


# Tibetan Buddhist Vanguard among the Mongols and Manchus, 1576-1638<sup>1</sup>

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his essay investigates the eastward journeys of eight Tibetan Buddhist vanguards between 1576 and 1638. The eight Buddhist monks introduced in this essay did not share sectarian, regional, and ethnocultural backgrounds. In what follows, we show that the earlier missionary peregrinations were spatially expansive and not centrally organized. In this essay, we identify the shared patterns of their travels and by shifting the focus away from the political epicenters of Beijing or Lhasa, we hope to study the developing efforts of Tibetan Buddhists to seek converts and financial resources.<sup>2</sup> The handful of Tibetan Buddhist vanguards under discussion here did not share a clearly Gelukpa inspired mission, but rather came from a range of traditions. While they may have been devoted to a particular Mongol patron for a time, they would court other supporters if their patron were defeated in war or otherwise lost power. These early missionaries established patterns for political maneuvering that inspired both the Dalai Lama's Buddhist government and the Manchu Qing court well into the eighteenth century.

The temporal scope under study was period of political reconfiguration that has had a long-lasting impact on the geopolitical history in Inner Asia ever since. Within Tibet, it was not until 1642 that the Dalai Lama line of reincarnations was able to consolidate a powerful political position and establish the Ganden Podrang Buddhist government in Lhasa. This was achieved largely through the military support of

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<sup>1</sup> To render Tibetan names, we use the THDL Transliteration system, except citations of published works for which we retained the original spellings. We use Pinyin to Romanize Chinese names. All translations are ours unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Li Wang, *Ming mo Qing chu Dalai Lama xi tong yu Menggu zhu bu hu dong guan xi yan jiu* (Studies of Interactions between the Dalai Lama Lineage and Various Mongol Tribes in the Ming-Qing Transitional Era), Beijing: Nationality Press, 2011. Söng-su Kim, *Ming-Qing zhi ji Zangchuan Fojiao zai Menggu di qu de chuan bo* (Tibetan Buddhist Dissemination in Mongolia during the Ming-Qing Transition), Beijing: Social Science Bibliography Press, 2006; Hoong Teik Toh, "Tibetan Buddhism in Ming China," Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 2004; Dora C. Y. Ching, "Tibetan Buddhism and the Creation of the Ming Imperial Image," in ed. David Robinson, *Culture, Courtiers, and Competition: the Ming Court (1368-1644)*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008, 321-364.

Gushri Khan (1582–1655), an Oirat Khoshut Mongol prince. The fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682) began to use the term Geluk consistently in defining his particular group of Buddhists in his *A History of Tibet, The Song of the Spring Queen*, written in 1643. The followers of Tsongkhapa (1357–1419)—posthumously recognized as the founder of the Geluk School—were commonly referred as Gandenpa in the *New Red Annals*, a Tibetan chronicle written in 1538. Even in the fifth Dalai Lama’s historical account, he acknowledged that the Tibetan Pakmodru dynasty “did honor to all sects without partiality.”<sup>3</sup> The Pakmodru rulers rose to power in Central Tibet in 1350, which went hand in hand with the decline of the Mongol power and its close allies, the Tibetan Buddhist Sakya hierarchs.<sup>4</sup> By 1364, the Sakya estate was split into four parts, each ruled by a member of the Khön family. This division led to internal political and economic struggles that contributed to the rise of the Pakmodru.<sup>5</sup> The Sakya School developed new sub-sects, each with its own monastic bases.<sup>6</sup> The Sakya’s internal division of both family estates and monastic institutions weakened their ability to counteract the emerging Geluk School. But the Geluk School’s dominance of the Tibetan Plateau needed more than the backing of Pakmodru rulers, whose patronage diminished over time. The Gelukpa were opposed first through the rise of the Rinpungpa family and later the Tsangpa kings.<sup>7</sup> The followers of Tsongkhapa were left no choice but to seek additional patrons far afield in Mongol lands and further east.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond Tibet, political turmoil similarly shifted geopolitical dynamics. To the east, the Wanli emperor (r. 1572–1620) saw Ming-dynasty China rapidly declining in front of him; to the north, a series of Mongol strongmen hoped to reunite the Mongols, whose leadership had disintegrated after they retreated north in the post-Mongol Yuan years; to the northeast, Nurhaci (1559–1626) united various Jurchen tribes and founded the Jin state, the predecessor of the Manchu Qing. In 1644, the Manchus crossed the Shanhai Pass and took over Beijing.

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<sup>3</sup> The fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lozang Gyatso, trans. Zahiruddin Ahmad, *A History of Tibet*. Bloomington, Indiana University: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1995, 147, 156

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 137–139, 145–8. Schwieger, *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China: A Political History of the Tibetan Institution of Reincarnation*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, 27.

<sup>5</sup> Personal communication with Leonard van der Kuijp, Nov. 1994.

<sup>6</sup> David Snellgrove and Hugh Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet*, Boston: Shambhala, 1995, 178–9.

<sup>7</sup> Both families were allied with the Red Hat Karma-pa incarnations. See the fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lozang Gyatso, 1995, 163 and Ahmad, 1970, 101.

<sup>8</sup> Zahiruddin Ahmad, “Sino-Tibetan Relations in the Seventeenth Century,” *Serie Orientale Roma*, vol. 40. Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1970, 96–7.

This was the beginning of Qing rule of China that would extend for the next two and a half centuries. Our goal here is to reveal the persistent effort undertaken by Tibetan Buddhists as the political turmoil unfolded in Inner Asia to demonstrate their active agency in engaging with the Mongol leaders, and then the Manchu rulers. Their missionary endeavors paved the way for more systematic and rigorous exclusively Gelukpa missionary enterprises in the eighteenth century. The later development, however, ought not to overshadow the foundation built by these earlier diverse Buddhist vanguards in the preceding two centuries with the Mongols and Manchus.

The notion of a lama's familial sectarian orientation was an attribute of consequence in this period. For example, Sonam Gyatso—the future third Dalai Lama—might in fact have come from “a distinguished family, connected with the Sakya and the Pakmodru rulers.”<sup>9</sup> The fifth Dalai Lama did not shy away from mentioning the third Dalai Lama's alleged familial connection to both the Sakya and the Pakmodru reign in his *History of Tibet*. Perhaps to him, the multiple connections legitimated Geluk power as a righteous successor to the Mongol Yuan-Sakya and then the Pakmodru dynasty in Tibet. The fifth Dalai Lama himself came from a prominent Nyingma family and courted relations with powerful Nyingma monks, whom he supported at Mindroling and Dorjedrak monasteries.<sup>10</sup>



Map 1 Important Sites under discussion, created by Shreena Pyakurel

<sup>9</sup> Snellgrove and Richardson, 1995, 183.

