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DEPENDENCY AT THE CENTRE AND PERIPHERY OF THE TIBETAN EMPIRE. SAYINGS, DOINGS AND INTERAGENCY

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Abstract

This paper presents a microhistory of ninth-century asymmetrical social relations in the centre and on the periphery of the Tibetan empire (ca. 600–850 CE), as well as relations between the periphery and the centre. During the reign of the Yar lung dynasty's Emperor Khri Srong lde brtsan (r. 756–ca. 800), official documents such as inscriptions represent him as a beneficent ruler of loyal ministers from elite families and as establishing Buddhism for the benefit of his rather non-descript but grateful subjects. The analysis of these rhetorical "sayings" then gives way to describing the "doings" in Dunhuang on the periphery of that empire, inhabited by mostly ethnic Chinese people who both perpetuated and worked within systems of asymmetrical dependency. Eighth- and ninth-century Tibetan emperors gradually introduced new rules for the Tibetan government of both monastic and lay organisations of Buddhists there, and they also employed many of the monks and laity as scribes to copy Buddhist works for the spiritual benefit of the rulers. Works found at the beginning of the twentieth century at the Mogao cave complex near Dunhuang, walled up in Mogao Cave 17 or the so-called "library cave," offer unparalleled access to their "doings," the relation of scribes with each other, with sutra editors, and with Tibetan imperial power right up to the emperors themselves. They thus fill out our image of the "interagency" between Tibetan subjects and their asymmetrical relations to the Tibetan empire—while problematizing the emperors' self-representational "sayings" in, inter alia, the imperial inscriptions.

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I. Introduction

Scholars at the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS), for whom this working paper is written, have adopted a practice-based approach, namely focusing on microhistories of asymmetrically dependent social relations between humans "in practice," and then comparing them "transculturally and transhistorically" in order to build a picture of the wider global history of this phenomenon.[1] This paper offers a microhistory from the late first millennium CE as a building block towards that larger project.[2] In order to write such microhistories, it is important to select what to study, and loosely following Theodore Schatzki, BCDSS scholars have described "in practice" as "a 'temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings'."[3] Further, human relations are broken down into "Sayings, Doings and Interagency" within the BCDSS approach,[4] and here I wish to contribute to how these terms are considered by contrasting the sayings and doings of the Tibetan empire (ca. 600–850) with those of subjects on the empire's periphery. Comparing these two reveals the range of interagency possible between the socially higher and lower levels of the empire, and how the latter could work within asymmetrical dependency and connect more directly to the emperor without resisting the status quo.

The geographical extent of what constitutes "Tibet" (Bod/ Bautai/ Baitai/ Tubbat/ Fa/ Tufan) in this contribution varies considerably as the Tibetan empire expanded and contracted at its various borders over time.[5] In fact, even the existence of the very thing at the beginning of the seventh century is open to debate, and so I shall prefer to speak of the empire of the Yar lung (/klung) dynasty. This indicates the hereditary lineage of power originating in and based around the Yar lung valley, in what I shall call, for ease of understanding, central Tibet. From this power base, the Yar lung dynasty expanded in all directions, except much to the direct south (due in part to the Himalayas), and so the land that Arabic sources of this period, for

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[1] Julia Winnebeck, Ove Sutter, Adrian Hermann, Christoph Antweiler and Stephan Conermann, "The Analytical Concept of Asymmetrical Dependency," *Journal of Global Slavery* 8 (2023): 14–15 and 41–45.

[2] This description in part comprises still rather preliminary speculations on scribal practices based on research that I undertook with Prof. Dr. Brandon Dotson at the British Library, to be published as Brandon Dotson and Lewis Doney, *A Study of the Tibetan Dunhuang* Aparimitāyur-nāma mahāyāna-sūtra *Copies Kept in the British Library* (forthcoming). All of the dates in this working paper refer to the common era.

[3] Winnebeck, Sutter, Hermann, Antweiler and Conermann, "The Analytical Concept of Asymmetrical Dependency": 16, quoting Theodore R. Schatzki, *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002): 80. One of the article's authors has gone into more detail on social interactions and how to identify dependence within them; see Christoph Antweiler, "On Dependency, Dependence, and a Dependency Turn," *Discussion Paper* 1, Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (2022), https://www.dependency.uni-bonn.de/images/pdf-files/discussion-papers/dp-1-antweiler.pdf [accessed 01.06.2023]: esp. 3–5.

[4] Winnebeck, Sutter, Hermann, Antweiler and Conermann, "The Analytical Concept of Asymmetrical Dependency": 16–22.

[5] On the earliest references to the various designations of 'Tibet', see Christopher I. Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia: A History of the Struggle for Great Power among Tibetans, Turks, Arabs, and Chinese During the Early Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987): 7. This work remains the most impressive monograph-length study of the Tibetan empire's foreign relations, although Brandon Dotson, *The Old Tibetan Annals: An Annotated Translation of Tibet's First History, With an Annotated Cartographical Documentation by Guntram Hazod* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009) is a mine of historical and geographical information on the empire itself. Another, more accessible account is Matthew T. Kapstein, *The Tibetans* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006): 51–83.

instance, called Tubbat was situated west of China, north of India, south of the Uyghur Turkic territories and east of the Khurasan marches.

The Yar lung dynasty's power base was at first ensured by alliances with a small collection of other minimally developed nomadic-pastoralist and agriculturalist families or clans centred around the relatively fertile region through which the gTsang po River (or Brahmāputra) flows.[6] The increase in their power meant coming to rule over a far larger but still sparsely populated area—corresponding to the Tibetan plateau and even beyond—inhabited by connected ethnic groups sharing the spoils of military conquest, Silk Road trade, and the taxation of others' trade, overseen by an emperor (*btsan po*) at its head. Since the ruler was an emperor, he was subject to no other ruler; so, for him, it was perhaps natural to try to convince others to submit. As Beckwith states, this "system of kingship provided a strong impetus to expansion."[7] The Tibetan, Chinese, and Arabic histories written soon after this period all claim that the Yar lung rulers conquered the "kings of the four directions and forced them to pay tribute."[8]

II. The Northeast

During the reign of Emperor Khri Srong btsan (died 649, known to later histories as Srong btsan sgam po, Srong btsan "the wise"), the Tibetan Empire expanded into the northeast regions that will be the focus of the second half of this working paper. The emperor's ministers subjugated the Mi nyag (some of ancestors of the Tangut empire, Chinese: Xi Xia) and the Sum pa (Chinese: Supi), the latter of whom had reneged on their former alliance.[9] In the middle of the seventh century, the Tibetan empire expanded farther northeast and conquered the 'A zha (Chinese: Tuyuhun), who were based to the west of Kokonor Lake (Chinese: Qinghai Hu) and the southeastern Tarim Basin. The 'A zha were a Turkic kingdom who had been a thorn in the side of bordering Turkish, Tibetan, and Chinese areas since the fifth century.[10] Like the Sum pa, perhaps the 'A zha were not degraded by their incorporation into the empire.

The Yar lung dynasty's expansion into the northeast also brought them increasingly into contact with Tang China (618–907). Tibetan culture was not held in high regard in Chang'an, as reflected in slightly later Chinese sources such as the *Tang History* (*Tangshu*).[11] At this time, there were no cities, no Buddhist monasteries or other large centres of population. Only after the fall of the empire did the town of Lhasa (first known as the temple-site of Ra sa in the eighth century) grow into a hub of pilgrimage and then of trade and eventually a capital. In the early imperial period, the emperors either lived in fortified castles or sat at the head of a mobile court that travelled around central Tibet as a tented encampment.

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[6] See, most recently, Lewis Doney, "Tibet," in *A Companion to the Global Early Middle Ages*, ed. Erik Hermans (Leeds: Arc Humanities, 2020): 191–223, 194–96.

[7] Christopher I. Beckwith, "The Tibetan Empire in the West," in *Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson: Proceedings of the International Seminar on Tibetan Studies, Oxford 1979*, ed. Michael Aris and Aung San Suu Kyi (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1980): 30.

[8] Beckwith, "The Tibetan Empire in the West": 30.

[9] Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*: 20–22.

[10] See Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*: 17–19.

[11] Kurtis R. Schaeffer, Matthew T. Kapstein and Gray Tuttle, eds., *Sources of Tibetan Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013): 6–10.

Silk, princesses, and perhaps also Buddhism were important parts of Tang-Yar lung diplomacy during the long eighth century. During the period from 634 to 846, it is estimated that the Tang sent 66 envoys to the Yar lung and were sent the same 125 times, and though silk flowed from east to west, it was reciprocated from the Tibetan side with lavish metalwork such as golden animal-shaped vessels and grand models of pastoral or cosmopolitan structures.[12] Commerce also flowed between the lands, with animals such as horses, sheep, cattle, and rare birds; animal products, including musk, yak tails, and superior honey; textiles, metalwork, and natural products (e.g., salt, gold, jade, and gemstones) from the west being traded for inter alia silk, paper, ink, and perhaps even tea from the east.[13] This, of course, does not mean that the relationship between the two imperial powers was uniformly peaceful over these two hundred years.

