

The Mongol Khaans and Taoism Before and During the Yuan Period

Bataa Mishig-Ish

Abstract

The thirteenth century Mongol invasion of China allowed the native religions of China not only to maintain a high level of autonomy, and but also compete with one another for gaining more influence with their new Mongol rulers. The case of Taoism in China was an excellent example. This paper explores the historical relationship of the Mongol khaans and Taoism from Chinggis Khaan's reign to Ulziitumur's reign, who succeeded Khubilai of the Yuan period. This relationship was indeed an interesting one as it reveals that spiritual leaders of influential Taoist sects had always sought for ways in which they could elevate the prestige of their Taoist sects and increase their spiritual supremacy over other religions such as Buddhism by gaining the favor of their Mongol rulers. Likewise, the Mongol Khaans realized the importance of the role of native Chinese religions, especially Taosim, in

Bataa Mishig-Ish is a Adviser on Religious Affairs to the President of Mongolia, a Director of Office of International Affairs, The National Academy of Governance-Government Agency of Mongolia.
(mbataa@gmail.com)

International Journal of Buddhist Thought & Culture September 2012, vol. 19, pp. 85-105.

© 2012 International Association for Buddhist Thought & Culture

The day of submission: 2012.6.15 / Completion of review: 2012.6.27 / Final decision for acceptance: 2012.7.6

effective ruling agrarian China. This historical correspondence of the Mongol Khaans with Taoism can be attributed to personal, spiritual, and political benefits for the Mongol rulers, and spiritual and political influences gained by the Taoists for maintaining their institutional power over other faiths throughout Chinese society.

Key words: Buddhism, China, Khaan, Mongol, Taoism, Yuan.

I. Introduction

When the Mongols invaded China in the thirteenth century, they took up new challenges and accepted new religious and cultural realities. The Mongols, due in large part to a lack of effective control over their occupied regions, allowed these areas to have a high level of autonomy, which enabled the native religions to continuously exist and further prosper. This was the case for Taoism in China, specifically Ch'uan-chen Taoism before and during the Yuan Dynasty.¹ When Ch'uan-chen Taoism first came into contact with the Mongols, it gained crucial influence over the religious and spiritual affairs of the Great Mongol Khaan, Chingghis.² The most eminent Taoist sage, Ch'iu Ch'u-chi also known as Ch'ang-ch'un, took a long journey and established a successful relationship with the Khaan, which gave him more prestige and tremendous impetus to his sect.

At the same time the Mongols rulers realized the need for ruling agrarian China by supporting its religious beliefs. With the extension of Mongol power, Khubilai Khaan, Chinggis Khaan's grandson, came into contact with other Taoist sects and strongly encouraged them to serve the Khaan in ruling the whole of China. The Mongol rulers, who allowed all religions to freely exercise their teachings and rituals, strongly favored Taoism and gave them more prestige than other religions, with the exception of Buddhism, during their Yuan ruling period in China.

1 The Yuan Dynasty was ruled by the Mongol Khaans from 1271 to 1368.

2 The founder of the Mongol Empire 1162-1227.

This paper will further explore the historical relationship of the Mongol rulers and Taoism before and during the Yuan period, specifically covering the period from Chinggis Khaan's reign to Ulziitumur Khaan,³ who succeeded Khubilai, of the Yuan Dynasty. In this paper, I intend to show the historical correspondence of the Mongol Khans with Taoism, which was probably attributed to personal, spiritual, and political reasons, and its implications. This paper will provide a clear picture of the relationship between the Mongol rulers and Taoism in the 13th century. My argument in this paper is that this strong historical correspondence between the Mongols and Taoism was originally attributed to the Mongol Chinggis Khaan's personal interest in Taoism. The scope of his interest was further broadened on the basis of his successors' interests in Taoism's spirituality, as well as its political and social implications, which met the needs of ruling a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious agrarian civilization for roughly two centuries.

II. Chinggis Khaan and the Ch'uan-chen Taoist Sect

Chinggis Khaan (1162-1227) himself played a significant role in spreading Ch'uan-chen Taoism throughout Northern Chinese and Southern Mongol lands. For advice on methods of attaining immortality the Khaan summoned one of Wang Che's seven talented disciples, Ch'iu ch'u-chi. According to Yao, Ch'iu is considered to be the most famous disciple of Wang Che. It is believed he was born into a farming family and his parents died when he was a child. Later Ch'iu became proficient at composing essays and poems (Yao 1980, 54). Ch'iu consequently spent some years living in a cave to practice asceticism. Since he was strongly favored by the Khaan, Chinggis sent an official invitation letter, in which the Khaan says:

Since I came to the throne, I have taken to heart my obligation to rule; but I have not yet met suitable people to occupy the positions of the "three dukes" and the "nine ministers." I inquired and heard about you, Taoist master Ch'iu, who has embodied the "truth" and