<sup>10</sup> Dominique Townsend, *A Buddhist Sensibility: Aesthetic Education at Tibet's Mindröling Monastery*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2021.

Beyond the political realm, the Geluk School was in debt to other philosophical traditions. Tsongkhapa embraced a range of traditions in his training; one of his two principal teachers was the Sakya lama Rendawa (1348/9-1412).<sup>11</sup> It was not until the enthronement of the fourth Dalai Lama (1589-1617), a Mongol, as the abbot of the Drepung monastery in 1603, with the military support that it entailed, that the Geluk School began to have any forceful political presence in Central Tibet.<sup>12</sup> To the Mongols, the institution of Tibetan Buddhist reincarnation also provided them with a means to exercise certain power over monastic and political contestations in Tibet; ultimately, they used it to sever deep-seated familial ties between the Tibetan aristocracy and Tibetan Buddhist monastic estates.<sup>13</sup> Thus, it was only in 1621 that an uneasy truce was established between the opposing parties of the Tsangpa allied with the Red Hat Karmapa Lama and the Mongols allied to the Ganden School.

In tandem with the rise of Geluk power, other schools' ability to influence affairs, especially outside of Central Tibet, dwindled after the fall of the Mongol Yuan (1279-1368). Four Sakya temples from the Mongol Yuan time continued to function until at least 1579 in the western Mongolian region of Liangzhou (modern Wuwei, Gansu Province), a town with a glorious past at the crossroads of Tibetan, Chinese, and Mongolian cultures.<sup>14</sup> But it was the Ming emperors Xuande (1426-1436) and Chenghua (1465-1488) who issued decrees to repair and maintain them. Owing to their geopolitical position, the Liangzhou temples welcomed both Han Chinese monks and Tibetan monks in much of their later history. The situation started to shift gradually with the rise of the Geluk hegemony. A cluster of Geluk monasteries replaced existing Sakya ones in Liangzhou. Tellingly, the fifth Dalai Lama did not expunge the Sakya from his historical account. Rather, he glossed over their sectarian affiliations.<sup>15</sup> Indeed his treatment of their involvement may be an indication that Geluk dominance was still not established as late as 1643 when he completed his account of

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 180 and 197. For more on this figure, Samten Chhosphel, "Rendawa Zhonnu Lodro," *Treasury of Lives*, accessed June 23, 2021, <http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Rendawa-Zhonnu-Lodro/8571>.

<sup>12</sup> Personal communication with Leonard van der Kuijp, April 1996.

<sup>13</sup> Schwieger, 2015, Chapter 2; Gray Tuttle, "The Role of Mongol Elite and Educational Degrees in the Advent of Reincarnation Lineages in 17th Century Amdo," eds. by Karl Debreczeny and Gray Tuttle, *Tibet's Turbulent 17th Century and The Tenth Karmapa*, Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2016, 235-262.

<sup>14</sup> Ngag dbang rnam rgyal, *Brgyud pa yid bzin nor bu'i rtogs pa brjod pa no mtshar rgya mtsho*, Lhasa: Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, 1992, 546.

<sup>15</sup> Wangqian Duanzhi and Jiang Zengli, "Saban yu Liangzhou sida fosi (Sa-Pan and the Four Liangzhou Temples), *Xizang yanjiu huixun* (Newsletter on Tibetan Studies), 15 (1993), 13.

Tibetan history, the *Song of the Spring Queen*.<sup>16</sup> At the time, internal competition was not limited to struggles between Tibetan Buddhists of different schools. Mongolian leaders were similarly consumed by contests for authority. In 1607, the death of Altan Khan (1507-1582)'s successor brought about internal rivalry for power.<sup>17</sup> The succession crisis that accompanied this turmoil did not end for some years.<sup>18</sup> In the meantime, Ligdan Khan (1588-1634) was also trying, unsuccessfully, to assert authority over his own people. For extra support, he turned to Tibetan Buddhism to solidify his legitimacy.<sup>19</sup>

In chaos lies opportunity. Two Buddhists from Tibet set out to meet Mongol leaders in the decade leading up to 1578 when the Altan Khan met Sonam Gyatso, the soon-to-be third Dalai Lama.<sup>20</sup> What brought the two groups together was an attack by Khutughtai Sechen Hungtaiji's troops on the Tibetans in northeastern Tibetan region of Amdo in 1566. Khutughtai Sechen Hungtaiji negotiated a surrender in which the "Three River Tibetans" submitted on the condition that the Mongols would accept Tibetan Buddhism as their religion.<sup>21</sup> The life stories of Sonam Gyatso and Altan Khan both mention a Buddhist monk, variously known as Aseng or Arigh, who allegedly came to explain the Buddhist religion and its benefits to Altan Khan in his court.<sup>22</sup> While hosting

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<sup>16</sup> Kurtis R. Schaeffer, Matthew Kapstein, and Gray Tuttle, *Sources of Tibetan Tradition*, New York: Columbia University, 2013, 538-540.

<sup>17</sup> Henry Serruys, "Sino-Mongol Relations: The Tribute System and Diplomatic Missions (1400-1600)," *Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques*, vol. 14, part 2, Bruxelles: Institut Belge des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1967, 111.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 102-3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 111. We leave out the Oirat communities to focus on Buddhists' activities to the east in this essay.

<sup>20</sup> Lin Chiu-yan, "Research on Emperors' Policies toward Mongols regarding Religion in the High-Qing," (M.A. Thesis, National Normal, 2000). Page 24-27, here Lin discusses how Altan Khan's nephew might have met with three lamas in 1566. But Lin could not find any sources on what sectarian affiliations the three lamas had. Altan Khan's meeting with the future third Dalai Lama was noted and source confirmed.

<sup>21</sup> Henry Serruys, "Early Lamaism in Mongolia," *Oriens Extremus*. 10, no. 2. (1963): 182.

<sup>22</sup> Hirehiro Okada, "The Third Dalai Lama and Altan Khan of the Tümed," ed. Per Kvaerne, *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 5th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, vol. 2. (Narita, 1992), 645-6. Johan Elverskog, "Whatever Happened to Queen Jönggen?" in *Buddhism in Mongolian History, Culture, and Society*, ed. Vesna A. Wallace (New York, N.Y: Oxford University Press, 2015), fn. 6, 18-19. Jiaye Chepai and Shuang Bao, "A Sheng Lama kao" (Studies of A Sheng Lama) in *Qinghai Min zu yan jiu* (Research on Nationality in Qinghai), vol 23, No. 1. (Jan. 2012): 80-85. Leiyi Wang, *Zang chuan Fojiao si yuan Meidai zhao Wudang zhao diao cha yu yan jiu* (Research on Tibetan Buddhist Temples: Meidai Temple and Wudang Temple), Beijing: China Tibetology Press, 2009. 28, n.1. Serruys mentions that Altan Khan went to Amdo to fight the Black Tibetans and brought back Aseng Lama. Serruys, 1963, 182.

