

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

From Chinggisid to Modern State: Geopolitics and Sovereignty in Central Eurasia during the 17th and 18th Centuries^{*}

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Abstract

The decline of the Mongol Empire and its successor states led to anarchy in Central Eurasia from the 16th to the 18th centuries. This era saw the fall of the Timurids and the Ming Dynasty and the rise of new regional powers, including the Kazakhs and Zunggars in Central Asia. Externally, the Manchus, and Russia began influencing Central Asian geopolitics. Meanwhile, significant political, cultural, and scientific developments were taking place in Europe, alongside the rise of colonialism. Although these trends in Europe began to affect Central Asia, the regional powers of the time focused more on European technological innovations than on ideas of sovereignty and statehood. With the acceleration of political and cultural interactions between the East and the West,

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mapping and related innovations reached Central Asia and soon became symbols of political hegemony. This strategy, adopted by China's Ming and Manchu Qing dynasties and Russia, was efficiently utilized in the struggle for dominance in Central Asia. This article examines the last attempts of the regional Kazakh and Zunggar polities as independent states to become the hegemon power in the region within the framework of the role of mapping in Russian and Manchu colonial advances, which has not been sufficiently studied yet. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, this study employs historical methodologies, as well as international relations terminologies and theoretical frameworks.

Keywords

Central Asia, Historical Geography, Maps, Kazakhs, Kazakh Khanate, Zunggars, Cultural interaction.

Cengizlilerden Modern Devlete: 17. ve 18. Yüzyıllarda Merkezî Avrasya'da Jeopolitik ve Egemenlik*

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Öz

Moğol İmparatorluğunun ve halefi olan devletlerin dağılması, 16. ve 18. yüzyıllar arasında Merkezî Avrasya'da bir anarşiye yol açtı. Bu dönemde Timurlular ve Ming Hanedanı yıkılırken Kazaklar ve Cungarlar gibi yeni bölgesel güçler yükseldi. Dışarıdan ise Mançular ve Ruslar, Orta Asya'nın jeopolitiğini etkilemeye başladı. Bu dönemde Avrupa'da da önemli bir kısım siyasi, kültürel ve bilimsel gelişmeler yaşanmakta, sömürgecilik yükselmekteydi. Avrupa'daki bu gelişmeler bir şekilde Orta Asya'yı da etkilemeye başlamış olsa da dönemin bölgesel güçleri, egemenlik ve devlet anlayışlarından ziyade Avrupa'nın teknik yeniliklerine odaklanmışlardı. Batı ile Doğu arasındaki siyasi ve kültürel etkileşimin ivme kazanmasıyla haritalama ile birlikte diğer bazı yenilikler, Orta Asya'ya ulaştı ve siyasi hegemonya için bir sembol hâline geldi. Çin'in Ming ve Mançu Qing hanedanları ile Rusya tarafından benimsenen bu strateji, Orta Asya'daki

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hâkimiyet mücadelesinde etkin bir şekilde kullanıldı. Bu makale, bölgesel Kazak ve Cungan siyasal yapılarının bağımsız devletler olarak hegemon güç olma yolundaki son çabalarını, şimdiye kadar yeterince çalışılmamış olan Rus ve Mançu sömürgeci ilerlemelerinde haritalamanın rolü çerçevesinde incelemektedir. Disiplinlerarası yaklaşımı benimseyen bu çalışmada, tarihsel metodolojilerin yanı sıra uluslararası ilişkiler terminolojileri ve teorik çerçeveler de kullanılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Orta Asya, Tarihi Coğrafya, Haritalar, Kazaklar, Kazak Hanlığı, Cungarlar, Kültürel etkileşim.

Introduction

The collapse of the Mongol Empire, followed by the disintegration of its successor states and ultimately the Timurids, ushered in a period of anarchical society in Central Asia. As in other anarchical societies, like the Westphalian European system, the hierarchical structure of the states system collapsed, and different states claimed equality to each other in their relations. The period between the 16th and 18th centuries witnessed not only the disintegration of the Timurids and the Ming Dynasty but also the emergence of new actors: two internal and two external. In Central Asia, after a brief period of Uzbek supremacy, the Kazakhs emerged as a new regional power. In Mongolia and parts of Central Asia, the Oirad Mongols wrested power from the Chinggisids and the Eastern Mongols. In Manchuria, and later in China, the Manchus appeared as an external power projector, meddling in Central Asian geopolitics soon after their conquest of China. Concurrently, Russia became another external power exerting influence in the region following its conquest of Kazan in 1552 and the Siberian Khanates beginning in the late 16th century onwards. This period also marked the rise of colonialism in Europe, with European trends gradually extending to East, Southeast, South, and West Asia, eventually influencing Central Asia. However, at this stage, the global prevalence of European ideas on sovereignty, hegemony, or statehood was still limited. Nonetheless, colonial movements led to the diversification of global trade routes, a change in the global balance of power and cultural interaction. This mobility also facilitated the transmission of military and technical knowledge and tools to the region. In particular, adaptations to magnetic compasses accelerated the further development of mapping and cartography. These technical innovations also garnered the attention of actors in Central Asia and were utilized in cartography studies, as will be mentioned later.

We must acknowledge that although social and cultural interaction was limited during the period, the activities of Jesuit missionaries, which commenced in Japan in 1549, spread to China, India, and eventually to Mongolia. The Jesuits, present in Central Asia under the patronage of Russia in the 17th and 18th centuries, were perceived as a means of exerting control over the region, particularly through religion. Actors in Central Asia were more interested in the technical innovations occurring in Europe. Among these, one of the least studied aspects of Russian and Manchu/Chinese colonial encroachment

into Central Asia is the role of historical and contemporary maps. Similar to the European powers in Africa and the Americas, mapping a territory began to signify political hegemony over that area and its inhabitants. The Chinese Ming (1368-1644), and later the Manchu Qing (1644-1912) dynasties, became aware of this strategy through Jesuit missionaries at their courts. For the Russians, initially, Siberia and later Central Asia became terra incognita, despite Russia's centuries-long subjugation under Mongol rule, with many Russian princes traveling to Mongolia via Central Asia and Siberia. Subsequently, historical and contemporary maps began to be used as an effective tool in the Russian and Manchu/Chinese encroachment into Central Asia, which is an understudied aspect in this field. From this point of view, this study aims to examine the changing geopolitics of the region as well as the changing understandings of sovereignty and power via new tools such as the use of maps by these four powers and the resulting transformation of the political order and interactions in Central Asia.

Methodologically, the article relies heavily on the theoretical analysis of the *longue durée* developments rather than direct translations of relevant documents due to the length of time and geographic area as well as the variety of sources. Since the limitations of an article would not allow for a detailed analysis of primary sources, a macro history approach was preferred by the authors while at the same time using select primary sources when necessary. Also, in their approach to the general analysis of the changes in the region in terms of geopolitics and political order, the authors adopted IR terminologies and approaches by taking into account such ideas as states system, balance of power, state formation etc. By using an interdisciplinary approach this way, the authors wish to contribute to both fields of macro history and IR, and since early modern Central Eurasia is rather taken as part of global history studies, the article also aims to serve as an introduction to the region during the early modern period for the non-specialist researchers working on either global history or other areas. The article argues that a hierarchical system established by the Mongol Empire was followed by an anarchical society where both state and non-state actors acted in their own interests on an equal basis and a balance of power based on the military strength of participants of this system emerged. While both the Zunggars and the Kazakhs tried to change this and become the dominant power in the region, despite the advantage of having access to both Russian and Chinese markets, the Zunggar superiority was

short-lived and ended in the collapse of both polities and a Russo-Manchu dominance as external colonial powers. These two centuries of Central Eurasia have not garnered the attention of IR scholars despite being the pivotal centuries for the later emergence of Russian and Chinese spheres of influence and although many historians paid great attention later on, the attention was mostly paid on the individual actors such as the Kazakh, Zunggar, and Uzbek polities. This article seeks to give a general picture of the era in terms of the geopolitical and systemic changes that the region underwent before Russian and Chinese hegemony over the region in the succeeding centuries.

