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The Issues of the Sixth Dalai Lama and the Transformation of Qing Information System on Tibet

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Abstract: After having been deceived by the Géluk government about the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama for almost 15 years, the Qing empire decided to strengthen its surveillance on Tibet by deploying espionage networks operated by spy lamas based in Xining and Dartsédo on Sino–Tibetan borderlands. Accordingly, the Qing successfully intervened in the reincarnation system of Tibetan Buddhism by taking advantage of the Sixth Dalai Lama’s issues. By establishing a new system of espionage operated by a eunuch lama serving in the imperial court, the Qing finally deposed the Sixth Dalai Lama and secretly murdered him in 1706. The Sixth Dalai Lama’s death embodied the monumental transition that significantly shaped the destiny of Tibet, China, and Inner Asia in the following three centuries. By investigating the Sixth Dalai Lama’s controversies, this article sheds light on how the Qing dynasty embarked on constructing its imperial enterprise in Inner Asia based on intelligence collection and information manipulation. By using multilingual sources in Tibetan, Mongolian, Manchu, and Chinese, the present study shows how the Qing empire overcame the challenges of information deficiency and lingual differences by developing intelligence networks and multilingual mechanisms to consolidate its governance in Inner Asia.

Keywords: Sixth Dalai Lama; Kangxi Emperor; Šangnan Dorji; Qing Empire; Tibetan Buddhism; Sino–Tibetan relations; intelligence networks; espionage; Géluk School; reincarnation system



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1. Introduction

The issue of the Sixth Dalai Lama, Tsangyang Gyatso (Ti. Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho, 1683–1706), represents a pivotal chapter in the intricate political and religious relationship between Tibet and the Qing Empire. Born into an era of geopolitical instability, his reign as Dalai Lama was fraught with controversy, marked by both his reluctance to fulfill his religious responsibilities and the ensuing political crises surrounding his abdication and eventual deposition. These controversies not only triggered significant shifts in Tibet’s internal politics but also exposed the flaws within the Qing Empire’s intelligence system regarding Tibet. This article aims to explore how the Qing dynasty, initially unaware of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s death, and later deceived about the true nature of the Sixth Dalai Lama’s status, gradually overhauled its information-gathering mechanisms in Tibet to maintain control over this crucial frontier region.

The historiographical significance of the Sixth Dalai Lama’s reign is often overshadowed by the powerful Fifth Dalai Lama Ngakwang Lozang Gyatso (Ti. Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, 1617–1682), but his story is central to understanding the Qing Empire’s evolving strategy in Tibet. The hidden death of the Fifth Dalai Lama by his regent Sanggyé Gyatso (Ti. Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, 1653–1705) between 1682 and 1696 exemplifies the

power dynamics within Tibetan theocracy, while also highlighting the lack of direct Qing oversight in Tibetan affairs. The deception not only weakened the mutual trust between the Qing court and Tibetan rulers but also led the Kangxi Emperor (r. 1661–1722) to reform the Qing information system, thereby extending the Qing's imperial reach in Inner Asia. Through a complex network of lamas, translators, and spies, the Qing Empire embarked on a transformative project of intelligence gathering, culminating in the deposition of Tsangyang Gyatso in 1706. This moment marks a turning point in Sino–Tibetan relations and sets the stage for the Qing dynasty's tighter control over Tibet in the centuries to follow.

By focusing on the case of the Sixth Dalai Lama, this article contributes to the broader discourse on the relationship between intelligence, governance, and imperial expansion in early modern Eurasia. The study draws upon multilingual sources, including Tibetan, Mongolian, Manchu, and Chinese archival materials, to illuminate how the Qing dynasty overcame the challenges posed by linguistic diversity and information asymmetry. Moreover, the study emphasizes how the Qing court strategically employed espionage, diplomatic maneuvering, and religious influence to intervene in Tibet's internal affairs, effectively reshaping its role as both a spiritual and political power.

The geopolitical landscape in which Tsangyang Gyatso rose to prominence was shaped by multiple factors. On the one hand, the Ganden Podrang government, under the leadership of Sanggyé Gyatso, was struggling to maintain control over Tibet in the face of external pressures from Zungharia and Bhutan. On the other hand, the Qing dynasty, newly ascendant in China, was grappling with the challenge of consolidating its authority over the vast and diverse regions of Inner Asia. At the heart of these challenges was the role of Tibetan Buddhism, particularly the Géluk School, which enjoyed widespread influence across Tibet, Mongolia, and parts of China. The Qing emperors, recognizing the importance of the Géluk School in maintaining order in these regions, sought to exert influence over the Dalai Lama's reincarnation system as part of their broader strategy of integrating Tibet into the Qing empire's political orbit.

In the early years of the Kangxi Emperor's reign, the Qing dynasty relied heavily on Géluk lamas as intermediaries to facilitate communication with the Tibetan government. The role of these intermediary lamas, however, came under increasing scrutiny following the revelation that the Fifth Dalai Lama's death had been concealed for nearly fifteen years. This deception raised serious concerns within the Qing court about the reliability of the information it was receiving from Tibet. The Sixth Dalai Lama's refusal to conform to the expectations placed upon him as both a religious and political leader only exacerbated these concerns, leading the Kangxi Emperor to take direct action to reform the Qing's intelligence system in Tibet.

In response to the perceived failure of the Géluk lamas to provide accurate and timely information, the Kangxi Emperor initiated a series of reforms aimed at creating a more reliable and effective intelligence network in Tibet. This new system was designed to bypass the existing networks controlled by the Géluk hierarchy, which had proven susceptible to manipulation and corruption. Central to these reforms was the establishment of a network of spy lamas, many of whom operated out of strategic locations such as Xining and Dartsédo, key borderland cities that served as gateways between China and Tibet (Kung 2021). Among these spies, Šangnan Dorji, a eunuch lama with close ties to the Qing court, played a crucial role in gathering intelligence on the political and religious developments in Tibet during the final years of the seventeenth century (Kusunoki 2006, 2008).

Šangnan Dorji's work exemplifies the Qing court's pragmatic approach to dealing with the challenges of ruling over a multicultural empire. Fluent in Tibetan, Mongolian, and Manchu, Šangnan Dorji was able to navigate the complex linguistic and cultural land-

scapes of Inner Asia, ensuring that the Qing court remained well-informed about developments in Tibet. His intelligence work not only provided the Kangxi Emperor with crucial information about the internal politics of the Ganden Podrang but also allowed the Qing court to intervene in Tibet's religious affairs by influencing the process of recognizing and installing new Dalai Lamas.

The abdication of the Sixth Dalai Lama in 1702 represents a watershed moment in the history of Qing–Tibetan relations. Tsangyang Gyatso's decision to renounce his monastic vows and abandon his role as Dalai Lama created a power vacuum in Tibetan politics, which the Qing court was quick to exploit. In the eyes of the Qing, the Sixth Dalai Lama's abdication provided an opportunity to assert greater control over Tibet, a region that had long been considered semi-autonomous under the rule of the Dalai Lamas. The Kangxi Emperor's decision to depose Tsangyang Gyatso and replace him with a more compliant figure signaled the Qing dynasty's determination to exert its authority over Tibet and ensure that the region remained under its influence.

In 1706, Tsangyang Gyatso was forcibly removed from his position as Dalai Lama, marking the end of his brief and controversial reign. His mysterious death later that year, reportedly at the hands of Qing officials, has been the subject of much speculation, with recent studies suggesting that he was assassinated to prevent him from becoming a rallying point for anti-Qing sentiment in Tibet ([Wuyunbilige 2010](#)). Whatever the case may be, the deposition and death of the Sixth Dalai Lama represented the culmination of the Qing court's efforts to tighten its grip on Tibet, setting the stage for the more direct control that would be exercised over the region in the centuries to follow.

The case of the Sixth Dalai Lama serves as a lens through which to examine the broader processes of imperial governance, intelligence gathering, and religious politics in early modern Inner Asia. Through its investigation of this pivotal moment in Sino–Tibetan relations, this article sheds light on how the Qing dynasty overcame the challenges of ruling over a multicultural and geographically diverse empire. By reforming its information system and developing new mechanisms for gathering intelligence on Tibet, the Qing court was able to assert greater control over the region, thereby consolidating its power and shaping the future of Sino–Tibetan relations for centuries to come.

Despite its historiographical importance, the reign of the Sixth Dalai Lama has not received sufficient scholarly attention compared to the towering figure of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Most existing studies in Qing–Tibetan history focus on the Fifth Dalai Lama's consolidation of power and his relationship with the Qing court, overshadowing the complexities of Tsangyang Gyatso's tenure. While the hidden death of the Fifth Dalai Lama and the deception orchestrated by Sanggyé Gyatso have been studied extensively ([Ahmad 1970](#); [Petech 1972](#)), the political and religious ramifications of the Sixth Dalai Lama's controversial abdication and deposition remain underexplored. Specifically, past research often neglects how these events catalyzed reforms in the Qing court's intelligence apparatus and redefined its approach to managing Tibetan affairs.

Previous scholarship on the life of Tsangyang Gyatso has largely centered on his literary and cultural legacy. [Aris \(1988\)](#) examines Tsangyang Gyatso's life through the lens of Tibetan mysticism and spirituality, highlighting his unconventional character as both a secular poet and a spiritual figure. [Sørensen \(1990\)](#) focuses on the songs attributed to the Sixth Dalai Lama, exploring their secularized nature and their departure from traditional monastic expectations. [Wickham-Smith's \(2011\)](#) translation of *The Hidden Life of the Sixth Dalai Lama* introduces religious narratives that present Tsangyang Gyatso as a wandering monk living in exile, reflecting the evolving cultural memory surrounding his life within Mongol–Tibetan Buddhist communities. While these studies provide valuable cultural and literary perspectives, they overlook the broader geopolitical consequences of his

abdication and the structural changes it triggered within the Qing administration. Specifically, the political and intelligence dimensions of Qing responses to this crisis remain inadequately addressed, leaving a significant gap in our understanding of Qing–Tibetan relations during this transformative period.

Furthermore, while existing works already pay attention to the significance of the Buddhist reincarnation system in Qing–Tibetan relationships, controversies, and the problems concerning Tibetan Buddhism reincarnation, especially the issue of Tsangyang Gyatso, still deserve further research. Studies such as [Schwieger \(2015\)](#) and [Oidtmann \(2018\)](#) have shown that the Qing court’s intervention in the Dalai Lama reincarnation system was essential to consolidating authority over Tibet. [Sullivan \(2021\)](#) further examines how the Géluk hierarchy expanded its influence through bureaucratic structures, while [Wu \(2022\)](#) contextualizes Tibetan Buddhist expansion within the larger framework of Qing Inner Asia. However, these studies do not fully engage with the reciprocal nature of Qing–Géluk interactions or the role of intelligence reforms catalyzed by the Sixth Dalai Lama’s deposition. This study builds on these works by demonstrating how the Qing court’s responses to the political crises surrounding Tsangyang Gyatso’s reign transformed its information systems and administrative strategies.

In addition, while intelligence and information networks have been identified as pivotal to Qing governance in other frontier regions ([Bartlett 1991](#); [Elliott 2001](#); [Mosca 2010](#)), their role in Tibet during the reign of the Sixth Dalai Lama has been largely overlooked. The reforms initiated by the Kangxi Emperor to enhance the reliability of intelligence from Tibet, including the establishment of spy networks and strategic deployment of multilingual intermediaries, remain an underexamined aspect of Qing administrative history. This study aims to address this gap by analyzing how these reforms enabled the Qing court to intervene in Tibetan affairs more effectively and consolidate its control over the region. It also provides new insights into the complex dynamics of religious politics in Tibet ([Tuttle 2005](#); [Elverskog 2006](#)), offering a fresh perspective on the relationship between the Qing court and the Géluk hierarchy during one of the most turbulent periods in Tibetan history. In doing so, it underscores the importance of information control and manipulation as tools of empire, both in early modern China and Tibet, as well as in the broader context of Eurasian history.

