

Chinese texts on the Tibetan king Glang Dar ma

This article is dedicated to Prof. Hisashi Sato
Yoshiro Imaeda

As L. Petech noted in 1994,¹⁾ «the problem of the chronology of Glang Dar ma is not yet finally solved. The datings are 838-842 in the Chinese texts and 841-842 or 841-846 for the Tibetan historians.»

When he speaks of Chinese texts, they are *Jiu Tangshu* 旧唐書 (945), *Cefu yuangui* 册府元龜 (1013), *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 (1060), *Zizi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (1086) and its commentary *Kaoi* 考異. These are compilations which were primarily based on day-to-day imperial Court records: the *Variable records* (*shilu* 實錄) of successive reigns which are no longer extant. Although Petech puts 838-842 as the dates of the ascent to the throne and death of Glang Dar ma according to Chinese texts, the reality is more complex and all the Chinese texts on the subject are not unanimous. Let us consider first the date of ascent. The *Jiu Tangshu* and the *Cefu yuangui* are silent on the subject. The *Xin Tangshu*, without specifying the exact date, has the following text just prior to the entry of the year Kaichen 開成 4 (839):

The *btsan po* had been occupying the throne for nearly thirty years; being ill and unable to govern personally, he entrusted government to his ministers. For this reason (Tibet) was unable to oppose China and tended to be overpowered along the border regions.

Because (the *btsan po*) passed away, his younger brother Damo 達磨 (= Dar ma) succeeded him.

From this passage, one can understand that the change of reign from Khri gtsug lde btsan to Glang Dar ma, or more accurately the arrival at

the Chinese Court of the report of this regnal change, took place just before 839. However if that is the case, the statement that the *btsan po* had been occupying the throne since nearly thirty years does not correspond to the reality. In fact Khri gtsug lde btsan ascended the throne in 815 and from then up to the year 839 (at the latest) there are only twenty-five years. We will examine this problem later.

The only Chinese text which gives the exact date is the *Zizi tongjian* :

-Kaichen 3 (838): This year, the Tibetan Yitai 彝泰 (Skyi rtag = Khri gtsug lde btsan) *btsan po* passed away and his younger brother Damo (Dar ma) succeeded.

The fact that he mentions both *bstan po'i* names gives the impression that Sima Guang 司馬光 had a reliable source for his statement.

From what we have seen above, we are tempted to think that the *Jiu Tangshu* and *Cefu yuangui* have omitted to mention the regnal change of 838. While the *Xin Tangshu* mentions it without a precise date, the *Zizi tongjian* gives the exact date. Thus we have the impression that according to Chinese texts, the ascent to the throne by Dar ma took place in 838. However Sima Guang notes in his commentary (*Kaoli*) the following remark :

-Kaichen 3 (838): (I noted in the main text that) Yitai (= Skyid rtag = Khri gtsug lde btsan) *btsan po* passed away and Damo (= Dar ma) ascended the throne. The *Veritable Record* however does not mention (this change of reign), and neither the *Jiuchuan* 旧伝 (= *Jiu Tangshu*) nor the *Xu Huiyao* 續会要 does. I followed the *Buguoshi* 補国史.

From this commentary, one understands that the *Veritable Record*, the most reliable Chinese document, does not mention this regnal change (as in the case of the *Jiu Tangshu* and the *Xu Huiyao*) and that it is simply because of the *Buguoshi*, unfortunately not extant, that Sima Guang put the regnal change in the year of 838. If one considers the close relationship between China and Tibet of the period and the calm state of

affairs in Tibet after the peace treaty of 821-822, it is rather unusual that a matter of importance such as the death of the *btsan po* was not reported to the Chinese Court. One can therefore conclude that it is highly probable that the absence of the mention of the regnal change in the entry for the year of 838 in the *Veritable Record* means that there was indeed no (report of the) regnal change in Tibet in this year. Therefore we rather think that it is by error that the *Buguoshi*, which is the source for Sima Guang's assertion concerning the ascent of Glang Dar ma in 838, placed the matter in this year. Therefore, the year 838 for the ascent of Glang Dar ma which Sima Guang advances based on the sole statement of the *Buguoshi* (so does the *Xin Tangshi* without specifying the exact date) is of questionable reliability. The most reliable source, the *Veritable Record*, makes no mention of it.