Aseng in his encampment, Altan Khan continued his fight with the “Black Tibetans” in Amdo. This monk, of unknown sectarian affiliation, may well have been responsible for brokering Altan Khan’s meeting with Sonam Gyatso, the soon-to-be Dalai Lama.<sup>23</sup>

Even though his meeting with the future third Dalai Lama was of paramount importance, it was not Altan Khan’s first meeting with a Central Tibetan Buddhist prelate. Shortly before this meeting, Altan Khan welcomed the sixteenth abbot of the Taklung Order, a sub-sect of the Kagyü School.<sup>24</sup> Impressed by Taklung Kunga Trashi (1536-1605)’s religious power, Altan Khan made countless offerings of gold, silver, silk and cotton cloth, tea, horses, mules, and camels. Altan Khan also invited him to visit Chakhar Mongol land in 1576, but the Taklung abbot was too ill to travel and did not leave Central Tibet until after the new year in 1578.<sup>25</sup> A 1579 entry of the abbot’s spiritual biography indicates a cognizance of the meeting between Altan Khan and Sonam Gyatso: for the first time, Altan Khan’s name is preceded by the title bestowed by Sonam Gyatso: “Chos gyi rgyal po (Dharma King).”<sup>26</sup> At this point, the record of donations from Altan Khan becomes much more specific. Similar to Sonam Gyatso, the Taklung abbot simultaneously received a silver seal and a title: Tathagata (Tib. Dezhin Shekpa).<sup>27</sup> This title may have been intended to evoke that of the fifth Karmapa (1384–1415), who was called Dezhin Shekpa, a title received from the Ming Yongle emperor (r. 1402-1424).<sup>28</sup> In addition to the

<sup>23</sup> Ahmad, 1970, 87.

<sup>24</sup> Ngag dbang rnam rgyal, 1992, 544. Elliot Sperling, “Notes on References to Brigung-pa—Mongol Contact in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries,” ed. Per Kvaerne, *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 6th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, vol. 2. (Oslo, Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, 1992), 748, n. 29. Leonard W.J. van der Kuijp and Gray Tuttle. “Altan Qayan (1507-1582) of the Tümed Mongols and the Stag lung Abbot Kun dga’ bkra shis rgyal mtshan (1575-1635),” In *Trails of the Tibetan Tradition: Papers for Elliot Sperling*, edited by Roberto Vitali, with assistance from Gedun Rabsal and Nicole Willock, Amnye Machen Institute: Dharamshala (H.P.), India. 2014, 461-482. *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines* 31 (February 2017): 461-482.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 545. Johan Elverskog, “An Early Seventeenth-Century Tibeto-Mongolian Ceremonial Staff,” *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, no. 3 (December 2007): 2.

<sup>26</sup> Ahmad, 1970, 90.

<sup>27</sup> Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Rje btsun thams cad mkhyen pa bsod nams rgya mtsho’i rnam thar dngos grub rgya mtsho’i shing rta*. Delhi: Jayyed Press, 1982, 192.

<sup>28</sup> Leonard van der Kuijp pointed out the connection of this Taklung abbot’s new title with the fifth Karmapa, Dezhin Shekpa. See Leonard W.J. van der Kuijp and Gray Tuttle. “Altan Qayan (1507-1582) of the Tümed Mongols and the Stag lung Abbot Kun dga’ bkra shis rgyal mtshan (1575-1635),” In *Trails of the Tibetan Tradition: Papers for Elliot Sperling*, edited by Roberto Vitali, with assistance from Gedun Rabsal and Nicole Willock, Amnye Machen Institute: Dharamshala (H.P.), India. 2014,

official recognition, the abbot also received official documents, hats, and clothing, as well as a large sum of silver, which again was reminiscent of the established Mongol Yuan practice with regards to monks.<sup>29</sup> His last meeting with Altan Khan was in the autumn of 1579, when the khan gave him a kettle made of 1,500 *sran*gs of silver and other unspecified offerings.<sup>30</sup> This spiritual biography also reveals the active involvement of this region's Chinese officials with Tibetan Buddhism and suggests that Buddhist (probably Taklung) clerics may have had some, possibly long-term, relationship with these figures. For instance, the text lists the official of Xining along with Jina nangso and Drati nangso as having made offerings to the abbot at a place called Taklung lasar.<sup>31</sup> While this text provides no further details of their interactions, the Mongolian biography of Altan Khan relates that a person called Taklung nangso was one of the main envoys to Sonam Gyatso.<sup>32</sup> The presence of this figure at the court of Altan Khan may help to explain some of the respect shown to the Taklung abbot. It is also interesting to note that his role as an envoy to Sonam Gyatso indicates a fairly fluid relationship between differing schools—especially for monks who served at the court of the Mongols. The Taklung order appears to have been on neutral, if not friendly, terms with the Geluk School at this time. A former abbot of Taklung received the future third Dalai Lama Sonam Gyatso in 1558, and the Geluk requested the Taklung lama handle the mediation when the fourth Dalai lama's monastery was under attack by the Tsang king in 1610.<sup>33</sup> Sectarian conflicts exhibited later on often distorted the earlier history of mutual support and protection of mutual interests.

What was so appealing about Sonam Gyatso to Altan Khan? Among the many Tibetan Buddhist hierarchs in contact with the Mongols, Sonam Gyatso's singularity lies in his manifold familial and doctrinal associations. For the Mongols, it was paramount to allude to the patron-priest model that Qubilai Khan (1215-1294) and Pakpa (1235-1280) established. Many Mongol leaders viewed this model as a vital legitimating tool as they attempted to recreate the Mongol empire. As is well-known, Altan Khan's meeting with Sonam Gyatso was

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461-482. Also available for download as an issue of *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 31 (February 2017) 461-482. [http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/ret/pdf/ret\\_31\\_27.pdf](http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/ret/pdf/ret_31_27.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> Serruys, 1963, 203-4.

<sup>30</sup> Ngag dbang rnam rgyal, 1992, 546.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 545-6. For details about the title of nangso, see Kam, 1994, 128. "Taklung lasar" seems to refer to the "new" pass of Stag lung, but its location is unknown.

<sup>32</sup> Okada, 1992, 648 and 650. By the 1630s the role of those holding the title of nangso as envoys was apparently well established in Ming China and was being adopted by the Manchus as well, see Kam, 1994, 129.

