

A Newly Found Old Tibetan Land Registry Preserved in the National Library of China¹

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1. Introduction

At the conference “Turfan Forum on Old Languages of the Silk Road” held at Turfan in 2010, I presented a paper titled “Old Tibetan land registries from Central Asia” in which I introduced several fragments of the Tibetan land registries and classified them into three types.²

However, having recently investigated the facsimile reproductions of Dunhuang documents preserved in the National Library of China (or Zhongguo Guojia Tushuguan), I realized that the library has many unidentified Tibetan Dunhuang documents and furthermore that there is an unidentified fragment of the Old Tibetan land registry among them. It is apparently an official registry with the square official seals stamped in several parts. Therefore, to complement the previous study (Iwao 2012), this short paper is an attempt to introduce a newly identified fragment of the Old Tibetan land registry. Here, I will present a preliminary analysis of the text and compare it with other land registries.

2. BD 9642

The newly found land registry is currently preserved in the National Library of China under the number BD 9642. This fragmental roll was first published as the

¹This paper is mainly based on my presentation titled “A preliminary study of an Old Tibetan land registry preserved in the National Library of China” read in an international conference of International Symposium on Central Asian Philology held at Zhongyang Minzu Daxue 中央民族大学 in 2012.

²The paper was recently published as Iwao 2012. See also Iwao 2015.

facsimile version in *GuoTu* (vol. 106: 158–59). *GuoTu* (vol. 106: 29) notes that the size of the manuscript is 101.1 cm x 29.6 cm; the beginning and the end of the manuscript are missing, but it still contains 48 lines; a vermilion square seal, which is 5.5 x 5.5 cm, appears at each end of the clause; the text is written in black and red ink.

Even with the black and white reproduction, most part of the text, both of red and black, is legible, but unfortunately the trace of seal is faint and illegible. The digitized photos were uploaded at the site for the International Dunhuang project, and one can easily access the colored images of the manuscript although the seal is illegible even with the photos.³

3. The structure of the text

The extant text can be divided into nine clauses. A headline of each clause is written in red ink, while the main text is in black ink. The end of each clause finishes with a square vermilion seal, the image and description of which is unfortunately obscure and illegible even in the digitized images. These features are strikingly similar to the fragments of Land registries that I classified into group 1 in Iwao 2012 (hereafter referred to as Group 1).⁴

The text is also similar to that of the land registries. Each clause begins with the name of the landholder, the kind of land, the size of the land, and the four directions of the land follow. This format is almost the same as Group I. However, in spite of these similarities and common characteristics, this land registry has unique features.

The most striking difference between Group 1 and BD 9642 is the name of landholder who appears on the beginning of each clause. While the landholders appearing in Group 1 are neither Tibetan nor Chinese (Iwao 2012: 177, n. 1), the landholders in BD 9642 are apparently Tibetan: apart from Clauses I and V, the names of the thousand-districts they belonged to are Gcom-pa, Phyug-tsams, and Grang-brtsan. It is worth noting that the Gcom-pa and Phyug-tsams districts belonged to Central *ru* (*dbu-ru*) of Central Tibet, while Grang-brtsan district belonged to Right *ru* (*gyas-ru*).⁵ Apparently, the landholders appearing in the registry were soldiers dispatched from Central Tibet. The clan names of some of the

³ I had a chance to see the original documents in Guojia Toshuguan in March 2015. I am grateful to Prof. Rong Xinjiang and Prof. Shi Rui of Beijing University for their grate help, and to library staffs.

⁴ See Iwao 2012: 176–178.

⁵ See the list of Iwao 2000: 8–9.

landholders also indicate their origins. For example, the landholders of Clauses II and III are from the clan of Cog-ro, a powerful clan of the Old Tibetan Empire. Moreover, the clan of vBring-yas, which appears in Clauses IV and VI–VIII, is not famous in Tibetan historiography but appears in some Dunhuang documents.⁶ Although Sta in Clause V and vDral in Clause IX are not known clans so far, they are surely not Chinese clan names.

Table 1: Landholders and their districts

Clause	Land Holder	Thousand-district	<i>ru</i>
I	?	?	?
II	Cog-ro khrom-btsan	Gcom-pa	Central <i>ru</i>
III	Cog-ro Ldong-kong	Gcom-pa	Central <i>ru</i>
IV	vBring-yas Stag-khong-spa	Phyug-tsams	Central <i>ru</i>
V	Stang-rtsoogs-lo-khrom stag, Legs-[+5]-ne-tsug	?	Central <i>ru</i>
VI	vBring-yas Stag-sku	Phyug-tsams	Central <i>ru</i>
VII	vBring-yas Ldong-nya - brtsan	Phyug-tsams	Central <i>ru</i>
VIII	vBring-yas Stag-stag-la -skyes	Phyug-tsams	Central <i>ru</i>
IX	vDral Gnyan-tse	Grang-brtsan	Right <i>ru</i>

4. Classifications of the land

In the previously known land registries only three classifications appear, namely, *rkya zhing*, *shug shing*, and *phong zhing*, which were interpreted by F. W. Thomas (1951: 367) as “the crop land,” “juniper land,” and “poor land,”

⁶ In P.t.1089, l.67, an official named vBring-yas bstan-kong appears as witness. See Imaeda et al. 2007: 136 and OTDO. For the study of P.t.1089, see Lalou 1955, Yamaguchi 1981, Wen 1987, Wang and Chen 1989, Yang 1997: 115-138, Scherrer-Schaub 2007.

respectively. As the first one, *rkeya zhing*, literary means the field of *rkeya* (tax unit), this classified land was most likely taxable land.⁷

However, instead of the above three classifications, the following two kinds of lands appear in BD9642: *gtan zhing* and *phyug mavi rten zhing*.