Our presumption is confirmed by Tibetan texts. According to Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1146-1216), author of one of the oldest historical treaties, says that Khri gtsug lde btsan passed away in 841. No other text mentions 838 as the year of death of Khri gtsug lde btsan. Therefore we think for certain that the *Buguoshi* erroneously dated the year of death to the year 838. Hence, this year advanced by Sima Guang, otherwise an extremely precise and reliable chronicler, is of no value. This error for the year of ascent by Glang Dar ma will have, as we will see later, unfortunate repercussions on Tibetan historians on the death of Glang Dar ma.

Let us examine the year 842 as that of Glang Dar ma's death. As we will notice, there is on this matter a great deal of confusion among the Chinese texts. First the *Jiu Tangshu* has the following entry:

-Huichang 会昌 2 (842): The *btsan po* passed away. In the twelfth month, (Tibet) sent Lun Zan 論贊 and others to report the mourning. By an imperial edict, Vice Director for the Palace Buildings (*jianzuo shaojian* 将作少監) Li Jing 李璟 was charged (to go to Tibet) to present condolences.

The *Cefu yuangui* has a similar passage :

-Huichang 2 (842): Eleventh month. The *btsan po* passed away. (Tibet) sent Lun Pure 論普熱 to report the mourning. By an imperial edict, Vice Director for the Palace Buildings Li Jing was charged (to go to Tibet) to present condolences.

In these two texts, the *btsan po* is not mentioned by name and one can not know his identity. However judging from the context, it is not Glang Dar ma but Khri gtsug lde btsan. As we shall see later, the year 842 does not refer to the death of Khri gtsug lde btsan who in fact passed away in 841, but to the arrival of the Tibetan envoy reporting his death and the decision of the Chinese Court to send a condolence mission. Therefore the *Jiu Tangshu* is perfectly coherent in mentioning in 842 the Court decision to send the condolence mission upon receiving the report of the passing away of the *btsan po* the year before.

As for the *Xin Tangshu*, it has the following entry :

-Huichang 2 (842): The *btsan po* passed away. Minister Zanre 贊熱 (= Bstan bzher) and others arrived to report the matter. The Emperor ordered (Vice) Director for the Palace Buildings Li Jing (to go to Tibet) to present the condolences.

As in the case of *Jiu Tangshu* and *Cefu yuangui*, the *btsan po* is not identified by name. However, as it is stated that Glang Dar ma ascended the throne in the entry just prior to the year 839, one has to presume that the *btsan po* in question is Glang Dar ma.

Now let us look at the *Zizi tongjian*. One reads :

-Huichang 2 (842), Twelfth month: Tibet sent Lun Pure to report the death of *btsan po* Damo (= Dar ma).

As usual, Sima Guang is more precise than other texts and he gives the name of the *btsan po* who passed away. He thus gives the impression that he had a reliable source to ascertain his statement. In *Kaoui*, one finds a rather lengthy and interesting commentary:

-In the *Veritable Record* (of Wuzong 武宗), it is stated that «on the

dingmao 丁卯 (of the twelfth month of Huichuang 2 = 842), because the *btsan po* of Tufan died, an envoy was sent to convey condolences and the government business of the Court was suspended for three days. It had been nearly thirty years since the *btsan po* had acceded to the throne; he had been suffering from an ailment of the mind and instead of governing personally, had been entrusting the affairs of state to his ministers. Vice Director for the Palace Buildings (*jianzuo shaojian*) Li Jing was appointed envoy to the memorial service.»

