


# Gog cu as Tibetan Buddhist Site of the North-Eastern Amdo Area during the Post-Imperial Period<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

he assassination of the last Tibetan emperor, Dar ma, in 842 certainly triggered the disintegration of the Old Tibetan Empire, whether or not he persecuted Buddhism.<sup>2</sup> A serious conflict over the succession to the imperial throne immediately began in the central Tibetan area, and two military commanders, Shang pipi 尚婢婢 and Lun Kongre 論恐熱 (\**blon kong bzher*), fought each other in the current north-eastern Amdo area. As this conflict went on, it led numerous small groups in the peripheral area to secede from the Tibetan Empire. Already in the late 9th century, various small non-Tibetan groups, such as the Rgya (Chinese), 'A zha, Lung,<sup>3</sup> 'Od bar,<sup>4</sup> Dor po,<sup>5</sup> and others, were independent in the Hexi and Amdo areas.

As Tsuguhito Takeuchi clearly showed, these groups have not been isolated from each other,<sup>6</sup> they communicated in Tibetan and were within the Tibet-speaking world. Moreover, as Helga Uebach's study on IOL Tib J 869 showed, numerous Buddhist sites were found in the Amdo and Hexi area, which also indicates that small groups in these areas were connecting with each other through Buddhism.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, a recent study on IOL Tib J 754 by Sam van Schaik and Imre Galambos indicates that the local Buddhist groups in the north-

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<sup>2</sup> The narrative of Dar ma's persecution of Buddhism has been widely and strongly established in the context of the Tibetan history. However, Yamaguchi 1996 arose doubt on this narrative.

<sup>3</sup> For the Long family 龍家, see Iwao 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Uray 1981: 82 identifies 'Od bar in Tibetan with Wenmo 噁末 in Chinese and hättäbara in Khotanese.

<sup>5</sup> For Dor po, see Iwao 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Takeuchi 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Uebach 1990.

eastern Amdo area were strongly interconnected and often communicated in Tibetan.<sup>8</sup>

These non-Tibetan small groups and their interconnections via Tibetan culture are an important factor to keep in mind in relation to the historical progress of the Tibetanisation of the Amdo area. How these Buddhist sites were organised in the area must also be clarified. In this study, the author discusses the location of one of these unidentified Buddhist sites in Amdo: Gong cu / Gog cu, and also discuss the historical background for it, dating back to the imperial period.

## 2. Gog cu 'byi lig in Pelliot Tibétain 996

Pelliot tibétain (hereafter referred to as PT) 996 contains several biographies of Chan 禪 masters, among which is master Namka'i nying po. He was active around Khri ga (currently Guide 貴德), namely the region along the Rma chu river in the southern foothills of Laji Shanmai 拉脊山脈. The biography of Namka'i nying po tells us that, on the night that Namka'i nying po died, two bright lights appeared from the hermitage underneath the Zhong pon mountain to the sky, and that Dge'dun Ltam rje dpal gi rgyal mtshan, 'Gvan Blo gros and many local inhabitants in Gog cu 'byi lig witnessed these two lights:

On the 29th day of the last spring month in the year of dog, at Khri ga Shing yong, Namka'i nying po gave an offering to an emanated statue, from whose body light appeared... That night (of Namka'i nying po's death), two great lights appeared from the hermitage underneath the Zhong pon mountains in the middle of the sky. The lights illuminated this region, and they went on to the west. This was witnessed by Dge dun Ltam rje dpal gi rgyal mtshan, 'Gvan Blo gros and many local inhabitants in Gog cu' byi lig.

*khyi 'i lo'i dpyid sla ra ba tshes nyI (2b5) shu dgu la / zhong pong gi dgon sar skyil mo grung ma g.yos / mdangs ma gyur par dus las 'das so / de'i num mo nang ma gi gung la / (2b6) dben sa'i lta 'og gi zhong pong gi ri rgyud nas / srin po ri'i bar gi nam ka la 'od chen po gnyis rgyud chags su byung bas yul phyogs (3a1) / / gsal bar gyur te / nub phogs su 'das par gyur te / 'gog cu 'byi lig gi dge 'dun ltam rje dpal gi rgyal mtshan dang / 'gvan (3a2) blo gros las bstsogs pa yul myi mang pos mthun bar mthong /*

<sup>8</sup> van Schaik and Galambos 2011.

