

SA-SKYA PAṄḌITA'S LETTER TO THE TIBETANS:
A LATE AND DUBIOUS ADDITION TO HIS
COLLECTED WORKS

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In the Derge printed edition of Sa-skya PaṅḌita's collected works there exists a short letter that purports to have been written by Sa-skya PaṅḌita (Sa-pan) (1182–1251) in about 1247, after he reached the Mongol camp in Liang-chou and had an interview with the Mongol prince Köden. It bears the title *Bu slob rnams la spring ba* and, if authentic, is one of the earliest sources on Tibetan-Mongolian political and religious relations. Till now it has been accepted as authentic and used as a basic source by scholars. It was translated in full and studied by G. Tucci in his monumental *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*,¹ and was summarized by T. W. D. Shakabpa in his *Tibet: A Political History*.² It has also been described or mentioned by several others.³ There are, however, some important reasons to doubt its authenticity, one being that it is absent from some of the early lists of Sa-pan's collected works and only enters Tibetan historiography from about the first half of the 16th century.

The earliest evidence for the existence of this letter is its mention in the record of teachings received (*gsan yig*) of Ngorchen Dkon-mchog-lhun-grub (1497-1557). In that work, which is entitled *Chos kyi rje dpal ldan bla ma rnams las dam pa'i chos thos pa'i chos thos pa'i tshul gsal bar bshad pa'i yi ge thub bstan rgyas pa'i nyin byed*, the letter is cited by the title *Bu slob rnams la springs pa*. It is the sixty-third work in that list.⁴ The letter is also listed in the *gsan yig* of the Gong-dkar bla-ma 'Phrin-las-rnam-rgyal (fl. c. 1700), a work entitled *Thob yig bum pa bzang po*. There the letter is cited by the different title *Chos rje Sa skya PaṅḌitas bod 'bangs spyi la gdams pa*, and the text is said to

have been four folios long in the manuscript upon which this *gsan yig* list was based. In the latter list it was the fifty-second work, the last work in volume *dza*.⁵

As for the actual text of the letter, the first place it is known to have turned up is in the *Sa skya gdung rabs chen mo* of A-mes-zhabs Ngag-dbang-kun-dga'-bsod-nams (1597–1659), a work that he completed in 1629.⁶ It is found added to the long biography of Sa-pan, which A-mes-zhabs took almost verbatim from the commentary by Glo-bo mkhan-chen Bsod-nams-lhun-grub (1456-1532) on Sa-pan's *Mkhas pa rnam 'jug pa'i sgo*.⁷ The inclusion of this letter, however, was one of the few instances where A-mes-zhabs departed from Glo-bo mkhan-chen's account and added some new material from elsewhere, two other important additions being the letter of summons from Köden to Sa-skya Paṇḍita and the list of Sa-pan's writings.⁸

The second place the letter turned up in was the edition of Sa-pan's collected works by Zhu-chen Tshul-khrims-rin-chen (1700-1769), Sa-pan's works forming the fourth main part of the 1736 Derge edition of the *Sa skya bka' 'bum*.⁹ The letter therefore is listed in the index compiled by Zhu-chen (ascribed to the Ngor mkhan-po Bkra-shis-lhun-grub, 1672–1739),¹⁰ as well as in the almost identical list of Sa-pan's works recorded in Zhu-chen's record of teachings received (*gsan yig*).¹¹ In both index and *gsan yig*, the title is marked with the numerals 9 and 24, thus apparently showing that he found the same work listed in the *gsan yigs* of Dkon-mchog-lhun-grub (1497–1557) and Sangs-rgyas-phun-tshogs (1649–1705), who were respectively the 9th (i.e. 10th) and 24th (i.e. 25th) abbots of Ngor. As mentioned above, the work indeed is listed in the record of teachings received of Dkon-mchog-lhun-grub. However, Zhu-chen noted in both the index and *gsan yig* that the letter is not actually listed in Sangs-rgyas-phun-tshogs's *gsan yig*, the *Gsan yig dbang gi rgyal po*.¹² Instead, according to Zhu-chen, one finds there the title *Bod yul la sngags pa*. This is the title of a work which appears in the Derge edition before the letter (being no. 69 in the Tōyō Bunko reprint edition) and which, according to its colophon, was written when Sa-pan was in his nineteenth year (1200).¹³ Zhu-chen decided that this title (which appeared twice in the *gsan yig* he was using?) must refer to the letter, since "there was no other [similar work?] besides this." He also notes that the letter itself had the title *Bod 'bangs spyi la gdams pa* in the manuscript available to him.¹⁴ One hopes that the actual *gsan yig* of Sangs-rgyas-phun-tshogs will become available so

that one can verify the presence or absence of the letter or of any similarly entitled work in its list. But until it does, it is open to doubt whether it lists this work, since Zhu-chen qualifies his citation from the *gsan yig* of Sangs-rgyas-phun-tshogs in the above way.

