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# ANALYSIS OF SOME CONCEPTS OF ABHIDHARMAKOSAKARIKA IN THE HISTORICAL SOURCE TEXTS OF MONGOLIAN BUDDHISM

The article concerns with such a historical source on the spread of Buddhism as the Abhidharmakosakarika, composed by the well-known Indian philosopher Vasubandhu.The cosmological ideas in Abhidharmakosakarika include the location, directions, and shapes of the continents, the unique characteristics of the body and the age of the living beings there, the ideology and content of the Buddhist teachings, the translation process and date of Abhidharmakosakarika into the Mongolian language, and the honoring of Mongolian kings as Chakravartin kings, as quoted in the sources mentioned above. The paper aims to analyze these concepts and discuss how the influence of Abhidharmakosakarika impacted Mongolian Buddhist historiography

*Keyword:* Mongolian Buddhism, history, abhidharmakosakarika, cosmology, chakravartin king .

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# АНАЛИЗ НЕКОТОРЫХ КОНЦЕПЦИЙ АБХИДХАРМАКОШАКАРИКИ В ИСТОРИЧЕСКИХ ИСТОЧНИКАХ МОНГОЛЬСКОГО БУДДИЗМА

Статья анализирует такой известный исторический источник по истории распространения буддизма в Монголии как Абхидхармакошакарика. В контексте статьи автор рассматривает и анализирует такие космологические постулаты этого сочинения как локация континентов, их направление, уникальные сущностные характеристики человека, идеология и содержание буддийского учения, история монгольских правителей в статусе чакравартинов, а также обращает особое внимание читателя на трудности перевода этого известного источника на монгольский язык.

*Ключевые слова:* Монгольский буддизм, история, Абхидхармакошакарика, космология, царь Чакравартин.

Historical sources on the spread of Buddhism in Mongolia often refer to the Abhidharmakosakarika, composed by the Indian philosopher Vasubandhu. For instance, historical sources such as “White History”, Sumbe Khanbo Ishbaljir‘s (1704–1788) “History of the Rise, Progress, and Downfall of Buddhism in India, Tibet, China, and Mongolia: A Wish-fulfilling Kalpavriksha Tree”, Dharmadala's “The Clear Narrator of the White Lotus Rosary: How the Supreme Dharma is Spread in the Land of Great Mongolia”, and Zava Damdin's (1867–1937) “The Golden Book of the Spread of Buddhism in Great Mongolia” cite various concepts Abhidharmakosakarika.

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The cosmological ideas in Abhidharmakosakarika include the location, directions, and shapes of the continents, the unique characteristics of the body and the age of the living beings there, the ideology and content of the Buddhist teachings, the translation process and date of Abhidharmakosakarika into the Mongolian language, and the honoring of Mongolian kings as Chakravartin kings, as quoted in the sources mentioned above.

The paper aims to analyze these concepts and discuss how the influence of Abhidharmakosakarika impacted Mongolian Buddhist historiography.

Starting from the 16th century, when Buddhism spread widely among the Mongols, researchers have observed that "the traditional historical thought of the Mongols developed under the strong influence of Indian, Chinese, and Tibetan historiography [Bira 2001: 16]. During this period, a conventional tradition of historiography emerged among Mongolian historians. Their historical writings included discussions on the origin of the world and the structure of continents as described in *Abhidharmakosakarika*, as well as the lifespan of humans, cosmic cycles *(kalpas)*, the origins of monarchy, and the king's virtues, qualities, and ethical values.

Furthermore, Sh. Bira noted that in medieval Mongolian historiography, historians believed that "before writing about their own country's history, they should first discuss, to some extent, the histories of India, China, and especially Tibet, skillfully utilizing the rich historical sources of these countries in their original form" [Ibid.].

Thus, in addition to historical sources, Mongolian historians possessed a profound knowledge of Buddhist philosophy, as reflected in their historical works, which explicitly mention concepts from *Abhidharmakosakarika* regarding the origin of the world, time cycles, and the establishment of a monarchy.

**Mongolian historical sources mention the origin and structure of the world as described in the Abhidharmakosakarika shastra**

The concept of the world's structure in the Abhidharmakosakarika is depicted as follows.

समन्ततस्तु त्रिगुणं तत्र मेरूर्युगन्धरः।
ईशाधारः खदिरकः सुदर्शनगिरिस्तथा॥४८॥

ྲྀཏ་ཡུག་ཏུ་ནི་སུམ་འགྱུར་རོ། །དེ་ལ་ལྷུན་པོ་གཟའ་ཤིང་འཛིན། །
གཟོལ་མདའ་འཛིན་དང་སེང་ཁྲིད་ཅན། །དེ་བཞིན་བསྟན་རྩིས་ཤུག་རི་དང་། །

"On all sides, there are thrice that in circumference. On that are Mount Meru, Yugandhara (The Yoke holder), Ishadhara (Plow holder), Khadiraka (Acacia Tree), and Sudarshana Giri (Lovely to Behold Mountain)" (Verse 48).

