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A Document from Tangut State Regarding the Lease of a Bakery

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Abstract: The paper is focused on the study of Document Дх-18993 “Agreement on a Bakery Lease to Li Chungou and others, drawn as a result of a contest of tenders conducted in the 1st month of the 12th year of the Guangding reign era” kept in the Institute of Oriental manuscripts of the RAS. The writer of the paper proves that the document originates from Khara-Khoto and gives the comments on its content.

Key words: Khara-Khoto, Tangut state, rent documents, bakery lease

Published in volume 17 of the facsimile edition of *Documents from Dunhuang kept in Russia (Ecang Dunhuang Wenxian)*, was a unique fragment titled “Agreement on a Bakery Lease to Li Chungou and others, drawn as a result of a contest of tenders conducted in the 1st month of the 12th year of the Guangding reign era” (*Guangding shi er nian deng Li Chungou pumai bing fangqi* 光定十二年李春狗等撲賣餅房契)¹. Although the document is kept in the Dunhuang Fund of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the RAS catalogued as Дх-18993, it clearly does not originate from Dunhuang, coming almost definitely from Khara-Khoto. The Guangding era was proclaimed by the Xi Xia Emperor Li Zunxu (Shenzong) and the 12th year of his reign corresponds to 1222, consequently the lease document was written five years prior to the fall of the Tangut state. In the opinion of the Chinese scholars Nie Xiaohong and Chen Guocan, the above agreement was concluded in Xi Xia, which is corroborated by the following facts. First, up to now no documents written in the final years of Western Xia have ever been found among the manuscripts discovered in Dunhuang. Second, the document made use of the collocations “the person who has tabled the lease” (*li wenzi ren* 立文字人) and “those who have jointly tabled the lease” (*tong li wenzi ren*

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¹ *Ecang Dunhuang Wenxian*, vol. 17, p. 310.

同文字人); formulas like those are only found in documentation from Western Xia and the Yuan dynasty and never in Dunhuang. Third, the formulaic phrase “need not be further discussed” (*bu ci* 不詞) was favoured exclusively in documents from Khara-Khoto. Fourth, no vocabulary item like “bakery” or “flatbread shop” (*shao bing fang* 燒餅房) has ever been discovered in documents from Dunhuang either.²

Apart from this, we believe there is another important point in support of the Tangut origins of the lease paper: the present piece is not the only document from Khara-Khoto included in the publication called *Documents from Dunhuang kept in Russia*. In the Dx index category, quite a few Khara-Khoto documents have figured: e.g. Dx-18992 “Document of the Chief Administration of the Yijinai District” (*Yijinai lu zong guanfu wenshu* 亦集乃路總管府文書), Dx-18996 “Marriage Contract of Buyanchaomu from the Yijinai District” (*Yijinai lu Buyanchaomu tonghunshu* 亦集乃路不顏抄木合同婚書), Dx-19022 “Receipt certifying payment for a purchased quantity of sulphur in year 23 of the Zhizheng reign era of the Yuan dynasty” (*Yuan Zhizheng er shi san nian zhifu mai liuhuang qian shouju* 元至正廿三年支付賣硫磺錢收據), Dx-19043 “Document dated year 24 of the Qianyou reign era in the state of Xi Xia” (*Xi Xia Qianyou er shi si nian weishu* 西夏乾祐廿四年文書), Dx-19070 “Document on purchases of horse fodder in year 1 of the Zhiyuan reign era of the Yuan dynasty” (*Yuan Zhiyuan nian xian hedi maliao wenshu* 元至元年間和羅馬料文書), Dx-19072 “Report dated year 3 of the Zhizheng reign era of the Yuan dynasty on the provision of nourishment to the aged and orphaned” (*Yuan Zhizheng san nian qing zhi gu lao kouliang chengzhuang* 元至正三年請支孤老口糧呈狀), Dx-19073 “Document dated year 2 of the Taiding reign era of the Yuan dynasty” (*Yuan Taiding er nian wenshu* 元泰定二年文書), Dx-19087 “Several documents in Xi Xia writing” (*Xi Xia wen ji shu wenshu* 西夏文記數文書) and so on.