<sup>33</sup> Sperling, 1992, 747. Snellgrove and Richardson, 1995, 193.

explicitly linked in narratives of the event to the earlier religio-political connections in the Mongol Yuan period.<sup>34</sup> The fifth Dalai Lama was to further elaborate on this ideological parallel in his own relations with Gushri Khan; interestingly, he omitted the third Dalai Lama's versatile connection with the Sakya tradition.<sup>35</sup> This omission perhaps reflects how the fifth Dalai Lama consolidated his power at a time when the Sakya tradition was significantly weakened and their patrons, the Mongols, defeated. The fifth Dalai Lama perhaps saw no need to allude to the third Dalai Lama's association with the Sakya School.

### 1578-1585: Amdo Buddhists at the Court of Tümed's Altan Khan in Southern Mongol Lands<sup>36</sup>

A descendant of the Mongol's ruling Borjigin clan, Altan Khan (r. 1542-1582) was an ambitious leader in the southern Mongolian community known as Tümed. Geluk-dominant historical narratives of early Tibetan Buddhists and their missionary undertakings in Mongol lands marked the meeting between Altan Khan and Sonam Gyatso, the third Dalai Lama *avant la lettre*, in 1578, as the beginning of a more substantial communication between the two. At their meeting in Amdo, Altan Khan requested the Dalai Lama send a representative to return with him to Köke Khota (present-day Hohhot). In response, Tongkhor (Tibetan: Stong 'khor, 1557-1587) Yonten Gyatso spent four years in Altan Khan's territory until 1582. During his stay, Yonten Gyatso was regarded as "the highest of the spiritual leaders there."<sup>37</sup> He was probably the first recorded Buddhist to represent the Geluk power in Mongol lands.<sup>38</sup> Yonten Gyatso was recognized as the second trülku of the Tongkhor line of reincarnations. This line continued to grow in influence as the Geluk School continued to consolidate power within Tibet and recruit more patrons to the east. By the time of the fifth Tongkhor

<sup>34</sup> Ahmad, 1970, 89-90.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 130 and 137.

<sup>36</sup> Some of the figures are listed in Coyiji, *Neimenggu Zangchuan Fojiao si yuan* (Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries in Inner Mongolia), Appendix I, Lanzhou: Gansu Minzu Chubanshe, 2014, 205-252.

<sup>37</sup> For a more detailed biographical account, see Sonam Dorje, "The Second Tongkhor, Yonten Gyatso," Treasury of Lives, accessed May 16, 2019, <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Second-Tongkhor-Yonten-Gyatso/3708>; Hurcha, Coyiji, and Wuyun, *Zangchuan Fojiao Zai Menggu Diqu de Chuanbo Yanjiu* (Research on the Tibetan Buddhist Dissemination in Mongolia), (Beijing: Nationality Press, 2012), 66-69. Walther Heissig, *A Lost Civilization: the Mongols Rediscovered*, New York: Basic Books, 1966, 29.

<sup>38</sup> W. D. Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History*, New York: Potala, 1984, 96. Ahmad, 1970, 90 states that a diplomatic office was set up at Tongkhor to maintain the relationship between the Gelukpa and the Mongols.



Ngawang Sonam Gyatso (1684-1752), the lineage had successfully maneuvered the selection of the second Jamyang Shepa and asserted its powerful position in the Amdo religious realm in the eighteenth century.<sup>39</sup> In a later account of the rise of the Tongkhor lineage, the posthumously recognized first Tongkhor actively transformed a Bon monastery in Kham into a Geluk monastery that came to be known as the Tongkhor Tashi Lhunpo.<sup>40</sup>

Another key power-broker in the Tibetan-Mongolian interaction was Tsoknyi Gyatso, later known as the first Zhapdrung Karpo. He represented the third Dalai Lama Sonam Gyatso in Mongol lands.<sup>41</sup> He was highly venerated among the Mongols and perhaps received estates from Holochi, a Mongol leader who recouped his strength in Amdo after being forced out of the Tümed region by Altan Khan.<sup>42</sup> Holochi's son was recognized as the second Zhapdrung Karpo in 1613 and given the name Lodro Gyatso (1610–1659). Lodro Gyatso received the title of Chahan nominhan from the fifth Dalai Lama for his mediation between the Khalkha and Oirat Mongols, and a "Jasak" title from the Qing Shunzhi emperor in 1648.<sup>43</sup> A oft-overlooked diplomatic endeavor of the Zhapdrung Karpo line of reincarnation was a curious mission in the fall of 1639. That is, a figure named Chahan Lama of Köke Khota joined a mission sent by Hong Taiji (1592-1643), but the mission was recalled before it left Köke Khota.<sup>44</sup> The presence of the Chahan Lama of Köke Khota in the aborted mission suggests that the

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<sup>39</sup> Sonam Dorje, [https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Ngawang-Sonam-Gyatso/TBRC\\_P1468](https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Ngawang-Sonam-Gyatso/TBRC_P1468). Accessed June 20, 2019.

<sup>40</sup> The Tongkhor lineage produced two lines of reincarnation. One is in Kham and the other is in Amdo. The Tongkhor Tashi Lhunpo is in Kham (TBRC G1552), recorded in the Chinese-language texts as Donggu si. It was converted into a Geluk monastery by the posthumously recognized first Tongkhor Trülku.

<sup>41</sup> Tsehua, "The First Zhabdrung Karpo, Tsoknyi Gyatso," *Treasury of Lives*, accessed November 06, 2017, <http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/First-Zhabdrung-Karpo-Tsoknyi-Gyatso/6670>. Date unavailable, but the second Zhabdrung Karpo was recognized in 1613, which indicates that the First Zhabdrung Karpo Tsoknyi Gyatso died some years before then.

<sup>42</sup> Holochi was variously recorded as Ho lo chi, Kho lo chi, Kholochi. W. W. Rockhill, "The Dalai Lamas of Lhasa and their Relations with the Manchu Emperors of China, 1644-1908," *T'oung Pao*, 11. (Leiden, Brill, 1910), 5. Rockhill states that he was known as the the Manjusri Hutuktu of Köke-Khota in Mongolia, Ahmad, 1970, 157.

