

Religion Competition in the Mongol-Yuan Period

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Keywords: Mongolia, Tibetan Buddhism, Religion competition

Abstract: In history, nomadic people in the Mongolian Plateau and farming people in the Central Plains communicated and exchanged with each other, thus forming our country. In the 13th century, Mongolia established its position as the ruler of the world, so it was urgent to choose a new thought to replace the Shamanism which was no longer suitable for Mongolia. The Mongolian Plateau became the communication bridge between the Central Plains and Eurasia. Different religions and sects sent envoys to the tent of Mongolian king one after another. Tibetan Buddhism joined in the competition as another branch of Buddhism and gradually stood out. Finally, it developed and grew up with the strong political and economic support of the Mongolians, and gradually changed Mongolians' mindset of over expansionism, thus establishing the territory of China today.

1. Introduction

At first, Mongolians believed in the Tangri (the eternal heaven) of Shamanism, and thought that they were “the Lord of the earth” who “relies on the power of the God”. Therefore, the brave Mongolian cavalry opened up their territory. In 1247, Prince Gotan and Sa-skya pan-chen met in Liangzhou; since then Tibetan Buddhism produced more influence on Mongolia. The Mongols gradually stopped the pace of war, and then established the territory of China. The relationship between Tibetan Buddhism and Mongolia is very important. At present, there have been some studies on reasons why Mongolia believes in Tibetan Buddhism, but it is not only related to the natural geography and human environment, but also related to the competition between Tibetan Buddhism and other religions.

2. The Period of Genghis Khan: the Rise of Quanzhen Taoism

In May 1219, Genghis Khan sent Zhonglu Liu to Shandong to invite Chuji Qiu. In April 1222, Chuji Qiu arrived at Genghis Khan's palace. Genghis Khan inquired about the method of eternal life and gave him the title of “immortal”. On March 7, 1223, Qiu asked Genghis Khan to leave, and Genghis Khan granted the holy decree to exempt Quanzhen Taoism from paying taxes. For more than a year, Genghis Khan sent greetings to Chuji Qiu and issued three holy edicts that he hoped Quanzhen religion would celebrate his birthday.^[1] Genghis Khan's financial support and transcendent position provided convenience for the prosperity of Quanzhen Taoism, but the expansion of Quanzhen Taoism, especially the change of temples, caused the antipathy of Buddhists. According to the *Identification and Falsification of Da-yuan to Yuan*,^[2] it is said that “the disciples of Quanzhen, under the influence of Master Qiu, tried to occupy the Zhongpan (mountain), with the excuse that Master Zhen wants to leave here for a while. In Zhen's opinion, Taoists usually live in isolated places; now since they have the power, they can occupy the mountain forever. Daozheng Wang, Zhiguan Chen, Master Wu and others demolished the temple and destroyed Buddha statues. They even presented memorials to the Empress Dowager, asking to demolish the Buddhism temple to build the Xiyun Taoist Abbey.” The action caused revenge from Buddhists. In the first month of 1226, the Buddhists broke into the abbey in the evening and destroyed the shrine of Quanzhen Taoism. The conflict between Taoism and Buddhism lasted from Genghis Khan to the four times of disputes between Taoism and Buddhism during the reign of Mongke Khan and Kublai. On July 7, 1227, Chuji Qiu died; Zhiping Yin and Zhichang Li successively served as the leader of Quanzhen Taoism. On July 12, Genghis Khan died in Qingshui

County.^[3]

3. The Period of Ogedei Khan: Preferential Treatment for Four Religions

During the reign of Ogedei, on the one hand, he inherited Genghis Khan's policy and continued to give preferential treatment to Quanzhen Taoism. In the autumn of 1229, Ogedei succeeded to the throne. Since then, he often called in Zhichang Li. In 1233, Zhichang Li was approved to teach young Mongolian nobles and won the title of “the fairy master”. In 1235, the holy decree of Ogedei followed Genghis Khan's preferential treatment of Quanzhen Taoism, but Zhichang Li paid attention to the management of Taoism. “In the imperial edict of Genghis Khan, Taoists do not get married; they do not eat wine or meat. Now all people know that you should not eat wine, meat or get married. The fairy master picked you out. Common people who need to pay taxes every year can do those things.” In the same year, Ogedei built Taoism abbeys and temples in KarAkorum. Zhiping Yin and Zhichang Li were asked to select Taoists with high moral integrity to host ceremonies and take charge of temples.^[4]

