



A Comparative Studies of Sixteen Pure Ethics of Human (*Mi chos gtsang ma bcu drug*), an Ancient Tibetan Law

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Introduction

The first Buddhist king and the 33rd in the royal lineage, and one of the mightiest king of Tibet, the King Songtsan Gampo (Wylie: Srong btsan sgam po, 617-698) embraced Buddhism in the early 7th century and gave it a royal support and recognition as the state religion of Tibet. Thonmi Sambhota, the intelligent minister was sent to India for the pursuit of learning Buddhism, Indian palaeography and Sanskrit grammar with an aim to introduce the Buddha's teaching in Tibet through the Tibetan translation by devising new script modelled on one of the Indian scripts prevalent during the 7th century.

The King Songtsan Gampo got married with Nepalese princess of emperor Angśuvarma and Chinese princess of emperor Taizong of Tang dynasty.

He was ideologically and spiritually influenced by these two Buddhist princess of the kingdom of Nepal and the emperor of China. Both of them brought a statue of Buddha as one of their dowries to Tibet.

Judges from the Tibetan historical accounts, the King Songtsan Gampo embraced Buddhism by the influence of these two Buddhist princes of Nepal and China. The King made a promise to establish laws based on the Ten Virtues (Tib. dGe ba bcu) and construct one hundred and eight shrines while proposing a princess in hand for marriage.¹

Dungkhar Lobsang Thrinley was of the opinion that the King embraced the Buddhism because of the fact that the animal sacrifices used to be practiced during the various occasions such as religious ceremony, marriage ceremony, birth and death rituals etc. As a result, it hampers the economic growth of the country. So in order to reduce the animal sacrifices, the non-violence teachings of the Buddha was felt necessary to establish in the country.

¹ Gyaltsen, Sakyapa Sonam. *The Clear Mirror, A Traditional Account of Tibet's Golden Age*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1996, p. 132. (Trans. McComas Taylor and Lama Choedak Yuthok).

So, the King Songtsan Gampo with a view to firmly establish Buddha's teachings in the Land of Snow, he initially made the law based on Ten Virtuous of god (Tib. Lha chos dge ba bcu) and Sixteen Pure Ethics of Human (Tib. Mi chos gtsang ma bcu drug).

The enumeration of Sixteen Pure Ethics of Human was first appeared in the text traditionally attributed to the King Songtsan Gampo known as *Mani Kabum* (Wylie: Ma ñi bka' 'bum).² *Mani Kabum* used to be placed on the head while taking the oath of any government position in ancient Tibet.³ In fact, it is regarded as the *Terma* literature which is said to be discovered from the hidden treasure by Atiśa Dīpankara and Drutob Ngodup (Wylie: Grub thob dngos grub) in the 11th century. It is said to be composed by the King Songtsan Gampo and transcribed by Thonmi Sambhota along with other scholars and hidden in the treasure.⁴

Tsultrim Kalsang was of the opinion that the accounts of establishment and the implementation of laws based on Sixteen Pure Ethics of Human by the King Songtsan Gampo was fabricated by later scholars.⁵ Moreover, the authenticity of date and the authorship of *Mani Kabum* (Wylie: Ma ñi bka' 'bum) is still remain controversy.

The Russian scholar A.I. Vostrikov remarked regarding the *Mani Kabum* thus; “As a historical source, however, it is of absolutely no value and cannot be classed under historical works”.⁶

Tsultrim Kalsang argued that if the so called term “Sixteen Pure Ethics of Human” is coined after the King Songtsan Gampo, then the term “Sixteen Pure Ethics of Human” would have to be maintained that it was first recorded in the text entitled “*gCes pa bsdu pa'i 'phrin yig*” (Epistle of Precious Collection) which was sent to Tibetan king and the subject by the minister Ba Palyang (Wylie: rBa dpal dbyangs, appeared in early 8th century) during the reign of King Trisong Detsen (Wylie: Khri srong lde btsan, (742-797). In this epistle, though mentioned “Sixteen Pure Ethics of Human” but in fact only eleven are enumerated⁷ which are as follows;

² Gampo, Choegyal Songtsan. *Mani Kabum*, Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2011, p. 275.