<sup>43</sup> Tsehua, "The Second Zhabdrung Karpo, Lodro Gyatso," *Treasury of Lives*, accessed May 16, 2019, <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Second-Zhabdrung-Karpo-Lodro-Gyatso/6667>

<sup>44</sup> Kam, 1994, 81. David Farquhar, "Emperor as Bodhisattva in The Governance of The Ch'ing Empire," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 38, no. 1 (1978), 19-20; Samuel Grupper, "The Manchu Imperial Cult of the Early Ch'ing Dynasty: Texts and Studies on the Tantric Sanctuary of Mahākāla at Mukden," Ph.D. Dissertation, Bloomington: Indiana University, 1980, 147-148.

second Zhapdrung Karpo Lodro Gyatso was active among the Tümed Mongols in 1639. If this is not the case, then the first Zhapdrung Karpo propagated religion in Mongol lands with a separate lineage sharing the same epithet. The latter possibility is less likely because the title of Chahan nominhan was granted to Lodro Gyatso, the Amdo-originated Zhapdrung Karpo line. A local Mongolian line of reincarnation different from the first Zhabdrung Karpo would not likely have received the same title from the Dalai Lama. In any case, this line of reincarnation played an important mediating role in the Qing's Inner Asian politics. The second Zhapdrung Karpo Lodro Gyatso took another trip (or resumed the aborted mission?) to Tibet and returned east before 1646, shortly after the Manchus moved their capital to Beijing, having defeated the Ming troops.<sup>45</sup> Both Buddhist vanguards continued their legacy through the institution of reincarnation and laid the foundation for a cluster of Amdo-based Geluk prelates in negotiations between the Geluk Buddhist government and the Manchu Qing in later centuries. The institution of reincarnation enabled the Mongol patrons to refashion their identity within the Buddhist realm. Meanwhile, it also helped sustain the growth of Geluk School with patrons whose familial genealogy and religious genealogy converged.

At the time of the third Dalai Lama's death in 1588, Geluk Tibetan Buddhism under these new Mongolian patrons' auspices had established a firm base among the southern and eastern Mongols, having its center in Köke Khota and translation work on-going there and among the Kharachin, with temples further afield in Khalkha and Khorchin territory.<sup>46</sup> Before his death in 1582, Altan Khan had sponsored many temples and translations at Köke Khota, the capital of his region, and this work was to flourish under his sons and grandsons.<sup>47</sup> In 1585, the third Dalai Lama came to the Ordos and Tümed regions at the request of Altan Khan's son. Apparently, translation work continued in Köke Khota and in the Kharchin territory under the leadership of Siregetü guosi chos rje and Ayusi guosi respectively, probably to the end of the century and possibly beyond.<sup>48</sup> These nodal points attracted all walks of life in Mongol lands, whose continuous interest and support for Tibetan Buddhism further contributed to the growth of Geluk School in Inner Asia.

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<sup>45</sup> Ahmad, 1970, 164.

<sup>46</sup> Heissig, 1966, 28-32.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-9.

### Farther East to Chakhar Mongol Ligdan Khan's and the Manchu Courts

In this section, we will situate the relocation of particular Tibetan Buddhists within specific geopolitical contexts. Although these individuals played important roles in Ligdan Khan (1588-1634)'s court in the southern Mongolian region of Chakhar, each of them eventually left for the nascent Manchu Jin power further east in Mukden (modern-day Shenyang, Liaoning Province). The shifting location of their bases illustrates the historical contingency of the growth of Geluk power.

Shortly after coming to Tibet in 1603, the fourth Dalai Lama sent "the re-incarnation of Chamba-gyats'o, who became known among the Mongols as Maitri [Maitreya] Hutuketu" to be his representative in Köke Khota.<sup>49</sup> Sometime around the turn of the seventeenth century, a certain Maidari [Maitreya] from the Tümed Mongols went to Tibet in the hope of bringing a learned Buddhist teacher back to Mongol lands to recite Tibetan canonical texts in the Tibetan language; it is unclear whether this was the same person, called the Maidari Hutuktu, who turned up in Mongol regions in the first decade of the seventeenth century and was actively involved with various Mongol leaders.<sup>50</sup> In 1614, an Ordos prince exchanged titles with Maidari Hutuktu, who was thereby granted the title: "Yekede Asarakchi nom-un khaghan" (Tibetan: Rgya chen Byams pa chos rje).<sup>51</sup> In addition, later Mongolian sources also record that a lama with the title of Maidari Nomun [Tib. chos rje] Khaghan consecrated Ligdan Khan sometime between 1604 and 1617.<sup>52</sup> This initiation suggests that either the khan himself or the lama representative (which is more likely) was, even before the fourth Dalai Lama's death, moving between the Tümed capital of Köke Khota

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<sup>49</sup> Rockhill, 1910, 6. This name refers to Maitreya, the future Buddha; "Byams pa" in Tibetan also refers to Maitri, as in Maitreya. We are aware of the confusion and complexity centering on the Maitreya in a Buddhist's title, and we hope to contribute to the debate on the political implication of this title. See Heqiyeletu, "Zangchuan Fojiao Hutuketu Zhi Xian Kao Shi (A Study of the Kutuktu Title in Tibetan Buddhism)," *China Tibetology*, Beijing: China Tibetology Center, 1997, vol. 3, 37-44.

<sup>50</sup> Zhaqisichen and Haier Baoluo, *Yi wei Huofo de zhuan ji: Mo dai Ganzhuerwa Hutuktu de zi shu* (An Autobiography of the Last Kangyurwa), Taipei: Lianjing Press, 1986.

<sup>51</sup> Samuel Grupper, "Manchu Patronage and Tibetan Buddhism during the First Half of the Ch'ing Dynasty," *The Journal of the Tibet Society*, vol. 4. Bloomington, 1984, 66. Source: *Erdeni yin tobchi*.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-110. Grupper's source is the anonymous seventeenth century *Sira tuquji*. For another source, see Grupper, 1984, 81-3: *Altan kürdün mingkhan gegesütü bichig*, which was written by Siregetü Guosi Dharma in 1739. It must be remembered in this context that the author of the text was a Geluk Buddhist writing in the time of his school's triumph in Mongolia. Nevertheless, this initial contact is mentioned without emphasis and is followed by a clear reference to a Sakya monk who was prominent at Ligdan Khan's court.

(modern Hohhot) and the Chakhar region to the northeast.<sup>53</sup> If these sources may be trusted, then Ligdan Khan's first recorded contact with Tibetan Buddhism was with a representative of the fourth Dalai Lama.<sup>54</sup>

The colophon of a text that Walther Heissig discovered credits the translation of the text to a Maidari da yigung dayun güding guoshi, elsewhere called Daigüng sikü guoshi. As this translator is described as a contemporary of the aforementioned companion of the third Dalai Lama, Siregetü guosi chorji (last mentioned in 1620<sup>55</sup>) it is chronologically possible that Maidari Hutuktu and this translator are one and the same person.<sup>56</sup> If this identification is accurate, then we may begin to answer questions raised by Heissig's explorations of the colophons of early Mongolian translations of the Tibetan canon. Although his research does not reveal the definite presence of any single monk in both settings, Heissig demonstrates that the names of translators active at the Tümed court of Köke Khota through the beginning of the seventeenth century appear (again) in the colophons of works that were attributed to Ligdan Khan's sponsorship in 1628–9.<sup>57</sup> If the later Mongolian sources that record the meeting between Maidari Nomun Khaghan and Ligdan Khan in the early part of the seventeenth century can be trusted, their evidence helps pose part of an answer to Heissig's questions by establishing a connection between the Tibetan Buddhists in

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<sup>53</sup> Serruys, 1967, 102-3, 111. If this Lama and his companion Joni Corji (Tibetan: chone chos rje), were moving among the Chakhar Mongols prior to 1617, this would be the first firm date attested for envoys of the Dalai Lama to be moving so far north and east since the third Dalai Lama's visit to this region. The 1631 reappearance of "the Darkhan Chos-rje of Co-ne" as a pilgrim in the company of a huge group of Mongols visiting central Tibet does much to confirm the above association, see Ahmad, 1970, 110. Darkhan is a Mongolian term for a person free of taxes, such as a clergy member, see Kam, 1994, 127. Thus, this additional title marks the intimacy of his interaction with the Mongols.