According to the *Buguoshi*, after Yitai (= Skyid rtag = Khri gtsug lde btsan) died, there was *btsan po* Damo (= Dar ma) (who succeeded in 838). Consequently, the *btsan po* who died this year (of 842) is Damo (= Dar ma). The *Veritable Record* of Wenzong 文宗 does not mention the death of Yitai (= Khri gtsug lde btsan). In the *Jiuchuang* (= *Jiu Tangshu*) and the *Xu Huiyao*, there is no mention of Damo (= Dar ma). The *Xinshu* 新書 (= *Xin Tangshu*) follows the *Buguoshi* and considers defective the *Veritable Record* (which is silent on the death of Khri gtsug lde btsan). Others (like *Jiu Tangshu*) have been misled (and consider): Yitai (= Khri gtsug lde btsan) ascended the throne in the year Yuanhe 元和 11 (= 816) and stayed on the throne for twenty-seven years up to this year (= 842). However (according to the *Buguoshi*, Khri gtsug lde btsan passed away in the year Kaichen 11 (= 838) and since then until this year (= 842) Damo (= Dar ma) had been on the throne for five years. The *Veritable Record* says «nearly thirty years» (as to the reign of Khri gtsug lde btsan): this is because it mistook Damo (= Dar ma) for Yitai (= Skyid rtag = Khri gtsug lde btsan) (= added the reign of Dar ma to that of Khri gtsug lde btsan).

Let us compare carefully the two versions of Sima Guang: the *Zizhi tongjian* and the *Kaoli*. In the former version, Sima Guang states that the *btsan po* who passed away is Damo (= Darma). But the text of the

Veritable Record, which he quotes in the *Kaoi* and which is the main source for his *Zizi tongjian*, does not mention the *btsan po* by name. As we have seen, he follows the *Buguoshi* which affirms that the regnal change between Khri gtsug lde btsan and Glang Dar ma took place in 838. Therefore, to be consistent, he is obliged to conclude that the *btsan po* who passed away in 842 is Glang Dar ma, and not Khri gtsug lde btsan. However this is contradicted by the *Veritable Record* which says: «It had been nearly thirty years since the *btsan po* had acceded to the throne.» If one follows the statement of the *Zizi tongjian*, Glang Dar ma ascended the throne in 838 and passed away in 842. This makes a reign of only five years. Therefore it is difficult to reconcile the statement of the *Veritable Record* with that of the *Zizi tongjian*. The *btsan po* who passed away in 842 and who had been on the throne nearly thirty years cannot be Glang Dar ma, whose reign lasted only for five years if we accept Sima Guang's version. The only *btsan po* whose death had been reported to the Chinese Court in 842 and who had been on the throne nearly thirty years could be Khri gtsug lde btsan. In fact, he ascended the throne in 815 and passed away in 841, and thus occupied the throne for twenty-seven nearly thirty years. Thus Sima Guang is wrong in his assumption that the death of Glang Dar ma was reported to the Chinese Court in 842. As a result, there is no Chinese text which can justifiably claim the year 842 to be that of the death of Glang Dar ma. Instead, it is the death of Khri gtsug lde btsan that Chinese texts note for the year 842.

As we know from Tibetan sources, Khri gtsug lde btsan passed away in 841. The apparent difference of one year between the Tibetan and Chinese sources can be explained due to the characteristics of the Chinese records. As E. Haarh puts it: «In fact, the Tang annals do not record the ²⁾death of the king, but the time of the Tibetan announcement of the death.» Let us see a passage in the *Jiu Tangshu*:

-Zhenyuan 貞元 20 (804): the *btsan po* passed away. Therefore

the Vice Minister of Public Works Zhang Jian 張薦 was sent for condolences.

This text is quite misleading and one might conclude that it is in 804 that the *btsan po* passed away. However, the year 804 refers exclusively to the decision taken by the Court to send an envoy and not at all to the *btsan po*'s passing away. This is a characteristic of Chinese texts which one must keep in mind when handling them.