Geopolitical Shifts and the Legacy of Chinggisid Rule: Tracing Historical and Geographical Transformations in Central Eurasia

Following the reign of Qubilai Qaghan (1260-1294), the Chinggisid polities slowly became rivals, and the power of the great qaghan was limited to Mongolia and China by the beginning of Timur's reign (1294-1307). Timur was perhaps the last real qaghan who could wield significant political power throughout the empire, albeit a waning one. Soon, the Golden Horde allied with the Mamluks against the Ilkhans. This alliance was not based on Chinggisid legitimacy but on Islam, marking the first time a Chinggisid allied with an external power against another Chinggisid. After a while, the Ilkhans lost all power and were replaced by the Jalairids (1335-1432), while in China, the great qaghans were expelled by the Ming dynasty in 1368, and the Chaghataid Khans were reduced to puppet rulers under the Timurids. The Ögödeids had already been weakened by Qubilai during his reign. As a result, by the beginning of the 15th century, the only Chinggisids holding real political power were in the territories of the Golden Horde and Mongolia, and their power was a shadow of what their predecessors had. However, the Mongol political system was more resilient than it seemed. As Zarakol (29) has demonstrated in her book, the Ming and the Timurids adopted Chinggisid modes of sovereignty and, more importantly, their understanding of world order was a continuation of the Chinggisid legacy, though they themselves were not Chinggisids. In fact, Neumann and Wigen (12) argue that this tradition continued into modern times. This was certainly true for the period between the 16th and 18th centuries. What blurs the picture, however, is the introduction of new elements and actors to the region. Islam was introduced into Central Asia long before the Mongols came, the Khitans, and later the

Mongols also brought non-Muslim nomadic populations to the region. More importantly, although Islam continued to play a significant role in social life and even thrived under Mongol rule, becoming the dominant religion, it was still not part of the Chinggisid charisma during the Mongol hegemony in the region. As an example, Öljeitü converted multiple times in Iran (Jackson 26-29), and the Mongol tribes still living in the Kypchak Steppe did not convert to Islam for a long time. However, beginning with Timur, Islam became an important factor in the political ecumene of Central Asia once more.

The Kazakhs, as a result, not only embraced Islam but also promoted it within their khanates. Around the same time, the Oirad Mongols were being converted to Tibetan Buddhism. Their Mongol cousins had begun this process during the Yuan dynasty, and they were among the last Mongolic peoples to convert to Buddhism from their Tengriist belief systems. The Lamas played a crucial role in Oirad politics as well as Mongol and East Asian politics. The Manchus were also Tibetan Buddhists, and they also sought to control and use Tibetan Buddhism to their advantage (Li 74). The Russians were perhaps the only actors in the region who did not share any religious affinity with the other actors, and their discourse on religion and politics was mostly for internal consumption in the Russian public, and Russian attempts at conversion were sporadic and disorganized compared other colonial powers elsewhere. But Islam and Buddhism certainly became important factors in the political landscape of the region. Another religious group that began to play a role were the Jesuits. However, unlike the Franciscans who traveled to the Mongol court, such as Carpini or Rubruck by land, the Jesuits traveled with the Portuguese and sometimes Spanish ships, and they arrived in China first. Their initial attempts in the Ming court were also unsuccessful despite having ingenious members such as Matteo Ricci among their ranks (Chen 102). But the Manchus employed people with useful skills regardless of their religious, ethnic, or social background. Thus, the Jesuits became frequent members of the Manchu court. The Oirads and the Kazakhs, on the other hand, employed the Tibetan and Muslim clergy that were available to them. Due to their connections with European powers, the Russians and the Manchus played a pivotal role in terms of introducing technical innovations to Central Eurasia. Moreover, modern cartographic methods were first utilized by these two powers as an extension of their colonial outreach in the region. Later on, under the leadership of Galdan Taishi (1671-1697), the Oirad Mongols

united to establish the Zunggar Khanate (1634-1755), attempting to imitate the Russian and Chinese polities and undergoing an extensive modernization process that covered various areas. They also aimed to pursue similar colonial policies as those of the Russians and the Manchus in Central Asia.

Meanwhile, the Kazakhs were also busy establishing their own polities. Compared to the Oirads, they faced disadvantages due to their lack of resources and their distance from major trading centers other than the cities of Transoxiana, which were more often prone to raids and attacks compared to the Chinese and Russian trading centers. This resulted in difficulties in attracting manpower with the necessary know-how to their polities. Furthermore, both polities were quite unstable in terms of their political structure and organization. While the Zunggars, albeit often not very centralized, functioned as a unitary state, whereas the Kazakhs were divided into three jüz.

The role of religion further complicated the political landscape. The Kazakhs had officially become Muslims long ago, but due to the persistence of old Turkic and Mongolic practices, thorough social Islamization was taking place at this time, with the Sunni branch gaining prevalence. This period marked significant shifts in the religious and political dynamics of the region, profoundly influencing the historical and geopolitical developments of Central Eurasia. In fact, the Islamization of the Kazakhs dates back to the 8th century (Kurt 254, Yazıcı 13). However, the mass Islamization coincided with the spread of Sufi movements, particularly Naqshbandiyya and Yassawiyya, into the Kazakh steppes in the 12th century (Altunkaya 1-16). These two Sufi traditions, rooted in Maturidi and Hanafi thought, not only influenced the societal structure but also gained political acceptance. Sufi leaders, known as Seyyid, Khoja, or Ata, were considered among the Aksüyek / White Bone (as opposed to the Karasüyek / Black Bone), one of the two main groups in the Kazakh social structure, along with the Töres who are descendants of Chinggis Qaghan.

In other words, Sufis who were respected in society were also respected by the rulers. During the reign of Tauke Khan (1680-1715), privileged arrangements were made for the Sayyids as well as the rulers in the Zhety Zhargy / Seven Jurisdictions, which was accepted as the first constitution of the Kazakh Khanate, where customary and Sharia law were combined (Rustemov). Similarly, it should be noted that after Kasym Khan, Kazakh Khans held their Khanate ceremonies in front of the tomb of Khoja Akhmed

Yassawi in Turkestan, on Fridays, with prayers led by the qadi (Ergaliyeva and Shakauzdauli 300-317). Herein, it is important to mention the letter dated 1715 sent by the Kazakh Khan Gaib Muhammed to the Ottoman Sultan Ahmed III, which clearly shows how the Kazakhs perceived themselves at the highest level. In the letter, while Gaib Khan asks for help from the Ottoman Empire for the Esteks, a tribe of the Bashkirs, he emphasizes that they (the Esteks) are also Ahl al-Sunnah like the Kazakhs (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, fol.6/219). Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that some old Turkic and Mongolian practices, both implicit and explicit, continued within this belief system. Unlike the Kazakhs, the Oirads converted to the Lamaist branch of Tibetan Buddhism. Similar to the Kazakhs, the Mongols' conversion to Buddhism dates back centuries, to the reign of Qubilai Qaghan, but it became socially and politically more prevalent around the 15th century when nobles also began sending their sons to Buddhist monasteries. Additionally, the Muslim begs who became Zunggar vassals also provided a source of intellectuals needed for state building in the Zunggar Khanate.

