


Game Changers of the Tibetan Buddhist Political Order in Central Asia in the Early Eighteenth Century¹

Darig Thokmay
(University of Oxford)

Introduction

 To comprehend the way Tibet's Buddhism shaped the political structure and diplomacy in Asia in the early 18th century, it is indispensable to go back to the developments during the late 17th century and explore the leading political figures and their visions and governing strategies. Therefore, this article will begin with a brief historical sketch of this turbulent period, outlining the power dynamics and leadership competition between the Mongols, the Manchus, and Tibet. The relations between these three entities during that time were described by those involved in terms of "preceptor-patron"² (*mchod yon*), "son of heaven and barbarians who are his subjects",³ and

¹ The author wishes to thank Professor Ulrike Roesler from the University of Oxford and self-trained researcher Angela Clyburn for their insightful comments and corrections. I am deeply grateful to these two wonderful scholars, who are always there, ready to help and offer academic guidance.

² The notion of preceptor-patron or *mchod yon* relations is a centuries-old Tibetan Buddhist approach to international relations in the Tibetan Buddhist world order. In the beginning, the idea was just about the relationship between religious leaders/institutions and their political/financial patrons in Tibet. However, in the 13th century, Sakya lamas introduced the concept to explain their relationship with the Mongol Khans of the Yuan dynasty, which broadened the scope of this terminology to describe the relationship between a Tibetan Buddhist master (*mchod gnas* or preceptor) and a foreign political leader (*yon bdag* or patron). This became the standard approach of the Tibetan Buddhist government to their foreign relations policy. Throughout Tibet's medieval history, the government managed their ties with other states through preceptor-patron relations, in which the patron was not only a financial supporter but also a protector. "*Rang rnam du ku la'i gos bzang*" by the Great Fifth Dalai Lama (2014, Vol-I, pp. 67-73) explains in detail Tibet's spiritual relationship with the Mongols and the Qing based on this Buddhist worldview. See further Cüppers (ed) 2000 and Norbu 2001.

³ The concept of Son of Heaven (*Tiān zǐ*) originated with the ancient Zhou dynasty, and it became the sacred title for the Chinese emperors throughout history. The Mandate of Heaven (1997) explains how the idea of "Son of Heaven" empowered rulers and legitimised his rule in China and barbaric regions. Regarding the Chinese classical texts, there are Four Barbarians (*sì yí*), referring to various non-Chinese people bordering China: Eastern Barbarians (*dōng yí*), Southern Barbarians

the “dual system of politics and religion”.⁴ In practice, these multi-faceted relations can also be interpreted in terms of mutual interest-oriented relations. This article will discuss how these relations played out in the late 17th century and how this set the scene for the developments in the early 18th century.

Upon the victory in the Tibetan civil war, Gushri Khan offered the thirteen territories (*khri skor*) of Tibet and his entire family lineage to the great Fifth Dalai Lama at bSam 'grub rtse palace in gZhi ka rtse, the capital city of the gTsang pa dynasty. The great Fifth Dalai Lama, previously merely a leading figure of a religious school among several others, suddenly became Tibet's real head.⁵ In the following years, the Dalai Lama gradually became the sole authority in terms of both spirituality and temporal influence in Tibetan and Mongolian societies. Gradually, Buddhism became more and more popular among the Manchus and northern Chinese people as well. The Kangxi emperor did not exclusively adopt Tibetan Buddhism, but he acknowledged the Dalai Lama's authority, "considering the fact that all the Tibetans and Mongols obeyed the words of the Lama [the great Fifth Dalai Lama]",⁶ and thus began to build Buddhist diplomatic relations with Tibet. During that period, Tibet-Mongol relations were different from Tibet-Qing relations, which were again different from Qing-Mongol relations, as will be demonstrated.

The Tibetan government, which was mainly run by spiritual leaders, enjoyed high influence in neighbouring countries because the Tibetan Buddhist soft power created a new legal and diplomatic order of international relations in Central Asia and beyond.⁷ This Tibetan Buddhist order of governance was beneficial in solving various social

(*nán mán*), Western Barbarians (*xī róng*), and Northern Barbarians (*běi dí*). These four barbarians are the distant subjects of the Chinese emperors, who are born to serve the Chinese emperors. Erica Brindley has explored this notion in the article, "Barbarians or Not? Ethnicity and Changing Conceptions of the Ancient Yue (*Yuè*) Peoples, ca. 400–50 BCE" (Brindley 2003). Throughout the centuries, the imperial Chinese foreign policy remained rooted in this old notion of "the Son of Heaven and the barbarians, who are the subjects." See further Pamela Crossley's article in "Sacred Mandates" (2018).

⁴ Generally, a dual governing system of religious and secular rule is familiar in many parts of the world. However, there are always variations from one system to another when it comes to the practical approach. In the Tibetan context, the dual system (*chos srid zung 'brel*) has three broad implications. First: a government, which is administered based on Buddhist principles. Second: a government, its spiritual and temporal head is one Buddhist person. See further information Dung dkar Rin po che's work "*Chos srid zung 'brel skor la dpyad pa*" (2014) and David Seyffort Ruegg's article about *yon mchod* (1995).

⁵ Karmay 2003, p. 72.

⁶ Rockhill 1910, p. 14.

⁷ Boltjee and Praag 2020, pp. 59-62.

and political conflicts peacefully: the Mongols negotiated major internal conflicts through Tibetan lama-mediators, and the Manchus pacified the Mongols at their northern border with the help of Tibetan Lamas. The dGa' ldan pho brang government at the time was still working on unifying the remaining Tibetan territories under their rule and making peace with other political and religious rivals. However, their unique dual governing system was adopted in many countries, which changed central Asia's political landscape.⁸

The political leaders involved in this Tibetan Buddhist political world order in Asia contributed significantly to the developments of the social, cultural, and political events in the early 18th century in Tibet. This article, therefore, analyses these game-changers of the central Asian political world.

