

DRAFT

CHAPTER IV

EARLY LIFE

At the time Dambijantsan was born, at the beginning of the 1860s, Tibetan Buddhism, despite the continued pressure to convert the Kalmyks to Russian Orthodoxy, was still prevalent in Kalmykia, the land of the Kalmyks. In all likelihood Dambijantsan was born into a family which adhered to Buddhism to one degree or another. The first news we hear of him is that at the age of seven he was supposedly enrolled as a novice in a Buddhist monastery in Dolonnuur, in what is now the Chinese province of Inner Mongolia. Maisky heard this story while in western Mongolia in 1919, when Dambijantsan was still alive. Dolonnuur was firmly in the orbit of the Eastern Mongols, the Chahar of Inner Mongolia and Khalkh of what was then considered Outer Mongolia, and at first glance it appears strange that a young Dörböt from the Volga River in Russia would have gravitated there. Kalmyks wishing to enter a monastery outside of Kalmykia, we would think, would have been more drawn to western China, including the modern-day provinces of Xinjiang, Qinghai, and Gansu, the traditional strongholds of the Torгут, Dörbot, and other Oirats, both those who not migrated westward in the early seventeenth century and those who had returned in the great exodus of 1771. Fred Adelman, in his introduction to Pozdnev's *Mongolia and Mongols* makes precisely this objection, and John Gaunt in his doctoral thesis on Dambijantsan repeats it: "it would be unlikely to find a Volga Kalmuk at Doloon Nuur, as they were not oriented toward Inner Mongolia's monastic net."¹

The French scholar Isabelle Charleux, an expert on Inner Mongolian monasteries, has a different view: "There were many monks and students [at Dolonnuur] from all of the Mongol world, given the reputation of the

Dolonnur monasteries that attracted people from very far away . . . The Dolonnur monasteries were not only connected with the Khalkh Mongols; but also with the Inner Mongolians of Alashan and Kholun Buir . . . Also the migrant population of the Chahar banners included many Oirat Mongols. If Dambijantsan's parents were especially fond of the Dolonnur monasteries—because they knew a lama there, because of the reputation of the monasteries, etc.—they would have sent their child there.”²

A Russian researcher adds that Dambijantsan's parents moved to Inner Mongolia “for all the usual reasons”—presumably they were traders—when he was a very small boy, which would explain how the seven-year old boy ended up there.³ Therefore it is entirely possible that this entry into Dambijantsan's curriculum vitae was not simply a later invention meant to burnish this reputation among the Khalkh Mongols but that he actually was enrolled as a monk at Dolonnur at an early age. In any case, this is the last we hear of his parents.

Dolonnur (*doloon* = seven, *nuur* = lake; Seven Lakes) is located in the grasslands (now suffering from increasing desertification) 210 miles north of Beijing, about fifty-two miles beyond the first major pass leading to the Mongolian Plateau. The area is much hallowed in Mongolian history. Fourteen miles from the current town of Dolonnur is the site of Shangdu, originally established in 1256 as the headquarters of Chingis Khan's grandson Khubilai. After Khubilai founded the Yüan Dynasty he made what is now Beijing the primary capital of his empire, but he retained Shangdu as his summer capital, where he and his court retired each year to escape the enervating heat of the North China Plain. Shangdu was destroyed in the so-called “Red Scarf Rebellion” of 1358, a precursor to the upheavals which led to the fall of the Yuan Dynasty in 1368 and the rise of the Ming Dynasty. Later the city became known to some as the Xiancheng, or Apparition City, since people claimed that at certain times the old city as it was in the days of Khubilai appeared suddenly before their eyes and then disappeared just as quickly, leaving only the ruins as we see them today. Shangdu is also remembered as the subject of Coleridge's much celebrated poem “Xanadu”:

*In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river ran
Through caverns measureless to man*

Down to a sunless sea . . .