The Rise of the Kazakhs and Zunggars

The collapse of the Yuan Dynasty in China and the subsequent waning of Chinggisid power in the Eastern Eurasian steppe during the 15th century coincided with a collapse of the political order in the Western Eurasian steppe. Whether these two phenomena were interconnected is beyond the extent of this article. However, as Zarakol suggests, the Chinggisid world order was still prevalent in both areas (Zarakol 89-91). But what followed these collapses was also the synchronous rise of the Kazakhs and the Oirads in the western and eastern halves of the Central Eurasian Steppe. While the Kazakh tribes broke away from the Uzbeks and gained dominance over the steppe areas of most of Central Asia, the Oirads had to fight first with the Ming and then with the Eastern Mongols (Khalkha) for dominance over the Inner Asian Steppe. Esen Taishi's victory in the Tumu Incident over the Ming armies and the capturing of the Ming emperor Zhu Qizhen in 1449 gained him and the Oirads prestige and popularity among the Mongol tribes. By the time of Esen Taishi who became a de facto ruler of the Yuan which continued in Mongolia despite having lost China. In fact, Esen also fought with the last independent Chaghataids of Moghulistan and captured their leader Üveys Khan three times in battle and released him in all instances finally marrying his sister Mahtum

Hanım and converting to Islam (Duglat 401). Taisung Qaghan remained as the nominal ruler of the Yuan Dynasty under Esen's rule, and during this time, the Oirad Mongols became the main power in the steppe, even subduing the Jürchens in Manchuria (Xiao 147). The Tumu incident did not solve the problems with the Ming and later on Taisung Qaghan and Esen Taishi fought each other over the issue of who should be the next Yuan ruler. Taisung Qaghan at this point still had armies albeit not as strong as Esen Taishi, and he also got help from the Ming who was willing to help him in return for his recognition of the Ming as suzerain. Meanwhile, Akbarjin who held the title of Jinong (Prince of Jin 晉王) was married to Esen's sister Checchek whose son Esen wanted on the throne after Taisung Qaghan, came to the Oirads, and in the ensuing war between Taisung's forces and the Oirads, Akbarjin won against his elder brother Taisung Qaghan in 1451. Taisung Qaghan died the next year, but Esen chose to kill Akbarjin and the other Borjigin and Chinggisid members of his entourage in a banquet, claiming the Yuan throne for himself with the title Tengri Boghd Qaghan. He was later killed following a rebellion by his own generals, who were unhappy with his rule and his claim to the Qaghanate, as he was not of the Chinggisid lineage in the traditional sense (his grandmother was a Chinggisid princess, but this was not sufficient for him to become a Qaghan). After Esen's death at the hands of his own men, the Oirads lost their supremacy until the rise of the Zunggars later on.

For the Kazakhs, the developments that took place during the initial phase of their rise were different. They were initially under the rule of the Shibanids during the reign of Abulhayr Khan. Abulhayr Khan was actually an unlikely candidate for the throne, he was taken hostage at a young age, and later on he was aided by Ulug Beg, the ruler of the Timurid Empire, and came to the throne in 1428 after the death of Barak Khan. He began by consolidating his power in the capital Chimgi Tura, and later on extended his power in Siberia by defeating Haji Muhammed, the ruler of the Sibir Khanate and turned his attention to his erstwhile ally, the Timurids. He defeated Shahruh and took control of most of Transoxiana and made Ebu Said, another Timurid contender for power, his vassal. As the Timurids lost most of Khwarazm and Transoxiana between 1430-1446, the Uzbeks upset the balance of power in the region in the long run despite their short-lived ascendancy. Abulhayr Khan himself died circa 1468 fighting against the Kazakhs who by this time began to assert their independence. The Dörben Oirad confederacy also dealt heavy blows to the

Uzbek Khans including Abulhayr Khan. After defeats at the hands of Kazakhs and the ruler of the newly rising Safavid State, Shah Ismail, the Uzbek Khan Muhammed Shaibani recognized the Kazakh Khans as independent rulers of Kazakhstan. Ten years later, his death at the hands of Shah Ismail marked the rise of the Kazakhs as the dominant power in Central Asia.

In a way, the collapse of the political order in East Asia and Central Asia paved the way for the rise of the two polities. The Oirads fell into political chaos following the death of Esen Taishi, but they reorganized as the Dörben Oirad again but they disintegrated as the Torghud tribe migrated westwards in the early 1600s becoming the Kalmyks under Kho Örlük, and the Khoshud tribes migrated to Tibet under Güshi Khan at around the same time. The remaining tribes organized around the Choros and became the Zunggar Khanate under Erdeni Baghadur. The Kalmyk alone were a formidable power and their raids on the Kazakhs, Nogais, Tatars, and Circassians were devastating. But in 1640, when the remaining Oirads in Western Mongolia united with the eastern Khalka Mongols in a qurultai changing the balance of power in the region once more, the Kazakh Khanate was also consolidating its power. The upsetting of the balance of power in Central Asia by Abulhayr Khan had long-lasting geopolitical consequences for the region. As the Timurid power completely dissolved, the Safavids in Iran filled the vacuum and rose to become the main rivals of the Uzbeks, and the subsequent Uzbek/Bukhara Khans consumed most of their power in this rivalry. As the Safavids rose, Islam began to play a more important political role in the Shia/Sunni rivalry in the region.

The Rise of Russia and the Qing

Russia's Strategic Calculations and Siberian Expansion

The Principality of Muscovy had been slowly but steadily rising since the 15th century in Eastern Russia, and after eliminating their own rivals within Russia proper, they set their sights on Kazan and its eastern expansion. As Khodarkovsky (74-78) argues, one of their lesser-discussed goals was to reach China via a land route in addition to exploiting the furs of Siberia, since their access to the ocean was limited in the Baltic and Black seas by the Swedish and Ottoman Empires. Unlike the Rurikids, the Romanov dynasty adopted a more colonialist mindset, utilizing Cossacks as frontiersmen to expand Russian influence into Siberia.

Tactically, the Cossacks and the Russian State deemed it prudent to expand into the northern tundras of Siberia and to steer clear of the steppe zone to avoid any costly confrontations with the steppe polities (Bergholz 46). It is often considered with hindsight that the Russians would eventually become the victors in Central Asia, but for contemporaries nothing was guaranteed. Despite possessing superior firearms, the Russian Cossacks were still no match for the Kazakh, Kalmyk, Zunggar, or Manchu armies that they would later confront. At this point, the Russian grand strategy was to become a power equivalent to the other European powers of the time, and since Central Asia and the Caucasus were out of reach during the 17th century due to a strong Ottoman and Kazakh presence, the Russian objective was to access the Chinese markets to provide a steady source of income for modernizing the Russian state and the military (Perdue, *China Marches West* 77-79). Thus, by circumventing the Kazakh steppe and Central Asia, the Russians first encountered the Zunggars through their Buryat and Kyrgyz vassals. Although the Kyrgyz and Buryat tribes created tense relations between the two over who should be their suzerain and collect *yasak* tax from them in the form of pelts, the two powers soon reached an agreement after a series of military confrontations. They were obliged to pay tribute to both polities (Chonov 52). At this point, the Zunggars became aware of the changing norms of sovereignty. The Russians were not only building forts as physical signs of their sovereignty over the new lands they “discovered,” but were also mapping the region and using these maps as proof of their sovereignty. They also adhered to more traditional forms of taking oaths of allegiance in a Chinggisid fashion from their new subjects, but maps and forts as physical evidence of sovereignty, albeit not new, began to gain more importance.

