

## Sumpa Khenpo Yeshe Peljor and his “History of Kokonor”<sup>1</sup>

Irina Garri, Yumzhana Zhabon

(Institute for Mongolian, Buddhist and Tibetan Studies of the  
Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Ulan-Ude)

Hortsang Jigme

(independent scholar, New York)

**S**umpa Khenpo Yeshe Peljor (1704–1788) stands out as a prominent figure in the Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhist realm. He can be regarded as an exemplar of what is known as Qing cosmopolitanism or ‘Pax Manjurica’. Born into an Oirat Mongol family of Kokonor, he was recognized as the reincarnation of a Tibetan lama, received education within the Geluk monastic tradition, and maintained close ties with the imperial court in Beijing. Sumpa Khenpo lived a long life and bore witness to a turning point in the history of the Mongols and the Tibetans, as they were compelled to submit to the Manchu empire. He was a man of great learning, acknowledged as an *Erdeni Pandita*. His “Collected Works” (Tib. *gsung ’bum*) comprise eight volumes and include 68 compositions. The research collective consisting of Irina Garri, Yumzhana Zhabon, and Hortsang Jigme, produced a comprehensive study, a critical text edition and a Russian translation of one of Sumpa Khenpo’s most significant works, “History of Kokonor”.<sup>2</sup> This paper presents the outcomes of this joint research endeavor.

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*Previous Studies on Sumpa Khenpo*

Sumpa Khenpo and his works were first brought to the attention of academia by the Indian scholar Sarat Chandra Das (1849–1917), a pioneering figure in Tibetan Studies. He published a biography of Sumpa Khenpo, a translation of his Chronological Table (Tib. *re'u mig*) (Das 1889), as well as the most renowned work by this Mongolian scholar, the *chojung* (Tib. *chos 'byung*, 'history of religion') entitled "Paksam Jonzang" (Tib. *dPag bsam ljon bzang*, "Wish-fulfilling tree") (Sum pa mkhan po 1908). It is worth mentioning that concurrently with Das, the Russian sinologist Vasily Pavlovich Vasiliev was engaged in studying Sumpa Khenpo's works. Even prior to the Indian scholar, Vasiliev drew attention to Sumpa Khenpo's significance (Vasiliev 1855). Within the scholar's archives, a manuscript of a Russian translation of "The Chronological Table" is preserved, along with "Excerpts from the work of Sumba Khutukhtu", which represent partial translations and narrations from "Paksam Jonzang". Regrettably, since Vasiliev wrote his works in Russian, and most of them were never published, the contribution of this Russian scholar remained unnoticed within Western academia.<sup>3</sup> Regarding Das's works, the Soviet scholar Andrey Ivanovich Vostrikov later pointed out numerous mistakes in the Indian scholar's translations and works (Vostrikov 1962: 250–256). Nonetheless, Das's role in introducing Sumpa Khenpo's works is indispensable, and despite the errors, his works laid the foundation for all subsequent scholarly investigations.

The subsequent step in the investigation of Sumpa Khenpo's works involved the examination of the catalog (Tib. *dkar chag*) of his *sumbum* (Tib. *gsung 'bum*) or Collected Works. The Japanese scholar Nagao Gajin was first to undertake this (Nagao Gajin 1947). Thereafter, the catalog was also described by Indian scholar Lokesh Chandra<sup>4</sup> and Soviet Tibetologist Bidiya Dandarovich Dandaron (Dandaron 1965). In 1967, Jan Willem de Jong provided a comprehensive summary of the history of the study of Sumpa Khenpo's biography and writings, and he compared four distinct versions of the scholar's *sumbum* (de Jong 1967).

The next crucial step in the exploration of Sumpa Khenpo's works was their publication through modern typographic methods. Between 1975 and 1979, Lokesh Chandra published a facsimile edition of the Mongolian scholar's *sumbum* in nine volumes as part of the Śatapiṭaka series in India (Sum pa mkhan po 1975–1979). In 1982 and 1992, "Tsongon gyi Logyu" (Tib. *Mtsho sngon gyi lo rgyus*, "History of

<sup>3</sup> See Vostrikov 1962: 10; Pubaev 1981: 12–21.

