

# International Memory of the World Register

## Official Records of Tibet from the Yuan Dynasty China, 1304-1367

(China)

2012-57

### 1.0 Summary (max 200 words)

*Official records of Tibet from the Yuan Dynasty, 1304-1367 is a collection of 22 invaluable original documents including imperial edicts issued by the Yuan Emperors, religious edicts issued by the Imperial Preceptors and orders from Tibetan political rulers written in Tibetan language and the rare Phags-pa script. They provide authentic evidence in understanding the political, religious, economic and cultural aspects of ancient Tibet.*

*These documents clearly show that the Yuan Emperors of that time supported the Sa-Skya-Pa Sect, one sect of Tibetan Buddhism, to manage Tibet, which introduced a new administrative system of unified political, religious power and thus ended the period of decentralization of more than 400 years in Tibet. These documents were nominated also because that they were not only part of the very rare Yuan-dynasty paper archives, but also because they were written in Phags-pa script, the new Mongolian character, which are extremely rare in the world so far as we know.*

### 2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

*Archives of Tibet Autonomous Region of China*

### 2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

*The nominated heritage is owned and managed by the Archives of Tibet Autonomous Region of China*

### 2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)

Tselha Sonam Gyal Deputy Director The Archives Of Tibet Autonomous Region, China

### 2.4 Contact details

*Name*

*Address*

*Tselha Sonam Gyal*

*12 Luding Middle Road, Lhasa, Tibet China 850001*

Telephone	Facsimile	Email
0891-6818132	0891-6830510	xzdaxxw@126.com

### 3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

#### 3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

If inscribed, the exact title and institution(s) to appear on the certificate should be given

#### Official Records of Tibet from the Yuan Dynasty China, 1304-1367

#### 3.2 Catalogue or registration details

*The documents are digitized and listed in the finding aids of the Archives of Tibet Autonomous Region of China. Translation of text in Chinese and English is also available.*

#### 3.4 History/provenance

*In the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century, Genghis Khan's empire expanded its influence from Asia to Russia and Eastern Europe. The Yuan Dynasty of China was established when China fell under the Mongol rule in 1279. Tibet was made one of the administrative regions of Yuan China under the patronage and military protection of Yuan Dynasty Emperor Kublai Khan.*

*Kublai Khan supported the Head Lama of the Sa-Sky-Pa Sect (one of the religious sects of Tibetan Buddhism) in exchange for political loyalty and religious guidance and blessing. Sa-Sky-Pa Lama Phags-pa (Basiba) was conferred the title of Imperial Preceptor and was granted both religious and political power in ruling Tibet under the protection of the Yuan Emperor.*

*The nominated heritage testifies the history of this ancient period of time when the Yuan Dynasty rulers were highly tolerant of the religion, political system and culture of Tibet, which brought about relative stability and development with lasting impact on Tibet and the world today.*

### 4.0 Legal information

#### 4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Name 姓名	Address 地址	
中国西藏自治区档案馆	中国西藏拉萨市鲁定中路 12 号	邮编 850001

The Archive Of Tibet Autonomous Region, China No.12 Luding Middle Road, Lhasa, Tibet, P.R. China 850001

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Name	Address	
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Telephone	Facsimile	Email
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**4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from the owner)**

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中国西藏自治区档案馆保管利用一处

中国西藏拉萨市鲁定中路 12 号 邮编:850001

文献保管负责人:依苏 0891-6833170

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No .1 Department of Archives Preservation and Access, The Archive Of Tibet Autonomous Region, China,

No.12 Luding Middle Road, Lhasa, Tibet, P.R. China 850001

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Name	Address
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Telephone	Facsimile	Email
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**4.3 Legal status**

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Provide details of legal and administrative responsibility for the preservation of the documentary heritage

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*The nominated heritage is owned and managed by the Archives of Tibet Autonomous Region of China.*

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**4.4 Accessibility**

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Describe how the item(s) / collection may be accessed

*Microfilm and photocopies of the nominated collection are provided for public access and use at the Archives of Tibet Autonomous Region, China. The nominated records are also published in the book entitled The Essential Collection of Tibet Archives, Cultural Relics Press (1995).*