(PT 996, fol. 2b4–3a2)

The toponym *Khri ga* (=ka) indicates that this episode happened around the Laji mountain, while other toponyms appearing in this episode are *Shing yong*, *Zhong pon* mountain and *Gog cu 'byi lig*: *Shing yon* has yet to be identified but is likely to be in or near the *Khri ga* region; as for *Gog cu 'byi lig*, it should be considered further.

Regarding *Gog cu 'byi lig* in 3a1, Marcelle Lalou, who first studied the manuscript and published a full translation, interpreted it as “byi lig des dix directions”.<sup>9</sup> The transliteration of the full Tibetan text was not given, but judging from the translation, we surmised that Lalou read this as *phyog cu 'byi lig*. While Okimoto read it as *phyogs cu 'byi lig*,<sup>10</sup> Horlemann, largely following Lalou’s interpretation, read it as *phyog[s] cu 'byl lig* and interprets it with the meaning “Byi lig of the Ten Directions”.<sup>11</sup> Horlemann also discussed the meaning of the “Ten Directions” and connected it with the Chinese *shiwang* 十方 (ten directions), meaning “public” monasteries and she also reported “byi lig” with possible variants such as *Bhig tig*/*Pyi tig* and concluded that it meant “public teaching monastery”.<sup>12</sup>

However, thanks to the investigation of the text with a high-resolution colour image of the manuscript as found on the site of the International Dunhuang Project (<http://idp.bl.uk>), the author found that Lalou’s (and others’) reading of *phyogs cu 'byi lig* was not correct. This image shows that the first five syllables of the passage, from *nub* to *cu*<sup>13</sup> were erased and rewritten, and a loser investigation of the manuscript revealed that the erased part was / *nub phyogs su*, and almost the same text, *nub phogs[!] su*, appears at the beginning of the very previous passage. A plausible interpretation, therefore, of the scribal process is that the scribe erased the passage as follows: the scribe first copied the previous sentence with a minor mistake, *phogs* instead of, and then began the next sentence with an incorrect beginning, mistakenly copying again the beginning of the previous passage, *nub phyogs su*. The very same scribe then noticed his mistake, erased the *nub phyogsu* and overwrote the correct passage *Gog cu* on top of the erased one.<sup>14</sup> This minimal and clever emendation, however, led a misreading among later readers, who saw *'phyog[s]* written where it was not intended.

<sup>9</sup> Lalou 1939: 513.

<sup>10</sup> Okimoto 1993: 5.

<sup>11</sup> Horlemann 2012: 115.

<sup>12</sup> Horlemann 2012: 116–26.

<sup>13</sup> More precisely, “su” was first written there and “c” was overwritten on it.

<sup>14</sup> Note also that some strokes and parts of the erased syllables were reused, such as -g, the *shab khyu* of *su* and the rectangular shape of the *ph-*.

For *'byi lig*, Horlemann, who did not discuss its meaning, recognised it as the name of a monastery, as she reported that this *'byi lig* also appears in the list of Chan masters' works in PT 116:<sup>15</sup>

Quoted from the *dhyāna* saying by *'byi lig hva shang*

*'byi lig hva shang gi bsam brtan gyi mdo las 'byung ba*  
(PT 116, fol. 186, ll. 2–3)

In the context of Buddhist Chan in Dunhuang, PT 116 was studied by numerous scholars,<sup>16</sup> among whom *hva shang* is explained as a phonetic rendering of the Chinese *heshang* 和尚, but *'byi lig* has not particularly studied yet. Horlemann stated that *'byi lig hva shang* was an unnamed monk affiliated with the *'Byi lig* monastery. However, because all monks in this list are addressed with their own name, *'byi lig hva shang* was likely a proper name, that is to say, *'byi lig* could also be the phonetic rendering of a Chinese name. In this regard, the author recalls Professor Tokio Takata's helpful note that *'byi lig* could be a phonetic rendering of the Chinese Mile 彌勒, Maitrēya.<sup>17</sup>

