

Brief Communications

THE 1413 MING EMBASSY TO TSONG-KHA-PA AND THE ARRIVAL OF BYAMS-CHEN CHOS-RJE SHĀKYA YE-SHES AT THE MING COURT

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The Ming mission which approached Tsong-kha-pa just prior to or during the year 1408 has become well known, thanks first of all to the writings of Yü Tao-ch'üan, and more recently those of Rudolf Kaschewsky and Heather Karmay. The letters which Tsong-kha-pa wrote as a result of this mission—to Ming Ch'eng-tsu, the Chinese emperor, and to an unknown Chinese official—have been variously translated by these scholars.

By contrast, much less is known about the mission which Ch'eng-tsu dispatched to Tsong-kha-pa in 1413, and to which Tsong-kha-pa responded by sending his disciple Shākya ye-shes to the Ming court. Yü Tao-ch'üan (p. 939) states that a Ming mission was dispatched to Tsong-kha-pa in the eleventh year of Yung-lo (1413-1414), but supports this only with a reference to a passage in the biography of Tsong-kha-pa by Cha-har dge-bshes Blo-bzang tshul-khrims (*cha*, ff. 41r-41v) which discusses the mission but does not give a date for it. Heather Karmay (pp. 81 and 102, note 89) dates this mission to the "2nd [Chinese] month of the 11th year of Yongle [March 2-31, 1413]," on the basis of a *Ming shih-lu* entry for March 11, 1413, which records the dispatch of a mission to Central Tibet led by the eunuch Yang San-pao. Karmay cites the reference to the mission in the compilation of *Ming shih-lu* notices dealing with Tibet published in Japan as *Mindai Seizō shiryō* (p. 62), and remarks that the mission's "main aim was probably to invite Tsong-kha-pa."

In 1977 a transliteration of the Tibetan text of the letter from Ch'eng-tsu which the 1413 embassy carried to Tsong-kha-pa, inviting him to visit the Ming court, was published by Dieter Schuh (pp. 181-182). Schuh discovered the letter in Dar-han mkhan-sprul Blo-bzang 'phrin-las' biography of Tsong-kha-pa (pp. 288-289), a nineteenth century work that was published in a type-set edition in Varanasi in 1967. According to the description of Blo-bzang 'phrin-las, the original letter carried Tibetan and Chinese texts and was kept at Dga'-ldan, while an exact copy was stored in the collection of books and documents held by the Tibetan government (*gzhung-sa'i phyag-dpe'i khrod-na 'dug-pa*). The author further states that the version of the letter which he inserted in his biography of Tsong-kha-pa was copied without mistakes from the government copy. The letter is dated the 11th day of the second month of the eleventh year of Yung-lo, which is March 12, 1413, only one day after Yang San-pao had been ordered to undertake his mission to Tibet. In the text of the letter, however, the envoy designated by Ch'eng-tsu to carry his missive to Tsong-kha-pa is identified

not as Yang San-pao, but as Hou Hsien (in Tibetan, Ho'u Hyen), Ch'eng-tsu's premier envoy to Tibet and, like Yang San-pao, a eunuch. If we now turn to the complete version of Ch'eng-tsu's *shih-lu*, the *Ming T'ai-tsung shih-lu* (*chüan* 137, p. 3a), we see that on the *chi-wei* day of the second month of the eleventh year of Yung-lo, which is March 11, 1413, the day of Yang San-pao's dispatch to Tibet, Hou Hsien was ordered to undertake a mission to Nepal. Although it is likely that the embassies of Yang San-pao and Hou Hsien travelled together part of the way, their missions were distinctly different ones. In view of the identification of Hou Hsien as the envoy who carried Ch'eng-tsu's letter of March 12, 1413, to Tsong-kha-pa, and his appointment one day earlier to lead a Ming embassy to Nepal, we must conclude that Hou Hsien travelled via Tibet to Nepal and that his itinerary included an audience with Tsong-kha-pa and the delivery of Ch'eng-tsu's letter. We should note that the *shih-lu* entry recording Hou Hsien's dispatch on this mission is not included in *Mindai Seizō shiryō*, no doubt because it appears to deal with Nepal and not Tibet. Only a knowledge of the contents of Ch'eng-tsu's 1413 invitation to Tsong-kha-pa shows this to be otherwise.