By examining the case of the Sixth Dalai Lama, this study offers new insights into the Qing dynasty’s strategies for managing its relationship with Tibet during a period of political and religious turmoil. Building on existing scholarship, it identifies significant gaps in the understanding of Qing–Tibetan relations, particularly the overlooked reciprocal influence of the Géluk hierarchy on Qing policies and the underexplored role of multilingual intermediaries in the Qing intelligence system. By analyzing Tibetan, Mongolian, Manchu, and Chinese archival materials, this article demonstrates how the Qing court’s responses to the crises of the late 17th and early 18th centuries transformed its approach to governance, solidifying its authority as both a spiritual and political power in Inner Asia. In doing so, it not only challenges the prevailing view of Qing–Tibetan relations as a unidirectional assertion of imperial control but also highlights the dynamic interplay between religion, governance, and information networks in eastern Eurasia.

2. Breaking the Géluk Echo Chamber

After 1682, Sanggyé Gyatso had successfully consolidated his political position by acting on the Dalai Lama’s behalf; nevertheless, the lie of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s death ruined the mutual trust between the Tibetan and the Qing governments after 1696. Concerned as to the reliability of his information on Tibet, Kangxi started to rethink the Qing information system’s institutional flaws. It should be noted that the Qing dynasty heavily relied

on Géluk monks to contact the Ganden Podrang government in the seventeenth century. From the time Hong Taiji sent the first Qing embassy led by Secen Corji to Lhasa in late 1637, Géluk Buddhists served as the primary intermediaries between the Qing court and the Ganden Podrang. Along with the Manchu conquest of China proper, Géluk monasteries were able to develop promptly in Beijing with Qing sponsorship after 1644 (Kung 2018). These Buddhist monasteries became places of worship in the imperial capital and information centers for Tibet, Mongolia, and the Qing.

Although Géluk monks widely served as the intermediaries between the Qing and Inner Asia in the seventeenth century, the Géluk brotherhood's nepotism gradually encapsulated the Qing court in an echo chamber of its limited information sources on Tibet and Mongolia. Because of their religious bonds with the Géluk School in Central Tibet, many envoy lamas commissioned by the Manchu emperors did not report real information about Tibet to the Qing court in the seventeenth century. This echo chamber caused the controversial cases of smuggling, bribery, and lies between the Qing and Tibet. After the divulgence of the Fifth Dalai Lama's death alerted the Qing to Géluk favoritism in 1696, the Kangxi emperor decided to establish a new imperial system of intelligence on Tibet to replace the existing Géluk communities in Beijing.

While the Qing translators were embarking on deciphering *Elixir for the Ear* as Sanggyé Gyatso's vindication, Kangxi ordered the Crown Prince and the Lifanyuan to interrogate Géluk monks in the Qing court that had visited the Dalai Lama on the Qing court's behalf after 1682. As Kangxi wrote to the Crown Prince in April 1697:

In these sixteen years, the lamas that we sent [to Tibet] deceived us extremely. They are not reliable. They all follow the Dépa (Sanggyé Gyatso) and do not even have a true word. Among them, Damba Serji (Ch. Danba se'erji 丹巴色爾濟 < Mo./Ma. Damba serji < Ti. Bstan pa gsal byed), who determinedly claimed: "I saw the Dalai Lama", is especially hateful.

Manchu: "Ere juwan ninggun aniya i dorgide, musei takūraha lamasa, muse be holtohongge ten de isinahabi, akdaci ojurakū, gemu diba ici ofi emu yargiyan gisun akū, erei dorgide damba serji, dalai lama be bi sabuha seme akdulame gisurehengge ele ubiyada."

(GZD, KX36/+3/10, vol. 8, pp. 880–82)

Due to the interrogation results, Kangxi ordered the Crown Prince to arrest Damba Serji and immediately confiscate his property. Moreover, Kangxi asked Jasağ Da Lama Mergen Corji to summon Géluk monks serving in the Qing court to collect their testimonies about the Dalai Lama's death (QSL, KX36/+3/5, vol. 182, p. 945). Kangxi scolded these Géluk lamas ruthlessly because none of them had reported on the Dalai Lama's death after 1682: "If I raise a dog, even it can bark at strangers and be useful. Raising you lamas is completely useless" (Manchu: "Indahūn be ujici hono eshun niyalma be gūwame tusa arambi, suweni lamasa be ujihangge umai tusa akū.") (GZD, KX36/+3/10, vol. 8, p. 882). Distrusting the envoy lamas that he had dispatched to Tibet between 1682 and 1696, Kangxi ordered the Lifanyuan to interrogate them separately.

When the Lifanyuan concluded its investigation in August 1697, three high-ranking Géluk monks that had visited the Fifth Dalai Lama on the Qing court's behalf were found guilty and sentenced for strangulation. In addition to Damba Serji, the other two prisoners were Acitu Gelūng (Ch. Aqitu gelong 阿齊圖格隆 < Ti. A chi thu dge slong) and Badzra Ramjampa (Ch. Bazan'er lamuzhamuba 巴咱爾喇木扎木巴 < Ti. Ba dzra rab 'byams pa). In the end, Kangxi commuted their death sentences to the confiscation of assets and titles for fear of irretrievably destroying his prestige in the Inner Asian Buddhist world (QSL, KX36/7/3, vol. 184, p. 969).

It should be noted that Acitu Gelüing and Damba Serji both visited the Tibetan government several times on the Qing court's behalf during the time the Fifth Dalai Lama's death was hidden. In early 1684, the Qing court sent Acitu Gelüing and Damba Serji to Lhasa to request that the Dalai Lama mediate the quarrel between Jasaḡtu and Tüsiyetü Khans (*DYMBGD*, KX23/2/3, vol 4, pp. 12–13 (Mo.); pp. 114–16 (Ma.); *QSL*, KX23/2/4, vol. 114, pp. 178–79). This mission was important to the Qing court because Jasaḡtu Khan Cenggün (Ch. Chenggun 成衮, ?–1686) intended to ally with the Zunghars to attack Tüsiyetü Khan Caqundorji. Therefore, Kangxi tried to request that the Dalai Lama prevent Galdan from invading Qalqa by taking advantage of the struggle between Jasaḡtu and Tüsiyetü Khans.

In June 1684, Acitu Gelüing and Damba Serji arrived in Lhasa and issued the emperor's edict, as well as offering silk, various incense, gold, and silverware, to the Dalai Lama. In return, Sanggyé Gyatso welcomed them and presented Tibetan textiles to Kangxi on the Dalai Lama's behalf (*DKL*, vol. 9, pp. 65, 75). In addition, Sanggyé Gyatso wrote imposter replies to Kangxi in the Dalai Lama's name. The first letter was a eulogy praising the generosity of the Qing emperor. This Tibetan letter was included in *The Collected Works of the Dalai Lama*, although Sanggyé Gyatso wrote it. After the Qing court received it, the Mongolian Office translated this letter into Mongolian and Manchu in January 1685 (*RBHS*, vol. 22, pp. 603–7; *DYMBGD*, KX23/6/1, vol 4, pp. 82–87 (Mo.); pp. 216–22 (Ma.)). Together with this eulogy, Sanggyé Gyatso sent a second imposter letter that said the Tibetan government would send Sempa Trülku (Ti. Sems dpa' sprul sku > Ma. Semba hūbilgan) to Qalqa to mediate the conflict there, based on Kangxi's request (*DYMBGD*, KX23/6/1, vol 4, pp. 87–89 (Mo.); pp. 223–25 (Ma.)). The two envoy lamas returned for the Qing court in early 1685 (*QSL*, KX23/12/9, vol. 118, p. 238).

Acitu Gelüing and Damba Serji's 1684 mission did not fulfill its expected goal in the end and even caused a geopolitical crisis for the Qing dynasty. Sanggyé Gyatso did not want to mediate the quarrel between the Jasaḡtu and Tüsiyetü Khans because his military ally and Dharma brother, Galdan Bošugtu, was eager to take this opportunity to invade Qalqa. The disagreement between the Jasaḡtu and Tüsiyetü Khans was aggravated after 1685. In this context, Galdan led the Zunghar army to invade Qalqa between 1686 and 1688. Moreover, neither Acitu Gelüing nor Damba Serji reported to the Qing court that the Fifth Dalai Lama had already passed away. Based on the information Acitu Gelüing and Damba Serji provided, Kangxi and his ministers made a series of wrong decisions because of their ignorance of the Dalai Lama's death.

In addition to their mission of 1684, Acitu Gelüing and Damba Serji visited the Dalai Lama on the Qing court's behalf several times. According to Tibetan sources, Acitu Gelüing visited Lhasa on behalf of the Qing dynasty in late 1682, 1684, and 1685 after the Dalai Lama's death (*RBHS*, vol. 22, pp. 597–99; *DKL*, vol. 9, p. 135). As per his testimony in 1697, Acitu Gelüing claimed that he had met the Dalai Lama three times in person; he did not know that the Dalai Lama he had met was a body double assigned by Sanggyé Gyatso (*QZPDSMFL*, vol. 45, p. 17b). Compared with Acitu Gelüing, Damba Serji visited the Dalai Lama more times on the Qing court's behalf. In addition to traveling to Lhasa together with Acitu Gelüing in 1684 and 1685, Damba Serji visited the Dalai Lama as the Qing envoy in 1691, 1694, and 1695 (*DKL*, vol. 10, pp. 279–80, 282, pp. 455–56). In his testimony in 1697, Damba Serji still insisted that he had seen the Dalai Lama in person during his missions, and that he did not lie to the emperor. Although Damba Serji pleaded his innocence, he refused to defend himself and resigned himself to the sentence of death (*QZPDSMFL*, vol. 45, pp. 14b–15b).

The Lifanyuan interrogated other envoy lamas that had visited Tibet on behalf of the Qing between 1682 and 1696. According to their testimonies, most of them could not identify the Dalai Lama's appearance or did not meet him in person. As many of them con-

fessed, Sanggyé Gyatso only allowed them to see the Dalai Lama from far away without having direct conversations. However, most of them were not suspicious about Sanggyé Gyatso's arrangements because they believed that the Dalai Lama took a retreat to practice esoteric Buddhism. Except for Iši Gelüng, who visited Lhasa and reported the history of Ming-Tibetan trade in 1685, none of these envoy lamas ever suspected the Dalai Lama's hidden death (QZPDSMFL, vol. 45, pp. 13b–19a).

Based on the existing sources, it is impossible to confirm if these envoy lamas lied to the Qing court; however, a possible explanation is that these Géluk lamas serving in the Qing court were credulous when they visited their Dharma brothers in Lhasa. As Géluk followers, these envoy lamas were never skeptical about the Dalai Lama's reality and Sanggyé Gyatso's integrity. Sanggyé Gyatso thus fed false information to Kangxi by using the Géluk identity of the Qing envoy lamas between 1682 and 1696 as their religious identity trapped them in an echo chamber of Géluk discourse; they never questioned why Sanggyé Gyatso did not let them meet the Dalai Lama closely.

The divulgence of the Dalai Lama's death made Kangxi realize that the discourse of Buddhism was a double-edged sword to his empire. On the one hand, the Géluk communities played significant roles in communications between the Qing dynasty, Tibet, and Inner Asia. On the other, the Qing court received only selective information via Buddhist monks. The Géluk tradition isolated the Qing from the reality of Tibet. Consequently, the Tibetan government deceived the Qing dynasty many times between the 1650s and the 1690s.