In this case, what is Gog cu? This term appears again in PT 1082, an official letter from an Uighur khagan in Ganzhou addressed to the Dunhuang governor under the Guiyijun 歸義軍 regime in 934.<sup>18</sup> According to the report, sent by a messenger to the Ganzhou Uighur khagan, which is cited in this letter, a message from Gog cu arrived at to the Uighur khagan:

A messenger from Gog chu Rma grom (the military government of Rma chu)<sup>19</sup> arrived in front of our presence and reported that a 10000 district of the military government of Rma chu would have an audience [with the Uighur khagan].<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Horlemann 2012: 116.

<sup>16</sup> For this text, see for example, Ueyama 1974; Kimura 1975; Obata 1976; Broughton 1983: 10–17, and 48–50, n. 6; and Mala and Kimura 1988.

<sup>17</sup> Prof. Takata gave me this advice in my lecture in Fudan University (Shanghai) on September 2019. I appreciate Prof. Takata of his insightful idea.

<sup>18</sup> The letter has been already well-studied by Wang Yao and Chen Jian 1983: 50–51; Yamaguchi 1985: 516–18; Gnya' gong dkon mchog tshes brtan 1995:329–35; and Ishikawa 2003. The author also published his own interpretation of the first part, Iwao 2018a. According to Ishikawa's study, the issued year of this letter was 934; Ishikawa 2003: 29.

<sup>19</sup> For Rma grom, see Uray 1980: 313.

<sup>20</sup> *Zha du blta* is difficult phrase to interpret. Yamaguchi 1985: 516 interprets it as "implicitly expect" (*an ni kisuruyoni* 暗に期するよう), and Ishikawa 2003: 26, judging *zha* as a place name, translates it as "see as Zha". However, given that, in Old Tibetan letters, typical expressions such as *as zha ngar* "in the presence of

*gog chu rma grom gi pho nya spyang ngar mchIs // rma grom khri sde  
cig zha du blta zhes gsol //*  
(PT 1082, ll. 8–10)

In this text, Gog chu appears with Rma grom, or the military government of Rma chu river, and along with Dbyar mo thang khrom, also known as Hezhou 河州.<sup>21</sup> Ishikawa suggests that Gog chu is the name of an unknown river,<sup>22</sup> but it is clear that the syllable *chu* must be a variant spelling of *cu*. Furthermore, Wang Yao and Chen Jian as well as Gnya' gong dkon mchog tshes brtan identified Gog chu with Kuozhou 廓州 (current Jianca 尖札).<sup>23</sup> Although a phonetic problem remains,<sup>24</sup> I basically agree with Wang Yao and Chen Jian's identification or suggestion that Gog cu/chu was Kuozhou, because, considering the geographic conditions, the only possible candidate is Kuozhou. Moreover, the Tibetan syllable *cu* in Gog cu is apparently a phonetic rendering of Chinese *zhou* 州 (Middle Chinese: *tʃiəu*),<sup>25</sup> so it designated a city that was once under the rule of the Chinese government.

Thus, Gog cu must have been under Chinese control at one time and not far away from Guide. In addition to that, Satō discusses how Kuozhou was a strategically important site along the Rma chu river for both the Tibetan Empire and Tang China.<sup>26</sup> If we take into account that another military government of Dbyar mo thang is in Hezhou 河州, located at the lower reaches of Rma chu than Kuozhou, it is no wonder that the military government of the Rma chu river would have been established in Kuozhou.

From the above discussion, we can confirm that Gog cu means Kuozhou and 'byi lig could be a phonetic rendering of the Chinese Mile. Therefore, the name Gog cu 'byi lig in PT 996 seems to refer to

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[someone]" frequently appear, it is highly probable that *zha* also mean face or [Uighur khagan's] presence. If it is correct, *zha du* should be interpreted as "at the place of his face/presence". *blta* is apparently the imperfect tense of the verb *lta ba*, thus here we should interpret this phrase as "will see [him] at the place of [one's] presence".