Mongol Leaders Under the Wing of dGe lugs School

The Khoshut Mongols

Regarding the Khoshut Mongols in central Tibet and Amdo Kokonor regions, Gushri Khan (1582-1654), the founder of the Khoshut-Tibetan army, who had died three years before, was succeeded by his elder prince bsTan 'dzin rdo rje in 1658 and the Dalai Lama gave him the title of Tenzin Dayan Khan.⁹ Some scholars argue that Gushri Khan alone had real power, but his descendants "had been the King of Tibet in name only"¹⁰ except lHa bzang Khan. After Gushri Khan, the Khoshut Mongol kings' influence in Tibet had, indeed, begun to decline rapidly and finally disappeared. According to the 18th-century scholar Sum pa mkhan po, there are several reasons: first, Tenzin Dayan Khan had neither charisma nor legacy like his father. Second, unlike during his father's time, the great Fifth Dalai Lama's prestige surpassed that of other leaders such as the Khoshuts. Third, the Khoshut leaders were facing constant internal conflict regarding hierarchy and territory both in Central Tibet and in Amdo Kokonor areas.¹¹ Tenzin Dayan Khan, unfortunately, untimely passed away in 1667.

In 1671, four years after Dayan Khan's death, dKon mchog bstan 'dzin, the younger prince of Gushri Khan, became the Mongol Tibetan Khan with the title of dKon mchog bstan 'dzin Dalai Khan.¹² Conversely, some Tibetan government documents, dKon mchog bstan

⁸ Brook, Praag and Boltjee 2018, pp. 99-100.

⁹ Shakabpa 2010, p. 361, and lNga ba Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2014, P. 433.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 359.

¹¹ Sum pa ye shes dpal 'byor 1994, p. 67, and Sum pa ye shes dpal 'byor 1989, pp. 89-103.

¹² Shakabpa 2010, p. 378.

'dzin Dalai Khan was the oldest prince of Tenzin Dayen Khan and Gushri Khan's grandson.¹³ Regarding the general tradition of Mongolian throne succession, dKon mchog bstan 'dzin should be the biological son of Dayen Khan, but that is not always the case for Mongol Khans in Tibet, which may have caused deviations from the regular system of father-to-son succession. Like his predecessors, dKon mchog bstan 'dzin Khan "did not interfere in political matters at all, but provided leadership for the Mongolian army, in case the Tibetan government needed them."¹⁴ Since 1683, after the great Fifth Dalai Lama's death, the sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653-1705) dominated the power of Tibetan government, and the Mongol-Tibetan Khan did not have much space to exercise his influence. After almost three decades in the position, dKon mchog bstan 'dzin Khan became sick in 1700 and passed away at the end of the same year.¹⁵ The Khan did not have any strong political alliance among the Tibetan aristocrats. However, during his last years in the position, he built a good relationship with the purist dGe lugs pa leader 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa. This relationship with the purist leader became the backbone of the power struggle for his son and successor lHa bzang Khan.

The Eastern Mongols

For the Khalkhas, Chahars and Kokonor-Khoshut Mongols, Tibet was a sacred land and a political power source. Whoever had better support from the dGa' ldan pho brang was able to enjoy a higher status in Mongolian society. The Mongols, especially those from the Kokonor and Khalkha regions, developed a custom of paying a visit to Central Tibet at least once a year to make donations to Tibetan Lamas, politicians, and monasteries, to earn both religious merits and political benefits. Keeping a high status in the Tibetan political hierarchy was extremely important for Mongol chieftains for their status back home. The 18th-century scholar, Thu'u bkwan Chos kyi nyi ma, vividly narrated the catastrophic revolt of Qingwang Blo bzang bstan 'dzin in 1723 that caused the massacre of an entire Dzungar tribe because of a seating arrangement discord between the Mongols and Manchu officials in 1720.¹⁶

Moreover, Mongolian aristocrats had a popular tradition to send their sons, even sometimes daughters, to Tibet to study Buddhism and build a relationship with Tibetan Lamas and political leaders. The

¹³ bKa' drung nor nang pa 1981, f. 35a.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 359.

¹⁵ bSe ngag dbang bkra shis n.d, f. 77a.

¹⁶ The'u bkwan chos kyi nyi ma 1911, ff. 36b-48b and the work of Sum pa ye shes dpal 'byor 1989, PP. 67-78.

great Fifth Dalai Lama explained in *the biography of the Third Dalai Lama* that the ruthless and wild Mongols converted into faithful and compassionate people under the Buddha's blessing.¹⁷ Knowing this phenomenon, the 19th-century Russian scholar and explorer Nikolai Przewalski argued, "Buddhism to be a religion that sapped vitality and hindered progress" of the Mongols.¹⁸ However, famous Dzungar leaders such as dGa' ldan Khan and Tse ring don drub studied and were trained in Buddhism at bKra shis lhun po monastery in Tibet but they later became aggressive leaders of historical importance. Gushri Khan was also a well-known religious practitioner and undefeated military leader at the same time. Tibetan Buddhism Perhaps did not "sap the vitality" or "hinder the progress" of the Mongols, but it brought some changes in Mongolian society, as the Tibetan Buddhist dual system replaced the existing political-legal order in Mongolia.

In the late 1690s, certain Manchus and Dzungars attempted to create discord between the eastern Mongols and the Tibetan government under the leadership of sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho because of the rumours created by the purist dGe lugs followers.¹⁹

The Biography of the Sixth Dalai Lama says:

"You [Manchus/Dzungars] have to fight with us first if you want us to go against Tibet. We [the Mongols] and the Tibetans are the same Lama's adherents. Thus, if we break our spiritual bond, the protector deities will punish us."²⁰

Despite the attempts of the Manchus and Dzungars under the influence of the purist dGe lugs followers, the Mongols generally never betrayed Tibet and Tibetan Lamas because of the deeply rooted cultural, spiritual and political relationship between Tibet and the Mongols. Tibet thus enjoyed an unmatched position of dominance among the Mongols both in terms of politics and spirituality.

¹⁷ INga ba ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2014, pp. 78-82. The Great Fifth Dalai Lama elaborated the Third Dalai Lama's work and how he re-converted the "wild Mongols" into faithful Buddhist followers. Also see "*Mu li chos 'byung*" (1992, PP. 126-132) by the 18th-century historian, Ngag dbang mkhyen rab, who narrated the same story to praise the influence of the Dalai Lama.

¹⁸ Perdue 2005, p. 104.

¹⁹ Purist dGe lugs followers believe in the purity of the dGe lugs tradition and maintain that it should be an exclusive and dogmatic school because they regard the dGe lugs school as superior to the other Buddhist traditions in Tibet. There were influential figures in both political and religious spheres of dGa' ldan pho brang who belonged to this group.

²⁰ sDe srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho 1989, p. 723.

