

Lamas and Oirat migrations: religion and the exodus of the main part of Kalmyks in 1771

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At the beginning of 1771, a significant historic event occurred when the main part of the Kalmyks departed from their long-established territory in Russia, situated between the Volga and Yaik (Ural) rivers, where they had roamed since the 1630s, and left for their former homeland in Dzungaria. The exodus to the east was driven by various factors, with socio-economic, political, and religious reasons being of great importance.

The Kalmyks were gradually forced out of their pastures due to the development of arable lands in the regions of Caspian Sea and the North Caucasus by Russian peasants and the founding of German colonies in the Lower Volga region. By the middle of the 18th century, more than a third of the entire Kalmyk population had been completely ruined. In 1765, the Russian government issued a law allowing the sale and transfer of state (that is, the Kalmyk) lands to landowners, further exacerbating the situation. As a result, Kalmyks were deprived of pastures and gradually forced to move to semi-deserts and salt marshes.

The Kalmyk Khan Ubasha (ruled 1761–1771) wrote to the Astrakhan governor N. A. Beketov in September 1765, expressing his concerns. He mentioned that the areas where the Kalmyks used to roam “without any obstacle or oppression” were now facing a different situation. Peasants were seizing cattle and people, and he remarked, “if the Russian settlements grow up, then Kalmyk cattle breeding will inevitably die due to a lack of forage”.¹ The economic hardships that forced the Kalmyks to go to work (*otkhodnichestvo*) in Russian regions, along with the loss of the male population during wars and conflicts, formed a negative demographic situation.

One of the indicators of the Kalmyks’ well-being was the number of yurts (*kibitkas*, i. e., the number of subjects) of the chief lama: in times

¹ Ocherki 1967: 200–201.

of prosperity, the lama had from 3,000 to 4,000 Shabiner² yurts. Under Donduk-Dashi,³ there were only 1,040 such yurts.⁴

The importance of political reasons became crucial over time. Tsebek-Dorji, the grandson of Donduk-Ombo and great-great-grandson of Ayuka,⁵ sought to take advantage of the ongoing centrifugal processes. He claimed the Khan's place, for which in December 1761, he went to St. Petersburg with gifts (two girls, a boy, and three horses).⁶ However, he was unsuccessful in regaining the Khan's Bagatsokhurovsky ulus and remained known in history as one of the most zealous supporters of the idea of exodus. By the decree of Empress Catherine the Great on May 8, 1765, Tsebek-Dorji was appointed head of the Zargo⁷ and started plotting "to act against the governor (*namestnik*) Ubushi through intrigues".⁸

Meanwhile, the situation with the Zargo was rather difficult after the changes implemented by the Russian authorities. When Ubasha was approved for the khanate, "the signs for this dignity [were sent to him] ... the same letter prescribed about the government⁹ of the Kalmyk people, and what basis it will henceforth rely upon".¹⁰ Since some rulers (Ayuka and Donduk-Ombo) "excessively strengthened in their people",¹¹ while others (Tseren-Donduk¹²) were considered "weak khans",¹³ it was proposed to increase the number of the Zargo members by the *zaisangs* "according to proportion to their uluses; they have all the affairs decided by a majority of votes, and in case of disagreement, inform us here and act according to our resolutions".¹⁴ It was assumed that in this way the ruler would not be excessively

² Shabiners – the subjects of lama.

³ He became the Kalmyk ruler in 1741 (*namestnik* from 1741, Khan from 1758), after the death of Donduk-Ombo (ruled 14.11.1735 – 21.03.1741) and the most likely pretender, Galdan-Danzhin (27.06.1741).

⁴ Archive of foreign policy of the Russian Empire (hereafter referred to as AFPRE). Coll. 119. Inv. 119/2. Book 2. 1732–1773. Folio 232.

⁵ The famous Kalmyk ruler, Khan from 1698 to 1724.

⁶ AFPRE. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/2. Book 2. 1732–1773. Folio 291.

⁷ The Zargo was the highest governmental and judicial body, comprising representatives of the upper strata (*zaisangs*, *noyons*), lamas, and managers (*tusalagchi*, *zarguchi*, and others).

⁸ Pal'mov 1927: 214. Cf. Kolesnik 2003: 189; Guriy 1915: 217.

⁹ I. e. Zargo.

¹⁰ In Russian: "знаки на сие достоинство... сей же граматою предписывается и о правительстве калмыцкого народа, на каком основании оно впрямь быть имеет" (AFPRE. Coll. 103. Inv. 103/1. Item 10. 1762. Folio 1).

¹¹ In Russian: "излишно в своем народе усиливались" (AFPRE. Ibid. Folio 1 verso).

¹² Son of Ayuka, ruled 1.05.1731 – 24.10.1735.

¹³ In Russian: "слабого состояния хан" (AFPRE. Ibid. Folio 1 verso).

¹⁴ In Russian: "по пропорции их улусов, которые имеют все дела решить по большинству голосов, а в случае несоглашения доносить сюда и поступать по здешним резолюциям" (AFPRE. Ibid. Folio 2).

strengthened, and all the owners would be involved in the decision-making process, thereby avoiding a split among the Kalmyks: "it is decided that the Kalmyk people should not be divided separately".¹⁵ Thus, in domestic political affairs (foreign political affairs were practically nullified), further restrictions on the rights of the Khan prevailed.¹⁶

Religious reasons also played an important role, as highlighted by scholars. Kolesnik noted: "There is no doubt that the Buddhist clergy of the Kalmyk Khanate fully and completely shared the position of the Dalai Lama" regarding the Kalmyks' decision to leave Russia.¹⁷ The threat of Christianization was also significant; this circumstance, cited as one of the main reasons for the exodus, was pointed out by believers who subsequently visited Tibet.¹⁸

As Rahul wrote, the Torguts¹⁹ retained political and religious ties with Tibet, which were vital for justifying the return of the Torguts to their former lands in Central Asia. He mentioned that this occurred after the alleged appeal of the chief Kalmyk lama to the Dalai Lama, requesting the indication of the date of the exodus.²⁰ Ukhtomskiy pointed out the connection between the Kalmyks and the Dalai Lama, which influenced the Kalmyks' exodus in 1771.²¹ Besprozvannykh was certain: "The Tsarist administration ... did not realize the importance of the religious factor in the life of the Kalmyk people and thus provided an additional argument to the supporters of migration from Russia".²²

It cannot be said that the Russian authorities were unaware of the ongoing changes in the Kalmyks' moods. They received fairly regular information about their preparations for migration, but no proper conclusions were drawn.²³ On February 10, 1770, the Empress Catherine the Great herself wrote to the Kazakh Nurali Khan, who warned about the escape of the Kalmyks, that this was unlikely, since "they, being under the highest patronage of Her Imperial Majesty, have the happiness ... to enjoy all the necessary advantages for human

¹⁵ In Russian: "представлено калмыцкого народа не разделять порознь" (AFPRE. Ibid. Folio 4 verso).

¹⁶ AFPRE. Ibid. Folio 4 verso.

¹⁷ Kolesnik 2003: 192. Cf. Dordzhiyeva 2012: 55; Besprozvannykh 2008: 191.

¹⁸ Ukhtomskiy 1904: 57.

¹⁹ The Torguts were the main among other Kalmyk peoples that left Russia. All the Kalmyk khans belonged to the Torgut people.

Rahul 1969: 216.

²⁰ Ukhtomskiy 1891: 14.

²¹ Besprozvannykh 2008: 35.

²² Dordzhiyeva 2002: 77–85; Kolesnik 2003: 170–177.

life, and, moreover, the immaculate justice".²⁴ Meanwhile, the information was supplied by quite reliable people; for instance, the Khoshut noyon Zamyán wrote to Beketov on February 28, 1767: "the derben Oirods' native place is over there, and even more, because the Chinese are of the same [religious] law [with them]; also, it is heard about the Chinese Khan that he gives great favors to his subjects, and besides, the Dalai Lama [worshipped by] Kalmyks is not far from there".²⁵ Some Kalmyk leaders were sure of the need to leave Russia: "Why should we live in the world like this under an infidel khan, it's better at least to die in the country of an orthodox khan".²⁶

Thus, a complex combination of a wide variety of factors had an impact on the young Kalmyk Khan Ubasha, eventually leading him to decide to return to the ancient homeland of the Oirats.

Exodus

Ubasha, on the night before the movement, announced to his army his decision to leave Russia "not only with great regret, but also with great tears",²⁷ also mentioning that he was under pressure to hand over "his son and other children of 5 owners and of a hundred zaisangs" as amanats.²⁸ Ubasha said, "Let the Russians follow their own way, but we Kalmyks ... have been harsh to harsh ones, and peaceful to peaceful ones. During the life of my father, what was it like? You do know whether we remained peaceful at home!"²⁹ (perhaps he meant the Kalmyks' participation in uprisings, wars, etc.).³⁰ Before the last campaign in which Ubasha took part, he had prayed to "the Burkhans

²⁴ In Russian: "они, будучи под высочайшею протекциею ея императорскаго величества, имеют счастье... пользоваться всеми к жизни человеческой нужными выгодами, а притом и непорочною справедливостию" (Cited in Dordzhiyeva 2002: 85).

²⁵ In Russian: "дербен ойродов природное тамо место, а паче потому что китайцы однозаконцы, при том же слышно о китайском хане, что он к подданным оказывает великие милости, к тому ж где и Далай-лама калмыцкой оттуда недалеко" (Cited in Dordzhiyeva 2002, 77). Cf. Gedeyeva 2020: 248.

²⁶ In Russian: "Чем нам жить на свете вот этак под неправоверным ханом, так лучше хоть помереть в стране правоверного хана" (Cited in Dzhambadordzhi 2005: 146).

²⁷ Guriy 1915, 219; Pal'mov 1992: 98.

²⁸ Guriy 1915, 219; Mitirov 1998: 268.

