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Ruling the Land of the Yellow Lama: Religion, Muli, and geopolitics in the 17th century Sino-Tibetan borderland

Xiaobai Hu

ABSTRACT

The author scrutinizes the history of Muli (木里) as a semiautonomous political entity in the 17th century southern Sino-Tibetan borderland. By tracing Muli's improvization in the face of multiple powerful regimes such as the Naxi kingdom, the Geluk Tibetans, the Khoshut Mongols, and the Chinese dynasties, the author explores how an indigenous notion of power took shape in the wake of geopolitical turbulence. Before 1580, Muli was a colony of the Naxi kingdom and dominated by the Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism. After 1640, it became a stronghold of the Tibetan Buddhist Geluk school and was deeply involved in the power struggles between the Geluk and Kakyu schools as well as the Tibetans and Mongols. Despite of acknowledging multiple sovereigns, Muli rulers utilized various tactics to hold on to power and prioritize local interest. The nuanced, yet creative, strategies Muli people adopted showcases the significant role border regimes played and their agency in shaping the power dynamics in pre-modern Eastern Asian borderlands.

KEYWORDS

Muli; Tibetan Buddhism; agency; rulership

In the present article, I examine how Tibetan Buddhism was disseminated, received, and perceived in the 17th century Sino-Tibetan borderland through the lens of Muli (木里). Located in the deep mountain of present-day southern Sichuan, Muli is a small county in the outermost eastern reaches of the Tibetan plateau and considerably disconnected from the soaring socioeconomic sphere of southwest China. Yet in the 17th century, Muli was one important stronghold of Tibetan Buddhism in eastern Tibet and played significant role in regional geopolitics. By investigating how Muli rulers strategically participated in the religious competition between different Tibetan Buddhist schools and played different powers off against each other, I trace the power dynamics of a turbulent regional geopolitics and highlights a rulership-building process that prevailed in many late imperial Chinese and Inner Asian borderlands.

Land of the Yellow Lama

Joseph Rock, one of the earliest Westerners who traveled within the mountainous Sino-Tibetan borderland, was likely the first to introduce Muli to the American general audience. In one of his popular articles published in *National Geographic*, Rock colorfully depicted his striking experiences in the early 1920s of traveling through snow ranges to meet with the great Lama of Muli, who sat quietly amidst remote mountains to contemplate the world. Rock writes: "I doubt whether until that time he had known of the discovery of America. He did not have the slightest idea of the existence of an ocean, and thought all land to be contiguous, for he asked if he could ride horseback from Muli to Washington, and if the latter was near Germany!"[1]

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Probably we should not be surprised at some misperceptions an indigenous leader of a deep-mountain society had about global geography. As "one of the least-known spots in the world,"[2] Muli, sitting in the mountainous Sino-Tibetan borderland, was greatly isolated from the outside world due to its geographical and topographical features. Even today, it takes at least eight hours under perfect road conditions from the provincial borders of Yunnan and Sichuan just to make a 200-km journey to Muli. Roughly the same size as the state of Maryland, in 1953 Muli was home to only 50,000 inhabitants, yet Tibetan Buddhist lamas made up two percent of the overall population.[3] In Muli's Donglang district, as much as 20% percent of the male population were lamas.[4] It is no small wonder then that Rock styled Muli "the land of the yellow Lama."

Questions naturally emerge from the complex geographic and religious landscape of Muli. Why did a small county in the outermost eastern reaches of the Tibetan plateau, and thus so difficult to access, become fertile ground for the growth of Tibetan Buddhism? What were the on-the-ground perceptions of the arrival of Tibetan Buddhism? How did the locals react? In the present article, I address these broader questions by tracing how Tibetan Buddhism was introduced to, took root in, and gradually transformed Muli into a "Lama's land" in the 17th century. Although Muli might be treated as a peripheral region either in contemporary sources or with a present-day view, its rulers in the late imperial period conceived of their domain as a center lying between potentially threatening powers. Despite the great Lama of Muli had less knowledge of the changing world in the early 20th century, Muli rulers back in the 17th century were crystal clear about the changing geopolitics they were facing. Investigating how Muli rulers strategically participated in the religious competition between different Tibetan Buddhist schools and played different powers off against each other, I trace the power dynamics between the alleged "center" and "periphery" to highlight a rulership-building process that prevailed in many late imperial Chinese and Inner Asian borderlands.

Such investigations would be impossible without the detailed accounts in *The Religious History of Muli, 1580-1735* (Ch. 木里政教史, Tb. *Mu Li Chos 'Byung*). The book was written by Ngawang Khenrab, a Muli native and Geluk Tibetan Buddhist, during the middle 18th century in a specific genre in Tibetan historiography called *chos 'byung* (History of Buddhism). Although heavily influenced by the hegemonic discourse of the Geluk school Tibetan Buddhism and thus demonstrating biases in its narrative, the text encompasses a wealth of information concerning Muli's social structure as well as its political and religious interactions with the outside world. Ngawang's work is invaluable because there exist only a few studies dedicated to Muli within English language scholarship. Besides Joseph Rock's substantial field trip logs and ethnographic records, Koen Wellens' work on the religious revival of the Premi people, an ethnic group in the contemporary Chinese minority register, briefly touches on the history of Muli. However, due to his anthropological focus, Wellen merely summarizes the major historical events that occurred in premodern Muli to pave the way for his ethnographic accounts.[5] In contrast, Peter Schwieger, a renowned Tibetologist, discusses Muli from a historian's perspective and employs a macro-history viewpoint to examine Muli in a broader context.[6] But because Schwieger's main purpose was to use Muli as a case study to prove the intensity of Qing-Tibetan contestation over Southeastern Tibet in the late 17th century, he leaves Muli's agency in reshaping geopolitics underexplored. As such, I seek to intervene in the study of the Sino-Tibetan borderland from a bottom-up perspective and unshroud Muli from the mists of both Chinese frontier history and southwest China's untraversed mountains.

Muli as a Naxi kingdom colony

The history of Muli prior to 1580 remains largely obscure due to the dearth of historical records. From the 8th century on, the region later known as Muli was successively part of the Nanzhao and Dali kingdoms, and it was integrated into the Mongol Yuan Empire territory in the middle

13th century.[7] After the late 14th century, Muli became one of Ming China's tributary states, and was later annexed by the Naxi kingdom in the 16th century.

During the Chinese Ming dynasty (1368–1644), the most influential border regime in Southwest China was the Naxi kingdom, whose major base was located in Lijiang, northern Yunnan. Established by the non-Han Naxi people, the Naxi kingdom was authorized by the Ming court to govern the region connecting the Tibetan Plateau and the Dali Basin and, more importantly, to check Tibet from growing stronger.[8] The Ming court believed that the stronger the Naxi kingdom became, the less powerful Tibet would be. Therefore, from the early 16th century, the Ming consented to, if not supported, the Naxi kingdom's military campaigns against various local polities, especially those adjacent to Tibet, including Muli.