<sup>54</sup> It is possible that the third Dalai Lama may have had close enough association with some Sakyapa to merit him entrusting them as his representatives. However, as Sakyapa affiliation is often clearly marked in Mongol sources, it may be safe to assume that he was Gelukpa, given his mission. Further research would have to consider Richardson's description of the relations between the Geluk School and Ligdan Khan. However, his research is quite outdated and obviously erroneous about many details of the Mongol affiliations with Tibetan schools, Hugh Richardson, "The Karma-pa Sect. a Historical Note," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, parts 3 & 4. [1958]: 157

<sup>55</sup> Heissig, 1966, 130-1. Also see András Róna-Tas, "The Mongolian Version of the Thar-pa chen-po in Budapest, ed. Louis Ligeti, *Mongolian Studies*, Amsterdam, B. R. Grüner, 1970, 457-9. This also places him at the capital of Altan Khan's successors, Köke Khota, modern Hohhot.

<sup>56</sup> The connection is unfortunately based only on the name of a Buddha, Maitreya, which might have been shared by many people. See Heqiyetu, 1997, 41.

<sup>57</sup> Heissig, 1966, 130-1.

Köke Khota and those at Ligdan Khan's court. In addition, this meeting and the possibility of Maidari's later participation in Ligdan's project complicate the relations that may have existed between Sakyapa and the Dalai Lama's representative in the entourage of Ligdan Khan.

These translation activities were to be crucial in the extension of Tibetan Buddhism to Mongolian regions.<sup>58</sup> During his tour of Mongolia, the Dalai Lama apparently sent images of the Buddha to Abudai of the Khalkha, which were enshrined in the Erdene Juu, one of the earliest known Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in Mongolia (est. 1585). In 1586, Lozang Zangpo—a Sakya lama—was sent by the third Dalai Lama to consecrate this temple in his stead.<sup>59</sup> With him came Siregetü guosi chorji, who was involved with the translation school founded in Köke Khota. The next year, the Dalai Lama extended his visit into the domain of the Kharchin further east, where another school for translation was set up.<sup>60</sup>

How did Tibetan Buddhism come to the Manchu's capital near Mukden, present-day Shenyang in northeastern China? An inscription, dated 1630, registers the building of a stupa to honor the first recorded Manchu court contact with a Tibetan lama active in Mongol regions. The Uluk Darkhan Nangso Lama submitted to Nurhaci in 1621, along with his dependent Khorchin Mongols.<sup>61</sup> The Uluk Darkhan Nangso Lama passed away shortly after arriving in the Manchu court. In 1630, a stupa was built to house Uluk Darkhan Nangso Lama's remains at the request of a certain "Bai Lama."<sup>62</sup> The 1620s are a significant yet under-explored decade in pre-conquest Manchu history. Even though Ligdan Khan was credited with sponsoring the translation and printing of the Buddhist canon Kangyur, the Kharachin and Bagharin Mongol communities—the very locations of the costly project—had deserted

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<sup>58</sup> Heissig, 1966, 130-1.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 27. He does not cite his source for this specific detail. This may well be the result of some later Geluk School's reinterpretation of history.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 28. In 1586 the third Dalai Lama went even further afield to the region of the Khorchin Mongols, north of the Liao River and east of the Khinghan range, to consecrate a temple at the invitation of their khan (32).

<sup>61</sup> A document in the *Manwen laodang* (The Old Manchu Chronicles) dated 1622 records that this lama had visited twice before 1621, see Yuxin Zhang, *Qing Zhengfu yu Lama Jiao* (Qing Government and Tibetan Buddhism), Xichang: Xizang Renmin chubanshe, 1988, 208-209; Eveline Yang, "Oluk Darhan Nangso," *Treasury of Lives*, accessed June 10, 2019, <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Oluk-Darhan-Nangso-/13075>.

<sup>62</sup> Zhang, 1988, 105. Tak-Sing Kam, "The dGe-lugs-pa Breakthrough: The Uluk Darhan Nangso [Nangso] Lama's Mission to the Manchus," *Central Asiatic Journal*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2000): 161-176. Li Qin-Pu, "B-a Lama and the Establishment of Buddhism from Tibet in the Ch'ing Dynasty," *Journal of the Institute of Modern History*, Taipei: Academia Sinica, Issue 30 (Dec., 1998): 65-100.

Ligdan Khan.<sup>63</sup> In fact, the Kharachin had officially concluded an alliance with the Manchus by 1628.<sup>64</sup> Ligdan Khan's downfall received little sympathy in Geluk historical writings. One widely-known account portrayed his fall from grace as the repercussions from his defying the established ruling practice, antagonizing allies, and ultimately collaborating with those persecuting the Geluk Buddhists.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, the Geluk sources possess a certain bias, since Buddhists across sectarian boundaries suffered from the loss of sponsorship in the political turmoil.

Ligdan Khan was close to Sharba Hutuktu, who was his religious advisor and perhaps involved in the Buddhist canon translation and printing project. But his name was not recorded in the editions of the Ligdan Khan-sponsored translations of Buddhist canons. The omission of this leading figure puzzled scholars, who concluded that Ligdan Khan fell into dissension with his close confidants like Sharba Hutuktu.<sup>66</sup> The Uluk Darkhan Nangso and Bai Lama's flight to the Manchu power was no doubt caused by Ligdan Khan's ambition of unifying and reviving the Mongol power under his leadership.<sup>67</sup> The incorporation of Tibetan Buddhism into the Manchu state was thus historically contingent but its legacy, the adaptations by both Tibetan Buddhists and Manchu rulers, remained versatile for several centuries.