<sup>4</sup> Lokesh Chandra's catalog was published in the foreword of the third volume of "Paksam Jonsang" [Sum pa mkhan po 1959: xvi–xxxii].

Kokonor"), the "Paksam Jonzang", and several other works were published in China (Sum pa mkhan po 1982; Sum pa mkhan po 1992). Furthermore, in 2015, a comprehensive critical edition of the Collected Works of Sumpa Khenpo was released in twenty volumes (Sum pa mkhan po 2015).

Regarding translations of Sumpa Khenpo's works into various languages, Tibetologists have undertaken the following efforts: Yang Ho-chin translated the second chapter of "History of Kokonor" (Sum pa mkhan po 1969) into English. Bidiya Dandaron provided a complete translation of this text into Russian (Dandaron [1972] 2006). Regbi Pubaev translated two sections of "Paksam Jonzang", namely "The Genealogy of the Tibetan Kings" (Tib. *rgyal rabs*) and "The Chronological Table" (Tib. *re'u mig*), into Russian (Paksam-Jonzang 1991). There are two Chinese translations of "History of Kokonor" released simultaneously but in different journals: one by Huang Hao (Sum pa mkhan po 1983–1984a), and the other jointly undertaken by Xie Jian and Xie Wei (Sum pa mkhan po 1983–1984b). Pu Wengchen and Cai Ran jointly translated "Paksam Jonzang" into Chinese (Sum pa mkhan po 2013). This work was translated into Mongolian in traditional script by Tsingele (Tsengel) and Mo Baozhu (Sum pa mkhan po 1993) and into Cyrillic Mongolian by Besud Perenlei Nyamochir (Sum pa mkhan po 2017).

Valuable information about Sumpa Khenpo and partial translations of his works were also provided by Giuseppe Tucci (Tucci 1943), Shagdaryn Bira (Bira 1960), Tsendin Damdinsuren (Damdinsuren 1957), and Regbi Pubaev, who published a comprehensive book on the "Paksam Jonzang" (Pubaev 1981), the only monographic study of this foundational work by the Mongolian scholar. In Inner Mongolia, Erdenibayar studied Sumpa Khenpo's poetry (Erdenibayar 2002) and his biography (Erdenibayar 2007). Research on Sumpa Khenpo in the West ceased for an extended period, until articles by Matthew Kapstein on Buddhist doxography (Kapstein 2011) and Solomon FitzHerbert on the Gesar epic, based on Sumpa Khenpo's writings (FitzHerbert 2015), emerged. The most recent and significant contributions to Sumpa Khenpo studies have been the PhD dissertations and articles by scholars Hanung Kim (Kim 2013; Kim 2017; Kim 2018) and Rachael Griffiths (2020).

### *The life and activity of the Buddhist master*

Sumpa Khenpo was born on the 15th day of the 8th month in the tree-monkey year (1704) in a place called Toli (Mong. 'mirror'), situated on the banks of the Machu (upper Yellow) River south of Lake Kokonor (Tib. *Tsongon*, Chin. *Qinghai*). His father, Dorje Tashi,

belonged to the Batud clan of the Oirat tribe, while his mother, Tashi Tso, was from the Dzungars. The name given to him at birth remains unknown. He became known in subsequent generations as Sumpa Khenpo Yeshe Peljor, a name composed of three parts bestowed upon him during different stages of his life and diverse circumstances. Among seven siblings, he was the fourth child. Their family was associated with the right wing of the Oirat Mongols, descendants of Gushi Khan, who had settled in the expansive pastures of Kokonor in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. The Mongolian clan into which Sumpa Khenpo was born belonged to the princely family (Tib. *rje'u dpon*) of the Kokonor Mongols. When Sumpa Khenpo was two, his father initiated his writing education. The child exhibited remarkable aptitude, mastering the Panchen Lama Prayer by the age of three, taught to him by his father (Samten Chhosphel 2010). When he turned four, he commenced his education at the Gongba Dragkar Melongling monastery, under the tutelage of the Mongolian monk Sokpo Chehor gelong.