Muli was important for the 16th century regional geopolitics mainly for two reasons. First, it was a region rich in resources with many gold mines scattered throughout. Scholars argue that the precious metal buried under Muli constituted the main reason for the protracted skirmishes between the Naxi kingdom and Tibet.[9] This is a bit ironic in retrospect, as according to a social survey conducted by the Chinese government in 1953, the annual purchasing power per capita for Muli people was a mere 1.8 USD.[10] Second, Muli's strategic importance lies in its vital position along major transportation routes. It was one of the three entrances through which the Naxi army could march north toward Tibet. The other two entrances were Changdu and Batang, both of which have been called "a door to Tibet."[11]

The economic and strategic potential of Muli rendered it a hotspot over which Tibet and the Naxi kingdom clashed intensely. Historical memory of these violent confrontations was still preserved in local epics and tales.[12] In the end, the ruling house of the Naxi kingdom won out and became Muli's new sovereign. After annexing Muli, the Naxi rulers implemented a three-step colonization project to consolidate their territorial control over the region. First, the Naxi rulers assigned their own people to govern Muli and encouraged military migration. Village leaders in Muli today are still referred to as *mu gua(n)*, meaning "headman" in the Naxi language,[13] and such titles are found in use across a wide range of territory that was under the Naxi kingdom's control in the 16th century.[14] Naxi migrants, predominantly soldiers, were also dispatched to Muli.[15] One survey conducted in 1961 indicates that more than 10% of the overall population of Muli identified themselves as Naxi descendants.[16] Most of them lived in the southwest part of the county, midway between Lijiang and Muli.[17] Second, the Naxi kings extensively extracted and exploited local resources, particularly gold from Muli. Gold mines opened up during the Naxi kingdom's occupation have already been identified,[18] and anthropologists have discovered local tales and stories of bridge construction projects for the sake of gold panning in Muli rivers.[19] Third, once taking over Muli, the Naxi rulers resorted to cultural means to assimilate Muli and considerably reshaped the local sociocultural landscape. The Dongba scripts were their most important vehicles. According to Christine Mathieu, the Dongba scripts, a pictographic letter system exclusively used by Naxi people in particular for religious reasons, are only found in the territories that the Naxi rulers acquired during the 15th and early 16th century.[20] In recent years, many Dongba inscriptions have been found in Muli,[21] indicating the Naxi rulers' clear agenda to integrate the cultural and political boundaries of their kingdom.

A Geluk enclave in a Kagyu land

If not for geopolitical changes in Tibet and the eastward movement of the Geluk school of Tibetan Buddhism,[22] Muli likely would have remained part of the Naxi kingdom and assimilated into Naxi Dongba culture. Since the collapse of the Tibetan empire in the 9th century, the Tibetan plateau had experienced centuries of turmoil. Different Tibetan Buddhist schools, with the support of various secular powers, clashed frequently with each other for religious and political influence. In the early 15th century, a new sect, the Geluk school, began to burgeon during

its founder, Zongkaba, and his disciples' time. Famous for its strict adherence to disciplines, the Geluk school expanded quickly and thus no doubt harmed other religious sects' interest. Therefore, from the early 16th century, the Geluk school found itself besieged by other religious rivalries, particularly the Kagyu school, with the help of many secular regimes in central Tibet. What was worse is that the power of Geluk school supporter in central Tibet, the Phagmodrupa regime had begun to diminish by then and was gradually replaced by the Rinpungpa force that supported the Kagyu school. In response to such unfriendly environment, Sonam Gyatso, the Geluk school leader and the future Third Dalai Lama, traveled beyond central Tibet to seek external religious and political support for his sect.[23] In 1578, Sonam Gyatso made one of his most significant alliances with Altan Khan, the de facto leader of the Tümed Mongols.[24] With the help of Altan Khan, Sonam Gyatso was also able to successfully develop diplomatic relations with Ming China, establishing a new historical paradigm for Sino-Tibetan relations.[25]

In addition to his travels to the Mongol steppe and China proper, Sonam Gyatso also journeyed to eastern Tibet to spread Geluk doctrines and seek additional allies. In 1580, he built a monastery in Litang, a strategic location along the vital Sino-Tibet transportation route. The construction of Litang Monastery itself exerted significant trans-regional influence, as the project involved craftsmen from Nepal, as well as financial backing and corvée labor from Naxi kingdom rulers.[26] It was also through the Litang monastery that Geluk Tibetan Buddhism was introduced to Muli.

Litang Monastery held different political and religious meanings for Sonam Gyatso and the Naxi rulers. For Sonam Gyatso, eastern Tibet was an ideal place to avoid the political struggle that the Geluk school faced in central Tibet. Meanwhile, the establishment of Champaling Monastery in Changdu, a significant eastern Tibet town, had already laid a foundation for the development of the Geluk school in the region.[27] Therefore, it was quite reasonable for Sonam Gyatso to continue moving east of Changdu to Litang, where he could contribute to the further spread of Geluk doctrines.

Although Naxi rulers had a much closer relationship with the Kagyu School since the early 15th century, the Geluk School did not present a threat to the Naxi polity in 1580 and thus was allowed to spread its teachings in the region.[28] As Karl Debreczeny convincingly argued from an art historical perspective, the Naxi ruling house inclusively patronized many religions across ethnic, sectarian and political boundaries.[29] In other words, the Naxi ruling house in the late 16th century did not seek an exclusive bond with a single sect, but maintained relatively friendly relationships, if not patronage ties, with different Buddhist schools. It is against this backdrop that the introduction of Geluk doctrines into eastern Tibet took place.

In the late 16th century, the Naxi kingdom allowed for the dissemination of Geluk doctrines in its Muli colony.[30] The spatial distribution of the Geluk monasteries showcases how the Geluk school expanded its influence in Muli in its early stage. As soon as Litang Monastery was completed, Sonam Gyatso dispatched Chökyi Sangye Gyatso from Changdu to preach in Muli.[31] Four years later, Chökyi Sangye Gyatso initiated the building of Waerzhai Monastery (Wachin Gompa, full name: Lhakhangteng Ganden Dargye Ling).[32] Waerzhai Monastery was situated in northern Muli—in close proximity to Litang Monastery, the source of the former monastery's religious authority. When Chökyi Sangye Gyatso passed away, Sonam Gyatso sent Neten Tsyltrim Sangpo as his next successor. In 1604, Tsyltrim Sangpo successfully built Kangwu Monastery (Khe-'ong Gompa, full name: Debachen Sönam Dargye Ling), the second Geluk monastery in the region that was approximately 200 miles south of Waerzhai Monastery.[33] Such a pattern indicates that the general strategy for Geluk monks at the time was to spread southward. On the one hand, this enabled the Geluk monks' access to the Yalong river, the major waterway in the region, and a large population among whom they could build a sphere of influence. On the other hand, the further south the Geluk school moved, the more difficult things became, as it was closer to places where the Kagyu influence was stronger.[34] Therefore, when the third successor of this regional

lineage, Ngari Penjor Gyatso, chose a location along the south bank of the Yalong river to build a third Geluk monastery in Muli, the project ultimately failed.[35]

The difficulties in disseminating Geluk doctrine in Muli should be put back to a broader geo-political context. From the early 17th century onward, changes in central Tibet began to affect micro-regional power dynamics in other parts of the greater Tibetan region. The Tsangpa regime that newly rose to power in central Tibet supported the Kagyu school and adopted radical policies to curb the Geluk's development. In 1635, the Tsangpa leader called up an anti-Geluk alliance consisting of Kagyu school supporters to completely eliminate the Geluk sect.[36] Because the Mongols were major supporters of the Geluk school at the time, multiple Mongol forces were thus dragged into the Tibetan civil war that generated extensive turmoil not only in central but also eastern Tibet. Although maintaining a relatively friendly relationship with the Geluk school previously, the Naxi kingdom eventually decided to exclusively patronize the Kagyu school.[37] Therefore, once they detected that Geluk forces were still spreading within their domain, the Naxi rulers immediately laid their hands on the newly constructed monastery. Moreover, the development of the Waerzhai and Kangwu monasteries was greatly checked as well. Infrastructure was destroyed and monks forced to flee into exile. The Naxi rulers even threated local Geluk believers that sending their sons to a Geluk monastery would result in the return of their children's corpses without heads and limbs.[38] Under such persecution, the Geluk monks recognized the need to adopt new strategies for survival.