Manchu Ascendancy and Jesuit Contributions

Meanwhile, in China, the Ming Dynasty began to collapse and was eventually replaced by the Manchu Qing Dynasty. The first half of the 17th century was relatively calm in terms of the Manchus’ relations with the steppe, due to their efforts in conquering China and consolidating power there. However, as the Manchus established the Qing Dynasty in China and consolidated their power, the Jesuits, who had lost their influence for a time at the Ming court, were again active in the Qing court. They were welcomed by the Manchu emperors not for their religious teachings but for the technical know-how

they brought with them. They brought valuable knowledge in metallurgy, iron casting, cartography, mathematics, astronomy, and geography. Later on, they also served as translators for the Qing emperors in their dealings with Western states, including Russia. It was in fact in this context that the first treaty between Russia and China was penned in Latin. The Jesuits working in the service of the Qing Kangxi Emperor managed to sway influence over both parties. One important innovation that the Jesuits brought to China was the way maps were perceived. Of course, the Chinese were very efficient in drawing maps, and the Chinese cartography tradition goes back centuries. As Kenzheakhmet (47) has also demonstrated, the Ming dynasty, preceding the Qing, was very adamant about mapping the regions of China as well as the neighboring regions of Central Asia and Inner Asia. However, for the Chinese, mapping a space conveyed a different meaning than it did for the Inner Asians. It was either for administrative purposes if the mapped space was part of a Chinese dynasty, or it was for military and political use in foreign relations for mapping the neighbors. And to a great degree, these maps concentrated on the tribes, mountains, rivers, and other strategically important geographical features. However, as the European powers began to colonize Africa and the Americas, mapping a space without “state” control over that space began to mean claiming sovereignty over that space. The Russians understood this soon enough, and the Manchus and Russians saw an advantage in mapping the areas not directly under their control.

Contested Steppes: Sovereignty and Strategy in the Shifting Borders of Eurasia

However, despite not having states in a European or sedentary sense, Eurasia was not militarily or politically a no man’s land. Unlike the other victims of colonialism in Africa and the Americas, the Eurasian nomads still had the military and political capacity to rule over these areas and to challenge Russian or Manchu claims based merely on maps. In fact, during the 17th century, the main struggle for hegemony in the Central Eurasian steppes was between the Kazakhs and the Zunggars. The Russians and the Manchus were at best external powers attempting to exert their influence in the region. As discussed above, the collapse of the Chinggisid states created a power vacuum, and the Kazakhs and the Zunggars were vying for hegemony over the region by the 17th century. In fact, both the Kazakh khans and Zunggar khans were trying to emulate what Chinggis Qaghan had achieved. Therefore, the initial struggle

for hegemony over the region was between these two groups. The Zunggars and the Kazakhs at this point still viewed geographical space in a more traditional Eurasian sense. A patch of land could be used in a defined order according to the seasonal changes by different groups, therefore they often laid claim on the people inhabiting the land rather than the land itself. Sovereignty over the land came with it. Of course, this is not to say that they had no sense of fixed borders. But the strategic goal in their wars was to gain people and livestock rather than setting fixed land borders. The Zunggars would at times erect steles in the areas that roughly corresponded to a border, or that were the site of important events, and this was a tradition going back to the Tang times and the Türk Qaghanate. This was why in *barantas* the Kazakhs and Zunggars would rather kidnap people and herds than lay claim on a certain area, and would return to their own area soon after. But by the 18th century, after failed negotiations with the Zunggars, the Russians finally reached the Qing Empire via Siberia (Shan and Wang 97). After a series of skirmishes in Siberia where the Russians built forts and took allegiances of vassalage from some Tungus tribes in Manchuria, the Russian Empire and the Qing Empire signed the Treaty of Nerchinsk on the 27th of August in 1689. This treaty became a blueprint for later treaties as well. It was drafted by the Jesuits in the service of the Qing emperor Kangxi (1661-1722). This treaty came as a result of Russian incursions into Northern Manchuria, the homeland of the Manchu people. The Russians were essentially trying to reach the Qing Empire, and they heard that the “Altan Qaghan” was beyond the Argun River. So, a group of Cossacks set out to take the region south of the Argun River and took allegiances of vassalage from the Tungus and Manchu tribes living there. But soon after they built a fort in Albazin, the Manchus with their Korean allies sent an expeditionary force that also included firearms and naval power in the river basin. The Russians had finally met their match in terms of firepower in Asia. The Russian force was defeated in 1685 and the Russians came to the realization that they would not be able to hold onto the Amur River basin, and after all, their grand strategy in the east was to commence trade with China on advantageous terms rather than getting yasak tax in the form of pelts from some Tungus and Manchu tribes in the Amur basin. The Treaty of Nerchinsk delineated the Russo-Manchu border. They also aimed at setting their borders in Mongolia as well, but this could not be achieved due to two reasons. The first reason was that both the Manchus and the Russians laid

claim over the Buryats and the other Mongol tribes in the Baikal region. The Russians laid claim in virtue of their having “discovered” and mapped the region, and the Manchus also began mapping their northern territories with help from their Jesuit advisors, and laid claim to the region on their claim to qut/tianming of the Yuan Dynasty which ruled over the area some centuries ago. The second reason was a more fundamental one. The Zunggars had just attacked the Eastern Mongols in the Selenge region and were also laying claim on the same area, and the fact on the field that the Zunggars were dominant in the region both militarily and politically would make any delineation on the map by Russians and Manchus be meaningless. The Russians were in good terms with the Zunggars due to their previous trade, and were also providing firearms to them. The Manchus were therefore wary of the Russian intentions in Mongolia. And the Zunggar Khan Galdan was also boasting of an alliance with the Russians, and he claimed the Russians would attack together with the Zunggars if it came to war with the Qing (Chang 123). At around this time, the Zunggars themselves were busy with their own state-building process. Galdan Boshughtu Khan, who was educated in Tibet was also very close with the fifth Dalai Lama, and after his brother Sengge was killed by rivals, he was permitted by the Dalai Lama to give up his status as a Lama and assume the Zunggar throne in 1671. His Tibetan connection also brought with it the alliance of the Khoshud Oirads who migrated to Tibet. He was given the title of Hongtaiji by the Dalai Lama after his victory over his rivals. This marked also the political entry of Tibetan Buddhism into Mongol politics at higher levels. Normally a Chinggisid ruler or a Chinese emperor (Ming emperors bestowed titles on Mongol rulers after the Yuan Dynasty was ousted from Mongolia) would bestow such titles to give legitimacy to the new ruler. But Galdan sought to legitimize his rule by the blessing of the Dalai Lama. Meanwhile in East Turkistan, the last Chaghataid rulers were also ousted from power and were replaced by Naqshibandiya Khojas. However, two groups, the Aktagh Khojas and Qaratagh Khojas began a struggle amongst themselves, and the Aktagh Khojas sought refuge in Tibet upon which Galdan seized the opportunity to take the region under his control. Galdan defeated the Qaratagh group and installed the Aktagh group as his proxies in the region (Kalan 58). Next, he turned his attention to the west after using a Kyrgyz raid into Moghulistan as a pretext, and defeated the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz and raided all the way to Taraz and Fargana. It was after these series of victories and

