

Why did the Hoshut Mongols occupy Tibet in the first half of the 17th century?

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In my paper I will explore the question of why the Hoshut Mongols occupied the Koknuur area and Tibet in the first half of the 17th century. Historians have been attributing to the request of the Tibetan dGe lugs pa Buddhists headed by the 5th Dalai Lama Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho the reason for the migration of the Hoshut tribe of the Oirats and their occupation of Tibet in the 1640s under their able leader Gushi Khan. But an examination of the situations of the Oirats, the historical circumstances of the Mongols at large, and those of Central Asia would make it apparent that the dGe lugs pa Buddhists were not the sole agents for the occupation; the answer has also to be sought in the political and social dynamics internal to the Oirats. In this paper, I will critically examine Mongolian and Tibetan source materials, with particular attention to the characteristics of the political and social organization of the Oirats. In addition to introducing new source materials, I shall venture my own opinion and provide a new explanation for the reason why the Hoshuts occupied Tibet. In particular, I will make the following arguments:

The earliest records of the invitation of the Oirats to Kokonuur and Tibet by the Tibetan clergy headed by the 5th Dalai Lama could be found in *Ko'knuuriin tu'uke* (History of Koknuur, T: *mtsho sngon lo rgyus tshangs glu gsar snyan zhes bya ba bzhugs so*) and *Burhan shashinii tu'uke* (History of Buddhism, T: *Dpag bsam ljon bzang*) both written by the Mongol lama Sumba-kambu-Ishibaljur (Sum pa mkhan po Ye shes dpal 'byor). All later writings referred to these two documents. However, a careful reading would reveal that Ishibaljur was not always faithful to historical truth, for he, as a Gelugpa monk, deliberately linked every historical event to Gelugpa Buddhism.

The materials written in Tod Mongolian script, between 1637–1642 cast a different light on these events. According to these historical sources, a confederate Oirat army consisting of Durbet, Torgut and Hoit tribes, entered Koknuur and Tibet. This is not the first, nor the last time that the Oirats invaded Tibet. The confederate Oirat army annihilated the existing groups of the Halh, Yungsyebu and Tumed Mongol tribes who were worshipping rival Buddhist sects. Eventually they managed to defeat the king of Tsang and establish the dGe lugs pa rule in 1642. However, according to the *Biography of the 5th Dalai Lama*, the 5th Dalai Lama at first opposed Gushi Khan's entry into Tibet.

Judging by all these evidences, it is clear that the Oirats did not come to Koknuur and Tibet simply at the invitation of the Tibetan Gelugpa clergy headed by the 5th Dalai Lama. Then why did the Oirats come to Koknuur and Tibet? In my view, it had to do with a number of factors that were internal to the Oirats, and their "inheritance" system in particular. This is testified by the concrete activities carried out during the Oirats' inva-

sion of Koknuur and Tibet and by the way in which they organized their rule over the region, lasting some 80 years.

Finally, I do not support the view that the rise and the fall of the nomadic societies should be attributed to external relations. Rather, I propose that the inheritance system, foundational to the nomadic social organization, should be highlighted in seeking answers to the questions raised by the expansive activities of the Oirat Mongols.