In 1710, at the age of seven, he was recognized, based on the recommendation of Labrang monastery's abbot, Jamyang Zhepa Dorje (1648–1722), as the reincarnation (Tib. *tulku*, Mong. *khubilgan*) of Gonlung monastery's abbot, Sumpa Zhabdrung Losang Tenpa Gyaltsen. During the same year, he took novice ordination under Tarshul Ponlop Chokyong Gyatso, adopting the monastic name Losang Chokyong. The designation "Sumpa", which the young tulku also adopted, is derived from an ancient Tibetan clan. This led Sarat Chandra Das and subsequent researchers, lacking access to Sumpa Khenpo's autobiography, to erroneously identify Sumpa Khenpo as being of Tibetan origin. Other Tibetologists, such as Louis Schram, a prominent researcher of the Monguors<sup>5</sup> (Schram 1957), and subsequently, Yang Ho-chin, the English translator of "History of Kokonor" (Sum pa mkhan po 1969: 4), concluded that Sumpa Khenpo was of Monguor descent. This interpretation likely stemmed from the fact that the Gonlung Monastery, where Sumpa Khenpo was recognized as a reincarnation along with the Changkya and Tukwan lineages, was situated in the region inhabited by the Monguors (Chin. Tu). Such interpretations gave rise to considerable confusion regarding Sumpa Khenpo's ethnic and cultural identity. Eventually, scholars including Damdinsuren, Bira, and Pubaev rightly identified Sumpa Khenpo as a Mongolian scholar who wrote in Tibetan (Damdinsuren 1957; Bira 1969: 18; Pubaev 1981: 43). In light of the complex identities prevalent in the population residing in this part of

<sup>5</sup> The Mongour, the Tu people (Chin. Tuzu), the White Mongol or the Tsagaan Mongol, are Mongolic people, one of the 56 officially recognized nationalities in China.

Inner Asia, referred to as Amdo in Tibetan, we will align ourselves with the standpoint of these representatives of Mongolian historiography and designate Sumpa Khenpo as a Mongolian scholar. This choice is supported by Sumpa Khenpo's own words in his autobiography, where he indicates that his father belonged to the Batud tribe (one of the four tribes of the Oirats), that his mother was Dzungar by origin, and that his family traced their lineage back to Gushi Khan.

In 1712, at the age of nine, Sumpa Khenpo arrived at Gonlung Monastery as one of the principal incarnations. It is noteworthy that Sumpa Khenpo's life, representing the Sumpa lineage, was marked by numerous challenges and conflicts. The term 'Sumpa' denoted not only a tulku lineage but also a local clan closely associated with the monastery. The Sumpa clan, in fact, sought to designate tulkus from their own ranks rather than from the external Oirat-Mongolian community. However, it was Jamyang Zhepa who selected this boy from his Mongol patrons' clan, despite the Sumpa clan's opposition. Consequently, the Sumpa clan's influence over local affairs was diminished by the Mongols. As a result, the clan consistently plotted against Sumpa Khenpo, leaving an enduring impact on his subsequent life. Sumpa Khenpo never maintained a permanent residence in the monastery. Despite assuming the role of its abbot on three occasions, he did so without genuine enthusiasm each time.

Most likely, conflicts with local clans significantly influenced Sumpa Khenpo's view of the tulku institution itself. Bira highlighted his substantial doubts about his Khubilgan origins, vehemently criticized this institution, and even declined the Khutukhtu title granted by Emperor Qianlong (Bira 1969: 20). As per Kim Hanung, Sumpa Khenpo did not reject the tulku institution itself (Kim 2018: 150–151). However, being a scholarly individual with a critical mindset, he opposed the excesses associated with this tradition. For instance, in his autobiography, he observed that in Central Tibet, Amdo, and Mongolia, incarnate lamas became as many as "the number of ears in good harvest" (ibid: 150). In this context, he cited the following lines from the Fifth Dalai Lama:

A foolish and inferior child,  
Beautifully decorated with satin piece by piece,  
Put on the higher throne in the midst of a foolish group of followers,  
Is like frost destroying the lotus garden of Buddha's teachings.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> mi shes gdol ba'i phru gu dar zab kyis / /  
phang phung mdzes par byas te mthon po'i khrir / /  
blun po'i 'khor tshogs dbus na 'gying ba yi / /  
ba mos thub bstan pad tshal bcom gyi dogs / / (Cit. according to Kim 2018: 115.)

