From: Richard Cook
Date: 2003-07-10 00:40:52 -0700
Subject: Re: 'Phags-pa...

Rick, I emailed Baxter again earlier, asking him for a sentence or two on why he thinks it's important to encode 'Phags-pa. If he has anything to add, I'll let you know. About who he is:

Dr. William H. Baxter is Associate Professor of Chinese and Linguistics, Department of Asian Languages and Cultures and Department of Linguistics, University of Michigan. He is author of *A Handbook of Old Chinese Phonology* <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/311012324X>, widely regarded as representing the state of the art for historical Chinese linguistics. His home page, complete with "A portrait of the lama 'Phags-pa, designer of an alphabet for all the languages of the Mongol empire", is here: <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~wbaxter/>.

-Richard

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Date: 2003-07-10 23:21:30 -0700

Rick, These are Baxter's comments on the importance of the script. He
says you may quote him. -Richard

-------- Original Message --------
Date: Thu, 10 Jul 2003 14:34:29 -0400
From: "William H. Baxter" (wbaxter @ umich . edu)

The hPhags-pa script (also written as 'Phags-pa) was perhaps the first script designed explicitly for multilingual use; it was developed by the Tibetan monk hPhags-pa on the orders of Khubilai Khan in 1269, and intended to be a script which could be used for all the languages of the Mongol empire. Texts in which the hPhags-pa script was used to write Chinese are an important source of information about the state of the Chinese language during the Mongol period: for example, the dictionary Mengu Ziyun [U+8499][U+53e4][U+5b57][U+97fb] of 1308 writes Chinese words in both Chinese characters and (phonetically) in hPhags-pa script. Examples of the hPhags-pa script are thus often required in academic discussion of the history of both the Chinese and Mongolian languages.

Note that although the script was not extensively used after the Mongol empire, examples still can be found today (see, for example, the columnar text on the left side of the Mongolian banknote pictured below):