²⁹ He considered it necessary to repeat the same at the reception of the Qing emperor when Ubasha presented the Emperor with family heirlooms—two sabers—uttering that "now he will not have to exhaust himself with wars". (Cited in Mitirov 1998: 271–272).

³⁰ In December 1769, the Russian authorities demanded that Ubasha equip 15,000 troops, although they typically required no more than 5,000. (AFPRES. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/2. Book 2. 1732–1773. Folios 326, 328).

for a calm and prosperous journey".³¹ On January 5, 1771, Kalmyks moved towards Yaik river. In total, more than 30,000 kubitkas, or at least 120,000 people, tried to leave Russia.³²

There were also those who were against migration: the Torgut noyon Asarkho, the Khoshut noyons Zamyán and Teke, and others. Nature itself seemed to be against the exodus as, by January 1771, the Volga had not been covered with stable ice.³³

At the end of the summer, with heavy fighting, they arrived in the lands of the former Dzungaria, where they hoped to restore an independent Oirat state and gain reliable contact with the Dalai Lama. However, after reaching the land of their ancestors, they discovered that it had already been transformed into the province of Xinjiang, and the Kalmyks had no choice but to agree to become subjects of the Qing.

Upon their arrival at the border of the Qing Empire, Qianlong Emperor sent his representatives to Ubasha, through whom he stated: "If you wish to go to Tibet to boil tea³⁴ before the Dalai Lama, we will also give you permission. At present Tibet has been incorporated into our territory. In the Yellow Religion no one is higher in the hierarchy than Dalai Lama and Pan-ch'an E-er-te-ni Lama".³⁵

The Imperial son-in-law, "commissioner, and Minister of Presence", Septen Paljur (Se-pu-t'eng Pa-le-chu-er), wrote to Qianlong:

"We have investigated and found that the Turgot Eleuths who escaped from Russia are descendants of A-yu-ch'i Khan, different from the Eleuths in Dzungaria.³⁶ ... It is the Turgots' custom to worship the lamaism of the Yellow Sect. Therefore they have petitioned us to allow them to go to Tibet to do religious service. The religion of the Russians is similar to the Moslem. Their scriptures and religion are different from those of the Turgots; therefore they cannot get along well".³⁷

According to the English representative J. Bogle, who visited Tibet in 1774–1775, the Sixth Panchen Lama Lobsang Palden Yeshey told him that "a few years ago, the Tatar tribe, who were subjects of Russia, went to the Chinese, and that the emperor of China had previously

³¹ Guriy 1915: 220.

³² Rychkov 1772: 55; Nefed'yev 1834: 70.

³³ According to other information, ice drift began; see AFPRE. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/2. Book 2. 1732–1773. Folio 427 verso.

³⁴ It was the well-known 'mancha' ('manja fuifumbi' – in Manchu) or 'aocha' (熬茶 – in Chinese) ceremony, held during the interaction between a lama and a believer. The main act involved the believer preparing the tea and offering it to the lama.

³⁵ Cited in Fu Lo-shu 1966: 256.

³⁶ Regarding the time and reasons for the appearance of the designation of a part of the Oirats as Dzhungars (also known as Eleuths/Elets) and the meaning of this word, see Kitinov, Lyulina 2023.

³⁷ Cited in Fu Lo-shu 1966: 258.

written to him about this, boasting of his luck".³⁸ From this information, we can infer that the highest lamas of Tibet were not involved in the political game played by the Emperor to achieve the long-standing dynastic goal of subordinating all Mongols to Manchu power. As one of the sources suggests, the return of the Kalmyks "completed the conquest of the Mongols, which began with the accession of the Manchurian dynasty".³⁹ Gibson notes that the Torguts were hardly mentioned in Tibetan writings even after their return to Xinjiang.⁴⁰ The Qing authorities were not only interested in this exodus, but also wished for the Kalmyks to arrive as weakened as possible, only wanting to survive and not being prepared to fight for independence. As a result, the Kalmyks were dispersed within the boundaries of the former Dzungaria.

The religious factor: obtaining the Khan title from the Dalai Lama

The issue of obtaining the title of Khan from the Dalai Lama also played an important role in the Kalmyks' exodus. It served as a significant condition for legitimizing and sacralizing the rule of their main Kalmyk (Torgut) leader.

Meanwhile, the Tsarist government's policy aimed at restricting contacts and any form of communication with Tibet and the Dalai Lama, which posed a considerable challenge for the Kalmyks. In our opinion, this communication conflict became the most crucial and practically insurmountable obstacle for Ubasha. The connection with the Dalai Lama and Tibet had always been essential for maintaining stable inner and foreign policies of the Khanate. For instance, Donduk-Dashi emphasized this importance in his letter to Colonel N. G. Spitsyn, head of Kalmyk affairs, regarding the dispatch of envoys to the Tibetan Hierarchy: "There is no other matter more critical, and you are well aware that anyone who has Law (Faith) has no greater necessity than to go to Zou".⁴¹

Probably, the most essential aspect of the interaction between the Kalmyk leader and the Tibetan hierarchs was the reception of the Khan title from the Dalai Lama. This tradition took shape during the early reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Daichin, the son of Torgut taiji Ho-Urlyuk and the grandfather of the renowned ruler Ayuka, was the first

³⁸ Cited in Besprozvannykh 2001: 210–211.

³⁹ Zhang-mu and He-tsi-tao 1895: 144.

⁴⁰ Gibson 1990: 91.

⁴¹ In Russian: "более сего важнаго дела еще другаго не имеется, и вы находитесь не без известно, ибо, всякая кто имеет закон, крайнее сей надобности другою быть не может, как отправление в Зоу" (AFPRES. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/1. Item 14. 1752. Folio 7).

Kalmyk ruler to meet the Fifth Dalai Lama⁴² and received the Khan title from him in the early 1650s.⁴³ Ayuka received the Khan title from the Sixth Dalai Lama after the enthronement ceremony of Tsanyang Gyatso that took place in Potala on October 25, 1697; a representative of the Kalmyk leader was also present there. Most likely, the title was delivered to him at the beginning of the following year, in 1698. It is worth noting that Ayuka had already received the Khan title in 1690 from Dipa Sangye Gyatso,⁴⁴ whom he had met in 1682.⁴⁵ At that time, the Dipa had already ruled Tibet for eight years on behalf of the Fifth Dalai Lama.

Despite facing certain difficulties with the embassy's route and their stay in Tibet,⁴⁶ Tseren-Donduk, Ayuka's son, was granted the title "Daichin-Shasa-Byuja Khan".⁴⁷ The Russian authorities supported this son of Ayuka, and the consent of the Dalai Lama was important to them. As mentioned in an archival document, if the Dalai Lama granted the title of "Khan to no one but him, Tseren Donduk, then Her Imperial Majesty has no objections to that".⁴⁸ The solemn ceremony took place on September 10, 1735, but, soon after, by decree of the Empress, Tseren-Donduk was detained in Tsaritsyn⁴⁹ and sent to St. Petersburg.⁵⁰

In November 1735, Donduk-Ombo became the new Kalmyk ruler, and his authority was more widely recognized among the Kalmyks than Tseren-Donduk's. A year later, in October 1736, Donduk-Ombo requested the Empress to send an embassy to the Dalai Lama. "And given the circumstances of having a war with the Turks, it was permitted for this Donduk Omba Khan to send 70 of his envoys to the Dalai Lama".⁵¹ The decree of the Empress also emphasized that among

⁴² Ngag dbang 2012: 219.

⁴³ The first visit took place in the 1640s.

⁴⁴ Together with those regalia to Ayuka, Byukongin (Bukang) lama could receive an assignment to the Kalmyks to head the sangha, and then went to the Kalmyks, since the previous chief lama, Dondub Gyatso, had already left for Boshogtu Khan (see below).

⁴⁵ Ayuka met the Fifth Dalai Lama in January, 1682. See Sangs rgyas 1999: 298.

⁴⁶ Ishihama 1992: 510–511.

⁴⁷ Pal'mov 1926: 96.

⁴⁸ In Russian: "ханской не иному кому, но ему Черень Дондуку, то из того Ея Императорскому Величеству противности быть не имеет" (AFPРЕ. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/1. Item 18. 1732–1735. Folio 310 verso).

⁴⁹ At that time, the authorities accessed Tseren-Donduk as "having a low mind and being drunk" and considered him militarily "powerless" (AFPРЕ. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/1. Item 4. Folio 13 verso).

⁵⁰ Pal'mov 1926, 146.

⁵¹ In Russian: "И по тогдашнему с турки военному времени, оному хану Дондук Омбе, посланцов его 70 человек к Далай ламе отправить позволено" (AFPРЕ Item 14. 1752. Folio 28).

the Kalmyks, the appointment of the Khan was made “only by the highest permission of Her Imperial Majesty”,⁵² indicating that the Dalai Lama’s decision and the Empress’s consent had to align.

Special nuances were added to the embassy due to Jimba Jamtso, a representative of Donduk-Ombo, carrying, according to his words, a letter from Donduk-Ombo to Pulutaiji⁵³ with a request for assistance in visiting the Dalai Lama.⁵⁴ Consequently, when sending his envoys to Tibet, Donduk-Ombo believed that the Dalai Lama was still in the east of Tibet (though, by the time the embassy was sent, the Dalai Lama Kalsang Gyatso had already returned to Lhasa) and was well aware of the situation in Tibet and the great power of Polhanai. Donduk-Ombo’s embassy arrived in Siberian Selenginsk in 1739, but the Manchu authorities refused its entry into China, stating that “the Russian people should not be admitted to the Dalai Lama, and thus the envoys of the Kalmyk Khan, a subject of the Russian state, should not be accepted, and it is impossible to proceed [to the Dalai Lama]”.⁵⁵ As a result, Donduk-Ombo did not receive the title of Khan.