3 The second Khaan who succeeded Khubilai.

walked in the paths of righteousness...After the war, I learned that you still live a secluded life in Shantung at the same place. I have always longed to meet you. I have heard the stories of the return from the River Wei in the same cart and the visits to the reed hut. Regrettably we are separated by mountains and rivers of great extent; therefore, I have been unable to visit you personally. I can only descend from the throne and stand by the side. I have selected and dispatched my adjutant Liu Chung-lu with escorts and cart traveling a thousand *li* to sincerely request that you temporarily move to sainted steps. Do not think of the extent of the sandy desert. Commiserate with the people in the present situation, or have pity on me, and communicate to me the means of preserving life. (Yao 1980, 125)

Despite its exaggerated and courtly tone, this letter reflects the true intention of Chinggis Khaan, which was likely attributed to finding the most suitable person for the position of the Khaan's minister or adviser. In this case the Khaan probably meant that Ch'iu was the one who was able to deal with the political and religious affairs of the conquered states under the title of minister. This letter seems to support the following argument by Baabar's (1996) book, in which he argues that as Chinggis Khaan was very tolerant to all religions, he intended to get political support from the well-known, prominent leaders of various religious sects. One of them was Ch'iu. The Khaan, as planned, foresaw his takeover of its southern neighbor some years before the actual invasion. Therefore, he wanted to recruit the most famous figure of Ch'uan-chen Taoism, who was Ch'iu, who Chinggis considered as a very valuable asset for the political and spiritual control of Northern China.

Similarly, a Mongolian source proves that this letter was actually sent to Ch'iu requesting him to pay a visit to the Khaan's court (Natsagdorj 1991). It is believed that it took the Khaan some years to finally see Ch'iu at his palace. Tao-chung Yao says "Although Ch'iu ch'u-chi had no panaceas to offer, the Khaan held him in high esteem and granted special privileges to the Ch'uan-chen clergy" (Yao 1980, 80). Chinggis Khaan could not obviously get what he wanted; however, he was pleased with Ch'iu's honesty and knowledge. One of the special privileges that the Khaan conferred was tax exemptions that gave the Taoist clergy an advantage over the Buddhist monks

at the time.

A Mongolian source suggests that Ch'iu gave Chinggis Khaan advice on legal affairs and governing the state. Ch'iu played an important role in creating the Ikh Zasag (The Law of Great Governance) that was the first constitutional document that provided a detailed legal basis for governing state affairs (Baabar 1996, 48). This statement has not been proven by any other documentary sources as of yet, so I have to conduct further research from Chinese sources to confirm it. Since Ch'iu was close to the Khaan and gave him valuable advice on his state affairs, it is likely that Chinggis asked Ch'iu's opinion on the legal foundation of the Mongol Empire.

Another important reason for the Khaan to summon the Taoist master was about prolonging his lifespan. A letter mentions one person, the Khaan's adjutant, Liu Chung-lu, who was a member of the Mongol court who closely served the Khaan on matters of medical treatment. Liu Chung-lu happened to be the one who reported to Chinggis that Ch'iu Ch'u-chi was reputed to have lived for three hundred years and possessed methods for prolonging and preserving life. When summoned, Ch'iu had no other choice but to accept the Khaan's invitation. Otherwise his refusal would be seen as unwillingness to serve the Mongol ruler. On this, Jagchid made a clear point that unless the leaders of other religions could win support from the Mongol rulers, they would experience a terrible destruction that could lead to an end not only to their lives but also their religions as well. Ch'iu certainly was aware of this. Thus, despite his old age, Ch'iu decided to take that long and painstaking journey in order to please the new but strongly emerging Mongol Khaan.

After traveling for a while, Ch'iu learned that the Khaan was not residing in Southern Mongolia that was relatively close to Ch'iu's home, so he wrote a letter to the Khaan saying that he was too old and weak to take such a long trip and asked the Khaan to permit him to stay where he was (probably in present-day Chahar province, Inner Mongolia) until the Khaan's return. After several months Ch'iu received Chinggis Khaan's reply, in which the Khaan indicated his interest in the Way (Tao), rather than political or military affairs, and urged Ch'iu to proceed on the journey (Yao 1980, 130).

As a result of the strong insistence of the Mongol ruler, Ch'iu resumed his journey. In the fall of 1221, Ch'iu arrived in Samarkand and spent the winter there. In the spring of 1222, Ch'iu left for the Khaan's encampment and arrived at the camp in May, 1222. According to Broeck and Yiu, Ch'iu's journey to see the Khaan took three years (Broeck and Yiu 1950, 5).

After the customary greetings, the first thing the Khaan asked was if Ch'iu had brought any medicine for long life. According to Yao, Ch'iu replied that he had no medicine, which was somehow disappointing to the Khaan (Yao 1980, 132). Consequently, several meetings took place, but there are no details of what they discussed. Either on November 19 or 20, 1222, Ch'iu preached on the Way of attaining longevity as follows "Tao is the producer of Heaven and the nurturer of Earth. The sun and moon, the stars and planets, demons and spirits, men and things all grow out of Tao. Most men only know the greatness of Heaven; they do not understand the greatness of Tao. My sole object in living all my life separated from my family and in the monastic state has been to study this question" (Li 1976). Chinggis Khaan, in one of the previous meetings, ordered that what was discussed should be recorded so they would not be forgotten (Yao 1980, 133). This shows how much importance the Khaan attached to the meetings with the Taoist sage so due to its importance he wanted to keep written records of the discussions.