³ Kalsang, Khangkar Tsultrim. *bsTan pa pa snga dar gyi chos 'byung 'brel yod dang bcas pa'i dus rabs kyi mtha' dpyod 'phrul gyi me long zhes bya ba bzhu gs so* (The Analytic History of Early Tibetan Buddhism). New Delhi: Western Tibetan Cultural Association, 1985, p. 250.

⁴ The authenticity of the date and authorship of *Mani Kabum* is still controversy.

⁵ Kalsang, Khangkar Tsultrim. *bsTan pa pa snga dar gyi chos 'byung 'brel yod dang bcas pa'i dus rabs kyi mtha' dpyod 'phrul gyi me long zhes bya ba bzhu gs so* (The Analytic History of Early Tibetan Buddhism). New Delhi: Western Tibetan Cultural Association, 1985, p. 250.

⁶ Vostrikov, A.I., *Tibetan Historical Literature*, Calcutta, 1970, p. 55.

⁷ Kalsang, Khangkar Tsultrim. *bsTan pa pa snga dar gyi chos 'byung 'brel yod dang bcas pa'i dus rabs kyi mtha' dpyod 'phru lgyi me long zhes bya ba bzhu gs so* (The Analytic History of Early Tibetan Buddhism). New Delhi: Western Tibetan Cultural Association, 1985, p. 253. See Tibetan Tanyur of Peking edition, Vol. 144, Pp. 123-128.

Sixteen Pure Ethics of Human according to *gCes pa bsdus pa'i 'phrin yig* (Epistle of Precious Collection, composed in the 8th century)⁸

- 1) Having faith in Triple Gems (*dKon mchog gsum la gcig tu dad*)
- 2) Honouring monks and Brahmins (*dGe sbyong 'dzin cing bram ze 'dzin*)
- 3) Having the nature of honesty (*Drang zhing drang ba'i rang bzhin can*)
- 4) Repay the kindness and benefiting others (*Byas gzos byas la phan 'dogs dang*)
- 5) Paying respect to parents (*Pha dang mar ni 'dzin pa dang*)
- 6) Paying respect to those of high status and to the elders (*Rigs kyi rgan rim gus par byed*)
- 7) Well-versed in dates (calculating astrological) and Tantra (*Tshes grangs rgyud la mkhas pa dang*)
- 8) Practicing confessional ceremony (Sanskrit, *poṣodha*) (*Dus tshigs gso sbyong byed pa dang*)
- 9) Without deceiving with regard to weights and measures (*Bre srang 'jal lugs g.yo sgyu med*)
- 10) Not jealousy and harming others (*Phan tshun 'gran sems gnod mi byed*)
- 11) Reconcile for the sake of future (*'Di ched phyi ma bsnyams nas spyod*)

Though in many of the later historical texts, we find the term simply *Mi chos bcu drug* or *Mi chos gtsang ma bcu drug* (Sixteen Pure Ethics of Human) but they varies with regard to their points and numbers of points while enumerating the Sixteen Pure Ethics of Human. So for the sake of comparison, I have here selected some of the important Tibetan historical accounts where the Sixteen Pure Ethics of Human are quoted for comparative studies.

Sixteen Pure Ethics of Human according to *Mani Kabum*⁹

- 1) Generate faith and devotion towards to the Triple Gems (*Lha dkon mchog gsum la dad pa dang gus pa bskyed par bya'o*)
- 2) To seek out the holy dharma and to practice it (*Dam pa'i lha chos btsal zhing bsgrub par bya'o*)
- 3) Repaying the kindness to one's parents (*Pha dang ma la drin gyis lan ldon par bya'o*)
- 4) Give more value to the learned one (*Yon tan can la zhe mthong che bar bya'o*)
- 5) Paying great respect to those of high status and to the elders (*Rigs mtho ba dang rgan pa la bkur sti chen por bya'o*)
- 6) Be honest and loyal to one's relatives and friends (*Nye du dang mdza' bshes la gzhung bzang bar bya'o*)
- 7) Bring benefit to the people of your locality and neighbours (*Yul gyi khyim mtshes la phan gdags par bya'o*)
- 8) Be honest in speech and humble in mind (*bKa' drang zhing sems chung bar bya'o*)
- 9) Emulating the polite one and be faithful to one's friend for a long time (*Ya rabs kyi rjes snyeg cing phyi thag ring bar bya'o*)
- 10) Be limited in taking food and collecting wealth (*Zas nor la tshod zin par bya'o*)