Let us take another example of the *Jiu Tangshu* :

-Huichang 2 (842): The *btsan po* passed away. In the twelfth month, (Tibet) sent Lun Zan and others to report the mourning. By an imperial edict, Vice Director for the Palace Buildings (*jianzuo shaojian*) Li Jing was charged (to go to Tibet) to present the condolences.

This again gives the impression that the year 842 is the year in which the *btsan po* passed away. However, that is not the case. These Chinese records are all based on the *Veritable Records* of successive reigns. They are the day-to-day records of the Imperial Court. The reason why this notice is inserted in the entry of Huichang 2 is that the Court decision to send an envoy was taken in this year, more precisely in the twelfth month. It goes without saying that the arrival of the Tibetan envoy reporting the death of the *btsan po* occurred some time before the decision. As for the date of the death of the *btsan po*, this type of Chinese record gives no precise information. One can assume that at least three or four months had been necessary for travel between the Tibetan and Chinese capitals. Therefore, the death of the *btsan po* must have occurred several months, even a year or more, prior to the date under which such information is recorded in Chinese materials. The extreme case is the death of Khri srong lde btsan which occurred in 797. It was only seven years later in 804 that the Tibetan envoy arrived at the Chinese Court and the condolence mission was dispatched to Tibet.

From what we have seen, it is important to know that Chinese texts

note the action of the Chinese Court in response to the Tibetan report. While the date of the Chinese action is meticulously recorded, there is no way of ascertaining the date of the Tibetan affair which was reported to the Chinese Court. In the case of the *btsan po*'s death, it usually took one or two years, sometimes up to seven years, for the Tibetan envoy to arrive at the Chinese Court. When a Chinese text notes in the entry of a particular year the death of a *btsan po*, it simply means that the report of the death arrived in that year and it never indicates that the death really took place in that year. Chinese texts are merely useful in that they indicate that the death of a *btsan po* occurred one or more, sometimes several, years prior to the year under which it is reported.

As L. Petech notes, it has generally been believed that the datings for Glang Dar ma's ascent to the throne and death according to Chinese texts are 838-842. From what we have seen, both these dates are groundless. As for the year 838, the most reliable document, the *Veritable Record* of Wenzong, is silent on this matter and it is most probably the mistake of the *Buguoshi* which is responsible for the statement of the regnal change from Khri gtsug lde btsan to Glang Dar ma in this year. The *Xin Tangshu* which follows the *Buguoshi* notes that the *btsan po* who passed away had been occupying the throne for nearly thirty year. This notice indicates that the *btsan po* in question is Khri gtsug lde btsan. Therefore the *Buguoshi* must have mistakenly placed under 838 the report of the death of Khri gtsug lde btsan which was received at the Chinese Court in 842.

As for the year 842, a report of a *btsan po*'s death indeed arrived at the Chinese Court in this year but the *Veritable Record* of Wuzong does not specify the *btsan po*'s identity. It is Sima Guang, misled by the *Buguoshi* for the regnal change of 838, who advances that it was Glang Dar ma's death which was reported in 842. The *Veritable Record* states that the *btsan po* had been on the throne nearly thirty year. This indi-

cates that the *btsan po* in question must be Khri gtsug lde btsan and not Glang Dar ma. In conclusion, we can say that the dates we get from Chinese texts on Glang Dar ma have no value and that they stem from an error. This error consists in considering that the regnal change between Khri gtsug lde btsan and Glang Dar ma took place in 838 and that the *btsan po* whose death was reported in 842 was Glang Dar ma.

In fact, in the *Veritable Records* there is no mention of neither the ascent to the throne or death of Glang Dar ma. It is only the *Buguoshi* which specifies, by the wrong year, the regnal succession from Khri gtsug lde btsan to Glang Dar ma. The *Veritable Record* of Wuzong mentions the death of Khri gtsug lde btsan but does not mention who succeeded him. We have the impression that neither the ascent to the throne nor the death of Glang Dar ma was ever officially reported to the Chinese Court.

