

‘Phags-pa lama, Prince Jin-gim’s Textbook of Tibetan Buddhism

The ‘Phags-pa lama (1235–1280), a Tibetan monk of the Sa-skya sect, had his life changed with the arrival of the Mongols. Invited by Khubilai Khan to travel to his court in China in the mid-1250s, ‘Phags-pa began a relationship of two decades with the Mongol ruler and his family. Chabi, Khubilai’s most prominent wife, was impressed with the Tibetan monk, who instructed her about Tibetan Buddhism’s precepts and practices. In 1258, Khubilai, perhaps influenced by his wife, invited ‘Phags-pa to participate in a Buddhist-Daoist debate that was designed to end the sometimes violent conflicts between the two religions. Thanks in part to ‘Phags-pa’s skills as a debater and an interrogator, the Buddhists emerged victorious. Khubilai then named ‘Phags-pa a state preceptor (guoshi) in 1260, administrator of Tibet and of government relations with Buddhists in China, and an imperial preceptor (dishì) in 1270. In turn, ‘Phags-pa rewarded his benefactor by proclaiming Khubilai to be an incarnate of Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom in the Buddhist pantheon, and by recruiting Aniko (1244–1306), a talented artist and craftsman who planned and constructed notable buildings in Daidu (Beijing) and may have painted the official images of Khubilai and Chabi. In the 1270s, ‘Phags-pa returned to Tibet, where he shared power with a civilian administrator, an untenable arrangement that may have led to his death. Monks from the Sa-skya sect accused the civilian administrator of poisoning ‘Phags-pa, and within a year of his death, the civilian administrator had been executed.

‘Phags-pa’s close relationship with both Khubilai and Chabi prompted them to assign him to tutor their son and Khubilai’s chosen successor, Jingim, particularly on Buddhist principles. As an instructional aid for his student, ‘Phags-pa wrote the Ses-bya rab-gsal (What One Should Know) and then began to refer to him as “Bodhisattva Imperial Prince.” The work provided a simple explication of Buddhist precepts as well as a brief geneology of Jingim’s Mongol ancestors.

Three thousand two hundred and fifty years after the Buddha’s Nirvana, Jin-gir (Genghis) became King up North in Hor (Mongolia); he enjoyed the fruit of his merit which had been stored up in former lives.

Beginning from the North he brought many countries of different languages and races under his power, and by his strength he became

like a 'Khor-los sgyur-ba'i King. His son Mo-go-ta (= Ögödäi), widely known as Ga-gan (mong. Qagan=Khan) succeeded him and the dominions became even more extensive than before.

His son was Go-yug-gan (= Güyük Khan); he also ruled as King (=Khan) over the realm.

Genghis' younger son was Do-lo (Tolui); he also obtained the rank of Khan and ruled supreme.

His eldest son was called Mon-go (Möngkä); he as well obtained the highest rank and ruled supreme.

His younger brother is known as Go-pe-la (Qubilai). He too was appointed Khan and ruled over far more dominions than his predecessors and, after entering the Door of the Precious Teaching, he has protected his realm according to the Dharma, and also manifested the Teacher's Teaching.

His eldest son is Jin-gim, who is endowed with all the glory of Heaven and who is also resplendent with the Ornament of the Precious Dharma. His brothers are Mangala, Nomogan and others. Each one is provided with his own virtues and riches and has his own sons and lineage.

So I have told [the history], beginning with the Sa-kya royal lineage up to the Imperial dynasty of our own time.

And so Man-pos bkur-ba was appointed as the first King. At that time the sentient beings mutually took from each other's fields what had not been given. When they were questioned by the King's men they even lied that they had not taken it. Because they were put to death by the King's men, many bad (mi-dge-ba, akusala) deeds, killing and so on, were committed; then the sentient beings who did these deeds died, transferred consciousness ('si-'phos) and were born among the Animals; after that they were born among the Hungry Ghosts. Then they were born successively in the Hells. When beings were born for the first time where they had not been before, in mNar-med-pa [the lowest Hell], then the Origination of the world was completed. In this way man's life became gradually shorter because they had committed negative deeds, and their objects for enjoyment dwindled; the life of the people of Dzambu'i glin became 80.000 years long and those Hell-beings who had been newly born in mNar-med had the same [length of] life.