⁸ Yang, Tsunpa Chen po Pal. *gCes pa bsdus pa'i 'phreng yig btsun pa chen po dpal dbyangs kyi bod rje 'bangs la rdzangs pa* (Mahābhādanta śrīghoṣa preṣita bhoṭa svāmi dāsa sāra saṃgraha lekha), Tibetan Tripitaka Bstan-Hḥgyur, Ņo-mtshar Bstan-bcos 1, Vol. 144, No. 5842, Pp. 123-128.

⁹ Gampo, Songtsan. *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum*, Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2011, Vol. 1, Pp. 275-276.

- 11) Do not offend the sensibilities of those who are grateful to you earlier (*sNga drin can gyi yi (yid) mi bcad par bya'o*)
- 12) Repay debts on time and do not deceit with regard to weights and measures (*Bu lon dus su 'jal bar bya zhing bre srang la g.yo sgyu med par bya'o*)
- 13) Be unbiased to all and avoid jealousy (*Kun la snyoms shing phrag dog med par bya'o*)
- 14) Take no heed of mean person among the friends and be adhere to your own principle (*Grogs kyi nang du ngan pa'i ngag la mi nyan par rang tshugs 'dzin par bya'o*)
- 15) Speak pleasant and less (*Ngag 'jam zhing smra ba nyung bar bya'o*)
- 16) Be compassionate and broad minded (*Theg pa che zhing blo khog yangs par bya'o*)

Fifteen Ethics of Human as recorded in *The Clear Mirror History* (Tib. rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long, composed 1328) of Sakya Sonam Gyaltzen (1312-1409)¹⁰ as follows;

- 1) Taking refuge in Triple Gems with faith and devotion (*dKon mchog gsum la skyabs su song zhing/ dad pa dang mos gus bya ba*)
- 2) Repaying kindness to the parents and respect them (*Pha ma la drin du gzo zhing bkur sti bya ba*)
- 3) Do not offend the sensibilities of those who are grateful: one's father, uncles and elders. Repay the kindness (*Mi drin chen dang pha khu rgan gsum gyi yi (yid) mi gcod cing/ bzang po'i lan byed pa*)
- 4) Do not quarrel against those of good behaviour and the faithful one but to accept them voluntarily (*Mi ya rabs dang rigs btsun pa la mi rgol cing dang du len pa*)
- 5) All your actions (karma) and characters should follow after the one who bears a good moral character (*Las dang spyod pa thams cad ya rabs kyi rjes su 'brang ba*)
- 6) Turn your mind towards the Dharma and study, and one should perceive their meaning (*Lha chos dang yi ge la blo 'jug cing don shes par bya ba*)
- 7) Having conviction in the causality and refrain only from non-virtuous action (*Las rgyu 'bras la yid ches shing/ mi dge ba 'ba' zhis la 'dzems pa*)
- 8) Bring benefit to one's friends and neighbours and harbour no ill-will (*mDza' bshes dang khyim mtshes la phan 'dogs cing gnod sems mi bya ba*)
- 9) Be honest and to make one's mind as a witness (*gZhi drang por bya zhing blo sems dpang du 'jog pa*)
- 10) Take the food and *chang* (Tibetan beer) mindfully with limit and behave with modesty (*Zas chang la tshod 'dzin cing khrel yod par bya ba*)
- 11) Repay debts on time (*Bu lon dus su 'jal cing*)
- 12) Do not deceit with regard to weights and measures (*Bre srang la g.yo zol mi bya ba*)
- 13) Do not take interest and involve in the task that you are not assigned to (*Ma bskos shing ma bcol ba'i bya ba la rtog 'jug mi bya ba dang*)

¹⁰ Gyaltzen, Sakya Sonam. *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*, Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2005, p. 75.