The ruins are now a popular tourist attraction and the area still serves as a summer getaway, only now not for Mongol potentates but for Beijing's middle classes. More important to our story, however, it was at nearby Dolonnuur that in 1691 a fateful meeting took place between the Kangxi emperor of China and Zanabazar, the First Bogd Gegeen of Mongolia and the nominal head of the Khalkh Mongols.

When we last left Khara Khula he was organizing the four tribes of the Oirat into the Oirat Confederation. He died in 1634 and his son Baatar-Khongtaiji then assumed the throne. In 1635 the Dalai Lama officially recognized Baatar-Khongtaiji as the leader of the Oirats and gave him the title of Yerdyen.⁴ By 1640 Baatar-Khongtaiji's realm became known as the Zungarian Khanate.⁵ The name derives from the Mongol *zuun gar*, "left hand," or "eastern side"; although the Oirats dwelt in the western end of the lands inhabited by Mongol peoples, the Choros tribe to which Khara Khula and Baatar-Khongtaiji's belonged was the easternmost of the Oirat confederation and thus on the "left hand" looking southward, as the Mongols always oriented themselves.⁶

Following a long internecine struggle between Baatar-Khongtaiji's offspring, replete with fratricide and rivers of blood, Galdan, probably the youngest of his eleven or so sons, seized the reins of the Zungarian Khanate. Under Galdan the Zungarian Khanate eventually encompassed a huge swath of Inner Asia, including the western edge of current-day Mongolia, the current-day Chinese province of Xinjiang, including the Silk Road cities of Hami, Turpan, and Kashgar, the legendary cities of Bukhara and Samarkand in what is now Uzbekistan, and the eastern part of current-day Kazakhstan. Although little remembered today, during Galdan's reign the Zungarian Khanate was a formidable adversary of both Czarist Russia and Qing-Dynasty China.

Galdan would become one of the role models of Dambijantsan, and we will return for a more detailed examination of his career in good time. Suffice it to say here that in 1688 Galdan, hoping to add the territory of the Khalkh Mongols to the Zungarian Empire, invaded what is now the country of Mongolia. Meeting little opposition from the disorganized Khalkh, his army first trashed the great monastery of Erdene Zuu, built on site of the old Mongol capital of Kharkhorum, and the monastery at Khögno Khan Uul (now known as Khögno Taryn Khiid), just to the east.

Advancing farther eastward into the Khentii Mountains north of Ulaan Baatar, Galdan's men then demolished Saridgiin Khiid, the monastery which had been established by Zanabazar himself and intended to be the center of Buddhism in Mongolia. Zanabazar, his brother Chakhuundorj the Tüsheet khan, the leaders of the other Khalkh khanates, and, according to one source, at least 30,000 of their followers fled southeastward before the advance of Galdan's troops, eventually reaching the edge of the Mongolian Plateau near Dolonnuur, land of the Chahar Mongols, who had already accepted the authority of the Qing Dynasty. Here the Khalkh Mongols, by now almost destitute, threw themselves at mercy of the Qing emperor Kangxi.⁷

Dolonnuur was at that time already an important monastic center, with no less than twelve incarnate lamas in residence. The town, strategically located at the edge of the Mongolian plateau, was also a busy Chinese-Mongolian entrepôt. Because of deposits of copper ore nearby it became a center of mining and smelting, and its factories were well-known for their weapons, and later its workshops better known for the bronze Buddhist artwork of the Dolonnuur School.