The embassy, led by Zouchi-Gelung on behalf of the next Kalmyk ruler Donduk-Dashi, departed for China on September 30, 1755, traveling through Kazan and Irkutsk. At the border, the Qing authorities did not have any questions about their allegiance, as the decree of the Empress stated that the ambassadors were traveling at “their own expense”⁵⁶ and not at the expense of the state treasury.

The Kalmyks, like the envoys of Tseren-Donduk in 1729, visited Beijing. Meng-gu-yu-mu-chi reports:

“In 1756, the Torgut envoy Choi-Jab⁵⁷ introduced himself to Qian-long, and, declaring that he, on the orders of his khan, Donrob-rashi,⁵⁸ traveled through Russia and arrived in Beijing⁵⁹ only in the third year, asking permission to go to Tibet to worship the Dalai Lama. Bogdokhan ordered to give him an escort. Upon his return from Tibet, he was given gifts for the Khan...”⁶⁰ According to another source, the meeting took place in Zhehe (Jehol) on October 5, 1756, during which

⁵² In Russian: “только по высочайшему Ея императорского Величества соизволению” (AFPRES. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/1. Item 41. 1737–1741. Folio 47).

⁵³ This name meant Polhanai (or Polhane; 1689–1747), the Tibetan ruler.

⁵⁴ AFPRES. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/1. Item 41. 1737–1741. Folio 397 verso.

⁵⁵ In Russian: “российских людей до Далай ламы допускать не положено, того ради подданного Российского государства калмыцкого хана посланцов принять не надлежит, и пропустить невозможно” (AFPRES. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/1. Item 14. 1752. Folio 31).

⁵⁶ In Russian: “[На] собственном коште” (AFPRES. Ibid. Folio 50).

⁵⁷ Hoshouchi-Tsoijit, who led the embassy after Zouchi’s death en route.

⁵⁸ Donduk-Dashi.

⁵⁹ In this work (*Meng-gu-yu-mu-chi*), there are some chronological errors. It is not clear when this meeting took place.

⁶⁰ Zhang-mu and He-tsi-tao 1895: 144.

Choi-Jab (Ch'uei-cha-pu) presented a "tribute".⁶¹ Probably, the envoys of Donduk-Dashi managed to receive the title of Khan and the seal from the Dalai Lama for their leader,⁶² as a document composed after the return of the embassy states that "the Kalmyk masters receive such seals from Tibet from the Dalai Lama".⁶³

Before the return of the embassy, on March 21, 1757, Empress Elizabeth (Elizaveta Petrovna) issued a decree, appointing Donduk-Dashi as Khan, and designating his son Ubasha as the governor. This appointment was officially announced a year later, on April 30 (according to other sources, February 20), 1758, during a meeting of the Kalmyk nobility near Cherny Yar (presently, in the Astrakhan region).⁶⁴ During the ceremony, Donduk-Dashi and Ubasha recited the oath in front of the Buddha statue and bowed their heads to it.⁶⁵ Almost simultaneously, in March 1758, a messenger from the returning embassy came to Donduk-Dashi with news that the Dalai Lama had "passed away from this world to the Taralang place",⁶⁶ and that "he would be reborn soon".⁶⁷

By that time, the situation in Lhasa had undergone another change: after the suppression of the uprising of Jurmed Wangyal, the Emperor reinstated the Dalai Lama (the Panchen Lama was still young then) into the political system, making him a ruler of Tibet once again. According to the Emperor's Decree of 1751, the system of management and selection of higher tulkus was changed. The Qing, on one hand, developed and maintained the image of the Dalai Lama as the spiritual leader of all Buddhist peoples, who was considered to be outside the system of state control. On the other hand, the institution of the tulku became the tool and basis of Qing influence in Tibet.⁶⁸ Subsequent

⁶¹ Fu Lo-shu 1966: 198–199.

⁶² The Seventh Dalai Lama passed away on 22.03.1757.

⁶³ In Russian: "калмыцкие владельцы получают таковые печати из Тибета от Далай ламы" (AFP. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/1. Item 22. 1760. Folio 2).

⁶⁴ This event was preceded by a meeting of a special board called "the conference" established at the court of the Empress, during which a report was presented by the Collegium of Foreign Affairs (*Kollegiia inostrannykh del*). It was noted that a change of the leading person among the Kalmyks would usually bring about some "strife, especially since the khans appoint their heirs themselves and also seek the khan title from the Dalai Lama, whom they idolize, instead of seeking it from our imperial court, and efforts have been made from our side up to this day to encourage them to seek this title from our imperial court and not from the Dalai Lama" (cited in Mitirov 1998: 219). Therefore, it was decided to meet the wishes of Donduk-Dashi and declare him as the Khan, while his son Ubasha as the governor (*namestnik*).

⁶⁵ Nefed'yev 1834: 83.

⁶⁶ In Russian: "от сего света переселился в Таралангово место" (Mitirov 1998: 218). Most likely, this word refers to his rebirth in the paradise of Tushita.

⁶⁷ In Russian: "скоро оный паки возродится" (Mitirov 1998: 218).

⁶⁸ Schwieger 2015: 220.

changes led to the increasing dependence of Tibetan religious institutions on the Emperor.

There is no definite information regarding the actual sending of an embassy to Tibet for the Khan title for Ubasha, the son of Donduk-Dashi, who died in 1761. The available data suggest the possibility of such an embassy in connection with the so-called “calling letters”, the last of which was allegedly received by Ubasha shortly before the Kalmyk exodus.

The Kalmyks also had various everyday connections with Tibet, including obtaining medicines, ritual and cult items that were highly valued by them,⁶⁹ and training new novices in monasteries. When Donduk-Ombo’s embassy could not proceed to Tibet due to the Qing ban, they managed to smuggle the most important part of the gifts and offerings to the Dalai Lama, without attracting the attention of the Manchu authorities. “In return, the Burkhan, which earlier had been sent to be blessed, books, and other things in three wraps were brought to them, secretly from the Chinese”.⁷⁰ Donduk-Dashi also attempted to send novices to study in Tibet. Unlike the Dzungar rulers, he had reasons to make this request directly to the Dalai Lama. He hoped that out of the participants of his embassy to Tibet in 1748 “23 people will remain there to learn the Law”.⁷¹

The religious factor: A “Calling Letter” from Tibet

A special place in the history of the exodus of the Kalmyks is occupied by so-called “calling letters” (or “conscriptio letters”), which were allegedly transmitted by the Dalai Lama to the Kalmyk rulers, demanding their return to their former homeland. The earliest mention of these letters dates back to the first quarter of the 18th century when Shakur Lama, originally a Kalmyk, arrived from Tibet to the homeland, seemingly carrying a “calling letter” from the Dalai Lama, urging a return to Dzungaria.⁷²

⁶⁹ The assessment made by Batur-Ombo, a member of the embassy in 1729, regarding the medicines and books confiscated by the Qing authorities was as follows: “[they] cost more than the Khan’s expenses for draught animals and provisions during their journey”; in Russian: “[они] более цены стоят нежели в их тракте от подвод и корму ханскому интересу убытку учинилось” (AFPRES. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/1. Item 18. 1732–1735. Folio 256).

⁷⁰ In Russian: “и напротив того привезли к ним оттуда посланные на благословение бурханы, книги и протчая в трех ширях, тайно же от китайцов” (AFPRES. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/1. Item 14. 1752. Folio 44).

⁷¹ In Russian: “23 человека для обучения их закона, тамо останутся” (AFPRES. Ibid. Folio 42 verso).

⁷² National Archive of the Republic of Kalmykia (hereafter referred to as NARK). Coll. 36. Inv. 1. Item 15. Folio 211 verso.

Shakur spent more than twenty years in Tibet, receiving education at Gomang Dratsang, and eventually becoming the head of the Shakhor (Shag skor) Dratsang, following established tradition.⁷³ At the request of Ayuka Khan and with the agreement of the second Sixth Dalai Lama, he left Lhasa in the spring of 1717, before the Dzungars captured Lhasa in the autumn of the same year. Most likely, Shakur Lama returned to the Kalmyks as part of an embassy that arrived back in the Khanate in 1719. His return was likely promoted by the death of the chief lama of Bukang (Byukongin), with Anjjatan temporarily holding the position of chief lama.

Zlatkin cites a Russian archival document from 1728 that states: "In the past years, upon the arrival of Shakur Lama from the Dalai Lama, he, Shakur Lama, announced the Dalai Lama's order to Khan Ayuka that all of them, Kalmyks, should migrate to their one-law Khan from the Russian protection, and Khan Ayuka and his wife Darma-Bala⁷⁴, along with Shakur Lama and Emchi Gelen, ... suggested that they migrate to Khontaisha, speak to him, and announce to him the command of the Dalai Lama, and they hoped that he, Khontaishi, would not disobey the Dalai Lama's order and would not ruin them (like he did to Sanjip, the Khan's son)".⁷⁵

Pal'mov believed that the "order" of the Dalai Lama made "a sensation in the steppe ... they debated the question which way to go, whether to the east of Mongolia or to its west".⁷⁶ According to Batmaev, Shakur Lama not only brought a call to come back to the "one-law" ruler but also tried in every possible way to implement it; however, family troubles in the Khan's family prevented this.⁷⁷

Kurapov also asserts that "'Eastern migration' was Shakur Lama's objective from the outset of his political career".⁷⁸ Such a definitive stance has led researchers to offer a negative evaluation of Shakur Lama's activities. However, it is worth noting that he was one of the most influential Geluk lamas, probably deeply involved in Tibetan

⁷³ See Doboorn Tulku's "A Brief History of Drepung Monastery".

⁷⁴ Darma-Bala, who was a cousin of the Dzungarian Khungtaiji Tsevan-Rabdan, was originally intended to marry Ayuka's youngest son, Gundelek. However, the 55-year-old Khan decided to marry her himself. She later bore him three sons.