अश्वकर्णो विनितको निमिन्धरगिरिः ततः।
द्वीपाः बहिश्चक्रवाडः सप्त हैमाः स आयसः॥४९॥

རྟ་རྣ་དང་ནི་རྣམ་འདུད་དང་། །སྒུ་ཕྲུད་འཛིན་རིའོ་དེ་ནས་ནི། །
གླིང་རྣམས་ཡིན་ཚོ་དེ་དག་གི །

"Next are the mountains Ashvakarna (Horse's ear), Vinitaka (Bowing down), and Nimindhara(Rim Holder Mount). Beyond these lie the continents. Outside of them is the circular boundary, The seven (rings) are of gold, and then of iron" (Verse 49) [Buddyn onolyn shashtaruud 2015: 16].

The above verses from the *Abhidharmakosakarika* describe the formation of the world system as a result of the interaction between the wind and water elements, established through the karmic actions of sentient beings. It explains that a great swirling force of wind causes the water element to revolve, providing a foundation for the golden earth, upon which eight great mountains arise.

Mount Meru is at the center of these mountains, surrounded by seven other mountains with distinct characteristics and appearances. These surrounding mountains are named the Yoke Holder, Plow Holder, Acacia Tree, Lovely to Behold, Horse's Ear, Bowing Down, and Rim Holder Mounts.

According to the text [Slo dpon dbyig gnyin 1998: 247], Mount Meru rises 80,000 yojanas above the water and extends 80,000 yojanas below it. The surrounding mountains are said to be 40,000 yojanas high. Additionally, Mount Meru is described as having four sides made of different precious resources:

1. The eastern side is silver.
2. The southern side is lapis lazuli (bindurya).
3. The western side is ruby (padmaraga).
4. The northern side is gold [Rgyal ba dge 'dun 'grub 2000: 221].

The mountains encircling Mount Meru are composed of pure gold, whereas the outermost ring of mountains is said to have the nature of iron.

Beyond these mountains, a great ocean surrounds the central world system. Within this ocean, four large continents exist:

1. Jambudvīpa (Zambuutiv) – The southern continent of the Jambu tree.
2. Purvavideha (Ülem Biyeet Tīv) – The eastern continent of the Surpassing Body.
3. Aparagodaniya (Ükher Edlegch Tīv) – The western continent of the Enjoyer of Cattle.
4. Uttarakuru (Muu Duut Tīv) – The northern continent of the Unpleasant sounding ones.

The sky above each of these continents reflects the glow of Mount Meru's precious constituents, creating unique colors. For example, the sky over Jambudvīpa, the southern continent, radiates a deep blue light resembling lapis lazuli.

These excerpts from the *Abhidharmakosakarika* describe the structure of the world, including Mount Meru at the center, the seven surrounding mountains, the great ocean, the four main continents, and the eight smaller sub continents. The text details their shape, cha-racteristics, height, composition, and overall structure. This cosmological framework has been referenced in several Mongolian historical sources, including:

– Sagan Setsen (1662) – *Erdeniin Tobchi* (*Precious Summary*) (National University of Mongolia, Mongolian Studies Center, 2006);

– Shambadar Tsogt Akhai (17th century) – *The Great Yellow Chronicle of the Ancient Mongol Khans* (Ibid.);

– Guush Luvsandanzan (17th century) – *Altan Tobchi (The Golden Annals): A Briefly Compiled Treatise on the State Founded by the Ancient Khans* (Ibid.);

– Mergen Gegeen Luvsandambijaltsan (18th century) – *Altan Tobchi* (The Golden Records) (Ibid.);

– Galdan Tuslagch (1841) – *Erdeniin Erikh (Precious Rosary): A Historical Record* (National University of Mongolia, Mongolian Studies Center, 2006);

– Sümbe Khambo Ishbaljir (1748) – *The Religious History Called the Tree of Galbarvas* [Sümbe Khambo Ishbaljir 2017];

– Darmadalai (1889) – *The History of the Spread of Buddhism in Mongolia* [Darmadalai 2016];

– Zava Damdin Gavj (1931) – *Altan Devter (The Golden Book), The History of the Spread of Buddhism in Mongolia* [Zava Damdin 2018].

These sources integrate Buddhist cosmology into Mongolian historiography, demonstrating the deep influence of the *Abhidharmakosakarika* on the historical and philosophical worldview of Mongolian scholars.

In his work *Erdeniin Tobchi* (Precious Summary) (1662), Sagan Setsen describes the structure of the world as follows:

"The Great Majestic Golden Earth, a vast terrestrial plane, lies at the center with the glorious Mount Meru, the king of mountains. Surrounding it are seven golden mountains, seven Anavatapta lakes, four great continents, and eight sub-continents – forming a total of twelve continents, which were established simultaneously" (National University of Mongolia, Mongolian Studies Center 2006: 19).