The Kangxi emperor, apprized of the arrival of the Khalkh Mongols in his domains, decided to meet with their leaders and if possible bring them into the fold of the Qing Dynasty. He left Beijing on May 9, 1691 and made his leisurely way north, stopping to do a spot of hunting on the way. From May 29 to June 3 Kangxi finally met with Zanabazar and the other Khalkh leaders in Dolonnuur. A great banquet was followed by a display of Qing might in the form of cannons, newly acquired from Jesuits in Beijing, the firing of which caused the Mongols "to tremble with fear and admiration," at least according to Qing sources.⁸ The upshot of all this was that in exchange for protection from the forces of Galdan Bolshigt and a promise from Kangxi to restore to the Khalkh their lost lands in Mongolia, Zanabazar accepted the suzerainty of the Qing Dynasty, in effect making Mongolia a province of China. The country which Chingis Khan and his sons had conquered and his grandson Khubilai had once ruled as the first emperor of the Mongol Yüan Dynasty now dominated Mongolia. Mongolia would remain under Chinese control until 1911, when the Qing Dynasty fell. Those 220 years of subjugation by the Qing Empire are seen by some as a direct consequence of Zanabazar's capitulation to Kangxi, and as a result many Mongolians resent him to this day. Dambijantsan himself would devote the greater part of his life to undoing what Zanaba-

zar had done and restoring the independence of Mongolia.

But that was all in the future. In 1691, In honor of his meeting with Zanabazar and the capitulation of the Mongols, Kangxi ordered the construction of what would become the Khökh Süm, or Blue Temple. (One prominent Mongolian incarnation, the Kanjurwa Khutagt [1914–1980], maintains that on the contrary Mongol nobles built the temple in honor of Kangxi, a telling interpretation of events from a Mongol viewpoint⁹) The Khökh Süm was completed around 1700 and it eventually began the center of a sizable monastery. About a half mile away, the Shar Süm, Yellow Temple, was built between 1729 and 1731 and it too became the foundation of a monastery. Both monasteries were overseen by a line of incarnate lamas known as the Jangjya Khutagts. Sedendonub, the first Jangjya Khutagt, was instructed by Kangxi himself to “spend the chilly wintertime in Peking and in the summertime heat govern here and the direct the local clergy.”¹⁰ The Jangjya Khutagts maintained residences at both the Blue Temple and the Yellow Temple. The second Jangjya Khutagt, Rölpé Dorjé, was described by one scholar as “an intimate of the Qianlong emperor and thus perhaps the most powerful Tibetan hierarch in the Qing Empire.”¹¹ Dolonnuur’s importance as a monastic center was underlined by the fact that the Third Panchen Lama visited here during his trip to China in 1780. The Panchen Lamas along with the Dalai Lamas were the highest ranking incarnate lamas in Tibet. The Panchen Lama arrived in Dolonnuur on the 20th day of the 6th month, and according to hagiographic Tibetan accounts was greeted by one million people, although this is almost certainly an exaggeration. In any case, while in Dolonnuur the Panchen Lama reportedly “performed a purification ritual that pacified the restless demons of Mongolia.”¹² He also gave Yamantaka initiation to the Jangjya Khutagt and read prayers dedicated to the sacred land of Shambhala, a realm for which he had already written a guidebook entitled *Shambhala Lamyig*.

From Dolonnuur the Panchen Lama proceeded to the Qing Summer Resort at Jehol where he was amazed to discover not only a huge replica of the Potala in Lhasa, already alluded to, but also a replica of his own Tashilhunpo Monastery in Shigatse. This complex of temples and facades, known as the Xumifoushou Miao (Happiness and Longevity Temple of Mt. Sumeru) was hurriedly constructed in 1779 and early 1780 by order of the Qianlong emperor. In front of it he had placed yet another stele declaring that the complex had been built to provide the Panchen

Lama with “a restful place for meditation.”¹³ The Xumifoushou Miao too is now a major tourist attraction. Unfortunately, the Panchen Lama never returned to Tibet from this trip. From Jehol he proceeded Beijing to where he contracted small pox and died in late November of 1780.