We noticed an error among Chinese texts concerning the chronology of Glang Dar ma : ascent to the throne in 838 and death in 842, making a reign of five years. This error has had unfortunate repercussions on Tibetan historians. It concerns the year of death according to the chronology 841 (ascent) - 846 (death) of Glang Dar ma. It is well known that medieval Tibetan historians have been influenced by a Tibetan translation of a Chinese source, namely the *Rgya yig tshang*.³⁾ Since it was printed in 1325, it became an authoritative source material for the relationship between Tibet and China. As the work is no longer extant, we cannot get more information on it, especially on the Chinese original. However, it is believed that it is a translation of passages concerning Tibet excerpted from *Zizi tongjian* of Sima Guang. While the early Sa skya pa authors such as Grags pa rgyal mtshan and 'Phags pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1235-1280) have the noted chronology of Glang Dar ma as 841 (ascent) - 842 (death), certain later authors who seem to have made use of the *Rgya yig tshang* put the year of death at 846, keeping the year 841 for the ascent. This is the case with the *Rgyal rabs gsal*

ba'i me long (1368) (but it is not mentioned in the main body of the work but rather in a note between the lines, probably of later date) and the *Rgya bod yig tshang* (1434). One might speculate that this chronology which states that Glang Dar ma's reign lasted five years was not influenced by Sima guang who states that the reign of Glang Darma lasted for five years from 838 to 82⁴⁾.

By way of conclusion, we can say that although Chinese texts are in general of great value for the study, especially the chronology, of Tibet between the seventh and ninth centuries, they are profoundly confused and contain no valid information on the chronology of Glang Dar ma. The chronology 841-846 which some Tibetan historians propose for Glang Dar ma is influenced by the already untrustworthy Chinese texts. Therefore, there remains only the chronology 841 (ascent) - 842 (death) as the reliable one.

Chinese texts offer a bit of information on the character of Glang Dar ma. Usually the Chinese sources are silent on personal traits of the *btsan pos*. Therefore, this piece of information is exceptional. It is contained in the *Xin Tangshu* in the following terms:

«Damo (= Dar ma) liked alcohol, was fond of hunting, loved women; he was rude and not generous. Therefore, government disorder grew more intense.»

They do furnish however a bit more information on the successor of Glang Dar ma. The *Xin Tangshu* states in the entry of the year 842 :

«(As the *btsan po* Glang Dar ma) had no heir, Qilihu 乞離胡 (=Khri?), the son of the elder brother Shang Yanli 尚延力 of the queen of the Chen (= Mchim) 緜 clan was installed (*btsan po*). He was only three years old and the queen governed the country together. On seeing him the Chief Minister Jie Duna 結都那 (= Rgyal to re stag snya of the Dba's clan) deliberately failed to pay reverence to him. He said : «Why a son of the Chen (= Mchims) clan has to be installed, while there are many relatives of the *btsan*

po?» He left the palace wailing with the vexation and was killed by the conspirators⁵⁾».

At first sight, this passage seems to have no correspondance in Tibetan sources. However a closer look at it reveals that it matches fairly well with Tibetan traditions. To give an example of the latter, here is how it is narrated in the *chos 'byung* (1322) of Bu ston rin chen grub (1290-1364):

«The queen of Glang Dar ma said: «I am pregnant.» Having found a baby, she showed it saying that she gave birth yesterday. The ministers said: «A baby born yesterday has no teeth. However, we trust (*brtan*) the word of the mother (*yum*). Therefore the baby was named Yum *brtan*.»

According to the Chinese source the adopted baby must have been the son of the queen's elder brother. In this case, there is a perfect concordance between the two traditions. Qilihu in the Chinese source must then be Yum *brtan*. In any case, according to the *Zizi tongjian*, one didn't send a mission to ask the investiture for Qilihu. It seems most likely that, in view of the troubled situation, even the report of the death of the *btsan po* Glang Dar ma was not sent to the Chinese Court, which is the reason for the confusion among the Chinese sources on the chronology of Glang Dar ma.