This depiction reflects Buddhist cosmology, illustrating the formation and order of the universe.

Similarly, in the 17th-century text "The Great Yellow Chronicle of the Ancient Mongol Khan"*s* by Shambadar Tsogt Akhai, the cosmological structure is described in further detail:

"The great ocean condensed and solidified due to the force of the wind. As dust arose, Mount Meru, the seven golden mountains, and the four great continents came into existence. The facets of Mount Meru were formed – silver in the east, lapis lazuli *(vaidurya)* in the south, ruby *(padmaraga)* in the west, and gold in the north. Of Mount Meru's 80,000 leagues are submerged beneath the ocean, while the other 80,000 leagues rise above the waters. The continents are composed of Earth. Surrounding the four great continents is an iron enclosure. To the south of Mount Meru lies Jambudvīpa, shaped like a chariot, and at its center is the land known as Magadha" (Ibid.: 33).

These descriptions align with the cosmological models found in Buddhist scriptures, such as the *Abhidharmakosakarika*, and illustrate how Mongolian historical and religious texts integrated Buddhist metaphysical concepts into their worldview.

In "Altan Tobchi (The Golden Annals): A Briefly Compiled Treatise on the State Founded by the Ancient Khans" (17th century), Guush[1] Luvsandanzan does not provide a detailed explanation of the world's structure but briefly mentions human origins in Jambudvīpa (the southern continent in Buddhist cosmology):

"In ancient times, humans of Jambudvīpa were born through transformation" (Ibid.: 27).

The text also states that Maha Samadhi, also referred to as the "Exalted King", emerged as a ruler to distinguish truth from falsehood, signifying the beginning of governance among early humans.

[1] Title of the renowned translator.

In the 18th-century "Altan Tobchi (The Golden Records)" by Mergen Gegeen Luvsandambijaltsan, the description of the world's structure closely follows Buddhist cosmology:

"Surrounding Mount Meru are seven layers of golden mountains, named as follows: The Yoke Holder, Plow Holder, Acacia Tree, Lovely to behold, Horse's Ear, Bowing Down, Rim Holder Mounts. These mountains are entirely made of gold. Among them, vast water has accumulated, forming seven lakes of pure joy, in which a golden island exists – constructed as the palace of bliss. Various precious substances gather, forming the four great continents. Each of these great continents is surrounded by two smaller continents, making a total of twelve continents positioned around Mount Meru in the four cardinal directions" (National University of Mongolia, Mongolian Studies Center 2006: 21).

This passage aligns with other Mongolian historical sources influenced by the *Abhidharmakosakarika*, illustrating a worldview that integrates Buddhist cosmology into Mongolian historiography.

In "Erdeniin Erikh (Precious rosary)" (1841), Galdan Tuslagch describes the structure of the universe based on the elements of wind, water, and earth, stating:

"At the center lies the majestic Mount Meru, the king of mountains, surrounded by seven golden mountains, seven Anavatapta lakes, four great continents, and eight minor continents – forming a total of twelve continents, established at the same time" [Ibid.: 29].

This passage reflects the Buddhist cosmological model, emphasizing the tiered and structured nature of the universe.

In "The Religious History of the Kalpavriksha Tree" (1748), Sümbe Khambo Ishbaljir explains the origin of the world in relation to karma and cyclical time:

*"Firstly, various worlds arise from karma"* [Sümbe Khambo Ishbaljir 2017: 3].

This suggests that the existence of different realms is determined by the collective karma of all beings. The text further elaborates on the four cosmic periods (kalpas) – formation, duration, destruction, and void kalpas – and states that destruction occurs due to wind, fire, and water disruptions.

Both sources integrate Buddhist cosmological concepts into Mongolian historiography, illustrating the interplay between Buddhist philosophy and Mongolian historical thought regarding the creation, existence, and dissolution of the universe.

This passage describes the Buddhist cosmological structure centered around Mount Sumeru and its surrounding features:

Composition of Mount Sumeru:

1. East: Silver
2. South: Beryl (Vaidurya)
3. West: Red crystal or Ruby (Padmaraga)
4. North: Gold

The colors of the sky and ocean in each direction reflect the respective gemstone's hue.

Seven surrounding golden mountains:

1. The Yoke Holder (Buulga barigch)
2. Plow Holder (Anjis Barigch)

3. Acacia Tree (Khadirt modtoi)
4. Lovely to behold (Uzvees goo)
5. Horse's Ear (Morin Chikht)
6. Bowing Down, (Tiin ekhiisen)
7. Rim Holder Mounts (Moor Barigch)

Four great continents and their names:

1. Jambudvīpa (Zambuutiv) – The southern continent
2. Purvavideha (Ülem Biyeet Tīv) – The eastern continent
3. Aparagodaniya (Ükher Edlegch Tīv) – The western continent
4. Uttarakuru (Muu Duut Tīv) –The northern continent etc…

This description aligns with traditional Buddhist cosmology while incorporating unique Mongolian terminology to explain the structure of the universe.