The Oirat Mongols

According to early European scholars such as Peter Simon Pallas (1741-1811) and I. Ia. Zlatkin (1635-1758), most of the Oirats were unified under the Dzungar leader Erdeni Batur, but recent scholars such as Miyawaki Junko argued that the true unification of the Oirats as a Khanate occurred only in 1678 under the charismatic leader dGa' ldan dpal bzang Khan (1644-1697),²¹ the fourth son of Erdeni Batur. He had studied Buddhism in Tibet, but upon hearing the assassination of his elder brother Sangs rgyas (Sengge) in 1670, dGa' ldan abruptly renounced his monastic vows and went back to Dzungaria. At home, dGa' ldan quickly took charge of the Dzungar leadership and killed Ochirtu Chechen Khan, the murderer of his brother Sangs rgyas. For the Oirat Mongols, the most difficult challenge was that they could not claim the title of Khan because in the Mongolian tradition, only patrilineal biological offspring of Chinggis Khan could assume this title.²² However, in 1678, the great Fifth Dalai Lama conferred Boshotktu Khan's title on dGa' ldan, which made him the undisputed Khan of the Dzungars. During that time, only the great Fifth Dalai Lama had the power to confirm or rearrange the hagiarchy of Mongol leadership. Gradually, dGa' ldan Khan expanded the Dzungar state into the most significant empire in Central Eurasia in the late 17th century.

While the Manchus were busy fighting against the last Ming forces, the three factions of feudatories in southern China, dGa' ldan Khan rapidly rose in power. He began to extend his influence from the Western to the Eastern Mongols. In the beginning, the relationship between the Kangxi emperor and dGa' ldan Khan was friendly and respectful – they exchanged lavish gifts and made a special concession for each other in terms of trade. The two influential leaders had several small quarrels since the 1670s. However, the direct confrontation began to develop only later because of two incidents during the time of conflict between Tusiyetu Khan and Jasaktu Khan, the leaders of two powerful tribes from eastern Mongolia: First, in 1686, the rje btsun dam pa Khutukhtu had disrespectfully sat directly across the Dalai Lama's representative at the Kuleng Barqir meeting and dGa' ldan Khan strongly criticised the behaviour of the Khutukhtu. Secondly, Tusiyetu Khan, the brother of the Khutukhtu, launched a surprise attack on the army of dGa' ldan's allies in eastern Mongolia and killed dGa' ldan's younger brother.²³

During those occurrences, Kangxi openly supported Tusiyetu Khan

²¹ Perdue 2005, p. 104.

²² Perdue 2005, p. 104.

²³ *Ibid*, pp. 144-151.

and the Khutukhtu, which led to a direct clash between Kangxi and dGa' ldan Khan. Some Qing documents treat those encounters as dGa' ldan's strategy of dominating all Mongol people.²⁴ However, the Jesuit Jean-François Gerbillon (1654–1707) who had travelled widely in Mongolia and Manchuria and was an eyewitness to this clash, argued that dGa' ldan's main motive was simply to take revenge for his brother's death.²⁵ Unlike the above two arguments, dGa' ldan himself repeatedly claimed that his actions were taken to protect the Dalai Lama's prestige.

dGa' ldan's personal letter to the Dalai Lama and the Kangxi emperor raised the claim:

"Since Gush Nomun Khan, we four Olod [Oirats] have also been patrons of the Dalai Lama. We[Mongols] have each lived peacefully and separately in our lands. We have not waged war against the Jebzongdanba Khutukhtu or Jasaktu Khan. They [r]Je btsan dam pa] failed to respect the Dalai Lama's representative, causing great turmoil."²⁶

In the Qing-Dzungar war, the Kangxi personally led massive military campaign to fight against dGa' ldan Khan and his Dzungar followers. In the beginning, Kangxi did not have confidence that he could win the war. Thus, he appealed to the Dalai Lama repeatedly to advise dGa' ldan and act as a mediator between the two rivals and attempted to invite the Fifth Panchen Lama to Peking. At the same time, the Qing diplomatically persuaded the other Mongols and Muslim leaders from the oasis towns of Hami and Turfan to support their fight.²⁷ Furthermore, Kangxi also signed treaties with the Russian emperor to make

²⁴ Ibid, p. 149.

²⁵ Gerbillon 1735, pp. 121–134. Gerbillon's travel accounts are compiled in "*A Description of the Empire of China and Chinese-Tartary*", edited by Du halde.

²⁶ *Dà qīng lìcháo shǐlù* 2012, Vol-5, p. 67. For the translation from Chinese, Perdue's translated work was used (2005, p. 197). This vital collection of official documents, short title *Qīng shǐlù* (Veritable records of Qing dynasty) is a chronologically arranged collection of so-called "veritable records", the essential proclamations, issued during the Qing period (1644-1911), through 11 reigns, and in 12 parts including the *Mǎnzhōu shǐlù* (the veritable records of Qing people).

²⁷ The Muslims from oasis towns such as Hami and Turfan are originally Turkic Muslims who had arrived there in the 9th to 10th centuries from the Middle East. In the 13th century, they were integrated into the Mongol Empire and thus became a part of Chagatai Khanate for centuries. When the Dzungar Empire became dominant in this region, many Muslim rulers such as king Afaq Khoja became puppets of the Dzungars. However, during the Dzungar-Qing war, the Muslims supported Kangxi and submitted under Manchu's power. Later they launched a few rebellions to free themselves from the Qing but failed. See further the work of the 18th Century scholar Wèiyuán's work "Shèng wǔ jì", Vol-IV and James Millward's work (Millward 2007).

Russia as an ally and to weaken Russia's close relationship with the Dzungars. Finally, the Manchu Qing court even convinced the rival Dzungar leader Tshe dbang rab brtan, the nephew of dGa' ldan, to back up the Qing military campaign against dGa' ldan Khan. However, as discussed before, the Qing desperately failed to terminate Tibet's close relationship with dGa' ldan Khan because dGa' ldan Khan's relationship with Tibet and Tibetan leaders were deeply rooted in culture and intimate connections.