political background that Galdan tried to take control of Mongolia. Qing and Russian empires had every reason to be careful about such a rival. At this point Galdan had already united the Zunggars, subdued East Turkistan, defeated the Kazakhs, his main rivals to the west, and held sway over Tibet and Qinghai via his allies Dalai Lama and Khoshuud Oirads. However, although he managed to defeat and drive out the Khalkha Mongols out of Mongolia and took Mongolia under his control just at around the time of the Nerchinsk Treaty (1687-88), he was later on defeated 1696. But before his defeat at the hands of the Manchus and death, he also learnt the importance of cartography, firearms, metallurgy, and state-building. He was exceptionally well-educated for the Mongol rulers of his time. Despite his devout Buddhist beliefs, he could manipulate both the Muslim and Buddhist groups to his advantage. He even took the Russians on his side during his attack on the Khalkha Mongols in 1688 and he not only received firearms from the Russians, but Russians sent an army into Mongolia as well. He was later on defeated by the Manchu and committed suicide in 1697. His successors, however, despite their political rivalries, continued the reforms. A Swedish cartographer and soldier, Johan Gustaf Renat, who was captured by the Russians during the Great Northern War was captured by the Zunggars during an unauthorized Russian excursion into Zunggar territory in 1716 for discovering gold mines (Chonov 96). He became instrumental in modernizing the Zunggar military by teaching them cannon casting which gave them an edge in their wars with the Kazakhs, Khalkha Mongols, and even the Manchus. But more importantly, he also taught the Zunggar modern cartography and its political significance. He was actually formally a slave under Zunggar captivity, but he married another Swedish captive Brigitta and helped the Zunggars to map their territory, to set up artillery regiments and cast cannons as well as advanced metallurgy to cast better iron cannons. He and his wife were permitted to go back in 1733. Thus, Chewang Rabdan and Galdan Cheren, two Zunggar Khans had the necessary know-how to oppose the Manchu forces as well as to demonstrate military superiority over their Kazakh rivals who were not only attacked by the Zunggar Oirads from the East but were also constantly attacked by the Kalmyk Oirad group to their west. For a time, during the first half of the 18th century, it seemed as though Central Eurasia would see the revival of the Mongol Empire, albeit in a much smaller scale. But it was not to be, Galdan Cheren died in 1745, and his sons began a war amongst themselves. Seizing

upon this opportunity, Emperor Qianlong (1735-1796) led successful expeditions against the Zunggars and in the aftermath of the battles, massacred most of the Oirad Mongols he captured thus ending the Oirad hegemony.

Cartography and Mapping: Political, Economic, and Sociocultural Aspects

Cartography studies date back to the 5th and 6th centuries B.C.E. It is known that the first sophisticated map, characterized by the systematic use of latitude and longitude, projection, and extensive geographic coverage, was created by Claudius Ptolemy of Alexandria, who was part of the Greco-Roman cartographic tradition. Ptolemy, a mathematician, astronomer, and geographer, mapped parts the continents of Asia, Europe, and Africa. Although Ptolemy's maps have not survived to the present day, his explanatory texts have had a significant influence on Islamic cartography, exemplified by Al-Khwarizmi in the 9th century and Al-Idrisi in the 12th century, as well as on Western cartography of European origin (Dilke 177-178).

However, it was during the Age of Exploration, spanning from the 15th to the 17th centuries, that cartography truly experienced a renaissance. This resurgence was driven by the demand for accurate maps to guide ambitious voyages of exploration (Fernandez-Armesto and Woodward 749-752). European cartographers, drawing upon classical knowledge and motivated by the spirit of exploration, developed new techniques and tools to depict the world with unprecedented accuracy. During this period, maps and cartography became tools for European expansionism in various ways as will be discussed, and later on Russia and the Qing Empire also adopted this strategy in their expansion into Central Eurasian steppes and Siberia.

The utilization of maps and cartography for political aims had multiple phases. First of all, many of the areas of the world that were *tabula rasa* for the expansionist powers became more navigable thanks to technically more accurate maps that allowed soldiers and settlers to have a better grasp of these new environments. The developments in cartography gave an edge to the Europeans in their expansionism in two distinct ways. The first advantage that technically superior maps provided was the technical superiority they provided to the European settlers and soldiers in planning settlements, military and geopolitical decisions and maneuvers. This was paralleled later on only by the invention of the planes that gave a superiority in observing as

well as locating the enemy forces when making military decisions. While the medieval Islamic and Chinese maps were mainly concerned about peoples and the rough location of countries, the new European maps contained information on more precise geographic data. While this kind of information could be found in Chinese and Islamic geographies, rather than maps, this information was mostly sketchy and based on hearsay. The main driver for these technical developments was initially navigation. It was a matter of life or death for the sailors to determine exact locations. One of the most notable advancements in cartography during this era was the development of the portolan chart, a navigational map used by sailors to plot their courses along coastlines and across oceans (Ash 509-512). These charts, distinguished by their detailed coastlines, rhumb lines, and compass roses, revolutionized maritime navigation and played a crucial role in the expansion of European powers into distant lands. Portuguese and Spanish explorers, in particular, relied on portolan charts to navigate the perilous waters of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, leading to the discovery of new trade routes and territories. Other European nations such as the Netherlands, Britain, and France also extensively utilized cartography during their colonial expansion efforts. Maps became indispensable tools for planning military campaigns, establishing fortified outposts, and asserting territorial claims in distant lands (Craib 9-16).

Portuguese cartographers, for instance, produced detailed maps of their African and Asian territories, which were instrumental in navigating trade routes and establishing trading posts along the coastlines of Africa, India, and Southeast Asia.

These technical developments in return not only turned into economic gain, but also into political tools for expansionism. The second benefit that having technically more precise and better maps was gaining political superiority against the European rivals in the newly “discovered” lands. Demarcating a land on maps and mapping previously “unknown” lands in themselves became legitimizing tools for colonizing those lands in the eyes of the European powers. Drawing lines on a map came to signify drawing borders on land in a legitimate way, and continues to be so. A recent example is the Chinese maps demarcating most of the South China Sea as Chinese maritime areas, or the Greek Sevilla Map both with maximalist claims in the Mediterranean. While previous treaties were mostly containing only the

treaty text defining the agreed upon borders in the case of a land takeover by signing parties, the new treaties began to include maps beginning from the early modern Era. While drawing a map alone is not sufficient today, as in the case of the Sevilla Map, when backed by a strong army and navy as in the case of China, such acts might still act as political tools, and this was definitely the case during the early modern and modern eras.

Moreover, some cartographic efforts were entirely culturally motivated. Jesuit missionaries, for example, played a significant role in the colonization and evangelization of the Americas. Jesuit cartographers, including Matteo Ricci and José de Anchieta, produced maps of newly discovered territories to support their missionary activities. These maps often depicted geographical features, indigenous settlements, and mission stations, serving not only as navigation tools but also as means for exploring and spreading Christian teachings among indigenous populations. Similarly, Jesuits traveled to Asian countries such as China, India, and Japan to propagate Christianity. Missionary societies sponsored the production of maps detailing missionary routes, native populations, and target areas for evangelization (Cattaneo 71-86). These maps provided crucial intelligence for missionaries and acted as visual aids during interactions with local communities. The missionary endeavors in Africa, which escalated in the 16th century and intensified into a competitive arena by the 19th century, can be cited as an example in this context. In addition to their religious pursuits, missionaries also endeavored to understand the languages and cultures of the communities they engaged with, producing ethnographic maps. Similarly, like its European counterparts, Tsarist Russia generated religious, linguistic, and cultural maps to consolidate its dominion over the regions it occupied. Notably, the Kazan Spiritual Academy, established in 1842, served as a significant instrument for the religious and cultural assimilation of the peoples of Turkestan (Özdemir 141).