⁷⁵ In Russian: "В прошлых годах по прибытии Шакур-ламина от Далай-ламы объявил он, Шакур-лама, повелением Далай-ламинным хану Аюке, чтоб они все, калмыки, ис под российской протекции к своему однозаконному хану откочевали, и хан де Аюка и жена его Дарма-бала и Шакур-лама и емчигелен... предложили, чтоб им откочевать к хонтайше, обослався с ним и объявля ему повеление Далай-ламино, и надеялись де, что он, хонтайши, Далай-ламино повеление не оставит и их (так, как ханова сына Санджипа), не разорит" (Zlatkin 1983: 221).

⁷⁶ Pal'mov 1926: 53–54.

⁷⁷ Batmaev 1993: 273.

⁷⁸ Kurapov 2021: 143.

politics during the initial fifteen years of the 18th century. Later, his role among the Kalmyks remained significant as well.⁷⁹

An incorrect assessment of this lama's actions often arises solely from the assumption of the "delivery" of the "calling letter" and from a general analysis of the Kalmyks' situation during their difficult historical period, without taking into account the situation in Tibet, which could have also exerted influence on policies towards the Kalmyks.

It is highly improbable that Shakur Lama could have brought a "calling letter" because the situation in Tibet was not conducive to such actions. Since 1707, there was a second Sixth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Yeshe Gyatso, appointed to this position by the "king" of Tibet, Lhavzan. The latter had no interest in the return of the Kalmyks to Dzungaria, as it would only strengthen the Dzungars and pose a significant threat to Lhavzan's rule. Despite Lhavzan's attempts at reconciliation with Tsevan-Rabdan after the execution of Dipa Sangye Gyatso in 1705, differences persisted.⁸⁰ In 1714, the lamas of Sera, Drepung, and Tashi-Lhumpo sought Tsevan-Rabdan's help in overthrowing Lhavzan, eliminating the "false" Dalai Lama, and enthroning the "true" incarnation—the young Kalsang Gyatso.⁸¹ Even after the subsequent marriage between Tsevan-Rabdan's and Lhavzan's children, the situation remained unchanged.⁸² Therefore, the circumstances in Tibet and its surroundings were not suitable for the dispatch of a "calling letter" at that time.

The issue of returning to Dzungaria once again became relevant among the Kalmyk leaders during the period of unrest that followed the death of Ayuka in February 1724. It is believed that this problem was mostly raised by the Dzungarian Darma-Bala, Ayuka's widow, against the backdrop of disagreements in the Khan's family. According to contemporaries, Shakur Lama allegedly again raised the issue of returning to the east at that time,⁸³ but no concrete evidence has been presented to support this claim.

The situation with the clergy remained tense as before, and with the loss of the embassy of Arabjur, the Khanate faced a shortage of important lamas,⁸⁴ making it difficult to replenish their ranks. Faced with these difficult religious and political conditions, Shakur Lama made a decision in early March 1729 to appeal to the Russian authorities, seeking permission to travel to Tibet "to pay homage to

⁷⁹ Kitinov 2015.

⁸⁰ Kraft 1953: 64–65.

⁸¹ Rockhill 1998: 32.

⁸² Petech 1966: 276; Dzhabdordzhi 2005: 129.

⁸³ APPRE. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/2. Book 1. Folio 10 verso.

⁸⁴ See below for more information about the lamas of Arabjur embassy.

the Dalai Lama".⁸⁵ The letter, written on behalf of Tseren-Donduk to Emperor Petr II, requested permission for his people to visit the Dalai Lama "to commemorate his father, the Khan, and to offer tea"⁸⁶⁸⁷, and "to construct a temple"⁸⁸.⁸⁹ However, the Russian authorities denied the lama's request to leave the Khanate due to his significant political influence.⁹⁰ The embassy departed from Saratov at the end of December 1729. Despite this embassy being considered one of the most important foreign policy actions of Shakur Lama, the archival documents related to it did not reveal any additional information about the supposed "calling letter".

Additional information regarding the "calling letter" pertains to Donduk-Dashi's embassy, which successfully reached the Dalai Lama and returned. Specifically, Pal'mov, citing the translator M. S. Vezelev, mentioned that the "calling letter" was delivered, but Donduk-Dashi did not agree to migrate.⁹¹ Kolesnik, on the other hand, suggested that Donduk-Dashi might have received such a "call" from the Dalai Lama: "It is quite possible that he called on the Kalmyks to return to their homeland".⁹² However, no definite confirmation exists. Despite the missing letter, experts are endeavoring to determine its possible authorship: G. Dordzhiyeva proposed the Dalai Lama as the author,⁹³ while Besprozvannykh suggested the Panchen-lama.⁹⁴

Perhaps there was another, a third "calling letter", during Ubasha's reign, but it was also not found. Pal'mov provides the following information from Beketov: there was another secret embassy to Tibet, after the death of the Seventh Dalai Lama and shortly before 1771.⁹⁵ This point appears to be crucial for further research on the issue, as it implies that Kalmyk envoys had to meet with the all-powerful regent-*gyaltsap* Demo Rinpoche (regent in 1757–1777), who was dependent on the Manchus and had the authority to act on behalf of the Dalai Lama. Consequently, if this "secret" embassy indeed existed, it could have delivered a "calling letter" from the "Dalai Lama" to Ubasha—an

⁸⁵ In Russian: "поклониться Далай-ламе" (AFPRE. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/1. Item 12. 1729. Folio 13).

⁸⁶ This refers to the ceremonies of commemoration of the dead, which consisted in the performance of special rites, after which the monks were treated to tea and presented with offerings (see no. 34).

⁸⁷ In Russian: "для поминовения отца ево хана и для подчивания чаем" (AFPRE. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/1. Item 18. 1732–1735. Folio 256).

⁸⁸ A stūpa was probably meant.

⁸⁹ In Russian: "построить церковь" (Pal'mov 1926: 77).

⁹⁰ Pal'mov 1926: 76.

⁹¹ Pal'mov 1992: 95–96.

⁹² Kolesnik 2003: 192.

⁹³ Dordzhiyeva 2012: 55.

⁹⁴ Besprozvannykh 2008: 167.

⁹⁵ Pal'mov 1927: 164.

essential element in the elaborate operation of the Qing court (see above). Hence, it is not surprising that upon their return from Tibet, the envoys “exceedingly praised the mercy of the Bogdykhan, the local ruler, to the newcomers”.⁹⁶

It is important to note that the idea of Manchu rulers being involved in the “calls” for the Kalmyks to leave Russia first emerged during the reign of Donduk-Dashi. Pal’mov was the first to propose this perspective, noting that “in regard to the Far Eastern influence on the Kalmyks as an aspect of the explanation of their departure, Vezelev believes the center of gravity lies in the influence of the Dalai Lama, while Beketov shifts the focus to the Bogdykhan”.⁹⁷ Upon considering the political situation in Tibet and the position of the young Eighth Dalai Lama, it is reasonable to assume that the opinions of Vezelev and Beketov do not generally contradict each other.

Be that as it may, one should concur with Kolesnik’s viewpoint: “The originals or copies of these calling letters have not yet been found. Maybe they did not exist at all”.⁹⁸ These letters might not have physically existed, but they could have been subjects of discussion among the Kalmyk rulers, serving as imagined symbolic supplement to the Khan’s regalia and signifying the Dalai Lama’s trust in the Kalmyk leader.

The Dzungarian factor

There was another powerful incentive that the Russian authorities considered, although contrary to reality, to prevent the Kalmyks from thinking about escaping: the Dzungars, or rather, the fall of the Dzungar Khanate. Despite the Tsarist government’s expectations that the Kalmyks would learn from the fate of the Dzungars, the Kalmyks had a different perspective on the situation. This viewpoint was clearly expressed by the envoys of Tseren-Donduk in Beijing. They asserted that even though the Qing might subjugate Kontaisha and his people, their land originally belonged to the Oirats, and it was only ceded to Kontaisha by them, the “Ayukans”. Hence, they would not yield it to the “Chinese”.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ In Russian: “чрезвычайно хвалили милость тамошнего богдыхана к пришельцам” (Pal’mov 1927: 164).

⁹⁷ Pal’mov 1927: 164.

⁹⁸ Kolesnik 2003: 190.

⁹⁹ In Russian: “что они китайцы говорят о взятъе контайши и народ ево и может быть что избудется а землю ево они аюкинцы им китайцам не уступят и невозможно понеже изстари та земля была их” (AFPRES. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/1. Item 18. 1732–1735. Folio 255 verso).

Indeed, the Kalmyk rulers held their own perspective on Dzungaria, its inhabitants, and territory. They never forgot about the Torguts of Sanjip, who had settled there in the early 18th century, and they regarded the land of Dzungaria as part of their shared Oirat heritage, received from their ancestors. Similarly, the Dzungarian leaders also kept their fellow tribesmen in Russia in mind and remembered their ties to them.

Interest in the events in Dzungaria was rekindled with the arrival of Louzan-Shuno, one of the sons of Tsevan-Rabdan, born from Seterjap, daughter of Ayuka, to the Kalmyk Khanate, in 1727.¹⁰⁰ Louzan-Shuno escaped the threat of assassination by Galdan-Tseren and probably hoped to receive support from the Kalmyks in his upcoming fight for the Dzungar throne.¹⁰¹ However, Shakur Lama and several other leaders actively opposed such sentiments and persuaded Tseren-Donduk to remain in Russia.

The most active attempts of the Dzungarian Khungtaiji, Galdan-Tseren, to entice the Kalmyk rulers, and by extension all Kalmyks, to move to Dzungaria occurred during the reign of Donduk-Dashi.¹⁰² This was veiledly communicated to Donduk-Dashi and Darma-Bala in a letter from Darma Bala's brother, Gomang Lama. He served as a lama in Drepung Gomang and later became the head of the sangha in Dzungaria.¹⁰³ In his epistle, Gomang Lama mentioned a former letter

¹⁰⁰ Another significant factor of interest in Dzungaria arose due to the capture of Lhasa. Twenty years later, in October 1736, count A. I. Osterman, the head of the Collegium of Foreign Affairs, informed Abuja, the envoy of Donduk-Ombo, that he was aware "of the devastation of the Dalai Lama's residence by the father of that Galdan Cheren"; in Russian: "о разорении отцем того Галдан Череня Далай Ламиной резиденций" (AFPRES. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/1. Item 40. 1736. Folio 32).