On 4 April 1697, dGa' ldan Khan suddenly died at Aca Amtatai, a land between Kara Usu Lake and Khobdo.²⁸ Both Danjila, a brother and the best general of dGa' ldan, and Cembu Sangbu, dGa' ldan's trusted doctor, confirmed that dGa' ldan died of natural causes. But the Kangxi emperor insisted on keeping his own prediction that dGa' ldan would commit suicide because it was "Heaven's Will", the ideal narrative of Confucianism. Qing court historians, thus, had to fabricate the suicide narrative to support their emperor.²⁹ The short-time relief of the Qing empire was disrupted again when two new leaders of the Dzungars formed another Dzungar empire. The first leader was the above-mentioned Tshe dbang rab brtan (r. 1697–1727), head of the new Dzungar empire who allied himself with the Qing court to destroy dGa' ldan. The second leader was Tshe ring don grub, the foremost general of the new Dzungar military force, who also happened to be a former monk from bKra shis lhun po monastery in Tibet. The new Dzungar leaders were very close to the purist dGe lugs lamas in Tibet who caused a catastrophic political disaster in Tibet in the early 18th century.

IHa bzang Khan and the Purist dGe lugs followers

IHa bzang klu dpal (c.1660-1717) was the second prince of bsTan 'dzin Dalai Khan, and later became the 4th Mongol Tibetan Khan in central Tibet. He also had an elder brother called bsTan 'dzin dbang rgyal. IHa bzang studied in Lhasa with other aristocratic children and became a learned scholar in classical Tibetan studies.³⁰ Petech said that "IHa bzang was a man of character and energy, who was ambitious for

²⁸ Wēn dá 1994, Vol-II. p. 66. These Qing official historical records were published in two volumes, as they had been in their original form. They include documents related to Kangxi's military campaigns in north-west China such as Dzungaria and eastern Mongolia.

²⁹ Wēn dá 1994, Vol-II. p. 66-67.

³⁰ bSe ngag dbang bkra shis n.d, ff. 26a-31b. *The biography of the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa* reported some occasions while the sDe srid and IHa bzang Khan had intellectual debates about Buddhist philosophical doctrines. Like many other Mongol elites, IHa bzang was a highly learnt scholar.

power and position"³¹ and Peter Schwieger³² supported the claim, but there is no efficient evidence to prove this narrative. However, the purist dGe lugs pa leaders strategically supported lHa bzang Khan and made him a potential competitor of the sDe srid,³³ which caused the Khan became more ambitious and greedier for political power. At that time, sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho was still the dominant leader of Tibet and his government had a very inclusive policy toward all religious traditions in Tibet including Bon, unlike the exclusive idea of the purist dGe lugs pas. Therefore, the purist dGe lugs followers desperately wanted to destroy the sDe srid by allying with the Mongol Tibetan leader lHa bzang Khan and form an exclusive dGe lugs pa government.

In 1699, a family quarrel between bsTan 'dzin dbang rgyal and lHa bzang klu dpal, the two princes of bsTan 'dzin Dalai Khan, for inherited family property became more and more confrontational. The sDe srid, as the leader of Tibet, initiated the negotiation: He diplomatically settled the conflict and divided the family estate among them. lHa bzang was then sent to the Kokonor region with the share of his estate and tax revenues.³⁴ During that time, the Qing just defeated dGa' ldan Khan and attempted to establish their permanent influence in Amdo Kokonor region. Thus, the Amdo Khoshut leaders found themselves in a position of uncertainty about their future. lHa bzang seemed critical of the Kokonor Mongol leaders visiting the Kangxi emperor when the latter invited Amdo Mongol leaders.³⁵ lHa bzang had almost faced civil war with Kokonor Mongol leader mGon po over their argument on the relations between the Qing and Amdo Kokonor Mongols.³⁶ Because of all these reasons, lHa bzang failed to build a bridge of trust and friendship with his relatives who were leaders in Amdo Kokonor region.³⁷

In 1700, King bsTan' dzin Dalai Khan became ill, and passed away approximately on 13 December 1700 in his home, Lhasa but this date is attested in the early 18th-century biography of the First 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa.³⁸ Petech, on the other hand, recorded the date as January 1701, which is based on Qing documents,³⁹ it is because the Qing court

³¹ Petech 1972, p. 10.

³² Schwieger 2015, p. 116.

³³ bSe ngag dbang bkra shis n.d, ff. 90ab-92a.

³⁴ sDe srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho 1989, p. 611.

³⁵ Petech 1966, pp. 268-269.

³⁶ Petech 1966, pp. 268-269.

³⁷ Sum pa ye shes dpal 'byor 1992, pp. 215-220 and see further Sum pa ye shes dpal 'byor 1989, p. 68.

³⁸ bSe ngag dbang bkra shis n.d, ff. 56b-57a.

³⁹ Petech 1966, P. 270.

perhaps did not receive the information of the Khan on time. Regarding the succession, Zha sgab pa claims that since the elder prince bsTan' dzin dbang rgyal was in Mongolia as an adopted prince, lHa bzang, the younger prince was invited from Amdo Kokonor region and formally enthroned him as the 4th Mongol Tibetan Khan in central Tibet in 1703.⁴⁰ Contrarily, Petech and Tucci claim that bsTan' dzin dbang rgyal, the elder prince of Dalai Khan, became the Khan after his father's demise in 1701, but was poisoned by his younger brother lHa bzang klu dpal in 1703.⁴¹ However, according to primary Tibetan materials, it is clear that bsTan' dzin dbang rgyal had nothing to do with either the poisoning or the adoption narrative.

The Biography of the First 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa, written in the early 18th century, vividly recorded:

"In the Iron Dragon year [1700], the prince bsTan' dzin dbang rgyal was seriously ill for a long time due to an evil spirit. He was completely paralysed and could neither speak nor move soon after; the prince passed away."⁴²

The First 'Jam dbyangs bzhad himself visited the sick prince and performed rituals for his recovery⁴³ but the former was died of sickness in 1700. Besides, by comparing the biographies of the Fifth Panchen Lama and the 'Jam dbyangs zhad pa, it became clear that the prince, bsTan' dzin dbang rgyal, had died earlier than his father, Dalai Khan, who died in the December of 1700. Thus, the title of Mongol Tibetan Khan was naturally bestowed on lHa bzang who had recently returned from Amdo Kokonor region. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that lHa bzang formally became the Khan only in 1703, after three years of his father's demise. *The Autobiography of the Fifth Panchen Lama* notes, "this year [1703] I sent my chamberlain [to Lhasa] to take part in the celebration of the prince lHa bzang's enthronement to become the king."⁴⁴ In most cases, Mongol Tibetan khans were formally entitled as Khan only after several years of each predecessor's passing, depended on the sDe srid or the Dalai Lama who had to lead enthronement ceremony.