In the case of the Americas, the Pacific Island chains and sub-Saharan Africa where statecraft, cartography and political structures were seen less developed by the European powers, maps became tools of expansionism. What a European power needed to do was to “explore” and map an area unknown to the other Europeans, and thus lay claim on that area after mapping it. In this way, coupled with the military advantage of firearms these peoples became victims of colonialism. According to the European

approach, unmapped land was no man's land. In fact, territorial claims over fixed borders and recognition of these claims by peers became and continues to be the basic conditions for being recognized as a state.

On the other hand, Chinese and Muslim cartography traditions actually had deeper historical roots. But, by the 17th century, with the exception of the Ottomans, the map making and cartographic traditions of the Europeans developed far beyond them. Especially the maritime traditions and sailing in the Oceans made it more vital for the European maritime powers to develop better maps. The Muslim merchants who navigated the Indian Ocean for centuries by then did not have a need for such precise maps since they navigated mostly based on personal experience and tradition like the Polynesian sailors who navigated the vast expanses of the Pacific Ocean without maps or even writing, but rather relied on stars and personal experience. In the case of the Mongols and their predecessors, the Song Dynasty (960-1279) however, maritime and land route trade was strongly supported by the state and there was an expansion of geographical knowledge thanks to the Mongol conquests which brought Chinese and Muslim know-how together. However, since both traditions lacked Ocean faring experience, such precise maps were not produced during the Yuan as well. As mentioned above, the Ottomans were an exception within the non-European world since they were the only non-European actor at the time with global ambitions spanning from Indonesia to West Africa. The Ming Dynasty also continued the Mongol policies in Central Asia and the Indian Ocean for a while but later on they burnt down their own fleet and gave up their ambitions in Central Eurasia following the Tumu Incident in 1449.

Of course, this is not to say that the Muslim and Chinese worlds were unaware of the political and military value of maps. For the Chinese, maps had always been political and strategic tools for decision-making and planning. However, the Chinese and Islamic approaches to maps differed from those of the Europeans. For the Chinese and Muslims, maps were often tools for intelligence gathering on their neighbors, intended for possible military operations, as well as for geopolitical decision-making. In the Islamic tradition, there was also the additional aim of gaining scientific knowledge about the world around them, with the hope that those lands could be incorporated into the Islamic fold. Much like the Jesuits, they

sought to gather information to facilitate future conversions to Islam. However, since Arab expansionism ceased with the Abbasids, the primary purpose of mapping became knowledge acquisition. As a result, maps were often crude, and aside from major geographical features, they primarily focused on the rough locations of tribes and countries in relation to each other. Therefore, most of the time, the Islamic tradition remained stagnant in terms of technical development. This is why, despite both traditions originating from Ancient Greek scholarship, the Muslim tradition fell behind the European one, despite having surpassed it during medieval times, when most Muslim states had larger political ambitions.

Knowing the existence of and mapping an area never meant laying claim to an area for the polities in Asia and Africa. In fact, the Chinese drew crude maps of Inner Asia and Central Asia early on, but this was for decision making processes. Even when the Tang Dynasty ended the Türk Qaghanate and brought the Jimi System which brought the steppe under loose Chinese control, this control and the local administrations were merely nominal. The Mongols also used maps mostly for military and strategic decisions. They mostly relied on Islamic and Chinese maps, and for them, legitimate claim on a land derived from Tengri rather than lines on a paper. Therefore, it is no wonder that the Russians were the first to utilize maps as a tool for expansionism in Central Eurasia. Russian expansion in Siberia was unhindered, all they needed to do was to send Cossack parties, map an area alongside oaths of allegiance to the Aq Qaghan (the Russian Tsar) from the local population. This was mainly modeled on the European expansionism in the Americas. While the Muslim and Turco-Mongol traditions did have dichotomies such as nomadic-sedentary, Muslim-Infidel, they did not have a civilized barbarian dichotomy like the West and China. But the approach to the so-called barbarians differed in China and Europe by the early modern era. In the Chinese tradition there was no “burden” for the Chinese as a whole or the emperor as an individual to go out and conquer those barbarians to civilize them. The emperor was free to choose “punishing or pacifying” these barbarians but being considered as a barbarian by the Chinese did not necessarily make it a just war for the Chinese to wage war and conquer those peoples unlike the medieval and early modern European understanding of a just war. The Russians, despite having been Mongol vassals for centuries, began to embrace European ideas after Peter I’s modernization efforts. As early as the 15th century, Russians were employing

European cartographers in their expansions. The unorganized groups following the collapse of the Sibir Khanate (1598), were considered as legitimate targets for exploitation in Siberia. But the Mongol tradition continued as the Russians called their emperor as Aq Qaghan in official documents and asked for oaths of allegiance and jasaq taxes. The Russians finally met their match in the form of the Kazakh Jüz and the Zunggar Khanate. The Russians initially refrained from direct military confrontations with both groups. To make matters more complicated, a group of Oirads headed by the Torghuds migrated west in the early 17th century, and settled in the lower Volga region close to the Russian heartland on the Northeastern shores of the Caspian Sea at a time when Russian Emperors claimed to have rid themselves of the so called “Tatar Yoke”. This showed that Russian superiority in the region was not as strong as they claimed. But the Russians continued to lay claim to the areas that the Cossacks “discovered” and as they came in contact with the Zunggars, this became the end of Russian unhindered expansion in the East. While the Ottomans and the Central Asians were boasting of cities more ancient and sometimes as developed as the Russian cities, the Zunggars were mostly nomadic, and did not have such claims. The same was mostly valid for the Kazakhs who despite having ancient cities under their control were themselves mostly nomadic. Therefore, the barbarian-civilized dichotomy for the Russians was based not only on life-style, but also on military power. Those who could field armies that were on par with the Russians were deemed worth being negotiated and recognized as states, those who could not, were not considered as such.

Changing Geopolitics and Maps

During one of the skirmishes with the Russians, the Zunggars captured afore mentioned Johan Gustaf Renat. He was sent to Siberia to help the Russian expansion there, and was taken captive by the Zunggars in 1716 near Lake Yamysh where the Russians were exploring gold mines (Haines 145). He was mapping the area for the Russians, but under Zunggar captivity he helped the Zunggars to map their territories and the Zunggars were quick to realize the intrinsic political value of maps. He also helped them to cast canons and taught metallurgical technology which they put to good use in their consequent wars. He served under Tsevang Rabdan and Galdan Cheren Khans. In fact, Renat returned to Sweden with two maps that are the earliest extant maps of Central Eurasia drawn by Mongols, and these maps were more accurate than the Jesuit

and Russian maps that were drawn later (Poppe 158). Drawing borders had great political implications for the peoples of the region at an existential level, for the first time, the Russian, Manchu and Mongol polities agreed on fixed borders and constrained the nomadic subjects and their identities within these fixed borders (Perdue, “Boundaries, Maps, and Movement” 265-67). There was a similar attempt, between the Chinese Song and Khitan Liao dynasties at the treaty of Shanyuan (1005) tried to set borders and prohibited people from crossing these borders without permissions of both sides or changing allegiances (Standen 25), but in the case of Russo-Manchu treaties and Russo-Zunggar treaties, maps were also involved. The Zunggar maps show the possibility that either Renat himself or other Europeans helped the Zunggars draw detailed maps of their areas, and one of the maps (Figure 1) that Renat brought with him to Sweden might have been drawn by the Zunggar Khan Galdan Cheren himself (Perdue, *China Marches West* 207).



