Introduction

“Listen, my dear Trotta!” said the Kaiser. “The whole business is rather awkward. But neither of us comes off all that badly. Let it be!”

“Your Majesty,” replied the captain, “it’s a lie!”

—Joseph Roth, The Radetzky March

On July 15, 1779, the Sixth Panchen Lama, Lozang Penden Yeshé, rode out from Zhikatsé to attend the seventieth birthday celebrations of the Qianlong emperor. He was accompanied by a large entourage of five hundred monks, escorted by a battalion of one hundred soldiers, and nearly a thousand servants and clerks came along to help the highest-ranking incarnate lama on his travels from central Tibet to Chengde, the Manchu’s summer palace north of Beijing.1

Before leaving Tibet the Panchen Lama and his group were feted by local Tibetan elites headed by the young Dalai Lama, whom the Panchen Lama had ordained only two years prior. After travelling together for eight days, Tibet’s two supreme hierarchs parted company and the Panchen Lama proceeded eastwards, eventually arriving in Kham, where he first met the imperial envoys dispatched from Beijing. The messengers informed the lama of the emperor’s great anticipation and joy at the prospect of finally meeting him. They also presented the Panchen Lama with a portrait of the emperor. The Panchen Lama was reportedly transported with joy at the sight of this representation of the imperial countenance and from then on always kept it with him.

From Kham the Panchen Lama went north to the famous Gelukpa monastery of Kumbum in Amdo, where he stayed for several months. During his stay through the winter months the Panchen Lama lived in a new opulent residence that the emperor had recently constructed at the monastery. Eventually, as the weather changed in the spring, the Panchen Lama and his entourage once again set out eastwards. This time his large entourage also included a bevy of individuals sent by the emperor, including cooks, purveyors, doctors, groomers, orderlies, key bearers, not to mention the porters carrying all the provisions needed for this convoy. These were not simply the basic sundries; they also included items specifically sent by the emperor, such as new clothes, hats and belts, as well as special foods that could not be procured in the harsh climate of Inner Asia. These delicacies included fruits, sweets and even a thirteen-
foot-long fish, all of which were quite unfamiliar to the Tibetans. Nevertheless, thus girded, the procession left the plateau and proceeded slowly to the center of the Manchu state.

Along the way the court spared no expense. At each stop on the way the Qing court provided the entourage with two thousand new horses, one hundred camels, forty Mongol felt tents, one hundred cotton tents, chairs, cushions and other furniture, in addition to a large daily sum of money to pay for travelling expenses. Each stop entailed meeting local dignitaries and also other envoys sent out from Beijing, all of whom presented more lavish gifts to the Panchen Lama. Eventually, as the Panchen Lama neared the center of imperial power he was greeted by the second Jangjia Khutugtu, Rölpé Dorjé, who was an intimate of the Qianlong emperor and thus perhaps the most powerful Tibetan hierarch in the Qing Empire.

Together, the two Tibetan lamas and the emperor's sixth son, accompanied by two thousand loads of gifts presented to the Panchen Lama, proceeded to Dolonuur, the residence of the Jangjia Khutugtu and center of Manchu-sponsored Buddhism in Inner Mongolia. When he arrived, according to his hyperbolic Tibetan biography, one million Mongols came to receive his blessing. According to Mongolian sources, he also performed a purification ritual that pacified the restless demons of Mongolia.²

Then, after having stayed in Dolonuur for some time and met with a great number of the Manchu and Mongol banner elite, the Panchen Lama continued north to the Qing emperor's summer residence. Nestled in the hills of northwest China the lama was surprised to find that the Qianlong emperor had constructed replicas of both the Dalai Lama's residence, the Potala, and his own Trashi Lhünpo monastery at Chengde.

Nevertheless, upon settling in, on the twentieth of August 1780, the Panchen Lama was carried in a sedan chair to have an audience with the emperor on his birthday. They exchanged pleasantries and further gifts, and then over the next several days they met routinely to talk and discuss the Dharma. The relationship between the two flourished, and subsequently, when the emperor left Chengde to return to Beijing, the Panchen Lama was invited to accompany him. Upon arriving in Beijing the Panchen Lama was installed in the Yellow Temple, the famous monastery built for the Fifth Dalai Lama when he visited Beijing in 1652.