Most of the modern Tibetan scholars have general perspective that, from the beginning of 1700, lHa bzang "did not intend to tolerate any

⁴⁰ Zhwa sgab pa 1976, 473. I quoted from both Tibetan and English(translated) versions of Shakabpa's history book because there are interesting differences between two. I have referred him as Shakabpa for his English version and Zhwa sgab pa for the Tibetan one.

⁴¹ Petech 1966, p. 270. and Tucci 1980, p. 77.

⁴² bSe ngag dbang bkra shis n.d, ff. 76a-77b.

⁴³ bSe ngag dbang bkra shis n.d, ff. 76a-77b.

⁴⁴ PaN chen blo bzang ye shes 1999, p. 340.

longer the powerless state to which the Qoshot [Khoshut] chiefs had sunk. At once, he began to show activity and interest in Tibetan affairs, which portended a revival of the almost absolute paramountcy of his family."⁴⁵ However, the argument is problematic because there had no record of lHa bzang's activities against the sDe srid before the former joined with the purist dGe lugs pas. lHa bzang seemed to know well that he did not have any reliable supporters in central Tibet. Moreover, many aristocrats in Lhasa wanted to get rid of Mongol influence from central Tibet. Elliot Sperling argued that "the relatively few Mongols in Tibet, like the relatively few British in India, were highly dependent on personnel."⁴⁶ lHa bzang initially relied heavily on good relations with the Tibetan government, but he became increasingly aggressive in the power struggle against the sDe srid after the purist dGe lugs pas began to support him. lHa bzang was the first Mongol Tibetan king who fought against the existing dGa' ldan pho brang power and the last Mongol Tibetan Khan in Tibet descended from Gushri Khan, who enjoyed the highest political power.

Kangxi's relationship with the Tibetan Buddhist lamas

In the 1670s, with his grandmother's help, Dowager Xiao Zhuang, Kangxi (1654-1722) was successful in gaining power from four regents. Kangxi grew up with the Shamanic culture brought to Peking by his ancestors, but he learnt the Chinese language and culture and mastered the Confucian classics. Kangxi began to rule China by using Chinese institutions and Confucian ideology, but he remained faithful to his Manchu culture. Shamanic rituals were essential to the Qing rulers for maintaining their ethnic roots and separate identity, but Confucian ideology helped the Kangxi emperor to administer the empire and gave him legitimacy among the Chinese. Kangxi also had a close connection with Tibetan Buddhism, which helped him dealing with the Mongols and Tibetans, and recent scholars have argued that he gradually became devoted to Tibetan Buddhism.⁴⁷ In addition to his mili-

⁴⁵ Petech 1972, p. 10.

⁴⁶ Sperling 2014, p. 197.

⁴⁷ According to *the biography of the lCang skya Ngag dbang blo bzang chos ldan*, he explains the devotion of the Kangxi emperor in Tibetan Buddhism, and Buddhist philosophy and tantric empowerments. Also see the brief biography of lCang skya Ngag dbang blo bzang chos ldan in *Gangs can mkhas dbang rim byon gyi rnam thar mdor bsdu*. pp. 359-363.

tary talents, Kangxi was also a liberal cultural man who brought cultural diversity to the Qing empire.⁴⁸

Generally, Kangxi was an open-minded and dynamic leader; he was interested in various scholarly fields such as geometry, mechanics, astronomy, cartography, optics, medicine, music and algebra from other civilisations, and the emperor sponsored many scholarly and professional projects in the country.⁴⁹ He highly admired Christian Jesuits and their specialised skills, and he offered them various levels of positions with different tasks at his court. Jesuit cartographers were encouraged to draw China's first map, and Jesuit physicians became Kangxi's personal doctors. Moreover, some Jesuit astronomers worked at the imperial calendrical bureau, and Jesuit fathers with linguistic skills became imperial interpreters.⁵⁰ Kangxi, however, did not tolerate the attempts of Christian missionaries to dominate Manchu and Chinese culture, and he firmly rejected the proposal of the Pope in Rome to appoint an emissary to Peking. Kangxi also opposed the Jesuits' attitude of refusing to offer respect to Manchu and Chinese traditions, and he commanded Jesuits and other missionaries to agree with "the definition of Confucian and ancestral rituals" he himself had formulated.⁵¹ The emperor had a similar approach toward Muslim chieftains and Russian Orthodox leaders; he was happy to accommodate them in his empire as long as they were respectful to the local traditions and norms.⁵² Personally, there is no record that the emperor embraced any of these religions.

Regarding the Tibetan Buddhism, Kangxi personally wrote many copies of, among others, the Heart Sutra, Diamond Sutra, Medicine Sutra and Lotus Sutra for over 30 years. He often visited Mount Wu Tai Shan and built temples because he was described as the manifestation of lord Manjushri and Chakrasamvara.⁵³ Tibetan Lamas at the court gave him such perspective of himself and of the Tibetan Buddhism.⁵⁴ Kangxi exchanged titles with Buddhist Lamas from Tibet and Mongolia, such as the Dalai Lama, the Panchen Lama and rJe btsun dam pa Khutukhtu. Peter Perdue argued that Kangxi had no genuine commitment to Tibetan Buddhism beyond his political engagement

⁴⁸ Spence 1974, p. XX. During the early period of the Qing dynasty, they adopted the classical Chinese philosophies and traditions, and embraced selective outside traditions such as central Asian shamanistic traditions and Tibetan Buddhist studies for, perhaps, both religious and political purpose.

⁴⁹ Spence 1974, p. XVIII.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. XVIII.

⁵¹ Spence 1974, p. XIX.

⁵² Elliott 2001, pp. 120-121.

⁵³ ICang skya ngag dbang blo bzang chos ldan n.d, ff. 19a-20b and from the same author ff. 34a-36a.