III. Khri Srong lde brtsan

The Tibetan empire reached its greatest extent during the reign of Emperor Khri Srong lde brtsan (r. 756–ca. 800). In the northwest, it threatened the territory of the fourth and fifth Abbasid caliphs, Al-Mansur (714–775) and Harun al-Rashid (763/766–809), on the banks of the Oxus; in the east, the Tibetan army even occupied the Chinese capital Chang'an (present day Xi'an) for 15 days in 763, during which time they named a new Chinese emperor and even announced the beginning of a new era.[14] This period thus constituted a moment of high connectivity in religious and material culture, trade, war, and diplomatic relations for the Yar lung dynasty—not to be matched again in the region until the Yuan dynasty of the Mongols (1271–1368).

Related to their antagonism against the Tang, six years before Khri Srong lde brtsan's rule began (i.e., in around 750), the Yar lung dynasty strengthened its ties with the Mywa or 'Jang kingdom (Chinese: Nanzhao) to its southeast, which consisted of two ethnically diverse groups: the more sinified majority known to the Tibetans as the "White Mywa" (Mywa dkar po; Chinese: Bai Man) and the ruling elite known as the "Black Mywa" (Mywa nag po; Chinese: Wu Man).[15] The Mywa leadership switched its allegiance between the Tang and the Yar lung dynasties at various points during the long eighth century but was never accorded parity with either. [16] In the 750s, the Mywa ruler Ge luo feng (Tibetan: Kag la bong; reigned 748–779) allied with the Yar lung dynasty and fended off Tang military advances into Mywa territory—for which he was rewarded with the title of "emperor younger brother" (*btsan po gcung*).[17] However, this alliance did not last many years after his death, and in 794, the region returned

[12] Tao Tong, *The Silk Roads of the Northern Tibetan Plateau During the Early Middle Ages (from the Han to Tang Dynasty): as Reconstructed from Archaeological and Written Sources* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2013): 20.

[13] Christopher I. Beckwith, "Tibet and the Early Medieval *Florissance* in Eurasia: A Preliminary Note on the Economic History of the Tibetan Empire," *Central Asiatic Journal* 21, no. 2 (1977): 96–100.

[14] See Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*: 143–57.

[15] Charles Backus, *The Nan-Chao Kingdom and T'ang China's Southwestern Frontier* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981): 49.

[16] Megan Bryson, "Tsenpo Chung, Yunnan wang, Mahārāja: Royal Titles in Narratives of Nanzhao Kingship between Tibet and Tang China," *Cahiers d'Extême-Asie* 24 (2015): 63.

[17] Helga Uebach, "Tibetan Officials in the 8th-Century South-Eastern Part of the Empire," in *Old Tibetan Studies Dedicated to the Memory of R.E. Emmerick: Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the IATS, 2003*, ed. Cristina Scherrer-Schaub (Leiden: Brill, 2012): 53–56; Bryson, "Tsenpo Chung, Yunnan wang, Mahārāja": 64–69.

its allegiance to the Tang.[18] However, the earliest extant stone inscription in Tibetan dates from the period of positive Yar lung-Mywa relations. It was discovered and probably erected at the "first bend of the Yangtze River" in Lijiang district, at a flash point of many Yar lung-Mywa-Tang territorial disputes.[19] Its importance for connectivity resides first in its "evidence of the use of Tibetan language in the eighth-century south-eastern region of the empire."[20] The conversion of some of the local population to the Tibetan language (both spoken and written) is a trait also found in the Tibetan-controlled Dunhuang from the eighth to the ninth century (see below), and this suggests an intentional policy of the Yar lung dynasty in addition to being simply a practical option for the conquered population. *The Dehua bei* Inscription of 766 and the ninth-century *Old Tibetan Chronicle* also show signs of a mixed Tibetan-Chinese (or Chinese-emulating Tibetan) system of titles granted to loyal officials of Mywa acting as ambassadors to the Yar lung court.[21]

The second point of importance in the Lijiang Inscription is the use of stone as a new form of material support for Tibetan public proclamations in the eighth century, and stone inscriptions were soon seen throughout the empire. The question of the source(s) of inspiration for the Tibetan imperial stone inscriptions remains unresolved since this practice possesses antecedents in indigenous standing stones and was common not only in China, but also in Turkic and Indic areas, and in Mywa itself.[22] Regardless of its source, the technology used in the construction of stone pillars (and in bell founding) and their adornment with artistic and written Tibetan epigraphy became more popular in the Yar lung valley as well as on the borders of the empire from the mid-eighth century onwards—sponsored by the emperors, their queens, and their ministers. Stone pillars were used to record treaties between the Tibetan empire and the Tang, proclaim support for state Buddhism, "set in stone" the privileges accorded to the families of loyal ministers, and to mark the tombs of the emperors with fitting eulogies to their lives.[23] This priceless stele corpus was augmented with tablet, wall, and rock inscriptions in the later ninth and tenth centuries, whose content increasingly

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[18] Tokio Takata, "A Note on the Lijiang Inscription," *Asia Major* 19 (2006): 165–67, provides a short outline of all these events; see also Bryson, "Tsenpo Chung, Yunnan wang, Mahārāja": 69–70.

[19] See Takata, "A Note on the Lijiang Inscription": 161–70; Uebach, "Tibetan Officials in the 8th-Century South-Eastern Part of the Empire": 59–62; Bryson, "Tsenpo Chung, Yunnan wang, Mahārāja": 60–63.

[20] Uebach, "Tibetan Officials in the 8th-Century South-Eastern Part of the Empire": 59.

[21] Bryson, "Tsenpo Chung, Yunnan wang, Mahārāja": 65–66; Uebach, "Tibetan Officials in the 8th-Century South-Eastern Part of the Empire": 61.

[22] See Mark Aldenderfer, "Domestic rDo ring? A New Class of Standing Stone from the Tibetan Plateau," *The Tibet Journal* 28, no. 1–2 (2003): 3–20, on prehistoric standing stones of the Tibetan plateau. Guntram Hazod argues that the three extant ninth-century tortoise-borne steles are "adoptions of Chinese or Turkic models, whereby the Tibetan example with its crouching posture and the neck slightly pulled back is closer to the 'Turkish model,' as represented by the sixth-century Turkic Bugut inscription pillar"; see Guntram Hazod, "The Stele in the Centre of the Lhasa Mandala: About the Position of the 9th-Century Sino-Tibetan Treaty Pillar of Lhasa in its Historical-Geographical and Narrative Context," in *Epigraphic Evidence in the Pre-Modern Buddhist World: Proceedings of the Eponymous Conference Held in Vienna, 14–15 Oct. 2011*, ed. Kurt Tropper (Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, 2014): 73. In contrast, the complex technology of founding large Buddhist temple bells, with imagery and text in both Tibetan and Indic scripts cast into the bronze, appears to have come from Tang China (where Korean artisans were employed as experts in the art); see Lewis Doney, "Temple Bells from the Tibetan Imperial Period: Buddhist Material Culture in Context," in *Comparisons Across Time and Space: Papers from the Seventh Leiden Asian Studies Symposium*, ed. Elizabeth Cecil and Lucas den Boer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020): 105–42.

[23] See Hugh Edward Richardson, *A Corpus of Early Tibetan Inscriptions* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1985); Fang-Kuei Li and W. South Coblin, *A Study of the Old Tibetan Inscriptions* (Taipei: Institute of History and Philology, Academica Sinica, 1987).

shifted from the imperial proclamations and eulogies of rulers and ministers to Buddhist prayers, mantras and instructions, representations of deities, and records of the construction of temples and monasteries.[24]

The inscriptions can be used as part of this microhistory to assess "Sayings, Doings and Interagency" evident within the Tibetan empire, but especially the "sayings,"[25] or worldview, authored and authorized by the Tibetan emperors at the centre of power. The stone inscriptions begin to appear during the lifetime, or perhaps the reign, of Khri Srong lde brtsan. The so-called Zhol Inscription records that he rewarded a minister, Ngan lam sTag ra Klu khong, for remaining loyal to the royal institution throughout the uprising and for counselling the emperor in bringing many districts and fortresses of China under subjugation. This inscription also contrasts Tibetan imperial power with that of the inferior and fearful Chinese lord (*rgya rje*; not designated an emperor), Suzong (He'u 'ki wang te; 711–762).[26]

The crowning event of this subjugation was the brief sacking of Chang'an in 763, after the Tang had been weakened by the internal An Lushan (ca. 703–757) / Anxi rebellion of 755 and the deceased Suzong had been replaced by his son in 762. The *Old Tibetan Annals* recorded this event and blamed the downfall of the western capital on a lack of respect from the new Chinese emperor, Daizong (727–779):

> [762–764] … The Lord of China having died at the end of winter, [another] Lord of China was newly installed. As he found it unsuitable to offer [Tibet] silk tribute and maps, and so forth, political ties were destroyed, and Zhang [Mchims-rgyal] Rgyal-zigs [Shu-theng], Zhang Stong-rtsan and others crossed the iron bridge at Bum-ling. They waged a great campaign. They sacked many Chinese strongholds, such as 'Bu-shing-kun, Zin-cu, and Ga-cu. Zhang [Mchims-rgyal] Rgyal-zigs [Shu-theng] returned to the land of Tibet. Zhang [Mchims-rgyal] Rgyal-zigs [Shu-theng], Minister [Ngan-lam] Stag-sgra [Klu-khong], Zhang Stong-rtsan, Btsan-ba, and others led a military campaign to the capital and sacked the capital. The Lord of China fled, [another] Lord of China was newly appointed, and the military campaign returned. Zhang [Mchims-rgyal] Rgyal-zig [Shu-theng] went to Tibet for a great consultation. So one year.[27]

The narrative here does not include a depiction of Khri Srong lde brtsan, but rather reflects positively on his reign. This is history written by the victors of this particular campaign and glorifies not only the emperor but also the top ministers and generals—against the common enemy of the expanding empire, China. In rewarding Ngan lam sTag ra Klu khong for his part in this victory, the Zhol Inscription thereby also portrays Khri Srong lde brtsan as a powerful and generous emperor. Like the *Old Tibetan Annals*, the Zhol Inscription questions the

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[24] See Kazushi Iwao et al., *Old Tibetan Inscriptions*: *Old Tibetan Documents Online Monograph Series II* (Tokyo: Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2009): 54–69 and 74–94.