Professors Nie Xiaohong and Chen Guocan mainly addressed the origins of “Agreement on a Bakery Lease to Li Chungou” hardly touching upon its content. This article will attempt to right the shortcoming.

Among the lease documents from the Sui, Tang, Song, Liao, Xia, Jin and Yuan dynasties, most related to the rent of land, while agreements on housing space were scarce and extremely fragmentary.³ The document we are publishing is the most detailed of those that have come down to us.

The following is the reproduced original text and our comments on it.

² NIE Xiaohong, CHEN Guocan 2009.

³ ZHANG Zhuanxi 1995, 274, 303–304.

光定十二年正月廿一日立文字人李春狗、劉

番家等，今於王元受處撲到面北燒餅房舍一位，裏九五行動用等全，下項內 炉鏊一富，重四十斤，無底。大小錚二口，重廿五斤。鐵匙一張，餠餅劃一張，大小檻二个，大小岸三面，升房斗二面，大小口袋二个，裏九小麥本柴石伍斗。每月行價賃雜壹石伍斗，恒月係送納。每月不送納，每一石倍罰一石與元受用。撲限至伍拾日，如限滿日，其五行動用，小麥七石五斗，迴与王元受。如限日不迴還之時，其五行動用、小麥本每一石倍罰一石；五行動用每一件倍罰一件与元受用。如本人不迴与不辨之時，一面契內有名人當管填還數足，不詞。只此文契為憑。

立文字人李春狗 [押]

同立文字人李來狗

同立文字人郝老生 [押] 立文字人劉番家 [押] 同立文字人王號義 [押] 同立文字人李喜狗 知見人王三宝 知見人郝黑見

Pu or *pumai* (撲賣) is one of the ways of business contracting in medieval China, where it came into being during the second half of the Tang dynasty's reign and became widespread under the North Song.⁴ It was then that it gained currency not only in the economically developed south-east, but emerged on the faraway north-west outskirts of the empire. In the sixth month of fifth year of the Dazhong-xiangfu period (1012) of Emperor Zhenzong's reign, "Cao Wei, the military chief of the Jinyuan Province, remarked that the inhabitants of frontier fortresses had just been permitted to buy shops on competitive basis and to trade in wine right on the border itself. He feared lest bad guys should be hiding there and asked for a ban on the practice. The emperor agreed with him".⁵ In the Tiansheng years (1023–1031) the *pumai* license validity was extended from one to three years.⁶ The following procedure for *pumai* leasing had formed: half a year before announcing the contest, the authorities "posted an advertisement at the liveliest spot in the locality and for two months tried to lure prospective buyers".⁷ Those who were interested were supposed to apply in writing and the authorities kept their tenders secret. As the deadline arrived, the bids were publicly disclosed and the contract was won by the highest bidder. If two top candidates offered the same amount, the

⁴ Li Huarui 1995, 191.

⁵ *Song huiyao jigao*, ch. 20, 5.

⁶ *Song huiyao jigao*, 113, 20, 7.

⁷ *Xu Zizhi tongjian changbian*, ch. 271 (*Xining san nian shi yi yue jia wu* 熙寧三年十一月甲午).

contest was won by the bidder that had applied earlier than the other one.⁸ If later anybody offered a higher price than the former participants in the competition, the contest winner was offered to outbid the new offer. If he did not want to, the contract was given to the last bidder⁹. The contest results were properly promulgated.¹⁰

In sum, the contract license was given to anyone who had offered the highest price, but if afterwards the winner did not run the business effectively or even went bankrupt, the person was forced to sell the possessions deposited as pledge. If there was nobody desirous of buying those, neighbors' were coerced to do so. If the neighbors' could not afford buying those possessions, the authorities searched for more distant buyers. If after the sale of personal effects the former contractor was still in debt to the authorities, the contract warrantor was ordered to pay the amount outstanding.¹¹

Besides wine shops, the *pumai* came to be applied to other spheres of monopoly trade.¹² During the Song dynasty, the *pumai* activities were adopted by the government. The document being published herewith proves, however, that the practice existed also as a method accessible to ordinary people. Li Chungou availed himself of the right to rent the bakery because he had paid the highest price. This fact evidences considerable changes seen in the public and economic life of Xi Xia and in the whole of China in those days.

