



Tibetan Astrology

- Ancient Tibetan astrology
- Chinese Astrology
- Indian Buddhist Astronomy-Astrology
- Indian Zodiac Astrology
- Tibetan Astrology

The Tibetan astrological culture and science is made from the different cultures and sciences of different countries, which were assimilated by the Tibetan culture, faith, belief, and spiritual and psychological environment. It was developed there with the specific color and characteristic of astrology necessary for the Tibetan people. It is called 'Tibetan astrology'. Independently from the source, the practice and theory of the astrology was constructed by Tibetan masters with the Buddhist view of the Tibetan culture and environment.

ANCIENT TIBETAN ASTROLOGY

From the beginning of inhabited Tibet, Tibetans, like other people, have believed in gods, mountains, spirits and natural forces. Spirits are like guardians who dwell in sky, earth, water and everywhere else. Many of them dwell in the country, mountains, river and so on, and can govern people. Ancient Tibetan people also believed that their ancestors¹ were human beings who descended from heaven². When these beings gradually began to get sick, they searched for the cause and remedy to cure the disease. They discovered that evil spirits, who were governing villages and countries, had put a curse and spread the sickness through mankind. The people used the mediums' speeches and began the tradition of propitiation to spirits along with the birth of Shamanism in Tibet. Naturally, people discovered the influence of stars, planets and their rotations on animals, humans and plants. The knowledge was kept oral by tradition and defused through centuries and is today called ancient Tibetan astrology. It mainly explains the monthly signs (Zodiac houses), 28 constellations, solar and lunar effects, etc. and is recorded in ancient history. This is the native Tibetan astrology used by ancient *Bonpo* of Tibet.

According to Tibetan *Bonpo*³, the source of traditional Tibetan astrology comes from an expert in astrology who was one of the 12 disciples of **Shenrab Miwoche**, the founder of Bon religion. Unfortunately no evidence has been found and it has remained a legend. It is quite certain that the tradition was lost for a long time. However after the 10th century, many *Tertonpa*, 'Tibetan treasure revealers', belonging to the Bonpo tradition, found a certain number of books on astrology⁴. Generally the following elements are roughly found in history and literature:

- The cosmic five elements.
- Five elements of wood, fire, earth, metal and water.
- Relationship with, mother, son, foe and friend.
- 12 months with animal signs.

- Seven days.
- 9 Planets.
- 28 Constellations.
- 12 Zodiac houses etc.

The ancient Tibetan or Bonpo culture has slightly different names concerning the names of the 28 constellations and *dhuetsig*⁵ names. They are unlike popular astrological terms used in Tibetan astrology which are translated from Indian astrology and Buddhism.

There is an illustrative text on the Bon astrology, *Chedsum-dagtsi*, composed by Bon master Khyungtrul-jigme-namkhai-dorje and published in India in mid 20th century.

CHINESE ASTROLOGY (*Nagtsi*)

Chinese astrology is called in Tibetan *Nagtsi*, which means ‘black astrology’, because in the country where it comes from, people in general mainly use black or blue cloths. The other reason to call it ‘black astrology’ is that its main concern is about elements of this earth while astronomy is considered white astrology as its concern is about bright stars. The Tibetan traditional concept and history on the account of the Chinese astrology tells that Buddha predicted in *Manjushrimulatantra* that Bodhisatva Manjushri would reappear in China in the form of a 16 year old person, in order to preach and develop astrology there⁶.

The system came to Tibet in the 7th century during the Tibetan King Namri Srongtsan’s reign. Unfortunately, due to the lack of script, it did not really develop.