Figure 1. Map of Zungaria and Central Asia which is thought to have been drawn by Galdan Tseren Khan (Renat, [Map of Russia])

The Manchus had the Jesuits in their service who first came to China during the Ming. In fact, the first treaty between the Russians and the Manchus was drafted in Latin thanks to the Polish Jesuits in the retinue of the Manchus who acted as interpreters (Perdue, *China Marches West* 256).

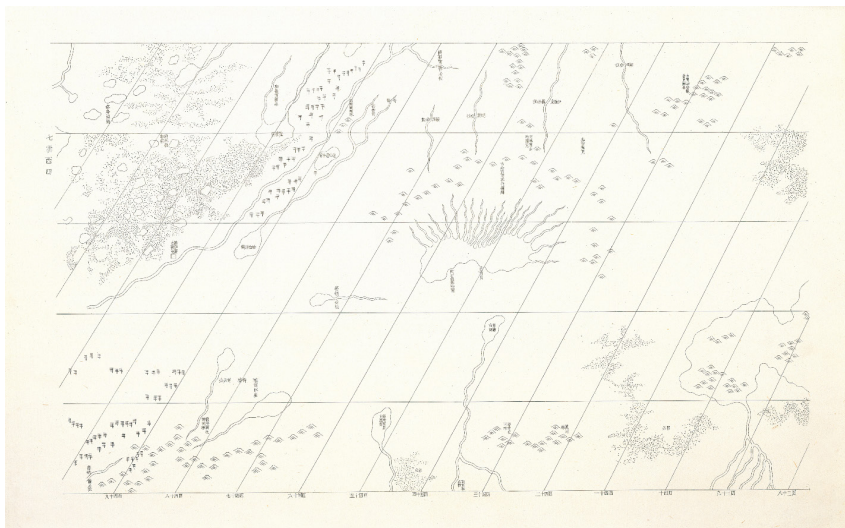


Figure 2. A fragment of the Qianlong Atlas (Chinese version), detail showing the Aqsaqal-Barbī Lake (modern Shalqar Tengizi) in the Kazakh Khanate. The atlas with large-scale maps was finished in 1766 and is now known as Qianlong shisan pai tu 乾隆十三排圖 /Atlas of the Qianlong Reign in Thirteen Rows (Benoist)

The Manchus were also active in Central Asia and drew maps of Central Asia as borderlands or peripheries of the empire. In fact, after China, their main goal was to dominate the whole steppe as successors to the Mongol Empire. They had formed marriage alliances with the Mongols, and acted like Chinggisid rulers, aiming to create their own dynasty as the new Chinggisids. Their understanding of sovereignty also began to change, and they used maps for better control over Mongol and Turkic subjects. The banners system they brought to the Mongol tribes prohibited them from migrating to areas other than their mapped and demarcated banners. As a result, a clash between the Manchus and the Oirads became inevitable. The map (Figure 2) above shows a Manchu drawn map of the Kazakh Steppe. As can be seen, this map was drawn during the Qianlong Emperor's

reign (1735-1796). This map is of course drawn half a century after the Mongol maps brought by Renat, and therefore is more complicated and accurate. But the Mongol map contains more information. Stylistically it was different from the Manchu map above, which shows that the Mongols blended their own traditions with the newly introduced western cartography while the Manchus mostly stuck to the western tradition, and most probably the maps were drawn by Jesuits and the texts were written down by Chinese officials both working under a Manchu official who knew the local toponyms better than both. After the treaties of Nerchinsk (1689) and Kyakhta (1727) delineating borders and mapping Manchuria, Mongolia and Central Asia became an important tool of Manchu strategy in their rivalries with the Russians and the Zunggars. The maps also show the Kazakh Steppe. The Manchus tried to establish and later on managed to ally with the Kazakhs against the Zunggars for a while, but the Kazakhs were fiercely independent and at times some Kazakh leaders also helped the Zunggars. The Manchu expansion in East Turkistan was definitely an event alongside Russian expansion, that limited the regional actors' abilities. One could ask the question why the Kazakhs and other Central Asian actors of the time failed to draw their own maps. Unlike the Russians and Manchus, who had western technicians in their employ, and the Zunggars who took western captives such as Renat who was more than willing to help them against the Russians, the main enemies of the Swedish Empire at the time, the Kazakhs and other Central Asians had no access to this technical knowledge or personnel. In fact, much later, as Kolodziejczyk points out, the Kalmyks would also be targets of an anti-Russia alliance with a Polish letter to the Kalmyk Khan Ayuki, but this mission was captured by the Russians and could never reach the Kalmyks (Kolodziejczyk 232). The only possible alternative for the Kazakhs was the Ottomans, but the Ottoman Empire was more concerned with the Balkans and the Habsburg Wars during this period. The map (Figure 4) below was one of the maps of Central Asia brought to Sweden by Renat. As a comparison, a map (Figure 3) drawn by the Jesuits can also be seen below. Not only is the map brought by Renat more accurate, it also contains more detailed information on topography and toponyms. While the map titled as the map of the Russian Empire (the Latin title calls Russia as the Muscovite Empire though) contains political borders of the time as rough borderlines between polities, the Renat map

does so in more detail. This attention to detail in the Renat maps shows not only the technical level of the maps but also their aims. The red line that can be traced in the map clearly demarcates the Zunggar borders unlike the Russian map which only shows the approximate locations of the polities in Asia with very crude and unproportionate drawings.

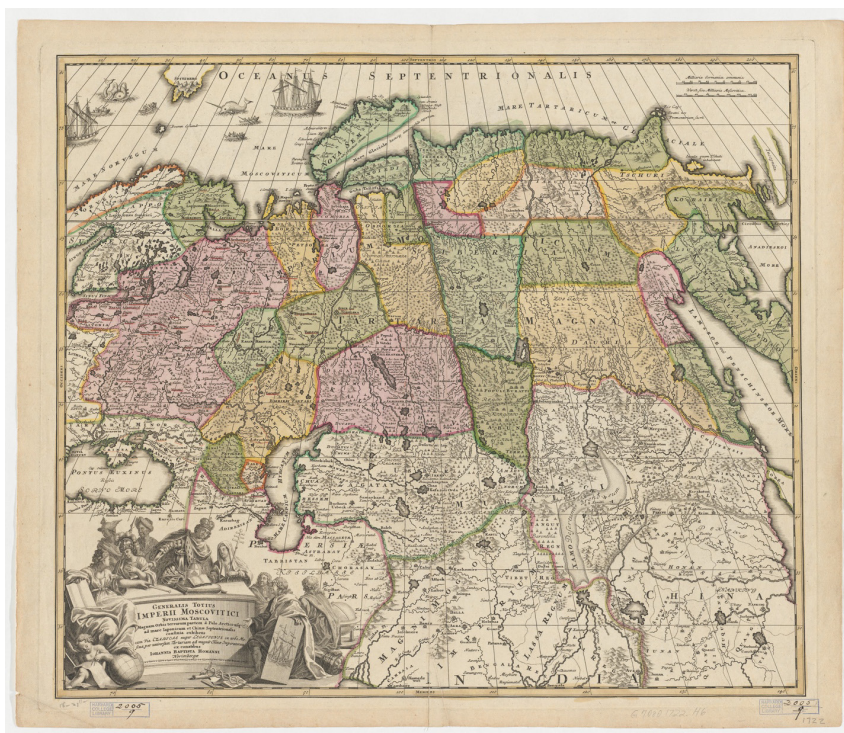


Figure 3. Generalis totius Imperii Moscovitici (General map of the entire Muscovite Empire), 1720 (Homann)