So the origination of the World of Sentient Beings takes nineteen Medium Aeons; the origin of the Inanimate World takes one Medium Aeon, and thus the Origination takes twenty Medium Aeons.

When people's age in Dzambu'i glin was 80,000 the Continuance (gnas-pa'i, sthiti) Aeon began; this world continues for twenty Medium Aeons. When their life is 10 years the Weapon Aeon (mTshon-gyi bskal-pa [bar-ma], Sastrantara-kalpa) comes, which lasts seven days; then the Sickness Medium Aeon (Nadkyi bskal-pa bar-ma, Rogantara-kalpa) of seven days and seven months, and then the Famine Aeon (Mu-ge'i bskal-pa bar-ma, Durbhiksantara-kalpa) of seven days, seven months and seven years, and because of that man has [then] almost disappeared.

When the remaining ones catch sight of one another, they love one another and live in harmony, because there are very few left; by the performance of positive (dge-ba, kusala) deeds (desisting from killing etc.) their life and objects for enjoyment gradually increase until their life is again 80,000 years. While it is increasing the 'Khor-los sgyur-ba Kings appear; they protect the sentient beings by the Law of the Dharma (chos-khrims, dharmasastra). In times of decrease the Perfect Buddhas (rDzogs-pa'i sans-rgyas, Sambuddha) appear in the world; they are the Saviours ('dren-pa) of the sentient beings.

The Solitary Buddhas (Ran sans-rgyas, Pratyeka-buddha) appear in times of increase as well as decrease; they form a Field of Merit for the sentient beings.

After the duration of twenty Medium Aeons the Destruction ('jig-pa, vibhava) begins. The World of Sentient beings is the first which it destroys. So new births in mNar-med are cut off and when the birth of beings there is finished, and if their Karma is also exhausted after their death, they are born into other destinies ('gro-ba, gati); those with whom it is not so go to the Hells above, or they will be born into hells in other World Spheres.

Thus, when mNar-med-pa has become empty and the hells above it also, they will be born among the Hungry Ghosts. In the same way the Hungry Ghosts and the Animals will also become empty.

Those humans who live in the Northern Continent (Byan-gi sGra-mi-snan, Uttara-kuru), are an exception. For the 'Dod-pa Gods [it is the rule that] they are born in the Absorption which they have

acquired by their True Nature (chos-nid, dharmata), and they will be born in the First Absorption (bsam-gtan, dhyana). The beings of the Northern Continent are born among the 'Dod-pa Gods; there they acquire the Thought of the First Absorption, and they will be born there. Those in the First Absorption have, even so by their True Nature, acquired the Second Absorption; when this has been born in their mindstream (rgyud, samtana) they are born, after death and transference, in the Second Absorption. In this way [everything] from the Lowest Hell to the Tshans-pa World becomes empty, and this goes on (thogs) for nineteen Medium Aeons. Then seven suns will rise in the Four Continents. There falls no rain, and the first sun desiccates the orchards of fruit trees which grow from water. The second one dries up ponds and small rivers; the third sun does the same with the Four Big Rivers, even the Ganges etc; the fourth one makes even Lake Ma-dros-pa (Anavatapta) fall dry; the fifth sun desiccates the Outer Ocean until it is knee-high only, the sixth sun dries up even the rest of the Outer Ocean, and the seventh one makes this our world go up in one sheet of flame. From the lowest Hell to the Tshans-pa World [everything] is destroyed by fire.

In this way the destruction of the world goes on for (thogs) one Medium Aeon.

Then there is an Empty Aeon. That is empty, also for twenty Medium Aeons. So there are eighty Medium Aeons in the Origination-, Continuance-, Destruction-, and Empty Aeons. Together these are called a Great Aeon. Hence it is the same as the life of the Tshans-ris Gods and so forth.

