

An Analysis of the Relevance of the Shih-chi (史記) to the Reforms of Tibet

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Abstract

In the fourth chapter of the Old Tibetan Chronicle (P.T.1287) of the Touen-huang Old Tibetan Documents, the account of the discussions held between the Tibetan king and his officials uses the framework of the story “Mao Sui Recommends Himself” from the “Biography of the Lord of Pingyuan” in the Shih-chi to illustrate the atmosphere of the court of gNam-ri-srong-brtsan and the dialogue between ruler and officials. That content from a Chinese history was quite naturally incorporated into a narrative of Tibetan historical events is clear evidence of the influence of Chinese historical texts. This paper suggests that this is likely not the only instance of such influence in Tibet; other instances may be found, but only through painstaking examination of the documents can we tease out the threads of the story.

Tibet during the T'ang period reached a high point of power and prosperity owing to the reforms of bTsan po Srong btsan sgam po. When his father gNam-ri-srong-brtsan was assassinated by poison, Srong btsan sgam po ascended the throne as a teenager. In a short period of time he transformed Tibet; from taking revenge on his father's murderers by exterminating their families, through reunifying the Tibetan plateau and establishing the institutional structure of a dynasty, to making Tibet into the powerful country that the Hsin T'ang Shu described as “receiving the

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submission of all countries of the Western region,” he took only a few decades. How did he do this? What measures did he take? What changes did he make that allowed Tibet to undergo such profound change? Most especially, were the numerous tactics adopted to make Tibet powerful the result of the careful strategizing of Srong btsan sgam po and his officials? Or were the ideas taken from historical records? Could it even be that the Tibetan officials who oversaw state histories and records borrowed China’s historical works and documents and made them their own?

This paper attempts to address the above questions. It examines the records found in the Touen-huang [Dunhuang] Old Tibetan Documents of Srong btsan sgam po’s tactics, and compares them with similar records in the *Shih-chi* of the political reforms adopted by the Qin dynasty to strengthen the state in a short period of time. It looks for any similarities and further discusses possible connections between the two.

Keywords: Tubo, T’ang-period Tibet, *Shih-chi*, reform, Touen-huang [Dunhuang], Old Tibetan Documents, Sino-Tibetan culture during the T’ang period, Qin dynasty reforms