The possible connection between a Tibetan lama originally present in Tümed territory with the Chakhar Ligdan Khan detailed above may well have another parallel in the person of Kunga Ozer (Kun dga' 'od zer) Mergen Mañjuśri Pandita. This figure's personal name supports a connection with the Sakya School because the personal name of one of the school's most distinguished scholars, Sakya Pandita, was Kunga Gyeltsen (Kun dga' rgyal mtshan). This possible link to the Sakya School indicates a contested process of establishing patronage for Tibetan Buddhists among the Mongols. Much about the Kunga Ozer Mergen Mañjuśri Pandita remains unknown. His positionality may shed light on the relations of Tibetan Buddhists with the Manchu rulers in Mukden after the fall of Ligdan Khan in 1634. This period was most difficult to account for the continued presence of the Tongkhor Mañjuśri Hutuktu, as the appearance of a Kunga Ozer Mergen

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<sup>63</sup> Heissig, 1966, 122-123.

<sup>64</sup> Johan Elverskog, 2006, Chapter 1, "The Mongols on the Eve of Conquest," 14-39. Heissig, 1960, 28. But Heissig's assessment of the state of Tibetan Buddhism among the Kharachin seem contradictory.

<sup>65</sup> Ho-Chin Yang, *The Annals of Kokonor*, Bloomington, Indiana University, 1969, 32-3.

<sup>66</sup> Heissig, 1966, 123. Róna-Tas, 1970, 479 n. 97. Heissig and Róna-Tas disagreed on whether Sharba Hutuktu was a special case, but both suggested there was broad resentment towards Ligdan Khan in his court.

<sup>67</sup> Walther Heissig, "A Mongolian Source to the Lamaist Suppression of Shamanism in the 17th Century," *Anthropos*, 48 (1953), 495.

Mañjuśri Pandita at the court of Ligdan Khan can only very tentatively be linked with the earlier Köke Khota figure describe above. Nonetheless, the institution of Buddhist reincarnation remained a dynamic mechanism in the Qing's Inner Asian politics. The break of a single incarnational lineage in this period did not remove powerful Buddhists from the political maneuverings.

Although the sons and grandsons of Altan Khan are said to have continued to patronize Tibetan Buddhism, their support may have become too unstable after the crisis in 1607 described above, which would leave another decade unaccounted for in this turbulent period. The only active support on record for the period beginning in the 1620s is the inscription from the Chakhar imperial complex at Chaghan Suburga from 1626.<sup>68</sup> For the decade between 1617 and 1626, the context of Tibetan Buddhism at the Chakhar court can be accurately characterized as Sakya in its sectarian orientation.<sup>69</sup>

Nevertheless, when the translation work for which Ligdan Khan is so famous for sponsoring took place, no distinction between sectarian affiliation is evident. The translation of the 1,100 texts attributed to Kunga Ozer Mergen Mañjuśri Pandita and his team of thirty-five scholars is said to have been the result of just two years of work, from 1628 to 1629. Heissig's queries as to the role of certain Köke Khota translators in this process are pertinent here: "How had these learned monks and translators come to work for Ligdan Khan in eastern Mongolia lands twenty or thirty years later? Or did he simply take credit for their work?"<sup>70</sup> Heissig clearly suspects the latter, and demonstrates some instances of the process, but he hesitates to say anything definitive.<sup>71</sup> The meeting of Maidari Hutuktu and Ligdan Khan, discussed above, suggests that contacts between the Tümed Tibetan Buddhists and the Chakhar were indeed ongoing. Thus, the possibility remains that the Tongkhor Mañjuśri Hutuktu from Köke Khota is the same as Kunga Ozer Mergen Mañjuśri Pandita of the Chaghan Suburga translation project's colophons.

The fact that the association with Tongkhor is not attested in the colophons is not surprising, given the length of time that had passed since his first arrival in Mongolian country and the altered situation. After the death of the fourth Dalai Lama, there is no further mention of the Tongkhor lama as an important juncture of communication between the Mongols and Tibetans. The Tibetan Buddhists in Mongol regions may well have been on their own through these years, especially the

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<sup>68</sup> Grupper, 1984, 65.

<sup>69</sup> A.M. Pozdneyev, *Mongolia and the Mongols*, vol. 1. (Bloomington, Indiana University, 1977), 238-63.

<sup>70</sup> Heissig, 1966, 131.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 132.

followers of Tsongkhapa, as there was fighting in Central Tibet from 1610 to 1621, and at least between 1634 to 1637 Amdo (and Kham) were controlled by rulers hostile to the Geluk School.<sup>72</sup> In any case, the use of the proper name (Kunga Ozer Mergen Mañjuśri Pandita) rather than an associated place name (Tongkhor Mañjuśri Hutuktu) may just reflect the different contexts in which the name was preserved. The colophon would be more likely to preserve the personal name, while common usage often seems to have been more oriented to place names and titles.<sup>73</sup> So, although the association with the bodhisattva Mañjuśri is the only obvious similarity in the names, there are other indications that these two names might refer to a single figure or incarnations in the same lineage.

The 1638 inscription of the Shisheng (“Real Victory”) Temple includes the story of the movements of the famed Mahākāla statue to its destination in Mukden. How and when did the cult of Mahākāla worship become a Geluk practice? This is perhaps the least understood aspect of sectarian contestations in the sixteenth century.<sup>74</sup> Many of the seventy plus forms of Mahākāla were established by the Sakya school, but later became important protective deities (dharmapālas; chos skyong) of the Geluk school.<sup>75</sup> The institutional transformation of this cult of Mahākāla worship remains largely unexplored. But its association with the Geluk school likely started at the time of the third Dalai Lama Sonam Gyatso. In 1558, he granted a Mongol official living north of Lhasa (in ’Dam) with “the authority of entrance into the Mahākāla tradition, at which time his appearance was wild, and he appeared in the form of Mahākāla to the official himself.”<sup>76</sup> Moreover, some twenty years later when Sonam Gyatso met with Altan Khan, he destroyed the shamanistic images of the Mongols with a ritual fire in the presence of Mahākāla.<sup>77</sup> Given the centrality of the Mahākāla Cult to the Mongols and the Manchus, it is important to point out that the Shisheng Temple was the first one built in the so-called “Mahākāla Complex” in Mukden. Even though the Shisheng Temple’s inscription does go into some detail as to the origins of the Mahākāla image, the statue is hardly central to the monastic complex named after the deity. Architecturally, the building housing the Mahākāla statue is smaller than the main hall, and

<sup>72</sup> Ahmad, 1970, 101-17.

<sup>73</sup> Other examples of this form of nomenclature are abundant in the Mongol sources, for example in the biography of Altan Khan: Stag lung (place name) *nang so* (title).