The third and last known appearance of Sa-pan's letter is its quotation in the recent *Hor chos 'byung* by Blo-bzang-rta-mgrin (1867–1937), as mentioned by D. Schuh.¹⁵

Besides its mention in the *gsan yigs* of Dkon-mchog-lhun-grub and Gong-dkar 'Phrin-las-rnam-rgyal, and the *Sa skya bka' 'bum* index and *gsan yig* of Zhu-chen Tshul-khrims-rin-chen, this letter is not cited in any other list of Sa-pan's works available to me. It is absent from that in the *gsan yig* of Ngor-chen Kundga'-bzang-po (1382–1456)¹⁶ and also from that of the fifth Dalai Lama Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho (1617–1682).¹⁷ It is likewise missing from the lists of Sa-pan's works found within the biography of Sa-pan in the *Mkhas 'jug rnam bshad* composed in 1527 by Glo-bo mkhan-chen Bsod-nams-lhun-grub,¹⁸ in the long biography of Sa-pan by Rin-spung-pa Ngag-dbang-'jigs-med-grags-pa (composed in 1579),¹⁹ and in the *Sa skya gdung rabs chen mo* of A-mes-zhabs Ngags-dbang-kundga'-bsod-nams.²⁰ As mentioned above, however, A-mes-zhabs did present the letter itself *in extenso* in that genealogical history.

The absence of the letter from those lists is sufficient to show that it was probably a later addition to Sa-pan's oeuvre. It surfaced as early as the early-16th century, the time when Dkon-mchog-lhun-grub received the *lung* for Sa-pan's works. It is curious that Rin-spung-pa did not list it, for he had access to many works, and he also was quite free in including a number of probably apocryphal letters and treatises among the works he listed. The letter was also not included by Glo-bo mkhan-chen in the biography of Sa-pan placed at the beginning of his commentary on the *Mkhas 'jug* which he completed in 1527. In this biography Glo-bo mkhan-chen did quote several of Sa-pan's other letters, as well as some four letters ascribed to Sa-pan's student Bi-ji Rin-chen-grags which he says were recovered from Khams in the time of Rgyal-tshab Kun-dga'-dbang-phyug (1424–1478; abbot of Ngor 1465–1478).²¹

All of this may not decisively disprove the letter's authenticity, but it does cast doubt on it. There are, moreover, some other dubious features of the letter. Stylistically it is quite unlike anything else I have read in Sa-pan's works. In general,

the letter is colloquial in tone and not at all elegant. I do not recall, for instance, seeing the *e* interrogative particle ever used by Sa-pan elsewhere.²² The letter, if authentic, was admittedly written in very unusual circumstances and its contents are somewhat unique among Sa-pan's writings. When I first read the letter some years ago, even without doubting its authenticity I noted its strange style and wondered whether Sa-pan had not received some official "help" in writing it, such as from a bilingual scribe at the court. It was ostensibly meant to be an official statement and, if authentic, it presumably was the product of close consultations with the Mongols. Another possibility that occurred to me was that it had survived in some Mongolian or Chinese collection of edicts and correspondence, and later had been translated back into Tibetan, thus giving it a strange flavor. Indeed, the work it reminded me of most was the putative letter of summons sent by the Mongol prince Köden to Sa-pan, a letter which likewise first surfaced as a complete work within the same section of A-mes-zhab's *Sa skya gdung rabs chen mo*.

One should not overlook the strong probability that these two letters are closely connected. The letter of summons attributed to Köden has already been investigated by D. Schuh, who has shown it to be not only corruptly transmitted but also, on formal grounds, probably a forgery.²³ Therefore there is all the more reason to doubt the authenticity of the related letter ascribed to Sa-pan. In this connection one should also take note of the fact that Köden's letter was known to Paṅ-chen Bsod-nams-grags-pa (1478–1554), who quoted part of its beginning in his *New Red Annals* (composed in 1538).²⁴ As seen above, this is also about the period in which the letter ascribed to Sa-pan is first known to have been cited in a *gsan yig*.