3. The Rise of a Spy Lama: Šangnan Dorji and Qing Espionage in Tibet

Because of the fraud of the Dalai Lama's death, Kangxi decided to reform the Qing–Tibetan communication system after 1697. Although concerned about potential collusion between Géluk communities in Beijing and Lhasa, the emperor did not abandon the Buddhist networks that the Qing court had managed since 1637. Instead, Kangxi started to rely on his trusted subordinates to collect intelligence on Tibet disguised as Géluk monks. In this context, two spy lamas played significant roles on the Sino–Tibetan borderlands in the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries: Šangnan Dorji in Kokonor and Tsultrim Zangpo in Kham. By investigating Šangnan Dorji's intelligence work on Tibet, this section illustrates how the Qing dynasty started to intervene in the internal politics of Tibet directly by manipulating the violent deposition and mysterious death of the Sixth Dalai Lama between 1705 and 1706.

Šangnan Dorji (also known as Ti. Phyag na rdo rje; Ch. Shangnan duo'erji 商南多爾濟) was a Mongolian lama that played a critical role in the relationships between the Qing, Tibet, and Inner Asia during the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries. According to his correspondence with the Kangxi Emperor in Manchu, Šangnan Dorji was born in Hohhot in 1641. In his secret memorial dated 1705, Šangnan Dorji called himself the emperor's *old bondservant* (Ma. sakda aha) (KXCMWZPZZ, KX44/11/1, no. 508-4-92-280, Reel 4, Microfilm 791). In another secret palace memorial dated 1706, Šangnan Dorji told the emperor that he was 66 years old at that time. Šangnan Dorji mentioned that he "had been raised in the emperor's courtyard" (Ma. enduringge ejen i hūwa i dolo ujime hūwašabuha) (KXCMWZPZZ, KX45/11/19, no. 508-4-92-281, Reel 4, Microfilm 843).¹ As Šangnan Dorji mentioned in another secret palace memorial dated in 1707, "Although [I] was born in Hohhot, [I] was raised in the emperor's court" (Ma. udu huhu hoton de banjicibe, ejen i hūwa de ujifi hūwašabuha) (KXCMWZPZZ, KX46/8/25, no. 508-4-92-282, Reel 4, Microfilm 1024). This evidence shows that Šangnan Dorji was originally a eunuch lama (Ch. taijian lama 太監喇嘛) who grew up in the Qing imperial household.² As Šangnan Dorji was 13 years older than Kangxi, the emperor might have been familiar with him since childhood. By studying Šangnan Dorji's complex experiences between China, Tibet, and Inner Asia, this

section sheds light on the roles of eunuch lamas in the Qing intelligence system on Tibet and Inner Asia.

As a Mongolian lama who grew up in the Qing court, Šangnan Dorji was fluent in three languages: Manchu, Mongolian, and Tibetan. In addition to his linguistic talents, his close relationship with the emperor made him an ideal candidate for spying on Tibet. In 1678 and 1679, Dalai Khan of the Qošud reported to the Qing court that Wu Sangui had sent envoys to Tibet (*DYMBGD*, KX17/2/15, vol. 1, pp. 497–500 (Mo.); KX18/7/6, vo. 2, pp. 122–27 (Mo.)). In return, Kangxi sent an embassy together with eight rolls of satin (Ti. gos yug brgyad) and a 30-tael silver teapot (Ti. dngul srang gsum cu'i 'dong mo) to reward Dalai Khan. According to a Tibetan document in the Lhasa Archives, the Qing embassy of 1679 was led by a lama called Chakna Dorjé Gélong (Ti. Phyag na rdo rje dge slong), Šangnan Dorji's Tibetan title (*YTPB*, pp. 80–81). In December 1685, Šangnan Dorji and Laduhu departed to visit the Dalai Lama on Kangxi's behalf to solve the controversy of the Oirats. This time he held the Mongolian title of Demci (Ch. demuqi 得木齊)—the monastic position of deputy abbot (*QSL*, KX24/11/17, vol. 123, p. 302). According to Sanggyé Gyatso, Šangnan Dorji arrived in Lhasa as one of the imperial envoys (Ti. gong gi mi sna) in March 1686 (*DKL*, vol. 9, p. 201). However, Šangnan Dorji did not realize that the Fifth Dalai Lama had already died during his mission.

Šangnan Dorji frequently traveled between Zungharia, the Qalqa territory, Tibet, and China as the Qing imperial envoy between 1687 and 1691. In September 1687, Šangnan Dorji brought Kangxi's imperial edict to Lhasa to request that the Dalai Lama mediate the conflict between the Zunghars and the Qalqas (*QSL*, KX26/9/25, vol. 131, p. 410). The trilingual copies of this edict Šangnan Dorji carried are preserved separately in the Beijing and Lhasa archives (*DYMBGD*, KX26/9/24, vol. 6, pp. 123–26 (Mo.); pp. 373–82 (Ma.); *YTPB*, pp. 85–87 (Ti.)). Šangnan Dorji continued visiting the Dalai Lama, the Jebtsundamba, and Galdan Bošugtu on the Qing court's behalf. Moreover, he also played a critical role in the Qing-Zunghar competition in the Qalqa region between 1688 and 1690. In the battle of Ula'anbutung, Šangnan Dorji served as the Qing negotiator with the Zunghars. Meanwhile, he also collected military intelligence on Galdan and managed the military supply chain of the Qing army (*QSL*, KX27/7/4, vol. 136, p. 474; KX27/11/15, vol. 137, p. 498; KX28/1/19, vol. 139, p. 514; KX28/4/13, vol. 140, p. 541; KX29/3/11, vol. 145, p. 595; KX29/3/12, vol. 145, p. 595; KX29/6/29, vol. 146, p. 616; KX29/7/13, vol. 147, p. 624). These activities shed light on the various roles of Šangnan Dorji, who was the eunuch lama close to the Manchu emperor and the international diplomat and military spy between China and Inner Asia.

Because of his prominent contributions and loyalty to the Qing court, Kangxi highly regarded Šangnan Dorji's work on Tibetan affairs (*KXCMWZPZZ*, KX45/2/25, no. 508-4-92-280, Reel 4, Microfilm 793–796). In 1690, Šangnan Dorji was unable to fulfill his mission to Tibet due to falling ill. Kangxi decided to dispatch Lama Damba Serji, who the emperor later harshly punished after the divulgence of the Dalai Lama's death (*QSL*, KX30/6/1, vol. 152, p. 679). Although Šangnan Dorji was also one of the envoy lamas visiting Lhasa on the Qing's behalf after 1682, Kangxi never blamed him for the issue of the Dalai Lama's hidden death, likely due to his good relationship with the emperor.

In tandem with the aggravation of the Qing-Zunghar relationship, Šangnan Dorji's espionage became even more active after 1690. As Galdan retreated to Western Mongolia after the battle of Ula'anbutung, the Qing dynasty was concerned about the security of Hohhot (Ch. Guihua cheng 歸化城). Therefore, Šangnan Dorji was sent back to his hometown to collect military intelligence in Inner Mongolia in 1694 (*QSL*, KX33/8/4, vol. 164, p. 739). Dorji became affiliated with the Siregtu Juu Temple (Ch. Yanshou si 延壽寺) in Hohhot, and was eventually promoted as the Jasaḡ Da Lama there (*Baoyintegusi* 2009, pp. 39–40).

In 1696, Šangnan Dorji supervised a secret project involving constructing water wells in the Southern Gobi for the Qing army's military supply. Šangnan Dorji was also directly related to the divulgence of the Fifth Dalai Lama's death. In 1696, Dorji led 100 horsemen to meet the Zunghar Damba Qasiga, who surrendered and finally told the Qing army about the Dalai Lama's death (GZD, KX35/5/15, vol. 8, pp. 216–21). Šangnan Dorji's deep engagement in intelligence and military missions shows that he was both a member of Buddhist clergy and a secret agent.

After 1697, the Qing court assigned a new position to Šangnan Dorji in Xining, where he collected intelligence on Tibet and Kokonor together with Ananda (?–1701), a Mongolian bannerman and Kangxi's bodyguard. Consequently, Šangnan Dorji moved from Hohhot to Xining, the most prosperous city between Northwestern China and Tibet. He was thus formally known as “the lama in charge of intelligence collection in Xining” (Ma si ning de mejige gaime tehe lama) in the Qing archives (*DYMBGD*, KX39/5/27, vol. 16, p. 109). In the following ten years, Šangnan Dorji widely collected intelligence on Tibet and Kokonor and sent regular reports to the Kangxi Emperor. As a result, a great deal of correspondence between Šangnan Dorji and Kangxi is preserved in the Manchu archives dated between 1697 and 1707. Covert correspondence between Šangnan Dorji and Kangxi recorded the Qing espionage in Tibet and the secrets of the Sixth Dalai Lama (Kusunoki 2006, pp. 65–98; 2008, pp. 33–62; Baoyintegusi 2009, pp. 33–66; Wuyunbilige 2016, pp. 216–28).

Šangnan Dorji's intelligence system had three aspects. First, Šangnan Dorji extended the Qing authority to Kokonor by buying the support of Koshut princes led by Jaši Ba'atur, the youngest son of Gūūsi Khan, in 1697. After that, Qošud Mongols in Kokonor pledged their loyalty to the Manchu emperor and regularly reported intelligence on Tibet to Šangnan Dorji. On the other hand, the Qing dynasty offered imperial titles and valuable gifts to Qošud princes as their rewards (Baoyintegusi 2009, pp. 37–39). In his secret palace memorial to Kangxi dated 1698, Šangnan Dorji claimed that “the Mongols used to pray for the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama out of their mouths; however, now they only pray for Your Majesty by joining their hands and kowtowing” (Manchu: “Monggoso daci angga juwame dalai lama. panchen jalbarimbihe. te damu enduringge han seme gala be gio-gin arafi hengkileme jalbarirakūngge akū.”) (*KXCMWZPZZ*, KX37/9/20, no. 508-4-92-282, Reel 4, Microfilm 865–866). His statement showed that Qing imperialism was intentionally competing with Géluk power in Kokonor to buy intelligence on Tibet from the Qošuds.

Next, Šangnan Dorji had an effective channel of communication with the Kangxi Emperor. According to Manchu documents, the communication between the spy lama in Xining and the emperor in Beijing mainly relied on a group of messengers that consisted of Buddhist monks and imperial bodyguards. For instance, Kangxi's Mongolian bodyguard named Rasi (Ch. Laxi 拉錫, ?–1733) was in charge of passing messages to Šangnan Dorji's student named Lobsang Rinchen, who was probably a Mongolian-speaking Buddhist (*KXCMWZPZZ*, KX45/2/25, no. 508-4-92-280, Reel 4, Microfilm 793–796). That is to say, whereas Kangxi and Šangnan Dorji corresponded with each other in Manchu, their messengers communicated in Mongolian. This phenomenon also explains why Šangnan Dorji's Manchu secret palace memorials were frequently dated in Mongolian on their covers.

Third, Šangnan Dorji's work on Tibetan affairs was based on the multilingual practice between Tibetan, Mongolian, and Manchu. He summarized affairs and regularly reported them in Manchu to the emperor after extensively collecting Tibetan and Mongolian intelligence. In addition to intelligence gathering, Dorji was also in charge of transmitting correspondence between the Tibetan government and the Qing dynasty after 1697. According to the Mongolian Office's records, when the Sixth Dalai Lama and Sanggyé Gyatso in Lhasa wanted to contact the Qing court in Beijing, they frequently communicated with the

Qing court via Šangnan Dorji (*DYMBGD*, KX39/9/1, vol. 16, pp. 146–47). Šangnan Dorji promoted the Qing’s understanding of Tibet, not only by collecting intelligence unidirectionally, but also by facilitating communication bilaterally. Under Šangnan Dorji’s management, Xining became a significant information center in the Qing intelligence networks.