Shaobing (燒餅) and *hubing* (餠餅) were two favourite Tangut types of food. According to “A Timely Pearl in the Hand” (*Fan han heshi zhang zhong zhu* (番漢合時掌中珠) Dictionary, the Tangut dough-based cuisine included *youbing* (油餅), *hubing* (胡餅), *zhengbing* (蒸餅), *ganbing* (乾餅), *shaobing* (燒餅), *huabing* (花餅), *youqiu* (油球), *jiaozhi* (餃子) and *mantou* (饅頭).¹³ The word *shaobing* is spelt with two symbols of the Tangut writing system, the first of which is pronounced as *bei* meaning “baked” and the other as *e*, meaning “flatbread”. The *shaobing* seems to have been like a flatbread baked in the *luo* (爐鑿) oven. The word *hubing* (餠餅) also spells with two symbols, the first pronounced with two symbols, the first of which is a homophone of the Tangut word for “oven”; the second symbol is pronounced as *yize*, as is oven; it includes part of the character from the word denoting

⁸ Xu Zizhi *tongjian changbian*, ch. 220 (*Xining si nian er yue ding si* 熙寧四年二月丁巳).

⁹ Xu Zizhi *tongjian changbian*, ch. 217 (*Xining san nian shi yi yue jia wu* 熙寧三年十一月甲午).

¹⁰ Xu Zizhi *tongjian changbian*, ch. 218 (*Xining san nian shi yi yue ding yichou* 熙寧三年十一月乙丑).

¹¹ Lü Tao, ch. 2, 1098–1020.

¹² Cf. OUYANG Xiu, 914.

¹³ *Ecang Heishuicheng wenxian*, vol. 10, 1–19.

oven; the second symbol is pronounced as *e* and means “flatbread”. In ancient China a baked flatbread sprinkled with sesame seeds was called *hubing* or *mabing*. The Tangut *hubing* (胡餅) should have been essentially the same flatbread, but baked in *zheng* (錚) rather than in *ao* (熬) ovens.

Together with the premises of the bakery, the properties on lease included also *ao* and *zheng* ovens, a large and a small iron ladle, a trowel for *hubing*, a large and a small *kan* (檻) closet, three large and small kitchen boards, two measures of *shengfangdou* (升房斗), a large and a small sack, seven *dan* (石) and five *dou* (斗) of wheat.

There existed two types of *ao* — one looked like a flat-bottomed pot and was called *bing-ao* (餅熬) or *bingguo* (餅鍋). In the third year of the Dazhong-xiangfu period of the Song dynasty (1010) Zhao Deming, ruler of Xiping, “built a great many palaces on the slopes of Aojishan Mount”.¹⁴ The name of the mountain indicated that its top was concave like a pot bottom. The *luao* flatbread oven mentioned in the document looked like a pail without a bottom. Firewood was burnt in its lower part, while dough for flatbread was pasted and baked on the inner sides of the walls in the upper part of the oven.

The *zheng* character (錚) denoted an ancient musical instrument resembling a copper gong. Here it represents a kitchen utensil — a flat-bottomed pot in which *hubing* is baked.

The iron ladle was evidently designed for drawing water or flour with. The *hubing* trowel was known as *hubing chan* (餹餅鏟); it was used in the baking of *hubing*. *Kan* (檻) or *gui* (櫃) denoted wooden vessels to hold water or something else. The “Mixed Symbols” dictionary (*Zi za* 字雜) includes “wooden *kan*” (木檻)¹⁵. The *Nong sang kuai xun* (農桑快訣) essay states: “On the left bank of the Yangtze river grass grows; it is mown and soaked in a big *kan*. When the grass gets sour and yellows, it is admixed to bran. This sort of extra nourishment mixture is good for fattening livestock”.¹⁶

No mention was made in the document of a tub for water or a kneading trough, therefore what was called a large and a small *kan* probably referred to containers for water and dough. *An* (案) was a kitchen board to knead and roll dough on.

