On certain Tibetan and Chinese phonological questions of the medieval period

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1.

The Sino-Tibetan Treaty Inscription of 821-822 is carved on a pillar which stands before the famous Lhasa Gtsug-lag-khang, or Jo-khang, called Dazhaosi 大昭寺 in Chinese. The text records a treaty of peace concluded between the Tang government and the ruling authorities of Tibet. The stele was set up in 823, which was, according to the traditional Chinese calendar, the third year of the Changqing 康慶 period, and according to Tibetan reckoning the Female-Water-Hare year.¹ This pillar, which is now over 1100 years old, has inscriptions on all four of its faces. The rear face is entirely in Tibetan, while the other three sides have texts in both Chinese and Tibetan. The inscription enables us to study Tibetan government, religion, and history of the Royal Period (i.e. 600-860). Sino-Tibetan relations of that time, ancient Tibetan and Chinese linguistic problems, etc. For these reasons it has been highly valued by scholars of both China and other countries, and is one of the oldest and most important paleographical monuments in the history of Asia.

¹ Our present font limitations require us to use modern abbreviated forms for the Chinese characters cited in this article. We hope to be able to handle the traditional forms of the characters in the near future. [Ed.]
The right face of the pillar records the names and titles of the Tibetan dignitaries who took part in the treaty negotiations. The Tibetan versions are above, with transcription into Chinese characters below. On the left face are the names and titles of the Chinese representatives; and here too we have both Tibetan and Chinese versions, with the former above, in Tibetan alphabetic transcription, and the latter underneath in the original Chinese characters. The present paper uses these Sino-Tibetan transcriptional forms to investigate certain ancient Tibetan and Chinese phonological questions. Since the transcriptions were recorded in the Chinese and Tibetan scripts rather than in an exact medium such as the IPA we use today, we cannot expect complete phonetic accuracy in the data; and it follows that the certitude of our conclusions and results must be accordingly affected. The data can only serve as material for further consideration or as ancillary evidence bearing on the questions we wish to consider. But there is nonetheless a point which ought to be emphasized here. This inscription records an official diplomatic document. And the fact that it was inscribed on a public monument attests to the seriousness with which it was viewed. We may consequently give considerable credence to its general reliability, and there is no reason whatever to suppose that the transcriptional portions are of a lesser order in this regard than the rest of the text.

II.

We shall begin by using the Tibeto-Chinese transcriptional material on the right face of the pillar to throw light on phonological questions in ancient Tibet. In an earlier paper, entitled, "Some Questions regarding the Old Tibetan Initials of the Royal Period" (MZYW 1986:6), this writer presented some preliminary views on linguistic points reflected in forms found in monolingual Old Tibetan documents. The present article uses Tibeto-Chinese transcriptional material to pursue these matters further. It can therefore be viewed as a companion and amplification of the earlier study.
The preposed, superscribed, subscribed and base or radical consonant graphs of Written Tibetan are used in combination to transcribe the initial consonant clusters of Old Tibetan. The ten final consonants and two post-final consonants combine with each other to form the syllable final configurations, and these in turn join with the vowels to yield the rimes of the language. But, due to linguistic evolution, by the ninth century these initials and finals had undergone certain changes. We shall now use the material in the Treaty text to investigate some of these.

A. Initials

(l) Preposed consonants: The Tibetan preposed consonants are called ལཱ་རི་སྒྲ་ (sngon-'jug) and include ག (g), ན (d), ཤ (b), ལ (m), and ཁ (').

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIBETAN FORM</th>
<th>CHINESE FORM AND DATA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tibetan</td>
<td>Tibetan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consonant</td>
<td>Form</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. ག (g) ཏི་བ་ནོ (65) gtoogs 符 (68) 冬毒切, 入, 沃韵, 端 *[tok]

2. ལ (d) སྤྱ་ནོ (14) dpal 体 (16) 北末切, 入, 末韵, 父 *[puat]

2 Romanizations of the Tibetan forms are given in round brackets, according to the following system: k, kh, g, ng; c, ch, j, ny; t, th, d, n; p, ph, b, m; ts, tsh, dz, w; zh, z, y; r, l, sh, s; h, zero. Vowels are as follows: a, i, u, e, o, i (inverse gi-gu).

3 The fangle portion of the table includes the fangle spelling, the tone, the rime, and the initial, in the traditional phonological nomenclature of Middle Chinese phonology. In citing reconstructed Chinese forms and the traditional sound categories, I rely primarily on the Qieyun system, as reflected in the Qieyun, completed by Lu Fayan in 601 and in the Guangyun, compiled in the Song period by Chen Pengnian et al.

4 The number which appears beside the Chinese and Tibetan forms designates the number of the line in the inscription in which they appear. For the Tibeto-Chinese transcriptions, this refers to the right face of the stele. References to Sino-Tibetan transcriptions pertain to the left face.
3. མ (b) སྦྲ. རྒྱལ blon rgyal 藏 [56] 拙 涌切, 去, 唇韵, 从 *dzan

4. འླི་ ཆིི བཞིང མཁྲི zhang khri 热 (49) 如切, 入, 转韵, 日 *nziet

5. རི་ མ བཟང klu bzang a 仏 b 指 a 智怯切, 入, 转韵, 见 *kiwv
   c 板 d 藏 (91-93) b 落侯切, 平, 侯韵, 末 *lu
   d 落 涌切, 去, 唇韵, 从 *dzan

6. བཞིང ཡ བཟྱན btsan a 伴 b 氣 a 则 吞切, 去, 转韵, 精 *tson
   c 热 (39-41) b 转火切, 上, 果韵, 矛 *p'ua
   c 如切, 入, 转韵, 日 *nziet

7. ཨ (m) འཇིི་ མ མ མ (75) mngan 岸 (77) 五 吞切, 去, 转韵, 精 *tan

8. འཇིི མ (48) mthong 通 (49) 幽 红切, 平, 东韵, 透 *t'jun

9. ས (r) སི (90) 'bro a 没 b 卯 a 乌 勒切, 入, 转韵, 明 *muet
   b 落 吐切, 平, 桃韵, 来 *lo

From the above examples we can observe the following points:

1. In examples (1), (2), (7), and (8) the Tibetan pre-initials ཨ (g), ས (d), and འ (m) are not represented in the Chinese transcriptions. There are two possible reasons for this: one is that by the ninth century these pre-initials had already been lost. Another is that, when these syllables were pronounced, the pre-initials ཨ (g), ས (d), and འ (m) were not clear, so that they were overlooked during the process of transcription. For this