In "The History of the Spread of Buddhism in Mongolia" (1889) by Darmadalai, the author states:

"The lower realm of this world and the ocean constitute the domain of the three unfortunate destinies. The valley below the upper waters of Mount Meru is the realm of the Asuras. From the Seven Golden Mountains to the summit of Mount Meru and beyond lies the heavenly realm. The twelve continents in the middle are the realm of humans, among which the most superior continent is Jambudvipa, located among the three southern continents" [Darmadalai 2016: 38].

By using Mount Meru as a reference, the author defines the structure of the universe, distinguishing between the celestial realm above and the human world in the middle.

Darmadalai, when discussing the spread of Buddhism in India, China, and Tibet, does not depict the cosmic structure, including Mount Meru, the seven surrounding mountains, and the four continents. However, in explaining the spread of Buddhism in Mongolia, he elaborates on the three higher existences – the Celestial, Asura, and human realms. Furthermore, he emphasizes that the lineage of the forty-nine Khalkha and Oirat noble lords is of heavenly origin.

Let's examine how the verse from the *Abhidharmakosakarika Shastra* regarding the structure of the world is quoted in Zava Damdin Gavj's The *Golden Book* (1931).

In the *Abhidharmakosakarika Shastra*, it is stated:

इहोत्तरेण कीटाद्रि नवकाद्धिमवान् ततः।
पञ्चाशद्विस्तृतायामं सरोऽर्वाग्गन्धमादनात्॥५७॥

འདི་ནས་བྱང་དུ་རི་ནག་པོ། །དེག་འདས་གངས་རིའོ་དེ་ནས་ནི།
ཐོས་ངད་ཤང་བའི་ཀུ་རོལ་ན། །ཆུ་ཚེང་ཕུ་བཅུ་ཡོད་པའི་མཚོ།

The following passage is quoted in Zava Damdin's Altan Devter as a reference to the description of the world's structure from Abhidharmakosakarika:

"To the north of this lies a black mountain.
Beyond the nine (mountains), there is a snowy mountain.
From there, beyond the fragrant air,
A lake, fifty mile wide, is found" [Buddyn onolyn shashtaruud 2015: 16].

In *Altan Devter* (The Golden Book), Zava Damdin presents it as:
“To the north, nine black mountains,
Beyond them, a snowy mountain.
Beyond the limits of the fragrant air,
A vast ocean, five mile wide” [Zava Damdin 2018].

Zava Damdin’s description of the world’s structure, derived from Abhidharmakosa-karika, closely follows the translation from the 151st volume of the Mongolian Danjuur. However, a notable difference appears in the final line, where the original phrase “a lake, fifty miles wide” is instead rendered as “a vast ocean, five miles wide”, presenting a numerical variation in measurement within his text. In addition, the translation of Abhidharma Kosha in the Mongolian Danjuur uses the word “lake,"whereas Zava Damdin, in his writings, uses the word "ocean”.

**Mongolian historical sources remark the Mongolian kings as Chakravartin kings as described in the Abhidharmakosakarika shastra**

Mongolian historical sources often praise Chinggis Khan and Kublai Khan with the esteemed title of *Chakravartin King* (Dharma Wheel Turning King), as described in *Abhidharmakosakarika*, particularly in Chapter III, which presents the structure of the world. Speci-fically, verses 95 and 96 of the third area discuss the concept of a universal ruler who governs with righteousness and power.

Mongolian chronicles and historical texts frequently draw parallels between these Buddhist ideals of a supreme sovereign and the rule of Mongolian emperors, portraying them as destined leaders who uphold cosmic order. The frequent application of this title to Chinggis Khan and Kublai Khan in these sources reflects the fusion of Buddhist cosmology with Mongolian imperial ideology, reinforcing their divine mandate and supreme authority over the known world.