Throughout his reply to the Khaan's inquiry about the "Way," Ch'iu strongly emphasized the negative effects of excessive sexual indulgence. According to Yao, Ch'iu suggested to the Khaan that he should have sex once a night. Since it is a well-known assumption that Chinggis Khaan had over thirty wives not including his concubines, the sage was concerned about his over indulgence in sexual relations and its negative health consequences. Hence, Ch'iu recommended to limit sexual activity and rest well at night. This can be proven from the sage's following quote: "to take medicine for one thousand days is not as good as to sleep alone for one night" (Yao 1980, 135). Ch'iu's teaching focused on persuading the Khaan to abstain from sex and reduce his sexual desires, for the preservation of his spirit. For Ch'iu this was, of course, not his first contact with the rulers of the northern nomads.

Ch'iu had some early experience in dealing with other nomadic leaders, especially the Jurchen rulers, to whom he gave similar advice in his previous meetings with them.

Following the example of the Jurchen rulers, the Khaan's invitation was a good opportunity for the leaders of Ch'uan-chen Taoism to further spread their teachings and take advantage of influencing the Mongol ruler. Ch'iu's main concern was about people's livelihood in Northern China. This was the period when the Mongols began their invasion of Northern China. Ch'iu wanted Chinggis Khaan to establish a state to rule North China and exempt its people from taxation. In Li's (1976) book, it is said that Ch'iu suggested that the Khaan send an honest and competent official to the Northern provinces of China so the people would experience less hardship and naturally support the Mongol troops in the region (Li 1976, 24). Unfortunately, the Khaan did not follow Ch'iu's advice on these political matters. However, Chinggis Khan took Ch'iu's advice to limit his hunting after he fell from his horse while hunting. According to Yao, the Khaan followed his advice and did not go hunting for the next two months (Yao 1980, 139). If the Khaan had taken Ch'iu's advice more seriously, Chinggis might have lived longer, as many scholars presume that Chinggis Khaan's 1227 death was caused by a fall from his horse during a hunt in the autumn of 1226.

According to the Secret History of the Mongols, Chinggis Khaan strongly believed in Shamanism as his native belief, which was the most influential faith amongst Mongol nomadic tribes before any foreign religion was introduced. It seems also that the Khaan highly respected Ch'iu and was willing to receive his advice in the same way he respected a *boe*⁴ who has an ability to communicate with *Tengri*,⁵ who is the highest divine-figure in Mongolian Shamanism. Before Ch'iu's departure, the Khaan issued an order to exempt Ch'iu's disciples from taxes and compulsive labor. Yao suggests that six months later, the Khaan issued another decree granting Ch'iu the authority over those who left their families (Yao 1980, 141). In this case, those were Taoist priests and Buddhist monks throughout the Khaan's empire. The

4 The Mongolian term for a shaman.

5 The traditional Mongolian term for Heaven or Eternal Sky.

Khaan's order can further be proven by Broeck and Yiu who say "Genghis Khaan's instructions of 1223 permitted Ch'ang-ch'un to claim authority not merely over his own sect but over all priests and persons of religion in the empire" (Broeck and Yiu 1950, 6). This event marked the most prestigious period of the Ch'uan-chen sect of Taoism in its history.

Yao states that during the Mongol invasion of Northern China, roughly two million people were saved that were affiliated with the Ch'uan-chen sect (Yao 1980, 142). The exact number of people rescued by the Ch'uan-chen sect is hard to determine. It is presumed by scholars that since the Khaan so favored Ch'iu and his religious beliefs that he spared the lives of a large number of people at Ch'iu's direct request. Another factor was that since all priests were exempt from taxes and labor and the popularity of the Ch'uan-chen sect was so great, the number of followers and priests increased rapidly not only to acquire tax exemptions but also to have their lives saved under such a prestigious religion. Thus, the Ch'uan-chen sect was able to save the lives of many people in North China. Generally, both sides benefited mutually so they cooperated and served one another's needs in the early period of the Mongol invasion of China.

III. The Successors of Chinggis Khaan and Taoism

Chinggis Khaan was not of course the last emperor that had strong affiliations with Ch'uan-chen Taoism. We know that the year 1227 marked the death of both Chinggis Khan and sage Ch'iu. Afterward the next Mongol ruler Ugudei, Chinggis Khaan's third son, had a cordial meeting with Yin Chih-p'ing, who then was the head of the Ch'uan-chen sect, in 1232 (Yao 1980, 148). In 1227, upon Ch'ang-ch'un's death, Li Chih-ch'ang, a disciple of Ch'ang-ch'un, became the Registrar of the sect and the main Attendant of the Ch'ang-ch'un Temple. According to Broeck, Li was appointed as tutor to the Mongol princes in Beijing and two years later he was also ordered by Ugudei Khaan to build a Taoist temple at Karakorum, the capital of the Mongol Empire (Broeck and Yiu 1950, 18). This shows that Taoism was quite a

popular and favored faith of the ruler since it was allowed to have its temple in the capital of the Mongols.