The Russian ethnographer A. M. Podzneeov visited Dolonuur in 1893. By then the monastic center seems to have lost some of its luster. The Yellow Temple had some 400 monks and the Khökh Temple some 500, not a lot compared to monasteries in Lhasa in Tibet and Örgöö (now Ulaan Baatar] in Mongolia. The fourth Jangjiya Khutagt, who died in 1891, spent most of his life in Beijing and had not visited Dolonuur in fifty years. Podzneeov was by that time a very seasoned traveler in Mongolia and China but even he was shocked by conditions in Dolonuur: “It would be hard to imagine anything dirtier and in greater disarray than Dolonuur’s street and alleys. The street in all Chinese cities are normally narrow and dirty, but here they are even narrower and dirtier . . . In the rainy season these ditches used as thoroughfares are so full of water and mud that some of the streets become literally impassable.”¹⁴

Presumably this was more-or-less the same Dolonuur Dambijantsan would have experienced in the late 1860s when he arrived there at the age of seven and became a novice monk.

The beginnings of Dambijantsan’s monastic career are unclear. He may have taken the preliminary vow known as Rabjun, which is given to young boys when they first enter a monastery. In addition to learning to read and write Mongolian, he probably began to study at least written Tibetan, since at that time most Buddhist texts were in the Tibetan language, and he would have received lessons in elementary Buddhism teachings, including the doctrines of the Gelug, or Yellow Hat, sect, one of the four main divisions of Tibetan Buddhism and the one to which the Dalai Lama belonged.

From his fellow Mongolian students, many of them from Khalkh Mongolia, the young boy who had been born in Russia may have imbibed the anti-Manchu sentiment then growing among a people ever-increasingly impoverished by their Qing masters. And perhaps he even got a sense that all was not well in the Qing Dynasty itself, then still reeling from the disastrous Second Opium War of 1856–60. In 1860, the year Dambijantsan was born, British and French forces had entered Beijing and sacked the Summer Palace, then forced on the Qing government to sign the so-

called Peking Convention, which opened several Chinese ports to foreign trade, gave foreigners the right to travel in the interior of China, allowed Christian missionaries into the country, and, perhaps most importantly, legalized the importation of opium, the mainstay of British trade at the time. It was a blow from which the Qing Dynasty would never really recover. The emperor Xianfeng, totally mortified by China's defeat in the Opium War and the onerous settlement forced on him by the foreign powers, died a broken man a year later at the age of twenty-nine. One of his concubines would lead a coup *état* and subsequently rule China for the next forty-seven years as the Empress Dowager Cixi, overseeing the slow but inexorable decline leading to the final extinguishment of the Qing Dynasty. When the Qing Dynasty finally did fall, in 1911–12, Dambijantsan would be in western Mongolian, leading the fight for Mongolian independence.

Maisky and George Roerich both allude to Dambijantsan's youthful sojourn in Dolonuur but give no details.¹⁵ According to one of his Russian biographers he excelled in his studies and was soon marked out for advancement in the lamaistic community. Talented and ambitious young monks were inevitably drawn to Lhasa, the wellspring and lodestone of Tibetan Buddhism, so it is not surprising that Dambijantsan would have set his sights on the Tibetan capital. There was a problem, however. Although a Kalmyk, he was apparently a Russian citizen, and most foreigners, including even Buddhists from Russia, were not allowed into Tibet. The earlier fraternal ties the Kalmyks had enjoyed with Tibet had ended at least a hundred years ago. But as a Mongolian-speaking Kalmyk studying in Dooloonuur he might well have been able to pass himself off as a Khalkh from Mongolia. As such he would have been allowed to travel to Tibet and enroll in a monasteries there. Dambijantsan's propensity for assumed false identities might well have begun at this point.