In any case, it is not yet possible to determine the authenticity of these materials in a decisive way. Moreover, if the letter is a forgery, one should be able to attribute a motive for it. I must leave that, as well as the detailed examination of its contents and style, to scholars who are specialized in the study of Tibetan political history and Tibeto-Mongolian relations. I do think, however, that all scholars who use this letter should henceforth do so with caution, since it is probably a later accretion to Sa-pan's collected works, and its ultimate origins are still by no means clear.

NOTES

1. G. Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (Roma: 1949), pp. 10–12.
 2. T. W. D. Shakabpa, *Tibet A Political History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967; reprinted New York: Potala Publications, 1984), p. 63f.
 3. See for instance D. Schuh, "Wie ist die Einladung des fünften Karma-pa an den chinesischen Kaiserhof als Fortführung der Tibetpolitik der Mongolen-Khane zu verstehen?" *Altaica Collecta* (Weisbaden: O. Harrasowitz, 1976), pp. 211f, and *Erlasse und Sendschreiben mongolischer Herrscher für Tibetische Geistliche*, Monumenta Tibetica Historica, Abt. 3, Bd. 1 (St. Augustin: VGH-Wissenschaftsverlag, 1977), pp. xvii, 18, 51f, and 76 n. 125; and J. Szerb, "Glosses on the Oeuvre of Bla-ma 'Phags-pa: II. Some Notes on the Events of the Years 1251-1254," *Acta Orientalia Hungarica*, vol. 34, p. 264, n. 6.
 4. Dkon-mchog-lhun-grub, *Chos kyi rje dpal ldan bla ma dam pa rnams las dam pa'i chos thos pa'i tshul gsal bar bshad pa'i yi ge thub bstan rgyas pa'i nyin byed* (dbu-med MS, 159 ff), p. 120b. For the full list see Appendix N of D. Jackson, *Sa-skya Paṇḍita on Indian and Tibetan Traditions of Pramāṇa and Philosophical Debate: The Entrance Gate for the Wise, Section III*, forthcoming in *Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde*, vol. 17.
 5. Gong-dkar 'Phrin-las-rnam-rgyal, *Thob yig bum pa bzang po* (dbu-med MS, 244 ff), fascicle *da*, p. 4b. For the complete list of Sa-pan's works from this source, see Appendix M of the study cited in the previous note.
 6. A-mes-zhabs Ngag-dbang-kun-dga'-bsod-nams, 'Dzam gling byang phyogs kyi thub pa'i rgyal tshab chen po dpal ldan sa skya pa'i gdung rabs rin po che ji ltar byon pa'i tshul gyi rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar rin po che'i bang mdzod dgos 'dod kun 'byung (New Delhi: Tashi Dorje, 1975). The letter occurs near the end of Sa-pan's biography, which extends from pp. 93.6–170.6. See pp. 156.4–162.1 (78b.4–81b.1).
 7. Glo-bo mkhan-chen Bsod-nams-lhun-grub, *Mkhas pa rnams 'jug pa'i sgo'i rnam par bshad pa rig gnas gsal byed* (New Delhi: N. Topgye, 1979). The biography of Sa-pan is found on pp. 94.4–154.5 (=47b.4–77b.5).
 8. A-mes-zhabs, 'Dzam gling, pp. 60a.4–61a.6 and 67b.1–6.
 9. Sa-skya Paṇḍita, *Bu slob rnams la spring ba*, Collected Works, Derge Edition, vol. na, pp. 214b–217a. See also the *Sa skya*
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pa'i bka' 'bum, Tōyō Bunko reprint (Tokyo: 1968), vol. 5, pp. 401.3.2-402.4.3.

10. [Zhu-chen Tshul-khrims-rin-chen], *Dpal Sa skya'i rje btsun gong ma lnga'i gsung rab rin po che'i par gyi sgo 'phar 'byed pa'i dkar chag 'phrul gyi lde mig*, *Sa skya pa'i bka' 'bum* (Tokyo: Tōyō Bunko, 1969), vol. 7, p. 329.4.2 (ba 449b.2).

11. Zhu-chen Tshul-khrims-rin-chen, *Dpal ldan bla ma dam pa rnams las dam pa'i chos thos pa'i yi ge don gnyer gdengs can rol pa'i chu gter* (Dehra Dun: D. Gyaltsan, 1970), vol. 2, p. 429.1 (=215a.1).