According to *Hsi Yu Chi*, Li was summoned by Ugudei Khaan and was asked about the reasons for various natural phenomena, such as earthquakes and thunder (Li 1976, 115). It was obvious that Chinggis Khaan's direct successor Ugudei, like his father, was interested in Taoist teachings and philosophy.

Even after Ugudei's death, his widow, a queen named Toregene, kept the ninth patriarch, Wang Chih-t'an, at the court for six years. The queen further revived Ugudei Khaan's order not to disturb Taoist temples. During Munkh Khaan's reign, the next Mongol ruler, Wang was also summoned to the court to discuss the matter of nourishing life (Yao 1980, 149). After accession to the throne, Munkh Khaan in 1251 reconfirmed Li Chih-ch'ang's appointment as the head of the Ch'uan-chen sect. Two years later Munkh Khaan issued an edict requiring Taoist priests and nuns to have their certificates stamped by Li Chih-ch'ang (Broeck and Yiu 1950, 18). Following the previous Khaans' examples, Khubilai, before ascending to the throne, invited a Taoist priest named Liu Ping-chung to consult about religious affairs (Chan and Bary 1982, 64). It is worth to note here that Khubilai was the founder of Yuan Dynasty and he eventually moved the Capital of the Mongols from Kharakorum to Beijing and named the dynasty Yuan. As a Taoist Statesman at the Court of Khubilai Khaan, Li Ping-chung is said to have suggested the word Yuan as the name of the dynasty (Langlois 1981, 3). This was the year 1260 when Khubilai held the Ikh Khurildai (Great Assembly or acclamation ceremony at an assembly), at which he announced the Chinese-style reign name as the first Mongolian Khaan used a Chinese name for his empire.

The term 'Yuan Taoism' is used by Ts'un-yan and Berling to denote its syncretic nature, since its works incorporate elements of all Three Teachings: Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism (Chan and Bary 1982, 495). The Ch'uan-chen sect was able to identify its nature with traditional religious Taoism and the two established religions, Buddhism and Confucianism during

the Yuan period.

Later when the Chinese society again became stable under Mongol rule, those who were under the protection of Ch'uan-chen Taoism no longer needed, to a large extent, both spiritual comfort and physical protection. In addition, the institutional structure of the Ch'uan-chen sect weakened and the social status of Ch'uan-chen priests deteriorated. The Ch'uan-chen leaders were not able to gain much interest to maintain the Mongol rulers' favor in terms of religious privileges and advantages. Also the increasing influence of Buddhism negatively affected the prosperity of the Ch'uan-chen sect. These may have been some of the reasons why the number of Ch'uan-chen followers declined during the second half of the Yuan period.

IV. The Buddhist-Taoist debates under the Mongol Khaans

Apparently Ch'iu had a great advantage over Buddhist monks as he was given the right to be in charge of all religious affairs among those who left their families or renounced worldly lives. But it seems that the Ch'uan-chen made a very indiscreet use of the Khaan's favor and further seized Buddhist monasteries, replaced Buddhist images with Taoist divinities. Under the Mongol rule, the first documented Buddhist-Taoist struggle probably took place in 1225 when the Buddhist monk Fu-yu accused the Ch'uan-chen sect of converting Buddhist temples into Taoist temples (Yao 1980, 151). The Buddhists' dissatisfaction with Ch'uan-chen Taoism was well reflected in Yeh-lu Ch'u-ts'ai's⁶ *Hsi-yu lu*. In his book Yeh-lu accused the Taoist of excluding Buddhist monks from tax exemptions. According to the Khaan's edict, issued in 1223, those who left their families were subject to Ch'iu. Thus mostly Taoist priests received this privilege. But Buddhist monks were not the beneficiaries of this exemption at the time.

During its period of greatest expansion, there is little doubt that the Ch'uan-chen Taoists seized many temples and monasteries from the Buddhists. It has been said that, "...as many as four hundred and eighty-two Buddhist

6 Yeh-lu Ch'u-ts'ai, a descendent of the Kitan royal family, was Legal Advisor to Chinggis Khaan and later Governor of Beijing at the time of its capture by the Mongols in 1215.

temples were seized by the Ch'uan-chen Taoists during the first half of the thirteenth century" (Yao 1980, 153). It is understandable that having thousands of new priests required more temples for housing them. To build new temples they needed sufficient capital, which the Ch'uan-chen Taoists lacked. Therefore, another but more plausible alternative was to efficiently utilize the existing Buddhist temples. In this sense, the Taoists were very opportunistic and used every chance to increase their power and remain as the dominant religion in the region at that time.