The relationship forged at Chengde continued, and the Panchen Lama visited the emperor in all his various palaces in the capital; and presumably the festivities, meetings with the emperor and high officials, Dharma teachings and blessings could have gone on for a long time. Unfortunately, however, as was often the case with dignitaries from the frontier regions who had not been previ-
ously exposed to the urban diseases of the empire, the Panchen Lama fell ill. A month and a half after his arrival in Beijing, the Sixth Panchen Lama died of smallpox.

Although the death of the Panchen Lama was a grave loss of face, the meeting between the Manchu emperor and the Tibetan lama had certainly not been a complete failure. Rather, on account of the court’s extravagant expenditures and the apparently profound relationship forged between the emperor and the lama, it had once again been powerfully confirmed for the entire Inner Asian world that the Qianlong emperor was indeed the supreme ruler and patron of the unified Buddhist Qing state.

The unfortunate death of the Panchen Lama was therefore overshadowed by the broader success of this ritualized performance of religiopolitical theatre. And that is indeed what it was: a form of Dharmic agitprop that secured the support of the Qing dynasty’s Buddhist subjects. Or at least that is how it is generally understood, especially in the case of the Mongols. By ritually confirming their rule through the symbols, myths and history of Buddhist political authority, it is assumed that the Manchus were able to ensure the undying loyalty of the Mongols.

Indeed, one of the first to make this observation was Father Amiot, a French Jesuit resident in Beijing who witnessed the preparations for the Sixth Panchen’s visit. In his explanation of why the Manchu emperor expended such time and money on the barbarous idolatry of “Lamaism,” rather than on the philosophically and morally superior “Confucianism,” he wrote: “By this political stroke, his Majesty foresees at once the execution of his orders, devotes the disobedient to the vengeance of the Lamas, and procures for himself more glory than ever, in their most brilliant days, had the Jenghis Khans, the Tamerlanes, and the Khubilais, who, like him, have given laws to the Tartars.” Remarkably, this view was confirmed thirteen years later by the Qianlong emperor himself in the famous “Proclamation on Lamas” (Lama shuo). “As the Yellow Church [i.e., Gelukpa Buddhism] inside and outside of China proper is under the supreme rule of these two men [the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama], all the Mongol tribes bear allegiance to them. By patronizing the Yellow Church we maintain peace among the Mongols. This being an important task we cannot but protect this religion.”

Ever since then, virtually every source touching upon the Mongols, Buddhism and the Qing dynasty has echoed the same refrain. Be it Qing-period Mongolian histories or post-Qing Mongol nationalists and Marxists, Japanese imperialists, contemporary Mongolists and Sinologists, the Oxford English Dictionary, or even Mongol Christians justifying their conversion, they all agree: the Manchus used Buddhism to rule the Mongols. Although they all make
this assertion for various discursive ends, the underlying logic is the same: the “Buddhist explanation” assumes that by promoting the Dharma the Manchus were able to ensure the loyalty of their Mongol subjects.

On one level, of course, the notion that Manchu rule was facilitated through its appropriation of Mongol discourses of Buddhist rule is entirely legitimate. Based solely on the enormous project of Buddhist cultural production carried out by the Qing court it is clear that the Dharma played a fundamental role in the Qing project of imperial consolidation. And perhaps even more important, from the architectonic India-Tibet-Mongolia-Qing Buddhist narrative found in all Qing-period Mongol sources it is also clear that the Mongols themselves powerfully identified with the court’s Buddhist project. Indeed, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Mongols were stalwart defenders of the Qing state precisely because it had become identified as a multiethnic Buddhist empire. It was the Mongol general Senggerinchen who defeated the British at

Dagu Fort in 1859. Some Mongols were so loyal to the Manchu state that they even attempted an imperial restoration in 1917. Clearly, Manchu Buddhist rule worked.