Figure 4. Charta öfwer landet Songarski Kalmucki med ther under lydande kottoner [Map of the Zunggar Kalmyk Land with the Subject Tribes] (Renat, [Map of Russia])

Consequently, the evolution of cartography in Central Eurasia during the 17th and 18th centuries demonstrates how maps became pivotal in shaping the geopolitics and sovereignty of the region. European powers, along with the Zunggars, Russians, and Manchus, recognized the political value of cartography in controlling vast steppes and nomadic populations. Maps were not just tools for navigation; they became essential instruments of power, allowing empires to legitimize their territorial claims and assert sovereignty over newly discovered lands. Johan Gustaf Renat's contribution to Zunggar cartography exemplifies how access to Western technical knowledge strengthened the strategic capabilities of non-European powers, while the Manchus, aided by Jesuit cartographers, used maps to consolidate their territorial control, particularly in Central Asia. In contrast, the Kazakhs and other Central Asian actors struggled to compete with these external forces due to their limited access to similar cartographic advancements.

At the same time, maps during this period played a far-reaching role in more than just military campaigns. Detailed maps produced by colonial powers became fundamental tools for delineating borders, facilitating the movement of trade routes, and even shaping cultural and linguistic interactions. As Central Eurasia transitioned from a fluid, nomadic landscape to one defined by fixed borders, maps enabled empires to solidify their influence and authority. This shift was not only political but also deeply economic and cultural, as the act of mapping territories laid the groundwork for asserting and maintaining sovereignty, ultimately shaping the historical trajectory of the region.

Conclusion

Following the collapse of the Chinggisid polities in Eurasia, a power vacuum appeared that gave rise to new empires and states. While the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire and the Manchu Empire receive most of the attention among these newcomers, the Kazakh Khanate and the Zunggar Khanate which rivaled both each other and Russia and the Manchu Empire for domination of Central Eurasia are often overlooked in the hindsight knowledge that their enterprises were not to be success stories. However, for their contemporaries both were strong and resilient states and to the last moment were candidates to rule over Central Asia. Additionally, they were not unaware of the developments that were taking place in areas such as cartography, firearms and cannons as is often claimed in Sinocentric and Russocentric historiography that depicts these two groups as outdated polities in need of civilizing for their own sakes. This kind of colonial historiography needs to be challenged and as this paper demonstrates the two formidable polities that emerged in Eurasia around the same time, the Kazakh Khanate and the Zunggar Khanate, contended for dominance over the Central Eurasian steppe despite the rising colonial Russian and Manchu empires that took advantage of the rivalries between the two. Their conflicts resulted in significant human losses and had enduring effects on the region, both culturally and politically. The Zunggars leveraged their geographic advantages and access to superior technology and financial resources to inflict serious setbacks on the Kazakh Khanate. The Kazakhs, fragmented by these assaults, were eventually compelled to seek Russian protection. By the time the Zunggar Khanate disappeared in the second half of the 18th

century, it was too late for the Kazakhs to establish their own state as a dominant power in Central Asia. In a sense, the conflicts between these two regional actors paved the way for Russian and Manchu takeover of their territories.

This process however is often taken as a benevolent intervention of Russian and Chinese “civilizations” that helped these “backward barbarians” to advance their civilizations. However, these technologies that were brought by the Russian and Qing empires primarily helped to build colonial spheres in the steppe and cartography was used as a tool in demarcating Russian and Qing interests as well as laying claim on lands that were actually ruled over different polities that all stemmed their legitimacy from a much older steppe tradition. Although the Russian and Qing empires also derived their legitimacies from this same tradition, they employed cartography and new ideas stemming from Europe to legitimize their colonial expansion while at the same time depicting these lands as *tabula rasa* like the Europeans did in Africa and the Americas, deeming the already existing states and political structures as outdated and therefore illegitimate. This was the main difference in the employment of the new technologies by these four Eurasian powers. While the Kazakhs and the Zunggars employed the new technologies as much as their geographic isolations permitted them, the Russians and the Qing Empire not only utilized these technologies, but also employed a colonial ideology to legitimize their colonial expansion. While they took allegiances from the groups living in these areas in a Chinggisid fashion, they also claimed that by merely mapping these areas they had the right to claim that land based on the premise that the pre-Russian and pre-Qing polities were not to be taken as “states”.

But the Zunggars as the more organized state of the two, had certain advantages against the Kazakhs to their west, and they saw Kazakh weaknesses at the time as well as the disorganized state of the region as an opportunity to further enlarge their state. Eliminating the Kazakh steppe would not only eliminate their enemy but would also add the Kazakh population and fighting forces to the Zunggar cause. The same was also valid in the Zunggar-Khalkha competition to the east. Ironically both attempts drew the colonial Russian and Chinese expansion into the steppe. First the Khalkha leaders felt compelled to ask for assistance from the Manchus in

the east, much later, the Kazakh leaders beginning with the head of the junior jüz asked for Russian help. In a way, the Zunggar ambition to reunite the state under their hegemony and end the anarchic system in Central Asia ended in a new hierarchical order, but this order had no place for the Zunggars themselves and the dominant powers were the external actors. Different tools such as new political arguments, maps, military technologies and settlements were used by almost all the parties save the Kazakhs who did not have access to these or in some cases very limited access. This would transform the region of Central Eurasia forever, and the Eurasian steppe and the neighboring areas would be divided into two as Central Asia and Inner Asia solely based on Russian and Chinese spheres of influence. One could easily anachronistically see good or evil in these events, but actually both the Zunggars and Kazakhs were actually trying to rebuild the Chinggisid World order against the Russian and Chinese onslaughts into their territories.

However, the efforts of the Zunggars and Kazakhs to reorganize their polities, along with their understanding of modern political theory in dealings with their Russian and Chinese counterparts, as well as their adherence to Chinggisid political ideology, demonstrate that these groups were not the backward, disorganized nomads often portrayed in nationalist Russian or Chinese historiography. Despite their modernizing efforts and their ability to stave off Qing and Russian expansion for a time, the Zunggars also inadvertently weakened the Kazakh Khanates and the Khalkha Mongols, who were subsequently forced to become subjects of the Manchu and Russian empires, respectively. While this historical fact is crystal clear to a modern reader, it was not so to their contemporaries and both the Zunggars and the Kazakhs were in pursuit of reviving the Chinggisid legacy albeit in a new form that actually also changed. Unlike Wittfogel (Wittfogel 469-478) and others who follow his ideas, the steppe was not a place of oriental despotism where time, people, ideas and institutions froze in time, but was rather a vibrant and ever-changing environment, and the Kazakhs and Oirads both brought about their innovations to the region in terms of the political order that they hoped to create, and both were actually no more different from the Russian and Qing empires at their starting points, to build up new empires on the lands that was once covered by the Mongol Empire. Thus, they also used cartography and other technologies emanating from Europe as much as they could. But at the end of the day, it was the

availability of these technologies and the rising economic power of the sedentary population centers that determined the outcome.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study. There is no conflict of interest between the authors.

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