In any event, we soon find Dambijantsan in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet and home of the Dalai Lama, enrolled in the Drepung Monastery, one of the "Great Three" monasteries of Tibet, along with Sera and Gandan. Drepung (literally "rice heap") Monastery had been founded in 1416 by Jamyang Chöje Tashi Pelden ("Dashi-baldan" in Mongolian accounts), born in Tibet near Samye Monastery, and a close disciple of Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelug sect. He was believed to be the eleventh appearance of Javzandamba, the line of incarnations of which Zanabazar, the

First Bogd Gegeen of Mongolia, was the sixteenth. In addition to Drepung, he established more than one hundred other monasteries, retreat centers, and hermitages all over Tibet.¹⁶

Drepung, located at the base of Gambo Utse Mountain about five miles west of the Potala, was once reputed to be the largest Buddhist monastery in the world, with as many as 8,000 monks in residence. The second, third and fourth Dalai Lamas lived at Drepung—this was before the completion of the Potala, later the residence of the Dalai Lamas—and their bodies were entombed here. Zanabazar, the First Bogd Gegeen of Mongolia stayed at Drepung during his visits to Tibet in the years 1649–51 and 1655–56. Drepung was divided into colleges (dratsangs) which specialized in a particular teaching or hosted monks from some specific area in the Buddhist world. One college, for example, hosted monks from Kham, in eastern Tibet. Gomang College was famous for its Mongolian monks, and it was here that Dambijantsan gravitated.

Drepung in general was renowned as an institute of higher learning, with many monks studying for fifteen or twenty year to achieve the Buddhist equivalent of a doctorate degree. Any monk aspiring to reach the pinnacle of Buddhist teachings could fulfill his ambitions here. According to George Roerich, Dambijantsan spent “many years” at Drepung. Unfortunately we do not know who his teachers were, what specific teachings he specialized in, or what initiations he might have taken. His years at Gomang College were not wasted, however. “People who knew him well,” according to Roerich, “affirm that his knowledge of Buddhist metaphysics and secret Tantric teachings was unusually vast and it seems he enjoyed a high reputation among the high lamas of Mongolia.”¹⁷

Given his apparent talents, Dambijantsan might have gone to become a teacher himself at Drepung or some other monastery and eventually become a high-ranking lama in the Buddhist hierarchy. It was not to be. According to Roerich, “From his youth, he manifested an ambitious, impetuous, and cruel character.” This aspect of his character now came to the fore. “It is generally said,” continues Roerich, “that he killed his roommate in the monastery because of a dispute and had to flee Lhasa in order to escape from the stern monastic law. This fact is generally known in Tibet and Mongolia.”¹⁸

Obviously any advancement in the monastic world was now impossible. A new stage of Dambijantsan’s life was about to begin. As Roerich notes, “It seems the murder was the crucial point of his life for from then on begins his life as an errant warrior monk, full of wonderful adventures, messianic prophecies, and cruel deeds.”¹⁹

Later in life, when he was living in Mongolia, Dambijantsan regaled A. V. Burdukov with tales of his earlier travels, including sojourns in India. Maisky and Roerich also heard tell of these Indian travels. It is never quite clear when he went to India, but we might surmise that after killing his roommate he might have found it wise to remove himself to the Indian subcontinent and thereby escape severe punishment for the crime of murder from the monastic and perhaps civil authorities in Tibet. Dambijantsan, already deeply steeped in metaphysics and tantric teachings, would have found himself at home among the various yogis, fakirs, magicians, and itinerant savants of India, and would have ample opportunities for learning and expanding the wide variety of talents he would exhibit in later life. He would become legendary for his skills at hypnosis, clairvoyance, mind-reading, fortune telling and other arcane arts which were the stock and trade of India's holy men. What talents he may have had in these areas would have been further honed during his stay on the subcontinent. By the early 1930s, almost a decade after his death, these Indian adventures had become an accepted part of his curriculum vitae. Henning Haslund picked up the story circulating around the campfires of Mongolia that Dambijantsan "himself asserted that he acquired in India the supernatural qualities of the fakirs."²⁰ Beyond this we can add nothing about Dambijantsan's alleged Indian interlude.