[25] Winnebeck, Sutter, Hermann, Antweiler and Conermann, "The Analytical Concept of Asymmetrical Dependency": 16–20.

[26] See Richardson, *A Corpus of Early Tibetan Inscriptions*: 1–25; Li and Coblin, *A Study of the Old Tibetan Inscriptions*: 138–85; Lewis Doney, "Emperor, Dharmaraja, Bodhisattva? Inscriptions from the Reign of Khri Srong lde brtsan," *Journal of Research Institute, Kobe City University of Foreign Studies* 51 (2013): 63–69.

[27] Dotson, *The Old Tibetan Annals*: 132; the square brackets are Dotson's and he capitalizes the first letter of Tibetan names whereas below I capitalize the "root letter" (*ming gzhi*). The *Tang History* naturally describes the same events somewhat differently (see Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle, eds., *Sources of Tibetan Tradition*: 16–19.

character of Tibet's neighbouring ruler in order to compliment the Tibetan emperor's strengths by comparison.[28]

The subsequent Yar lung-Tang treaty of 783 laid less of an emphasis on Tang superiority and brought a reduction in open hostilities between the two powers.[29] However, the truce was soon broken by the Tang, and the two sides became antagonistic once more.[30] Only the treaty of 821/822, the final of seven agreements between the Yar lung and Tang dynasties, was "the first one in which the political co-equality between the two powers was also recognized by the Chinese side," as evidenced by the unique way in which the Treaty Inscription of 823 is written.[31] It initiated a longer period of peace between the two empires, but the Yar lung dynasty fell soon after and perhaps was already unable to exert great military pressure on the Tang due to internal problems.

IV. Buddhism

Religious influence on the Yar lung dynasty came as much from their imperial expansion in western and northwestern areas as from the east.[32] The Yar lung court may have been in contact or familiar with Nestorian Christianity, more properly known as the Church of the East, and Manichaeism, but it was Buddhism that became a state religion in the eighth century.[33] Although Buddhist priests and artists may have been present at the Tibetan court and patronized by its emperors during the seventh century, the late eighth century marks a watershed moment for the institution of Buddhism in the Tibetan empire. The ascendancy of the empire allowed the emperor to confer high status, patronage, and support on the Buddhist institution of ordained monks (the *saṃgha*).

On the famous stele that still stands outside bSam yas Monastery, in what was the heart of the empire, Khri Srong lde brtsan proclaims that such patronage "shall never be abandoned or destroyed" as well as provide the wealth that makes the "provision of the necessary accoutrements" possible.[34] The donee is not a specific person or clan (as in the Zhol Inscription above), but rather the monastic followers of Buddhism. The bSam yas Inscription draws on certain rhetorical devices used in earlier secular proclamations, for instance, the Zhol Inscription, in order to evoke both imperial expansion and the stability of the dynastic lineage. It uses these rhetorical *topoi* to lend authority to Buddhism. Reciprocally, the ministers who

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[28] Doney, "Emperor, Dharmaraja, Bodhisattva?": 68.

[29] It is described according to the *Tang History* in Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle, eds., *Sources of Tibetan Tradition*: 19–21.

[30] See Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*: 149–50.

[31] Hazod, "The Stele in the Centre of the Lhasa Mandala": 41. Kazushi Iwao goes further, claiming that the Yar lung dynasty showed signs of taking a superior position to the Tang, even in the 783 treaty, and actually led the 821/822 treaty negotiations; see Kazushi Iwao, "Organisation of the Chinese Inhabitants in Tibetan-ruled Dunhuang," in *Old Tibetan Studies Dedicated to the Memory of R.E. Emmerick: Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the IATS, 2003*, ed. Cristina Scherrer-Schaub (Leiden: Brill, 2012): 65–75.

[32] On this expansion, see Doney, "Tibet": 206–8.

[33] See Geza Uray, "Tibet's Connections with Nestorianism and Manicheism in the 8th to 10th Centuries," in *Contributions on Tibetan Language, History and Culture: Proceedings of the Csoma de Kőrös Symposium Held at Velm-Vienna, Austria, 13–19 September 1981*, ed. Ernst Steinkellner and Helmut Tauscher (Vienna: Universität Wien, 1983): 399–429. The following was taken from a longer discussion in Doney, "Tibet": 209–13.

[34] See Richardson, *A Corpus of Early Tibetan Inscriptions*: 26–29; Li and Coblin, *A Study of the Old Tibetan Inscriptions*: 186–92; Doney, "Emperor, Dharmaraja, Bodhisattva?": 69–72.

swore to protect this newly established state religion also thereby pledged their continued loyalty to the Yar lung dynasty, and the imperially sponsored construction of large temple structures centralized the generally itinerant power base of the empire around the two "capitals," Ra sa (later to be named Lhasa) and Brag dmar (farther southeast where bSam yas stands). The circular *maṇḍala* symbolism inherent in the design of bSam yas Monastery reflects the ideal empire, with the emperor identified with the powerful cosmic buddha (Vairocana) at its centre—as at other imperially sponsored Buddhist sites in East Asia more generally during this period.[35]

According to a "royal explanation" (*bka' mchid*) of Khri Srong lde brtsan's acts on behalf of Buddhism, the emperor then spread (or perhaps imposed) the religion throughout his empire, in the west as far as Zhang zhung and Little Palūr, and in the east up to the "bDe blon khams" area, which included Dunhuang and more, by means of councils held with his loyal nobility (including the preferentially treated lords of the 'A zha).[36] He thereby apparently succeeded by and large in realizing his intention of granting all Tibetans access to Buddhist liberation from the mundane world of suffering (*saṃsāra*).[37] Buddhism probably had little wider influence on Tibetan *cultural* practices beyond the court, unlike the transformations it wrought from the post-imperial period onwards.[38] Yet, even if the spread of Buddhism itself throughout the empire was more rhetorical or real, the idea of this spread was important, in part because it reflected positively on the Yar lung dynasty's power over their realm. The identification of Buddhism as a state religion and the emperor as Buddha Vairocana may have also facilitated relations between the Yar lung dynasty and rulers of the surrounding states, which made similar claims around this time. Unfortunately, we lack concrete evidence, such as written communications between these rulers, that would corroborate such a hypothesis.[39]

A mass translation exercise funded and led by imperial power formed part of the process of establishing Tibetan Buddhism.[40] By the ninth century, this created a quite substantial royal library (catalogued in the *lHan kar ma* and *'Phang thang ma* catalogues) that may have been emulating either the monastic libraries of Nālandā and Dunhuang or the royal libraries of

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[35] Kapstein, *The Tibetans*: 71–72; Doney, "Emperor, Dharmaraja, Bodhisattva?": 71.

[36] See Hugh E. Richardson, "The First Tibetan Chos-'byung," in *High Peaks Pure Earth*, ed. Michael Aris (London: Serindia, 1998): 92–93; Lewis Doney, "Narrative Transformations: The Spiritual Friends of Khri Srong lde brtsan," in *Interaction in the Himalayas and Central Asia: Processes of Transfer, Translation and Transformation in Art, Archaeology, Religion and Polity*, ed. Eva Allinger et al. (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2017): 313.

[37] Sam van Schaik, "Tibetan Buddhism in Central Asia: Geopolitics and Group Dynamics," in *Transfer of Buddhism across Central Asian Networks (7th to 13th Centuries)*, ed. Carmen Meinert (Leiden: Brill, 2016): 59–62. Later Tibetan histories recount that one of the pious Buddhist sons of Khri Srong lde brtsan, Mu ne btsan po, also attempted (and failed) thrice to liberate his poorer subjects from the financial inequalities of the Tibetan social system by levelling the difference between rich and poor; see Per K. Sørensen, *Tibetan Buddhist Historiography: The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies, An Annotated Translation of the XIVth Century Tibetan Chronicle Rgyal-rabs Gsal-ba'i Me-long* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994): 404–5. However, this can be neither proved nor falsified on the basis of the (admittedly almost non-existent) contemporaneous or proximate sources on this early ninth-century period of Tibetan imperial history.

[38] See, most recently, Doney, "Narrative Transformations."

[39] However, see below on Mi nyag representations of the Tibetan emperors as bodhisattvas—emanating from the borders of the empire, if not from outside.

[40] See Cristina Scherrer-Schaub, "Enacting Words: A Diplomatic Analysis of the Imperial Decrees (*bkas bcad*) and their Application in the sGra sbyor bam po gnyis pa Tradition," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 25, no. 1–2 (2002): 263–340.