Šangnan Dorji’s position transfer from Hohhot to Xining in 1697 was directly related to the aftermath of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s death. As seen above, Kangxi lost his trust in the envoy lamas in his court after learning of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s hidden death. The emperor interrogated those envoy lamas and started to establish a new surveillance system over Tibet. In this context, Kangxi entrusted Šangnan Dorji, the eunuch lama who grew up in the Qing court, to manage Tibetan and Mongolian affairs on the northwestern borderlands of the empire, as well as to spy on Tibet. Kangxi had high expectations for Šangnan Dorji’s surveillance; the emperor continuously urged the eunuch lama to report the situation in Tibet. Kangxi made a vermilion rescript on Šangnan Dorji’s secret palace memorial dated December 1698 that said, “It has been several months since your departure. What happened to the information about Tibet?” (Manchu: “Suweni genefi utala biya oho, wargi ba i mejige geli absi oho.”) (*KXCMWZPZZ*, KX37/11/1, no. 508-4-92-280, Reel 4, Microfilm 755). By appointing Šangnan Dorji as the imperial surveillant on the Sino–Tibetan borderland, the emperor aimed to prevent Sanggyé Gyatso from manipulating the information barriers between the Qing and Tibet.

4. The Controversy About the New Dalai Lama

After realizing the Fifth Dalai Lama’s death in 1696, the Qing court started to pay close attention to the Dalai Lama’s young reincarnation. Realizing that Tsangyang Gyatso was under Sanggyé Gyatso’s control, the Qing resolved to divide the latter’s political and religious influence by inviting the Fifth Panchen Lama Lozang Yéshé (1663–1737) to Beijing. In response, Sanggyé Gyatso found various excuses, such as the risk of smallpox, to dissuade the Panchen Lama from visiting China (Shi 2015). Sanggyé Gyatso intended to centralize his power in the Géluk School by monopolizing Tibet’s communication with the Qing court on the young Dalai Lama’s behalf. Consequently, Sanggyé Gyatso’s manipulation of Tsangyang Gyatso caused controversies between Tibet, China, and Zungharia. In this complicated geopolitical context, Šangnan Dorji began his surveillance of Tsangyang Gyatso.

The controversies of the recognition of the young Dalai Lama occurred immediately after 1697. In February 1698, Kangxi received a Mongolian letter in the Todo script from the Zunghar Prince Cewang Rabtan (r. 1697–1727), who criticized Sanggyé Gyatso’s autocratic leadership via the concealment of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s death (*DYMBGD*, KX37/1/6, vol. 15, pp. 348–50 (Mo.); pp. 346–48 (Ma.)).³ Cewang Rabtan was Galdan’s nephew; however, he broke his relations with Galdan because of an internal struggle in Zungharia in 1689. When Galdan marched eastward on the Qalqa and confronted the Qing army in Ula’anbutung in 1690, Cewang Rabtan took advantage of this opportunity and occupied Galdan’s nomadic territories. After that, Cewang Rabtan collaborated with the Qing army to besiege Galdan in Qobdo. After Galdan died, Cewang Rabtan took over the Zunghar khanate throne in 1697. Cewang Rabtan was hostile to Sanggyé Gyatso, who was regarded as Galdan’s close ally. Along with his letter dated 1698, Cewang Rabtan sent two envoys named Püntso Rapjampa and Dorji Jaiisang to pass on a verbal message to the Qing emperor. According to Cewang Rabtan’s message, Sanggyé Gyatso centralized his power by placing the Fifth Panchen Lama under house arrest. Cewang Rabtan also argued that the Sixth Dalai Lama was Sanggyé Gyatso’s puppet. He accused Sanggyé Gyatso of worshipping a Nyingma monk called the Tertön of Dorje Drak (Ti. Gter ston Rdo rje grags), who should be Rikdzin Pema Trinlé (Ti. Rig ’dzin padma ’phrin las, 1641–1717), the second abbot of the Dorje Drak Monastery (*DYMBGD*, vol. 11, pp. 434–37 (Ma.)).⁴

Cewang Rabtan suspected that the Sixth Dalai Lama Tsangyang Gyatso was identified by the Nyingma monk rather than by the Panchen Lama (*DYMBGD*, vol. 15, pp. 425–27 (Ma.); pp. 427–31 (Mo.); *NMSBKC*, pp. 271–73). As a radical Géluk follower opposed to the Nyingma tradition, Cewang Rabtan suggested Kangxi wage a holy war against Sanggyé Gyatso as the Dharma protector (Ch. Hufa 護法) of the Yellow Church (*QSL*, KX37/1/14, vol. 187, pp. 990–91). Although the Manchu emperor did not agree to invade Tibet together with the Zunghars, he was happy to have an opportunity to manipulate the struggle between Cewang Rabtan and Sanggyé Gyatso. Therefore, Kangxi sent an encouraging reply to Cewang Rabtan, together with ten bolts of silk as gifts (*QSL*, KX37/3/3, vol. 187, pp. 995–96).

Cewang Rabtan's letter to Kangxi shows that the relationship between Zungharia and Tibet deteriorated seriously after Galdan's death. Because of the political tension between Zungharia and Tibet, the Sixth Dalai Lama's legitimacy was first challenged in 1698. The disagreement between Sanggyé Gyatso and Cewang Rabtan provided the Qing dynasty an excuse to extend its intervention in Tibet and Zungharia. Based on Cewang Rabtan's accusation, Kangxi sent a trilingual edict to admonish Sanggyé Gyatso in April 1698. In this edict written in Manchu, Mongolian, and Tibetan, Kangxi harshly criticized Sanggyé Gyatso for hiding the Dalai Lama's death and colluding with Galdan Bošugtu. Additionally, the emperor blamed Sanggyé Gyatso for obstructing the Fifth Panchen Lama from visiting Beijing. Accordingly, Kangxi ordered Sanggyé Gyatso to send the Panchen Lama to Beijing as soon as possible. At the end of this edict, the emperor warned Sanggyé Gyatso not to play tricks on the Qing court. To keep from falling into Sanggyé Gyatso's Géluk echo chamber again, Kangxi relied on Šangnan Dorji in Xining to spy on the Tibetan government (*DYMBGD*, KX37/3/1, vol. 15, pp. 431–34 (Ma.); pp. 434–38 (Mo.); *YTPB*, pp. 193–94 (Ti.)).

While Kangxi, Cewang Rabtan, and Sanggyé Gyatso argued about the new Dalai Lama's legitimacy for their political interests, the Panchen Lama tried to maintain international order in the Géluk world by sending a Tibetan letter to Kangxi in 1699. In this letter, the Panchen Lama intended to dispel Kangxi's doubts about Tsangyang Gyatso by verifying the young Dalai Lama's legitimacy. Accordingly, the Panchen Lama provided a comprehensive description of the genealogy of the Dalai and Panchen Lamas (*DYMBGD*, KX38/7/9, vol. 14, pp. 408–24 (Mo.); pp. 388–407 (Ma.)). Moreover, he also submitted an account of Tsangyang Gyatso's birth, entitled *Homage Through Past Lives: The Supreme Mind* (Ti. 'Khrungs rabs gsol 'debs blo chen rgyal kun ma).⁵ Based on Mongolian and Manchu translations of these two Tibetan texts, the Qing court acquired detailed information about Tsangyang Gyatso. The Panchen Lama's verification temporarily mediated the dispute about the new Dalai Lama's political legitimacy and religious authenticity between Tibet, Zungharia, and the Qing.

Nevertheless, the Qing court still assigned Šangnan Dorji to monitor the situation of Tsangyang Gyatso after 1699. Meanwhile, a series of economic and geopolitical conflicts occurred in Dartsédo between Tibet and China. Šangnan Dorji's intelligence system played a critical role in the Qing frontier policy during these pressing border issues.

5. Spy, Trade, and Border: Qing–Tibetan Debate over Dartsédo

The disclosure of the Dalai Lama's death not only provoked the controversy surrounding Tsangyang Gyatso but also rekindled the Dartsédo border conflict. Sanggyé Gyatso had successfully requested that Kangxi reopen the tea-horse trade in Dartsédo by hiding the Dalai Lama's death. After seeing through Sanggyé Gyatso's lie, Kangxi promptly ordered Qing officers in Sichuan to investigate the Dartsédo borderlands in 1696. Based on the suggestions of Yu Yangzhi (Ch. 于養志), Provincial Governor of Sichuan, the Qing dynasty did not shut down the tea-trade markets in Dartsédo, considering that Tibetans widely

“relied on tea to live” (Ch. jiecha dusheng 藉茶度生). Nevertheless, Kangxi decided to integrate Dartsédo into China proper by including the territory into *The Unified Gazetteer* (Ch. Yitongzhi 一統志) (QSL, KX35/9/10, vol. 176, pp. 891–92). The exposure of the Dalai Lama’s death directly changed Qing frontier policy toward Tibet and later caused border conflicts in Dartsédo.

Although the Qing dynasty adopted a tolerant policy toward Sino–Tibetan trade, many border conflicts still occurred. Along with the eastward expansion of the Géluk School in the late seventeenth century, the Ganden Podrang government gradually strengthened its control over Dartsédo by establishing military colonies and collecting commercial taxes there. Consequently, the Ganden Podrang’s intervention conflicted with the kingdom of Chakla (Ti. lcags la), the indigenous power in Dartsédo. In response to the penetration of Géluk colonialism, the Chakla kingdom decided to ally with the Manchus by participating in the Qing hierarchical system after 1652 (Tsomu 2009, pp. 67–71). Nevertheless, because of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s authority, the Qing dynasty acquiesced to Géluk privileges in Dartsédo until 1696. By 1699, Tibetan merchants imported more than 800,000 tea packs (approximately 206.4 tons) annually from Sichuan (QSL, KX38/7/+4, vol. 194, pp. 1052–53). Accordingly, the Gandan Podrang enjoyed considerable economic benefit by collecting tea taxes in Dartsédo. However, after the exposure of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s death, the Qing court began to adopt an uncompromising attitude toward Géluk colonialism in Dartsédo. This strategic change finally evolved into a border conflict between Géluk power and the Qing–Chakla alliance in 1699 (Dai 2009, pp. 54–63). In the end, Dépa Chakdzö Trinlé (Ch. Dieba changce jilie 喋吧昌側集烈 < Ti. Sde pa phyag mdzod ’phrin las), the Géluk commissioner in Dartsédo, killed the Chakla king, named Shérab Drakpa (Ch. Shezha zhaba 蛇蜡渣吧 < Ma./Mo. še ja ja ba < Ti. Shes rab grags pa), and occupied his kingdom (QSL, KX39/3/7, vol. 198, p. 11). In 1700, Kangxi sent an edict to threaten Sanggyé Gyatso, demanding he withdraw the Tibetan army from Dartsédo and hand over Chakdzö Trinlé to the Qing. Moreover, the emperor ordered Sanggyé Gyatso to return his golden edict and seal issued by the Qing (DYMBGD, KX39/6/16, vol. 14, pp. 120–21 (Ma.); pp. 131–32 (Mo.); QSL, KX39/6/30, vol. 199, p. 31 (Ch.)).