At some point in time in the early 1880s Dambijantsan may have gone back to Russia. In any event, he somehow managed to attach himself to the 1883–85 Inner Asian Expedition of Russian explorer and zoologist N. M. Przhevalsky (1839–1888). Przhevalsky's earlier 1870–1873 expedition had been first serious Russian attempt to penetrate the maidenhead of virginal—at least from the Russian viewpoint—Tibet. On this first try he reached the northern edge of the Tibetan Plateau and the vicinity of the headwaters of the Yangtze River before being forced to turn back. A later expedition in 1879–80, this one authorized by the Czar and backed up by a formidable detachment of armed-to-the-teeth Cossacks, got to within 150 miles of Lhasa before encountering a large contingent of the Tibetan army. In the ensuing stand-off Przhevalsky finally backed down. "Let someone else, a luckier traveler than me, proceed farther into Asia. I have done everything I could do and that was possible to do," pouted the disheartened explorer.²¹ Russians, unlike the English a few decades later, were not yet ready to shoot their way into Lhasa.

Interestingly, upon his return to Russia Przhevalsky prepared a memorandum in which he proposed pushing the Russian border with Mongolia down to about the latitude of Örgöö, now Ulaan Baatar. Russian geographers, it seems, had opined that the mountains and mixed forest-steppe from the vicinity of Örgöö northward were really a continuation of Siberia, and thus based on landforms the border should run along the crest of Bogd Khan Uul (mountain) just south of Örgöö, beyond which lies the treeless steppe, desert steppe, and deserts of Mongolia proper. Thus Örgöö would then be in Russia. Przhevalsky had a religio-political motive for this proposal:

In future, should the English want to penetrate into Tibet from India, it is very likely that the Dalai Lama would move his residence to Urga, towards his most ardent believers there, the Mongols. Then, by, possessing Urga and patronizing the Dalai Lama, we would be able to influence the entire Buddhist world.²²

Przhevalsky was surprisingly prescient here. As already mentioned, in 1904 the English Younghusband Expedition did invade Tibet and the 13th Dalai Lama did flee to Örgöö. Of course Przhevalsky's proposal to move the border south had not been taken serious and at the time Örgöö was still the capital of Mongolia and not a Russian city.

Przhevalsky's 1883–1885 expedition started at Kyakhta, the entrepôt on the Russian-Mongolian border, proceeded south, presumably through Örgöö, to the Gobi Desert and then westward to the eastern spurs of the Tian Shan Mountains in Xinjiang. The expedition then veered off to the sources of Yangtze River and Qinghai Lake in modern-day Qinghai Province, China, continued on westwards to Khotan, on the southern edge of the Takhlamakan Desert, and finally northward to the huge lake of Issyk Kol in modern-day Kyrgyzstan. Thus the three-year-long expedition traversed a huge swatch of Inner Asia but did not enter Tibet proper.

Dambijantsan reportedly accompanied the expedition as one of its eighteen armed escorts. At this time he was traveling under the Russian alias Irinchinov. A photograph of the escorts showing Dambijantsan at the far left is, according to one researcher, "the first pictorial record of the charismatic adventurer that can be traced hitherto."²³ Dambijantsan was already familiar with Inner Mongolia from his stay at Dolonuur, and assuming that he joined the expedition at its beginning in Khyakhta he now would have had ample opportunities to spy out the land of the Khalkh, the current-day country of Mongolia. At this time, however, he was just

a hired-hand traveling under an alias and had not yet assumed the role of Ja Lama, the descendant/incarnation of Amarsanaa come to free the Mongols from the yoke of the Manchus. Yet we may assume that the ambitious adventurer had his eyes wide open, and was even at this point plotting his dramatic reappearance in Mongolia as the leader of a liberation movement.

There are unsubstantiated rumors that Dambijantsan had earlier accompanied the expedition of Russian explorer Grigory Nikolayevich Potanin (1836–1920), who traveled through western Mongolia in the years 1876–77, with stays in the towns of Khovd and Uliastai (Potanin Glacier, which flows off Khuiten Uul, the highest peak in Mongolia, in Bayan-Ölgii Aimag, is named after the Russian explorer). This claim is part of Dambijantsan lore repeated to this day in Khovd Aimag, although there does not appear to be any written documentation to support it. In any case, Khovd City and Uliastai would later play important roles in the Dambijantsan saga, and it is quite possible that he visited them before he assumed the role of Ja Lama.