Training the locals

To continue spreading Dharma seeds in Muli, the Geluk monks changed their approach: rather than sending scions from Tibet to establish footholds in the Naxi kingdom, they started to seek out local agents. At this time, a boy from the Bar family was identified as the most suitable candidate. Although we lack detailed historical records, it is enough to know that the Bar family was not at all a common lineage in Muli. It must have enjoyed great local prestige, as the Bar patriarch was the bearer of the golden seal bestowed by the Ming court, signifying that the Ming court recognized the Bar family as the legitimate ruler of Muli.[39] Peter Schwieger has demonstrated how the Ming titles conferred on the Phagmodru Rulers in Central Tibet strengthened their authority over Tibet's internal affairs.[40] In Muli, more interestingly, the prestige the Bar family gained from the Chinese emperors was in turn taken advantage of by the Tibetan Geluk monks to justify the authority of the local agents they selected. In this way, the Tibetan religious institution inserted itself into the local power structure through a hierarchical framework created by the Ming.

Jamyang Sangpo was the Bar family boy picked by Tsyltrim Sangpo, who was responsible for both the Waerzhai and Kangwu monasteries at the time.[41] The boy spent his early years in Muli studying the fundamentals of the Geluk teachings. At the age of 20, he was encouraged by his mentors to travel to central Tibet for further training.[42] On the one hand, having Jamyang Sangpo receive authentic training in central Tibet would by any measure bolster his understanding of Geluk doctrines. On the other hand, this was also one way to keep the young Muli leader away from politics and potential danger in Muli, particularly threats stemming from the souring relationship with the Kagyu school under the Naxi kingdom's patronage.

Spending many years at several prestigious Geluk monasteries in Lhasa and Zhikatsé, Jamyang Sangpo gradually acquired rich knowledge and attained the high Buddhist scholarly degree of *geshe* (Ch. 格西 Tb. dge bshes). Meanwhile, Jamyang Sangpo dedicated himself to public service. He endeavored to raise donations and build dormitories and hostels in Central Tibet for the young monks and pilgrims from eastern Tibet, particularly those coming from Batang, Litang, Muli, Yongning and Zhongdian. By making accommodations more accessible, Jamyang Sangpo

greatly facilitated and strengthened the weak connections between southeastern and central Tibet.[43]

Jamyang Sangpo was not trained for purely academic or religious reasons. Therefore, when hearing of his plan to spend the rest of his life in retreat, the fifth Dalai Lama immediately summoned him and reminded him of his mission: "It is your mandate, Jamyang Sangpo, to destroy the Naxi kings and take Muli back. It is your duty to spread Geluk teachings there. Go back to Muli and use every means to fight the Naxi kings!"[44] Convinced by both the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama, Jamyang Sangpo finally returned to Muli.

Although the anti-Geluk alliance had already been destroyed with the help of Gushri Khan of Khoshut (和碩特部固始汗) in 1642, the pro-Kagyu force signified by the Naxi kingdom rulers was still quite strong in southeast Tibet.[45] Therefore, after he came back from central Tibet, Jamyang Sangpo could stay only shortly at Muli before leaving again to avoid capture by troops sent by the Naxi ruler.[46] Jamyang Sangpo spent another several years in hiding in Yanjing, until he heard of the civil strife within the Naxi kingdom—a seemingly good opportunity for the Geluk school to grow—and rushed back to Muli in 1648.[47] But as soon as he arrived, Jamyang Sangpo came to a shocking revelation: the only two Geluk monasteries in Muli were in great poverty; the monastery abbot, his previous mentor, was old and weak; and the authority of the Bar family was extensively damaged.[48]

Jamyang Sangpo had to start building Geluk influence again from the ground up, but the political environment was not exactly friendly. At that time, the monk did not enjoy solid local authority because both the Ming and the Geluk school, the sources of his legitimacy, were experiencing great difficulties. The Ming's hegemonic status was crippled by domestic rebellions as well as the external threat coming from the Manchus. Meanwhile, the Geluk school in southeast Tibet was still checked by the strong Kagyu presence, which was further strengthened when the Kagyu school leader Chöying Dorje fled to Lijiang and started his decades' stay there. Therefore, Jamyang Sangpo had to reconsolidate his power over local political and cultural affairs with force.

Jamyang Sangpo resorted to bloody tactics to settle the confrontations he encountered with the local society. By ripping out the heart of his opponents and scalping captives, he ruthlessly suppressed those who dared to challenge him.[49] Scholars such as Koen Wellens tends to interpret this violence as a form of religious conflict,[50] which is essentially the message that the historical material intends to convey,[51] but I argue that economic concerns were in fact the underlying rationale for Jamyang Sangpo's aggressive actions. In Muli, Jamyang Sangpo not only had to collect funds to reinstall Geluk institutions locally, but it is also quite possible—according to subtle hints in historical sources—that he was required to share the economic burden of the newly established Geluk government in Lhasa. As Jamyang Sangpo began to visit his relatives when he went back to Muli, what he cared about most was not which religious sect they followed, but rather to whom they paid taxes. As such, the content of his preaching during this period was mainly concerned with persuading locals to pay tax to him instead of the Naxi kings.[52]

Following this reasoning, the violence sparked between Jamyang Sangpo and the local establishment derived from the tax issue as well. It was because of the Naxi kingdom local agents' intervention in Jamyang Sangpo's tax collection that the monk finally decided to resort to military action.[53] In these cases, religion was seldom the catalyst of the bloody conflicts. When new opponents surrendered, the first thing Jamyang Sangpo did was to divide up the new territory and clarify tax duties among the new subjects.[54] The fact that Muli had many gold mines, and local tax was usually paid with pure gold, was probably the reason why the Fifth Dalai Lama was so eager to hear from Jamyang Sangpo.[55] As soon as Jamyang Sangpo reclaimed power in 1648, two officials were immediately dispatched from Lhasa to Muli to collect taxes and conduct a population census.[56]

During the period following Jamyang Sangpo's return, the basic contours of a post-Naxi kingdom rulership in Muli took shape. Politically, Jamyang Sangpo held both administrative and

military powers. Many parts of the region fell under Jamyang Sangpo's direct control,[57] yet he still kept some headmen—be they Naxi, Tibetan, or Han Chinese—in position and granted them certain executive rights.[58] To avoid the centrifugal effect such a feudalist structure might create, the monk rotated his office through different parts of Muli to effectively supervise his multiethnic confederation.[59] Culturally, Jamyang Sangpo converted many Bönpo believers and followers of the Kagyu school to Geluk Tibetan Buddhism.[60] Although folk religions were very likely still in practice at the grassroots level, Geluk Tibetan Buddhism had by any measure become the dominant religion. Economically and diplomatically, Jamyang Sangpo distributed labor and tax responsibilities, particularly gold and grain, to multiple local headmen and shipped a large fortune to central Tibet.[61] Because of the changing geopolitical situation at the time, Muli also started to play an intermediary role in Sino-Tibetan trade and provided translators to facilitate Sino-Tibetan diplomacy.[62] As new regimes took shape in the 1640 s in both China and Tibet, Muli entered a new era as well.