Unlike his previous response to the Dalai Lama’s hidden death, Kangxi did not wait for Sanggyé Gyatso’s reply this time. Instead, he immediately ordered the Green Standard troops to march westward on Dartsédo. However, when the Han Chinese soldiers tried to construct a temporary bridge to cross the Lu River (Ch. Luhe 瀘河; Ti. rgyal rong rgyal mo rngul chu) to Dartsédo, the Tibetan army ambushed them and killed the bridge builders. Moreover, the Tibetans destroyed the bridge that linked Dartsédo to Yaknga (Ti. g.yag rnga) and Chengdu; the bridge was the main traffic route between Kham and China proper at that time. Upon hearing this information, the angry emperor ordered Šangnan Dorji to ask Sanggyé Gyatso to relinquish the murderers to China (QSL, KX39/10/10, vol. 201, p. 54). Accordingly, Šangnan Dorji sent a Tibetan letter to Sanggyé Gyatso where he mentioned that the Tibetans in Dartsédo killed 13 Qing bridge builders. On the emperor’s behalf, he asked Sanggyé Gyatso to investigate this case and send the criminals to Sichuan immediately, otherwise the Qing court would send a large army to Tibet (YTPB, pp. 255–56 (Ti.)). Šangnan Dorji served as a critical go-between, communicating with Kangxi and Sanggyé Gyatso. The border conflict along the Lu River in 1700 reflected that local agent and transportation facilities played significant roles in the Qing intelligence system. This case made the Qing court determined to control transportation between Chengdu and Dartsédo.

Although the Qing army encountered the Tibetans’ strong resistance, it successfully occupied Dartsédo by killing Chakdzö Trinlé and 5000 Tibetan soldiers in early 1701 (QSL, KX40/2/7, vol. 203, p. 71). While hearing about the Qing invasion of Dartsédo, Géluk leaders, including the Dalai Lama, the Panchen Lama, and Sanggyé Gyatso, submitted petitions

to the Qing emperor to claim Tibet's ownership of Dartsédo. Accordingly, the Qing's Mongolian Office translated their Tibetan requests into Mongolian and Manchu. While the emperor enjoyed the military victory over the Tibetans on the borderlands, he received a letter from Tsangyang Gyatso, who claimed the innocence of the Tibetan army and requested that the Qing court reopen markets in Dartsédo by following the trading model from the Fifth Dalai Lama's period (*DYMBGD*, KX40/2, vol. 16, pp. 232–36 (Mo.); pp. 229–32 (Ma.)). Simultaneously, the Panchen Lama and Sanggyé Gyatso also sent letters to the emperor to support the young Dalai Lama's petition. While the Panchen Lama criticized the Han Chinese's invasion of Dartsédo (*DYMBGD*, KX40/2, vol. 16, pp. 237–41 (Mo.); pp. 237–39 (Ma.)), Sanggyé Gyatso further argued that the Chinese officers in Sichuan had deceived Kangxi and Šangnan Dorji by supplying incorrect information about the Sino–Tibetan borderlands. Sanggyé Gyatso intended to talk the emperor out of closing the border market because the expenditures of the Sera, Drépung, and Ganden Monasteries primarily relied on the revenues of Dartsédo's tea taxes (Ti. dar rtse mdo'i ja 'don).⁶ Although the Ganden Podrang intended to maintain Tibetans' economic privileges in Dartsédo by claiming the Fifth Dalai Lama's legacy of the patron–priest relationship, the Manchu emperor did not accept their requests of yielding the Sino–Tibetan borderlands to the Tibetan government. On the contrary, the Qing dynasty adopted a tough stance against the Ganden Podrang government on the Dartsédo issues in 1701 because of the deterioration of the Qing–Tibetan relationship following the fraud of the Fifth Dalai Lama's death.

After hearing about the Qing invasion of Dartsédo, Sanggyé Gyatso contacted Šangnan Dorji several times to negotiate the border conflicts in Dartsédo between late 1700 and early 1701. In his letter to Šangnan Dorji, Sanggyé Gyatso emphasized that “Chakla has been a part of Tibet since the ancient times” and the Tibetans could not give up the historical territory of Dartsédo (Mongolian: “Jaḡla erten-ece tübet-ün əajar mön”; Manchu: “Dzakla sere ba julgeci ebsi tubet i harangga ba bihe.”) (*DYMBGD*, KX40/4/13, vol. 16, pp. 409–10 (Mo.); pp. 408–9 (Ma.)). In another reply to Šangnan Dorji about the murders of the Qing bridge builders, Sanggyé Gyatso blamed Han Chinese soldiers for building roads in Tibetan territory without permission (*YTPB*, p. 256–57 (Ti.); *DYMBGD*, KX40/12/29, vol. 16, pp. 414–17 (Mo.); pp. 412–14 (Ma.)). As the Tibetan government refused to recognize the Qing authority in Dartsédo, the emperor decided to impose political and economic sanctions on Tibet.

After occupying Dartsédo, the Qing court decided to revoke Sanggyé Gyatso's political title of Tibetan king and stopped any economic exchange with Tibet. Consequently, the Lifanyuan asked Sanggyé Gyatso to return the golden seal and edict issued by the emperor (*DYMBGD*, KX40/3/26, vol. 16, pp. 319–26 (Mo.); pp. 312–18 (Ma.)). Meanwhile, the Lifanyuan returned the Panchen Lama's tribute to the Qing court (*DYMBGD*, KX40/3/26, vol. 16, pp. 329–31 (Mo.); pp. 327–29 (Ma.)). Finally, the Lifanyuan accused Sanggyé Gyatso of three misdeeds. First, his subordinates not only murdered the Chakla king but also killed the Qing soldiers in Dartsédo. Lastly, Sanggyé Gyatso illegally claimed Dartsédo as Tibetan territory and occupied the Sino–Tibetan borderlands by force. It should be noted that the Lifanyuan rhetorically interrogated Sanggyé Gyatso: “How can [you] annex the territory of *Zhongguo* (the central state) into [your] foreign country?” (Ma. dulimbai gurun i ba be tulergi gurun de ejelebusi ombio). Based on the Lifanyuan's statement of charges, the Qing dynasty decided to place a trade embargo in Dartsédo to force Sanggyé Gyatso to plead guilty (*YTPB*, p. 260–62 (Ti.); *DYMBGD*, KX40/4/23, vol. 16, pp. 438–45 (Mo.); pp. 433–38 (Ma.)). The Lifanyuan's accusations reflected a fundamental fact of the Qing–Tibetan relationship beyond the border conflicts in Dartsédo; while the Qing dynasty identified itself as China—literally *the Middle Country* (Ma. dulimbai gurun)—it regarded Tibet as a *foreign country* (Ma. tulergi gurun) that was outside the territory of China. The Qing

court imposed sanctions on Tibet because it was treated as a foreign country that threatened China's authority on the borderlands.

Under the pressure of the Qing embargo, Sanggyé Gyatso decided to acknowledge his mistakes. However, he continuously requested that Kangxi return Dartsédo to Tibet as during the Fifth Dalai Lama's reign. His petition was also supported by the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama (*DYMBGD*, vol. 16, pp. 510–15, 548–55). The Qing dynasty and the Tibetan government finally compromised in late 1701. Kangxi agreed to reopen the market in Dartsédo, where the Qing and Tibetan governments would send administrative lamas to supervise trading affairs. Nevertheless, in his trilingual edict to Sanggyé Gyatso in Manchu, Mongolian, and Tibetan, the emperor claimed: "Because Dartsédo has been the interior region [of China] (Ma. dorgi ba > Mo. dotoḡadu ḡajar > Ti. nang phyogs; *Ch. neidi 内地) included in documents and maps since the Ming dynasty's period, it cannot be given to you" (Manchu: "Da jīyan lu i ba serengge ming gurun i fonci dangse nirugande dosika dorgi ba be dahame. suwende buci oḡorakū." Mongolian: "Dar tse mdowa kemegci ming ulus-un caḡ-aca tangsan jirumal-dur oroḡsan dotoḡadu ḡajar-un tula. tan du ögcü ülü bolomui." Tibetan: "Dar rtse mdo 'di mi[ng] sde'i dus nas t'ang tse'i yi ger mthun pa'i nang phyogs kyi sa cha yin don khyed la phyir gnang mi thub.") (*DYMBGD*, KX40/12/29, p. 567 (Ma.); p. 571 (Mo.); *YTPB*, p. 173 (Ti.)). While insisting on China's ownership of Dartsédo, the Qing dynasty made a significant compromise of trading taxes. Accordingly, in addition to reopening the market in Dartsédo, Kangxi promised that Tibetan merchants would enjoy the privilege of duty exemptions, whereas Chinese merchants had to pay taxes to the Qing and Tibetan governments. As the emperor told his trade representatives in Dartsédo, "Tibetans are the greediest. They feel happy if they have little interest. Collect silver taxes from the merchants of our country rather than from theirs." Compared with economic benefits, Kangxi cared more about the empire's geopolitical interests in Dartsédo. Therefore, he ordered his trading representatives to pay more attention to gathering intelligence and buying popularity than collecting taxes in Dartsédo ("番人最貪，見小利便喜，稅銀不取於彼，就我國商人徵之。") (*QSL*, KX41/1/24, vol. 207, p. 105).

The Qing court ceded the interests of trading taxes in Dartsédo to Tibet because of complicated geopolitical considerations. The Qing trading representatives in Dartsédo had multiple identities; while they worked as tax collectors superficially, they also served as the imperial secret agents who directly reported border information to the emperor. The Qing trading representatives therefore conducted their secret missions in Dartsédo under cover of their religious status of lamas. These spy lamas on the Sino-Tibetan frontier played significant roles in the Qing intelligence system. In addition to Šangnan Dorji residing in Xining, there was another influential spy lama in Dartsédo named Tsultrim Zangpo ([Kung 2021](#)).

Briefly, the border conflicts in Dartsédo between 1700 and 1701 changed the Qing-Tibetan relationship significantly. After the exposure of the Fifth Dalai Lama's hidden death, the Manchu emperor and his ministers lost their trust in Sanggyé Gyatso and the Tibetan government. Therefore, the Qing dynasty resolved to control Dartsédo, which was the commercial center and an information hub between China and Tibet. Although the emperor agreed to release some economic interests to Tibetan merchants in Dartsédo superficially, the basis of mutual trust between the Qing court and the Ganden Podrang government had already collapsed. Consequently, the emperor commissioned spy lamas to the Sino-Tibetan borderlands to extend imperial power into Central Tibet. In addition to border intelligence, the Dartsédo issues made the Qing court pay much more attention to transportation facilities on the Sino-Tibetan borderlands. After the Tibetan army destroyed the temporary bridge linking Sichuan with Kham, the Qing army constructed an

iron bridge known as the Luding bridge (Ch. Luding qiao 瀘定橋) crossing over the Lu River between 1705 and 1706. Meanwhile, Kangxi established a garrison with one hundred soldiers to protect the bridge (QSL, KX45/6/28, vol. 225, p. 265; Xia 2018, pp. 39–41). The control of transportation facilities helped the Qing army enter Tibet in the early eighteenth century. The Dartsédo issues between 1700 and 1701 served as a profound prelude of the Qing empire's grand strategy toward Tibet in the aspects of intelligence collection, trans-regional trade, and transportation facility after the revelation of the Fifth Dalai Lama's death. In this context, a political struggle centered on the Sixth Dalai Lama from 1702 to 1705 provided the Qing empire an opportunity to directly intervene in Tibet's internal affairs.

6. The Sixth Dalai Lama's Abdication

After hearing about the Qing dynasty's promise to restart border trade in Dartsédo, the Tibetan government sent gratitude letters on the Dalai Lama's behalf along with a regent to Mampi, the Manchu amban in Sichuan, to remedy the Qing–Tibetan relationship in 1702 (DYMBGD, KX41, vol. 16, pp. 41–48). Nevertheless, a critical political crisis centering on the Sixth Dalai Lama's legitimacy occurred. This radical change fundamentally impacted the Dalai Lama's reincarnation system and significantly transformed the Qing–Tibetan relationship.