⁵⁴ ICang skya ngag dbang blo bzang chos ldan n.d, ff. 15b-16a.

because: firstly, he had a sceptical approach toward the Mongols' obsession with Tibetan Lamas and offering of their whole family wealth to Tibetan Lamas and monasteries.⁵⁵ Secondly, Kangxi mercilessly massacred many high Lamas in the Chahar revolt in 1675 and executed Ilagukesan, the head Lama of the Dzungars, by slow slicing.⁵⁶ However, Kangxi spent fortunes to produce the woodblock print of Buddhist canons and volunteered to build significant temples in many places in China. Kangxi also employed many Tibetan Buddhist lamas to perform rituals for his royal family and to dispel his personal misfortunes. Most importantly, he had a Buddhist royal priest to whom he offered great respect. Kangxi never had such an intimate relationship with any other religions at Peking.

Some scholars, however, have argued that Kangxi's relationship with the Tibetan Buddhism was just for diplomacy because he kept many Buddhist lamas at the Qing court and let them perform various rituals to improve his imperial image and influence among Tibetan and Mongolian people.⁵⁷ Knowing the influence of lamas, Kangxi often sent his royal court lamas as mediators to solve conflicts among the different Mongol tribes. V. Uspensky argued that "it was the policy of Qing ... to communicate with each group [of the Mongol tribes] in a manner that was meaningful to them."⁵⁸ For example, the Tibetan scholar Sum pa mkhan po described how in 1697, Kangxi used the Tibetan lCang skya Lama to summon Amdo Kokonor Mongol leaders and built political alliance with them by offering titles and gifts.⁵⁹ There are many such examples where Tibetan lamas played crucial role in empowering the influence of Kangxi. Without examining this unseen power dynamics, some scholars such as Petech jumped to the conclusion that "this audience of 1697, followed by another in December 1703, meant the establishment of Qing suzerainty over the Kokonor Qosots",⁶⁰ but this is obviously an overestimated claim. Apart from giving titles and seals, it appears that Qing had no actual authority over the Mongols in Amdo Kokonor in the late 17th century. This becomes clear from the fact that after meeting with the Kangxi emperor, the Mongols from Amdo Kokonor dispatched their representatives to Lhasa to consult with Tibetan leaders whether they should

⁵⁵ *Qing sheng zǔ shǐlù* 2008, Vol-5. p. 25. This is one of the most elaborate collections of Qing official documents ever recorded in history. The original documents are compiled in hundreds of volumes, but later all the documents were published in 60 volumes. These books contain the records of almost everything about the Qing court and Qing emperors throughout their dynasty.

⁵⁶ Perdue 2005, P. 204.

⁵⁷ Schwieger 2015, pp. 113-114.

⁵⁸ Uspensky 2003, p. 107.

⁵⁹ Sum pa ye shes dpal 'byor 1989, pp. 836-837.

⁶⁰ Petech 1966, p. 269.

continue the direct relations with the Qing court.⁶¹ Thus, in spite of the attempts of the Qing court, the influence of the Tibetan Buddhist government was still more powerful, and the Kokonor Mongols sought approval from Tibet to continue Mongol-Qing relations.

Throughout the Qing and Dzungar war, both Kangxi and dGa' ldan Khan consistently tried hard to keep Tibet's support and the Dalai Lama on their side. The emperor dispatched several envoys to invite the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama to Peking to increase the Qing's soft power among the Mongols and reduce Tibet's relations with the Dzungars. Kangxi personally appealed to the Dalai Lama:

"My goal is to dissolve the contention between Khalkha and Olod [Oirat] and create peace. If you [the Dalai Lama] can send Lamas to Galdan[dGa' ldan Khan], urging him to make peace, he will follow your orders."⁶²

At the same time, the Dzungar leader, dGa' ldan Khan, repeatedly claimed that he was fighting "for the Dalai Lama's soul by destroying their [Manchu's] devils",⁶³ and for protecting Buddhist faith. dGa' ldan was very close to the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama. In return, the Lamas also treated him specially. The 17th-century Chinese scholar Liang Fen remarked that the Dalai Lama "was very fond of him [dGa' ldan] although the Lama [the Dalai Lama] has so many close students. People are not allowed to stay around when the Dalai Lama and dGa' ldan are in private conversations."⁶⁴

Therefore, both sides were keen to bring the Dalai Lama, the sDe srid and other high-ranking Buddhist leaders on their side to legitimize their interventions and secure the support of more Mongol leaders for their mission. However, neither side succeeded in drawing the sDe srid entirely to their side and the Dalai Lama died at the time without the knowledge of the Dzungars and the Manchus. The Qing court often complained that "the Dalai Lama appeared to diverge from Qing emperor's goals",⁶⁵ but neither the Qing nor the Dzungars had the power to give a command or influence the Dalai Lama and the Sde srid. In 1697, dGa' ldan Khan suddenly died, and Kangxi finally prevailed but the sDe srid still kept a balanced diplomatic approach between the Qing and the Dzungars without becoming the Qing empire's puppet.

⁶¹ sDe srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho 1989, pp. 312-313.

⁶² *Dà qīng lǐcháo shǐlù* 2012, Vol-II. p. 62. For the translation from Chinese, the translated work of Perdue was used (2005, pp. 150-151).

⁶³ *Wēn dá* 1994, p. 20. Translation is mine.

⁶⁴ *Liáng fèn* 1782, p. 519.

⁶⁵ Perdue 2005, P. 152.

The sDe srid and His Political Strategy

sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653-1705) was the sole political leader of the Tibetan dGa' ldan pho brang government from 1679 to 1705. The Dzungars, under the leadership of Tshe dbang rab brtan, had spread slander accusing the Dalai Lama of being "the natural father of Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho."⁶⁶ Alexander Csoma de Koros and Giuseppe Tucci were the first western scholars to agree with the Dzungar narrative of the father-son biological relationship between the Fifth Dalai Lama and the sDe srid.⁶⁷ Early Chinese scholars also agreed this claim.⁶⁸ However, Elliot Sperling and 'Jigs med bsam grub accurately dismissed the claims by using both Tibetan and Qing official sources.⁶⁹ They explained that the great Fifth Dalai Lama embarked on his journey to Peking on 15 March 1652, and he arrived back in Lhasa on 8 October 1653. In total, the journey of the Dalai Lama took nineteen months. The mother of Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho never left Lhasa and gave birth to Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho in July 1653.⁷⁰ Thus, the claimed biological relationship would only have been possible if the baby had stayed in his mother's womb for nineteen months!

However, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho grew up in the circle of dGa' ldan pho brang aristocrats and became a charismatic leader and versatile scholar. He became the Fifth sDe srid (regent) of Tibet by order of the great Fifth Dalai Lama at the age of twenty-six in 1679.