¹⁰¹ Donduk-Ombo married his daughter Cheren-Balzang to Shuno; in 1732, Shuno passed away "childless". See Bakunin 1995: 57.

¹⁰² Zlatkin states that as early as the mid-1640s the Dzungarian Batur-Khungtaiji urged the Kalmyks to return to their former nomad camps, and a certain lama came to convey this wish to them. It is possible that Zaya Pandita brought this message to the Kalmyks during his visit in the spring of 1645, when he met with many Kalmyk leaders at Daichin's invitation. However, if such events did occur, they remained unfulfilled due to conflicts, primarily between the Oirats themselves, as the Khoshuts of Kundulen and Ablay could block the Kalmyks' way to Dzungaria. See Zlatkin 1983: 112, 133.

¹⁰³ Gomang Lama in Dzungaria "has primacy over all spiritual ones"; in Russian: "надо всеми духовными их имеет первенство" (AFPRES. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/1. Item 23. 1745-1746. Folio 2 verso). It was a famous Buddhist master, Lobsan Phuntsok, also known as Kempotan Lama, Goman Laza Lobsan Phuntsog and Dzungarian Noyon Khambo Luvsanpuntsog, he was a prominent disciple of Jamyang Shadpa (see Terbish 2008: 88; Kitinov 2004: 131-134). He was the head of the Drepung Gomang datsan, and during the period of Dzungar occupation of Tibet, he was tasked with overseeing the persecution of lamas from different schools, not aligned with Geluk.

from Galdan-Tseren, saying: “Galdan Cheren narrated everything to you, both past and future, and the apt advice he gave you, mindful of the Yellow Law and the former four Oirots’ [=Oirats’] power, when he swore an oath, is, in my opinion, better for you to trust”.¹⁰⁴ Thus, shortly after coming to power, the Dzungar ruler appealed to Donduk-Dashi and Darma-Bala, urging them to remember the union of the four Oirats, their common faith, and to return to their former homeland (“the apt advice he gave”). The letter specifically emphasized the unity of Buddhism and the Oirat people, stating: “And the Yellow Law with the power of four Oirats still stands unfailingly and indestructibly”.¹⁰⁵ It is evident that Gomang Lama linked the “invincibility” of Tsongkhapa’s teachings with Dzungaria, and he did not consider the Oirat people outside the sphere of Buddhist faith: “And because I only have you, my younger sister, for that, without hesitation, I give you advice that it is better to die than to lag behind your law and become a Russian”,¹⁰⁶ which implies a case of accepting Orthodoxy and thereby forsaking their Oirat identity.

However, the Russian authorities, to whom Donduk-Dashi handed this letter, did not view it as a cause for serious concern and did not pay significant attention to the emphasis placed by Gomang Lama on the importance of religion for the unity and future of the Oirats. They only noted that the lama was attempting to “cause indignation” and “do harm” to the Kalmyks, and considered the letter to reflect the lama’s position rather than Galdan-Tseren’s, who was in “good neighborhood” with the Russians.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the information about this “sign of hostility” was presented to the Dzungarian ambassadors, Lama Dashi and Navasbai, on October 31, 1745. Meanwhile, at the end of July 1745, Orenburg Governor I. I. Neplyuev wrote to the Collegium of Foreign Affairs, reporting that one of his subjects had visited Galdan-Tseren and claimed that Galdan-Tseren

¹⁰⁴ In Russian: “вам Галдан Черен обо всем прежнем и будущем представлял, и какой он памятуя желтой закон и прежнюю четырех ойротов власть, при учинении им присяги, вам склонной совет подавал, по моему мнению лучше вам тому верить” (AFPРЕ. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/1. Item 23. 1745–1746. Folios 14 verso – 15).

¹⁰⁵ In Russian: «А желтой закон со властью четырех ойротов и доньне непременно и несокрушимо состоит» (AFPРЕ. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/1. Item 23. 1745–1746. Folio 15). In Dzungaria during the reign of Tsevan-Rabdan and Galdan-Tseren, Buddhism reached a high level of development (Das 1984: 154; Dzhambadordzhi 2005: 121; Moiseyev 1991: 35; Baruun 2018).

¹⁰⁶ In Russian: “А понеже я тебя толко одну мою меньшую сестру имею, того ради не обвиняя в совет тебе представляю, что лучше умереть, нежели от закона своего отстать и учинится росианином” (AFPРЕ. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/1. Item 23. 1745–1746. Folio 15).

¹⁰⁷ AFPРЕ. Ibid. Folios 22 verso – 23.

“constantly talks and regrets that [the Kalmyks] are converting to the Christian faith, but he does not know how to help them”.¹⁰⁸

Christianization was indeed perceived by the Kalmyk leaders as one of the most significant issues in their relations with the Russian authorities.¹⁰⁹ At one point, Donduk-Ombo expressed deep concern about the religious situation among the Kalmyks. In the 1720s to 1730s, the government intensified Christianization efforts by offering significant benefits and privileges to converts.¹¹⁰ In response to this, the Khan, while meeting the Russian envoy foreman Danila Efremov in the Kuban region at the end of 1734, demanded that “the Kalmyks who come for baptism not be accepted in Russian towns and cities because it weakens the strength of their people”.¹¹¹ Archival records contain a description of the confrontation between zaisang Abuja, the envoy of Donduk-Ombo, and count Osterman. Abuja, representing the Kalmyk ruler, appealed to the Empress, requesting the prohibition of the baptism of Kalmyks who come to Russian urban areas, stating that “because of this their Kalmyk uluses get diminished, indulging Donduk Ombo in much sadness”.¹¹²

The count replied that the voluntary desire to be baptized cannot be prohibited, as it would be considered “a great sin and so on in similar terms”.¹¹³ He added that to Her Majesty, all Kalmyks are considered “equally subjects”, whether they are baptized or not. Apparently, the zaisang received instructions on how to act in case of an evasive response, effectively denying the claims made. “The envoy, upon hearing this, stated that Donduk Ombo wishes for their Russian spiritual scholars to engage in a debate with their Kalmyk spiritual scholars, and if their Christian faith appears more right than the Kalmyk one, then Donduk Ombo himself may consider accepting the Christian law. To this His Excellency did not respond directly, but reiterated the earlier answer and statements”.¹¹⁴ The threat to the

¹⁰⁸ In Russian: “имеет всегдашние разговоры и сожаление, что [калмыки] обращаются в христианскую веру, токмо как им помочь не знает” (AFPРЕ. Ibid. Folio 26).

¹⁰⁹ Bakunin 1995 : 51.

¹¹⁰ Dzhundzhuzov 2011: 114.

¹¹¹ In Russian: “приходящих для крещения калмык в российские города не принимать, для того что от того сила их народа слабеет” (Bakunin 1995: 127).

¹¹² In Russian: “оттого их калмыцкие улусы умяются, от чего Дондук Омбо находится в немалой печали” (AFPРЕ. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/1. Item 40. 1736. Folio 32).

¹¹³ In Russian: “превеликий грех и протчая в тому подобных терминах” (AFPРЕ. Ibid. Folio 32 verso).

¹¹⁴ In Russian: “Выслушавший сие посланец говорил, что Дондук Омбо желает, дабы их российских духовных ученые люди, с их калмыцкими духовными учеными же людьми имели диспутацию, и буде христианская вера их калмыцкой покажется правед, то Дондук Омбо и сам может принять

Kalmyk Buddhist faith resurfaced after the death of Donduk-Dashi. Rumors spread among the Kalmyks that Peter, the baptized son of Donduk-Ombo from a Kabardinian Moslem woman named Dzhan, would become Khan, leading to the belief that all Kalmyks would be baptized. This concern left them in “a state of great confusion”.¹¹⁵

Being cautious about potential interreligious conflicts and not wanting the “return” of the newly baptized individuals to Buddhism, and also considering the request of the baptized themselves, the government decided to build a fortress for them: “Privy Councilor Tatishchev ... found a site in the Simbirsk province, commonly known as Kunya Voloshka ... and erected a fortress there, which was named Stavropol in 1739¹¹⁶”.¹¹⁷ By June 1754, there were already 8,695 people living in it.¹¹⁸ It was here that the Dzungars, who fled to the territory of Russia after the fall of their Khanate and were baptized, were sent.¹¹⁹ Out of more than 25,000 Oirats from Dzungaria who crossed the Siberian border lines, around 3,000 people converted to Orthodoxy.¹²⁰ To prevent potential attempts by Qing authorities to forcibly return the fugitives, the Russian authorities decided to resettle the remaining Dzungars with the Volga Kalmyks.¹²¹ At the request of the Empress, Donduk-Dashi sent a lama to Altai in March 1756 to expedite the migration process.¹²²

христианской закон. На что Его Сиятельство точно ничего не сказал, но вышеписанный ответ и соизъявлений повтори” (AFPRES. Ibid. Folio 32 verso).

¹¹⁵ In Russian: “в великом смятении находятся” (AFPRES. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/2. Book 2. 1732–1773. Folio 150 verso).

¹¹⁶ Presently, the city of Tolyatti.

¹¹⁷ Bichurin 1991, 107.

¹¹⁸ Rychkov 1762, 115–116.

¹¹⁹ AFPRES. Coll. 113. Inv. 113/1. Item 7. 1757. Folios 9 verso – 10; Coll. 113. Inv. 113/1. Item 3. 1757. Folios 343, 343 verso, 345, 345 verso.