After the Tibetan script had been invented, the astrology theory was translated and it evolved three times in Tibet up to now according to the history:

The first translation took place during the King Srongtsan Gampo’s reign (617-?), when his Chinese Queen Wenchen Kongjo was brought to Tibet. She took with her the Jobo Shakyamune Buddha statue, Chinese Astrology and many other sciences in Tibet. She was herself an expert in this science and medicine. She brought 15 *Gabtshe*⁷ (15 hidden secret astrology texts) royal Chinese astrology knowledge and later translated the texts into Tibetan. Wenchen Kongjo made Fengshui and, to control the negative energy and signs, the king had many temples and stupas build in Tibet. The famous Jokhang was erected under the guidance of Wenchen Kongjo’s Fengshui astrology. Then Chinese astrology continued to be studied in Tibet and more Tibetan scholars went to China and translated different Chinese astrological traditions and practices. During the King Mei Agtsom’s reign, his Chinese Queen Angchung also brought seven astrology tantras and their commentaries. The Tibetan King Trisong Deutsan (742-798) sent his minister to China to invite an astrologer called Semtse who translated many astrological works and developed them in the Snow Land.

The second phase of astrology development was when the great Chinese scholar Mahayana⁸ visited Tibet and translated Chinese contemporary astrology works, and many other scholars developed astrology during the next centuries.

The third translation and development of Chinese astrology was made by the Tibetan scholar Khampa Bhayuchogyal who learned this art from the Chinese scholar Penchen Jamchen Dragpa.

In short, many other scholars from both countries contributed with their knowledge and experience to make the great world of astrology and practice from the 7th century till now.

There is a very beautiful story about Wenchen Kongjo’s knowledge of astrology and how she was fooled by the Tibetan minister Gar Tongtsan: Gar went to China to arrange a marriage between the Chinese emperor’s sister and his Tibetan King Srongtsan Gampo. The Chinese emperor had no will to give his sister to the Tibetan King. However the Tibetan minister needed to complete his mission. There were many tests given by the emperor. The important key was to recognize the princess Wenchen Kongjo among 300 other girls in a festival. Her attendant mistress, who was the only one to know the secret, became Tibetan minister Gar’s friend. Gar asked her to tell him the secret and made a magic trick so that astrology may not discover the teller. He filled a copper container with water, and on its top he put a bamboo basket with hundreds of holes. Then the lady told the secret through a metal tube put across the basket and Gar listened to it through another metal tube from the other side. Gar recognized the princess in the festival and put the Tibetan banner on her neck. She was surprised to be discovered and thought that someone had told the secret. So she made the astrology horoscope for it, and found two metal mouths telling the secret to each other on the lake with hundreds of eyes around. The princess didn’t believe the result and said “Astrology betrayed me!”. She threw the royal astrology books in the fire. Many of them burnt but some were saved. This tradition of astrology came to Tibet and Wenchen Kongjo made the astrological calculation for the construction of Jokhang temple of Lhasa.



An interesting story, recorded in Desid Sangye Gyatsho's *Bedurya Karpo* says that many of those astrology and Dharma translations and works were hidden in the mountains and monasteries in order to be protected for future generations. The astrology texts were hidden in tiger skin boxes, Dharma texts in leopard skin boxes and black magic in bear skin. Most of these hidden treasures were found by Tibetan Tertons, 'hidden treasure revealers' after the 10th century, the 'dark age' of Tibet.

The most ancient celebrated astrology masters are Duhar Nagpo, who composed *Rinchensalbeigronme* text and two translators Penchen Rahula and Khamtra.

INDIAN BUDDHIST ASTRONOMY-ASTROLOGY

The first Buddhist astronomy-astrology science was found in the Vinaya sutra where Buddha taught astrological calculation of *sadak-tochei-thik*, 'landlord spirit', for temples and monastery construction and confession dates. The most important teaching is the Shri Kalachakra tantra, 'wheel of time', taught by Buddha in Shri Dhanyakataka, South India. The practice and teaching went to Shambhala and later was brought to India during the three Palas of Indian Kings (8th to 10th century) by Tsilu Pandita and Dhueshab-yabse (brothers or master-disciple). They spread it in Nalanda, Brikramashila and other great monastic universities in India, around the 10th century. During and after the reign of Ngari Tibetan King Lha Lama Yeshe Od, Gyijolotsawa Dhawei Odzer invited Shri Bhadrabodhi from India who translated Kalachakra tantra into Tibetan. Later, the great master Shongton Lotsawa and many others also translated many great works on Kalachakra tantra. In short there are 56 texts composed and translations are so far done for the three aspects of the Kalachakra tantra. The great master Buton Rimpoche (1290-1364) and many other scholars wrote commentaries which were spread all over Tibet.