Yet, one may very well wonder, how in fact did it work? Did one simply have to project oneself as a Buddhist ruler, as the Qianlong emperor did by meeting the Sixth Panchen Lama, to elicit the undying loyalty of Mongol Buddhists? Can we assume that simply by fulfilling the ritualized role of a Cakravartin, the Wheel-turning king of Buddhist political theory, or by being a Buddhist patron, all Inner Asian Buddhists would readily submit to Manchu domination and become loyal subjects within a Buddhist “encompassed hierarchy”? Obviously it was not that easy. If it had been, then the Shunzhi emperor’s meeting with the Fifth Dalai Lama should have secured the obeisance of the Khalkha and Oirad Buddhists at that time; but it did not. Similarly, according to the logic of the “Buddhist explanation,” Mao Zedong’s meeting with the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and the broadcasting of its iconic representation should also have secured the Tibetans’ undying loyalty, which it clearly did not. Both of these examples therefore point to an inherent flaw, or oversight, in the “Buddhist explanation.” Namely, how did those on the periphery actually understand the actions of the metropole? Indeed, we may very well wonder how the Khalkhas, Oirads and Tibetans actually understood these projects of purported Buddhist rule carried out by the imperial center? In particular, we should ask ourselves, how did these Manchu projects of promoting Buddhist rule actually foster a reformulation of preexisting religious, political and communal identities?

Unfortunately, however, on account of the Buddhist explanation’s static and unidirectional framework, it is precisely this process that is most often held in suspension. As a result, little in fact is known about how the Buddhists within or outside of the Qing state actually accepted, rejected, reinterpreted, deflected, or renegotiated these new narratives and rituals of political authority and state power that were assiduously broadcast by the Qing court. This study therefore aims to provide a picture of this process of engagement from the other side—from the periphery. In particular, it investigates the long process through which the politically independent “shamanists” of the Khorchin ulus came to be Mongol Buddhist bannermen willing to fight and die for “Our Great Qing” (Manu Yeke Cing).

Technologies of Domination

In order to explicate this process of transformation, this study of Qing Inner Mongolia begins with several assumptions. Counter to Mongol nationalist historiography and its Western romantic counterpart, it is assumed that the Mongols
were not simply the hapless victims of Manchu Buddhist imperialism. Moreover, contrary to the “Buddhist explanation,” the idea that the Qing simply adopted and duplicated early “age-old” Mongol traditions, rituals and narratives is rejected. And finally, in contrast to the common framework of unidirectional discourses of power, this study begins with the premise that Manchu rule was an ongoing process of negotiation between the metropole and the periphery. As Struve has indeed noted, “a full comprehension of the Qing formation involves study of how that Manchurian regime transformation interacted—generatively, reactively, cybernetically, concurrently, sequentially—with other, or overlapping, contemporaneous regimes in eastern Asia, such as those of China proper, Choson Korea, the Mongolian steppe, Siberia, and the southeastern maritime sphere.”

The Qing conquest and subsequent Manchu rule are therefore understood less as events than continuing projects or processes. Not only did the Manchus adopt and transform earlier Mongol conceptualizations of communal and religious identification as manifested through rituals and narratives of political authority, but also the Mongols in turn engaged with those new discourses emanating from the imperial center in various ways. Thus while recognizing that the Qing state employed different technologies to socialize its constituents into self-disciplining subjects, we must recognize it was also the case that there were continual counterstrategies to evade, subvert, or criticize such rationalities. Nevertheless, in the task of achieving the submission of the Mongols and ensuring their continued loyalty to the Qing state it is clear that the Manchus had recourse to a host of technologies of domination. As social historians have pointed out, they used several means, such as marriage alliances, economic and social institutions, the Bureau of Colonial Affairs, legal systems and brute military force to secure continued Mongol loyalty. However, while all of these factors certainly played a role in maintaining the Qing state, they will not be the focus of this study. One reason for such an approach is that this study is focused less on the activities and technologies of the center, which have been extensively studied, but rather on how these actions were actually understood or translated into reality by those on the frontier. Thus, not only is the aim of this study to allow the natives to speak, but also to give them agency. And in this regard it is important to note that none of the above technologies of domination are ever mentioned in Mongolian historical sources. What is talked about continually and at length in Mongol sources is what it means to be Mongol, what it means to be Buddhist, and how these relate to the Qing state.