On the other hand, Ogedei began to contact with other sects and also provide them preferential policies. In November 1229, Ogedei issued a decree stipulating that “monks and Taoists who engaged in agriculture shall pay local taxes and commercial taxes in accordance with regulations, and shall be exempt from miscellaneous taxes and general duties.” “In accordance with regulations” should refer to the holy decree of Genghis Khan that “all the servitude and taxes should be suspended”. At first the decree only aimed at the Quanzhen Taoism of Chuji Qiu. However, in the first year of Ogedei, it covered all “monks and Taoists”. In 1238, four religions were exempted from taxes and corvee labour. According to the 29th volume of *General Laws and Regulations*, the article on commercial and land taxes stipulates, “in the first month of the fifth year of Zhongtong, the Central Secretariat approved the regulation. When the former Emperor Genghis was in power, all people engage in agriculture should pay the land tax. For monks, Taoists, Christians and Islamists, they should pay land tax if they do farming, and pay commercial tax if they do business. Other taxes and duties are exempt. In the imperial edict of the later emperor, the regulation remains.” According to the Master of Changchun Abbey, the date of “the imperial edict” is unknown. It should be the earliest edict which equally treated the four religions, and was followed by later generations. The time is about after the imperial edict of the first year of Taizong in November and before the leap of April in the tenth year of Taizong.

4. The Period of Alaon Khan: the Official Communication between Tibetan Buddhism and Christianity with the Mongolian Royal Court

In 1246, Alaon became the Khan. He continued to carry out the policy of preferential treatment for four religions during the period of Ogedei, but both his teacher Fu Wang, and Zhenhai, the minister who served him since childhood, were Christians. He respected Christians and priests extremely. During his reign, Christianity flourished and prospered. “From Asia Minor, Celia, Baoda, Aorsoi and Oroso, there were a large number of friars who came to court.” The status of Islam declined. “He naturally tends to reject Mohammed's religious beliefs...No Islamists dares to complain about them (Christians).” On August 24, 1246, Jean de Plan Carpin, a Christian, was sent to Mongolia by the decree of Pope Innocent IV to attend the ceremony of Alaon Khan's succession and present the Pope's letter.^[5] However, it can be seen from the Pope's letter sent by Alaon Khan that he had firm belief in the native Shamanism of Mongolian and doubts about Western Christianity.

At the same time, Tibetan Buddhism entered Mongolia in the official name. In 1240, the Prince Gotan of Liangzhou sent Duodana to lead troops and march into Tibet. In 1244, Gotan sent Dolsgon and Benjuedama to Tibet with an imperial edict, inviting Saban to preach in Mongolia. In 1247, Gotan and Saban met in Liangzhou. In this period, Liangzhou, like the court of Alaon Khan, worshiped Christianity and Shamanism. “When the prayer meeting is held, Christians and the Mongolian Shaman sit in front of monks.” During that meeting, “Gotan and Saban, the Prince of

Dharma, talked about many doctrines, so that Gotan could understand the creed of Buddhism.” Therefore, Gotan ordered that henceforth, the Christians and the Mongolian Shaman cannot sit on the place of honor; Saban should sit in front of monks. When praying, the Buddhist monks should make the first wish. After that, Gotan was seriously ill and repeatedly treated with Shamanism, which was ineffective. “Saban made a lion roaring Bodhisattva ritual for Gotan, which freed Gotan from the disease.” “Gotan was devoutly. He asked the Dharma King for many times about the broad and profound creeds, such as Mahayana's bodhichitta.” Local monks in Liangzhou also support Saban very much. At the same time, Gotan asked his nephew Edachanadoji to wear Mongolian clothes and marry Princess Mercaton.