Chang'an, among others.[41] The subsequent influx of Indic Buddhism exerted a great influence on Tibetan culture, introducing new notions of virtue, concepts such as *karma* and rebirth, sophisticated methods of philosophical reasoning, and advice on how to follow the ideal of dharmic kingship, among others.[42] Other aspects of the South Asian poetic and narrative traditions that entered Tibetan culture with the translation of all sorts of literature, and their indigenous transformations over time, are also undeniable.[43] However, we should not ignore the translations into Tibetan from Chinese or those from the Silk Road, which appear to have been undertaken without the production of imperially edicted guidance.[44] At least one bilingual Tibetan-Chinese (or Chinese-Tibetan) lexicon of technical Buddhist vocabulary exists in Dunhuang, but it is difficult to date and its authorship and intended audience remain debated.[45] Other manuscripts from the imperial period and later suggest that Chan Buddhism (Tibetan: bSam gtan), which is known as Zen in Japan, was popular in Tibetan translation too.[46]

V. Dunhuang

We now move on in our schema of "Sayings, Doings and Interagency" to contrast the sayings of the centre with their doings on the periphery,[47] and with the sayings and doings of their subjects in relation of interagency with each other and with the empire, "on the ground" so to say. Parts of the periphery obviously accepted or mouthed the centre's sayings, and farther

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[41] See Adelheid Herrmann-Pfandt, *Die Lhan kar ma: Ein früher Katalog der ins Tibetische übersetzten buddhistischen Texte* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2008); Georgios Halkias, "Tibetan Buddhism Registered: A Catalogue from the Imperial Court of 'phang thang," *The Eastern Buddhist* 36, no. 1–2 (2004): 46–105; Xiang Wang, "From Nālandā to Chang'an: A Survey of Buddhist Libraries in Medieval China (618–907)," in *Buddhism Across Asia: Networks of Material, Intellectual and Cultural Exchange*, ed. Tansen Sen (Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, 2014): 220–23.

[42] See, for instance, David L. Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists and their Tibetan Successors* (London: Serindia, 1987): 381–526; David Seyfort Ruegg, *Ordre spirituel et ordre temporel dans la pensée bouddhique de l'Inde et du Tibet: Quatre conférences au Collège de France* (Paris: Collège de France, 1995): 1–35; Michael L. Walter, *Buddhism and Empire: The Political and Religious Culture of Early Tibet* (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 165–285.

[43] A good source of references for further reading is Ulrike Roesler, "Narrative: Tibet," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, vol. 1, ed. Jonathan Silk (Leiden: Brill, 2015): 515–23.

[44] See, for example, Rolf A. Stein, "Tibetica Antiqua I: Les deux vocabularies des traductions Indo-tibétaine et Sino-tibétaine dans les manuscrits des Touen-houang," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 72 (1983): 149–236; Jonathan Silk, "Out of the East: Tibetan Scripture Translations from Chinese," *Bod rig pai' dus deb / Zangxue xuekan* 藏學學刊 */ Journal of Tibetology* 9 (2013): 29–36; Ronald E. Emmerick, *Tibetan Texts Concerning Khotan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).

[45] On this document from the Mogao Cave 17 near Dunhuang, Pelliot tibétain 1257, which is now held in the Biblithèque nationale de France in Paris, see James B. Apple and Shinobu A. Apple, "A Re-Evaluation of Pelliot tibétain 1257: An Early Tibetan-Chinese Glossary from Dunhuang," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 42 (2017): 68–180. Apple and Apple argue that it is a copy of a document somewhat like a questionnaire, in which Tibetans sought from Chinese monasteries the Chinese equivalents of Tibetan calque translation terms that they were already using in their translations.

[46] See Sam van Schaik, *The Tibetan Chan Manuscripts: A Complete Descriptive Catalogue of Tibetan Chan Texts in the Dunhuang Manuscript Collections* (Bloomington: Sinor Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies Indiana University, 2014). Two other Mogao Cave 17 documents (now held in the British Library), ITJ 709/9 and ITJ 667, together make up a treatise on Chan Buddhism, which the work itself says had been authorized under the seal of Khri Srong lde brtsan. This treatise thus alludes to his activity as patron of the dharma coming from China as well as India.

[47] Winnebeck, Sutter, Hermann, Antweiler and Conermann, "The Analytical Concept of Asymmetrical Dependency": 20.

east, there is epigraphic evidence of the depiction of emperor Khri Srong lde brtsan as a bodhisattva who allowed his subjects to enter the path towards enlightenment. In Brag lha mo Rock Inscription A, inscribed to the southeast of what is today Jyekundo (sKye dgu mdo; Chinese: Jiegu zhen) in the eastern part of the Tibetan empire, a high-status member or even ruler of the Mi nyag ethnic group—a substantial portion of the later Tangut region, which was allied to the Yar lung dynasty during the second half of the eighth century—proclaims:[48]

> During the reign of the emperor, the bodhisattva, Khri Srong lde brtsan [his] merit was great. After that authority (literally, "secure helmet") spread to the borders in the ten directions, [Khri Srong lde brtsan] was inspired and codified many *Mahāyāna sūtra* scriptures. Over a thousand [people], including Me nyag --- rgyal, entered the path of liberation. [He?] extensively built the --- monastery, and the subjects and --- offered support. The sacred teachings --- [He?] accepted the *Mahāyāna* and firmly maintained [it].[49]

Brag lha mo Rock Inscription A is difficult to date accurately, but it appears to fall within the period of the Mi nyag alliance to the Yar lung dynasty (also corresponding roughly to the reign of Khri Srong lde brtsan, 756–ca. 800). The rock is also situated in land controlled by the latter at that time. The inscription describes the recent spread of Buddhism throughout the Mi nyag ethnic area, using the symbolism of the spread of empire and giving Bodhisattva Khri Srong lde brtsan the credit for their conversion.

The text of the inscription is written in Tibetan rather than in a local Mi nyag language, but it also records the names of a local nobleman or ruler and a monastery. This suggests that the text of the inscription was locally authorized rather than centrally created and sent out to Brag lha mo to be proclaimed there. Perhaps this use of Tibetan is further evidence of the impact of the empire in the provinces, as with the southeastern Lijiang inscription above. Furthermore, the mention of the emperors as bodhisattvas accords with their description in the *Prophecy of the Khotanese Arhat* from the northern part of the empire. If Khri Srong lde brtsan evidently intended to spread Buddhism (and hence his own self-representation as a Buddhist ruler) to the edges of his realm within his lifetime, here we have proof that this was achieved, at least rhetorically in the eyes of some of the elites of the subject polities.

From 787 to 848, the Tibetan empire ruled over Dunhuang, which belonged to Guazhou Province (Tibetan: Kwa chu khrom) and had its base in the Guazhou oasis, 15km to the east of Dunhuang.[50] This area was pivotal for trade and connectivity since the northern and southern Silk Roads came together here before entering the Gansu Corridor, which led to Liangzhou and Chang'an. Gertraud Taenzer explains how the Tibetan administration split the inhabitants into civil and military units—the former paying taxes and remaining relatively untouched by Tibetan culture, and the latter group in addition performing *corvée* labour (including

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[48] See Amy Heller, "Buddhist Images and Rock Inscriptions from Eastern Tibet, VIIIth to Xth Century, part IV," in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Graz 1995*, ed. Helmut Krasser (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997); Lewis Doney, "Early Bodhisattva-Kingship in Tibet: The Case of Tri Sondétsen," *Cahiers d'Extême-Asie* 24 (2015): 36–39.

[49] Doney, "Early Bodhisattva-Kingship in Tibet": 37.

[50] Gertraud Taenzer, "Changing Relations between Administration, Clergy and Lay People in Eastern Central Asia: A Case Study according to the Dunhuang Manuscripts Referring to the Transition from Tibetan to Local Rule in Dunhuang, 8th–11th Centuries," in *Transfer of Buddhism across Central Asian networks (7th to 13th Centuries)*, ed. Carmen Meinert (Leiden: Brill, 2016): 19.

recruitment as soldiers), and more often taking on Tibetan names.[51] The area was primarily Buddhist, and military units included some monks who became military citizens (though perhaps not soldiers). Regional councils (*'dun sa/tsa*) administered both the general "bDe blon khams" area and the more specific Kwa cu military district that included Dunhuang, and new rules were gradually introduced for the Tibetan government of both monastic and lay organisations, altering the already-existing structures but with a relatively light touch.[52]

Inhabitants of the area were mostly Chinese but also came from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and Dunhuang was visited by embassies, armies, pilgrims, and merchants from many more lands during the long eighth century. The works found in the Mogao cave complex near Dunhuang at the beginning of the twentieth century, walled up in Mogao Cave 17 or the so-called "library cave," are written in Chinese, Khotanese, Sanskrit, Sogdian, Tibetan, Uyghur, and other languages. They include important works such as the *Old Tibetan Annals* and the Tibetan Chan Buddhist works described above. During the Tibetan occupation, many monastic and lay inhabitants of the region worked as scribes for the grand sutra copying projects undertaken by Emperor Khri gTsug lde brtsan (r. 815–841). There, they worked in both Tibetan and Chinese on such classic outlines of the bodhisattva path and the "perfection of [Buddhist] wisdom" (*prajñāpāramitā*) as the *Śatasahasrika-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (Tibetan) and *Mahā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (Chinese), as well as the *Aparimitāyurnāma-mahāyāna-sūtra* (Tibetan and Chinese), which lies closer to the tantric Buddhism of spells (*dhāraṇī*) and liberation in this lifetime.[53] Taenzer suggests that the relationship between the Yar lung dynasty and Dunhuang was at first amicable, and that local officials were well rewarded with official duties, titles (though never higher than Tibetans), and exemption from conscription and taxes.[54] Not only the above copied sutras, but also other ritual texts and prayers dating from the period of Tibetan control over Dunhuang, are dedicated to increasing the merit or life-span of the Tibetan emperor.[55]

VI. Working with(in) Dependency

The Tibetan empire ruled over Dunhuang until 848, and during that time, some of the inhabitants (especially those in the military designation) converted to using the Tibetan language (both spoken and written) and took on Tibetan names, suggesting an intentional policy of Tibet's Yar lung dynasty in addition to a practical option for the conquered

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[51] See Taenzer, "Changing Relations between Administration, Clergy and Lay People in Eastern Central Asia": 20–22. For more on the geographical divisions, see Iwao, "Organisation of the Chinese Inhabitants in Tibetan-ruled Dunhuang."