It is evident that by citing these words written by the Dalai Lama, Sumpa Khenpo conveyed his adverse attitude towards the thoughtless propagation of this tradition.

Looking back at the years when Sumpa Khenpo studied at the Gonglung Monastery, we observe that he delved into Logic, Vinaya, Abhidharma, and Prajñāpāramitā under the guidance of Ngawang Tenzin and Lodro Gyatso, and Lamrim under the tutelage of Chozang Rinchen. In 1716, he formally embraced novice monkhood (Tib. *dge tshul*) under Chozang II. The subsequent year, in 1717, he journeyed to Kumbum Monastery, where he had an audience with the Seventh Dalai Lama, Kelsang Gyatso (1708–1757), during the young Geluk hierarch's stay under the protection of the Khoshot Mongols. From the age of fifteen to twenty, Sumpa Khenpo dedicated himself to the study of the arts (Tib. *bzo rig pa*) and created numerous Buddhist thangkas. In 1720, he embarked on Vajrabhairava meditation. By 1722, he had completed his study of Prajñāpāramitā, and in 1723, he and 700 fellow monks received tantric initiation from the master Pa Rinpoche Ngawang Tashi.

Looking ahead, we observe that among Sumpa Khenpo's teachers were Tukwan II Ngawang Chokyi Gyatso (1680–1736), Changkya Khutukhtu II Ngawang Lobzang Choden (1642–1714)—who extended assistance to the young tulku while in Beijing in 1737—and Changkya Khutukhtu III Rolpai Dorje (1717–1786). It was the latter, rather than the Manchu Emperor, who bestowed upon Sumpa Khenpo the title of Erdeni Pandita in 1749.<sup>7</sup> In response, Sumpa Khenpo bestowed the name Rolpai Dorje (Tib. *rol pa'i rdo rje*) upon Changkya Khutukhtu III. The subsequent Tukwan III Lobzang Chokyi Nyima (1737–1802), a renowned scholar, became a student of Sumpa Khenpo. These three Khubilgan lineages of Gonglung Monastery maintained close connections. The Changkyas and Tukwans primarily resided in Beijing, with the Changkya Khutukhtus serving as imperial mentors (Chinese: *da goshi*). Through their influence, Tibetan Buddhism gained substantial popularity among the imperial elite of the Qing Dynasty.

While being in Amdo, Sumpa Khenpo always aspired to study in Central Tibet. When he was 19 years old, his dream came true. On the 15th day of the 6th month of the water-hare year (1723), he set off to study in Central Tibet. Along the way, Sumpa Khenpo visited numerous monasteries and holy places and eventually reached Lhasa. However, he did not stop there. He continued his journey to Tashilhunpo Monastery in Tsang, where he had two audiences with the Fifth Panchen Lama, Lobzang Yeshe (1663–1737). During the second audience, Sumpa Khenpo was able to take the full *gelong*

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<sup>7</sup> On this matter see below.

monastic vow and received a new name—Yeshe Peljor. Afterward, he began his journey back to Lhasa. Once there, he was received in audience by the Seventh Dalai Lama and joined the Samlo Khamtsen of the Gomang Dratsang within the Drepung Monastery.

In the following year, 1724, during his residence in Gomang Dratsang, a Mongol messenger delivered news to him about an uprising among his fellow tribesmen, the Khoshots, descendants of Gushi Khan. They had rebelled against the Manchu dynasty but were subsequently defeated and suppressed.<sup>8</sup> This terrifying information had such a profound impact on Sumpa Khenpo that he fell seriously ill. Most likely from that moment he developed an ambivalent attitude towards the Manchu dynasty: loyal and hostile at the same time, as we can assume from his writings. In his work "The Chronological Table", he recounts that in 1723, the Olyots (Oirats) of Kokonor suffered defeat at the hands of the Chinese forces. The latter inflicted casualties on over 700 monks, set ablaze numerous monasteries, and in 1724, even razed his native Gonlung Monastery (Paksam-Jonzang 1991: 138). In "History of Kokonor", composed when he was already advanced in age, he expressed these events through poetry. His verses reflect empathy for his fellow tribesmen, while also conveying an understanding of the futility of their uprising. He metaphorically likened the Khoshots to a flock of birds, while the Manchurian troops were depicted as an eagle, and the planet Rahu causing an eclipse of the moon (Sum pa mkhan po, IMBTS, TT-11993: f. 9a).