5. The Period of Mongke Khan: Disputes among Different Sects

In 1251, Mongke succeeded to the position of Mongol Khan. In 1252, he issued *A Letter from Phags-pa to Greats Monks in the Region of Wusi Tibet during the Parinirvana of Sakya Pandita*, and designated his four brothers to govern different parts of Tibet with 10000 households each as their fief. Although the Sa-skya sect was in charge of Tibetan monks' affairs in name, the quality of sects supported by Mongolian nobles affects the reputation of individuals. “If you and others do not behave according to the laws and regulations of Sakyamuni, Mongolian people must say: is the teaching of Sakyamuni feasible? You can't do evil; otherwise I will lose face in front of the public.”^[6] This led to disputes among various sects in Tibet. The *Feast of the Wise* recorded, “when Kublai Khan was a prince, Sakya bunnkhin sakya sambo, Chaibhasna hisa hwan-hisa and Khamdi rinpoche were protected and supported. But when (the Mongke khan) was very powerful, Dogmbe, the khri dpon of Zhigomba, became the commander of the guard. Therefore, in front of Mongke Khan, we must rely on Ariq Boke to confront Kublai Khan and debate with him to reveal the truth.”

In 1254, Mongke Khan met with Rubruk, the emissary of King Louis of France, in KarAkorum.^[7] At that time, KarAkorum “had twelve idol temples of different nationalities, two mosques, and a Christian church at the end of the city”. Because “all sects said their doctrines were the best, and their books were the most useful”, Mongke Khan hoped that Christians, Arabians and monks could hold a debate and write down their own doctrines, so that he can know the truth. On May 30, as a representative of Christianity, Rubruk held a debate with representatives of other sects in the church of KarAkorum. Both Christianity and Islam believe there is only one true God who is omnipotent, which is consistent with the Tangri belief of Mongolian Shamanism; Buddhism believes that different places have different gods and different functions. Although Buddhism tries to show that there is one God above all gods, it is obviously not as justified as Christianity. The next day, Mongke Khan summoned Rubruk and monks on the debate, and they had a dialogue. Although Rubruk won the debate with Buddhist monks on behalf of Christian, Mongke Khan still had doubts about the local Christians in Mongolia, because there were many differences between the Western Christianity advocated by Rubruk and the Christianity localized in Mongolia. Mongke Khan said to Rubruk repeatedly, “I don't mean you.” Because of the improper behaviors of local Christians and the contradiction between Islam and Christianity in Mongolia from Alaon Kaan period to the Mongke Khan period, Mongke believed that Christians “find faults of each others” and “did evil things for money”.

In 1255, Mongke Khan called together Fu Yu, the elder of Shaolin Temple and Zhichang Li, the leader of Quanzhen to debate in front of the emperor. In 1256, monks and Taoists debated again, and Taoism failed. Emperor Xianzong of Yuan Dynasty ordered Taoists to take off their hats and cut their hairs, and burned their classics and scripture boards. In 1258, Emperor Xianzong entrusted Kublai Khan to preside over the second debate of monks and Taoism in Kaiping. The Buddhist monk asked Quanzhen Taoist to answer Buddhism precepts and explain the profound meaning of Buddhism. The Taoist said that the Buddha was “aware of benevolence and righteousness”, which was refuted by an elder from Yuanfu Temple in Yanjing: “the words of benevolence and faith of Confucianism are also stolen.” Kublai Khan concluded that Taoism lied. Quanzhen Taoists had to take out the historical books of Han region, such as *Biography of Laozi* and *Historical Records*, to

prove their innocence. However, only the historical records of royal bloodlines in Han region mentioned Laozi preached Hu people, while the historical records of other places do not have similar records. The issue of orthodoxy in royal succession irritated Kublai Khan. At last, Phags-pa asked the history of Buddhism in the history books of Tibetan, and Quanzhen religion ended in a tragic defeat. In the Kaiping debate in 1258, with the joint efforts of Buddhist representatives from all over the world, Quanzhen Taoism lost its religion privileges since Genghis Khan. At the same time, Phags-pa demonstrated his talent in this debate, which laid the foundation of his position as the Buddhism leader after Kublai Khan succeeded to the throne.

At present, many researches on the dispute between Buddhism and Taoism point out that Kublai Khan's partiality to Buddhism is the direct cause of the failure of Quanzhen Taoism. However, it is not difficult to see that the denial of a sect by the Mongolian royal court is not decided by several debates or the preference of the host. During the period of Mongke Khan, Mongolia had established its dominant position in the world. The Quanzhen doctrine which adopted the Confucian concept of "the center position of Han region" was not liked by Mongolian nobles.