The focus of this study is therefore precisely on how various Mongolian sources represent communal identity in relation to the state. In particular, this
work investigates how Mongol narratives and rituals were transformed during the course of the Qing dynasty, and what these shifts and their intellectual and cultural context tell us about Mongol, Buddhist and Qing history.

Another reason for presenting an intellectual history of Mongol self-representation, moreover, is because it is these very transformations that have most often been occluded in the perpetuated myth of a static Buddhist rule that could simply be grafted onto the Qing “Great Enterprise.” As a result, we know very little about the actual process of becoming or being Mongol or Buddhist, not only during the Qing dynasty, but also before and after as well. Yet it is precisely these processes beyond the imperial monologue that need to be explored if we are to better understand the success of the Qing, as well its collapse and lingering legacy.

Buddhist Rule in Theory and Practice

To a large degree it was this process of becoming a Qing Mongol Buddhist that was purposely subverted within the Qing’s multilingual logorrhea of Buddhist state consolidation. For the Manchus themselves the process of projecting an image of continuity and tradition was greatly beneficial; and, as is well known, the Manchus had a keen sense of how to appropriate history in order to shape the legitimacy of the present. A fundamental element of their imperial enterprise was in fact the projection of themselves as the ultimate apotheosis of righteous rulers in the recurring cycles of history and myth. To achieve this project the Qing court produced and reconfirmed this new reality in a torrent of textual, visual and various performative media in order to establish a shared reality with those incorporated into the empire.32

Thus, long before Durkheim realized that the central focus of all human societies is the imagining of communities, the Manchus were creating such communities “by mobilizing the formal properties of such sign systems as language, poetics and ritual.”33 And perhaps nowhere was this project more successful than with the Mongols. The Qing formation, its radical social and cultural disruption, and the three centuries of Manchu domination came to be seen as simply the natural progression of Buddhist history. Thus, by drawing upon both Buddhist and Mongol history, the Qing simply became, not only a reflection of what always was, but also what in fact should be. And it was within this dynamic wherein imperial success clearly resided.

However, not only did the Mongols accept this new narrative, but, unfortunately, we also take these imaginings for granted in our own discussions of Mongol, Qing and even Tibetan history. To some extent the lama–emperor relationship even shapes the whole framework of Sino–Inner Asian cultural and political history. Yet by continuing to apply an ideal Weberian model of traditional
Buddhist rule to explain this history, we miss the very particularities that we are attempting to understand.

By appropriating a static model of Buddhist rule, be it in the Tang dynasty, the Yuan, the Ming, or the Qing, the actual processes that engendered these distinct Buddhist imperial/national/local identities are overlooked. As a result, little is known about what it meant to be Buddhist, or what the interactions between religious identities and political institutions were in the premodern period.34 The whole process in which rituals, myths and histories were transformed in the creation of new Buddhist identities is too often displaced by the discourse of an idealized form of Buddhist imperial rule. Thus Buddhist history often reads like a laundry list of famous Asian rulers who promoted the faith.35 However, the interrelated process of becoming both Buddhist and an imperial subject, or a national citizen, or a person within a localized community is, on account of this displacement, little understood.

In the case of the Qing these issues are not only confounded by the stunning success of the Manchu myth but, moreover, by the very absence of other voices. Until recently there were no Mongol sources from the pre-Qing period that could shed light on this process of transformation. In a sense, there was no point from which to begin reevaluating the Qing narrative, since its vision of Mongol Buddhist rule had become hegemonic. Fortunately, the recent discovery of the 1607 *Jewel Translucent Sutra* and the *Golden Summary of Chinggis Khan* (Cinggis qayan-u Altan Tobci) affords us a new perspective. The first of these is a history of Altan Khan, his conversion to Buddhism and the lives of his two descendants. The second is pre-Qing history of Chinggis Khan that differs markedly from the later “standard” Mongol histories of the seventeenth century, especially in regard to the presentation of Buddhism and Chinggisid rule.36 As a result, both of these works provide an important perspective, and corrective, on Mongol society, religion and the state in the late sixteenth century. Moreover, by providing a window into Mongol culture on the eve of the Manchu conquest, these two Mongolian works also provide us with a starting point from which to begin reevaluating, not only other contemporary sources such as Manchu–Mongol correspondence and imperial stelae, but also the history of the Qing formation and its impact on Mongol society.