While the Tibetan government was anxiously negotiating with the Qing dynasty on the border issues of Dartsédo in 1701, Tsangyang Gyatso, the virile 18-year-old Dalai Lama, was bored by his dull monastic life and religious responsibility. As a talented poet who yearned for individual freedom, he preferred to be an ordinary layman rather than Tibet's theocratic ruler. As he became tired of monastic rules, Tsangyang Gyatso started to engage in some rebellious activities against Sanggyé Gyatso and the Géluk system. Finally, Tsangyang Gyatso insisted to abandon his title of the Dalai Lama together with the monastic vows. His eccentric behavior seriously impaired the Géluk theocracy's authority in Inner Asia and significantly shifted geopolitics in Inner Asia after the eighteenth century. By regularly spying on Tsangyang Gyatso through Šangnan Dorji's intelligence networks based in Xining, the Qing empire finally deposed and murdered the young Dalai Lama to gain its control over Tibet in 1706.

After the Fifth Dalai Lama passed away in 1683, Tsangyang Gyatso was found in 1685 as his reincarnation in Tawang (Ti. rta dbang, present-day Arunachal Pradesh) on the borderlands between Tibet, Bhutan, and India. However, as the Tibetan government decided to hide the Fifth Dalai Lama's death because of its sophisticated geopolitical concerns about China, Zungharia, and Bhutan, the existence of Tsangyang Gyatso was kept in secret until 1697. After the disclosure of the Fifth Dalai Lama's death, the Tibetan government formally moved Tsangyang Gyatso to Lhasa from Tsona (Ti. mtsho sna, in current Arunachal Pradesh) (SGNM, pp. 160–70; Aris 1988, pp. 130–38). Unlike other reincarnations of the Dalai Lama, Tsangyang Gyatso was raised in the border region rather than in Tibet's political center. His childhood experience made him incompatible with the bureaucracy of the Potala Palace.

The disagreement between the young Dalai Lama and his regent was directly related to Cewang Rabtan's challenge of the young Dalai Lama's authority. As discussed previously, Cewang Rabtan sent Püntsok Rapjampa to the Qing court in 1698 to suggest that Tsangyang Gyatso was merely a fake Dalai Lama—Sanggyé Gyatso's puppet. Therefore, Cewang Rabtan requested that Kangxi wage a holy war against Sanggyé Gyatso and Tsangyang Gyatso to restore the Géluk order. Dissatisfied with the Fifth Dalai Lama's hidden death, Kangxi intentionally invited Püntsok Rapjampa to join his Lantern Festival party, where the Zunghar envoy ruthlessly criticized Sanggyé Gyatso and Tsangyang Gy-

also in front of other princes and envoys from different Mongolian clans (*QSL*, KX37/1/14, vol. 187, pp. 990–91). The Qing court intended to diminish Sanggyé Gyatso's influence in Tibet and Mongolia by circulating the rumor of Tsangyang Gyatso's illegitimacy.

Furthermore, while Kangxi blatantly sent a harsh criticism to the Tibetan government, he secretly ordered Šangnan Dorji to circulate the rumor of illegitimacy through the Qošud princes led by Jasi Ba'atur in Kokonor. According to Šangnan Dorji, the Qošuds made a clear statement that they supported the Qing court and the Panchen Lama rather than Sanggyé Gyatso (*KXCMWZPZZ*, KX37/4/20, no. 508-4-92-282, Reel 4, Microfilm 860–864). When the Qing dynasty successfully isolated Sanggyé Gyatso from the Mongolian powers by accusing him of manipulating the 15-year-old Dalai Lama in 1698, Tsangyang Gyatso promptly lost trust in his regent and started to demonstrate rebellious behavior against the Tibetan Buddhist theocracy after 1699 ([Wuyunbilige 2010](#), pp. 17–50).

The young Dalai Lama's virility not only caused his disagreement with Sanggyé Gyatso but also eventually evolved into an unprecedented crisis that eventually caused Tibet to lose its independent status for the next three centuries. Frustrated by the rumor of Sanggyé Gyatso's political conspiracy, Tsangyang Gyatso refused to follow his regent's guidance and insisted on making decisions on his own after 1699. When Sanggyé Gyatso requested that Tsangyang Gyatso receive the full ordinations of a Buddhist priest on behalf of the Tibetan government in 1701, the young Dalai Lama declined to do so. On the contrary, he decided to abdicate the Dalai Lama's throne and abandon his novice ordination in July 1702 (*PCKPNPNT*, vol. 1, pp. 341–42; *DYMBGD*, KX41/10/5, vol. 17, pp. 91–101 (Mo.); pp. 81–90 (Ma.); [Petech 1966](#), pp. 262–66). This event led to a significant ruling crisis at the Géluk School in Tibet. By spying on Tsangyang Gyatso's activities through Šangnan Dorji's intelligence system, the Qing court took advantage of the chaos and intervened in Tibetan affairs.

In September 1702, Šangnan Dorji collected critical intelligence about the Sixth Dalai Lama. Considering its urgency, he promptly reported the situation to the Kangxi Emperor in Manchu before verifying its authenticity. According to Šangnan Dorji, Tsangyang Gyatso led his entourage of 3000 people to meet the Panchen Lama in western Tibet. It was said that Tsangyang Gyatso decided to resign his Buddhist precepts (Ma. sahil < Mo. sakil) to the Panchen Lama. As the Ganden Podrang government was based on the Buddhist theocracy, Tsangyang Gyatso's abdication of the Dalai Lama's throne extensively stunned political and religious leaders in Tibet. After receiving the intelligence report, the emperor ordered Šangnan Dorji to keep reporting the case after gathering and investigating related information (*KXCMWZPZZ*, KX41/7/15, no. 508-4-92-282, Reel 4, Microfilm 869–870).

Consequently, Šangnan Dorji sent the emperor another Manchu secret palace memorial dated November 1702, in which he confirmed Tsangyang Gyatso's abdication. According to Šangnan Dorji's report, Tsangyang Gyatso met the Panchen Lama near Yamdrok Lake (Ma. yamrub sere omo < Ti. yar 'drog g.yu mtsho)—a sacred site where Tibetan Buddhists looked for prophetic signs about the Dalai Lamas' reincarnations. They later went together to the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery, where the young Dalai Lama claimed that he was unwilling to be a monk and insisted on returning his śrāmaṇera precepts to the Panchen Lama. Accordingly, the Panchen Lama sent a Tibetan letter to each Qošud prince, led by Jasi Ba'atur in Kokonor in 1702, to announce the young Dalai Lama's abdication. In addition, the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama each sent a Tibetan letter to the Qing court through Jasi Ba'atur, who forwarded these letters to Šangnan Dorji (*KXCMWZPZZ*, KX41/9/19, no. 508-4-92-282, Reel 4, Microfilm 872–877). Consequently, Šangnan Dorji submitted these Tibetan letters on Tsangyang Gyatso's abdication to Beijing, where the Mongolian office translated them into Mongolian and Manchu.⁷ Based on these multilin-

gual sources that were originally processed by Šangnan Dorji, it is possible to clarify the myth of Tsangyang Gyatso's abdication in detail.

According to the Panchen Lama's letters sent to the Kangxi Emperor through Šangnan Dorji, Tsangyang Gyatso insisted that he did not regard himself as the Fifth Dalai Lama's reincarnation. When he met the Panchen Lama in July 1702, Tsangyang Gyatso submitted a letter in which he confessed that he never regarded himself as the Dalai Lama's reincarnation. Instead, Tsangyang Gyatso claimed that he acted as the Dalai Lama only because Sanggyé Gyatso asked him to do so (*DYMBGD*, KX41/6, vol. 17, pp. 146–51 (Mg.); pp. 142–46 (Ma.)). While the young Dalai Lama was questioning the authenticity of the reincarnation system in his mind, the Qing and Zunghar challenges in 1698 finally made him decide to abdicate his throne. According to Tsangyang Gyatso's self-statement, as the Zunghars led by Cewang Rabtan refused to recognize his religious authority, Tsangyang Gyatso started to doubt if he was the real Dalai Lama. Moreover, Kangxi's distrust of Sanggyé Gyatso and the Tibetan government also frustrated Tsangyang Gyatso. As a result, Tsangyang Gyatso told the Panchen Lama that he resolved to abandon his political and religious responsibilities of the Dalai Lama (*DYMBGD*, KX41/10/2, vol. 17, pp. 71–75 (Mo.); pp. 68–71 (Ma.)). That is to say, Sanggyé Gyatso's political struggles with Kangxi and Cewang Rabtan due to the issues of Dartsédo and Galdan finally caused the Géluk ruling crisis centering on Tsangyang Gyatso's abdication.

Following Tsangyang Gyatso and the Panchen Lama, Sanggyé Gyatso also sent a letter to Kangxi to report the issues of the young Dalai Lama's abdication (*DYMBGD*, KX41/12/21, vol. 17, pp. 138–41 (Mo.); pp. 135–38 (Ma.)). Nevertheless, the Qing doubted the reliability of Sanggyé Gyatso's report on Tsangyang Gyatso considering his previous lie about the Fifth Dalai Lama's death. To avoid being disgraced and confused by the problems of the Géluk echo chamber, the Kangxi Emperor decided to cut off his direct communications with Géluk leaders by refusing to accept letters from the Dalai Lama, the Panchen Lama, and Sanggyé Gyatso. Instead, the emperor commissioned the Lifanyuan to communicate with the Tibetan government on his behalf. As a result, the Lifanyuan sent a tough proclamation to Sanggyé Gyatso in December 1702. This document was originally composed in Manchu and later translated into Mongolian and Tibetan (*DYMBGD*, KX41/11, vol. 17, pp. 103–9 (Ma.); pp. 110–17 (Mo.); *YTPB*, pp. 216–18 (Ti.)). According to this proclamation, the Lifanyuan announced that the emperor would no longer respect Tsangyang Gyatso as how he had treated the Fifth Dalai Lama in the past. Also, the Lifanyuan claimed to close the Sino–Tibetan border markets by announcing that the Qing government would not provide the services of provisions and transportation to merchants in Dartsédo. In doing so, the Qing court intended to boycott the Tibetan government by threatening to downgrade the diplomatic and economic relations between China and Tibet.