[52] Dotson, *The Old Tibetan Annals*: 69; Taenzer, "Changing Relations between Administration, Clergy and Lay People in Eastern Central Asia": 27–35.

[53] What follows is based on preliminary results from Dotson and Doney, *A Study of the Tibetan Dunhuang* Aparimitāyur-nāma mahāyāna-sūtra *Copies Kept in the British Library* (forthcoming); see also Brandon Dotson, "The Remains of the Dharma: Editing, Rejecting, and Replacing the Buddha's Words in Officially Commissioned *Sūtra*s from Dunhuang, 820s to 840s," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 36–37 (2013–2014): 5–68.

[54] Taenzer, "Changing Relations between Administration, Clergy and Lay People in Eastern Central Asia": 26 and 21, n. 4.

[55] Rather than, say, the Tang emperor; see, for example, Huaiyu Chen, "Multiple Traditions of One Ritual: A Reading of the Lantern-Lighting Prayers in Dunhuang Manuscripts," in *Buddhism Across Asia: Networks of Material, Intellectual and Cultural Exchange*, ed. Tansen Sen (Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, 2014): 249–52.

population. The mixture of direct rule and a single enforced law code with de facto flexibility in sources of authority (especially for Buddhist clerics) at Dunhuang would make this case usefully comparable with that of the later Roman Empire.[56]

When Buddhism became a state religion at the Tibetan court in the mid to late eighth century, this was also spread (or perhaps imposed) throughout the empire. A truly extraordinary mass translation exercise, funded and led by imperial power, formed part of the establishment of Tibetan Buddhism. The Dunhuang area was already primarily Buddhist, and many monastic and lay inhabitants of the region worked as scribes for imperial sutra copying projects between the 820s and 840s. The sutra copies that they scribed were dedicated to the increase of the merit or lifespan of the Tibetan emperor.

Despite making up the vast majority of the Mogao Tibetan texts, scholars of the twentieth century largely neglected these manuscripts, as kept inter alia in the British Library and Bibliothèque Nationale de France (referred to under ITJ and PT numbers, respectively, below). They tended instead to favour historical and other religious works due to the repetitive content of the *Aparimitāyurnāma-mahāyāna-sūtra* (henceforth *Ap*) copies. However, reassessing these copies as the material embodiment of the sutra copying project and as archaeological evidence of the daily life of Dunhuang scriptoria offers unparalleled access to the world of early Tibetan Buddhist scriptoria, including the relation of their scribes with each other, with sutra editors, and with Tibetan imperial power, right up to the emperor himself. These fascinating sources could be combined with other Mogao documents such as contracts, letters, and other religious works as well as already-published art and archaeological evidence from the Mogao caves and the surrounding region. Such data would then form the basis for contextualizing the life of scribes within the religious and social world of Dunhuang during the period of Tibetan occupation.

Of especial relevance to the "doings" of scribal culture at Dunhuang that are not given any acknoweldgement in the "sayings" of the scribes or their overseers is the effacing and replacing of scribal and editorial colophons. Often, multiple copies of *Ap* are written in the same scribal hand on a single roll (like a scroll but unrolled horizontally). Yet, occasionally they are attributed in their colophons to separate scribes. Other cases, where one scribe's name is rubbed out or struck through and replaced with that of another, arediscussed in section X below. Sometimes, the attempt to efface another scribe's name is not at all thorough, such that one can hardly tell that one name is struck through. It appears that scribes, who would be corporally punished for failure in their duties, were quite openly swapping other scribes' names for theirs and thus claiming to have scribed a sutra that they did not. Other evidence suggests that the paper on which the sutra copies were written was itself of great importance, and a failure to hand in all the sheets one was given at the beginning of a scribal project would also be punished with lashes. Some scribes were able to take on others' debts, and it is likely that the misattribution of copies to particular scribes also plays a part in this economy. All of this evidence attests to a paper economy in which scribes traded, loaned, and stole not only the tools of the trade in the form of paper, ink, pens, and knives, but also the finished products in the form of completed sutra copies—which act as "receipts" of a job well done. Given the length of the sutra copying project, it is unlikely that a scribe who owed more and more paper

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[56] As described in Caroline Humfress, "Thinking Through Legal Pluralism: 'Forum Shopping' in the Later Roman Empire," in *Law and Empire: Ideas, Practices, Actors*, ed. Jeroen Duindam, Jill D. Harries, Caroline Humfress and Nimrod Hurvitz (Leiden: Brill, 2013): 225–50.

or copies could always be freed of their debt. This suggests the possibility of debt spirals existing in the scriptoria over the course of the early ninth century, which may have only ceased with the end of Tibetan control over Dunhuang.

Fig. 1: Layout of a Tibetan copy of the *Aparimitāyurnāma-mahāyāna-sūtra* from Mogao Cave 17, PT 3905; copyright Bibliothèque Nationale de France.
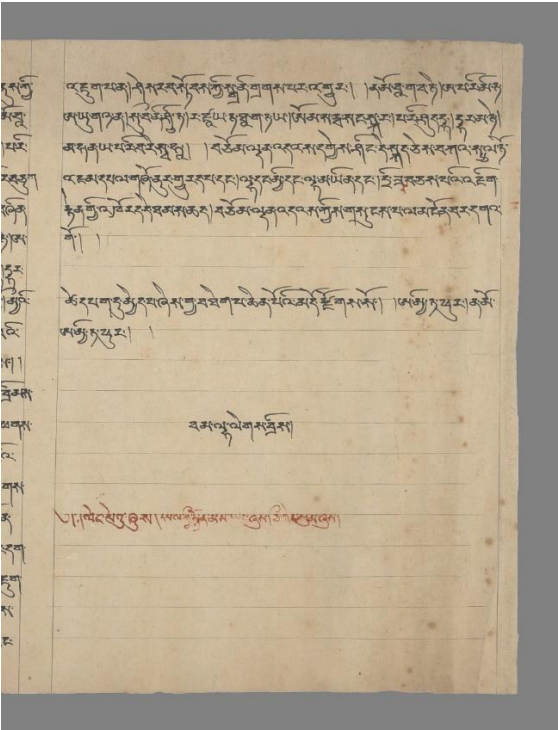
Fig. 2: Layout of the final column, PT 3905; copyright Bibliothèque Nationale de France.
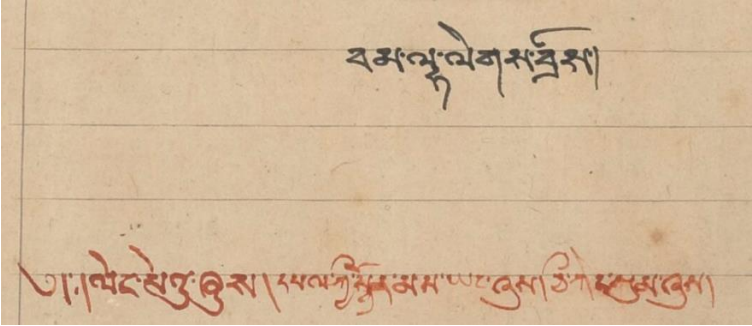

Fig. 3: Scribal and editorial colophon, PT 3905; copyright Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

VII. Editorial Process

The colophons of the *Ap* copies suggest how the process of copying the sutra and editing the sutra copies, contributing to the terminology of labour practices under this imperially orchestrated project that could be compared transculturally or transhistorically in future.[57] Single-sutra rolls appear to be the most complete. The *Ap* copies almost always contain the entire sutra, ending with its secondary title, and a scribal colophon containing the name of a scribe and usually the names of editors who ostensibly checked that the sutra was complete. The sutra, title, and scribe's name are written in black ink, whereas the editors' names and their corrections to the main text may be written in different hands and in red ink. Some scribes were extremely prolific. one named Phan phan, for example, is attributed as the scribe of 52 sutra copies. Most often, the editors worked in teams of three, but occasionally, only one or two editors are named. Some editors are also credited as scribes. In a few of the cases where an editor was a scribe, the colophon also credits him as the second editor of his own work. 113 sutra copies lack scribal colophons, and one of these states "as for this, I wrote it" (*'di ni bdag gis bris*; ITJ 310.1133). Most of these "unsigned" copies are unedited, and many appear in rolls of multiple copies, where a scribe's name may be written in one colophon and not in another, and where the "unsigned" copies are in the same hand and can therefore be attributed. However, some "unsigned" copies have been edited and bear the names of the editors.[58]

In the colophons of the Tibetan Dunhuang *Ap* copies held in the British Library, one finds more than 150 named scribes and more than 30 named editors. The same names appear both in the sutra copies from single-sutra-roll bundles and in those from mixed bundles. Some of the unedited *Ap* copies contain what appear to be the instructions "to be edited" (*zhu lags*). This comes in the form of the phrase *dang zhu bar zhu sum zhu lags*, variants of which can be found in at least nine unedited copies (ITJ 310.259, 310.279, 310.368, 310.536, 310.766, 310.808, 310.820, 310.833, and 310.843).[59] Perhaps significantly, these instructions are found only in the colophons of unedited copies that come from bundles of single-sutra rolls, and not from the copies found in mixed bundles of single- and multiple-sutra rolls.