While it is easy to imagine a gun-toting Dambijantsan as part of an armed escort on expeditions to the remote fastnesses of Inner Asia, it is a bit more difficult to picture him as a lawyer with a briefcase stalking the halls of a courthouse. Yet while in Mongolia in 1927 painter, mystic, Shambhalist Nicholas Roerich, father of already mentioned George Roerich, would hear that Dambijantsan, “no ordinary bandit,” was “a graduate of law from Petrograd University.”²⁴ For a moment a vision rises before us of Dambijantsan, a Kalmyk Mongol from the sun-drenched Caspian Steppes, striding the cobblestone streets of Peter the Great’s gray, gloomy city by the Gulf of Finland. Inessa Lomakina, Dambijantsan’s indefatigable Russian biographer, took the time to track down even this flimsy lead and came away with a different picture:

I couldn’t believe it at all [that Dambijantsan had studied law in St. Petersburg], so I decided to consult the historical archives of St. Petersburg, where the records of the university is stored, in order to check on whether this information was true or not. Fortunately, there was the card index of all the students who studied at that university before the revolution. I searched very carefully for any of the names which the Ja Lama may have used but didn’t find any. Moreover, I looked through all the personal files of students, entrance application forms, graduation certificates of the gymnasium, college graduation diplomas, exam papers, course papers, application

forms for the higher education courses, etc. . . .²⁵

She found nothing and by the end must have seriously regretted Rorich's off-hand comment about Dambijantsan's studies in St. Petersburg. Thus whatever else Dambijantsan was guilty of in his long and eventful life he cannot be accused of being a lawyer.

Dambijantsan himself claimed that he "served as one of the Ta Lamas or Heads of Department in the Chang-skya Khutughtu [Jangjya Khutagt] yamen at Peking, a learned ecclesiastical institution entrusted with the fixing of the calendar and other astronomical and metaphysical questions."²⁶ The Jangjya Khutagts were as we have seen incarnate lamas connected with the monasteries in Dolonnuur where Dambijantsan may have studied as a boy. The fourth Jangjya Khutagt, who would have been alive at the time in question, was very seldom in attendance at Dolonnuur and lived almost full-time in Beijing.

The Songzhu Monastery in the old Imperial city was his full time residence in the capital. This ancient Chinese monastery, which specialized in printing sutras during the Ming Dynasty, was converted into a Tibetan monastery in 1712 by the Kangxi emperor. In 1724 it was given to Rölpe Dorjé, the second Jangjya Khutagt, and served as the residence of the subsequent Jangjya Khutagts. It did not appear, however, to have been a "learned ecclesiastical institution" of the kind where Dambijantsan supposedly served. The Yonghe Gong was the main academic monastery of Beijing, with various colleges that dealt with astronomy and calendar making, medicine, and various esoteric studies, and this may be the institution to which Dambijantsan made mention. Whether he was actually one of the Ta (or Da) Lamas there is another question altogether. Since the position would have acquired considerable academic credentials he could have held the post only after his studies at Drepung. But after his stay at Drepung he was wanted for murder in Tibet, and this would seem to preclude him from holding a high position in a Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhist institution in Beijing. Either officials in Beijing were unaware of his past, or he had just made up this episode about being a Da Lama in Beijing to further burnish his reputation after he began a famous man in Mongolia.

We have covered most everything known about the first three decades of

Dambijantsan's life. Up until 1890 he had, in effect, been in training for his future role. At the age of thirty or so he was about to assume a new persona: the descendant of Amarsanaa returning to the land of the Mongols in order to free them from their Qing oppressors.