Local ramification of a great game

The mid-17th century geopolitical turmoil in East Eurasia had an overwhelming impact on Muli. From the 1650 s to 1710 s, the back and forth conflicts among Geluk Tibetans, Khoshut Mongols, and Manchu Qing in southeast Tibet greatly affected the character of Muli rulership. How did these exogenous powers project themselves into Muli society? How did the Muli rulers respond to such penetration while maintaining their local authority? There are the central questions the following sections will answer.

Jamyang Sangpo died in 1656. During his short yet influential reign, Jamyang Sangpo consolidated his rulership under the acknowledgement of the Geluk government in central Tibet. This connection was inherited by Samten Sangpo, Jamyang Sangpo's successor, who also came from the Bar family.[63] Samten Sangpo's recognition of the Geluk school as the source of his political and religious legitimacy is best shown through the construction of the Muli Monastery (Muli Gompa, full name: Ganden Shedrub Namgyel Ling). The monastery was built in 1656, and with its completion, the so-called "three great monasteries of Muli" finally took shape.[64]

While the official claim for building the monastery was likely to commemorate Jamyang Sangpo, I argue that it also arose from Samten Sangpo's intention to further confirm the Muli-Lhasa linkage at the cosmological level. In Lhasa, the religious complexes of Ganden, Drepung, and Sera constituted the "three great monasteries of Lhasa" and together represented the paramount power of Geluk doctrine. In Muli, the three monasteries functioned in a similar way just on a smaller scale. Moreover, the monastic population of the Muli and Lhasa monasteries were proportionally parallel, and they were paired up in administrative and religious interactions such as clergy exchange or abbotship recognition.[65] When using his "galactic theory" to illustrate the functioning of Southeast Asian Buddhist society, Stanley Tambiah emphasizes that religious ritual, rather than realpolitik indicators, held the centers and their vassal satellites together.[66] In Muli, we see how a spiritual network was formed between center and periphery in the Tibetan world.

Although Samten Sangpo inherited local leadership from Jamyang Sangpo and managed to consolidate connection with Lhasa, his authority was still not as well recognized as was that of his predecessor. One local figurehead called Jamyang Penden was one among many who constantly challenged Samten Sangpo's rule.[67] Jamyang Penden was not from the Bar family. In fact, he was not a Muli native at all and had no prestigious family background of which to speak; instead, his power directly derived from Jamyang Sangpo's endorsement. Having had a miserable childhood, Jamyang Penden was fostered by Jamyang Sangpo when he was a homeless boy on the street. Later, he became Jamyang Sangpo's footman and was sent to learn Geluk doctrines in central Tibet, where he received the title *sngags rams pa*, meaning learned Vajrayana scholar.[68] Upon completing his study and returning to Muli, Jamyang Penden began to take on diplomatic

tasks, particularly those related to the Han Chinese.[69] Later, he was also responsible for dealing with Muslim merchants doing business in Muli.[70]

When Jamyang Sangpo died in Waerzhai Monastery, Jamyang Penden was with him. To Samten Sangpo, despite being the legitimate heir, Jamyang Penden was still a potential and powerful threat: he was close to the deceased sovereign, knowledgeable about Geluk teachings, in charge of significant secular affairs, and recognized by a considerable number of locals. To undermine his rival's power, Samten Sangpo attempted to remove Jamyang Penden from his stronghold in Waerzhai Monastery, but he failed.[71] In contrast, Jamyang Penden managed to sow discord between Jamyang Sangpo and his allies and successfully damaged the new leader's reputation.[72]

Probably one of the most important reasons that Jamyang Penden was able to check Samten Sangpo's power was his close association with the Khoshut Mongols. After eliminating the anti-Geluk forces in the 1640 s, the Tibet-Mongol alliance divided their sphere of influence into two parts: the Tibetans presided over the central Tibet region, while the Mongols occupied eastern Tibet.[73] Such a twisted power structure was projected into Muli as well. While Muli's religious legitimacy came from the Dalai Lama's government, its daily politics were very much affected by the Mongols' hegemony. In the 1650s, the Khoshut Mongol army was proactively launching military campaigns in eastern Tibet to eliminate anti-Geluk remnants. Muli troops were frequently summoned to join the campaigns, and Jamyang Penden was always the military leader. In 1658, Jamyang Penden joined the campaign led by King Kazhuo (Ch. 卡卓 Tb. mkha' 'gro) against the Kagyu believers of Acai in present-day Daocheng. King Kazhuo refers to Handu (Ch. 罕都 Mo. Qantu), the grandson of Gushri Khan, who was responsible for the Khoshut Mongols' military actions in eastern Tibet.[74] After the battle, the Mongol leader bestowed on Jamyang Penden the title spelled as *Ja sang* in Tibetan and *Jiasang* in Chinese (加桑),[75] which I believe is a corruption of "ja'i sang" from Mongolian *jaiisang* meaning minister (宰相), a high official title.[76] Such military cooperation by any measure paved the way for Jamyang Penden and Handu's future interaction. *Mu Li Chos 'Byung* even blamed Jamyang Penden for Handu's later abandoning of Geluk doctrines and conversion to Kagyu school.[77] Although there is no other material to attest to Jamyang Penden's role in Handu's betrayal, which was considered significant in mid-17th century Tibet-Mongol relations, the close relationship between Jamyang Penden and the powerful Mongol leader is evident.[78]

Likely out of respect for their shared past on the battlefield, Jamyang Penden did not fight against Handu after Handu's secession from the Tibetan-Mongolian alliance although he was ordered to do so. In 1674, the allied Tibetan-Mongol forces marched toward Handu's stronghold in Yunnan for the final battle. The Muli army made a great contribution in defeating Handu;[79] however, despite having a huge army under his command, Jamyang Penden declared that he was sick and withdrew his troops without informing his allies.[80] Because of his long military service, Jamyang Penden accumulated considerable authority in local society. Even facing the troops sent by the Geluk government with the intention to take him down, Jamyang Penden was able to rally a local militia and stand up to the Tibetan army.[81] However, with the suppression of Handu, Jamyang Penden finally disappeared from historical memory.

As one of the Geluk government's subordinating regimes, Muli's fate was extensively entangled with the Tibet-Mongol clash in the 1650s. The bifurcated legitimacy generated great political turbulence in Muli, and even rendered its rulership unstable. To avoid being dragged too deep into others' wars, Muli rulers started to prioritize their local interests by tactically managing their relationship with Tibet.