The following texts *Lao-tzu hua-hu ching* (The Canon of Lao-tzu's Conversion of the Barbarians) and *Lao-tzu pa-shih-I-hua t'u* (The Picture Book of Lao-tzu's Eighty-One Conversions) were another source of controversy between Taoists and Buddhists. The Buddhists claimed that these books contained false stories that undermined Buddhism. As the Buddhists grew in strength they brought complaints to the Khaan, who in turn arranged debates that involved Taoists, Buddhists, Confucianists, and others. The Buddhist monk Fu-yu of the Shao-lin Monastery challenged Li Chih-ch'ang on the matter of the compilation of the above mentioned books at Munkh Khaan's court in 1255. As a result the Khaan issued an edict prohibiting false canons and "changed Buddhist images" (Yao 1980, 159). In the following year, another debate took place in Karakorum, the capital of the Mongols. However, the Taoists for some reason did not show up (Li 1970, 31). There are varying explanations of why the Taoists were not able to make it to the debate. Some say they were intentionally late, and while others say they were unprepared and afraid of the Buddhists.

Munkh Khaan handed all the religious matters over to his brother Khubilai, who in 1258 arranged a large debate at Shang-tu. This time the Taoists were convicted of stealing Buddhist sutras and Confucian doctrines. The Buddhist monks Fu-yu (Ch'an Buddhist) and Phags'pa⁷ (Tibetan) were the team leaders of one side and Chang Chih-ching and Fan Chih-ying represented the Taoists on the other side (Yao 1980, 160). The debate took place under Khubilai's direct control. The Taoists failed to provide satisfactory answers or

7 A well known Tibetan monk as Phags'pa lama of Sakhya sect who was strongly promoting Tibetan Buddhism to the Mongol rulers at the time.

reveal their magical powers. As the Taoists lost the debate, seventeen of the Taoists priests were ordered to shave their heads and become Buddhist monks, and all 482 temples, which had been taken over by the Taoists, were returned to the Buddhists (Yao 1980, 161). But the Buddhists wanted to take only 200 temples back and allowed the Taoists to keep the rest. This number was close to Waley's suggested number 237 (Li 1970, 32). Waley also suggests that some 45 "forged canons" were ordered to be burnt, including their wood-blocks.

It seems that Khubilai Khaan put little pressure on the Ch'uan-chen sect to comply with the previous edict to limit Taoists activities. Over the years, Khubilai Khaan was somehow passive in implementing this order. This was also proved by Khubilai's next edict issued in 1269 honoring the patriarchs and masters of the sect (Yao 1980, 163). According to Rossabi, the Ch'uan-chen leader, Chang Chih-ching received sums of money from the court to build other Taoist temples and to promote the interests of his sect (Rossabi 1988, 147). Consequently, conflicts still existed between Taoists and Buddhists over doctrinal disputations and historical accounts.

In 1281 another debate took place involving other Taoist sects. The Heavenly master, Chang Tsung-yen participated in the debate along with the Ch'uan-chen patriarch Ch'i Chih-ch'eng and the Ta-tao patriarch Li Te-ho (Yao 1980, 164). Broeck says that the participants went over thousands of books and concluded that except for the "Tao-te Ching" and a few medical books, all should be destroyed. The joint efforts of the Taoist sects were still unable to prove the authenticity of Taoist scriptures. The Buddhists defeated the Taoists and they requested that all Taoist literary works, except the "Tao-te-ching" be burned. Khubilai Khaan suggested to the Taoists that they should manifest their magical ability to resist fire and water, but none dared to show such a magic performance. The Heavenly master, Chang Tsung-yen acknowledged that such claims were groundless (Broeck and Yiu 1950, 12). All Taoist priests then had to follow Buddhist rules or return to lay life. Rossabi proves that Khubilai Khaan was not simply a passive witness to these debates, rather he asked intelligent questions and made logical comments and

statements, through which he was able to show his skills and credibility, and impress the participants in the debates (Rossabi 1988, 43). The Mongol Khaan was still curious about the Taoists' ability to perform magic.

The defeats of the Taoists in the debates surely had adverse affects. In 1280, the Taoists deliberately set fire to the Ch'ang-ch'un Taoist temple and blamed a Buddhist monk named Kuang Yuan for the incident. As a result of an official investigation, the Taoists were convicted of the crime. Two were executed, one had his nose and ears chopped off; and six others were exiled (Rossabi 1988, 203). This cannot be simply seen as legal discrimination by the Mongol Khaans against the Taoists, because according to the *Yuan Shih*, both groups fit into similar legal categories in case of criminal offenses. Paul Heng-chao in his book provides detailed information on the jurisdiction and legal affairs of the Yuan Dynasty (Ch'en 1979, 87). If Buddhist monks or Taoist priests committed serious offences, such as robbery, fraud, homicide, deceit, and sexual offenses for example, the heads of their temples were authorized to decide the cases and civilian officials were asked not to be involved. Similarly, in case of robbery or stealing, monks or priests were exempt from being punished by ordinary penalties (Ch'en 1979, 67). In general, both Taoist priests and Buddhist monks had a very similar set of penalties in case of involvement in crime. After the 1281 debate, the Taoists faced more severe restrictions on Taoist charms, incantations, and magic.