In Abhidharmakosakarika:

चक्रवर्तिसमुत्पत्तिर्नाधोऽशीतिसहस्रकात्।
सुवर्णरूप्यताम्रायश्चक्रिणः तेऽधरक्रमात्॥९५॥
एकद्वित्रिचतुर्द्वीपाः न च द्वौ सह बुद्धवत्।
प्रत्युद्यानस्वयंयान कलहास्त्रजितः अवधाः॥९६॥

འཁོར་ལོས་སྒྱུར་བ་འཇུག་བ་ནི། །སྐྱོང་ཐག་བཀུད་ཟུ་ལས་མི་འཕྲི།།
གསེར་དངུལ་ཟངས་ལྕགས་འཁོར་ལོ་ཅན། །དེ་དག་སྒོང་གཅིག་སྒོང་གཉིས་དང་།།
གསུམ་དང་བཞི་ལས་མས་རིམ་བཞིན། ।ཉན་ཐོག་གཉིས་མེད་སངས་རྒྱས་བཞིན།།
ཕས་བསུ་རང་འཕྲོ་གཡུལ་བཟློམས་དང་། ।མཆོད་བརྟམས་པས་རྒྱལ་གནོད་པ་མེད།།

The Concept of the Chakravartin (Wheel-Turning King) in Abhidharmakosakarika
The text states:

“The Wheel-Turning Kings appear,
When Life is not less than eighty thousand.
With golden, silver, copper, and iron wheels,
They rule over one, two, three, or four continents.
At once, there are never two, like Buddhas,
When advance and conquer their opponents,
Effortlessly achieving victory without harm” [Buddyn onolyn shashtaruud 2015: 18].

According to Abhidharmakosakarika, in the auspicious age (kalpa), a thousand Buddhas will descend into the world alongside a Chakravartin king. This Wheel-Turning Monarch is born when human lifespans decrease from innumerable age to eighty thousand years old. He governs with dignity, supreme power, aided by his weapons and divine wheel, which symbolizes his rule over the world.

Chakravartin kings are categorized based on their majesty, wisdom, power and influence:

1. The Golden Wheel King holds supreme power.
2. The Silver Wheel King possesses great power.
3. The Copper Wheel King wields moderate power.
4. And the Iron Wheel King has the least power among them.

This classification reflects the ruler's ability to maintain order and extend his dominion across one to four continents. In Mongolian historical sources, this concept was often used to glorify the great khans, such as Chinggis Khan and Kublai Khan, equating their rule with the divine mandate of a Chakravartin.

The Hierarchy of the Chakravartin Kings, according to Buddhist scriptures [Slo dpon dbyig gnyin 1998: 292–293], the classification of Chakravartin (Wheel-Turning) Kings is as follows:

The Supreme King (Golden Wheel King) rules over all four continents.

The Great King (Silver Wheel King) governs three continents.

The Moderate King (Copper Wheel King) controls two continents.

The Lesser King (Iron Wheel King) reigns over one continent.

The Chakravartin king is unique in his era – he emerges once in Jambudvipa (the earthly realm) and surpasses all other rulers and kings in majesty and power. Just as the Buddha alone subdues beings through the Dharma, the Chakravartin rules the world with absolute authority.

The four types of Chakravartin kings demonstrate different levels of influence:

The Golden Wheel King, through sheer power, attracts not only allied rulers but even opposing kings, who willingly submit to him.

The Silver Wheel King subdues challengers simply by setting out on a military campaign.

The Copper Wheel King asserts dominance merely by preparing for war.

The Iron Wheel King pacifies enemies without bloodshed, relying only on his military presence [Mi pham rnam rgyal rgya mtsho 1998: 174].

From this perspective, the Chakravartin is not merely a conqueror but a ruler who governs with righteousness and wisdom. His leadership is characterized by moral governance and justice, unquestionable authority and influence, wealth, military strength, loyal ministers, good health, a noble appearance, longevity, fame, generosity, virtue, dedication to his people, compassion, patience, unity, self-discipline, peacefulness, and a commitment to non-violence.

This definition of kingship embodies not only political power but also the ethical and spiritual virtues of an ideal ruler.

The Wheel-Turning King upholds the Dharma by possessing the seven treasures of a sovereign ruler: the wheel, the elephant, the noble horse, the wish-fulfilling jewel, the

queen, the military general, and the minister. He is described as a ruler who holds absolute authority over these treasures, embodying wealth and perfection in material possessions. Additionally, the great king amasses the seven personal treasures: the sword, sheep's skin, throne, bed, cushion, chariot, and shoes – symbolizing weapons, wealth, and power, which contribute to his widespread fame and glory.

Researcher Sunait Chutintararn (1988) studied the origin of the term "Wheel-Turning King" or "Chakravarti King", as mentioned in the *Abhidharmakosakarika Shastra*. He explored when this term was first used in scriptures, referencing Hindu texts such as *Samvidana Brahmana* and *Maitri Upanishad* [Sunait Chutintararn 1988]. Additionally, scholar Kyoung-joon Park (2002) examined whether the term "Chakravarti" originated before the Buddha's time or after Emperor Ashoka's reign of the Maurya Empire. His research concluded that the term's meaning became more defined during the Buddha's time and later became more refined and widespread following Emperor Ashoka's rule [Kyoung-joon Park 2002].