Postscript

Initially I wanted to do an English translation of Prof. Hisashi Sato's article: «Daruma-ô zaii nenji nitsuite (Chronological Study on King Dar ma's Reign)», *Shirin*, vol. 46, n° 5, 1963 (reproduced in *Chûsei Chibetto-shi kenkyû* (Studies on the Mediaeval History of Tibet), 797 + 56 p., Kyoto, 1986, pp. 9-42) because I consider the article as one of the most representative works in the field of Sino-Tibetology in which Prof. Sato is undoubtedly one of the most eminent scholars. I have long regretted the fact that his works, all written in Japanese, are not at

all read or used by foreign scholars. It is particularly so with his three monumental works: *Kodai Chibetto-shi kenkyū* (Historical Study of Ancient Tibet), 2 vols (1-496, 497-935, 82 p. of index, 34 p. of English abstract), Kyoto, 1958-59, «Toban den (annotated Japanese translation of the chapter on Tibet in the *Jiu Tangshu* and the *Xin Tangshu*)» in *Kiba minzoku-shi* (History of Nomadic Peoples), Tokyo, 1973, pp. 103-291 and *Chibetto rekishi chiri kenkyū* (Studies in the Historical Geography of Tibet), xv, 434, 76 p. of index, Tokyo, 1978. All his works demonstrate the rigorous methodical meticulousness with which he crosschecks the Chinese and Tibetan texts to arrive at a conclusion.

I abandoned my initial idea of making a faithful translation of Prof. Sato's article, because of the difficulty of understanding all the Chinese passages which are usually quoted without any translation (into Japanese), at best with some explanation or note. Instead, while following his argument and demonstration, I rearranged them rather freely and added here and there some materials in such a way that his conclusion can be easily understood. The part covered by this article is the sections I-III (pp. 9-26) of the original article and a part (pp. 46-49) of another article: «Daruma-no shison nitsuite» (King Dar ma's Descendants) in the same volume. Notwithstanding my intention, if I have misunderstood Prof. Sato's argument or if I have presented it wrongly, it goes without saying that I alone am to blame. This small article was written to bear testimony to the long years spent by Prof. Sato doing research and to the high quality of his scholarship. I hope that it will contribute, in however modest a way, to making his work better known by foreign scholars.

Notes

- 1) «The Disintegration of the Tibetan Kingdom», *Tibetan Studies*, vol. 2, Oslo, 1994, p. 649.
- 2) «The identity of Tsu-chih-chien, the Tibetan «King» who died in 804 AD», *Acta Orientalia*, 1961, p. 146.

- 3) For this text, see G. N. Roerich, *The Blue Annals*, part One, Calcutta, 1949, introduction pp. vii-viii; Inaba Shoju and Sato Hisashi, *Huuran teputeru, Chitetto nendaiki* (*Hu lan deb ther*, Tibetan chronicle), Kyoto, 1964, pp. xi-xiv and K. Sorensen, *The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogy*, Wiesbaden, 1994, pp. 501-503.
- 4) The year of death of Khri gtsug lde btsan reported in some Tibetan sources might be another example of Chinese influence on the Tibetan chronology. The *Hu lan deb ther* (*Deb ther dmar po*) and the *Deb ther sngon po* both of which make use of the *Rgya yig tshang* place the death of Khri gtsug lde btsan in the year 836. This is quite unusual for Tibetan chronicles and we find no reason for this date. We have seen that the *Zizi tongjian* puts his death in the year Kaichen 3 (838). It is not impossible that there was a mistake in the process of translation and that the year Kaichen 3 was misread as Kaichen 1 (836), the two chinese characters for the number one and three can effectively be confused. But this is a mere hypothesis.
- 5) P. Pelliot, *Histoire ancienne du Tibet*, Paris, 1961, p. 133; H. Sato, «Tobanden», *Kiba minzoku-shi*, Tokyo, 1973, p. 280.