There are seven traditions in Tibet so far in Kalachakra which are:

- *Gyijolug*
- *Ralug*
- *Drolug*
- *Tsamilug*
- *Shakyashri lug*
- *Chaglug*
- *Shawariwangchugjimgaglug*

The Kalachakra Tantra

Kalachakra is one of the highest tantras, which explains the Buddhist concept of universal philosophy of the mind and cosmology science. The science is bound by Buddhist spirituality and tantric initiation and transformation for the total liberation of body, mind and speech.

The three basic subjects of the Kalachakra tantra are:

- External Kalachakra
- Internal Kalachakra
- And secret Kalachakra

The External Kalachakra

The external Kalachakra explains the creation of the world, universe, Mount Meru and other universes. Our world belongs to the solar and lunar system, with the eclipse system that move the universal energy of the planets, stars, galaxy around Mount Meru. It is a macrocosm of our body/mind, and reflection of the inner world.

The Internal Kalachakra

The Internal Kalachakra explains the respiration of the beings and formation of our internal world of three channels, *Tsa-Uma*, *Roma* and *Kyangma* systems, corresponding to the inner eclipse, solar and lunar systems of the person's life. Medically, the three channels correspond to the nervous, blood circulatory and lymphatic systems (see also in the Tibetan medicine section). As an analogy, the body/mind produces five solid and hollow organs (five elements), seven body constituents (corresponding to 7 days), 28 vertebrae (28 constellations), twelve ribs each side (twelve months), 12 major joints (12 zodiac houses) and 360 minor joints (360 days of one year). In short, what exists inside the body is similar to what is outside. In fact, the outside world is formed by the power of the internal world.

The Secret Kalachakra

The world of the mind and mental function is the main dynamic force of the formation of both outside and inside worlds. The secret Kalachakra explains the symbol of the basic enlightened mind in a form of mandala with Buddha Kalachakra in the blue color of the sky (symbol of space element) and his female consort Buddha Vishuamata in yellow color (symbol of earth element). The practitioner's own body, mind and mental function are transformed in the Buddha Kalachakra in union with absorption in great bodhicitta contemplation.

To learn detailed explanations about Kalachakra, one should first receive the Kalachakra initiation and enter into the world of highest tantra, and astrology and astronomy of Buddhism.

Basic contents of the external Kalachakra:

- History that judges the development of human society and time of the Shambhala war.
- Buddhist cosmology and Mount Meru.
- Basic calculation system.
- Calculation of Solar and Lunar systems.
- Calculation of the rotation of five other planets.
- Basic theory of the eclipse, and its practice.
- Calculation of three basic calendars, Solar, Lunar and Zodiac astrology.
- Calculation of time of returning planets to the place of origin.
- Seasons and agricultural astrology.
- Construction of almanac.
- Spiritual practice of transformation of external, internal and secret Kalachakras.



INDIAN ZODIAC ASTROLOGY (*Yangchar*)⁹

Svarodaya Astrology (*Yangchar*) is a part of Hindu *Shiva tantra*¹⁰ and was translated into Tibetan by Pandit Jayananda and Lotsawa Ghelong Mongpei-nyenpo-goedhod-jungwa. *Yangchar* means ‘appearance of vowels and consonants’, which arise in the sky in the morning in the form of Sanskrit letters as symbol of stars, planets and zodiac houses. The tradition has ten chapters that developed very fast in Tibet, and importantly with numerous commentaries and annotations. The distinguishing character of this astrology is its accurate predictions of future and its usefulness. It says that what is coming out (suffering or joy) is manifested from inside, from the five subtle winds and their flow in the channels. Therefore a very strong connection with yoga and meditation practice can help practically. Lord Shiva, the Hindu God, at his consort Devi Parvati’s request, taught her this knowledge.