¹²⁰ Shovunov 1992: 135.

¹²¹ NARK. Coll. 35. Inv. 1. Item 85. Folios 5–6.

¹²² NARK. Coll. P-145. Inv. 1. Item 429. Folio 4. For details see Kitinov 2004: 139–141.

The religious factor: Lamas and Emperors

Upon the arrival of the Dzungars among the Kalmyks, the situation of the latter began to change, including in religious terms. According to Pallas, "As soon as the Syungor uluses arrived, they also had a commanding lama".¹²³ It is likely that Pallas was referring to the Dzungarian lama Delek, who arrived among the Kalmyks around the end of July 1758, accompanying the envoys of Donduk-Dashi to the Dalai Lama. Once among the Kalmyks, this lama proclaimed himself to be "a reborn one", a khubilgan, supporting his claims with "miracles". Ubasha wrote that lama Delek "... when he came here, and having not yet got used to us, did amazing things".¹²⁴ According to N. Spitsyn, "all the Kalmyk people worship him in the likeness, as if to their Burkhan, that is why he, the khutukhtu Lama, after that began to manage according to their law",¹²⁵ meaning he became one of the leaders of the Kalmyk sangha.¹²⁶

Around the end of October 1759, his shabiners complained to Donduk-Dashi "about the considerable insolence committed by him [lama Delek] by damaging their Burkhans, and other nasty deeds, and so on".¹²⁷ Khan not only removed him from the post of one of the main lamas but even arrested him. This decision aligned with the articles of

¹²³ Pallas 1809: 516.

¹²⁴ In Russian: "как сюда приехал, и с нами еще не обвыкнув, удивительные дела произвел" (NARK Item 429. Folio 30).

¹²⁵ In Russian: "оному весь калмыцкий народ поклоняется на подобие как бы их бурханом, почему он, хутухту лама, после того в правление свое по их закону и вступил" (NARK Item 429. Folio 29).

¹²⁶ In fact, he most likely attained equal status with the chief lama of the Khanate, Lauzan Jalchin, because only the Dalai Lama had the authority to appoint the chief lama among the Kalmyks. Tseren-Donduk stated that "... although they [Kalmyks] also have other lamas, they cannot do this [appoint the chief lama] without the order of the Dalai Lama"; in Russian: "хотя у них и другие ламы имеются, но без повеления Далай-ламы им того чинить не можно" (AFPRES. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/1. Item 2. 1736. Folio 82 verso). Jimba Jamtso expressed a similar view (AFPRES. Coll. 119. Inv. 119/1. Item 41. 1737–1741. Folio 396). Pallas also observed that "the Torgout Kalmyks have a Lama or a viceroy of the Dalai Lama" (Pallas 1809: 515). The precise origin of this practice is difficult to determine. It is possible that the first such appointment took place in 1690—the events associated with this year were described earlier. In 1688, two years prior, Dondub Gyatso, possibly the chief lama of Ayuka (it cannot be excluded that he may have been appointed by Ayuka himself), left the Torguts for the Dzungars (Das 1984: 154; Norbo 1999: 122). The next chief lama was Byukongin, who may have received the necessary charter (seal) from Dipa in 1690. Thus, Ayuka's subsequent appeal to the Dalai Lama regarding the return of Shakur-lama to replace the aged Byukongin is noted in the documents as a common practice.

¹²⁷ In Russian: "о учиненных от него немалых предрозостях повреждениями их бурханов, и других противных поступках, и о прочем" (NARK. Coll. P-145. Inv. 1. Item 429. Folio 29).

the Togatol laws, which imposed stricter punishments on clerics for violations of vow requirements, duties, etc. Spitsyn stood up for the lama and insisted on his release.¹²⁸

On January 21, 1761, Donduk-Dashi passed away. His son, Ubasha, wasted no time and, on March 28, sent a letter to Spitsyn, accusing lama Delek of witchcraft and implicating him in Donduk-Dashi's death: "therefore, we do not trust him at all".¹²⁹ Ubasha demanded "his lama be excommunicated, for his obscene actions, to a remote place where no Kalmyks would be".¹³⁰ Taking into consideration the role of the clergy and the importance of a peaceful resolution, Spitsyn informed the Collegium of Foreign Affairs about this incident, which resulted in the order to send the lama to St. Petersburg. In autumn, Delek, along with his nephew, who was also a lama, was sent to Moscow and later to St. Petersburg, where he was questioned about the system of incarnations. The nature of the questions suggests that the officials responsible for supervising the Kalmyks and their spiritual life had little understanding of the concept of "reincarnation" and its significance for believers. On the way to his new place of residence, Delek fell ill and passed away near the city of Voronezh.¹³¹

The reasons for the rapid growth of Delek's authority can be attributed to the unique circumstances prevailing among the Kalmyks. During their settlement in a new place, in the Volga region, and the establishment of a new social order, the cultural values and orientations of the Kalmyk people were closely intertwined with their political and religious systems. The religious institutions and principles, as reflected in legislative acts, played a crucial role in political legitimization. As time passed, the influence of the limited spiritual (Buddhist) context of the region and intermittent connections with the Dalai Lama led to the prominence of separate specific institutions within the religious system as well as the political system closely connected with it. In particular, the institution of reincarnation, due to its social perception and influence on the political processes of the Kalmyks, started determining the order of political legitimization (for instance, we can mention the anxieties surrounding the confirmation of the next Dalai Lamas whose authority extended to sending the Khan regalia or confirming the main Kalmyk lama).

¹²⁸ Kitinov 2004: 143–144.

¹²⁹ In Russian: "из того усмотря, мы ему вовсе не доверяем" (NARK. Coll. P-145. Inv. 1. Item 429. Folio 30).

¹³⁰ In Russian: "чтоб его ламу за непристойные ево поступки отлучить в отдаленное место где б калмыков не было" (NARK. Coll. 36. Inv. 1. Item 330. Folio 91).

¹³¹ NARK. Coll. P-145. Inv. 1. Item 429. Folio 34.

Perhaps the first such experience, many years after the death of Khoshut lama Zaya Pandita, occurred with the arrival of lama Delek. The mere fact that he was perceived by the people as a "saint" due to his khubilganism suggests that, until that time, there were no obvious (well-known) examples of such phenomena among them. Consequently, among the Kalmyks by the middle of the 18th century, the tradition of searching for and discovering incarnations had apparently been interrupted. However, there is limited information about the possible line of reincarnations among the Torgut lamas, which played an important role in the exodus of 1771. Russian geographer Rychkov, who personally spoke with a subject of Ubasha (Kalmyks were already moving towards Dzungaria), mentioned a lama "called Lauzin Lanchin,¹³² who, being revered by the people as an immortal person, excited everyone with the name of his gods, to go to Zyungoriya". Before that, he "pretended to be dead while being near the Volga River, but after three years he appeared alive again, telling the people that he was revived in Tibet, in the capital of their chief Dalai Lama, from where he brought a written testimony from this immortal high priest".¹³³ His "revival" gave the Kalmyk chiefs the opportunity to use this "holy incident" to convince the ordinary people to leave Russia.

If Rychkov's information has a certain historical basis, it can be assumed that this lama "died" around the mid-1760s, and after that, he was "resurrected in Tibet" and returned to his homeland with "written evidence" of this event.¹³⁴ The reappearance of Lauzan Jalchin

¹³² He is better known as Lauzan Jalchin.

¹³³ Rychkov 1772: 54.

¹³⁴ This story is truly remarkable, and at this point, there are no confirmed sources that verify Rychkov's account of the "death" and "revival" of this lama in Tibet. Nevertheless, such information does not appear to be entirely unique. In an archival document from 1617, which describes the presence of Russian envoys at the East Mongol Altyn Khan, there is a record stating: "And after negotiations, the Golden king Kunkachei [Ubashi-Khungtaiji] told us, yours serfs, about kutuktu: he is a saint according to our Busurman faith, and he was sent to us from the Labaist state [Tibet]. And when that kutukta was born, he knew how to read and write. He lived for 3 years from birth and [then] died. He remained in the ground for 5 years, dead, and [then] revived. And again, he began to read and write as he did before and recognized his people just as he did previously. And from that kutuktu, [they have] their gods, and bells, and books according to their faith"; in Russian: "И после посольства Золотой царь Кунканчей [Убаши-хунтайджи] нам, холопом твоим, сказал про кутукту: то де у нас по нашей вере бусурманской святой, а прислан де он к нам ис Лабинскова государства [Тибет]. А как де тот кутукта родился, и он де грамоте умел. Да жил де он от рожения своево 3 годы да умер. Да лежал де он в земле 5 лет мертв да ожил. Да опять де по старому к грамоте уметь стал и людей своих по старому стал знать. А того кутукты по своей вере боги их и колокола и книги" (Materialy 1959: 57).

played a dual role: on the one hand, the deep faith of the Kalmyks in his words and actions reflects a fairly high level of religiosity within the nation, and on the other hand, their unquestioning trust in the “fidelity” of the lama’s calls and actions allowed him to become one of the main organizers and inspirers of the Kalmyks’ exodus.

Part of the description of Lauzan Jalchin’s activities can be gleaned from an epigraphic source—a text (referred to hereafter as the “stele text”) written in both Chinese and Oirat on the pedestal of a stele dedicated to the 19th Anjjatan Lama Lobsang Danbi Nyima (1918–1985),¹³⁵ situated in the Bayangolin Mongol Autonomous Prefecture, Xinjiang Uigur Autonomous Region of PRC. This text provides information about his predecessors, the most famous lamas of this lineage. The details about them found in Russian archival documents, as well as in Chinese and Kalmyk sources, are scarce and sometimes contradictory. However, by studying the history of some lamas among the Oirats and Kalmyks, important information that can be revealed, which may contribute to understanding the reasons for the high position of this lineage, and consequently, to a more comprehensive assessment of Anjjatan Lama.