During the next ruler's reign, Tumor (1295-1307), the Ch'uan-cheng Taoists were able to reprint their texts and obtain their lost properties (Yao 1980, 170). Obviously, its golden age was over and it began to decline by the first half of the fourteenth century. Since Tumor Khaan was in favor of Taoism, the Taoists attempted to revive their status. But, the outcome was not impressive as it was at the height of its influence. The Taoists were not able to improve their social status externally, especially in terms of gaining the new rulers' favor, and enhance their institutional establishments internally. By then many Taoists priests were married, including some Ch'uan-cheng Taoists. Unlike the Heavenly Master or the Cheng-I sect, Ch'uan-cheng Taoists were originally prohibited from having families and were only required to lead

celibate lives according to their rules. Since some marriages took place among the Ch'uan-chen priests, the Emperor issued an edict forbidding the violation of the "old rules" in 1326 (Yao 1980, 173). Internal disorder among the Ch'uan-chen Taoists was another leading factor that ruined their reputation.

The Buddhists and Taoists under the Mongols sought supremacy and both appealed to the secular authorities for assistance. Each strongly desired the patronage of the Mongol court and actively attempted to get acquainted with the Mongol ruling elites. Even after the major debates, both sides continuously challenged each other at every opportunity. In terms of the size of communities, the Taoist communities were relatively less rich, less numerous, and less powerful than the Buddhist communities during the late Yuan period (Wright 1962, 214). Most accounts of the Buddhist-Taoist struggle under the Mongols characterize the Taoists as the more assertive offensive party in the struggle. But we have to realize that today we are almost totally dependent on Buddhist sources to find evidence for this. At the same time there are very limited Taoist sources concerning what actually happened during this period.

V. Other Northern Taoist Sects during the Yuan

Other Taoist sects were also recognized by different khaans and performed somehow distinct religious functions from each other as the ruling Khaans preferred. According to Broeck, the Chen-ta-tao sect was recognized by Monk Khaan and later participated in the 1281 debate. The head of the T'ai-I Taoist sect, Li Chu-shou was first summoned to the court in 1264 by Khubilai and later was ordered to perform one of the annual religious services for the Khaan's court. Khubilai Khaan occasionally asked the Shan-ch'ung sect priests to perform special prayers (Broeck and Yiu 1950, 14). It was one of the Emperor's duties to have the Taoists perform certain rites and sacrificial rituals. One of these was the worship of T'ai-shan, one of the sacred mountains of China. Therefore, as his vital responsibility, Khubilai, according to Rossabi's account, annually dispatched Taoist priests to perform all the

associated rituals (Rossabi 1988, 147). Broeck's account proves that the performance of such rites is recorded in the dynastic history every year almost without exception from beginning in 1266 (Broeck and Yiu 1950, 16). This proves that the Mongol rulers were also associated with other sects of Taoism during their ruling periods.

VI. Southern Taoism during the Yuan Period

K'o-k'uan Sun in his article provides an interesting account of the Mongol rulers' impact on Southern Taoism. Specifically he argues that Hsuan-chiao (the sublime teaching) as a branch of southern T'ien-shih Taoism (Celestial Master) was created by an edict of the Mongol rulers. He says, "Hsuan-chiao, a Taoist religious movement replete with beliefs in magic, divination, and immortality, was the product, not of Taoists acting on their own, but of Taoists working with the active cooperation of prominent Confucian clergy and under the endorsement and sponsorship of the ruling Mongols" (Langlois 1981, 213). Interestingly, the people in China had never experienced rule by non-Han people; therefore, the Mongol conquest was very threatening to their culture. K'o-k'uan argues that the emergence of Hsuan-chiao was, therefore, highly attributed to the political and cultural views of traditional elite Han Chinese. Thus once the Mongol rule ended Hsuan-chiao had no functions.

Khubilai's conquest of the Southern Sung capital in 1276 reunited the north and south after many years of separation. Before his accession to the throne, Khubilai came into contact with the leaders of the Cheng-I sect, the Celestial Master, (Correct Unity). Khubilai later summoned Celestial master Chang Tsung-yen to his court (Broeck and Yiu 1950, 10). As was expected, Khubilai Khaan issued an edict to appoint Chang Tsung-yen as a new head of Southern Taoism. Khubilai occasionally sent Chang gifts of silks and incense in order to keep on good terms with him (Rossabi 1988, 204). When Chang-Tsung-yen returned, he left his disciple Chang Liu-sun as his representative. Later, Liu-sun would go on to build up a high reputation for

himself.