<sup>21</sup> For the location of Dbyar mo thang khrom, see Xie Jisheng and Huang Weizhong 2007: 70. Also, for the discussion on the location of Dbyar mo thang, see Uebach 1991 and Kapstein 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Ishikawa 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Wang Yao and Chen Jian 1983: 50; Gnya' gong dkon mchog tshes brtan 1995: 333–34.

<sup>24</sup> The author has already discussed this small phonetic problem in Iwao 2018a: 12, n. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Karlgren 1957: 1086a.

<sup>26</sup> Satō 1978: 108.

the Mile monastery in Kuozhou. It is noteworthy here that in PT 5579 (16), a Chinese Dunhuang fragment providing a list of monks with their ordination places and dates, Ganzhou, Suzhou and Kuozhou appear as ordination places.<sup>27</sup> It is possible that this Mile monastery provided this ordination.

### 3. *Gog cu in IOL Tib J 689*

We have seen that *'phyog cu* in PT 996 should be read as *Gog cu*, and *Gog cu* is to be identified with Chinese Kuozhou, located in current Jianca 尖札. Here the author would like to point out that this *Gog cu* also appears in IOL Tib J 689 (= Ch.0021), which tells a tradition of Dharma colleges in the 10th century. According to IOL Tib J 689, there were four colleges in Tibet, namely Bod (Tibet), Mdo gams (province of Mdo), Kam bcu (Ganzhou) and *Gog/Gong cu*. Here, the author only cites the final part:

Teachers of Dharma colleges in **Gog (/Gong) cu** were: Myang Rin chen byang chub, Zha snga 'Jam pa'I snying po, 'Go (< Chin. 呉) 'Bom sa mun tra, 'Grenng ro Dge'i blo gros, Phung Dge rgyas. They were lineages of **Gong cu (/bu)**.

*Gog (/gong) cu'i chos gra'i slos dpon myang rin cen byang chub / / zha snga 'jam pa'i snying po / 'go 'bom sa mun tra / / 'grenng ro dge'i blo gros / phung dge rgyas las brtsogs pa ni Gong cu (/bu) nas (2b8) brgyud pa lags s-ho / / (IOL Tib J 689, fols. 2b7–2b8)*

For *Gog/Gong cu/bu*, it appears as *Gog/Gong cu* in the first instance and as *Gong cu* in the second. The ambiguous reading in the first instance is caused by a scribal amendment of the second characters of *Gog/Gong*. Uebach read this as *Gong bu* but also suggested another possible reading, *Gong cu*, and further suggested that *gong cu* could have been a mistake for *Gog cu*.<sup>28</sup> Shen Chen affirmed that the scribal amendment of *Gog/Gong* was a horizontal line that crossed out the character and concluded that it should be read as *Gog cu*, a phonetic rendering of Kuozhou.<sup>29</sup>

Here again, the question relates to the reading of the toponym. To clarify this question, we should again investigate the Tibetan text in

<sup>27</sup> See Chikusa 2002: 76–77.

<sup>28</sup> Uebach 1990: 408.

<sup>29</sup> Shen Chen 2020: 151.

the manuscript. The high-resolution photograph makes it clear that the second item should be Gong cu, not Gong bu. The first instance is somewhat problematic, but a closer investigation of the scribal amendment indicates that the amendment is an overwriting on top of a letter: it is either *-ng* on *-g* or *-g* on *-ng*.

Thus, there are two possibilities for the scribal process that unfolded. In the first, the scribe completed the text once, writing Gong cu in both places, noticed the mistake and overwrote *-g* on *-ng* in the first one but forgot to correct the second one. The other possibility is that the scribe first wrote Gog cu, quickly noticed the mistake, corrected it into gong cu, overwrote it and finished the text without any other mistakes.

The manuscript alone does not provide sufficient information to make a judgement. However, as has already been seen, Gog cu appears in two manuscripts in an important place and there are no any candidates with *zhou* 州 for Gong cu. It thus seems that the first possibility, Gog cu, is more likely to be correct, that is to say.

