The history of Tibet took another turn with the rise of the Mongol Empire. At the end of the 12th century, the hordes of Genghis Khan overran Europe and Asia. A solution had to be found to defend the integrity of the Tibetan nation from the Mongols for whom the Buddhist concept of love and non-violence was still unknown.

‘Good luck’ came in 1244, when Godan Khan invited a leading Tibetan Lama, Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltsen to the Mongolian Court to be the Imperial Preceptor. The relation between the Khans and the Lamas of Sakya continued to flourish under Kublai Khan who adopted Buddhism as the State religion after Dogon Choegyal Phagpa, Sakya Pandita’s nephew had become the Khan’s teacher. In gratitude, Kublai Khan offered him political authority over Tibet in 1254.

The Priest-Patron relationship (or Choe-yon) developed thus: in exchange for their spiritual advice, the Lamas of Sakya were given temporal authority over Tibet, while getting protection against outside interference. This unique Central Asian institution would later become the cornerstone of the relationship between the Dalai Lamas and the Manchu Emperors.

The Choe-yon relationship solved the problem faced by the Buddhist State, which could not have survived without the external patronage of a strong military power.