

## **Religions in the Mongol Empire Revisited: Exchanges, Conversions, Consequences**

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The political theology according to which Tengri (Tenggeri) the sky god of the steppe, conferred upon Chinggis Khan and his heirs the right to rule over the earth was a major component of the unprecedented expansion of the Mongol Empire (1206-1368). Perceiving world religions as various ways of addressing the same God and well aware of the importance of religion for co-opting their subjects, the Mongols pursued religious pluralism, subsidized religious experts of various creeds, and presided over religious debates—thereby fostering a degree of religious exchange unparalleled in world history, promoting religious relativism, and significantly changing the religious landscape of Eurasia.

One main outcome of these exchanges was the conversion of the Mongols themselves to either Islam or Tibetan Buddhism. This paper focuses on the religious transformation of the Mongols, from adherents of Tengri during the united Empire to believers in world religions after its dissolution to four regional empires. Analyzing the reasons for, and the effects of, these transformations, it reviews their impact on future empires in both steppe and sawn, highlighting the changes in the ruler's connection to the divine that originated in the adjustment of Mongol political theology to the Islamic realm, later adopted by the early modern Islamic empires; the role of Tibetan Buddhism as part of the Chinese imperial institution; and the impact of the division of the steppe between Islam and Buddhism on future nomadic empires that were no longer able to unite the whole steppe.