

principle that Buddhist administration was independent from civilian officialdom, in direct contrast with the Song dynasty. Given the Mongol reverence for Buddhism, it is not surprising that the Mongols offered political convenience to Buddhists by establishing an administrative system that, by the time of Khubilai Khan, combined the experience of other Northern dynasties with the basic strategy of the four previous Great Khans. This was a Buddhist administrative institution full of Mongol characteristics. Below we will focus on how Khubilai put this strategy into practice in Southeastern China until the end of his reign.

The Mongols conquered Southeastern China in 1276. After one year the Jianghuai Supervisory Office for Buddhist Teaching (*jianghuai zhulu shijiao du zongtongsuo* 江淮諸路釋教都總統所, hereafter ‘Supervisory Office’) was established.⁴² It was the only body subordinate to the Supervisory Office for Buddhist Teaching for which we have specific records of the date when it was established, in contrast to the one set up in Fujian region called the Fujian Supervisory Office for Buddhist Teaching (*Fujian dengchu shijiao zongtongsuo* 福建等處釋教總統所). Thus we find a total of two subordinate bodies set up within Southeastern China, of which the one located in Jianghuai played the most significant role. Their heads were mostly Tibetan Buddhists.⁴³ While this is another indication of Khubilai Khan’s inclination towards Tibetan Buddhism, it might also represent Khubilai’s intention to utilize Tibetan Buddhism to counter or politically mitigate the predominant local culture. This could be explained through the comparison with his policy in Tibet. By contrast, the fact that the Bureau of Tibetan and Buddhist Affairs and

⁴² Song Lian, *Yuanshi*, 9:188.

⁴³ Lai Tianbing, “Guanyu yuandai sheyu jianghuai/jiangzhe de shijiao duzongtongsuo”, 66-68.

its branch set in Tibet were charged with Buddhist issues as well as with Tibetan military and political affairs derived from the Mongol rulers' profound comprehension of Tibetan Buddhism and its possible clout with regard to current affairs in Tibet. They adjusted their mode of government to local conditions for the sake of imperial stability.⁴⁴ It would have been logical to apply this approach to Southeastern China as well, by putting Southern Chinese Buddhists in positions of religious administration rather than Tibetans. However, Khubilai's policy indicated that political supervision of Southeastern Buddhism would be achieved by Tibetan Buddhists.

One example of this policy was the appointment of Yang Lianzhenjia (楊璉真加).

⁴⁵ As one of the Commanders-General of the Supervisory Office, the Tibetan Buddhist Yang Lianzhenjia played a crucial role in the region. However, the hyperextension of his position and powers planted the seeds of his eventual failure in Jiangnan. In the year of Yang's replacement, the central court set up another institution, the Branch Bureau of Tibetan and Buddhist Affairs (*xing xuanzheng yuan* 行宣政院, 'Branch Bureau' hereafter) in Southeastern China.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, however, the Supervisory Office continued to exist, and the Tibetan Buddhist Shal-lu-pa (沙羅巴, 1259-1314) was appointed in Yang's place. Unlike his predecessor, Shal-lu-pa was put in charge of both the Jianghuai and Fujian regions. Meanwhile, there was another Buddhist called Yuanjixiang (苑吉祥) who is

⁴⁴ Song Lian, *Yuanshi*, 202:4520.

⁴⁵ Herbert Franke, "Tibetans in Yuan China" in John Langlois ed., *China under Mongol Rule* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 312-325.

⁴⁶ Song Lian, *Yuanshi*, 16:350.

recorded as having held the same title as Shal-lu-pa around the same time.⁴⁷ There is no direct record showing when the Fujian Supervisory Office for Buddhist Teaching was established. However, judging by the records of these two officials, it seems likely that the two regions were put under a single administration from the time they were appointed onwards. Among these regions, Jiangnan was regarded by the Yuan government as the core, as could be seen through the process of Shal-lu-pa's appointment.

Sources suggest that the institutional setting of Buddhist administration was in disorder, especially in Jiangnan, because of the power vacuum that Yang left. Khubilai felt anxious about this problem, a concern deriving no doubt from his realization of the great importance of Jiangnan to his empire, but neither he nor his central government was able to resolve the situation adequately. After Shal-lu-pa was recommended to Khubilai by Imperial Preceptor Jialuosi-bagan-jili (迦囉思巴幹即哩), the Khan even met and saw him off personally in order to promote him to the Supervisory Office.⁴⁸ Clearly, Khubilai's continued involvement in Jiangnan's religious affairs indicated the importance of Jiangnan Buddhism to him, which also helps to explain his protection of Yang. Moreover, Shal-lu-pa's appointment illustrates Khubilai's intention to continue employing Tibetan Buddhists to administer Buddhist affairs in Jiangnan. However, the influence and power of Shal-lu-pa and his colleague paled in comparison to that formerly wielded by Yang. Because the

⁴⁷ Lai Tianbing, "Guanyu yuandai sheyu jianghuai/jiangzhe de shijiao duzongtongsuo", 64.

⁴⁸ Nianchang, *Fozu lidai tongzai*, 22:461; Shi Ruxing 釋如惺, *Daming gaosengzhuan* 大明高僧傳, ed. in *Dazheng xinxiu dazangjing* 大正新修大藏經, 1:901.

Supervisory Office failed to reclaim the institutional prowess it had achieved under Yang's leadership, it was gradually replaced by another institution, the Branch Bureau.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Southeastern China, especially Jiangnan, was one of the core centers of national wealth and knowledge production, which in turn increased its importance for aspiring emperors and politicians. In that sense the Mongol rulers correctly assessed the value of Jiangnan after they had conquered it, and it can be fruitful to compare their policies towards Buddhism in comparison to other regions and dynasties. Khubilai Khan established an administrative system independent of the civilian bureaucracy to govern Buddhist affairs in Southeastern China, his policy largely influenced by strategies of the previous four Great Khans, including the appointment of Tibetan Buddhists to leadership roles. Although there was reference to Jin and Western Xia dynastic precedents in the arrangement of certain institutions, the overall setup and operational principles differed from those of earlier dynasties, especially the locally-centered Song dynasty. This demonstrates that Khubilai actually did not implement a hybrid system of Buddhist administration in Southeastern China; instead, his basic strategy was to continue and carry forward the Mongol institutions of appointing key Buddhists to govern their own affairs. Shagdaryn Bira has proposed that one important reason for the Mongol preference of Tibetan Buddhism was that Khubilai wanted to avert the possibility of the conquered people's spiritual predominance, and he realized the political value of Tibetan Buddhism

⁴⁹ Song Lian, *Yuanshi*, 20:427.

as a useful vehicle for consolidating his power.⁵⁰ The particularity of Southeastern China as the core of the Southern Song dynasty, combined with this particular perspective, may have been the main factors behind Khubilai's special policy. His original aim was well accomplished with the appointment of Yang and Shal-lu-pa, with the latter appointment especially reflecting Khubilai's strong wish to maintain Mongol institutions until the end of his reign even through another institution was established in his final years. A hybrid system incorporating both Mongol and Chinese traditions governance of dual combination system was implemented only later, after Khubilai's reign. Therefore, we should not over-emphasize Khubilai's influence in the implementation of a hybrid system, or ignore his heirs' policy innovations in Buddhist administration.

⁵⁰ Shagdaryn Bira, "Qubilai Qa'an and 'Phags-pa Bla-ma" in Reuven Amitai-Preiss and David O. Morgan ed., *The Mongol Empire and its Legacy* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999), 242.