According to Langlois, Chang Liu-sun soon became well regarded by Khubilai and his son. Khubilai Khaan wanted to award him the title Celestial Master, but Chang declined. However, the Khaan awarded him the title “Patriarch of the Sublime Learning,” which was the establishment of a new school (Langlois 1981, 222). Since Chang Liu-sun was so close to the Khaan’s family, he may have had some positive effects on the banning of Taoist writing, which was never strictly enforced. Ulziitumur Khaan, who succeeded Khubilai in 1294, was personally very fond of Taoism and gave Chang Liu-sun the title “Great Patriarch of Hsuan-chiao” in 1295. When Chang died in 1322, Wu Ch’uan-chieh succeeded him as the next Great Patriarch.

Sun says, “Chang Liu-sun’s and Wu Ch’uan-chieh’s influence came of course from their easy ties, through their Taoist practices, with the Mongol court. But their influence in society at large depended to a great extent on the administrative and demonstrative aspects of their favor within the court” (Langlois 1981, 224). The Mongols rulers effectively used the religious popularity of these religious figures in the affairs of regional administration. In return, the head of Southern Taoism had communication access to the court and maintained a close relationship with the Khaan and his family members. Before he died the Mongol ruler, Ulziitumur, issued an edict, which was based on personal favors, to protect Taoism. During Chang and Wu’s period, many Taoist monasteries were rebuilt and restored.

Like the Ch’uan-chen sect, the Heavenly master sect enjoyed tax exemptions and subsidiaries as gifts from the Emperor. The only duty of the priests was to pray and perform rituals for the well-being of the people and for relieving diseases, droughts, floods, and devils, etc. Heavenly master Chang Yu-ts’ai was asked by the Emperor to pray for rain, which was immediately answered, pleasing many. As part of the Khaan’s duty, the ruler always encouraged and rewarded Taoist priests for their service to the court.

Many sources suggest that after the unification of the North and South in 1279, the Ch’uan-chen sect lost its popularity, and its political and religious

influence declined as well. Yao says “after 1279 when the south and the north were politically reunified, the Cheng’I sect challenged the Ch’uan-chen for supremacy” (Yao 1980, 175). As the traditional “Heavenly Master” sect regained imperial favors, they were able to challenge the Ch’uan-chen in terms of literary works and performances.

According to Sun, there were three types of Taoists in the South during the Yuan period. One was the Taoists in government service that worked as a professional clergy. The second type was the Taoists that were considered to be errant scholar-monks or adherents of immortality Elixir Taoism. The third type was those who mostly studied and loved literature, which can be termed as “literary Taoists” (Langlois 1981, 240).

The Five Thunders School of Southern Taoism was well known through its engagement in the making of rain and thunder by magical charms. The chief figure of the school was Mo Ch’I-yen who was believed to have obtained the methods of the Five Thunders. Mo was summoned by Khubilai Khaan and demonstrated his magical charms that caused a thunderclap by throwing a walnut on the floor of the Khaan’s palace (Langlois 1981, 248).

Another Taoist sect that existed during the second half of the Yuan Dynasty in China was the Chin-tan school (Golden Elixir Taoism) that highly emphasized the practices of “inner elixir.” In other words, acquiring immortality through the “inner medicine” was its central teaching. Due to large similarities between the Ch’uan-chen and the Chin-tan, according to Yao, “apparently both of these two schools came to realize the existence of the other and they eventually merged into one” (Yao 1980, 181). These sects were later referred to as the Northern and Southern branches of the Tan-ting School. The political unification by the Mongol rulers enabled them to build a relationship between the two schools. Under the Mongol rule the South (China) proved itself a fertile ground for the rapid development of religious Taoism. During the Yuan period different sects of Taoism were able to spread their teachings in different areas and develop their religious institutions independently from one another.

VII. Conclusion

Chinggis Khaan's edict of 1223 played, no doubt, the most crucial role in the expansion of Ch'uan-chen Taoism. The descendents of Chinggis Khaan followed his example. Later Munkh Khaan appointed the Ch'uan-chen patriarch Li Chih-ch'ang as the head of religious Taoism. Imperial favors in reality put the Ch'uan-chen sect in the position of being the leading sect of religious Taoism during the Yuan period.

The Mongol rulers were generally religious people. During the thirteenth century, shamans, Buddhist monks, and Taoist priests played a significant role in fortune telling and divination. The Mongols were interested in divination to determine auspicious moments for action. Shamans, Taoist priests, and Buddhist monks, therefore, all competed in matters of divination, control over spirits, and prayers for rain, etc. As Bary said, "The Taoist religion, in certain of its manifestations, appealed to the Mongol appetite for the magical and supernatural, and in others to the conqueror's interest in a teaching of acquiescence and passivity among his subjects" (Chan and Bary 1982, 1). Many of the Mongol Khaans of the Yuan period shared and used traditional Taoist religious principles in governing the Yuan Dynasty. This was one of the fundamental reasons that Taoism was such an influential religious practice among the Mongol rulers. Simultaneously, the Mongol rulers found something new and appealing in Taoism as opposed to their old Shamanistic practices and rituals.