**Mongol Identity and the Qing State**

Central to this project is the operative assumption that Mongol Buddhist identity was never static. Its creation and maintenance was an ongoing dialogue in which narratives and representations of identity were continually being renegotiated. Communal boundaries and notions of political authority were always
being transformed within larger intellectual and cultural discourses. By revealing these changes it is hoped that a better picture of Mongol history will emerge, as well as a more nuanced understanding of what it meant to be Buddhist in late imperial China.

At the outset, however, it needs to be noted that this study is focused on “Inner Mongolia,” not the Khalkha, Oirad, or Zunghars. One reason for this is that we simply do not have enough extant Khalkha and Oirad material, while for those Mongols of the area that was to become Inner Mongolia we do. Why this is the case is no doubt due to the fact that the “Inner Mongols” not only joined the Manchu project very early, but also that Inner Mongolia was the intellectual center of the Mongolian cultural area throughout the Qing period. Thus, even though this study focuses on Inner Mongolia, the term “Mongol” will be used throughout. Indeed, while the terms “Mongol,” “community” and “identity” will be used, the reader is advised to “unload as much as possible of the baggage usually carried by the words ‘community’ and ‘identity’ so that these terms can travel light in the pages that follow.”

Mongol identity was clearly multivalent and fluid during the Qing period, and I can never present it in all its complexity. Thus, while I will talk about Mongol identity, the Mongols, Buddhists, Buddhism, the Qing and so on, these terms are not meant to be essentializing. If anything, this whole project is an attempt to move beyond the problems inherent in discussing “Qing” history solely in terms of “Mongol” and “Buddhist.”

At the same time I do recognize that many factors shaping Mongol identity are not addressed in this book, such as gender and various other elements of identification. Some of these issues are simply not available in the sources, while others are not directly relevant to the focus of this study. Moreover, as noted above, Mongol identity was always changing. Different identities were triggered in different contexts, such as when Mongols met Europeans; yet in recognizing these factors I do not believe that an elucidation of Mongol self-representation during the Qing is beyond our grasp. Rather, the available sources, produced by educated men of the elite class or the Buddhist establishment in Inner Mongolia, do provide us with a framework of how Mongol, Buddhist and Qing identities developed over the course of time.

**New Qing History and Buddhist Studies**

By focusing on the formation of Mongol Buddhist identity this study is also able to address two other current scholarly enterprises: the “New Qing History” and the current historical turn in Buddhist studies. In regard to the expanding scholarship on late imperial China, I believe that an elucidation of Mongol intellectual history affords us a new perspective on Manchu rule and the cultural dy-
namics of the Qing dynasty. In particular, the case of the Mongols presents an example that focuses less on the metropole and more on the periphery.

This is important because, although there has recently been a wealth of outstanding scholarship on the Qing imperial project as envisioned in the center, little work has been done on how the projects of the imperial center were actually translated, or even understood, among the various constituents of the empire. In many cases, of course, the voice of the periphery either never existed or is now lost, and we do not know how the various people of the empire understood the Qing, their ethnic conceptualizations, the court’s historiographical enterprise, or their mapping projects. As a result, the case of the Mongols, with their large corpus of written materials, affords us a unique perspective on the other side of the equation, one that is beyond the “theatre of majesty” and its unidirectional power relations.