In this context, Dandaron wrote in the preface to his translation of "History of Kokonor": "Sumpa Khenpo calls for reconciliation with reality, as the struggle against foreign domination has little chance of success. It is necessary to establish peace with the Qing power, relying on it for aid and support in advancing the cause of faith, thereby assisting the Mongols [...]. The prevailing political circumstances shape Sumpa Khenpo's ideology and approach. Unlike Zaya Pandita and Galdan Boshogtu, he emerges as a reformist, conciliator, collaborator, who nevertheless maintains a progressive stance for his time and serves, to a degree, as an educator. It is plausible that if the Dzungar Khanate had not been vanquished by the Qing, Sumpa Khenpo's perspectives would have diverged" (Dandaron 2006: 567). From this excerpt, despite the critical tone of Dandaron's analysis, it is evident that he accurately captured the prevailing ethos of the era in which Sumpa Khenpo lived. This was a turning point in the histories of Mongolia and Tibet, where the Mongols and Tibetans were

<sup>8</sup> The rebellion, which received backing from the Geluk monasteries, was led by Losang Tenzin, the grandson of Gushi Khan. However, it faced ruthless suppression by the Qing forces, ultimately resulting in Kokonor's incorporation into the Qing empire (Petech 1950: 82).

compelled to acquiesce to the Manchus, thus reshaping completely their future trajectories.

So, during his stay in Lhasa, Sumpa Khenpo learned about the Khoshots' defeat in Kokonor and continued his studies at Gomang Dratsang. In 1725, he embarked on visits to numerous monasteries in Ü, including Ganden and Sera, where he engaged with numerous lamas. In 1726, during a Monlam prayer gathering, he attained the *lingse* degree (Tib. *gling bsre*) and honed his debating skills. He persisted in his study of Buddhist disciplines under the guidance of several mentors, including the Seventh Dalai Lama, Gyalse IV, Konpo Lobpon, and Namkha Sangpo. Notably, Namkha Sangpo served as his primary teacher, and through him, Sumpa Khenpo delved into the Lamrim while also receiving various Geluk oral transmissions. An important aspect of his studies in Central Tibet was his interest not only in Buddhist disciplines (Tib. *nang don*) but also in 'worldly sciences' (Tib. *tha snyad*), that subsequently left a discernible impact on his religious and scholarly pursuits.

Regarding the duration of Sumpa Khenpo's stay in Central Tibet, it is crucial to highlight a substantial error in Das's account of Sumpa Khenpo's biography, a mistake that has been subsequently replicated in almost all references to the Mongolian master. This pertains to the claim that Sumpa Khenpo held the position of abbot at Gomang Dratsang from the age of twenty-three and retained this role for a span of five years (Das 1889: 38). Remarkably, the master's autobiography does not corroborate this assertion. Furthermore, Sumpa Khenpo's name is conspicuously absent from the list of Gomang's abbots during that timeframe. Plausibly, Das's error can be attributed to the fact that the Mongolian scholar bore the title "*Sumpa Khenpo*", denoting the *abbot* Sumpa. However, it is crucial to clarify that he acquired this title and position not as a Khenpo of Gomang Dratsang, but rather as a Khenpo of the Dreyul Kyetsel Monastery. This distinction was bestowed upon him by the Tibetan ruler, Polhane Sonam Tobgye (1689–1747) (Kim 2018: 54–56).

In connection with Sumpa Khenpo's time at Gomang Dratsang, another detail of significance emerges: amidst all the historians who wrote in Tibetan, he stood alone in expressing support for the Dzungars. Within his autobiography, he extolled the 'good' approach of the Dzungars, who ousted negligent students from educational centers in Lhasa, effectively cleaning the Dratsangs. He contended that this strategy, when coupled with the exceptional tutelage provided by the foremost masters, engendered an ideal environment for the study of Buddhism in Geluk monasteries. As a result, students could attain, within just two or three years, the level of knowledge that previously required a minimum of 15 years to acquire (Kim 2018: 165).