<sup>74</sup> On Shisheng Temple, see Yumiko Ishihama, “A Comprehensive Study of Imperially Sponsored Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries in Early Qing,” *Manzokushi Kenkyū* (*Journal of Manchu and Qing Studies*) 6 (December 2007): 1–39.

<sup>75</sup> De Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet: The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities*, (Kathmandu, Tiwari’s Pilgrims Book House, 1993), 38.

<sup>76</sup> Sperling, 1992, 742.

<sup>77</sup> Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, 1982, 192, n. 2.



off the central axis. Other temples within the Mahākāla complex were each associated with a particular deity, all of which were doctrinally distinct from Mahākāla, rather than being part of an entourage to complement the monastic complex.<sup>78</sup>

This temple was built, possibly under the direction of a monk who had been at Ligdan Khan's court, to commemorate the Manchu success over the Chakhar Mongols and to house the Mahākāla statue brought by Mergen lama.<sup>79</sup> The latter part of the inscription reads as follows, "At the request of Sharba Hutuktu, it was transferred to the realm of Chakhar's Ligdan Khan, the descendant of [the Mongols] of the Great Yuan Empire, and was worshipped [there]. After the benevolent Magnanimous Harmonious Holy Khan of the Great Qing Empire subjugated the Chakhar nation, its tribesmen all came to surrender. At this juncture, the Holy Emperor heard of Mergen lama's coming to submit with the Mahākāla [statue], [he] made the lamas welcome [Mergen] with protocol and had [the statue] installed west of Mukden city."<sup>80</sup> Since his former patron Ligdan Khan had turned against his own family and people and driven away his lamas, Mergen lama (likely Kunga Ozer Mergen Mañjuśri Pandita), who maintained possession of this important image, turned to the victors, the Manchus, for patronage. It stands to reason that an imminent figure would possess such an image and seek to use it to his own advantage and for those he represented, just as did the son and widow of Ligdan Khan, who are said to have tendered the Yuan seal as a token of their loyal submission to the Manchus. Although the name Mergen, a Mongol epithet of Mañjuśri,<sup>81</sup> is again the only obvious connection with Kunga Ozer Mergen Mañjuśri Pandita, the circumstantial evidence for the identity of this Mergen lama with Kunga Ozer Mergen Mañjuśri Pandita is reasonable and certainly possible.

To understand his position at the Chakhar court, a brief review of the prominent lamas and translators at the Chaghan Suburga is helpful. Sharba Hutuktu became Ligdan Khan's court chaplain in 1617 when he first consecrated the khan. At this time, "he founded a temple and a monastery and consecrated an image of Śākyamuni and other [images],

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<sup>78</sup> Zhang, 1988, 201.

<sup>79</sup> The satellite temple designs, started in 1643, were entrusted to Biligtü Nangso. Mergen Lama was welcomed, by order of the Khan, by Biligtü Nangso, for more see Grupper, 1980, 141. Grupper seems to imply that this Biligtü Nangso was present at Chaghan Suburga with Sharba Hutuktu and Mañjuśri Pandita, but he does not indicate his sources, see Grupper, 1980, 95.

<sup>80</sup> Kam, 1994, 139. Later Chinese sources interpret Mergen Lama's arrival as due to his understanding that the "fortune of Heaven" was shifting to the Manchu nation.

<sup>81</sup> Farquhar, "Emperor as Bodhisattva in the Governance of the Ch'ing Empire," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*. vol. 38, no. 1. Cambridge, MA Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1978, 12-13, n. 21.

and assembled translators headed by Gūngge oser (Kun dga' 'od zer) to translate with ease the *Kanjur*.<sup>82</sup> Heissig further describes the situation as, "Thirty-five Mongolian and Tibetan scholars and monks under the leadership of Kunga Ozer are reported to have translated the 1,100-odd works from Tibetan into Mongolian."<sup>83</sup> Róna-Tas goes into some detail on the extensive colophon references to Kunga Ozer Mergen Mañjuśri Pandita, including his Tibetan origins and the fact that he worked on these translations together with Sharba Hutuktu.<sup>84</sup> All of these details support the assessment that this figure was of major importance at the Chakhar court and a close associate of Sharba Hutuktu. Thus, when a "Mergen lama" is designated as responsible for the transfer of the Mahākāla statue to the Mukden court, it is plausible to conclude that this is the same person that figured so prominently at the Chakhar capital. In addition, the 1638 inscription reveals, for the first time, that the image was first brought to Ligdan Khan by Sharba Hutuktu. As Kunga Ozer Mergen Mañjuśri Pandita worked closely with this person and is the only other prominent figure mentioned at the Chakhar court, it is likely that the responsibility for leadership of its Buddhist community would fall to him.

### Conclusion

These Tibetan Buddhist vanguards discussed here showcase the diversity and complexity of this period. This short list of eight names is by no means complete. But we hope to stress the gradual and contested process through which the Tibetan Buddhists gained a foothold in Mongol regions and eventually were embraced by the Manchu court in Mukden. The process had a long-lasting impact on how the Manchu Qing imperial rulers envisioned a multicultural empire within which Tibetan Buddhism played an important role. By focusing on the period between 1576 and 1638, we show the origins of the presence of Tibetan Buddhists that were influential in shaping Qing imperial policies. Furthermore, we hope to call into question the notion of rigid sectarian boundaries in this early period and raise questions regarding assumed tensions between different schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Such tensions became crystallized as the Geluk Ganden Podrang grew increasingly powerful in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But in spite of this, political engagements went beyond sectarian

<sup>82</sup> From the anonymous *Sira tughuji*, see translation in Grupper, 1980, 110.

<sup>83</sup> Heissig, 1966, 125.

<sup>84</sup> Róna-Tas, 1970, 477 and 479; Grupper's translation of *Altan kirdün mingghan gesüitiü bichig* 1980, 83,

boundaries.<sup>85</sup>

The years between 1576 and 1638 were marked by a matrix of Buddhist missionaries, the decline of Mongol political power, and the rise of the Manchus. We hope to rekindle a discussion of the multifaceted interaction among all these groups and to expand the temporal scope of research to an earlier time so as to reconsider the shifting geopolitical history of Inner Asia beyond the purview of Qing China. The sporadic individual-driven journeys to the east by these eight Buddhist vanguards took place under specific historical circumstances that preceded the rise of the Manchu Qing and the Gelukpa hegemony. In the post-conquest phase of the Qing, it was upon this foundation that Qing emperors and the Ganden Podrang developed their imperial and religious agenda.

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<sup>85</sup> For a Nyingma envoy of the Geluk's fifth Dalai Lama in Nepal, see Michael Monhart, "Seeing All as One, Mediating between Gods, Humans, and Demons: The Travels of Katok Tsewang Norbu 1749-1751" (MA. Thesis, Columbia University, 2011).

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