In the same period, the Mongolian Khanate welcomed the Tibetan monk Karma-pag-shi. He can make "countless strange changes like God. All the nobles, ministers and common people of Mongolia automatically believed in him and converted to Buddhism from other evil heresy. His fame, like the stars in the sky, is regarded as the top ornament by the King." Mongke Khan gave Karma-pag-shi the gold seal, a thousand ingots of silver and many other treasures. All the monks in KarAkorum were very happy. His preached in the Mongolian royal court and greatly promoted the position of Buddhism among Mongolian nobility.^[8]

6. The Period of Kublai Khan: the Prosperity of Tibetan Buddhism

Kublai Khan had been contacted Buddhism in the Han region for a long time. "In the year of Renyin (1242), Kublai Khan asked his teacher to go to his tent and ask him general ideas of Buddhism. The King was ready to learn the bodhichitta discipline." In 1251, Kublai Khan met with Phags-pa in Liupan mountain. At the beginning of 1254, Kublai Khan asked Phags-pa to teach him Abhiseka, and honored Phags-pa as the great master. In 1254, Kublai Khan wrote an imperial edict to give preference for monks, so that "monks are inviolable and can dedicate themselves to Buddhism". In 1260, Kublai Khan ascended the throne, granted Phags-pa the title of master teacher, ordered him to take charge of Buddhist affairs, and gave him a jade seal. After Kublai Khan succeeded to the throne, he withdrew the army guarding the territory of Mongolia in Tibet and ordered Hulegu to manage Tibet. In 1264, Kublai Khan issued a "Pearl Imperial Edict" to monks and common people. He juxtaposed the Genghis Khan Dharma formed on the basis of Shamanism with the Buddha Dharma, and said that the development of the country in the future would resort to the accumulation of Buddha Dharma. Therefore, the Buddha Dharma not only replaced the status of Shamanism among Mongolian nobles, but also became the source of later policies on governing the country. In 1269, Kublai Khan issued an imperial edict to use the new Mongolian character created by Phags-pa, and honored Phags-pa as the Gyalwa Karmapa and gave him a jade seal. In 1270, Kublai Khan promoted Phags-pa to be the "emperor's master". After Phags-pa, Rin chen rgyal mtshan, Dharmapala-rakshita, Ye-shesrin-chen, and Grags-pahod-zer inherited the position of the emperor's teacher and great master.

Kublai Khan's fondness for Tibetan monks helped Buddhist monks to form their transcendent position and to accumulate a lot of wealth in Yuan Dynasty. But this does not mean that other sects disappeared in the Yuan Dynasty.

"(Kublai Khan) replied, 'there are four prophets worshiped all over the world. Christians call their God Jesus Christ; Muslims call it Mahatma; Jews call it Moses; idols call it Shakyamuni, their first God. I salute all four of them. I worship and pray for the silent protection from those who are in the highest position in heaven and who are the most real.' "

7. Conclusion

In history, rising political powers always needed to seek ideas and thoughts, in order to build a whole system which can control all the people. In the period of great Mongolia, brave cavalries rapidly expanded the ruling area of the Mongolian kingdom with their tenacious fighting power and strong impact. The Mongolian aristocracy suddenly entered the imperial society from the tribal society. Facing the huge population gap and the situation that it is difficult to control more with less, only relying on force suppression and Shamanism can not help Mongolians to establish a stable regime. Therefore, since Genghis Khan established the Empire of Mongolia in 1206, the upper class has been looking for a political ideology to help their rule. From the transcendent position of Quanzhen Taoism in the Genghis Khan period, to the coexistence of four religions in the Ogedei period, and to the fierce competition of various sects in the Mongke Khan period, under the layers of screening and the influence Dharma Masters on the Mongolia region, Kublai Khan began to choose the Tibetan Buddhism which was similar to Shamanism but was more systematized as the leading ideology. This process finished when Wanze, the Chengzong Emperor of Yuan Dynasty issued *The Imperial Edict of Precedence to Monks* to Tibetan monks, which not only makes Tibetan Buddhism stand out from Buddhism, but also marks that the king's court of the Mongol-Yuan Dynasty finally chose their own religious belief and policies on governing the country. This choice also affected the Mongols' conscription from then on. In Ming and Qing Dynasties, the central government still adopted the strategy of “ruling Mongolia by the Tibetan Buddhism”, which helps to establish the territory of China.

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