The Qing decided to downsize its interactions with Tibet after realizing the controversy of Tsangyang Gyatso mainly because of its distrust in Sanggyé Gyatso. In February 1703, the Lifanyuan again sent another trilingual letter in Manchu, Mongolian, and Tibetan to interrogate Sanggyé Gyatso on the Sixth Dalai Lama's abdication (*DYMBGD*, vol. 17, pp. 157–66 (Ma.); pp. 166–72 (Mo.); *YTPB*, p. 218–22 (Ti.)). Being skeptical about Sanggyé Gyatso's manipulation of Tsangyang Gyatso's abdication as the previous scandal of the Fifth Dalai Lama's hidden death, the Qing court claimed that “the Dépa (Sanggyé Gyatso) was an extremely unreliable person.” (Ma. “diba umesi toktohon akū niyalma”; Ti. “sde pa spyir brtan po'i mi min 'dug”). Therefore, the Qing decided to cut off its economic exchanges with Tibet by refusing to receive Sanggyé Gyatso's tributes before clarifying the controversy of Tsangyang Gyatso's abdication (*DYMBGD*, vol. 17, p. 165 (Ma.); *YTPB*, p. 222 (Ti.)).⁸

To defend his integrity and clarify Tsangyang Gyatso's abdication, Sanggyé Gyatso sent a petition together with Tsangyang Gyatso's confession to the Qing court in May 1703. After these Tibetan letters arrived in Beijing, the Mongolian Office translated them into Mongolian and Manchu. In his reply to the Qing, Sanggyé Gyatso insisted that he did not manipulate the Fifth Dalai Lama's death and the Sixth Dalai Lama's recognition. As for Tsangyang Gyatso's abdication, Sanggyé Gyatso claimed that even the Panchen Lama could not change the young Dalai Lama's mind. In the end, Sanggyé Gyatso begged for the Kangxi Emperor's understanding and hoped the latter could receive his tributes and letters (YTPB, pp. 222–23 (Ti.); DYMBGD, KX42/7/5, vol. 17, pp. 191–95 (Mo.); pp. 188–91 (Ma.)). In order to convenience Kangxi, Sanggyé Gyatso also provided a detailed explanation on the Sixth Dalai Lama's reincarnation based on the prophecies of the Fifth Dalai Lama, the Néchung Oracle, and Buddhist scriptures (YTPB, pp. 225–26 (Ti.); DYMBGD, pp. 220–27 (Mo.); pp. 213–20 (Ma.)).

Together with Sanggyé Gyatso's petition, Tsangyang Gyatso sent the Kangxi Emperor a Tibetan petition in which the young Dalai Lama requested that the Qing court rebuild its friendly relations with the Tibetan government (YTPB, pp. 223–24 (Ti.); DYMBGD, KX42/7/5, vol. 17, pp. 183–87 (Mo.); pp. 179–83 (Ma.), pp. 280–83 (Ma.)). Moreover, Tsangyang Gyatso emphasized that his abdication from the Dalai Lama's throne was completely based on his independent will without Sanggyé Gyatso's manipulation. Finally, Tsangyang Gyatso thoroughly abandoned his divine status by voluntarily confessed that "I do not think I am really the Fifth Dalai Lama's reincarnation" (Tibetan: "Nga rang gong ma'i skye ba rang ngos nas yin bsam pa mi 'dug"; Mongolian: "Bi öber-ün degedü-yin qubilg-a minu jüg-ece möngecü sanaqu ügei"; Manchu: "Bi meni beye be, sunjaci dalai lama i hübilgan inu seme gūnirakū.") (YTPB, p. 224 (Ti.); DYMBGD, vol. 17, pp. 183–87 (Mg.); p. 182 (Ma.)). Consequently, the Sixth Dalai Lama seriously lost his religious authority in front of the Manchu emperor. Eventually, Tsangyang Gyatso's voluntary abdication led to a series of complicated struggles between the Tibetan government, the Qoşud khanate, and the Qing empire from 1703 to 1706. These monumental events jointly formed a watershed of Sino-Tibetan history after the eighteenth century.

7. Power, Sex, and Murder

To understand the historical meanings of Tsangyang Gyatso's abdication, it is necessary to contextualize his eccentric behavior in the political struggles between the Qoşud-Tibetan regime, the Zunghar khanate, and the Qing empire. As previously discussed, to weaken Sanggyé Gyatso's influence in the Inner Asian Buddhist world, Tsewang Raptan decided to collaborate with the Qing court by questioning the Sixth Dalai Lama's authenticity in 1698. Although the Qing and Zunghar powers did not wage a religious war against Tibet in the end, they jointly imposed diplomatic pressure on the Tibetan government and blamed Sanggyé Gyatso for manipulating the young Dalai Lama (DYMBGD, KX41/10/5, vol. 17, pp. 91–101 (Mo.); pp. 81–90 (Ma.); PCKPNPNT, vol. 1, pp. 342–53). Frustrated by Tsewang Raptan's slander, Tsangyang Gyatso started to doubt his authenticity as the Fifth Dalai Lama's reincarnation after 1698. Being bored with Buddhist doctrines, Tsangyang Gyatso took off his monastic robe and started to dress as a secular man. Moreover, he became addicted to playing arrow, lute, and chess while he stopped practicing Buddhism (DYMBGD, KX41/6, vol. 17, pp. 146–51 (Mo.); pp. 142–46 (Ma.)).

On the other hand, Tsangyang Gyatso's rebellious behavior was directly against Sanggyé Gyatso's overwhelming control. To centralize his power as the king of Tibet, Sanggyé Gyatso acted on behalf of the Fifth Dalai Lama by concealing the latter's death. After his plan failed in 1697 due to the disclosure of the Fifth Dalai Lama's hidden death, Sanggyé Gyatso tried to control the Sixth Dalai Lama to maintain his political authority in

the Inner Asian Buddhist world. Nevertheless, Tsangyang Gyatso's unexpected abdication ruined Sanggyé Gyatso's plan in 1702, when, Tsangyang Gyatso visited the Panchen Lama in western Tibet and asked to return his monastic vows without informing Sanggyé Gyatso. After that, Sanggyé Gyatso sent many Géluk leaders to the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery to request that Tsangyang Gyatso embrace his religious responsibilities by emulating the Fifth Dalai Lama. Nevertheless, their requests irritated the young Dalai Lama, who insisted on being a layman; otherwise, he said he would commit suicide (*DYMBGD*, KX41/10/2, vol. 17, pp. 77–80 (Mo.); pp. 75–77 (Ma.)). As a result, Sanggyé Gyatso and other Géluk leaders had no choice but to acquiesce to Tsangyang Gyatso's decision. Finally, Sanggyé Gyatso decided to use a different way from the Buddhist preaching to manipulate the pubertal Dalai Lama: sex.

After Tsangyang Gyatso abandoned his monastic vow and became a secular man, Sanggyé Gyatso intended to marry his daughter to Tsangyang Gyatso in 1703 ([Wuyunbilige 2016](#), pp. 209–10). Sanggyé Gyatso's purpose was to influence Tsangyang Gyatso via his daughter. Nevertheless, Sanggyé Gyatso's strategy led to a tragedy in the end. According to Tibetan sources, Tsangyang Gyatso kept a group of courtiers with whom he played and drank ([Duoji 2020](#), pp. 202–3). While Sanggyé Gyatso's daughter had a sexual relationship with Tsangyang Gyatso, she also had an affair with his courtier called Lhawang (Ma. Lawang < Ti. Lha dbang). Knowing about his daughter's affair with the courtier, Sanggyé Gyatso decided to send assassins to murder Lhawang. However, the assassination failed and broke up the relationship between Sanggyé Gyatso and Tsangyang Gyatso ([Wuyunbilige 2007](#), pp. 73–108).

When Tsangyang Gyatso was socializing with his courtiers in the Barkhor Circuit (Ma. joo; Ti. bar skor) in Lhasa's downtown one night in September 1703, suddenly more than ten assassins ambushed his entourage. As a result, one of Tsangyang Gyatso's most favorite courtiers, called Darchenné (Ma. Tarjannai < *Ti. Dar chen nas), was promptly killed. Tsangyang Gyatso barely escaped alive from the assassination and took refuge in Sanggyé Gyatso's house. Immediately, Šangnan Dorji gathered this crucial information on Tsangyang Gyatso and forwarded it to the Qing court ([Kusunoki 2006](#), pp. 82–83). According to Šangnan Dorji's secret palace memorial to Kangxi dated September 1703, Tsangyang Gyatso was suspicious about the potential connection between the assassins and Sanggyé Gyatso. Therefore, Tsangyang Gyatso ordered Sanggyé Gyatso to arrest the criminals and transfer them to him as soon as possible. Nevertheless, Sanggyé Gyatso did not do so. This event became the last straw that broke the relationship between Tsangyang Gyatso and Sanggyé Gyatso (*KXCMWZPZZ*, KX42/7/28, no. 508-4-92-282, Reel 4, Microfilm 897–899).

In addition to Šangnan Dorji's secret report, the Qing empire also tried to investigate the assassination of 1703 in detail by sending secret agents to Central Tibet. According to a Qing spy's retrospective report, Sanggyé Gyatso sent the assassins to murder Lhawang, who had an affair with his daughter. However, the assassins wrongly killed Darchenné. More importantly, the assassins did not realize that Tsangyang Gyatso was socializing together with Lhawang and Darchenné that night, probably because the young Dalai Lama was dressed like a secular man. After investigating the death of Darchenné for several months, Tsangyang Gyatso finally captured the murders and verified that the assassination was organized by Sanggyé Gyatso. Although Sanggyé Gyatso pleaded for the assassins, Tsangyang Gyatso transferred them to Lazang Khan, who sentenced them to death (*KXCMWZPZZ*, KX44/12/26, no. 29, Reel 9, Microfilm 855–859). Consequently, Tsangyang Gyatso finally severed his relationship with Sanggyé Gyatso because of this murder, caused by the sexual scandal ([Wuyunbilige 2007](#), pp. 73–108).

The assassination of 1703 significantly changed the politics of Central Tibet. After that, Tsangyang Gyatso became more friendly with Lazhang Khan than with Sanggyé Gyatso.

Tsangyang Gyatso's personal preference for Lazhang Khan over Sanggyé Gyatso shifted the power balance between the Tibetan government and the Qoşud khanate. According to Šangnan Dorji's report to Kangxi, dated 1704, Sanggyé Gyatso complained that Tsangyang Gyatso and Lazang Khan had taken his power away (KXCMWZPZZ, KX43/10/8, no. 508-4-92-282, Reel 4, Microfilm 913–918). The rise of Lazang Khan and the decline of Sanggyé Gyatso after 1703 were also reflected in Tsangyang Gyatso's letter to Kangxi, dated 1705. In this letter, Tsangyang Gyatso addressed some important changes in Tibet's politics. First, Sanggyé Gyatso wanted to resign from the position of the Tibetan regent to pacify the controversies of the Fifth Dalai Lama's death and the Sixth Dalai Lama's abdication that had broken the mutual trust between Tibet and the Qing. Moreover, Tsangyang Gyatso requested that Kangxi let Sanggyé Gyatso's eldest son, Ngawang Rinchen (Ti. Ngag dbang rin chen), and Lazang Khan take over the positions of Sanggyé Gyatso and Dalai Khan, respectively, in order to lead the Qoşud–Tibetan diarchy (YTPB, pp. 233–34 (Ti.); DYMBGD, vol. 17, pp. 197–203 (Ma.); pp. 204–9 (Mo.).⁹

Sanggyé Gyatso never gave up his political ambitions, even after he resigned from the post of regent. Dissatisfied with the rise of Qoşud power, Sanggyé Gyatso finally decided to poison Lazang Khan in 1705; nevertheless, his plan failed once again. Being cured by the First Jamyang Zhépa Ngawang Tsöndrü (Ti. 'jam dbyangs Bzhad pa'i rdo rje, 1648–1721), Lazang Khan invaded Lhasa and attacked Sanggyé Gyatso to take revenge. Lazang Khan's queen brutally executed the regent in 1705 (KXCMWZPZZ, KX44/10/21, no. 508-4-92-282, Reel 4, Microfilm 931–937; Wuyunbilige 2016, pp. 208–15; Kusunoki 2006, pp. 87–90). The political struggle of 1705 provided the Qing empire an opportunity to intervene in Tibet's political and religious affairs. After Sanggyé Gyatso's death, Tsangyang Gyatso, who already abandoned his religious authority by abdicating the Dalai Lama's throne, was the last obstacle for the Qing control over Tibet.