The literal translation of *gtan zhing* is “hereditary field,” probably referring to the hereditary property for the landholder and his family.⁸ The other term, *phyug mavi rten zhing*, is difficult to interpret. The term *phyug ma* appears in Pelliot tibétain 1089, line 37, as *stod smad gyI phyug maviI gzbls pon chen po*, which can be interpreted as “Supervisor of grazing land on upper and down sides.”⁹ Thus, according to this, one could interpret *phyug mavi rten zhing* as a field for livestock, i.e., pasture. If this translation is correct, it might mean a pastureland for livestock. However, it is still strange that the size of this field is calculated with the *dor* unit, which was seemingly adopted for cultivated land¹⁰. Therefore, there might be an alternative interpretation.

5. The localization of the land in BD9642

Although the landholders seem to be from Central Tibet, given that this is from the Mogao cave in Dunhuang, it is likely that the target land of BD 9642 is not far from Dunhuang or is at least around the Hexi area. In the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, three thousand-districts from Central Tibet appear: Dor-te, P(h)yug-tshams, and Ste-vdzom.

The territory became wider and Tsenpo obtained as far as the mountain range of Longshan. Five divisions of ten-thousand district of Mthong-khyab was established. The principality of Bde blon was newly created. . . among the subjects, [the thousand districts] of Dor-te, Phyug-tshams, and Ste-vdzom were bestowed the fur cloth (? thog-bu)¹¹ of tiger for their bravery.

⁷ For *rkeya* as a tax unit, see Iwao 2009. Taenzer (2013: 28, n. 9) states that a unit of *rkeya* consists of 6 men. But surprisingly, she does not offer any evidence supporting her assertion. Taenzer (2012: 222) argues this topic citing IOL TibJ 1414 + 940, but admits, “as it is not stated on the manuscript it must be regarded as a suggestion.”

⁸ This reminds us of yongtian 永田 in the equal-field system of the Tang Dynasty; however, there is still much room for discussion.

⁹ Lalous (1955: 182) interprets it as the supervisor of the real property and livestock in Tibet, but it is apparently strange that a Tibetan official was set in Dunhuang. I follow Yamaguchi’s interpretation (1981: 17), “Supervisor of grazing land on upper and down sides” 上手・下手牧地大管理長.

¹⁰ For the *dor* unit, see Jiang 1984.

¹¹ *thog bu* is unidentified term. The author provisionally follows the interpretation of Huang and Ma 2000: 294, 296-297, n. 19. See also Wang and Chen 1992: 86, n. 316.

chab srId che ste long shan la rgyud yan chad / / pyag du bzhes
 nas / mthong khyab khrI sde lnga btsugs / bde blon khams ched po
 gchig gsar du bskyed do / / . . . vbangskyI nang na / dor te pyug tshams
 ste vdzom dpav ba vI mtshan mar / stagI thog bu stsal to / /
 (*Chronicle*, ll. 385–386)¹²

It is noteworthy that Dor-te, P(h)yug-tshams, and Ste-vdzom belonged to Central *ru* and that among them Phyug-tshams also appears in BD 9642. This sentence indicates that the thousand-districts of Central Tibet came to the Hexi area in the middle of the eighth century. Furthermore it is worth noting that officials of Phyug-mtshams appear as in “*Prayers for the foundation of the De-ga-yu-tshal monastery*” (P.t.16 + IOL Tib J 751, f. 40r2-3), which monastery was founded to commemorate plural and simultaneous treaties between Tibet and “three great countries” (*rgyal khams chen po gsum*, ff. 37v3, 38v3, 39v2), namely Tang China, Uigur and Nanzhao.¹³ It is not a coincidence that all of the thousand-districts appearing in BD 9642 are from Central *ru* and Right *ru*, and it is likely that they still occupied some parts of the Hexi area even after the area surrendered to Tibet. According to BD 9642, they possessed “hereditary land” or “grazing land.” Therefore, the author surmises that these lands were rewards for soldiers who advanced and occupied the Hexi area.

6. Conclusions

The conclusions of this paper are as follows:

- (1) BD 9642 is a newly discovered land registry of the Old Tibetan Empire.
- (2) The target area is likely to be located around Dunhuang.
- (3) The landholders were Tibetan soldiers who belonged to thousand-districts dispatched from Central Tibet, namely Central and Right *ru*.
- (4) These lands were rewarded to Tibetan soldiers who advanced and occupied the Hexi area.

Appendix: tentative translation and the text

* This is a provisional translation of BD 9642. The fully annotated translation will be published separately.

Clause I, ll. 1–6

¹² Bacot et al. 1940: 154, Wang and Chen 1992: 167. Huang and Ma 2000: 294. For other references, see Imaeda et al. 2007: 217 and *OTDO*.

¹³ For “*Prayers for the foundation of the De-ga-yu-tshal monastery*,” see, for example, Kapstein 2009, and see Imaeda 2007: 5 or *OTDO* for other references. For the treaties and its historical background, see Iwao 2014.