

Priest-Patron Relation

A Special Partnership with the Mongols



Map of the Mongol Empire at the beginning of the 13th century



The Sakya monastery became the main political center in Tibet



Genghis Khan



Ogedei Khan



Kublai Khan



Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyalsten



Choegyal Phagpa teaching at the Mongol Court

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 corner stone 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.



Mongols were great hunters and warriors



The Mongol Khan bids farewell to Choegyal Phagpa as he leaves for Tibet



Mongols are blessed by the Lama on the way



First encounter between Kublai Khan and Choegyal Phagpa at the Mongol Court