Furthermore, In the sixth chapter of *The Great Joyful Sutra*, which narrates the life of the Buddha, the term and concept of "Chakravarti" or "Wheel-Turning King" is mentioned for the first time. This chapter describes how Queen Maha Maya, after becoming pregnant, had an extraordinary dream one night: a great light appeared in the sky, and a magnificently radiant white elephant approached her and merged into her body. Upon waking, she told King Suddhodana about the dream, prompting him to summon wise Brahmins who specialized in dream interpretation. When asked about its meaning, they provided the following explanation.

वचनमिमु श्रुणित्वा ब्राह्मणा एवमाहुः
प्रीति विपुल चिन्त्या नास्ति पापं कुलस्य।
पुत्र तव जनेसी लक्षणैर्भूषिताङ्गं
राजकुलकुलीनं चक्रवर्ति महात्मं॥११॥ [University of the West 2016: эл. ресурс]

དེ་སྐད་ཅེཞེས་ཐས་ནི་བྲམ་ཟེ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་འདི་སྐད་སྨྲས། །
རིགས་ལ་དངོ་བ་མ་མཆིས་དཀྱེལ་པ་རྒྱ་ཆེན་བརྟེས་པར་ཐྱུར། །
ཁྱོད་ལ་སྲས་མངའ་མཚན་ཕྱིས་ཡན་ལག་བརྒྱན་པ་སྐྱེ་བར་འགྱུར། །
རྒྱལ་རིའི་རིགས་ཀུ་རིགས་ཤ་ཟན་འཁོར་ལོས་བསྒྱུར་བ་ཅེ་བ་ཉིད། །

Upon hearing this, the Brahmins spoke as follows:

"Do not be worried, for a great and joyous event has occurred. A prince endowed with auspicious qualities will be born to you. If he becomes a king, he will be a wise and all-powerful Wheel-Turning King".

Thus, they prophesied that if the Buddha were to assume kingship, he would become a universal ruler, a *Chakravarti* or Wheel-Turning King, who would govern the world. This suggests that even before the birth of the Buddha, the concept of a *Chakravarti* was already established in Indian society and political thought as a title for an influential and supreme ruler.

Later, Buddhist masters adopted this term and included it in Buddhist historical sources. The title *Chakravarti* (Wheel-Turning King) became associated with rulers who upheld and protected Buddhism. In ancient India, Emperor Ashoka of the Maurya Empire

(268–232 BCE) was honored as a *Chakravarti* king and a dharma-protecting king due to his patronage of Buddhism.

Beyond India, in Buddhist-influenced countries such as Burma (Myanmar) and Thailand, powerful monarchs were also bestowed with the title of *Chakravarti* king. Notable examples include Burmese King Kyansittha (1084–1111) and Siamese King Trailok (1448–1488), both of whom were recognized with this esteemed title.

From the reign of Altan Khan of the Tümed (1507–1582), during the third spread of Buddhism in Mongolia, some Mongolian khans began to be honored with the title Khürden Ergüülegch Khaan (Wheel-Turning King) in Buddhist historical writings.

Let's look into the historical sources reveals how Mongol rulers embodied the wisdom, power, and authority of a Chakravarti king:

In the 13th-century text "The White History of the Ten Meritorious Dharmas of Mongolia":

"Later, in the land of the Mongols, the great Chinggis Khan was born. He unified the 361 languages, 721 clans, and 16 great states of Jambudvipa into five groups and four factions, establishing order in the world – an extraordinary feat. Therefore, the Thousand Golden Wheel-Turning Kublai Chakravarti the Wise Khan, as the supreme patron of the Golden Radiance, established the Eight White Yurts and decree the great precise law ..." [Choima 2006].

Here, Chinggis Khan and Kublai Khan are praised for their ability to rule over diverse peoples and cultures, earning them the title of Golden Wheel-Turning Kings.

In *Erdeniin Tobchi* (Precious Summary) by Sagan Secen:

"Thus, like Samantabhadra, who spread the Buddha's teachings across the four continents, the Golden Wheel-Turning Chakravarti King became renowned ..."

Kublai Khan is described as implementing the Ten Meritorious Laws of Dharma, bringing stability to the world, and ensuring the prosperity of all beings. This led to him being honored as the Thousand Golden Wheel-Turning Chakravarti the Wise Khan, a title that was glorified across the lands. The same text further states:

"From there, the Chakravarti Wise Khan's noble queen Chabi bore four sons – Dorji, Mangala, Chingim, and Nomukhan – and one princess, Setseg".

This passage not only praises Kublai Khan's wisdom, knowledge, power, and achievements as a Chakravarti ruler but also acknowledges his queen and royal heirs, emphasizing the legitimacy of his divine rule.

These sources indicate that Mongol rulers, particularly Chinggis Khan and Kublai Khan, were likened to Chakravarti kings due to their vast conquests, governance over multi-ethnic empires, and support of Buddhism.

In The Yellow Chronicles (Shar Tuuj), the concept of the Wheel-Turning King (Chakravarti) is described as follows:

"From the Exalted King to myself, the Blue King, six Wheel-Turning Chakravarti Kings have been renowned.