- 14) Take no heed of women in conversion and adhere to your own principle (*Gros kyi nang du bud med kyi kha la mi nyan cing rang tshugs 'dzin pa*)
- 15) When disputes over something to be proved innocent, take an oaths to local deities and Dharma-protectors as witnesses (*Yin min gyis ma tshang ba byung na/ yul lha bstan srung dpang du btsugs nas mna' byed pa la sogs te*)

Having based on the model of the Ten Virtues (Tib. *dGe ba bcu*), the Twenty Laws of Tibet (Tib. *Bod khrims nyi shu*) were established at Kyishoe Shomara. All the king and ministers affixed the seals, and spread the laws like the sun shines and the moon light. (*dge ba bcu la dpe byas nas/ bod khrims nyi shu/ skyi shod/ sho ma ru gtan la phab ste/ rje blon kun gyi phyag rgyas btab ste/ nyi zla'i 'od lta bur khyab par mdzad do*)

Red Annals (Tib. *Deb ther dmar po*, composed between 1346-1363) of Tsalpa Kunga Dorjay (Wylie: Tshal pa kun dga' rdo rje, 1309-1364) simply mentioned about the “Sixteen Pure Ethics of Human” as “*Bod 'bangs la dge ba bcu'i khrims bcas mi chos gtsang ma bcu drug gi srol btsugs*” (To the Tibetan people, the law was established on the basis of Ten Virtue and the system of Sixteen Pure Ethics of Human was introduced)¹¹. So, no detail divisions were given but simply the term Sixteen Pure Ethics of Human was recorded in the *Red Annals*.

Sixteen Pure Ethics of Human according to *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (composed in 1544) of Pawo Tsuglag Threngwa (1504-1566)¹²

- 1) Taking refuge in Triple Gems and worship out of faith and devotion (*dKon mchog skyabs bzung dad cing gus pas mchod*)
- 2) Repaying kindness to the parents and respect them (*Pha dang ma la drin gzo bkur sti bya*)
- 3) Do not offend the sensibilities of those who are grateful. Repay their kindness (*Drin can yi (yid)mi gcod cing bzang lan 'jal*)
- 4) Do not quarrel against those of higher status but to accept them whatever they say (*mThon po rnams la mi rgol smras na nyan*)
- 5) All your actions (karma) and characters should follow after the one who bears a good moral character (*Las spyod thams cad ya rabs rjes su 'brang*)
- 6) Turn your mind towards the Dharma and study, and one should perceive their meaning (*Chos dang yi ger blo 'jug don shes bya*)
- 7) Having conviction in the causality and refrain from non-virtuous action (*rGyu 'bras yid ches sdig pa'i las la 'dzem*)
- 8) Harbour no ill-will to others and bring benefit to others (*Gzhan la bsam ngan mi bya phan pa gdags*)

¹¹ Dorjay, Tsalpa Kunga. *Deb ther dmar po*, (Red Annals), Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1993, Pp. 35-36.

¹² Threngwa, Pawo Tsuglag. *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, Vol. 1, 1985, p. 193.

- 9) Whatever you do, be honest and make your mind as a witness (*Ci byed rang sems dpang bzhag drang por bya*)
- 10) Take the food and *chang* (Tibetan beer) mindfully with limit and behave with modesty (*Zas dang chang la tshod zin khrel 'dzem skyed*)
- 11) Repay debts and loans etc. on time (*sKyin pa bu lon la sogs dus su gzhal*)
- 12) Avoid deceit with regard to weights and measures (*Bre dang srang la sogs la g.yo zol spang*)
- 13) Do not take interest in the task that you are not assigned to (*Ma bcol las la don med kha gtogs spang*)
- 14) Adhere to your own standpoint and should not be inconstant (*rang tshugs bzung nas bsgyur kha lci bar bya*)
- 15) The promise that you made should be kept (cherished) like your life-force (*mna' dang dam bzhag srog ltar gces par 'dzin*)

