

Galdan's Death: When and How

By Hidehiro OKADA

On K'ang-hsi 36/IV/14 (June 3, 1697), the Ch'ing emperor had camped at Buγutu (now Pao-t'ou) on the bank of the Yellow River on his way home to Peking from the frontier city of Ninghsia, where he had traveled to supervise the preparation for a two-pronged military expedition across the Gobi against the remaining forces of Galdan Bošoγtu Qaγan of the Jūn Far, who had taken refuge in the eastern part of the Altai Mountains after he had suffered a crushing blow at Jāγun Modu, near the present-day city of Nalaikh on the Tuula, from the Ch'ing forces in the preceding year. That night at Buγutu, word reached the emperor that Galdan had died. Excited, the emperor wrote to his Crown Prince, In Ceng, who was staying behind in Peking to take care of government in the father's absence, early next morning:

"A message sent to the Crown Prince. I had decided to depart by the waterway on the seventh (May 27). The Yellow River has many bends and is muddy. Few people live along it and beasts of burden are not to be obtained. Such being the situation, I had ordered that all reports to the throne be forwarded to Muna Qosiγu to wait for my arrival, which would be within four days, and sent all of them overland. I left behind *Dorgi Amban* Songgotu with two-hundred musketeers, more than one-thousand four-hundred horses of the Banners of the Capital, and eight-hundred *hule* of rice I had brought with in excess, at the place of Po T'a, with the detailed instruction that he prepare to take care of the troops, grooms and merchants when they came back as did *Aliha Amban* Bandi last year. Then I departed but was greatly delayed as wind blew everyday and waves were high. In the night of the fourteenth (June 3), Erdeni Paṇḍita Qutuγtu, by whom I had stopped, sent his men to inform me, who said: 'Today, shortly before the sunset, a boat arrived with a message in a great hurry that there was an important business to be reported to the throne; Galdan was dead, and Danjila and others were all coming over to surrender. Thereupon our Qutuγtu sent us posthaste bringing this piece of good news to Your Majesty.' Then, though the day had not yet dawned, I got hold of horses in a hurry and sent men to ride and meet the boat halfway along the both banks of the river. Also I sent out boats to meet the same by water. At the hour of dragon

(8:00 a.m.) of the fifteenth (June 4), *Sula Amban* Buktao arrived and reported: 'Your Majesty had left this boat with *Dorgi Amban* Songgotu with the instruction that if any important business arose by the time of your arrival at Muna, where no horse could get through to, we should take this boat to catch up with you in a hurry. Now there can be no piece of good news of greater importance than this. Therefore we were sent to catch up with you going all night, and we have been on our way for two days and two nights on end.' He brought with him a report from *Amba Jiyanggiyün Be* Fiyanggū. I am sending you a copy of *Amba Jiyanggiyün Be* Fiyanggū's report. Moreover, I want to have Galdan's head fetched promptly and send it on to the Capital as soon as it arrives. That I have come to the remote frontier three times was because it was impossible to let this bandit be even for a day. Is there any reason that I should be not clear in thinking and become the ridicule of posterity? Now, thanks to the grace of Heaven, Earth and our ancestors, all the numerous Ögeled have been gathered together. There is not a single nation of Mongolian origin remaining without becoming our subjects and pledging allegiance to us. Now that Galdan's head is to be sent to the Capital, assemble the kings, princes, dukes and the Manchu and Chinese ministers and officials, tell them clearly about this development, and report back to me their deliberations. My heart is filled with so much of joy that I am unable to hold the writing brush and compose sentences. I am sending this in a hurry. So much for my message. *Ssu yüeh shih wu ssu shih* (The hour of serpent—10:00 a.m.—of the fifteenth of the fourth month)."⁽¹⁾

Fiyanggū was the commander-in-chief of the military expedition against Galdan and was marching on the eastern part of the Altai from northwestern Inner Mongolia at the head of an army, while another army was marching out from Kansu toward the same destination, in a pincer movement to catch Galdan. The Manchu general's report reads:

"Respectfully reported to the throne by your servant, *Goroki Be Dahabure Amba Jiyanggiyün, Hiya Kadalara Dorgi Amban, Be, Fiyanggū* and others. This is to report urgently that Galdan is dead and Danjila and others are coming over to surrender. We, your servants, arrived at a place called Sayir Balγasun on the ninth of the fourth month of the thirty-sixth year of *Elhe Taifin* (K'ang-hsi; May 29, 1697). There came to us nine men including Čikir Ĵayisang who had been sent by Danjila and others of the Ögeled and said: 'We are messengers dispatched by Danjila of the Ögeled. On the thirteenth of the third month (April 5), Galdan died upon arriving at a place called Ača Amtatai. Danjila, Noyan Gelüng and Danjila's son-in-law Lhasrung, taking along Galdan's body and Galdan's daughter Ĵunčaqai and leading three-hundred families in

all, came hither to surrender to the *Boγda Ejen*, stopped at a place called Bayan Öndör and are waiting there for an imperial decree. Whatever decree is issued by the *Boγda Ejen* in the way of instructions, they will act in respectful obedience to that decree.....' When we interrogated Čikir Ĵayisang and others as to how Galdan had died and why Danjila did not come here straightaway but is staying at Bayan Öndör and waiting for an imperial decree, they said: 'Galdan fell ill in the morning of the thirteenth of the third month and died soon in the evening. We do not know what illness it was.....'”(2)

On IV/18, Čikir Ĵayisang himself caught up with the imperial retinue at a place called Düre. Upon interrogation, he stated:

“Galdan died of an illness on the thirteenth of the third month. Immediately in that night we cremated his body and, on the sixteenth (April 8), we departed from Ača Amtatai bringing along Galdan's daughter Ĵunčaqai, Noyan Gelüng, Lhasrung, Čengbei Zangbu, Nirba Gabču and Čenbel, and arrived at Bayan Öndör after ten days' march. Our men have neither horses nor beasts of burden nor provisions. We will all starve to death after entering the Gobi. Thus we are staying at Bayan Öndör for a while to wait for a decree from the *Boγda Ejen*. When a decree is issued we should like to act in respectful obedience..... I came from Bayan Öndör on the fourteenth of the intercalary third month (May 4).””(3)

Thus all primary sources concur in that Galdan died of an illness on K'ang-hsi 36/III/13 (April 5, 1697). For some reason of his own, however, the emperor preferred to believe that it was a case of suicide by taking poison. Immediately after the interrogation, he wrote to Crown Prince In Ceng:

“On the eighteenth, after we had passed by Muna, Čikir Ĵayisang arrived. I had his interrogation written down and am sending it to you. Moreover, upon my own face-to-face interrogation in detail, it is certain that Galdan's death was caused by taking of poison. Whether others got together to poison him or he took poison at his own will, I should like to determine at leisure after Čembü Zangbu arrives. Now that my greatest concern is finished, I have no more worries in my mind. Everyday, with the ministers and bodyguards, I reminisce on the one hand and rejoice on the other. Only Galdan's body has been cremated. Even whole, it would have been only a dried head. In the past, Wu San-kuei had also been cremated. His ashes were brought over, pounded into powder and scattered on the execution ground. The precedent is perfectly clear.””(4)

We do not know how the emperor arrived at this conclusion. We are

afraid that he might have put considerable pressure on Čikir Ĵayisang to get out what he wanted to hear, despite the testimony to the contrary. The emperor appears to have had his own reason why he wanted his most hated enemy commit suicide rather than die of an illness. The reason was Galdan's sanctity as the reincarnation of a grand lama.

Galdan, or Dga' Idan in Tibetan, was born in 1644 and recognized as the reincarnation of Dben sa sprul sku Blo bzang bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho, who had passed away toward the end of the previous year, of smallpox at Bkra-shis-lhun-po of Gtsang. This Dben sa sprul sku was an important lineage in Western Tibet, going back to Sangs rgyas ye shes, whose reincarnation was Ye shes rgya mtsho, 1592-1604. The third Dben sa sprul sku was born in 1605. Thus Galdan was the fourth in this lineage. At the age of thirteen, Galdan traveled to Tibet for the first time, had an audience with the fifth Dalai Bla-ma in Lha-sa, and then went on to Bkra-shis-lhun-po where he started training as a disciple of the first Paṅ-chen Bla-ma, in 1656. In 1662 the Paṅ-chen Bla-ma passed away, whereupon Galdan, then nineteen years old, moved to Lha-sa and studied under the Dalai Bla-ma. In 1666 Tshe-dbang-rgyal-mo, queen of Sengege, elder brother of Galdan's, came to Lha-sa on pilgrimage and took Galdan home. Upon leaving Lha-sa, the 23-year-old Galdan had an audience with the Dalai Bla-ma, who discussed with him how the cause of Buddhism would be best served. Thus Galdan had spent over ten years as an incarnate monk in Tibet. When Sengege was murdered by his half-brothers in 1670, Galdan took up arms for revenge, and in the next year defeated and killed his main rival for the office of the tribal leader, a cousin by the name of Baṛaqan Bandi. The Dalai Bla-ma bestowed on him the title of Qong Tayiji in recognition of his new status.⁽⁵⁾