The Lord declared: "By the decree of Tenggeri Khurmast, my celestial father, I have brought twelve great kings of the world under my command and completed most of my great deeds. Now, I shall rest in peace …"

The Wise Khan governed according to the Ten Meritorious Laws of Dharma, bringing peace and prosperity to the world, and became renowned across the lands as the Thousand Golden Wheel-Turning Chakravarti Wise Khan. He ruled for thirty-six years and passed away at the age of eighty-two in the Year of the Earth Monkey" [MUIS, Center for Mongolian Studies 2006: 56].

This historical source first references the Chakravarti kings known in Indian and Tibetan history, then highlights Kublai Khan (Khubilai Setsen Khan) of the Yuan Dynasty, who brought ten great kingdoms under his rule and governed according to Buddhist principles. It also provides details on his reign and the year of his passing.

Similarly, in Luvsandanzan's Altan Tovch (The Golden Summary), the Chakravarti king is described as follows:

"That noble ruler governed by distinguishing between truth and falsehood. Because of this, all the people greatly revered and honored him, and he became renowned as Maha Samadhi, the foremost king of India. The lineage of kings originates from him".

The text further states that his descendants became known as the Five Chakravarti Kings:

– Golden Wheel King
– Silver Wheel King
– Copper Wheel King
– Iron Wheel King [Choimaa 2006: 28].

This account suggests that the Chakravarti concept was not only recognized in Indian and Tibetan traditions but also deeply integrated into Mongolian historical narratives. It portrays Mongol rulers as rightful successors to this legendary kingship, reinforcing their divine legitimacy and Buddhist-inspired governance.

In The Essential Summary of Kings – The Golden Summary (Khaadyn Ündsen Khuraangui Altan Tovch), the concept of the Chakravarti king is applied to Chinggis Khan as follows:

"Temujin Chinggis Khan was born by divine destiny… He first unified the Five Colors and Four Foreign countries. He brought the tributes and services of the 361 clans and 721 languages of Jambudvipa under his rule. He fostered peace, harmony, and joy, earning renown as a great Chakravarti King. The great Chinggis Khan, born in the Year of the Black Snake,

At the age of forty-five, in the Year of the Tiger, he raised the Nine White Banner at the source of the Onon River and ascended to the great throne of kingship" [MUIS, Center for Mongolian Studies 2006: 46–47].

This passage suggests that Chinggis Khan not only conquered and ruled vast territories, like a Chakravarti king, but also embodied the qualities of a wise and righteous ruler who established order and brought peace to his people. His governance is portrayed as an enlightened rule that fulfilled the ideals of a Chakravarti, balancing conquest with wisdom and stability.

In Ishbaldan's Erdeniin Erikh (1835), the Chakravarti concept is applied to Chinggis Khan as follows:

“Chinggis Khan brought under his rule more than half of Jambudvipa, including China, Tibet, Mongolia, Khashi, and Khoton. Before him, no other ruler of China, Tibet, and Mongolia had achieved such a feat.

Thus, it is not as though a mere minor lord, ruling over a handful of destitute five or six thousand subjects, falsely claimed the title of ‘Wheel-Turning King’ (Chakravarti). Instead, Chinggis Khan was the true and legitimate supreme ruler of the world, the revealer of Heavenly decree, Great Khan, the true forceful Wheel-Turning King” [MUIS, Center for Mongolian Studies 2006: 16–17].

This historical source explicitly acknowledges that Khashi, which refers to Islamic territories, was among the regions conquered by Chinggis Khan. This detail emphasizes that he successfully ruled over religiously and culturally diverse lands. His ability to govern such a vast and multi-ethnic empire demonstrates that he embodied the wisdom and authority of a true Chakravarti king, one who not only conquered but also wisely administered his domains.

In Galdan’s *Erdeniin Erikh*, the concept of the Wheel-Turning King (Chakravarti) is described in relation to the lifespan of beings and the rulers who embody this title:

“The five Chakravarti kings – those of gold, silver, copper, and iron wheels – emerge from the boundless lifespan of beings and rule for up to eighty thousand years” [Choimaa 2006: 36].

Chinggis Khan's proclamation further reinforces his divine mandate and the extent of his rule:

“By the decree of the father heaven, Tenggeri Khurmast, I have brought the twelve great kings of the world under my authority. I have set right the errant and minor kings as I saw fit,

I have united my vast universal empire, I have gathered and completed all my great undertakings.

Now, I shall rest with a peaceful mind” [Ibid.: 107].

Compared to other sources, this one explicitly details the principles of state governance of Chinggis Khan, as well as the nations and ethnic groups he brought under his rule.

Furthermore, this source explicitly outlines the vast geographical and ethnic diversity of Chinggis Khan’s empire:

“Among the lands of Jambudvipa, he conquered five colors and four foreign realms.