The instructions that the sutra must be edited, re-edited, and "third-edited" accurately reflect the editorial process, in which there are three named editors in the colophon of an edited *Ap* copy who "edit" (*zhus*), "re-edit" (*yang zhus*), and "third-edit" (*sum zhus*) the sutra.[60] One typical colophon, for example, reads: "edited by Rev. Shin dar, re-edited by Leng ce'u, and third-edited by Ci keng" (*dge slong shin dar zhus // leng ce'u yang zhus / ci keng sum zhus //*;

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[57] Winnebeck, Sutter, Hermann, Antweiler and Conermann, "The Analytical Concept of Asymmetrical Dependency": 44.

[58] The few examples include ITJ 310.760, 770, 777, 780, and 793, all from within the same bundle (site number 78.IX), ITJ 310.735 (edited by the same editorial group) and ITJ 310.1108 (edited by another triumvirate of editors).

[59] Of these nine that explicitly state they are "to be edited," four lack scribal colophons.

[60] This is similar to the editorial process for the roll-type copies of the *Śatasahasrika-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, though there one also finds "fourth editors" (*bzhi zhus*) and "chief editors" (*zhu chen*); see, for example, PT 1500, PT 1510, 1550, and 1556 in Marcele Lalou, *Inventaire des manuscrits tibétains de Touen-houang conservés à la Bibliothèque Nationale (Fonds Pelliot tibétain), tome III* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 1961): 71, 73, 83, 85.

ITJ 310.24).[61] In a few apparently unedited *Ap* copies, such as the two sutra copies under the shelfmark ITJ 310.161, we find the phrase "edited and re-edited" (*zhus lags / yang zhus*, and *zhus / yang zhus*). In another sutra that seems free of corrections by an editor's hand, we find the similar phrase "it has been edited" (*zhus lags so*; ITJ 310.431). These may attest to a process of self-editing by scribes. On the other hand, the attestations are few, and these instances of the word "edited" (*zhus*) may simply be misspellings for the phrase "to be edited" (*zhu lags*).

In ITJ 310.1045, we find the editors' names in red, followed by the statement "additions and omissions having been corrected, it is finalized" (*lhag chad bcos nas gtan phab bo*), also in red and in the same hand. The phrase *gtan la phab* describes the work of the editors and refers to the end of the editorial process—or the end of one stage of editing. This term appears in the same position in ITJ 310.1101, and we find a more detailed statement in the colophon of ITJ 310.1117: "Written by Cang Zhun shun. Edited. Sutra finalized, it is to be [re]edited by RDorje's team. Li Phab weng's exemplar for comparing with sutra [copies]" (*cang zhun zhun kyIs bris / / (red<) zhus so / dar ma gtan la bab te / rdo rje'i grar zhu / (>red) (orange<) II phab weng gyI dar ma gtugs pa'I dpe' / / (>orange)*). The *zhu* may be an error for *zhus*, meaning that RDorje's scriptorium has already edited the sutra—a distinct possibility, given the loose grammar of such editorial notes. Alternatively, his scriptorium is the next stop in the editorial process. The verb "compare" (*gtugs*) also relates to the editorial process, and we often find this word in some copies of the *Śatasahasrika-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*. It appears to refer to the practice of editing a sutra with recourse to an exemplar copy. For example, a fragment from the back of a blank, 16-line column of the *Śatasahasrika-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* refers to the use of exemplars during editing: "having no exemplar, we did not perform the second edit" (*dphe ma mchiste yang zhus ma bgyis*; ITJ 932). This suggests that in the above situation, the editor Li Phab weng used this corrected, finalized copy as an editorial exemplar for correcting other copies that had been submitted to him.

VIII. Exemplar Copies

This editorial use of exemplars seems to mirror the manner in which scribes produced their copies. Here, it appears that editors wrote out model sutra copies for scribes to copy. In the colophon in PT 3601, an *Ap* copy "signed" by the editor Shes rab acting as a scribe, we find the phrase, "Cang ZhIg hing['s] copy" (*cang zhIg hing dpe' / / legs so /*).[62] In this context, where the colophon states that the sutra was written by Shes rab, who was an editor, the phrase "Cang ZhIg hing['s] copy" probably means that the scribe Cang ZhIg hing used this exemplar as a model for his own copies. In at least one case, a scribe inadvertently copied the colophon of his model text. In PT 3648, a two-sutra roll, the scribe Dang Tse tse "signed" his own name in one colophon, but wrote "written by 'Dam ge" in the other.[63] The latter, whose name is

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[61] Very rarely, the terms *dang*, *bar*, and *sum* from the "to be edited" formula are used in the editing formula instead. For instance, ITJ 310.1035 reads: */ he jing dang zhus / / pug 'gi bar zhu* [=*zhus*]…*he jing sum zhus /*.

[62] The capital "I" in "*cang zhIg hing*" (as elsewhere in this working paper) reflects a reversed "i" diacritic in the original text. However, "I" seems to be semantically no different than "i" in these colophons.

[63] See Brandon Dotson, "Misspelling 'Buddha': The Officially Commissioned Tibetan *Aparimitāyur-nāma mahāyāna-sūtras* from Dunhuang and the Study of Old Tibetan Orthography," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 79, no. 1 (2016): 146.

properly 'Dam gi, was a prolific editor, and so a similar situation of an editor's copy acting as a scribe's exemplar is the likely circumstance in this case too.

The use of editors' copies as scribal exemplars also accounts for two out of the three anomalous edited sutra copies found in the mixed bundles of unedited copies. ITJ 310.1045 and ITJ 310.1046 are the first two rolls in a mixed bundle of 19 rolls, most of them multiple-sutra rolls and all otherwise unedited. These first two are edited single-sutra rolls. Their scribes are dPal gyi sgron ma and Shin dar, both of whom are prolific editors. One explanation for the otherwise anomalous presence of these two edited copies here is that they were used as scribal exemplars in producing the other copies in the bundle. If these colophonic notes reflect the normative situation at Dunhuang and the other imperial-period scriptoria, then we can infer that sutra copies were made from exemplars and edited by comparison with exemplars.[64] Whether the scribes and editors worked visually or aurally is unspecified.
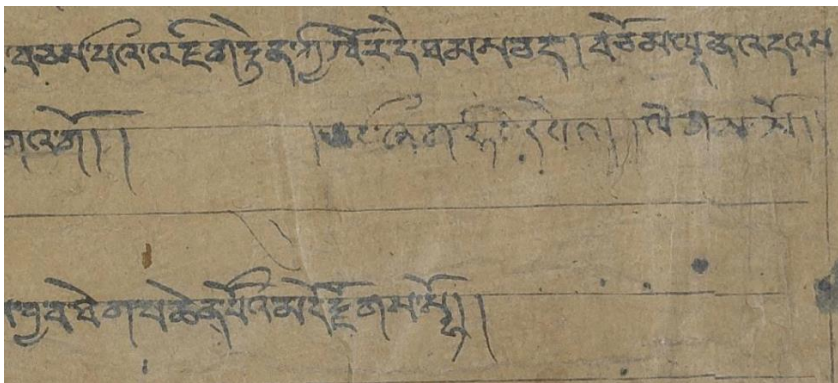

Fig. 4: Colophon, PT 3601; copyright Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

IX. Extra Text Beyond the Sutra and Colophon

Scribes added very little content beyond what they were tasked to copy. Unlike copies of the contemporaneous *Śatasahasrika-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, whose margins contain poetry, prayers, letter drafts, and jottings, the versos and margins of the *Ap* copies remain largely bare.[65] This is likely due to the fact that none of the *Ap* copies appears to be a discard, and none is explicitly marked as such—though we cannot rule out the possibility that *Ap* copies may have been discarded in a different manner from the folia of the *Śatasahasrika-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*.

Among the few exceptions to the scribal practice of only copying the sutra and adding a scribal "signature," we can find jottings and names in Chinese on at least thirteen sutra copies, and at least twenty instances of scribes writing "Praise to Amitābha" (*na mo a myi ta pur*) just

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[64] This does not mean that every exemplar was identical. Surveying such scribal and editorial exemplars written by editors, we find some interesting variations in their prescribed orthographies; see Dotson, "Misspelling 'Buddha'": 145–46.

