the groom, and a concluding address.\(^\text{23}\)


\(^{21}\) The Guiyijun period is divided into two stages. In the earlier stage, the Zhang (張) family governed Dunhuang in the latter half of the 9th century (848–890), whereas the Cao (曹) family replaced the Zhang family in the 10th century (914–1036).

\(^{22}\) Takata, Tonkō shiryō ni yoru Chūgokugoshi no kenkyū. 

Prayers consist of verse with end rhyme. Unfortunately, none of the Chinese Dunhuang texts of this kind match perfectly with our text and it is not easy to recover the full text. Nevertheless, I was able to reconstruct a part of the Chinese text. The following is part of the “Prayer for the Groom” (Chin. yuan xinlang 願新郎, Recto, ll.11–15), supplemented with reconstructed Chinese characters.

(11) 'gwan si lo 願新郎
je’u je’u cho cho 濟濟蒼蒼
khwe’i lag shing sho 快樂勝常
khag khyi ‘ga’ (12) cho twan dzwa’端座
khwe’u ‘du cwan ba ‘gyi’u yo 百位
je’u ‘du cwan ba khe’u zwo 坐
bag (13) ‘be’u ‘du ke’i ge’u ha den lyo 百味
sog ‘bag wan wan yi tsho 粟麥
beg h’u kyen ti’u si so 入倉
(14) shi tsi lyo ban tshen so 百妙
‘nam the pug to 南□北堂
ci’u hwa’i bu lo □□歩廊
beg so da kyim (15) zhib gyu 白象駝金入庫
hig ‘gyi’u da sog zhib tsho 黑牛駄粟入倉

Fortunately, the passage written on the verso provides us with the key to date the manuscript.

(1) // 'gwan sin lo / dze’i dze’i cho cho / bag ’be’ ‘du ke’ ...... dan lyo .... 願新郎 濟濟蒼蒼百味□□□□□□□□□□ ....
(2) // ha se tse to tyen de’i wo gyis can rka thub slas dpon la gs[o]......

Figure 8. A Chinese text in Tibetan script. P. T. 1254, BnF.

The first line is a repetition of the beginning of the text on the Recto: *yuan xinlang* (願新郎, “prayer for the groom”). The second line is a
Tibetan composition but presumably a writing exercise for a letter (or order). The sender ha se tse to tyen de’i wo, which denotes literally “Military Commissioner of Hexi and Great King of Heaven,” was a title used by Cao Yuanzhong (r. 944–974, 曹元忠) the fourth governor of tenth-century Dunhuang. Cang rka thub slas dpon is the name of the addressee: Cang is the most popular surname in Dunhuang and he bears the Tibetan name of rka thub. The name is followed by a title, Head Valet (Tib. slas dpon). Therefore, the writing exercise seems to be the beginning of a letter or an order from Cao Yuanzhong, governor of Dunhuang, addressed to his Head Valet named Cang rka thub. The third line reads: “this was written by Beg Zhib-tig [Bai Shi-de], student.” This, therefore, is a writing exercise practised by this Beg Zhib-tig, obviously a Chinese student. However, he used Tibetan instead of Chinese. An important point to emphasize is that Cao Yuanzhong ruled from 944 until 974. The phonetic forms of the transcription also support the contention that the text was written in the 10th century. Therefore, surprisingly enough, Tibetan influence on Chinese society survived a long time and reached to the second half of the 10th century.

In conclusion, I would like to repeat the main causes of the formation of the Tibeto-Chinese community:
(1) Linguistic pressure from the dominant language, i.e. Tibetan, which was the language of the ruler from 786 until 848.
(2) Low level of literacy of Chinese inhabitants in Dunhuang.
(3) Factors favoring the acquisition of the Tibetan language and script, namely the copying of Buddhist sūtras. This was a crucial condition for the formation of a Tibeto-Chinese community.

As a result, we see the growth of a Tibeto-Chinese community whose members used Tibetan script to write their Chinese language, a practice that lasted until the 10th century, long after the decline of the Tibetan regime.
Abbreviations

BL British Library in London
BnF Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris

IOL Tib J Tibetan Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved at the British Library in London (formerly in the India Office Library (IOL))
P. Pelliot Collection of Chinese Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved at the Bibliothèque National in Paris
P. T. Pelliot Collection of Tibetan Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved at the Bibliothèque National in Paris

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P. T. 1230 (Chinese Hanshi pian 寒食篇 in Tibetan script).
P. T. 1235 (Chinese Dui mingzhu 對明主 to the tune of Zheng Langzi ci 鄭郎子辭 in Tibetan script).
P. T. 1238 verso.
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