The four Dharma colleges in Tibet in the 10th century were thus Bod (Tibet), Mdo gams (Mdo province), Kam bcu (Ganzhou) and Gog cu. It is interesting to note the distribution of these Dharma colleges: Bod was apparently in the central Tibetan area or *ru bzhi* area, and Mdo province was in the current north-western Amdo area, namely the Tsaidam basin, where 'A zha yul was established.<sup>30</sup> According to IOL Tib J 689 (fol. 2b7),<sup>31</sup> Ganzhou represented the region of Byang ngos, which meant the Hexi area,<sup>32</sup> and probably identical to Bde khams (Bde province).<sup>33</sup> If this is correct, it appears that Gog cu represents the remainder of the region, namely the northern and southern foothills of Laji mountain.

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<sup>30</sup> On the location of Mdo province and 'A zha yul, see Iwao 2018b: 55.

<sup>31</sup> Uebach 1991: 408, 410.

<sup>32</sup> In PT 1263 (= Pelliot chinois 2762 verso): Tib. ha se byang ngos = Chin. 河西一路. See Pelliot 1961: 143. Ha se byang ngos also appears in PT 1284, III, l. See Uray 1981: 84.

<sup>33</sup> For the province of Bde, see Richardson 1998 [1990]. Note that Ganzhou was a Buddhist centre in Hexi area, and probably belonged to the Bde province. In Tibetan-ruled period, Xiuduosu 脩多寺 temple (脩多 < Skt. sūtra. See Pelliot 1908: 513), where Wu Facheng 吳法成 translated sūtras into Chinese. See also Ueyama 2012: 106.

#### *4. Gog cu as a Critical Site in the North-Eastern Amdo Area During the 10th Century*

According to the three Tibetan manuscripts described above, the military government of Rma chu was established in Gog cu during the Tibetan imperial period and was a considerable force until at least the 10th century. It was also the location of one of the four main Dharma colleges in Tibetan Buddhism, and Namka'i nying po was active nearby. These indicate that Gog cu was a main site along the Rma chu river.

In this area, another important site was apparently Hezhou, the seat of the military government of Dbyar mo thang. Moreover, Tsong ka had continually been acknowledged as an important site since the imperial period.<sup>34</sup> Thus, along the Laji mountain range, at least three sites were located: Dbyar mo thang (Hezhou), Tsong ka and Gog cu. The first two sites are well known to scholars, but it is probable that Gog cu was even more important than other two, as it was considered to be one of four main Dharma colleges.

One should recall the case of Gusiluo 唃廝囉, who was invited from western Tibet to eastern Amdo by local inhabitants as an authority to establish a new kingdom at the beginning of the 11th century. Gusiluo was first invited to Hezhou by Helang Yexian 何郎業賢 of Hezhou Qiang 河州羌 in 1009, but Zongge 宗哥 tribes abducted Gusiluo and installed him in the seat of power in Kuozhou in 1015.<sup>35</sup> Thus, Gog cu maintained its importance even until the beginning of the 11th century.

#### *Conclusions*

This investigation of Tibetan texts in the Dunhuang manuscripts indicates the following conclusions:

- Gog cu had a military government in the imperial period and was held by a strong military group whose power lasted (?) until at least the 10th century.
- Gog cu 'byi lig in PT 996 refers to the Mile 彌勒 monastery in Kuo-

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<sup>34</sup> According to *Old Tibetan Annals*, Tibetans marched to greater and lesser Tsong ka (tsong ka che chung) in 698 (PT 1288 + IOL Tib J 750, l. 127. See, for example, Dotson 2009: 99–100). In the Zhol inscription (South l. 34), Tsong ka is also mentioned. See, for example, Richardson 1985: 10. PT 1217 mentions that the conference of a military government was held at Tsong ka rtsis skyang dgur.

<sup>35</sup> He was then moved to Zongge Cheng 宗哥城. See Iwasaki 1993.



zhou.

- Gog cu was a Buddhist centre according to some Dunhuang Tibetan documents.
- Gog cu maintained its importance even during the early 11th century.

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