An indigenous notion of power

Seeking patronage from different parties in a regional power struggle to gain advantage for local political competition, Muli leaders' primary goal was to serve their own self-interest. By

responding to requests imposed by central Tibet, reconceptualizing the essence of the Muli rulership, and reacting to the triangular relationship among Geluk Tibet, Manchu Qing, and the Yunnan Wu Sangui regime, Muli people gradually developed an indigenous notion of power.

From the late 1650s to the early 1660s, the Fifth Dalai Lama paid close attention to eastern Tibet affairs. This was mainly due to two reasons. The first, as aforementioned, was related to the growing tension within the Tibetan-Mongol alliance in which the Fifth Dalai Lama sought a greater voice in eastern Tibet affairs.[82] Second, in 1659, the Manchu Qing general Wu Sangui (吳三桂) took over Yunnan and greatly weakened the Naxi kingdom's local authority. But instead of completely incorporating Yunnan into the Qing's administrative system, Wu Sangui retained considerable agency and even established diplomatic relations with the Mongols in eastern Tibet by himself.[83] All of a sudden, the geopolitical situation in eastern Tibet became quite complicated.

As such, in 1665, the Fifth Dalai Lama spent many days in a row learning the history of eastern Tibet.[84] This was a direct indicator of the Fifth Dalai Lama's intension to solidify his presence and control over eastern Tibet. In 1666, during a regular pilgrimage in Lhasa, Samten Sangpo was interrogated by the Fifth Dalai's Dharma protector. The Dharma protector questioned him in a harsh tone: "With the predestined affinity blessing, you are finally here. But why didn't you come when you were thirteen? Has Jamyang Sangpo reincarnated? Is his reincarnation taking charge of things now? You must have known that I am always with you like a shadow. Do you still remember all the oracles and divinations?"[85] From Samten Sangpo's answers, it is clear that he was quite surprised by these out-of-nowhere questions and had no idea about the reincarnation issue at all.[86] Later summoned by the Fifth Dalai Lama, Samten Sangpo was given clear information on the location of Jamyang Sangpo's reincarnation boy and how to find him.[87] Daring not to disobey the Dalai Lama's order, Samten Sangpo agreed to try his best to find the boy who fit the description of Jamyang Sangpo's reincarnation when he returned to Muli.

The strangeness about this meeting lies in the way it is told. It appears that the Fifth Dalai Lama forced Samten Sangpo to find Jamyang Sangpo's reincarnation, while that was obviously not part of Samten Sangpo's plan. It was not part of Jamyang Sangpo's plan either, because otherwise he would have directed his own incarnation before his demise. In that case, why then did the Fifth Dalai Lama make such a request all of a sudden?

Considering the specific political context of the mid-1660s, I argue that the Fifth Dalai Lama's insistence on finding a reincarnation for Jamyang Sangpo derived from his resolution to substantiate his power in eastern Tibet. As Max Oidtmann put nicely, for many Tibetan Buddhist schools, the idea of finding a reincarnation for a *trülku*, who was usually informally designated as the living Buddha (活佛), "represented a means of reproducing religious and political authority in a manner at least somewhat independent of aristocratic households and lay rulers, whose whims might be fickle and whose fortunes could wax and wane."[88] Therefore, in the Muli case, finding a reincarnation for a *trülku* could help to maintain the hegemony of the Dalai Lama's government in Muli, and enabled a remote control of the region through religious means.

From the Dalai Lama's perspective, this was a reasonable request because when Jamyang Sangpo was chosen, he was deemed the reincarnation of Chökyi Sangye Gyatso, who was not only the third Dalai Lama's disciple that came to Muli to spread Geluk doctrine, but also the reincarnation of Lodro Chokyong, the Geluk school founder Tsongkhapa's great disciple.[89] Therefore, such religious mandates should be passed further down to continue the sectarian lineage. But Jamyang Sangpo did not do so at all; instead, he chose someone in his own family as the successor and converted the religious authority entitled to a privileged Geluk lineage into prestige that was tied exclusively to his own family. Such a concentration of power could prevent the Dalai Lama from further strengthening his hegemony over Muli affairs. Therefore, the Dalai Lama intended to take religious authority back by assigning a separate agent in the local society, as the source of secular authority was already beyond his control.

From the Tibetans' perspective, taking over religious hegemony, which was usually viewed as superior to secular power was an efficient way to maintain authority in Muli. But the Muli people knew how to negotiate such impositions. Despite receiving instructions and promising the Dalai Lama on spot, Samten Sangpo still spent two years looking for the reincarnated boy. In 1668, he finally found one and sent his name to Lhasa for official recognition.[90] Although there are no detailed records of how Samten Sangpo found the boy, no doubt he made good use of this two-year interval and played a crucial role in identifying the "right" candidate. Here, I put "right" inside quotation marks because in practice, the oracles containing the information of the deceased *trülku's* reincarnation are usually quite obscure. Many instructions may sound like "to the west of the region with four rivers and six peaks, a boy was born by a lake." The geographical information in these prophecies can be quite vague and thus open to interpretation. Therefore, in the case of Muli, who should be and where to find the "right" boy was totally subject to Samten Sangpo. Indeed, as Koen Wellens pointed out, the Bar family not only intervened in the procedures of selecting the *trülku*, but also intentionally picked those from rather poor backgrounds, such as farming and herding families, to diminish their influence among local society.[91] Moreover, from then on, the *trülku* were restrained from directly interfering in politics and required to focus only on religious affairs. [92] As the seat of the Bar patriarch rotated among the three monasteries of Muli to supervise the districts under his reign, the *trülku* was always required to follow as one way to monitor him closely. [93] Oidtmann noted that although reincarnation initially appeared as an elegant solution to the problems posed by prior methods of reproducing religious and political authority, in practice it quickly engendered its own unique dilemmas.[94] While it is the case in Tibetan history that reincarnation became an incentive for political contests or a tool by which lay powers hijacked the religious apparatus, in Muli it created a space where Muli leaders could comply overtly, but transgress covertly.

Samten Sangpo's manipulation of the *trülku* selection derived from and simultaneously reinforced an indigenous notion of power in Muli. Having joined forces with the Geluk school to overthrow the Naxi kingdom's colonization, Muli people's ultimate goal lay in self-strengthening and self-government. The fact that Tibet constituted of an important source of legitimacy did not necessarily preclude the formation of an indigenous approach to Muli rulership: for Muli people, the legitimate ruler should come from the Bar family, and his legitimacy was built on the premise of prioritizing Muli interests.

