On the Term, Bay, Found in Old Uighur Documents:
An Examination of the Standard Measure for Cotton Cloth in the
Turfan Region

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This article focuses on an Old Uighur word, bay, an important term that is
said to be closely connected to measuring cotton cloth in the pre-modern
Turfan region. According to the available documents, cotton cloth functioned
as currency in addition to other kinds of cloth between approximately the 9th
and 14th centuries. Therefore, clarifying how cotton cloth was standardized
as currency will hopefully help to understand Turfan society and economy
better.

It is a well established explanation that bay (lit., bundle), which often
appears accompanied by the numeral, iki (two), corresponds to the Chinese
織 (chuan) and/or 布 (pi), the traditional Chinese units for measuring cloth
length; and while such an argument may have a large measure of validity, the
author discusses the subject from another point of view; that is, the actual
state of the cloth in question.

On the basis of archaeological materials and the historical record, it can
be concluded that one standardized piece of cloth in China was traditionally
rolled from both edges toward the center, taking the form of a bundle (pi)
consisting of two rolls (圍織 liangchuan). Judging from the historical situation,
Uighur cotton cloth may have been bundled in the same manner, as indicated
by the term iki bay (two bundles). Therefore, rather than considering bay as
a fixed length of cloth, as has long been assumed, the author considers the
form of the cloth instead. This notion leads to an interesting aspect concerning
the function of the term, bay. A reexamination of the related documentation
reveals that bay appears in only a few contracts, where it functions as a
modifier to guarantee standardized size by specifying that the cloth keeps its
original form of iki bay.

Although more research is needed on this subject, the above interpretation
of bay may offer a new glimpse into the social and economic aspects of cotton
cloth in pre-modern Turfan.