[65] For the character of the jottings in the colophons and margins of discarded *Śatasahasrika-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* folia and their pertinence both to dating these documents and to the social and cultural history of sutra copying under the late Tibetan Empire, see Dotson, "The Remains of the Dharma." See also Dotson, "Misspelling 'Buddha'."

before the colophon.[66] ITJ 310.46 adds the *dhāraṇī* after the end of the text. In a few cases, *Om* is written after the scribe's name or the editors' names. Other scribal additions include "dedicated as a gift for the lord, the son of gods" (*rje lha sras gyI sku yon du bsngos the*; ITJ 310.168, ITJ 310.939), and "written as a gift for the great king" (*rgyal po chen po de'i sku yon du bri*; ITJ 310.699). In writing this, scribes can embrace their religious identities and thereby enter into a more direct, Buddhist relationship with the emperor, which seems to bridge the wide chasm of space and social status that otherwise divided them. This reminds us that in an asymmetrical relation, "the social positions of Actors A and B are never perfectly stable, as they always depend on physical, oral, or written actualization and iteration in concrete doings and sayings."[67] Here, and in the next section, scribes appear to be working *within* their positions of asymmetry to make the best of their situation.

X. Trading Sutras

The vast majority of the rolls with multiple sutra copies give the same scribe's name in each colophon, and all of these are written in the same hand. In a few cases, however, we find copies from a single roll, written in the same hand, but attributed in their colophons to separate scribes. In ITJ 310. 216 and 217, for example, a roll contains three copies. The first and the third bear the name mChims g.Yu gzIgs in the scribal colophon, and the second has the name Mal gZIgs kong, but they are written in the same hand. Many other such cases exist, such as the three rolls that comprise shelfmarks ITJ 310.955 to ITJ 310.963, which are all in the same hand but contain nine copies that are attributed to Ha sTag slebs and five to I 'do. There are also many cases where one scribe's name is rubbed out or struck through and replaced with that of another. Sometimes, the attempt to efface another scribe's name is not at all thorough, so one can hardly tell that one name is struck through. This is the case, for example, in ITJ 310.796, where we find in the colophon "Written by Him lHa bzher. Written by Cang sNang legs" (*him lha bzher bris // cang snang legs gyi bris*).

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[66] ITJ 310.426, 310.967, 310.1034, 310.1038, 310.1040, 310.1103, ITJ 1598 and 1610 contain Chinese on their versos. ITJ 310.204, 310.908, 310.1187, ITJ 1626 and 1679 contain Chinese in the margins at the crossover between panels. ITJ 310.68, 310.134, 310.258, 310.285, 310.287, 310.392, 310.523, 310.543, 310.553, 310.575–79, 310.603, 310.609, 310.776, 310.1045, 310.1098, 310.1100 and ITJ 1591 all contain some variant of the phrase *na mo a myi ta pur*. On *a myi ta pur* as the Tibetan rendering of the Chinese Amituofo, see Jonathan Silk, *The Virtues of Amitābha: A Tibetan Poem from Dunhuang* (Kyoto: Ryukoku University, 1993): 17–19.

[67] Winnebeck, Sutter, Hermann, Antweiler and Conermann, "The Analytical Concept of Asymmetrical Dependency": 21. Note, too, that relations with non-human actors such as gods and spirits (mentioned in ibid.: 3) also play a role in the "sayings" and religious identities of scribes around Dunhuang, though these are somewhat de-emphasized in ibid.: 22–23. On some of these aspects of life around Tibetan-ruled Dunhuang, contrasted with central Tibet, see Lewis Doney, "On the Margins: Between Beliefs and Doctrines within Tibetan-Ruled Dunhuang Scribal Culture," *BuddhistRoad Paper* 1.6 (2023), https://omp.ub.rub.de/index.php/BuddhistRoad/catalog/view/265/242/1349 [accessed 01.06.2023].

Figs. 5 and 6: Rubbed-out names in the colophons of PT 3564 and 3582; copyright Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

More than one scribe is listed in some instances, such as in PT 3957. Here, "Written by 'Gu Khong brtan" is in the same hand as the sutra, but "Written by Jeg Shan she'u" is in a second hand, and "also written by Song ag tshe" is in a third. None is crossed out. In other cases, the spelling of a scribe's name is corrected, as with "Phan ~~b~~phan" in ITJ 310.8, or "Bam sTag bz~~ǂ~~ang" in ITJ 310.425—almost as if the original person writing it did not know how to spell the name. Several examples instead show that the scribe's name in the colophon is written in a different hand and/or with a different (e.g., fainter) ink than the body of the sutra (e.g., ITJ 310.489).

We gain some insight into the process by which such colophons were produced when examining a roll of six sutra copies spread across shelfmarks ITJ 310.319–321. The colophons of the first five copies state "written by Gu rib lHa lung brtsan," apart from the second colophon, which is blank. However, the final colophon reads "Gu rib lHa lung brtsan's roll, written by mChims g.Yu gzIgs" (*gu rib lha lung brtsan gyi bam po mchims g.yu gzIgs gyis brIs /*; ITJ 310.321). This suggests a dynamic of scribes and client scribes; here, mChims g.Yu gzigs has written a sutra that will presumably be recorded as Gu rib lHa lung brtsan's when it is handed in and credited against his earlier receipt of paper. It is further evident from a jotting in ITJ 310.516 that scribes exchanged copies with one another: "written by Ling ho Bing bing. Offered as a gift to Bam sTag slebs" (*lIng ho bing bing gis 'bris / / bam stag slebs gyi lag stang gi phul ba /*). Moreover, it is clear from the desultory strikethroughs, and from those texts that contain the "signature" of more than one scribe, that the intention was not to fool the editors or to hoodwink the official, known as the *rub ma pa*. He was responsible for tallying the amount of scribed sutra panels received, by the page, against the number of blank sheets each scribe had been given. A sutra would be marked as handed in by one scribe and not the other, and it was this record that mattered for the accounting process. The colophons do not constitute a record for the official, and as such their testimony of a sutra having been written by a scribe other than the one to whom they were credited did not need to be hidden or effaced.

Such circumstances are further suggested from a close reading of ITJ 1359, the legal document that records a scribe's shortfalls of paper to be collected. Despite being an official document bearing personal seals, it contains numerous interlinear annotations that bear witness to the difficulty of bookkeeping. To cite one example: Khang bTsan slebs, a scribe of sTong sar thousand-district, faced a deficit of fifty-two sheets of paper. However, an interlinear note says that this debt was taken over (*kha bstan*) by Sheg lHa rton, who is found in the same capacity in two further interlinear notes related to the deficits of other scribes whose debts

he took upon himself.[68] Assuming Sheg lHa rton was not serving as a scapegoat and taking a whipping for the others, his undertaking would have involved "ghostscribing" sutra copies for these scribes in order to save them from punishment—and perhaps to make a profit himself on the interest or whatever other fee he asked for. This may have been the norm for many other scribes who wrote *Ap* copies and sold or gave them to other scribes who needed to fill their quotas to avoid punishment. Such a scribe might also write in the colophon the name of a scribe in whose debt he found himself. This would account for those copies attributed to a given scribe, but whose handwriting plainly differs from scores of other copies "signed" by the same name. There are other possibilities, and the dynamics of a scribal black economy in paper and sutra copies remains to be fully investigated.

XI. Conclusion

Both in the context of the BCDSS, as well as together with Brandon Dotson, I continue to investigate such scribes' working practices and attempts to mitigate asymmetric dependency in Buddhist scriptoria on the periphery of that empire. The thousands of Tibetan manuscripts discovered in 1901 within Mogao Cave 17, most of which date from before the eleventh century, continue to provide scholars with an unprecedented wealth of detail on the daily life and legacy of this great centre of Buddhism, located at a crossroads of the ancient Silk Routes and visited and inhabited by people of many lands, languages, and ethnicities. I hope to reframe many of the documents from Mogao Cave 17 as expressions of asymmetrical relations between regions and levels of the Tibetan Empire. The texts discussed above do not show any signs of the disruption or will to overturn the "sayings" of the empire (as spread from the centre to peripheral areas like Jyekundo or Dunhuang), as a "heterodox" group resisting the dominant narrative of the "orthodox" in other times and places might.[69] However, their practices within an imperial situation show that agency within asymmetrical dependency does not always take the form of resistance.[70] These working scribes are "working within the system," so to speak, namely the social order of the Tibetan empire that is mediated by the more proximate social order(s) of the secular and religious worlds that the Dunhuang scribes inhabit.[71]

The texts these scribes created can also be seen, following the material turn,[72] as embodiments of the scribal practices that produced by far the majority of these documents, physical testaments to their worldviews rather than simply texts *about* them as a subaltern community. These objects comprise both the "final products" of the scriptoria of Dunhuang and the remains of their daily lives, left along with scribbled-on drawing boards, nibbed pens, and other discarded items. These views of the periphery, diverse in ethnicities, practices and

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[68] *Sheg lha rton kha bstan te stsal*; ITJ 1359(B), l. 4. In the two other examples, the grammar is different, i.e., *sheg lha rton la…kha bstan*. The phrase *kha bstan* is employed in a very similar context in a loan contract, where Ban de Thub brtan takes over the loan of grain to Li Kang tse and pays it back to the lender; Tsuguhito Takeuchi, *Old Tibetan Contracts from Central Asia* (Tokyo: Daizo Shuppan, 1995): 260–61.

[69] Examples are given in Winnebeck, Sutter, Hermann, Antweiler and Conermann, "On Asymmetrical Dependency": 17.