Some part of this astrology hasn’t been translated from Sanskrit to Tibetan because dealing with magic, preparation of war, etc, could put mankind more in danger than serve it. The most standardized work on the subject was done by Master Phugpa Lhundrub Gyatsho and later annotated by Master Drigung Choedrag in *Palgyule-nampargyalba-cepeigyudkyi-gyalpoyangcharbeigyachergrelwale-legparshadpei-jugngog chogtu-gahwei-drayang-zhejawa*.

Following are the chapters topics roughly translated.

- Five paths of winds and vowels chapter
- Zodiac house and practice
- Zodiac house predictions
- 100 Chakras (100 *Kang-gya*) and shalaka chapter
- 81 Chakras (*Kang-gya*)
- Explanation of the ‘Wheel of time’ (Kalachakra)
- Chakra for the path
- Chakra for the protection of the fort
- Chakra of the Rahula
- Chakra of Saturn
- Advice for the study and preservation of the science

Tibetan astrology and almanac tradition was not under the ancient Tibetan government or official control before the 17th century. It was produced by many different private astrology schools of monasteries, and astrology family traditions, especially astrologers of the villages and cities. Desid Sangye Gyatsho, the 5th Dalai Lama’s regent, composed the astrology book *Beduya Karpo* and supplement *Bedurya-Yasel* that made the great road to the Tibetan astrologers and became the central reference book for all astrologers. Later, since the beginning of the 20th century, Lhasa *Mentseekhang*, ‘house of astrology and medicine’, has taught astrology as a schooling system and produced numerous astrologers that have given light to the life of Tibetan astrology.

TIBETAN ASTROLOGY (*Jungtsi*)¹¹

Gradually, like in Tibetan Medicine, Tibetan scholars and masters practiced and wrote numerous books on astrology according to the Tibetan culture, language, Buddhist view, and under many other influences. They then created practices and understandings of the elemental astrology, which have been quite different according to the origin and widely practiced all over Tibet for centuries.

The most celebrated scholars and masters in this science from the later centuries are: **Lochen Dharma Shri**, **Dharpa Lotsawa** and especially **Desid Sangye Gyatsho** (1653-1705) who collected all astrological traditions in Tibet and composed the most illustrative text *Bedurya Karpo*, an astrology text which is still the fundamental book for Tibetan astrologers. He gave the ability to see to the people interested in this science. From his tradition, the official almanac and complete information on astrology was accessible by common people of Tibet.

The famous books on Tibetan elemental astrology are:

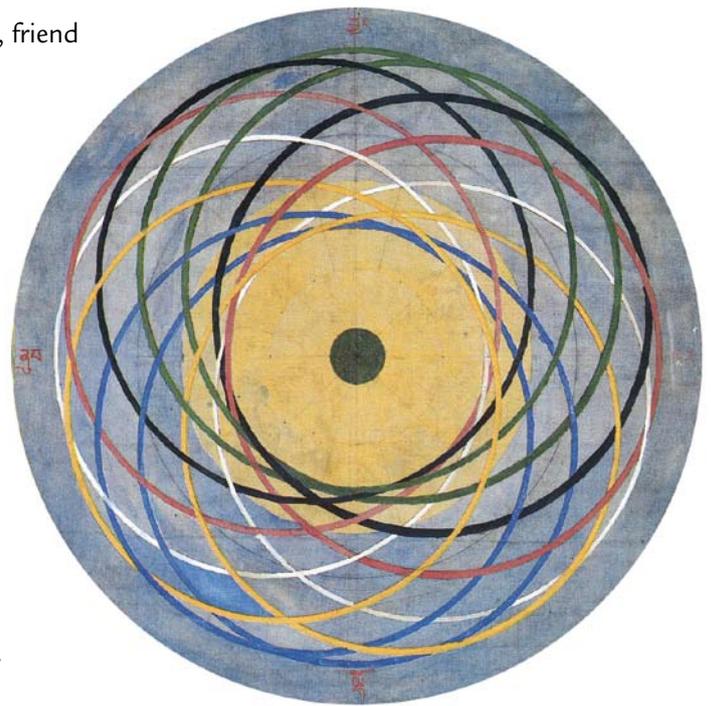
- *Nyinjed Nangwa* by Lochen Dharma Shri
- *Dhawei Odser* Lochen Dharma Shri
- *Bedurya Karpo* Desid Sangye Gyatsho etc.