Tsong-kha-pa was not the only hierarch whom Hou Hsien visited while travelling through Tibet in 1413. In the November, 1981, issue of *Wen-wu* the "Board of Management for Cultural Relics of the Autonomous Region of Tibet" (in Chinese, Hsi-tsang tzu-chih-ch'ü wen-wu kuan-li wei-yüan-hui) published a photograph of a bilingual letter in Tibetan and Chinese which Ming Ch'eng-tsu had sent to the 5th Karma-pa, De-bzhin gshegs-pa. The letter is dated the 10th day of the second month of the eleventh year of Yung-lo, i.e., March 11, 1413. The text of this letter too identifies Hou Hsien as the envoy appointed to deliver it. Thus, we now know that Hou Hsien visited the Karma-pa as well as Tsong-kha-pa while en route to Nepal. It was also Hou Hsien whom Ch'eng-tsu sent to Tibet in 1403 to invite De-bzhin gshegs-pa to the Ming court, and who accompanied the hierarch on his journey to China in 1406-1407. The original text of Ch'eng-tsu's 1413 letter to the Karma-pa, as shown in the photograph, is unfortunately unreadable, due to the scale to which it was reduced in printing. An accompanying article gives the Chinese text of the letter (in simplified characters), however, but not the Tibetan text.

It is fortunate that Ch'eng-tsu's letter to the Karma-pa survived the ravages visited upon Tibet by the Chinese authorities in the 1960's. According to Wang Yao (pp. 185-186), both Mtshur-phu, the seat of the Karma-pa, and Dga'-ldan, where Ch'eng-tsu's letters to Tsong-kha-pa was kept, were leveled during this period. Let us hope that the original copy of Ming Ch'eng-tsu's 1413 letter to Tsong-kha-pa, as well as other priceless documents and books, may yet survive in Tibet, as has turned out to be the case with the emperor's 1413 letter to the Karma-pa.

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It is a well-known fact that Tsong-kha-pa declined Ming Ch'eng-tsu's

invitation to visit the Ming court and instead dispatched his disciple Byams-chen chos-rje Shākya ye-shes to court in his place. Shākya ye-shes' arrival at court is not mentioned in any of the *Ming shih-lu* notices contained in *Mindai Seizō shiryō*. As a result, Satō Hisashi (p. 205) has assumed that references to his arrival were not included in the *shih-lu*. Karmay (pp. 81-82) remarks that Shākya ye-shes' "arrival is not mentioned in XZSL [i.e., *Mindai Seizō shiryō*] and he appears abruptly in the 4th month of the 13th year of Yongle (May 9 - June 6), 1415 [in *Mindai Seizō shiryō*] p. 65. . . ." The *shih-lu* entry to which Karmay refers is for May 11, 1415, and deals with Ch'eng-tsu's bestowal of a title on the hierarch after he had already been at court for some time.

Surprisingly, however, if we turn to T'an Ch'ien's renowned private history of the Ming period, the *Kuo-ch'üeh* (*chüan* 16, p. 1111), we find a brief entry stating that on the *kuei-ssu* day of the twelfth month of the twelfth year of Yung-lo, which is February 3, 1415, Shākya ye-shes had come to court. Even more surprisingly, if we check the same date in the *Ming T'ai-tsung shih-lu* (*chüan* 159, p. 3a), we find an *identical* entry. We can only assume that this *shih-lu* entry was overlooked in the compilation of *Mindai Seizō shiryō*.

Therefore, it is now possible for us to establish that Shākya ye-shes arrived at Ming Ch'eng-tsu's court in Peking on February 3, 1415. Furthermore, his arrival was in response to the letter of invitation brought to Tsong-kha-pa by Hou Hsien, whom the emperor had placed at the head of a Ming embassy that travelled to Nepal via Tibet.

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