[70] A point made in Winnebeck, Sutter, Hermann, Antweiler and Conermann, "On Asymmetrical Dependency": 21–22.

[71] For a more general discussion of the local and translocal aspects of social order and agency, see Winnebeck, Sutter, Hermann, Antweiler and Conermann, "On Asymmetrical Dependency": 26–29.

[72] Winnebeck, Sutter, Hermann, Antweiler and Conermann, "On Asymmetrical Dependency": 22–26.

material productions, contrast with the more monolithic glorifications of the emperors written into stone and bronze at the centres of the empire. Although the inhabitants of Dunhuang do not explicitly reject the centre's "sayings," their texts and objects offer glimpses of the one part of the largely silenced majority of the Tibetan subjects, including women and local ethnic groups, whom the inscriptions portray as grateful beneficiaries rather than agents within a number of stronger or weaker asymmetric relations such as imperial hierarchies, religious regulations, or gender norms. For example, the paper used to copy Buddhist works can be revealed as centres of something like a black market for scribal resources, and the cause of possible debt spirals begun as a means of alleviating both institutional and everyday asymmetries. While the Dunhuang community's Buddhist practices enhanced the Tibetan emperor's self-presentation, the mixture of direct rule and a single enforced law code with de facto flexibility in sources of authority (especially for Buddhist clerics of both genders) would make this case usefully comparable, for instance, with that of the later Roman Empire.[73]

This working paper sketched out the possibilities revealed by revisiting the treasure trove of material from Mogao Cave 17, which is a major source for studying the nature of asymmetric dependency in Dunhuang during the period of Tibetan imperial control. Above, I began to interrogate these remains as the embodiment of a community on the empire's periphery and compared them with objects left behind by the empire itself, such as its architecture, rock and pillar inscriptions, temple bells, and tombs at the centre. This approach sheds new light on the large-scale asymmetry inherent in the Tibetan empire's control of Dunhuang and the local spiral of asymmetric dependency entailed by the imperial sutra copying project established in Dunhuang's scriptoria. At the centre, the monumental constructions of the empire, its large indigenous tomb complexes, the imported Buddhist architecture of its new temples, the highly visible rock and pillar inscriptions proclaiming court and religious law, and other aspects of its material culture serve to uncover the Tibetan empire's self-presentation as a mighty Buddhist power in Inner Asia and its impact on Dunhuang. At the periphery, we see contrasting practices in the many colophons, in which the emperor is approached as another Buddhist rather than simply as the source of the scribe's dependency, or where one name has been rubbed out or struck through and replaced with another; a paleographic analysis of the scribal "signatures" in these scribal colophons is also useful in the search for patterns of practice, economy, and an open "black market" among scribes. lastly, the relation between the two levels—the self-presentation of the Tibetan empire in Dunhuang and the dynamics of a scribal black economy in paper and sutra copies there—hints at the interesting dynamics of interagency that needs to be more fully investigated.

The Mogao corpus could therefore be used to contextualize the social, occupational, and administrative culture of Dunhuang and its relations with the Tibetan empire and Buddhism at the end of the first millennium, through the prism of the Sino-Tibetan scriptoria active during this period. Taking a social history approach, this research would address religious and royal status under the Tibetan empire, the hierarchy and power dynamics in Tibetan society during this time. It can also show how the glorification of the emperors, and the ministers as loyal to the emperors, largely silenced the subjects as mere grateful beneficiaries, especially the women or local ethnic groups. This could then be contrasted with the wealth of data on everyday lives within a peripheral area of the empire, such as those found in letters, legal documents, scribal colophons, etc., from the Mogao cache. Specifically, the paper used to

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[73] As described in Humfress, "Thinking Through Legal Pluralism: 'Forum Shopping' in the Later Roman Empire."

copy Buddhist sutras could be further revealed as the centre of a black market of scribal resources and the cause of possible debt spirals that began as means of alleviating asymmetric dependency on both an institutional and also an everyday level.

Finally, Dunhuang's Mogao corpus also uncovers the beginnings of the re-envisioning of the Tibetan empire after its retreat from Dunhuang and its fall in the mid-ninth century, as well as the beginning of new, religion-based asymmetrical power relations taking the place of older imperial ones. When the empire began to collapse in the mid-ninth century, it gave up the control of Guazhou and Dunhuang to the local Zhang (848–ca. 915).[74] In this uprising, the private army of Zhang Yichao (died 872) was aided by the clergyman Hongbian (Tibetan: Hong pen; died 862/868), to whose memory the walled up "library cave" at Mogao was originally dedicated.[75] Some scholars have even suggested that Buddhism was at the root of the general implosion of the Tibetan empire.[76] Others, instead, see the process working in the opposite direction: the economic bankruptcy of the empire having an effect on both its previous expansion and its ability to fund the monastic institutions, including at Dunhuang.[77] Many on either side of this debate maintain that Buddhism in central Tibet was exclusively a religion centred around the emperor at his court and not shared by all (with the attendant effects on literacy that this may have had), whereas others dispute this view.[78] Prof. Dr. Peter Schwieger, my predecessor at Bonn, has already shown how Buddhism gradually became the dominant ethical source of values in Tibetan cultural areas by the fourteenth century.[79] He identified Tibetan historiography as one key motivator of this shift—histories and biographies which narrativize the remembered past and play a mythic role inasmuch as they confer constructed meaning on Tibetan culture, determine cultural self-interpretation to some extent, and provide a source of normative claims concerning sociocultural interrelationships that hold true in the histories' "present."[80] As we have seen above, the geographical extent of what constituted "Tibet" during the imperial period varied considerably as the Tibetan empire expanded and contracted at its various borders over time. Yet, especially through the prism of Buddhist historiography, a "Tibet" that was increasingly identified with the values of Indic Buddhism rather than military expansion emerged. Works of historiography reflecting the influence of Buddhist literature and the cultural memory of the post-imperial Tibetans

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[74] Taenzer, "Changing Relations between Administration, Clergy and Lay People in Eastern Central Asia": 19.

[75] Taenzer, "Changing Relations between Administration, Clergy and Lay People in Eastern Central Asia": 35–37; Yoshiro Imaeda, "The Provenance and Character of the Dunhuang Documents," *Memoirs of the Toyo Bunko* 66 (2008): 81–102.

[76] Guntram Hazod, "Tribal Mobility and Religious Fixation: Remarks on Territorial Transformation, Social Integration and Identity in Imperial and Early Post-Imperial Tibet," in *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300–1100*, ed. Walter Pohl, Clemens Gantner and Richard Payne (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012): 48; Charles Ramble, "Sacral Kings and Divine Sovereigns: Principles of Tibetan Monarchy in Theory and Practice," in *States of Mind: Power, Place and the Subject in Inner Asia*, *Studies on East Asia*, ed. David Sneath (Bellingham: Western Washington University, 2006): 133.

[77] Kapstein, *The Tibetans*: 77–79; Christopher I. Beckwith, "The Central Eurasian Culture Complex in the Tibetan Empire: The Imperial Cult and Early Buddhism," in *Eintausend Jahre Asiatisch-Europäische Begegnung: Gedenkband für Dr. Peter Lindegger*, ed. Ruth Erken (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011): 233.

[78] van Schaik, "Tibetan Buddhism in Central Asia": 62.

[79] See Peter Schwieger, "Geschichte als Mythos: zur Aneignung von Vergangenheit in der tibetischen Kultur. Ein kulturwissenschaftlicher Essay," *Asiatische Studien: Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft* 54, no. 4 (2000): 945–73; translated as Peter Schwieger, "History as Myth: On the Appropriation of the Past in Tibetan Culture," in *The Tibetan History Reader*, ed. Gray Tuttle and Kurtis R. Schaeffer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013): 64–85.

[80] Schwieger, "Geschichte als Mythos": 947; Schwieger, "History as Myth": 65–66.

transformed the cosmopolitan Tibetan imperial world into a wild borderland that contrasted with the Buddhist Indian subcontinent of the first millennium through the biographies of its emperors, who brought queens and religious masters to court from throughout their empires and beyond and thereby civilized "Tibet." [81]

This second part of my research falls outside of the scope of this working paper's microhistory since it begins the more wide-focus work of making "transcultural and transhistoric comparisons,"[82] mostly of the "*homological-diachronic*" type,[83] but it will be published through ongoing collaborations with other members of the BCDSS. In short, some of these sources from the same region ("*homological*" focus) but of a later period ("*diachronic*" focus) rely on the Yar lung Dynasty's self-representation in painting the emperor as being at the zenith of Tibetan society and responsible for the overall establishment of Buddhism throughout "Tibet," but they show that he is capable of being wrong and so rightly criticized by a subject due to the latter's religious status. The ongoing Tibetan adaptation of Buddhism in politicized works of biography and historiography provides rich ground for the study of the multi-faceted cultural processes of power and resistance at work during this period, playing out such important themes as the geopolitical centre and periphery discourse and issues of human and material agency in perceived governmental structures—but in sometimes surprising ways.

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[81] Lewis Doney, "The Degraded Emperor: Theoretical Reflections on the Upstaging of a Bodhisattva King," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 49 (2019): 13–66.
[82] Winnebeck, Sutter, Hermann, Antweiler and Conermann, "On Asymmetrical Dependency": 44.
[83] See Winnebeck, Sutter, Hermann, Antweiler and Conermann, "On Asymmetrical Dependency": 38–39.

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