After Sanggyé Gyatso's death in 1705, Šangnan Dorji suggested the Kangxi Emperor remove Tsangyang Gyatso from Lhasa. According to his secret palace memorial dated in February 1706, Šangnan Dorji reported that Tsangyang Gyatso was still very influential in Tibet. Moreover, the Mongols still respected Tsangyang Gyatso as the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama, regardless of his eccentric behavior and the rumor about him being Sanggyé Gyatso's bastard. To strengthen the Qing authority in Tibet, Šangnan Dorji proposed that Kangxi had Tsangyang Gyatso kidnapped from Lhasa (KXCMWZPZZ, KX44/12/20, no. 508-4-92-282, Reel 4, Microfilm 938–943; Kusunoki 2006, pp. 90–93). After acquiring Kangxi's permission in the same month, Šangnan Dorji started to collaborate with Lazang Khan to depose Tsangyang Gyatso, on the excuse of his abnormal behavior. Accordingly, Šangnan Dorji sent a secret messenger to Lazang Khan to pass Kangxi's edict of kidnapping Tsangyang Gyatso. After that, Lazang Khan forwarded this edict to the Lhamo Oracle, who agreed to follow the Manchu emperor's will on behalf of the Tibetan government. Moreover, the Lhamo Oracle replied to Lazang Khan that "if (Tsangyang Gyatso) enters the devil's path, it would be beneficial to the Dharma. Please tell this to the emperor" (Manchu: "Hutui songko-de dosifi yabuci šajin-de tusa ojoro-be dergi ejen-de wesimbu.") (KXCMWZPZZ, KX44/12/20, no. 508-4-92-282, Reel 4, Microfilm 944–952; Wuyunbilige 2016, pp. 216–28). In doing so, the Lhamo Oracle seemed to agree with Kangxi's proposal to murder Tsangyang Gyatso and set him onto "the devil's path." Following Kangxi's order, Lazang Khan arrested Tsangyang Gyatso and escorted him to Beijing. However, the young Dalai Lama never visited the imperial capital as the Fifth Dalai Lama had done. Instead, he was secretly poisoned in Kokonor in 1706 (Wuyunbilige 2016, pp. 216–28).

An additional perspective worth exploring in the historiography of the Sixth Dalai Lama is the claim that he was not assassinated in 1706 but lived on in exile until his death in 1746. This alternative narrative is presented in *The Secret Biography of Tsangyang Gyatso*

(SBNT), which recounts the story of a monk in Alxa who was mistakenly identified as Tsangyang Gyatso in 1756. This misidentification reflects the complexities of historical memory surrounding Tsangyang Gyatso in the world of Mongol–Tibetan Buddhists. The work suggests that Tsangyang Gyatso survived and lived a secluded life as a wandering monk and Buddhist teacher in Inner Mongolia.

The religious biography offers a perspective distinct from Qing archival records, portraying Tsangyang Gyatso not as a political martyr but as a Buddhist practitioner who embraced a spiritual path outside the constraints of his former theocratic role (Aris 1988; Zhuang 2010; Wickham-Smith 2011). While Qing imperial documents are silent on this possibility, the persistence of this narrative in Tibetan oral traditions and modern scholarship adds a compelling dimension to the understanding of his life and the broader political-religious dynamics of the period. This view underscores the multilayered legacy of the Sixth Dalai Lama and invites further inquiry into the interplay of history, myth, and memory within the Qing–Tibetan context.

8. Conclusions

After learning of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s death, the Qing dynasty deployed intelligence agents on the Sino–Tibetan borderlands. To avoid the information problems of an echo chamber, the Kangxi Emperor decided to commission his bondservants instead of Géluk partisans to gather information about Tibet. Consequently, the emperor chose Šangnan Dorji, the eunuch lama who grew up in the Forbidden City, to be the spymaster orchestrating relations between Tibet and China. Through the multilingual practice between Tibetan, Mongolian, and Manchu, Šangnan Dorji closely spied on the Sixth Dalai Lama and regularly reported the situation in Tibet to Kangxi. The intelligence system managed by Šangnan Dorji not only changed the Qing–Tibetan relationship but also comprised the development of a new imperial mechanism of information gathering.

Owing to the multilingual communications between the Panchen Lama, Jasi Ba’atur, Šangnan Dorji, and the Kangxi Emperor, the Qing court knew about Tsangyang Gyatso’s disagreement with other Géluk leaders in detail. Moreover, it should be noted that Šangnan Dorji served as an important middleman between Kangxi, Jasi Ba’atur, and the Panchen Lama by collecting, translating, and transmitting intelligence on Tsangyang Gyatso in the Tibetan, Mongolian, and Manchu contexts. By examining multilingual documents processed by Šangnan Dorji and the Mongolian Office of the Qing empire, this chapter has reconstructed the controversial life of Tsangyang Gyatso, whose abdication fundamentally changed the history of Tibet and Inner Asia after the early eighteenth century.

In conclusion, the case of the Sixth Dalai Lama, Tsangyang Gyatso, and the Qing dynasty’s subsequent intervention illustrates a critical juncture in Qing–Tibetan relations. The Qing empire’s response to the concealment of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s death and the complexities surrounding Tsangyang Gyatso’s controversial reign underscore the Qing’s growing reliance on intelligence networks and espionage to govern its Inner Asian frontiers. By strategically leveraging the religious and political issues surrounding the Sixth Dalai Lama, the Qing successfully undermined the authority of Tibet’s Géluk hierarchy and solidified its influence over the region.

The transformation of the Qing information system, led by key figures such as Šangnan Dorji, not only enhanced the empire’s ability to manage Tibet but also demonstrated the Qing’s adaptability in confronting the unique challenges posed by the linguistic and cultural diversity of Inner Asia. By integrating espionage, diplomatic maneuvering, and religious influence, the Qing established a new framework for governance in Tibet that would have lasting effects on Sino–Tibetan relations for centuries.

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how imperial powers like the Qing dynasty utilized information control and manipulation as fundamental tools of empire. The events surrounding the Sixth Dalai Lama's abdication and death mark a significant turning point, reflecting the Qing's commitment to consolidating power in Tibet while reshaping the political and religious landscape of the region. This episode, therefore, offers valuable insights into the broader dynamics of imperial governance, intelligence systems, and religious politics in early modern Inner Asia.

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Abbreviations

DKL	<i>Biography of the Fifth Dalai Lama</i> (Ti. <i>Drin can rtsa ba'i bla ma ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho'i thun mong phyi'i rnam thar du k'u la'i gos bzang</i>).
DYMBGD	<i>Archives of the Mongolian Office of the Grant Secretariat</i> (Mo. <i>Daicing gürün-ü dotuḡadu yamun-u Mongḡol bicig-uṅ ger-uṅ dangsa</i>).
GZD	<i>Qing Secret Palace Memorials</i> (Ch. <i>Gongzhongdang</i> 宮中檔).
KXCMWZPZZ	<i>Manchu Secret Palace Memorials with the Kangxi Emperor's Vermillion Rescripts</i> (Ch. <i>Kangxi chao manwen zhupi zhouzhe</i> 康熙朝滿文硃批奏摺).
NMSBKC	<i>Catalog of Nyingma Terma Teachings</i> (Ti. <i>Rnying ma'i gsung 'bum dkar chag</i>).
PCKPNPNT	<i>Biography of the Fifth Panchen Lama</i> (Ti. <i>PaN chen sku phreng lnga pa blo bzang ye shes kyi rnam thar</i>).
PCKPNPSB	<i>Collected Works of the Fifth Panchen Lama</i> (Ti. <i>PaN chen thams cad mkhyen pa Blo bzang ye she dpal bzang po'i gsung 'bum</i>).
QSL	<i>Qing Veritable Records</i> (Ch. <i>Qing shilu</i> 清實錄).
QZPDSMFL	<i>Imperial Campaign History of Pacifying the Northern Desert</i> (Ch. <i>Qinzheng Pingding shuomo fanglue</i> 親征平定朔漠方略).
RBHS	<i>The Fifth Dalai Lama's Correspondence with the Peoples of China, Tibet, and Mongolia</i> (Ti. <i>Rgya bod hor sog gi mchog dman bar pa rnams la 'phrin yig snyan ngag tu 'god pa rab snyan rgyud mang</i>).
SGNM	<i>Biography of the Sixth Dalai Lama</i> (Ti. <i>Gser gyi snye ma</i>).
YTPB	<i>Collection of the Tibetan Archives</i> (Ti. <i>Bod kyi yig tshags phyogs bsgrigs</i>).

Notes

- ¹ Kusunoki misread this source and wrongly suggested that Šangnan Dorji was born in 1651. See Kusunoki (2006) and Kusunoki (2008, p. 1090).
- ² On eunuch lamas in the Qing court, see Dale (2018, pp. 79–81), Goossaert (2007, pp. 210–18), and Mou (1990, p. 259).
- ³ *The Veritable Records* included an incomplete Chinese translation of this letter; see (QSL, KX37/1/14, vol. 187, pp. 990–91).
- ⁴ The Qing court wrongly identified “Tertön” and “Dorjé Drak” as two monks; “Tertön Dorjé Drak” should be Rigdzin Pema Trinlé (Ti. Rig 'dzin padma 'phrin las, 1641–1717), the second abbot of the Dorje Drak Monastery. Tertön is a title of *discoverer of ancient hidden texts* (Terma) instead of a common personal name. Rigdzin Pema Trinlé was a Nyingma master and also the student of the Fifth Dalai Lama. When the Zunghar army invaded Tibet in 1717, Trinlé was killed because of the anti-Nyingma movement. This letter shows that Cewang Rabtan was already hostile to Rigdzin Pema Trinlé and Sanggyé Gyatso before the Zunghar invasion of Tibet. For more information on the life of Pema Trinlé, see Dudjom (2002, pp. 719–20).
- ⁵ The title of this Tibetan text was translated into Mongolian and Manchu as *Töröl-ün cadiḡ-un manadaqal: yeke oyutu бүкүн-i ilaḡuḡsan* and *Dalai Lama i jalan be ejehe suduri bith: jai amba funiyangga i gubci be etehe*, respectively (YTPB, pp. 211–12 (Ti.); DYMBGD, KX38/7/9, vol. 14, pp. 378–80 (Mo.); pp. 376–78 (Ma.)). The original Tibetan text was included in *The Fifth Panchen Lama's Collected Works*; see PCKPNPSB, vol. 3, pp. 617–22.

- ⁶ The content of this Tibetan letter was included in the Lifanyuan's reply to Sanggyé Gyatso, dated 1701. (YTPB, p. 261 (Ti.)). For the Mongolian and Manchu translations, see (DYMBGD, KX40/2, vol. 16, pp. 245–50 (Mo.); pp. 241–45 (Ma.)).
- ⁷ For Tsangyang Gyatso's letter to the Qing court on his abdication, see (DYMBGD, KX41/6, vol. 17, pp. 124–28 (Mo.); pp. 119–24 (Ma.)). For the Panchen Lama's letter on Tsangyang Gyatso's abdication, see (DYMBGD, KX41/6, vol. 17, pp. 131–34 (Mo.); 128–31 (Ma.)).
- ⁸ This quote's Mongolian translation was lost.
- ⁹ Dalai Khan (?–1701) was the third khan of the Qosud Khanate and the father of Lazang Khan. After Dalai Khan passed away, Lazang Khan and his brother, Wangchuk Khan, vied for the throne of the khanate. Eventually, Lazang Khan emerged victorious in the struggle and received Tsangyang Gyatso's recognition in 1703. Subsequently, Tsangyang Gyatso requested the Qing court to empower Lazang Khan as the successor of Dalai Khan in 1705. For more information on the successions of Ngawang Rinchen and Lazang Khan, see [Peteich \(1972, p. 10, p. 17\)](#), [Schwieger \(2015, p. 116\)](#), and [Wuyunbilige \(2016, pp. 202–3\)](#).

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