All access restrictions should be explicitly stated below:

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*For preservation purpose, access to the original collection of documents is restricted but microfilm and photocopies are available for the public.*

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#### **4.5 Copyright status**

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*Copyright is held by the Archives of Tibet Autonomous Region of China*

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### **5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria**

#### **5.1 Authenticity.**

*The nominated heritage has been held by the Tibetan Government of Dga'-Ldan-Pho-Brang for centuries and subsequently passed to the Archives of Tibet Autonomous Region, China for preservation. Tibetologists and Mongolian language researchers have studied these documents thoroughly. Their authenticity is beyond doubt.*

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#### **5.2 World significance**

*The nominated heritage dates back to the 14th century. It is unique and irreplaceable in the world in the following aspects:*

*First, these original records from the Yuan imperial courts and the ruling echelon of Tibet are the only records of the kind extant. They are also the oldest surviving written official records of China. They are unique and very precious.*

*Second, there are four imperial edicts in the collection written in Phags-pa script. The latter was a set of phonetic symbols invented by Phags-pa Lama for multi-lingual writing that could be used to translate and write different languages. Phags-pa script was intended and mandated to be a unified national script for writing the disparate languages spoken by different ethnic groups to facilitate communication, integration and policy implementation within the Yuan Empire. The rare script was seen mostly in official documents in parallel with the local script as appropriate. It was introduced to many parts of the Yuan Empire and applied to writing Mongolian, Chinese, Tibetan, and Ughur, Turkic and other languages. Although its use was discontinued after the fall of the Yuan Dynasty in 1368, many scholars and researchers have acknowledged the importance of Phags-pa script in providing useful linguistic clues about the changes and development of the languages used in China, Korea and inner Asia. The 4 imperial edicts are the only surviving original official records of the Yuan Emperors written in Phags-pa script. Their intrinsic value is undeniable. A number of Phags-pa scripts*

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have been discovered over the years but they are mainly copies from monumental inscriptions. Therefore, the four documents thus have the mission to present all historical information the New Mongolian Characters had. If they were lost or destroyed, it would be a gap in the history of human civilization.

Third, these official records have a rich content documenting the laws and orders issued by the Yuan Emperors and the rules and regulations introduced by the Imperial Preceptors and top political leaders in offering land estates, tax privileges and protection to the monasteries as well as appointing religious leaders to be government officials with instructions for maintaining law and order, regulating land use, prohibiting abusive power, respecting contracts and agreements. On the other hand, the Yuan Imperial court executed through the edicts and orders in the nominated heritage had the effect of integrating Tibet, a distant and inaccessible region locked in the high plateau of the Himalayas to the Yuan Dynasty China. Such integration helped strengthen its political institutions, expand its economy, widen its cultural horizon as well as stimulating its historical tradition through the contact and exchange of ideas, commodities, arts and technologies circulated between and among the East and West via the many postal stations and trade routes built across China.

Lastly, The nominated heritage revealed the close relation between China's Yuan Emperors and Imperial Preceptors that lay the foundation for Tibetan Buddhism to burgeon and assert dominance in the imperial court of Yuan China. This special form of Buddhism was thus able to evolve and spread to the far east and far west of Tibet as well as to Nepal, Bhutan, India, Mongolia and other part of Asia, Russia and the West in the later days.

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### **5.3 Comparative criteria:**

#### **1 Time**

The nominated records covered the period from 1304 to 1367. It was the time when the 400-year's division among the competing religious sects in Tibet was brought to an end and replaced by unification and peace. The nominated heritage had a kind of administrative authority to merge diversified races and different local cultures. It embraces the value of tolerance, openness and rule of law which is inspiring not only to eastern civilizations but to the whole world today.

#### **2 Place**

Tibet is the world's largest and highest plateau and is often regarded as the third pole of the world. Its geographical location makes it remote and inaccessible. Yet Tibet has excellent records in documenting its history and development of culture, religion and social change. These nominated original records of ancient Tibet are part of its valuable documentary heritage, which is extremely precious and instrumental in understanding the past and present of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism.