The indigenous notion of power in Muli was demonstrated through both narratives and actions. When Samten Sangpo passed away in 1678 and both of Muli's religious and secular rulers were in Lhasa, two usurpers took advantage of the power vacuum and seized control of Muli.[95] However, they were harshly criticized by the locals for their non-Bar identity and thus not qualified to be the rulers of Muli.[96] The rhetoric here is worth particular attention: lines and phrases such as "the *trülku* and lay successor from the Jamyang family," "ancestral property left by Jamyang Lama," "servants of my family," and "not members of the Jamyang lineage" come up recurrently in the locals' narrative.[97] In 1683, the Muli elites, after eliminating the usurpers, called for a gathering and swore everlasting loyalty to the Jamyang family's religious and secular rulers forever. They also took a vow that whoever dared to challenge this principle would be the last of his family line.[98] From a retrospective standpoint, such local laws were indeed effectively carried out, as from 1683 on Bar family members had held the post of Muli leader for a total of 21 generations, until the mid-20th century.[99]

Reaching a consensus on the absolute power of the Bar family was an important step in Muli rulership building. At the same time, Muli leaders' prioritization of local interests was demonstrated through their response to the changing geopolitics, which was most typically demonstrated through their ever-shifting attitude toward Wu Sangui. After taking over Yunnan for the Qing dynasty in 1659, Wu Sangui soon decided to abandon the Manchus and create his own independent regime. During this process, he established multilateral diplomatic relations with the Geluk

school Tibetans, the Kagyu school Tibetans, the Khoshut Mongols and the Lijiang Naxi people. Muli was part of his diplomatic network as well. At first, Muli functioned as the intermediary between Wu Sangui and the Dalai Lama, and received lavish gifts from Wu for delivering messages between them.[100] Such friendly terms did not change even after Wu Sangui's independence in 1674. In 1675, to have Muli pacify the border, Wu Sangui sent an official called Lord Jiang to settle a conflict for Muli, and to help Muli to subordinate a long-term regional rival.[101] For Muli, to whom Wu Sangui pledged loyalty was not important as long as Muli was the favorite. Therefore, the Muli leaders maintained friendly terms with Wu Sangui until 1678. However, Muli leaders immediately turned their back on Wu Sangui when the geopolitical situation changed. As the Qing continued to request military support from the Tibetan government, and the Dalai Lama had to order Muli to cut off interactions with Wu Sangui, Muli soon captured Lord Jiang and his underlings and sent them to the Qing for rewards.[102] But suppressing Wu Sangui for the Manchu emperor does not necessarily mean that Muli had shifted their loyalties completely to the Qing side. In 1701, when the Qing and Tibet began to fight over the eastern Tibet region, Muli leaders chose to stay neutral because the situation was hard to judge.[103] Muli's political action was always carried out according to meticulous calculation.

Faced with the complicated power struggle among the Qing, the Tibetans, the Mongols, and the Wu Sangui regime, Muli elites carefully examined, reacted, and adjusted their position to the changing political environment. In his study on the political investment of the frontier generals in the 7th century China-Inner Asian borderland, Jonathan Skaff argued that it is "self-interest, rather than ideologies of loyalty, [that] generally determined political allegiances."[104] This is also the case for late 17th century Muli. Political allegiance was no more than a strategic narrative that could be rephrased easily, and it only served to justify the pursuit of specific self-interests. Although acknowledging dual authority, Muli's subordination was actually quite contingent, or simply nominal, because what really mattered to Muli rulers was the benefits one could provide, no matter if the provider was Tibetan, Mongol, Manchu, or Chinese.

Conclusion

Scholars have long debated the nature of local regimes such as Muli in the Sino-Tibetan borderland in a modern nationalism framework. While Chinese scholars tend to highlight Chinese sovereignty over Muli, Tibetologists like Shakabpa prefer to use accounts in Tibetan to negate the Chinese claim.[105] I disagree with both the China-centric and the Tibet-centric viewpoints because they both downplay the local agency of the Muli elites regarding how they understood and responded to the changing power dynamics.

I showcase the careful and creative strategies Muli leaders adopted to resolve the inter-regime relationship. One should not assume that the power projected by various exogenous authorities was automatically translated into local legitimacy; instead, it was filtered, negotiated and digested in specific cultural and political contexts. In Muli, local rulers frequently reformulated their identity in order to adjust to the changing geopolitical situation. The way Muli constructed itself as a center surrounded by multiple powerful regimes indicates a sense of local consciousness. Muli people had their own definition of "the land of the Yellow Lama," and the 17th century was merely the first stage of an ongoing process through which such an indigenous notion took shape.

Notes

1. Joseph Rock, "The Land of the Yellow Lama: National geographic society explorer visits the strange kingdom of Muli, beyond the Likiang snow rage of Yunnan Province, China," in *The National Geographic Magazine* 47, (1925): 474.

2. Ibid, 447.
3. "Zhongguo shaoshu minzu shehui lishi diaocha ziliao congkan" xiuding bianji weiyuanhui Sichuan Sheng Bianji zu,.*Sichuan Sheng Muli Zangzu Zizhixian Zangzu Naxizu Shehui Lishi Diaocha* (Investigation of the History and Society of the Tibetans and Naxi People in Sichuan Muli Tibetan Autonomous County) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2009), 5.
4. Ibid., 6.
5. Koen Wellens, *Religious Revival in the Tibetan Borderlands: The Premi of Southwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010).
6. Peter Schwieger, "The Long Arm of the Fifth Dalai Lama: Influence and Power of the Fifth Dalai Lama in Southeast Tibet," in *Buddhist Himalaya: Studies in Religion, History and Culture*, ed. Alex Mckay and Anna Balikci-Denjongpa (Sikkim: Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, 2011).
7. Muli Zangzu Zizhixian zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Muli Zangzu Zizhixian Zhi (*Annals of Muli Tibetan Autonomous County*)* (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1995), 113.
8. Gu Zucheng, *Ming Shilu Zangzu Shiliao* (Historical Materials on Tibetans in Ming Dynasty Veritable Reocords) (Lhasa: Xizang renmin chubanshe, 1982), 1206.
9. Mu Guang, "Mushi Tusi Wenzhi Wugong De Zhuyao Yeji (Major Achievements of the Mu Chieftains)," in Mu Shihua, eds. *Lijiang Mushi Tusi Yu Dianchuanzang Jiaojiao Quyu Lishi Wenhua Yantaohui Lunwenji* (Proceedings of Symposium on History and Culture as Well as Lijiang Chieftain Mu Famility in the Junction Area on the Border of Yunnan, Sichuan and Tibet*)* (Beijing: Zhongguo zangxue chubanshe, 2008), 17.
10. "Zhongguo shaoshu minzu shehui lishi diaocha ziliao congkan" xiuding bianji weiyuanhui Sichuan Sheng Bianji zu,*Sichuan Sheng Muli Zangzu Zizhixian Zangzu Naxizu Shehui Lishi Diaocha*, 27.
11. Ibid, 11.
12. Wang Bei, "Yan yu Yizu: Dui Gesaer Wang zhuan Jiangling Dazhan de yizhong xin lijie (Salt and the Others: A New Understanding of the Battle of Peak.Jiang in Epic of King Gesar)," in *Qinghai shehui kexue* (Qinghai Social Science), no. 4, 2014.
13. "Zhongguo shaoshu minzu shehui lishi diaocha ziliao congkan" xiuding bianji weiyuanhui Sichuan Sheng Bianji zu. *Sichuan Sheng Muli Zangzu Zizhixian Zangzu Naxizu Shehui Lishi Diaocha*, 29.
14. Ren Naiqiang, "Mexie Mu Tianwang (the Naxi Heavenly King of Mu)," in *Lijiang Mushi Tusi Yu Dianchuanzang Jiaojiao Quyu Lishi Wenhua Yantaohui Lunwenji*, 12.
15. Substantiating newly acquired land through military migration was frequently adopted by the Naxi kingdom rulers. See Yu Qingyuan, *Weixi Jianwen ji* (The sketch book of Weixi) (Weixi: Weixi lisu zu zizhixianzhi bianweihui bangongshi, 1994), 36–39.
16. "Zhongguo shaoshu minzu shehui lishi diaocha ziliao congkan" xiuding bianji weiyuanhui Sichuan Sheng Bianji zu *Sichuan Sheng Muli Zangzu Zizhixian Zangzu Naxizu Shehui Lishi Diaocha*, 6.
17. Ibid., 7.
18. Wan Sinian, "Mingchu Yu Mingmo Mu Tusi Lingyu De Bijiao (a Comparison of the Territory of the Mu Cheifdom in Early Ming and Late Ming)," in *Lijiang Mushi Tusi Yu Dianchuanzang Jiaojiao Quyu Lishi Wenhua Yantaohui Lunwenj*, 42.
19. Ge Agan, "Dianchuanzang Jiaojiaoqu Mushi Lishi Zongji: Tianye Kaocha Biji Zongshu (Historical Traces of the Mu Kingdom in the Junction Area on the Border of Yunnan, Sichuan and Tibet: A Field Trip Report)," in *Lijiang Mushi Tusi Yu Dianchuanzang Jiaojiao Quyu Lishi Wenhua Yantaohui Lunwenji*, 77.
20. Christine Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological study of the Ancient Kingdoms of the Sino-Tibetan borderland-Naxi and Mosuo* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), 184.
21. Yang Yihua and Yu Suisheng, "Naxi Dongbawen Shike Shulue (Studies on Stone Inscription with Naxi Dongba script)," in *Yunnan Shehui Kexue* (Yunnan Social Scienece), no. 2, 2013.
22. Like many other religions in the world, Tibetan Buddhism could be further divided into many subsects according to their different religious ideas, practices, and distinct structures. Some famous Tibetan Buddhist schools are the Nyingma, Sakya, Kagyu, and Geluk schools. The Geluk school has been relatively much more powerful than the others in late imperial China, with the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama as religious leaders.
23. Chen Qingying, "Gushihan he Gelupai zai Xizang Tongzhi de ianli he gonggu (The establishment and consolidation of Gushri Khan and Geluk school's governance in Tibet)," in *Zhongguo Zangxue* (China Tibetology), no. 1 (2008): 68.
24. According to Gray Tuttle's article, Altan Khan constructed multiple lines of connection with different Tibetan Buddhist Schools, rather than with Gelugpas only. However, because of the hegemony of Gelugpas in historical narrative, these evidences were omitted. See Leonard W.J. van der Kuijp and Gray Tulle, "Altan Qayan (1507–1582) of the Tumed Mongols and the stag lung abbot kun dga's bkra shis rgyal mtshan (1575–1635)", In Roberto Vitali eds., *Trails of the Tibetan Tradition: Papers for Elliot Sperling* (Dharamsala: Amnye Machen Institute, 2014), 31–36.