The theory and practice elemental astrology:

- Five elements and cosmology
- External, internal and secret astrology
- The Mystic Turtle
- Calculation method: mother, son, friend and foe relationships.
- Constitution and personality
- Calculation of life, body, power and fortune
- 12 Animal signs
- 60-year cycles
- *Mewa* astrology
- *Parkha* astrology
- Month, day, time and hour calculations.
- Planets and constellations

Astrological Practice for daily life:

- Astrology consultation works for houses, temple and monastery constructions
- Practice of *Richad* and *Sachad* (Fengshui)
- Horoscope for life (natal chart)
- Horoscope for matrimony
- Horoscope for health
- Horoscope for yearly consultation
- Horoscope for dead people etc.



The tradition of Tibetan astrology is very complex and contains a great collection of many different astrological systems. The scholars abstracted and tailored the astrology made for the necessity of the Tibetan people, from the Buddhist, Chinese, Indian Hindu astrology systems and of course the Bonpo ancient Tibetan native astrology. Basically it is a lunar mansion system of astronomy which gathers the Buddhist and Hindu astrology for solar, lunar and eclipse calculation with basic almanac and practice, whilst the elemental Chinese astrology is practically and actively used for seasonal, agricultural and personal health reasons. However, the system is a living astrology and practice in all Himalayan countries of Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal, Mongolia and Indian Himalayan states including Ladakh, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh.

Different traditions developed in later centuries:

- *Bonpo* astrology
 - *Phuglug* astrology (the main astrology school that has been dominant through centuries until now)
 - *Tshurtsie* the tradition developed in Tshurphu Karmapa monastery and which belongs to the Karma Kagyu lineage.
 - *Gedhen Sertsie* astrology, developed by the Gelukpa school
- etc.

Notes

¹ Bon history says that Tibetans are descendants of Yabla Dhaldrug (heavenly being) from the 13th stage of heaven. See more in Lopon Tenzin Namdak's *Narab-bodkyibyungva-jodpei-beltamlungjinyingpo-shebya-shugso* (Without year of publication.)

² Ibid

³ The Tibetan native religion is Bon, and practitioners are called *Bonpo*

⁴ Pasang Yonten Arya's *Bodkyi-sowarigpei-logyukyibangdzod-gyuthoglama-drenpei-phonya* pub. 1988

⁵ There are six seasons of two months each called *dhuetsig* or joint seasons. (see more in the Tibetan medicine section (table of energy cycles).

⁶ Desid Sangye Gyatsho's *Bedurya Karpo* pub. 1987 Tibet, China and Karnag-tsiskyilogyue pub. In Sichuan, China 1998

⁷ Details with names can be found in Desid Sangye Gyatsho's *Bedurya Karpo* p. 243

⁸ Mahayana is a translator, astrologer and physician also often found in the history of medicine, contemporary to the Tibetan King Trisong Deutsan

⁹ See more detail in Phugpa Lhundrub Gyatsho's *Palyulle-nampargyalwa-chepeigyudkyi-gyalpo-yangcharwei-gyachergrelwa -legparshadpei-jungog-chogtugawei-drayangshejawa* in Tsirigkunduechenmo pub. in Sichuan, China 1998

¹⁰ The Tibetan translated text mentions *thalwei-wangpo* as the name of lord Shiva, who is the emanation of Bodhisatva Avalokiteshvara, and consort Parvati.

¹¹ *Jungtsi* and *Nagtsi* (Chinese astrology) are the same but as the Tibetan culture and practice changed the face of Chinese astrology, it is then called *Jungtsi*, which means 'elemental astrology and practice'.

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