A Torgut boy Lobsan Sanji, a disciple of another Torgut lama named Lobsan Dorja,¹³⁶ devoted approximately 27 years of study in Drepung Gomang monastery,¹³⁷ and, during the period from 1700 to 1707, he studied under the guidance of the renowned Jamyang Shadpa.¹³⁸ His Tibetan name was Lobsang Gelek.¹³⁹ He successfully defended the highest degree of Geshe Rabjamba and returned to the Kalmyk khanate around 1712. It was him that the Qing ambassador Tulishen referred to among the three lamas of Ayuka Khan, whom he met on July 1, 1714, namely Geva, Aramjamba, and Samtan.¹⁴⁰ Among the Kalmyks, his name transformed into Anjjatan,¹⁴¹ and his temple (originally built by his first mentor, Lobsan Dorja) became known as Anjjatan-khure. Pozdneev mentioned that “during the time of the first Kalmyk Khan Ayuka, Anjjatal Lama was the high priest”,¹⁴² indicating that Anjjatan likely held the position of chief lama until 1719, when the pointed Shakur Lama returned from Tibet.¹⁴³ Although there is no

¹³⁵ The photo of the monument, along with the text of the inscription on the stele, was kindly provided to me by the Chinese researcher Da Li.

¹³⁶ Terbish 2008: 167.

¹³⁷ Batubayar 2016: 75.

¹³⁸ Gibson 1990.

¹³⁹ Lijai 2020: 704.

¹⁴⁰ Zapiski 1978: 467, 471; also, see Pal’mov 1926: 39.

¹⁴¹ Kitinov, Lyulina 2021: 863.

¹⁴² Cited in Kurapov 2007: 216.

¹⁴³ According to Pal’mov, he returned to the Kalmyk Khanate in March 1719 or around a year later. See Pal’mov 1926: 53. About Shakur Lama, see Kitinov 2015.

available data on Anjjatan's passing, it seems that he was the main Kalmyk lama during the period in question.

As the stele text notes, "the seventh incarnation of Anjjatan Lobsan Danzan, [who] was one of those who made the decision that the Torgut [Kalmyk] aimags should return to their homeland in the 36th year [of the reign] of Qianlong (in 1771)". This name, Lobsan Danzan, almost completely coincides with the name of Lauzan Jalchin, making it evident that they are referring to the same individual.

According to Astrakhan Tatar Mustafa Abdulov, Lauzan Jalchin claimed upon his return to Dzungaria that, "allegedly, through his efforts and influence, the Kalmyk people escaped to the Chinese side, leaving behind Russian protection, and, thanks to his leadership, they reached that place, and it was his intention to secure, in retribution, the main position of a leader among this people for himself".¹⁴⁴ This information further corroborates Rychkov's account.

Some Chinese researchers also mention the Torgut lama Dunlubu Jyatso, who, in collaboration with Lauzan Jalchin, secretly journeyed to the Dalai Lama before 1771. Subsequently, he traveled to Qianlong to report on the plan and organization of the Kalmyk exodus. After the Kalmyks arrived in the Ili region of Xinjiang, this lama was honored the title of "Gomang" and returned to Xinjiang, where he established his line of reincarnated khubilgan Gomang Lamas. Meanwhile, Lauzan Jalchin remained in Yonghegong as a "kanbu"¹⁴⁵ and visited the Kalmyks in Xinjiang twice a year to preach.¹⁴⁶

About the "Torgut" policy of Qianlong

The policy of the Qing Dynasty concerning Buddhism is an almost endless topic. Often, the Qing's "Buddhist" policy ran in parallel with its "ethnic" policy, as exemplified by their approach towards the Kalmyks. During the reigns of Xuanye Emperor (1654–1723, reigning motto of Kangxi, reigned until February 1723), Shizong Emperor (1678–1735, reigning motto of Yongzheng, reigned until October 1735) and Hongli Emperor (1711–1799, reigning motto of Qianlong, reigned until 1795), differences can be observed in their Oirat policies. Under Kangxi Emperor, the primary focus was on the Dzungars, with efforts made to win their individual leaders to the Manchu side. However, during the reign of Yongzheng, the Qing court extended its

¹⁴⁴ In Russian: "якобы по ево старанию и склонению калмыцкой народ побег ис протекции российской в китайскую сторону зделал, да и по ево предводительству тамошних мест достиг, желая в воздаяние за то получить себе главное в сем народе начальство" (cited in Istoriiia 2009: 425).

¹⁴⁵ From the Tibetan term *mkhan po*, meaning 'abbot', or 'main lama of a monastery'.

¹⁴⁶ Li 2016.

benevolence to other Oirat groups, including the Khoshuts and Torguts. By the time of Qianlong, the court's attention shifted towards the Torguts. The content of the letter (decree) from Yongzheng to Tseren-Donduk, delivered to the Kalmyks by the Qing embassy led by Merin Zangin Mandai in 1731, reveals two main vectors in the policy of the Manchu rulers towards the Kalmyks (Torguts), which also influenced the exodus of 1771.

The first vector has a religious dimension.

The letter addresses the fate of the embassy of Arabjur, who was Ayuka's nephew and the son of Ayuka's cousin, Nazar Mamut. Arabjur was sent by Khan to worship the Dalai Lama in the middle of 1698 and stayed in Tibet for several years. However, he was forced to stay in China afterward because he failed to return through Dzungaria due to worsening relations between the Dzungars and the Kalmyks. Several years earlier, Khungtaiji Tsevan-Rabdan had taken 15,000 yurts from Sanjip, Ayuka's son.¹⁴⁷ Many publications that focus on the embassy of Arabjur either ignore its religious aspect¹⁴⁸ or include interpretations that need clarification.¹⁴⁹

Yongzheng acknowledges that Arabjur was detained at the order of his father, Kangxi Emperor, and as a form of "compensation", he was granted a high rank and salary. The letter states: "And, while returning from there [from Tibet, Arabjur] was not allowed to pass through by Tsong Araptan; my late father showed mercy and accepted Him along with his mother ... also, Gomang Lama's spiritual servants, who had participated in religious ceremonies with the Dalai Lama, were not permitted to return by the Tangut people who held them captive, and Boktokhan gathered them and provided food, showing his mercy. Later, [he did the same for] the Torgouts brought by the Zengorians [=Dzungars] who had captured [them]. And [he] brought them all together from various places and provided food, making them partake of his mercy".¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ In 1701, Sanjip, along with his ulus, headed towards Lake Kukunor to join forces with the local Torguts, who were part of the Khoshut khanate. The reason for this move was a quarrel between Sanjip and Ayuka.

¹⁴⁸ Zlatkin 1983: 221; Perdue 2005: 215.

¹⁴⁹ Natsagdorz 2015.

¹⁵⁰ In Russian: "И оттуда [из Тибета Арабджур] возвращался Цонг Араптаном не пропущен, покойный отец мой принял Ево и с матерью под свою милость... также Гоман ламинных духовных служителей бывших на мольбищах у Далай ламы, тангуцкой народ не отпустил назад завладел был их, которых боктохан собрал и содера в своей милости, питал. Потом от зенгорцов в добычь полученных торгоутов. И бывших в разных местах воедино совокупил и учиня причастными своей милости питал же" (AFPRES. Coll. 62. Inv. 62/1. Item 9. 1731. Folios 334 verso – 335).

The Arabjur embassy consisted of a large group of Kalmyk lamas with their shabiners, who were subordinates of the chief Kalmyk lama, Byukongin (also known as Gomang Lama). For some unknown reasons, they were detained by the Tibetans (“[they] were not permitted to return by the Tangut people who held them captive”), however, thanks to the intervention of the Emperor, they were able to return to the envoy of the Kalmyk Khan (“Boktokhan gathered them and provided food, showing his mercy”).

The involvement of these lamas in internal Tibetan affairs, particularly in relation to the events surrounding the Sixth Dalai Lama Tsanyang Gyatso, cannot be discounted. Moreover, lama Dondub Gyatso, mentioned earlier, may have wielded considerable influence in this regard. By approximately 1701, he found himself in Lhasa, where he could have had encounters with the Kalmyk lamas, who were his former subjects. In 1710, a decision was made to relocate the monks and subjects of Dondub Gyatso, who had passed away in the same year, from Kham (where he had overseen the Litang monastery), to the Serten area in Amdo.¹⁵¹ Due to the scarcity of relevant sources, one can only surmise that they might have been united with the subjects of Arabjur who were roaming in the area.

Thus, the Manchu court skillfully manipulated the situation with the Arabjur embassy to its advantage. The considerable presence of Kalmyk clergy among the embassy’s representatives seemingly rendered them a valuable bargaining asset in the political dealings between Beijing and the Kalmyk Khan. Consequently, the Emperor strategically highlighted the Tibetans’ “guilt” while emphasizing his own benevolence: he “gathered” the Kalmyk lamas and “fed” them mercifully.

The second vector has an ethnic dimension.

The Emperor aimed to demonstrate to Ayuka and other leaders that under his rule, the Torguts would experience a better life compared to living in Russia: as stated in the letter, the Emperor “brought them all together from various places and provided food, making them partake of his mercy”. Ambassador Tulishen conveyed: “We were ordered to bring four of the Arabjur people and present them to Arabjur’s father, Nadzar-Mamut, and ensure that Nadzar-Mamut would be fully aware of all the mercies bestowed upon his son Arabjur by His Highest Majesty, our most sacred Khan”.¹⁵²

The Torguts were traditionally distinguished by the Qing rulers. It is possible to speculate that one reason for this distinction was the

¹⁵¹ Natsagdorzh 2015: 164–165.