Koudai (口袋) were woolen or cotton sacks for storing flour, rice and other grain. *Sheng* and *dou* were measuring units of volume, one *dou* containing ten

¹⁴ *Song shi*, ch. 485 (*Xia guo zhuan shang* 夏國傳上).

¹⁵ Cf. SHI Jinbo 1989.

¹⁶ XU Guangqi, ch. 41 (*Nong sang kuai xun* 農桑快訣).

sheng. Inside the measuring tool leased, a *fang* container was installed; therefore the “tool” was referred to in the text as *shengfangdou*.

According to the text of the document, the lessee renting the bakery together with all the requisite utensils plus 7 *dan* 5 *dou* of wheat had to return monthly 1 *dan* 5 *dou* of assorted grain.¹⁷ The monthly interest rate amounted to 20 per cent.

In the Tangut state, grain would generally be borrowed in March-April, when the old harvest stocks were almost exhausted and the new crops were standing; debts were returned in July-August from new harvest. Interest rates ranged from 30 to 100 per cent, the latter known as “double interest” (*beicheng zhi xi* 倍稱之息). A number of similar examples are found in documents from Khara-Khoto. A curious case is on record when a quantity of grain was borrowed in the fourth month of year six in the Tianqing era and returned on 1 August. For each *dou* borrowed the amount returned was 1 *dou* and 7 *sheng*, i.e. return per 1 *dou* was 1 *dou* and 7 *sheng*. The interest over four months amounted to 70 per cent — 17.5 per cent a month. Another example. In May of year 12 in the Tianqing era some wheat was borrowed. It was returned on 1 August, with 4 *sheng* added to each *dou* borrowed. It came to a 40 per cent return over three months, 13.3 per cent interest repaid monthly. In January of year 12 of the Guangding period, Li Chungou and others borrowed a quantity of wheat at an interest rate of 20 per cent. The rate was high, for which there were two reasons: first, the owner lent wheat to Li Chungou, whereas the requital was in “assorted grains”. Wheat and “assorted grains” differed in price. Secondly, the lease included not only repayment for the wheat, but also for the premises and utensils. Taking all this into account, we can observe that between the Tianqing and the Guangding periods Khara-Khoto saw relative stability in lease interest rates and commodity prices.

The document was signed by two persons, evidently by the married couple of Li Chungou 李春狗 and Liu Fanjia 劉番家. It was very rare for Western Xia documentation to have a paper signed simultaneously by the husband and wife. In ancient China, married women were not officially called by their feminine names. They were usually referred to by their husband’s names — e.g., “Liu’s wife” (*Liu jia de* 劉家的), Li’s wife (*Li jia de* 李家的) and so on. Evidently, Liu Fanjia is a feminine name. *Fan* reads *mi* in Tangut and it was the Tanguts’ national self-identity name.¹⁸ Perhaps the Tangut custom did not

¹⁷ “Assorted” or “ancillary” (*za* 雜) cereals — like barley, buckwheat, etc. Their market prices were much lower than those of wheat.

¹⁸ Cf. SHI Jinbo, BAI Bin, HUANG Zhenhua 1983.

require a woman to bear her husband's name. This supposition, however, needs further study.

The name Li Chungou translates as “springtime dog”. In the names of the document cosignatories, Li Laigou and Li Xigou, evidently his kinsmen, the character “dog” is also present. Names like this were not uncommon for Tanguts, especially those living in out-of-the way places. Their babies were given lowly names like *gou* (“dog”), *zhu* (“pig”) in the belief that it would be easier to raise them that way. For example, in the document dated year 12 of the Qianding Western Xia period, asking for a lease on the pledge of a quantity of millet, the applicant's name is He Gougou 何狗狗 and the name of the witness is Lishang Shigou 李臙使狗. In a document from the Qianyou years we come across such names as Sun Zhugou 孙猪狗, Bai Bangou 白伴狗, Li Zhuer 李猪儿, as well as the name Zhao Zhugou 趙猪狗 in the document registered as inv. № 7465v, and so on.

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