

Gelugpa and Qing Empires: an alliance of ideologies

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One of the basic misinterpretations regarding the history of the Qing Empire is when this political regime is solely referred to as a dynasty [Alternative way of expressing this idea: The history of the Qing Empire is misinterpreted by referring to this political regime as a mere dynasty.] By understanding the phenomenon of the Qing Empire as a result of the efforts of myriad forces and tendencies with contributions from various national and state formations opens up a number of perspective directions in this field. One such prospect is bringing to light and analyzing the prevailing political tendencies in Central Asia, which promoted or impeded the process of establishing Qing domination. This issue aroused discussion among experts in Mongolian history, yet it is practically ignored by tibetologists. The problem was clearly formulated in one of the works of Melvin Goldstein, who stressed the point that “religion” (and the religious segment) was not the homogeneous entity it is typically implied to be, even within the Gelugpa sect”. He argued his point by illustrating several cases where the government of the Dalai Lama and the greatest Yellow Hat monasteries collided in the 19th–20th century. It seems the issue of internal contradiction within the Yellow Hat church appears most vividly when correlated with the general political situation in 17th century inner Asia, especially in light of Qing expansionism.

The history of Gelugpa internal controversy begins with the establishment of the Dalai Lama institution. The concept of reincarnation possessed a number of advantages over other institutions of authority. By the end of the 16th century, it had attracted various Mongol khans to personally establish a special kind of relationship with the Dalai Lama through the revival of the patron-priest concept, already elaborated on during the early Yuan. This resulted in the rise of the Dalai Lama institution, which in turn caused asymmetry in the hierarchical structure of Gelug because the Dalai Lamas, unlike the Karmapas, never officially headed the sect they come from. The Fifth Dalai Lama’s actions aimed at sacralizing the institution and consolidating authority strained his relations with the Gelugpa monastic hierarchy. This contradiction, in my opinion, had its root not just in an adherence of the Great Fifth to Nyingmapa School, but in the fact that “he attempted to build a state with a broader power base, state which he presented as the re-establishment of the early Tibetan empire. His rule was to be supported by the Ge-luk tradition, but would also include groups affiliated with other religious traditions”. I think I wouldn’t be so much wide of the truth suggesting, that the majority of Gelugpa followers considered their tradition as a true and most adequate transmission of Buddha Doctrine and hence regarded its political predominance as a triumph of Buddhist religion. Moreover, a certain number of Tsonkapa followers thought of interests of the school more highly than of Tibetan national interests and, therefore, could consider a policy of rapprochement to other Buddhist sects pursuing by the Dalai Lama V, if not as betrayal of

Yellow church interests, but at least as an unfavorable for their own school tendency. The efforts for creation of a national state seems to have caused a reaction from side of some representatives of the high Gelugpa hierarchy that was expressed in harsh conflicts fixed in some Tibetan historical sources. I emphasize, that it was not a reaction to the institute of Dalai Lamas in general, but a reaction to strengthening of this institute and to its deviation from sect-orientation with the purpose of creation of more representative government. In this case Gelugpa would lose its authority monopoly, or this monopoly would be threatened. Some Yellow-sect monks might regard such tendency as adverse, and that seems to have made them opposed to the Fifth Dalai Lama. It seems that the expansion of the Qing empire intensified this tension. After their unsuccessful attempts to affect Mongols through the Dalai Lama, Qing emperors were compelled to invent many-sided policy for neutralization of Dalai Lamas spiritual authority over Mongols and taking control over this influential institute. I suggest that in their efforts Manchu, rather unexpectedly, received a backing of separate representatives of the high Yellow-sect hierarchy. Some unknown earlier facts discovered in one of the biographies of Jamyan-Zhadba I, an authoritative representative and, most likely, the leader of Lhabzang-Qing-oriented part of Gelugpa clergy seem to have confirmed the last suggestion. Jamyang-Zhadba's position probably reflected the viewpoint of many other monks and can be understood as a care of interests of Gelugpa as a dominating sect, which to the beginning of the 18th c. has already stepped over boundaries of the national states, becoming a phenomenon of international significance. Fear of the perspective of missing the exclusive position occupied in the empire by Gelugpa strengthened sectarian tendencies within its clergy. There are cited some episodes recorded in the biography of the Second ICang-skya Khutukhtu, displaying political orthodoxy of Gelugpa hierarchy in Peking. It is noted, that the ICang-skya Khutukhtu institute had been used by the Qing emperors in purpose of reducing nationalist tendencies in Inner Mongolia down to 30s of the 20th century. It is important to remember, that at the same time Yellow-hats used the emperors too. In other words the interests of the Qing and Gelugpa agreed: expansion and strengthening of the empire meant also spreading of the Yellow sect.