Sixteen Pure Ethics of Human according to one of the editions of *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston*) of Pawo Tsuglag Threngwa are as follows:

1. Generate faith and devotion for the Triple Gems (*Lha dkon chog gsum la mos gus bskyed pa*)
2. To seek out and practice the Holy Dharma (*Dam pa'i chos btsal zhing bsgrub pa*)
3. Repaying the kindness to the parents (*Pha ma la drin lan 'jal ba*)
4. Giving value to the learned one (*Yon tan can la zhe mthong yod pa*)
5. Paying great respect to those of high status and to the elders (*Rigs mtho ba dang rgan par bkur sti che ba*)
6. Bring benefit to the people of your locality and the neighbours (*Yul mi khyim mtshes la phan gdags pa*)
7. Being honest in speech and humble in mind (*bKa' drang zhing sems chung ba*)
8. Being loyal to relatives and friends (*Nye du mdza' bshes la gzhung ring ba*)
9. Emulating the polite one and be a faithful to one's friend for a long time (*Ya rabs kyi rjes bsnyeg cing phyi thag ring ba*)
10. Having limited food and wealth (*Zas nor la tshod 'dzin pa*)
11. Search for those who were grateful earlier (*sNgar drin can gyi mi rtsad gcad pa*)
12. Repay debts on time and do not deceit with regard to weights and measures (*Bu lon dus su 'jal zhing bre srang la g.yo med pa*)
13. Avoid jealousy to all (*Kun la phrag dog chung ba*)
14. Take no heed of mean person and be adhere to your own principle (*Ngan pa'i gros la mi nyan zhing rang tshugs 'dzin pa*)
15. Speak pleasant and less (*Ngag 'jam zhing smra ba nyung ba*)
16. Being compassionate and broad minded (*Theg pa che zhing blo khog yangs pa*)

Sixteen Pure Ethics of Human according to *Bod kyi deb ther dpyid kyi rgyal mo'i glu dbyangs* of Great Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682)¹³ are as follows:

- 1) Generate faith and devotion for the Triple Gems (*dKon chog la gus pa byed pa*)
- 2) To seek out and practice the Holy Dharma (*Dam pa 'i chos bsgrub pa*)
- 3) Repaying the kindness to the parents (*Pha ma la bkur ba*)
- 4) Giving value to the learned one (*Yon tan can gong du bkur ba*)
- 5) Paying great respect to those of high status and to the elders (*Rigs mtho ba dang rgan rabs la phu dud byed pa*)
- 6) Being loyal to one's friends (*mDza' bshes la gzhung ring po byed pa*)
- 7) Bring benefit to the people of your locality (*Yul mi la phan 'dogs pa*)
- 8) Being honest (*Yid drang ba*)
- 9) Emulating the polite one (*Mig ya rabs la lta ba*)
- 10) Knowing the proper usage of food and wealth (*Zas nor la spyod shes pa*)
- 11) Repaying kindness to the grateful one (*Drin can la phan lan 'dogs dgos pa*)
- 12) Avoid deceit with regard to weights and measures (*Bre srang la g.yo sgyu med pa*)
- 13) Knowing in keeping balance and avoiding jealousy to others (*sPyi snyoms shes shing gzhan la phrag dog med pa*)
- 14) Paying no heed to women (*Bud med kyi kha la mi nyan pa*)
- 15) Speak pleasant and skilful in speaking (*Ngag 'jam zhing smra mkhas pa*)
- 16) Being compassionate and broad minded (*Theg pa che zhing blo khog yangs pa*)

Whether the law based on Ten Virtues (Tib. dGe ba bcu) and Sixteen Pure Ethics of Human were established by the King Songtsan Gampo or not but as a result of following the practices of above mentioned laws over the centuries, the Tibetan people are by nature straight forward, obedient to parents, teachers and the elders, having contentment and compassionate towards others etc.

¹³ Ogyen, Northrang. *Bod kyi deb ther dpyid kyi rgyal mo'i glu dbyangs kyi 'grel pa yid kyi dga' ston*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1993. P. 74.

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