The five colors are: Blue Mongols, Red Chinese, Black Tibetans, Yellow Saracens (Sartuls), and White Koreans.

The four foreign lands are: The Kingdom of the Girl with water husband, The Eastern Province, The One with an Eye in the Chest, and The Dog-Headed People” [Ibid.: 111].

Unlike other sources, this text provides a more structured account of Chinggis Khan’s governance principles, the nations he subjugated, and the ethnic groups under his dominion. It emphasizes his role as a Chakravarti ruler who not only wielded military power but also imposed order and structure upon his vast empire, aligning with the traditional Buddhist ideal of the Wheel-Turning King. This source intriguingly states that Chinggis Khan brought four foreign nations under his rule, each named after heroes from myths of various nations such as the girl married with water husband, the man with eye on his chest, and the dog headed people.

In the source “How the Supreme Teaching Spread in the Land of Great Mongolia” by Darmadalai (2016), it is written that Genghis Khan was exalted as “the incarnation of Vajrapani, the wielder of the cosmic wheel, the great king, Lord Genghis” [Darmadalai 2016: 58–59].

In this source, Genghis Khan is not only hailed as “the wielder of the cosmic wheel, the great king”, but also as an incarnation of Vajrapani, the fierce protector deity of Buddhism. Vajrapani is considered a guardian of the Buddhist teachings, one of the ten protectors, and a symbol of courage, justice, perseverance, and resoluteness, whose role is to protect Mongolia and subdue harmful forces.

This portrayal demonstrates that Genghis Khan was not only a ruler of the world, but his leadership, sense of justice, and military power were deeply intertwined with the spiritual realm. During the spread of Buddhism, the idea that the Mongol rulers were under divine protection became widespread. Viewing Genghis Khan as an incarnation of Vajrapani helped strengthen his reign and served as a means to promote the ideology of combining religious and political governance.

Zava Lama Luvsandayan also praised the great king known as Chakravarti (the Wheel-Turner) by stating, “The Lord King, who ruled a hundred families and controlled some of the noble lords, was not merely praised as a ruler who turned the wheel of power in a trivial sense, but rather, as one who truly embodied heavenly fate, an earthly Esrün(Brahma), and the great king who turned the wheel of power in the true sense” [Zava Damdin 2018: 72]. In this work, Genghis Khan is exalted not only as the "Wheel-Turner of Power" but also as a divine figure, compared to Esrün (Brahma), the deity who created the earth and presented the golden wheel to Buddha, representing a divine incarnation.

In Buddhism, both the Buddha and the Wheel-Turning King are credited with infinite merit in creating the welfare and happiness of the people. Therefore, their birth, great deeds, and roles in nirvana and teachings are remembered and celebrated similarly. The authority of the Wheel-Turning King and the wheel of power are said to correspond to the four noble truths, righteousness, and the Buddha's teachings, which revolve around the Dharma Wheel [Ling 1973: 171].

From the time Buddhism spread in Mongolia, the Mongol kings, who were responsible for guiding the relations between the Buddhist clergy and the common people according to the teachings of the Dharma, took on the role of the Wheel-Turning King. As a result, they became known as Chakravarti kings, and this title began to be recorded in historical texts of Mongolia.

**Conclusion**

In the history of Buddhism in Mongolia, the *Abhidharmakośakarika* scriptures have influenced concepts about the origin of the world, its principles, dimensions, the positioning of continents, forms, and life existing on them. They also touch on the emergence of the monarchy, the qualities and power of the king, as well as his wealth and treasures. The *Abhidharmakośakārika* describes a cosmic order centered around Mount Meru, depicting three worlds along a vertical axis: the worlds of desire, form, and formlessness. Horizontally, it details mountains, rivers, lakes, oceans, the four main continents, and the eight smaller continents, showing their locations. This scripture, influenced by Indian cultural cosmology, describes the traditional Buddhist geographical knowledge of Earth, the hea-

vens, and various forms of life, including hell beings, animals, humans, asuras, and celestial beings, and introduced this knowledge to the Mongols.

From the third period of the spread of Buddhism in Mongolia, the term Chakravarti King mentioned in the *Abhidharmakośakarika* came to symbolize the origin of monarchy, the qualities, power, wealth, and justice of Mongolian kings. These kings were depicted as leaders who ruled over a diverse set of peoples and cultures, uniting them through the tenets of the *Dharma*, governing justly, and bringing peace and prosperity to the world.

In historical texts, Mongolian kings were referred to as Chakravarti, or Wheel-Turning Kings, symbolizing the union of temporal and spiritual governance. From the 16th century, when Buddhism spread vigorously in Mongolia, the concept of governing according to both political and religious principles emerged, and the title of Chakravarti became widely used in Mongolian historical writings to describe the great Mongolian khans.

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