12. Ibid., and [Zhu-chen Tshul-khrims-rin-chen], *Dpal sa skya'i rje btsun gong ma lnga'i gsung rab rin po che'i par gyi sgo 'phar 'byed pa'i dkar chag 'phrul gyi lde mig*, p. 329.4.2 (449b.2): *gsan yig dbang gi rgyal por bod yul la bsngags pa zhes byung ba 'di min pa gzhan mi 'dug pas yig skyon yin nam snyam/ bod 'bangs spyi la gdams pa zhes dpe dngos la 'dug/*.

13. Sa-skya Paṇḍita, *Bod yul la bsngags pa, Sa-skya pa'i bka' 'bum*, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Tōyō Bunko, 1968), pp. 395.3.2-396.1.2 (=na 202a.2-203a.2). The colophon reads: *bdag nyid chen po grags pa rgyal mtshan gyi zhabs kyi rdul la reg pas blo gros gtsang ba'i 'khon jo sras kun dga' rgyal mtshan gyis lo bcu dgu lon pa'i tshel dpal sa skya'i dben gnas yon tan rin po che'i 'byung gnas su nye bar sbyar ba'o/*.

14. See above, note 9.

15. Blo-bzang-rta-mgrin, *'Dzam gling byang phyogs chen po hor gyi rgyal khams kyi rtogs pa brjod pa'i bstan bcos chen po dpyod ldan mgu byed ngo mtshar gser gyi deb ther* (New Delhi: Lokesh Chandra, 1964), p. 92a.5-6, as cited by D. Schuh, *Erlasse und Sendschreiben*, p. 192, YIG, and p. 185, GSER.

16. Ngor-chen Kun-dga'-bzang-po, *Thob yig rgya mtsho, Sa skya pa'i bka' 'bum* (Tokyo: Tōyō Bunko, 1969), vol. 9, pp. 62.1.1-62.3.4 (ka 124b.1-125b.4).

17. Dalai Lama V, Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho, *Zab pa dang rgya che ba'i dam pa'i chos kyi thob yig gang ga'i chu rgyun* (Delhi: 1971), vol. 2, pp. 126.2-134.1 (kha 63b.2-67b.1).

18. Glo-bo mkhan-chen Bsod-nams-lhun-grub, *Mkhas pa rnams 'jug pa'i sgo'i rnam par bshad pa*, pp. 40.1-43.3 (=20b.1-22a.3).

19. Rin-spungs-pa Ngag-dbang-'jigs-med-grags-pa, *'Jam pa'i dbyangs dngos smra ba'i mgon po sa skya paṇḍita kun dga' rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i rnam par thar pa bskal pa bzang po'i legs lam, Lam 'bras slob bshad* (Derge ed.), vol. 1 (ka), pp. 109b-112b.

20. A-mes-zhabs, *'Dzam gling*, pp. 60a.4-61a.6.

21. Glo-bo mkhan-chen Bsod-nams-lhun-grub, *Mkhas pa rnams 'jug pa'i sgo'i rnam par bshad pa*, pp. 30a.3–32a.4; 32a.4–33b.4; 33b.4–34a.4; and 39a.3–42a.6. These are the minor works listed in the index to the Tōyō Bunko reprint, vol. 5, nos. 97, 99, and 32.

22. Sa-skya Paṇḍita, *Bu slob rnams la spring ba*, pp. 401.3.5 (na 114b.5): *de ngas mi shes pa e yin*, and *khyed kyis lha chos* [line 6] *kyis bskyangs na shākya mu ne'i bstan pa yang phyi'i rgya mtsho'i mtha' tshun chad khyab par mi 'gro ba e yin gsungs so//*. And on p. 401.4.2 (115a.2): *nga bzang por e gtong gnam shes gsungs/*. All three of the above sentences are from supposed direct quotes of Köden's words. Cf. Köden's letter of invitation, D. Schuh, *Erlasse und Sendschreiben*, pp. 32f, line 13: *khyod kyis chos go ba'i dam bca' dang e 'gal/* and lines 16–17: *(sems can) mang po la gnod pa byas na (khyod) mi skrag pa e yin/*.

23. D. Schuh, *Erlasse und Sendschreiben*, p. 41.

24. Bsod-nams-grags-pa, Paṇ-chen. *Rgyal rabs 'phrul gyi lde mig gam deb ther dmar po'am deb gsar ma* [*Deb ther dmar po gsar ma*]. Text and partial translation published in G. Tucci, *Deb t'er dmar po gsar ma*, Serie Orientale Roma, vol. 24 (1971). The origin of this passage of the *Deb ther dmar po gsar ma* was noticed by D. Schuh, *Erlasse und Sendschreiben*, p. 40.

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