INTRODUCTION

The author, Tsalpa Kunga Dorjé (Tshal pa Kun dga' rdo rje, 1309–1364), was a member of the Tsalpa (Tshal pa) family, who were powerful in Central Tibet before the rise of the Lang (rLangs) family. The Lang leader, Ta'i Situ Jangchub Gyaltsen (’Byang chub rgyal mtshan) (1302–1364) was effectively ruler of central Tibet after 1354. Kunga Dorjé spent a considerable amount of time in the Mongols’ Yuan dynasty court, going there first at a young age, in 1324. His father, grandfather, and great-grandfather had all served in the Yuan court. In his final years Kunga Dorjé entered monastic life in Tibet. He began writing The Red Annals in 1346 and completed it in 1363.

The work itself has been described as ‘the earliest extant Tibetan example of an attempt at writing a global history’ (van der Kuijp 1996: 44) and as ‘an important source on Buddhism under the Mongol Yuan dynasty as viewed by a learned Tibetan monk’ (Franke 1990: 37).

Sources

The edition generally used by current scholars was published in Beijing in 1981, with extensive notes in Tibetan by Dungkar Lozang Trinlé (Dung dkar blo bzang phrin las). In the introduction he states that nine examples of the text were known at the time of publication. Although written in Tibetan, the title of the work was originally Hu lan deb ther, a transcription of the Mongolian title.

It has been suggested that some parts of the text are later additions (Petech 1990: 2; Gamble 2014, Appendix 2).

References


**OUTLINE**

In the 1981 edition the text is arranged into 26 chapters (over 150 pages). The first nine chapters concern the origins of the world, the life and teachings of the Buddha, continuing with accounts of royal lineages (*rgyal rabs*) of India, China, Xi-Xia (Tangut), Mongolia, and Tibet. The middle section deals with the history of the diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet. Later chapters are dedicated to individual sects of Tibetan Buddhism: Sakya (Sa skya), Kadampa (bKa’ gdam pa), and Kagyu (bKa’ brgyud). The final chapter concerns an edict issued by Temür Qan (1295–1307).

**EXTRACTS**

The page numbers below refer to the 1981 Beijing edition and use the chapter headings in that edition.

The author, Tsalpa Kunga Dorjé, begins with his own background.

[pp. 1-2]
At the age of 17, in the wood ox year [1324], I came before the emperor of the Yuan royal lineage, Ye sun the’i mur. [There I] received large quantities of silver, a silver seal, golden ornaments, and many sorts of silk clothing, together with an edict (’ja’ sa), which specified all the powerful men of the Tshal pa family.

Chapter Five: Translations of Tang Chinese sources on Tibet

One story concerns a queen named Wu san.

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Subsequently, when she was older, the Tang dynasty ceased. She was appointed under the name Wu san. At a gathering of many people, it was briefly asked whether it was right to have appointed Wu san. When they said it was not right, an edict was issued for the execution of the queen.

Chapter Nine: The Tibetan royal lineage

This section concerning Songtsen Gampo (Srong brtsan sgam po) recounts the way in which he founded temples in Tibet. It lists ministers and religious teachers from India and elsewhere and describes the translation of religious texts.

[p. 35–36]

Thon mi [sam bho ta] created the Tibetan letters, using the Indian letters as an example. [The king] made laws based on the ten virtues (dge bcu’i khrims bcas) and introduced the practices (srol) of the sixteen pure human customs (mi chos gtsang ma) for the Tibetan people. Tibet was divided into four stong sde (thousand communities).
Chapter Twenty-Three: The history of the Karma Kagyu

After passages on the First and Second Karmapas, the chapter continues with an account of the activities of the Third Karmapa (1284–1339).

In accordance with the prediction, on the invitation of the eastern king Thog thi mu,¹ he was offered a *mgon po tshal ching* edict (’ja’ sa). Having received the golden seal of Karma Pakshi, and taking it with him, he went to dBuś in the seventh month of the sheep year.²

An edict (*dam kha*) was issued by Gushri in the name of the Karmapa, known as the one who has realized the emptiness of all phenomena, with a crystal seal and a travelling pass.³

Later, the Third Karmapa is concerned with religious practices and fallacies (*skyon*), which need to be put right. He issues an edict in this regard:

Wherever it was read out, an edict (’ja’ sa) was proclaimed in all directions.

The chapter continues (from p. 108) with the activities of the Fourth Karmapa (1340–1386). It describes how, as a child and teenager, he completes his education in Central Tibet, and at nineteen years old is invited to the Yuan court by the last emperor of the dynasty, Toghun Temür (r. 1333–

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¹ Dung-dkar (1981: 418, n. 483) states that this king was the tenth in the Yuan lineage and ruled from 1328 to 1331.

² This would be 1331.

³ This may be what was known as a *paiza*, after the Chinese term.
The emperor is delighted to renew his relationship with a reincarnation of his former teacher.

All the philosophers asked him to stay.⁴ The emperor (gong ma) put his hands together and shed tears. He gave [the Fourth Karmapa] a poetically written letter (‘ja’ sa) of invitation to stay, in Tibetan script, along with three gifts: a bre of gold, three bre of silver, and nine rolls of silk cloth.

