On a mode of borrowing from Middle Chinese into Proto Tibetan
(A new look at the problem of the relationship between Chinese and Tibetan)

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Abbreviations:

MC  Middle Chinese (Karlgren Ancient Chinese): the stage of the $Qie^4$ $Yun^4$
     reflected in the $Yun^4$ $Jing^4$.
OC  Old Chinese (Karlgren Archaic chinese): the stage of the rhymes of the $Shi^1$
     $Jing^1$.
WT  Written Tibetan
PT  Proto Tibetan (The stage just before the Middle Chinese influence)
PST Proto Sino-Tibetan (in a restricted sense)
TB  Tibeto-Burman

Introduction:

It is well known that Chinese and Tibetan are genetically related. But it has been
asserted by some scholars that an important part of the supposed common vocabulary
represents an ancient layer of borrowings from Middle Chinese into Ancient Tibetan.
Depending of the point of view, Chinese and Tibetan can be considered as more or less
genetically related. It is important to separate the loanwords from inherited vocabulary in
order to evaluate the closeness of the relationship.

The study of loanwords depends on the relationship of the languages in contact.
When the languages are not genetically related, it is in general relatively simple to sort out
loanwords. In this process the borrowing concerns the whole of one word. But when
genetically related languages are in contact with a degree of intercomprehension and in a
hierarchical relationship of prestige, more complex types of influence can occur. This kind
of process works only with one segment in a word, the borrowing affects one syllable in a
dissyllabic word or one constituent (consonant, vowel or rhyme) in a syllable. This
phenomenon has been observed, with more or less degree of importance, by the author in
several cases of linguistic contacts in the Southeast Asian area.

This process will be illustrated here by borrowings, or partial borrowings, from
Middle Chinese (MC) into Proto Tibetan (PT), a stage of the language that preserved a
The divisions of the Middle Chinese (MC) syllable system are characterized by the following rules or conventions (1957):

- In Old Chinese (OC) with or without medial -r- in the syllable, all syllables belong to division III. In this scheme, the pronunciation is the same as in Old Chinese.
- In the scheme of Old Chinese without medial -r- in the syllable, division I is used. This is also the scheme of Middle Chinese (MC) with division II.
- In the scheme of Old Chinese without medial -r- in the syllable, division I is used. This is also the scheme of Middle Chinese (MC) with division II.

In Middle Chinese (MC), the division of syllables into three categories is based on the presence or absence of a medial -r- in the syllable. The three divisions are:

- Division I: Syllables with medial -r-.
- Division II: Syllables without medial -r-.
- Division III: Syllables with medial -r-.

The pronunciation of Old Chinese (OC) syllables in Middle Chinese (MC) is given by the following rules:

- The pronunciation of Old Chinese (OC) with medial -r- is the same as in Middle Chinese (MC).
- The pronunciation of Old Chinese (OC) without medial -r- is the same as in Middle Chinese (MC).

Morphological prefix as well as a number of elements without any significance.

There are exceptions to the above rules when the syllable is a syllable without a reference vowel. The reference vowel can be a syllable without a medial vowel. The pronunciation of Old Chinese (OC) syllables in Middle Chinese (MC) is given by the following rules:

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Reminder of the theory of monosyllabization from Old Chinese (OC) to Middle Chinese (MC):

Influences are reflected in the following developments will not be clearly understood.

Before any further developments it seems useful to remind our theory on the part of our vocabulary that relatively close to the Indo-European.
Schema résumé:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tense syllables</th>
<th>no medial -r-</th>
<th>medial -r-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(OC)</td>
<td>MC</td>
<td>(OC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>I/IV / T</td>
<td>(-r-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lax syllables</td>
<td>(-j-)</td>
<td>III / L</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some examples: The presentation is taken from Baxter (1992), I only added my own phonetic interpretation between square brackets.

T  I  纳  naḍ < nup [nʌp] < *nup [T(C-)nup] "send in" (695h)
L  III 入  ruḍ < nyip [nɬjɪp] < *n-j-up [ɬ-] "enter" (695a)
T  IV 銘  ming² < meng [mɛŋ] < *meng [T(C-)men] "inscription" (826d)
L  III (>IV) 名  ming² < mjen [məjen] < *m-j-eng [ɬ-men] "name" (826a)
T  I  股  gu³ < ku₂[kɔʔ] < *kaʔ [T(C-)kaʔ] "thigh" (51a)
Tr II 假  jia³ < kæx [kʰæʔ] < *k-r-aʔ [T(C-)kraʔ] "false, simulate" (33c)
Lr III 营  ju³ < kjox [kʰɛʔ] < *k-rj-aʔ [ɬ-kraʔ] "round basket" (76j)

Before this complete and structural phenomenon of monosyllabization that affected the whole sesquisyllabic vocabulary, it could happen a kind of slow and aleatory monosyllabization that affected the vocabulary word by word.

Brief presentation of the mode of borrowing from MC into Proto Tibetan

Proto Tibetan (PT) is defined as the stage of the Tibetan language just before the MC influence. PT could be as well called pre Old Tibetan.

One language A (here MC) is in a dominating position with a genetically related language B (here PT). Language A is regarded as prestigious by speakers of B who, by a kind of affectation, are led to imitate some characteristic sounds of A unknown in B. This results in a phonetic compromise, a segment of an A word being borrowed and put in place of the corresponding segment of the cognate B word. The characteristic sounds of MC that don't exist in PT are the segments (rhymes or main syllables) involved by the division III (presumed breathiness marked by the proteus [ʰ]) and the division II (spirantized velar sound marked by the spirans [ʰ]). Speakers of PT tried, unconsciously or not, to imitate these unfamiliar sounds of MC because their pronunciation by Chinese speakers was felt as more prestigious. But, at the difference of the usual process of borrowing that concerns the entire word, ancient speakers of PT borrowed only the segment bearing the characteristic sound in a MC word.

This process will be first illustrated with the numbers "one" to "ten" and "hundred".

Comparison of Tibetan and Chinese numerals


The Chart 2 is the reference chart for the following demonstrations.
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Samuel Sargent
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