Thus Galdan himself had been a reincarnation of very high order, being a disciple of no less than the first Paṅ-chen Bla-ma and the fifth Dalai Bla-ma. Also his former incarnation, the third Dben sa sprul sku Blo bzang bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho, was a very important personage in the history of Tibeto-Mongolian relations. It was this Dben sa sprul sku who in 1639 gave full ordination to the three-year-old Rje btsun dam pa Qutuṭu, a son of Gombo Tüsiyetü Qayan of the Qalqa,⁽⁶⁾ and in the following year presided over the Qalqa-Oyirad assembly at which the Mongol-Oyirad Code was written.⁽⁷⁾ Thus Galdan had in his former life been the master of the first Rje btsun dam pa, who was to become later a favored protégé of Emperor K'ang-hsi. It was the emperor's intention to build up the Rje btsun dam pa's religious authority to check the influence of the Dalai Bla-ma in Mongolia. For this purpose, Galdan was a major obstacle simply by being a fourth Dben sa sprul sku.

Would an incarnate bla-ma, by definition a bodhisattva, commit suicide? It seems rather unlikely, that a person who had been brought up in a firm belief in his own sanctity, should become despaired enough to harm his flesh

in order to leave this life prematurely. The emperor's contention that Galdan had poisoned himself to commit suicide, therefore, sounds like a deliberate attempt for political purposes at a character assassination. If Galdan committed suicide, he was not a reincarnation after all.

Interestingly enough, the present edition of *Ta Ch'ing Sheng Tsu Jen Huang Ti Shih Lu* reflects Emperor K'ang-hsi's claim in amending the texts of Fiyanggū's report and Čikir Jayisang's testimony. The former, which reads in the Manchu original "*ilan biyai juwan ilan de, g'aldan aca amtatai gebungge bade isinafi bucehe,*" is changed in the Chinese Veritable Records to "*jun san yüeh shih san jih, ko-le-tan chih a-ch'a a-mu-t'a-t'ai ti fang, yin yao tzu chin,*" or, "On the thirteenth day of the intercalary(!) third month, Galdan arrived at the place of Ača Amtatai and drank poison to finish himself."⁽⁸⁾ The latter, which reads in the Manchu original "*g'aldan, ilan biyai juwan ilan de nimeme bucehe,*" is also changed, by removing reference to the illness, in the Veritable Records to "*ko-le-tan jun san yüeh san shih jih shen ssu,*" or "Galdan died on the thirteenth day of the intercalary(!) third month."⁽⁹⁾

The reason why the date of Galdan's death also had to be moved forward by one month, from K'ang-hsi 36/III/13 (April 5, 1697) to K'ang-hsi 36/intercalary III/13 (May 4, 1697) is not too hard to find. There is not the slightest doubt that the thirteenth day of the intercalary third month cannot be the day on which Galdan died. We have already learned from Čikir Jayisang's testimony on K'ang-hsi 36/IV/18 that it was the day before he started from Bayan Öndör and headed for the Chinese border. Danjila and his men had spent ten days traveling from Ača Amtatai, where they had left on K'ang-hsi 36/III/16, three days after Galdan's death. Thus there is every reason to believe that the thirteenth day of the third month, rather than of the intercalary third month, was the correct date of Galdan's death.

It should be pointed out that, by moving the date by one month, the compilers of the Veritable Records could save the face of the emperor who, still unaware that his enemy no longer existed, was taking great pains to assemble large armies and preparing a final attack on Galdan's position in the eastern Altai. He had left Peking on K'ang-hsi 36/II/6, with a plan to supervise the operation from the border garrison town of Yu-wei, Shansi, which was close by the gate of Sha-hu-k'ou in the Great Wall. On arriving Ta-t'ung on II/17, however, he changed his plans and decided to go on to the city of Ningshia instead, which was closer to the Altai. The main body of the troops in the emperor's retinue were dispatched to Ningshia through Inner Mongolia, outside the Wall, while he himself headed southwestward over the Shansi Plateau, crossed the Yellow River at Pao-te-chou, Shansi, over to Fu-ku County, Shensi, and traveled along the inside of the Wall as far as Yü-lin, where he arrived on III/10. The terrain was so bad that the emperor had to take a short cut from Yü-lin to An-pien through the land

of the Ordos tribesmen outside the Wall. He wrote to the Crown Prince:

“The road leading from Shen-mu County to Yü-lin is full of large sandhills and very bad. This is no place to march an army. Observing this, one feels it is understandable that men of yore used to squander the cream of the nation in the northwest by expanding territories, military adventures and building of the Great Wall. It is not what men of today can do. It is not what men of love should do. Whereas even the ministers, bodyguards, guards and handymen escorting me, numbering less than four-hundred men, are traveling under a considerable difficulty, how did they manage to march with tens of thousands of troops? In addition to many dales and gulches, sand also is deep. Thus we are going out of the Wall at Yü-lin and heading toward Ninghsia making a short cut across the land of Ordos.”⁽¹⁰⁾

After An-pien he traveled again inside the Wall, crossed the Yellow River at Heng-ch'eng and arrived at Ninghsia on III/25, where he stayed for eighteen days until the intercalary III/15.