The chapter describes how the Fourth Karmapa travels around and is invited to many places, being offered gold, silver, and silk cloth.

At Shing kun, bLa ma ’jam dbyangs said that he would not welcome the officials (gser yig pa) if the army was likely to cause harm to sentient beings. Nevertheless, he said that if a ‘ja’ sa arrived in a peaceful manner, he would accept the difficulties of the invitation. A ‘ja’ sa of invitation issued by Kar ma lha sding, brought by the ‘ja’ protectors themselves, was offered to the dharma lord [the Fourth Karmapa].

⁴ The meaning of gtam kin is obscure.
The dharma lord himself [the Fourth Karmapa] was given the crystal seal of Thu lu shri skya’o ta’o gu shri. He requested a crystal edict (shel ’ja’ sa) for the release of prisoners and the commanders were given banners with auspicious symbols on them, in order to make [the edict] known in Tibet.\(^5\)

Chapter Twenty-Four: concerning the Pagmodru (Phag mo gru) and Drigung Kagyu (’Bri gung bka’ brgyud).

This chapter describes the activities of the Pagmodru leader, Ta’i Situ Jangchub Gyaltsen. There are references to ’ja’ sa (edicts) confirming official appointments, such as that of khri dpon (head of one of the major Tibetan districts). It continues with a synopsis of Drigung Kagyu history, ending with a brief description of the life of Lha Rinchen Gyalpo (Lha rin chen rgyal po) in the fourteenth century.

[p. 126]

When he [Lha Rinchen Gyalpo] was staying at his uncle’s place at lHa nang, he was harmed by the vanguard of the army, which disregarded the royal law (rgyal khrims), so he went to sKyi smad.

Chapter Twenty-Five: concerning the Tsalpa Kagyu.

The chapter describes the activities of Zhang Rinpoche (1123–1193), founder of the Tsalpa Kagyu. He establishes monasteries at Tsalpa in 1173 and at Gungtang (Gung thang) in 1187. He also commissions the large lHa chen dpa’i bar statue of Śākyamuni at Tsal Gungtang. The author extols Lama Zhang’s spiritual achievements and qualities, with no mention of his violence.

[p. 128]

He [bLa ma Zhang] established the yoke (gnya’) and the royal law (rgyal khrims).

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\(^5\) Czaja (2013: 171, n. 193) interprets this as referring to a general amnesty that Rol pa’i rdo rje requested from the Chinese emperor in 1361, which was then publicly proclaimed in Tibet.
Chapter Twenty-Six: An edict (’ja’ sa) from the time of the emperor Öljeitü (Ol ja thu) of the Yuan royal lineage concerning an increase in the clerical authority bestowed on the monks of Tibet.

This chapter describes an edict made in 1297 by the Yuan emperor, Öljeitü (Ol ja thu), also known as Temür (r. 1294–1307).

[p. 149]
ཨོལ་ཇ་ཐུ་རྒྱལ་པོའི་དུས།

During their reign of King Ol ja thu, under the inherent authority of everlasting heaven and from an abundance of great merit, our king’s edict [was pronounced as follows]:

To the chief administrator of the Central Secretariat (hrung shu zhing); the officials of the Board of Military Affairs (chu mi dben); the officers of the Censorate (g.yu shri tha); the officers of the Branch Secretariats (hying dzu shri) and the Branch Censorates (hying g.yu’i shri tha); the officers of the Surveillance Bureau (gle hwong si); the city governors and the regional protectors; the army commanders and the army personnel; the elders of the various communities: this edict is to be made known to many people.6

[p.150]

The King Jing gis (Chinggis Qan) and the King O go ta (Ögodei Qan) are said to have directed that tax, military conscription, and labour obligations are not to be imposed on any monks who follow the doctrinal tradition of Śākyamuni, so that [they] may make religious offerings and say prayers.

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6 The bureaucratic terms in this passage are transcriptions of Chinese terms, with tentative translations based on Bira (1964) and Schuh (1977).
As King Se chen (Qubilai Qan) was devoted to the Three Jewels, he also caused the doctrine of the Buddha Śākyamuni to spread throughout the world. Although he told people to pray and perform rituals for him, because people appointed elsewhere as city officials (mkhar mig) and community leaders did not understand, they flouted the inherent authority of the temples and monasteries and they will flout the inherent authority of the monks. In the circumstances, the leaders responsible for the people, and the mass of people should follow the doctrinal tradition of Śākyamuni. The inherent authority of the monks should not be flouted, the inherent authority of the temples and monasteries should not be flouted, and they should be honoured.

[p. 150–51]

In order to ensure that the monks were honoured, during the reign of King Se chen (Qubilai Qan), when a certain wicked city-dweller assaulted an ordained Buddhist monk, he was prosecuted for the fault. From now on, if a lay person so much as touches a Tibetan monk, his hand is to be cut off; if he touches him verbally, his tongue is to be torn out. Once this edict ('ja'
sa) has been proclaimed, people who do not respect the monks and flout the inherent authority of the temples and monasteries, wherever they may be, should be seized by appointed officials or senior monks, and they must be brought before me. This is to be understood.

This is my edict, made on the twenty-eighth day of the last month of spring in the bird year [1297], at Shang to.