The Autobiography of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama records the Dalai Lama saying:

"I am now becoming older and older and cannot handle both religious and political matters. Apart from you, I do not have hope and belief in anyone to carry out my legacies. Thus, you do not have permission [to avoid this responsibility] unless you decide to ignore me."⁷¹

Then, the great Fifth Dalai Lama declared in a public proclamation that all "my followers and adherents should respect and listen to sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho as you have been doing to me."⁷² For Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, the great Fifth Dalai Lama's endorsement became the backbone of his power for the next twenty-six years of his political

⁶⁶ sLe lung bzhad pa'i rdo rje 1985, ff. 183a-183b.

⁶⁷ Koros 1834, p. 191 and Tucci 1980, p. 77.

⁶⁸ Wáng yáo 1980, pp. 191-192.

⁶⁹ Sperling 2014, p. 214, and 'Jigs med bsam grub 2016, and see via online.tibet3.cn.

⁷⁰ sDe srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho 1990, p. 819.

⁷¹ sDe srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho 1990, p. 201.

⁷² lNga ba ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2014, Vol-3. p. 201.

reign as a Tibetan leader.

The great Fifth Dalai Lama passed away on the 2nd April 1682, three years after Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho was appointed as the political leader of Tibet in 1679. On his deathbed, the Dalai Lama gave his final advice to the sDe srid and other top leaders of the dGa' ldan pho brang government. The sDe srid later recalled this event in his biography of the great Fifth Dalai Lama:⁷³

"We were kindly advised on how we [the Tibetan government] were to maintain the relations with the Mongols and Qing. The compassionate one [the great Fifth Dalai Lama] also signified the vitality of keeping his death in confidentiality. Thus, we were strictly guided to do the daily chores and duties as if he was still alive ... He also permitted us that for uncertain [government] decisions, we could consult the prophecies of the La mo oracle⁷⁴."

Most of the contemporary Tibetan sources, such as the autobiographies of the Fifth Panchen Lama⁷⁵ and Sle lung Bzhad pa'i rdo rje⁷⁶ and the biography of the 48th abbot of the dGa' ldan monastery⁷⁷ agreed with the sDe srid's narrative, which suggests that hiding the great Fifth Dalai Lama's death was his own guidance. However, official Qing documents⁷⁸ several times accused the sDe srid of fabricating the story for his own political benefit. Some early scholars, such as Sarat Chandra Das⁷⁹ and Rockhill⁸⁰ follow Qing's narratives and blame the sDe srid. Observing the whole context, it is clear that the events were complex and the motivations of the sDe Srid could have been mixed. Thus, it is obviously hard to describe the occurrences in black and white.

Due to the conflicting narratives, scholars of Tibetan Studies have voiced different opinions regarding this matter: Ahmad⁸¹ and Goldstein⁸² argued that the sDe srid concealed the death of the great Fifth

⁷³ Ibid, Vol-3. p. 45.

⁷⁴ During the 17th to 18th centuries, the Lamo oracle was the Tibetan government's primary deity oracle. The Tibetan government and the Dalai Lama often received official consultations or advice from the Lamo Oracle. The Great Fifth Dalai Lama himself composed ritual prayers for the Lamo oracle and wrote the history of Dpal ldan lHa mo and her historical relationship with Tibet. See his book "*Cho ga dang bskang gso'i skor bzhuvs so*" printed as a block print by rNam rgyal Monastery.

⁷⁵ PaN chen blo bzang ye shes 1999, pp. 58-60.

⁷⁶ sLe lung bzhad pa'i rdo rje 1985, ff. 78b-79a.

⁷⁷ Grags pa mkhas grub 1945, ff. 17b-18a.

⁷⁸ *Dà qīng lǐcháo shǐlù* 2012, Vol-II. p. 98.

⁷⁹ Chandra 1905, p. 89.

⁸⁰ Rockhill 1910, pp. 26-27.

⁸¹ Ahmad 1970, p. 76.

⁸² Goldstein 1997, p. 10.

Dalai Lama to prevent possible disturbances among the Mongols and the Tibetans. Van Schaik viewed the event as a strategy to "protect his [the sDe srid's] own power position."⁸³ Tucci remarked that the sDe srid used the plan to allow "Tibet to choose its future alliance between Qing and the Dzungars."⁸⁴ Schwieger claims that the sDe srid applied this strategy to unite all the Mongols and Tibetans under a dual government system.⁸⁵ Of course, each of these scholars has made their own share of assessment to prove their claims. However, it still remains difficult, or perhaps impossible, to verify the authenticity of the sDe srid's claim and his real intention. Regarding this matter, two things are very clear: Firstly, if the great Fifth Dalai Lama did not give him the advice, the sDe srid made the most dangerous decision of keeping the great Fifth Dalai Lama's death secret to keep stability in either his power or Tibet's relations with the Mongols and the Manchus. Secondly, it is remarkable that the sDe srid was able to persuade the top Tibetan officials to keep the secret of the great Fifth Dalai Lama's death for the last 14 years.

In the 1690's, the Qing court repeatedly complained about Tibet's support for the Dzungars under dGa' ldan Khan⁸⁶ and also about the fact that Kangxi's invitations to the Fifth Panchen Lama and the Sixth Dalai Lama to visit Peking were repeatedly declined.⁸⁷ The problem was that the Qing invited the Panchen Lama through the dGa' ldan pho brang instead of contacting the Panchen Lama's office directly. Indeed, for more than a decade, the Qing court did not know two basic facts about Tibetan internal politics or the significance of the Tibetan Buddhist hierarchy: Firstly, the foreign diplomacy of the Tibetan Buddhist government was based on a non-aligned approach, which helped them to maintain their influence on both parties, such as the Mongols and the Manchus. Secondly, Tibet's internal political power structure was different from that of the Qing empire or the Mongols; Tibet had a nominal head of the state but very flexible internal autonomous governance structures and leaders who were, at many levels, ruling their territories.

Kangxi became restless and angry about the sDe Srid's deeds when he heard the rumour of the Dalai Lama's death from captured Dzungar soldiers.⁸⁸ Richardson argued that the subterfuge surrounding the

⁸³ Schaik 2011, p. 129.

⁸⁴ Tucci 1980, p. 76.

⁸⁵ Schwieger 2015, p. 220.