25. Wei Jiandong, "Anda Han dai Sanshi Dalal Lama qiufeng shiyi kao (A Study on Altan Khan's tribute request foe the Third Dalai Lama), in *Zhongguo Zangxue* (China Tibetology), no. 3, 2017.
26. Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso, *Yi Shi Si Shi Dalai Lama Zhuan* (Biographies of the First to the Fourth Dalai Lama) (Beijing: Zhongguo zangxue chubanshe, 2006), 226–28.
27. Peter Schwieger, *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China: A Political History of the Tibetan Institution of Reincarnation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 30.
28. Feng Zhi, *Yunnan Zangxue Yanjiu: Dianzang zhengjiao guanxi yu qingdai zhizang zhidu* (Studies on Yunnan Tibetology: Yunnan-Tibet political-religious relationship and Tibet policy of Qing China) (Kunming: Yunnan minzu chubansh, 2007), 260.
29. Karl Debreczeny, "Ethnicity and Esoteric Power: Negotiating the Sino-Tibetan Synthesis in Ming Buddhist Painting," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, Department of Art History, 2007), 221–80.
30. Koen Wellens argued that the introduction of Geluk School was initiated by a Muli local ruling clan that attempts to gain greater independence from Lijiang. Tempting as it sounds, I argue that at that time, Muli local leaders did not have that much power to rely on Geluk school to resist the Naxi kings' colonization governance. Although the historical material portrays it in this way, I believe that it is somewhat biased as the historical reality was disguised by the material's dense Geluk narrative; in contrast, I argue that Naxi kings at the time had the final say to allow the spread of Geluk doctrines in Muli. See Koen Wellens, *Religious Revival in the Tibetan Borderlands: The Premi of Southwest China*, 29.
31. Ngawang Khenrab, *Mu Li Chos 'Byung* (The History of the Emergence of Dharma in Muli), Translated by Lobsang Gedün, *Muli Zhengjiao Shi, 1550–1735 (The History of the Politics and Religion of Muli)* (Chengdu: Sichuan minzu chubanshe, 1993), 2. This further attests to Changdu's influence in eastern Tibet and its religious status in Geluk school.
32. Ngawang Khenrab, *Muli Zhengjiao Shi*, 3.
33. Ibid., 3.
34. Ibid., 3.
35. Ibid., 3.
36. Peter Schwieger, *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China: A Political History of the Tibetan Institution of Reincarnation*, 36–38.
37. Similar transformation took place in other eastern Tibet regimes as well. For example, Donyod Dorje, the king of Beri, also adopted a relatively egalitarian policies in his early reign. Only after joining the anti-Geluk alliance did he became a pro-Bönpo ruler who was hostage to Buddhism. Peter Schwieger, "Towards a Biography of Don-Yod Rdo-Rje," In Helmut Eimer, et al., eds. *Studia Tibetica et Mongolica* (Swisttal-Odendorf: Indica et Tibetica Verlag, 1989), 247–60.
38. Ngawang Khenrab, *Muli Zhengjiao Shi*, 5.
39. Ibid., 4.
40. Peter Schwieger, "Significance of Ming Titles Conferred Upon the Phag Mo Gru Rulers: A Reevaluation of Chinese-Tibetan Relation During the Ming Dynasty," *The Tibet Journal* 34/35 (2009).
41. Ngawang Khenrab, *Muli Zhengjiao Shi*, 3–4.
42. Ibid., 4–5.
43. Ibid., 5.
44. Ibid., Intro, 3.
45. For a detailed history of the turbulence of early 17th Century Tibet, see Peter Schwieger, *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China: A Political History of the Tibetan Institution of Reincarnation,* 40–49.
46. Ngawang Khenrab, *Muli Zhengjiao Shi*, 6.
47. Ibid., 6–7. The civil strife was mentioned in Joseph Francis Charles Rock, *The Ancient Na-Khi Kingdom of Southwest China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), 133. The turmoil was most likely a chain effect of the civil war in southwest China after Ming dynasty's collapse in 1644, see Fang Guoyu, eds., *Mushi Huanpu* (The Genealogy of Mu lineage) (Kunming: Yunnan daxue chubanshe, 1998), 548.
48. Ibid., 7.
49. Ibid., 8–9.The issue of Buddhist violence has been touched upon by Johan Elverskog in describing the Khoshut Mongols as "Gelukpa death squad", and here we see a micro-history case of how violence was resorted to over the course of spreading Buddhist doctrines, see Johan Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 221.
50. Koen Wellens, *Religious Revival in the Tibetan Borderlands: The Premi of Southwest China,* 33.
51. The historical material that includes Jamyang Sangpo's brutal actions is written from a Geluk angle. The purpose of the narrative is to portray the tension from the religious perspective and points out the terrible outcome one could get if he or she dare to challenge Geluk doctrines.
52. Ngawang Khenrab, *Muli Zhengjiao Shi*, 7.
53. Ibid., 7–8.