The destruction of the Inanimate World is effected by fire as well as by water and wind. The destruction by fire is as has been explained above just now. After the Origination has again happened successively seven times, the Origination World is destroyed by water, and this wipes out [everything] up to the Second Absorption. In the 'Od gsal Abode a big mass of clouds accumulates, and then, after torrents of rain have fallen, the Inanimate World has disappeared, like salt which dissolves in water, and then even the water itself dries up. In this way, after it has been annihilated by water, it will be destroyed again seven times by fire, just like before.

Then it is again wiped out by water; and so, after every seven destructions by fire there is destruction by water; after the seventh

destruction by water there come again seven destructions by fire. After that the Origination World is annihilated by wind and this destroys [everything] up to the Third Absorption, and so, when the storm shatters even the King of Mountains, Ri-rab, of course all other mountains are destroyed and shattered by the wind.

The Fourth Absorption cannot be destroyed by an outside cause, but when the beings are born there, they are born together with a heavenly palace, and when they die, they are destroyed together with the palace.

End of the description of the Inanimate World, the Sentient Beings in the Animate World, their Origination and Destruction.

Prince Jin-gim's Textbook of Tibetan Buddhism, translated by Constance Hoog (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983), 42–46.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did Khubilai have his son and chosen successor Jingim receive instruction on Buddhism by the most prominent Tibetan Buddhist at his court? What does this reveal about Khubilai's attitudes toward education and governance?
2. What does such religious instruction for the Crown Prince disclose about Khubilai's and the Mongols' attitudes toward the sacred and the profane?

Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, Cathay and the Way Thither

Francesco Balducci Pegolotti (ca. 1280–after 1347) was a merchant in fourteenth-century Florence who worked for a number of companies and local governments. Fragmentary records indicate that he conducted business in London, Antwerp, and Cyprus, among other places, during his peripatetic commercial career. In Cyprus and Armenia, he negotiated better terms of trade for all Florentine merchants.

His commercial handbook offers precise and precious information about the prices and products found along the Silk Roads. He never traveled far toward the

East and must have received most of his data from merchants who had. His descriptions of the routes from the Middle East to China and from Turkey to the Il-Khanate capital at Tabriz were remarkably accurate, even to the distances and the number of days required for the voyages. He also specified the number of men needed for long-distance caravans and the imports and exports from specific regions en route and offered useful information on foreign languages and business customs. More helpful still were his descriptions of the values of coins and different weights and measures and even the differing lengths of cloth and the quality of gold and silver throughout the oases and other stopping places. The range of his information was truly remarkable.

The road you travel from Tana to Cathay is perfectly safe, whether by day or by night, according to what the merchants say who have used it. Only if the merchant, in going or coming, should die upon the road, everything belonging to him will become the perquisite of the lord of the country in which he dies, and the officers of the lord will take possession of all. And in like manner if he die in Cathay. But if his brother be with him, or an intimate friend and comrade calling himself his brother, then to such an one they will surrender the property of the deceased, and so it will be rescued.

And there is another danger: this is when the lord of the country dies, and before the new lord who is to have the lordship is proclaimed; during such intervals there have sometimes been irregularities practised on the Franks, and other foreigners. (They call *Franks* all the Christians of these parts from Romania westward.) And neither will the roads be safe to travel until the other lord be proclaimed who is to reign in room of him who is deceased.

Cathay is a province which contained a multitude of cities and towns. Among others there is one in particular, that is to say the capital city, to which is great resort of merchants, and in which there is a vast amount of trade; and this city is called Cambalec. And the said city hath a circuit of one hundred miles, and is all full of people and houses and of dwellers in the said city.

You may calculate that a merchant with a dragoman, and with two men servants, and with goods to the value of twenty-five thousand golden florins, should spend on his way to Cathay from sixty to eighty *sommi* of silver, and not more if he manage well; and for all