⁸⁶ Perdue 2005, pp. 140-201.

⁸⁷ Rockhill 1910, p. 26.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 26.

great Fifth Dalai Lama's death "was a diplomatic discourtesy and perhaps unnecessarily secretive."⁸⁹ As a result, Sperling claimed that "[the relations between] the Tibetan administration in Lhasa and Qing court was irreparably damaged"⁹⁰ due to concealing the death of the great Fifth Dalai Lama. However, these arguments do not provide a complete picture of the story. Indeed, the concealing of the Dalai Lama's death and the refusal of Kangxi's invitations for Tibetan Lamas created suspicion,⁹¹ but the underlying problem was the sDe srid's non-compromising foreign policy toward the Qing and the Mongols. The Qing official documents repeatedly complained about Tibet's foreign policy and distrust of the Qing⁹² because, as mentioned before, they simply did not comprehend the non-aligned foreign diplomacy of the Tibetan Buddhist government.

However, in 1696, the sDe srid diplomatically disclosed the death of the great Fifth Dalai Lama to Qing and Mongol leaders to secure their support,⁹³ followed by a public announcement of both the great Fifth Dalai Lama's death and the birth of the Sixth on the same day. The 18th century autobiography of Sle lung Bzhad pa'i rdo rje recorded Lhasa people's praise to the sDe srid:

"Through all the years that the omniscient great Fifth Dalai Lama has not been alive, the suffering of people on earth and the political and religious burdens of the world have been placed on the shoulder of the Desi. Without knowing that the sun had set, we have seen its dawn."⁹⁴

According to the Manchu official documents, the angry Kangxi emperor dispatched his main messenger Pao Chu, who had just returned from Lhasa to Tibet to investigate the Dalai Lama's death and his incarnation matters.⁹⁵ However, not even single record was mentioned in both Tibetan and Manchu primary sources that the Qing officer Pao Chu conducted any sort of investigation in Tibet. More importantly, before completing the investigation, Kangxi again dispatched lCang skya Ngag dbang blo bzang chos ldan, a Peking based Tibetan Head

⁸⁹ Richardson 2003, p. 559.

⁹⁰ Sperling 2003, p. 130.

⁹¹ *The biography of the Sixth Dalai Lama and the biography of the Fifth Panchen Lama* stated four invitations for the Panchen Lama and one for the Dalai Lama by the Kangxi emperor were refused in the late 17th and early 18th century due to various social and political reasons. Thus, neither of the Sixth Dalai Lama nor the Fifth Panchen Lama ever visited Qing court in Peking.

⁹² Rockhill 1910, pp. 24-26.

⁹³ sDe srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho 1989, p. 567.

⁹⁴ sLe lung bzhad pa'i rdo rje 1985, ff. 56b-57a.

⁹⁵ *Dà qīng lǐcháo shǐlù* 2012, Vol-I. pp. 14-15.

Lama, to represent the emperor at the Sixth Dalai Lama's enthronement ceremony along with the Mongol representatives.⁹⁶ The reason was that both the Mongols and the Qing knew very well that the Tibetan authorities would organise the succession of the great Fifth Dalai Lama, whether outsiders had approved the new Dalai Lama or not. And once the new Dalai Lama was announced, all Tibetans and the Mongols would respect him as the great Fifth Dalai Lama's successor. Therefore, apart from its official claim, it is highly suspect that the Qing had done any actual investigation in Tibet. For the Qing, the claim is perhaps a political gesture of the empire to exaggerate their sphere of power influence. Many dynasties in China, especially Ming and Qing have a long culture of pretension to enlarge their power and achievements in the official documents.

Conclusion: Dramatis Personae in the Central Asia

The politics of Tibet and its relations with the Mongols and the Manchus in the late 17th and early 18th centuries were mainly centred around the leaders of the Mongols, the Manchus, and Tibetans. For the Mongols, the relationship with Tibet was not purely based on politics but was intertwined with culture and Buddhist religion. For the Manchus, the ties with Tibet were mainly from the top Manchu leaders, mainly for political strategy. The Mongols wanted the Dalai Lama and Tibetan leaders to solve their internal conflicts as mediators and confirm their titles and rankings because they did not have a single ruler who could command all the Mongols. The Manchus found the unmatched influence of Tibetan Lamas to pacify and negotiate with the Mongols advantageous, as the latter had often brought problems to the northern border regions of the Qing Empire. Qing emperors also used Tibetan lamas to recreate their divine images as Manjushri or Chakrasamvara to legitimise their rule among the Mongols and elsewhere.

The Tibetan Buddhist government, under the leadership of the sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, strategically maintained a balance in its relations with the Mongols and the Manchus to enhance their influence in both societies. The sDe srid's government used the great Fifth Dalai Lama's influence to ensure Tibet's power among the Mongols, and it managed to maintain relationships with Mongol leaders through both politics and religion. Regarding the Qing empire, the sDe srid's government retained the same mutually respectful relations that had been built between the great Fifth Dalai Lama and emperor Shunzhi. While Kangxi's influence began to increase among the eastern

⁹⁶ Petech 1972, p. 9.

Mongols and other periphery territories of Tibet, the sDe srid kept Tibet at a distance from the Qing and managed to maintain the eastern Mongols' loyalty toward Tibet.

The Dzungar Mongols played a huge role in complicating the relations between the dGa' ldan pho brang and the Qing empire in the late 17th and early 18th centuries for various political and religious reasons. dGa' ldan Khan's unwavering loyalty toward Tibet and his intimate relationships with Tibetan leaders such as the sDe srid made the Manchus suspect that Tibet might back up the Dzungars in the Dzungar-Manchu war in the 1690s. Nevertheless, in the numerous diplomatic correspondences with both Dzungars and the Manchus, Tibet firmly kept their non-aligned foreign relations position, which avoided provocations as well as close alliances with both neighbouring countries.

The dGa' ldan pho brang government's political power structure during that period was solely dependent on the internal power balance among the leaders of the dGa' ldan pho brang. Knowing the supporters of Lha bzang Khan and sDe Srid, it is clear that the major political decisions were highly dependent on the big dGe lugs monasteries such as 'Bras spung and Sera and their monastic leaders. Despite the visibility of Qing and the Mongols on the international stage, Tibet's Buddhist politics during that time was equally crucial in the power mechanism between these three worlds to shape the central Asian political landscape.

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