Rather, Mongol sources offer us a valuable perspective into the actual dynamics of the Qing formation in both its destructive and constructive elements. They reveal the process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization that brought the Mongols firmly within the Manchu orbit. They thus provide us with a view into the “middle ground” of the seventeenth century, during which Mongol and Manchu conceptualizations of community, state formation, political authority and religion informed one another. Moreover, Mongol sources reveal not only this period of engagement but also the dynamics through which these earlier conceptualizations were transformed and ultimately swept away. These sources show how this occurred, how earlier constructions were displaced by those of the center and how the idea of the Qing was actually internalized by people outside of the center. And by exploring this ongoing dialogue between the metropole and the periphery in terms of an “interactional history,” it is hoped that a more nuanced understanding of Manchu rule and the Qing dynasty can emerge.

Investigating how Qing Buddhist rule developed also engages the growing scholarship on premodern Buddhist history. Buddhism has unfortunately often been studied outside of history, and while this oversight is now being addressed, the imaginary ideal of Buddhist rule as an explanatory model still remains. Thus Buddhist rule is very often discussed and framed within the same theoretical model, whether in third-century BCE India, twelfth-century Vietnam, or eighteenth-century China.

Of course, while all of these regimes drew upon the orthodox model found in the textual sources in producing their legitimacy, this projection and the ideal should not distract us from their possible differences, or what this purported uniformity actually obscures. We need to keep in mind that religion is part of a complex process of identity creation. As Orsi has pointed out, “[a]ll religious
ideas and impulses are of the moment, invented, taken, borrowed, and improvised at the intersections of life.”47 Thus, not only should we explore how these regimes differed from the orthodox paradigm, but also how the “imperial metaphor” actually translated into reality on the ground. If we ignore these questions, the very process that engendered a Buddhist imperial or local identity is obviated and the changes in myths, rituals and histories that actually made one a Thai Buddhist, a Tibetan Buddhist, or a Qing Buddhist are little understood.48

Indeed, if we are to understand how one becomes a Buddhist, or even what it means to be Buddhist, these connections are one important factor that needs to be investigated. There are certainly other factors, such as how Buddhists understand cultic practices in a transnational context; however, a fundamental component of Buddhism that transcends cultural boundaries is the saṁgha, or Buddhist community. Affiliation with this community is therefore a transcultural feature of being Buddhist.

As a result, Buddhist conversion has historically been enacted on a group level, as with the ummah in Islam, and thus narratives of this process invariably entail the production or redefinition of a new religious and often political community. Histories of Buddhist conversion thus often involve reconceptualizations of community ethnogenesis in order to transform the boundaries of communal identification; and in this regard Mongol histories contain the well-known apocryphal story of Chinggis Khan and his meeting with the Sakya lama Kungga Nyingpo, which supposedly introduced Buddhism to the Mongols.49 No matter how historically inaccurate this episode may be, the linkage between the Mongol Urmensch and Buddhism generates a powerful connection between being Mongol and being Buddhist. Yet, what happens when being Mongol also means being a member of the Qing?

Since the “making and remaking of religion is a political enterprise, intimately linked to the imagination of new social and intellectual communities,”50 one would assume that there would be a radical transformation between the historical representation of an independent Mongol Buddhist identity as opposed to one related to the Qing state. Unfortunately, as noted above, it is exactly the nature of this transformation that is glossed over in most accounts. Instead, we need to “rethink our conceptualizations of Buddhism as a translocal tradition with a long and self-consciously distinct history but which is at the same time a tradition dependent on local conditions for the production of meaning.”51 And, as noted by Kapstein, one of these important local discourses is “national” identity. “When it is conversion of a nation that is at issue, the gradual transformation of cosmological frameworks, or ritual, intellectual, and bureaucratic practices, and of the historical and mythic narratives through which national identity is constituted are among the key themes to which we must attend.”52
The case of the Mongols and their shifting communal and “national” boundaries therefore provides a valuable perspective on this process, and on the connection between Buddhist identity and state formations.

More specifically, however, what follows is an intellectual history of Mongol self-representations in late imperial China. By revealing this history, which, on account of the “Buddhist explanation” has long been neglected, this study also provides a history of the Qing and the project of imperial rule. And on account of this rule being largely refracted through the prism of Buddhism, this book is also a history of Buddhism. Thus, hopefully, it may address some of the issues that have for so long kept Buddhism out of history and the Mongols within Qing history.