54. Ibid., 8.
55. Ibid., 7.
56. Shakabpa, *Tibet a Political History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 113.
57. Ngawang Khenrab, *Muli Zhengjiao Shi*, 9.
58. Ibid., 9, 17.
59. Ibid., 9.
60. Ibid., 8–9.
61. Ibid., 7–9.
62. Ibid., 11.
63. Ibid., 11.
64. Ibid., 27.
65. While Ganden of Lhasa was said to have a quota for 3,300 monks, Waerzhai of Muli had 330; Sera of Lhasa had 5,500; and Kangwu of Muli had 550; Drepung of Lhasa was allowed to accommodate 7,700 monks, and Muli Monastery 770. Qin Heping and Qin Xinghao, "Muli Da Lama Jian Tusi Tongzhi De Youlai, Tedian Ji Zhongjie De Yuanyou (a Discussion on the Origin, Characteristics of and Reasons for the Decline of Muli's Great Lama-Tusi System of Rule)," *Minzu xuekan (*Journal of Ethnology*)*, no. 1 (2015): 52, see footnote 10.
66. Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, "The Galactic Polity in Southeast Asia," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, no. 3 (2013): 517.
67. The following parts on Jamyang Penden come from Ngag dbang mkhyen rab, 10–15. One thing worths mentioning is that in *Muli Zhengjiao Shi*, Jamyang Penden was protrayed as a traitor who not only poisoned Jamyang Sangpo but also kept challanging the Bar family's rulership. Such narrative was most likely a reflection of the rivalry between Jamyang Penden and Samten Sangpo for gaining control over Muli. In this section, I selectively draw on information on Jamyang Penden while try to avoid intentionally inaccurate information provided by the biased historical material. In other words, I am restructuring the narrative on Jamyang Penden to create a relatively objective picture of him.
68. Ngawang Khenrab, *Muli Zhengjiao Shi*, 10.
69. Ibid., 11.
70. Ibid., 13.
71. Ibid., 12.
72. Ibid., 13.
73. Many scholars have already scrutinized the shifting balance of power within the Tibetan-Mongol alliance at the time. Peter Schwieger argued that despite recognizing Khoshut Mongols'—particularly Gushri Khan's—authority, the Fifth Dalai Lama at the same time consolidated his own power to undermine the Mongols. Chen Qingying, from the Mongols' perspective, points out that Gushri Khan was quite clear about his tenuous authority in central Tibet and thus intentionally consolidated his power in eastern Tibet by appointing his sons to important tax and military positions. Peter Schwieger, *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China: A Political History of the Tibetan Institution of Reincarnation*, 53–57; Chen Qingying, "Gushihan he Gelupai zai Xizang Tongzhi de ianli he gonggu," 78.
74. Sui Haoyun, "Handu shijian jiqi dui qingchu chuandian zangqu de yingxiang (The incident of Qandu and its Influence on early Qing Yunnan and Sichuan Tibetan areas)," in *Zhongguo Zangxue* (China Tibetology), no. 3 (1996), 131.
75. Ngawang Khenrab, *Muli Zhengjiao Shi*, 13. For the Tibetan spelling, see *Mu Li Chos 'Byung,* 42.
76. I want to thank Prof. Christopher Atwood for pointing this out for me in his seminar on *The Secret History of the Mongols*.
77. Ngawang Khenrab, *Muli Zhengjiao Shi*, 14.
78. Zeng Xianjiang, *Huxi Minzu yu Zangyi Zoulang: Yi Mengguzu wei Zhongxin de Lishixue Kaocha* (Nomadic Groups and the Tibetan-Yi Corridor: A Case study on the Mongols) (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 2007), 132–40.
79. Ngawang Khenrab, *Muli Zhengjiao Shi*, 30.
80. Ibid., 14.
81. Ibid., 14.
82. The death of Gushri Khan in 1654 provided the Fifth Dalai Lama a good opportunity to meddle in the Mongol affairs. In the following years, the Fifth Dalai Lama gradually achieved hegemony among the Mongols, particularly about imperial succession. See Wang Li, *Mingmo Qingchu Dalai Lama Xitong yu Menggu Zhubu Hudong Guanxi Yanjiu* (The Interaction between the Dalai Lamas and the Mongol Groups in late Ming and early Qing) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2011), 245–46.
83. Zeng Xianjiang, *Huxi Minzu yu Zangyi Zoulang: Yi Mengguzu wei Zhongxin de Lishixue Kaocha*, 124.
84. Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso, *Wu Shi Dalai Lama Zhuan (the Autobiography of the Fifth Dalai Lama)* (Beijing: Zhongguo zangxue chubanshe, 1997), 581.

85. Ngawang Khenrab, *Muli Zhengjiao Shi*, 28.
86. Ibid., 28.
87. Ibid., 28.
88. Max Oidtmann, *Forging the Golden Urn: The Qing Empire and the Politics of Reincarnation in Tibet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 26.
89. Ngawang Khenrab, *Muli Zhengjiao Shi*, 4.
90. Ibid., 28.
91. Koen Wellens, *Religious Revival in the Tibetan Borderlands: The Premi of Southwest China,* 32.
92. "Zhongguo shaoshu minzu shehui lishi diaocha ziliao congkan" xiuding bianji weiyuanhui Sichuan Sheng Bianji zu *Sichuan Sheng Muli Zangzu Zizhixian Zangzu Naxizu Shehui Lishi Diaocha*, 107.
93. Ibid., 111.
94. Max Oidtmann, *Forging the Golden Urn: The Qing Empire and the Politics of Reincarnation in Tibet*, 29.
95. Ngawang Khenrab, *Muli Zhengjiao Shi*, 15.
96. Ibid., 16.
97. Ibid., 15–17.
98. Ibid., 18.
99. "Zhongguo shaoshu minzu shehui lishi diaocha ziliao congkan" xiuding bianji weiyuanhui Sichuan Sheng Bianji zu *Sichuan Sheng Muli Zangzu Zizhixian Zangzu Naxizu Shehui Lishi Diaocha*, 95.
100. Ngawang Khenrab, *Muli Zhengjiao Shi*, 30.
101. Ibid., 30–31.
102. Ibid., 32.
103. Ibid., 38.
104. Jonathan Skaff, "Survival in the Frontier Zone: Comparative Perspectives on Identity and Political Allegiance in China's Inner Asian Borderlands During the Sui-Tang Dynastic Transition (617–630)," *Journal of World History* 15, no. 2 (2004): 119.
105. Shakabpa, *Tibet a Political History*, 113.