It is true that Chinggis Khaan's original intention to invite Ch'iu was to learn methods for prolonging life. However, the focus of the Khaan's intention was later changed as Ch'iu's statements were about living a more ethical life. In other words, Ch'iu highly emphasized the importance of ("inner elixir") having right living habits, eliminating one's desires, and consolidating essence. But the successors of Chinggis Khaan had rather a different purpose. They intended to maintain this popular religion to support the state and serve both elite and ordinary Chinese in the Yuan society.

Similarly, Rossabi's argument supports the idea that the Mongol rulers

in reality were more interested in the political influence of religious leaders than their doctrines. He says “Both Khubilai and the Taoists needed each other. He (Khubilai) knew of the Taoists’ strong appeal to the lower classes, a group he too needed to attract” (Rossabi 1988, 146). There is no doubt that the Ch’uan-chen sect, politically and religiously favored by the Mongol rulers, occupied a higher position than that of any other Taoist sects, including the Heavenly Master sect, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The Mongol Khaans certainly recognized the supremacy of Ch’uan-chen Taoism as the leading Taoist sect. This was the only native Chinese religion in North China under the Mongols that came into competition with other foreign religions such as Shamanism and Buddhism in the realm of politics.

For other Taoist schools, the Mongol rulers had a tolerant and to some extent supportive policy depending on their spiritual and social role in the communities they existed in. Through their recognition and favoritism of Taoism, the Mongol Khaans intended to keep the peace and avoid possible sectarian conflict among the existing religions. Most of the nomadic khaans of the Yuan Dynasty seem to have realized that effectively ruling a massive agrarian civilization much depended on appropriate policy making towards their native religion, Taoism, as they saw its utilization for better governing a peasant-society. Similarly, Taoist institutions competed with other religions for gaining a more powerful status and privilege granted by the Mongol Khaans and sought for better opportunities to serve them as well. Thus, it can be clearly seen that the Mongol rulers of the Yuan needed Taoism for better ruling China and satisfying their personal spiritual needs and the Taoist institutions also needed the rulers for maintaining their institutional power over other religions and throughout society as a whole.

The Great Khaans of the Mongol Empire

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------|
| I. Chinghis Khaan, Temujin | (1206–27) |
| II. Ogodei (Uguudei) Khaan | (1229–41) |
| III. Guyuk Khaan | (1246–48) |
| IV. Mongke (Munkh) Khan | (1251–58) |
| V. Khubilai Khan | (1260–94) |

The Minor Khaans of the Yuan after Khubilai (The Mongolian Names)

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------|
| I. Olziitemur (Ulziitumur) Khaan | (1295–1307) |
| II. Khaisankhuleg Khaan | (1308–11) |
| III. Buyant Khaan | (1312–20) |
| IV. Gegeen Khaan | (1321–24) |
| V. Yosentemur (Yesuntumur) Khaan | (1324–28) |
| VI. Khuslen Khaan | (1329) |
| VII. Tuvtemur (Tuvtumur) Khaan | (1329–31) |
| VIII. Renchinbal Khaan | (1332) |
| IX. Rajibag Khaan | (1333) |
| X. Togoontemur (Togoontumur) Khaan | (1333–70) |

References

- Baabar, B.
1996 *The 20th Century-Mongol*. Ulaanbaatar: Ulaanbaatar Press.
- Broeck, Janet
Rinaker Ten,
and Yiu Tung
1950 *A Taoist Inscription of the Yuan Dynasty: The Tao-Chiao Pei*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Chan,
Hok-Lam, and
Wm.
Theodore
de Bary,
eds.
1982 *Yuan Thought: Chinese Thought and Religion under the Mongols*. NY: Columbia Univ.
- Chan,
Hok-Lam
1999 *China and the Mongols: History and Legend under the Yuan and Ming*. Variorum Collected Studies CS647. Burlington: Ashgate.
- Ch'en, Paul
Heng-Chao
1979 *Chinese Legal Tradition under the Mongols: The Code of 1291 as Reconstructed*. NJ: Princeton Univ.
- Kahn, Paul
1984 *The Secret History of the Mongols: The Origins of Chinghis Khan*. CA: North Point Press.
- Langlois, John
D. Jr.,
ed.
1981 *China under Mongol Rule*. NJ: Princeton Univ.
- Li
Chih-Ch'ang
1976 *The Travels of An Alchemist: The Journey for the Taoist Ch'ang Ch'un from China to the Hindukush at the Summons of Chingiz Khan*. CT: Greenwood.
- Natsagdorj,
Sh.
1991 *Chinggis Khaany Tsadig*. Ulaanbaatar: Ulaanbaatar Press.
- Rossabi,
Morris
1988 *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times*. CA: Univ. of California.
- Wright, H. M.
trans.
1962 *Daily Life in China: On the Eve of the Mongol Invasion 1250-1276*. London: Allen and Unwin. (Orig. pub. 1959. Paris: Hachette.)
- Yao,
Tao-Chung
1980 *Ch'uan-chen: A New Taoist Sect in North China during the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*. AZ: Univ. of Arizona.