#### **3 People**

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*The nominated heritage comprising records written by emperors, prominent religious leaders and political rulers, who made laws and orders that affected the daily life of Tibetans in every aspect. These include principal personalities recognized in Tibetan history and Tibetan Buddhism such as Sa-Skya-Pa Governor Kun-Dga' Rdo-Rje, Sa-Skya Kun-Dga' Rgyal-Mtshan, Sa-Skya-Dbang Grags-Pa Blo-Gros Rgyal-Mtshan, Imperial Tutor(Ti-Shri) Sa-Skya Ren-Chen Rgyal-Mtshan, Sa-Skya Khri-Chen, Tshal-Pa Kun-Dga' Rdo-Rje, the founder of Pag-Mo-Gru-Pa Regime T'i-Si-Tu Byang-Chub Rgyal-Mtshan, the King of Sne-Gdong area, Sa-Skya Lama Kun-Dga' Bsang-Po, the Great Master Sa-Skya 'Khon-Ston, the Greater Master Sa-Skya Ren-Chin Dpal-Bsang-Po, the Greater Master Ren-Chen-Mgon, Tongpon Dbang-Rgyal, Zha-lu-Ba Ye-shes Kun-Dga' and the noble family of Rab-Brtan-Shar-Pa all were either directly mentioned in, or impacted by, these administrative documents .*

#### **4 Subject and theme**

*The nominated heritage witnessed and implemented the theocratic regime of Tibet which combined political and religious power and Tibet's integration into the Yuan Dynasty some seven hundred years ago. These records encompass the political, religious, economic and land systems of Tibet as well as the religion and ethics of Tibet people in the Yuan Dynasty. These important original records not only affirm the true history of Tibet, they also explain Tibet's importance to the world in an inspiring perspective.*

#### **5 Form and style**

*The nominated records were written in Phags-pa script, which were circulated in Yuan's court, and special forms of 2 Tibetan languages: namely 'bru-Thabs-Ma, and 'bru-Tsha-Zsha-Sgong-Ma used by rulers of the Sa-Sky-Pa sect and the Phag-Mo-Gru-Pa sect,*

*To indicate the special rank and status of the records creators, the nominated records, wrapped mostly in yellow silk, were written on different types and sizes of traditional Tibetan paper and folded in different styles according to requirements. Different seals were also used as there were formal systems regulating the use of seals by the Yuan Emperors, the Imperial Preceptors and the leaders of the Sa-Skya-Pa and Phag-Mo-Gru-Pa Regimes.*

*The form, style and carrier of these records are highly reflective of the social norms, culture, customs, language as well as the change and development of the Tibetan society at the time.*

#### **6 Social/ spiritual/ community significance:**

*This collection of very rare Official records of Tibet from the Yuan Dynasty China provide trustworthy evidence in understanding the special relations between and among the Yuan imperial court, the Tibetan Lama, and the local authority. They also revealed the fact that their religious ties laid solid foundation for the long-lasting relations between the central and local*

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government, and among Tibetans, Mongolians and other nationalities.

*With the “teacher” and “patron” relation with the Yuan Emperors, the Phags-pa Lama and his successors were able to consolidate and promote the cultural and religious identity of Tibetans .This relation also contributed to the development of Tibetan Buddhism to burgeon and spread to the far east and far west of Tibet as well as to other parts of Asia, Russia and the West in the later days. The exchange and harmony among different nationalities and areas based on the same religious believes has had a profound effects on today’s pattern of world civilization.*

*The 22 earliest official records of Tibet provide historical evidence of the unique political and religious ties that unified the fragmented territories of Tibet in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, replacing isolation and wars of some 400 years with peace and development. This is of great enlightenment to today’s world in cultural exchange and harmony among different peoples.*

## **6.0 Contextual information**

### **6.1 Rarity**

*The nominated records are the original official records by the Yuan Emperors, the Imperial Preceptors and political leaders of the highest ranking in Tibet dated to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. They are the oldest and the only records of the kind survived in the world. Apart from the importance of the records creators, the Phags-pa scripts used in the 4 imperial edicts also make them rare treasure of irreplaceable value.*

### **6.2 Integrity**

*Although some pages have been ruined, the content of which was not impacted and was kept intact and thus were basically preserved well.*

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