¹⁵² Zapiski 1978: 457.

existence of a special relationship between the Torguts and the Chinese authorities. This is evidenced by historical information suggesting that Torgut leaders possessed a seal from the Ming dynasty. For instance, in the late 1920s, Haslund reported witnessing the seal of Ubasha Khan, which he received in 1776 from Qianlong as a replacement for a previous seal acquired from the Ming dynasty.¹⁵³ That seal was kept in the palace of Seng-chen Gegen, the ruler overseeing all the Torguts. According to Bichurin, in 1771, during a meeting with Qing officers at the Chinese border, Ubasha presented various gifts to the ‘Commander-in-Chief’ of the Ili area. “At the same time, he also presented a jasper seal with an inscription in ancient Chinese characters, which had been granted to his ancestor by the Ming court during the 8th summer of the reign of Yong-le (in 1410)¹⁵⁴.”¹⁵⁵

These data validate the Chinese politico-historical tradition, which suggests that local leaders who acknowledged the Emperor’s authority were granted seals that they were required to personally exchange in the event of a change in dynasties. Failure to do so was perceived as loyalty to the previous Huangdi. Consequently, it appears that one of the Torgut rulers received such a seal from Zhu-di (the motto of the reign of Yong-le, ruled in 1402–1424), Emperor of the Ming Dynasty, and it was subsequently preserved and inherited by Torgut rulers until it reached Ubasha Khan. This information holds significant research potential as it indicates that the head of the Torguts, who were not yet part of the Oirats,¹⁵⁶ had established relations with Nanjing, then capital of the Ming Empire. Zhu-di Emperor recognized him as a local ruler and, consequently, a “tributary” of the Ming Empire, through the presentation of the seal. The study of the history of this seal could potentially shed light on the Torguts’ former roaming grounds. In our opinion, the seal bestowed by the Emperor upon the Torgut ruler in 1410–1411 may serve as evidence of the Torguts’ possible presence in the northwestern lands of the former Tangut state Xi Xia, a territory occupied by Ming troops in 1405.¹⁵⁷ This period likely marked the Torguts’ close contact with the Ming Empire.

¹⁵³ Haslund 1935: 308–309.

¹⁵⁴ According to Denby, the seal was made of jade, and the Torgut ruler received it in 1411; see Denby 1891: 172. Batubayar mentions that the seal was presented in 1409 to the Torgut wang Taiwan for services to the Ming Empire. The same author also writes that after arriving in Xinjiang, Ubasha received “an old seal with the inscription ‘Yongle ershier nian san-yue sanzhi’”, which was handed to one of the Torgut rulers on February 2, 1424, but Batubayar found it difficult to “assume if there is any obvious connection between the two [seals]” (Batubayar 2014: 82).

¹⁵⁵ Bichurin 1829: 193.

¹⁵⁶ The Torguts joined the Oirats under the Choros Toghon in 1430s.

¹⁵⁷ Gumilev 2007: 133.

Having joined the Oirats, the Torgut rulers retained possession of that seal—and in this context, the reasons and conditions for the Torguts' submission to Choros Toghon should be reexamined. It is possible that the possession of such a seal influenced the cautious and balanced policy of subsequent Torgut rulers towards Beijing, regardless of whether the Ming or Qing dynasty ruled China. Additionally, the possession of the seal could have played a role in the recognition of the Torgut ruler's leadership by other Kalmyk leaders signifying a special relation with the Celestial Empire.

Indeed, the Kalmyks, on the whole, had stable contact with the rulers of China. According to Haslund, the lamas of the "Yellow Monastery" recounted that Ayuka once received an invitation from the Qing authorities to return to Dzungaria. Although Ayuka declined the proposal, he prudently kept a secret document in case the Torguts decided to establish their yurts again in Dzungaria under the protection of powerful China.¹⁵⁸ China held significant importance for the Kalmyks in both political and religious contexts. In regard to the political aspect, it is worth remembering that the Torguts' former homeland was in the territories of Qinghai and Gansu, and Dzungaria was located within Xinjiang. Religiously, the Kalmyks sought free access to Tibet. Pal'mov emphasized the close relationship between religion and politics among the Kalmyks: "The negotiations with Beijing concerning the organization of the Kalmyks' political future demanded their caution and thoughtfulness. The Kalmyks tried to secure political freedom for themselves, which they had unsuccessfully sought from Russia and would fail to get from China".¹⁵⁹ All the Manchus promised to them was only to facilitate access to Tibet.

Conclusion

The 1771 exodus of Kalmyks from Russia to former Dzungaria occurred under the influence of several factors, with the religious aspect being of utmost significance. This factor encompassed several dimensions, namely the acquisition of the Khan title, which was to be received from the Dalai Lama; the phenomenon of "calling letters" from Tibetan hierarchs that urged the Kalmyks to return to their native lands; the importance of Dzungaria as the homeland of all Oirats, where Buddhism could thrive as traditionally did; the influence of the Kalmyk lamas, and special intervention of the Qing emperors and officials.

¹⁵⁸ Haslund 1935: 209.

¹⁵⁹ Pal'mov 1926: 102.

It is evident that after Ayuka, each Kalmyk leader (Tseren-Donduk, Donduk-Ombo, Donduk-Dashi, and Ubasha) encountered the challenge of seeking legitimization from the Dalai Lama. By the time of Donduk-Ombo, the Kalmyks were aware that the Dalai Lama could not grant Khan titles independently, without approval of the Emperor. However, due to their adherence to religio-political traditions, they did not fully grasp the implications of these political changes.

The new element that significantly influenced these traditions was the introduction of the "calling letters". While historical tradition asserts that the first letter "came" to the Kalmyks around 1719 with Shakur Lama, this assumption did not take into account the complex conditions prevailing in Tibet itself. The Dalai Lama Ngawang Yeshe Gyatso was entirely dependent on the Tibetan "king" Lhavzan, who was not interested in strengthening Dzungaria. Information about a second and third letter of this kind "emerged" during the reigns of Donduk-Dashi and Ubasha. However, to date, no original letter has been discovered, leading to the possibility that these "calling letters" might not have been actual written documents.

The Dsungarian factor, independent of Tibetan affairs, held its own significance. Dzungaria was regarded as Oirat land, located in close proximity to Tibet. During Galdan-Tseren's rule, relations between the Kalmyks and the Dzungars began to improve. The Dzungar ruler extended an invitation to the Kalmyks to return to their former homeland, emphasizing Buddhism as a shared indicator of their Oirat identity, in contrast to the active promotion of Christian Orthodoxy among the Kalmyks. However, after the Qing troops defeated the Dzungar Khanate, the refugees migrated to Southern Siberia and partially converted to Christianity. Later they were sent to a specially established town for baptized Kalmyks, Stavropol, while other Dzungars arrived among the Volga Kalmyks.

The Russian authorities were aware of the shifts in the Kalmyks' sentiments. They received regularly updates about their intentions to leave, yet they failed to draw appropriate conclusions. As the negative processes escalated and the situation among the Kalmyks worsened, their leaders made the decision to return to their former homeland.

The desire to return to Dzungaria grew stronger among the Kalmyks during the 18th century, especially with the arrival of the Dzungarian refugees. When Delek Lama declared himself a khubilgan, he gained significant authority and a high position in the Kalmyk sangha, effectively becoming the second spiritual leader alongside Lauzan Jalchin Lama. Although Ubasha later removed Delek Lama from his position due to unrighteous behavior and he died around 1762, his example had a lasting effect. Lauzan Jalchin himself took advantage of the theme of incarnation, claiming that he was

reincarnated in Tibet after death, attaining a status comparable to a khubilgan. The Kalmyks placed complete trust in him, allowing him to become one of the main organizers of the eastward exodus.

The comparative analysis of Oirat (also Kalmyk), Tibetan, Manchu, and Russian sources reveals the significant role played by lamas in the Kalmyk exodus.

The available data strongly suggests the strong influence of the Qing court on the Kalmyk sangha, primarily through the main Kalmyk lama, Lauzan Jalchin, and his inner circle. It is possible to identify this lama with Lama Lobsan Danzan, who, after the exodus, was acknowledged by the Qing as a spiritual leader instrumental in the migration and, furthermore, was declared to be the seventh incarnation of the renowned Kalmyk lama Anjjatan, also known as Lobsan Sanji and Lobsan Gelek. Anjjatan spent 27 years in Drepung Gomang monastery and achieved the highest degree of Rabjamba. Chinese sources also mention Lama Dunlubu Jyatso, who played a significant role in this tragic event.

Indeed, information about these lamas is scarce, but historical records shed more light on the Arabjur Kalmyk embassy to Tibet in 1698, which played a crucial role in the Qing court's geopolitical game aimed to make the Kalmyks return to their former lands. This event marked the fusion of religious and political matters.

The Qing authorities employed various tactics to promote their vision of a new world that awaited the Kalmyks if they chose to leave Russia for China. The Emperor, often depicted as a Bodhisattva, would appeal to his distant believers, showing concern for his far-flung subjects. The Emperor's promises, coupled with the pro-Manchu stance of some lamas, created a distorted perception of the situation and instilled false hopes of a brighter future among the Kalmyks.

Changes in the national mentality of the Kalmyks were also significant. The confidence they once had in overcoming all difficulties, bolstered by the support of the Dalai Lama, began to waver. It is possible that the Kalmyks no longer relied on their ability to adapt to changes and were truly willing to relinquish their lands in Russia to return to their former homeland. In their perception, this homeland held the promise of freedom from any restrictions, including or even especially those of a religious nature, that they believed were unavoidable in their current situation.

Indeed, during that period, all the leaders showed some interest in the Kalmyk exodus to their former Oirat homeland, Dzungaria. This interest was observed among Tibetan hierarchs, Qing emperors of China, some Kalmyk rulers, and even the Dzungars themselves. The Tsarist authorities, on the other hand, seemed to be the only side that opposed it, but their actions were influenced more by geopolitical

considerations rather than genuine concern for the Kalmyks' well-being or interests. Each side pursued its own goals, driven by geopolitical interests. Notably, the Qing court achieved the most success in this regard, skillfully using religious and ethnic factors that primarily concerned the ruling Kalmyk elite.

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