The emperor regretted that he had taken the Shensi route. He wrote to the Crown Prince:

“The horses of the troops who came under the command of Maska and others are good in flesh. All my riding horses arrived well. Some are eight-tenth well. The reason is that they suffered great hardship on their way as there were no pastures, it was dusty, and the mountains and plains were all made up of sand. There has never been an army marching along this route since the olden times. The distance from the Capital to Ninghsia reported by *Aliha Amban* Maci is two-thousand seven-hundred twenty *li*. The distance from the Capital through Yü-lin, from Yü-lin outside the Wall to An-pien and from there to Ninghsia reported by Guide Buda and others is two-thousand six-hundred *li*. The distance from the Capital through Yü-lin, from Yü-lin outside the Wall to An-pien and from there to Ninghsia measured by *Ashan i Bithei Da* Yangšu is two-thousand one-hundred fifty *li*. With six days that were spent taking rest subtracted, we have reached here on a forty-fifth day. If measured from Ninghsia by way of Kökö Qoton up to the Capital, the distance can never be more than one-thousand eight-hundred *li*. It would have been shorter and easier to travel, with good supply of water and pastures. We have come here making an unnecessarily long detour.”⁽¹¹⁾

Then, after completing chores involved in preparing the two-pronged military operation against Galdan, the emperor left Ninghsia and headed home, sailing the Yellow River downstream, and on his way he heard the news that Galdan

already been dead for a long time.

It must have been embarrassing to the emperor that he had been so actively engaged in an operation that turned out to have been completely unnecessary since Galdan had long been dead. The date of Galdan's death fell between the time the emperor left the Wall at Yü-lin and the time he re-entered it at An-pien. Thus his assiduous journey further to Ninghsia was totally useless, making him look somewhat ridiculous. Had the date been moved forward to the intercalary III/13 by one month, however, Galdan would have died just as the emperor was busily putting finishing touches on the preparation of the offensive on the Altai, for he was in Ninghsia on that date. Thus it seems likely that the version of the story of Galdan's death found in the Veritable Records is the product of the over-loyal court historians who wished to protect the honor of the charismatic emperor by juggling dates and facts.

That was the when and how of Galdan's death: on April 5, 1697, of an illness.

N.B.: This is a paper read at the Fifth East Asia Altaistic Conference, held in December, 1979, in Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China.

NOTES

- (1) *Kung Chung Tang K'ang Hsi Chao Tsou Che/Secret Palace Memorials of the K'ang-hsi Period*, No. 8 (National Palace Museum, Taipei, March 1977), Document 32, pp. 124-128. Its Japanese translation is found in: OKADA, Hidehiro, *Kōhitei no Tegami* (Chūō Kōron Sha, Tokyo, November 1979), pp. 176-178.
- (2) *Kung Chung Tang*....., No. 9 (National Palace Museum, Taipei, March 1977), Document 206, pp. 35-39. Cf. OKADA, p. 178.
- (3) *Kung Chung Tang*....., No. 9, Document 208, pp. 44-46. Cf. OKADA, p. 178.
- (4) *Kung Chung Tang*....., No. 9, Document 207, pp. 42-43. Japanese translation: OKADA, pp. 178-179.
- (5) All information on Galdan's early years has been supplied by courtesy of YAMAGUCHI, Zuihō, on the basis of *Autobiography of the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma* and *Life of the First Paṅ-chen Bla-ma*.
- (6) Cf. C. R. BAWDEN, *The Jebtsundamba Khutukhtus of Urga* (Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1961), p. 44, where the name Dben sa sprul sku has degenerated to *bürilegüü, wangsüü bürülegü, etc.*
- (7) His name appears in the Code as *šakyayin toyin ečige inžan rinboče*, i.e., Dben sa rin po che.
- (8) *Ta Ch'ing Sheng Tsu Jen Huang Ti Shih Lu*, chap. 183, fol. 7v.
- (9) *Ta Ch'ing*....., chap. 183, fol. 9v.
- (10) *Kung Chung Tang*....., No. 8, Document 172, pp. 821-823. Japanese translation: OKADA, pp. 149-150.
- (11) *Kung Chung Tang*....., No. 8, Document 26, pp. 92-95. Japanese translation: OKADA, p. 156.