While studying at Gomang Dratsang, Sumpa Khenpo also distinguished himself through his unconventional stance during the civil war of 1727–1728 between the Ü and Tsang regions, or, as one might also say, between the pro-Dzungar and pro-Manchu factions. The former was led by the ministers Lumpawa Tashi Gyelpo (d. 1728) and Ngapopa Dorje Gyelpo (d. 1728), while the latter was led by Kangchenne Sonam Gyelpo (d. 1727) and Polhane Sonam Topgye, companions and followers of Lhasang Khan, who had been slain by the Dzungars. The first faction assassinated Kangchenne. In response, Polhane organized resistance and ultimately emerged victorious (see Petech 1950). During this period, the still young Sumpa Khenpo, albeit pro-Dzungar, urged the monks of the Lhasa monasteries not to join the army on the side of the Ü province, thus providing significant support to Polhane. This is a highly intriguing detail that has captured the attention of previous researchers. It is documented in Sumpa Khenpo’s autobiography and holds immense importance in understanding his character.

Sumpa Khenpo wrote: “Although I was young and foolish, I expressed the following words without fear even though the Tibetan government would throw me into the river” (Cit. according to: Kim 2013: 175–176). He argued that involvement in the pro-Dzungar faction would inevitably lead to retaliation by the Manchus, a reality that the Amdowa were well aware of, unlike their counterparts in Central Tibet. He expressed it as follows:

Previously, when Amdo people and China were in conflict, monks, who were like greatly flourishing trees of poisonous thorns which grew from now ripening hundreds of crimes produced by non-virtuous seeds of earlier times, gave the doctrine a bad name and participated in the army. Based on this, to Chu-bzang Rin-po-che, who held the mkhan-po position of three great monasteries of Amdo, [a Chinese general] said, “Since you did not stop the monks many of them went to the army”. Then [the Chinese troops] surrounded and put Chu-bzang Rin-po-che, many elder monks and dharma lords of Gser-khog monastery on the second floor of Yamen building, and burnt them alive. This is what I heard. Now it is out of question to appeal for permission for becoming monk soldiers (Ibid: 176).

For taking this stance, Sumpa Khenpo was poisoned but swiftly recovered. According to him, afterwards, numerous monks and people from the Ü region acknowledged his position, considering it a significant service to the Sangha and the lamas of the major monasteries. In appreciation for his assistance, both Polhane and the Seventh Dalai Lama appointed him as the abbot, *khenpo*, of the Dreyul Kyetsel monastery. He resisted this appointment, yet he was

compelled to accept it (Kim 2018: 70). From that point onwards, he became renowned as Sumpa Khenpo.

In 1729, Yeshe Peljor received news of the restoration of the Gonlung Monastery. In the same year, he was ordered by the emperor, conveyed through a messenger, to return to Amdo. Although he resigned from his position as abbot, he delayed his departure and instead traveled to Central Tibet. During his time there in 1729, he learned that Gonlung Monastery was now requesting his return. Simultaneously, Polhane intended to appoint him as an envoy to China (Tib. *Rgya nag mkhan po*). In order to avoid this assignment, he returned to his homeland in 1731 at the age of 28.

However, he felt uncomfortable at Gonlung and thus did not stay for long. He began traveling to various monasteries, delivering teachings, meeting with lamas, and only occasionally returning to Gonlung, residing in a secluded hermitage during his visits. He bestowed initiations at Ganden Rinchenling and then accepted an invitation to lead Pari Tashi Choling monastery, assuming the role of its abbot. During his time there, he painted a magnificent thangka depicting the six-armed Mahākāla, conducted initiations, and taught various rituals, including the grand ritual of offering tormas (Tib. *gtor chen*) and religious dances of Dharmarāja in accordance with the Zhalupa tradition. He received significant Sakya teachings, such as the practice of Guhyasamāja Tantra and Lojong (Tib. *blo sbyong*), from Kumbum Sherab Chojor and Gyupa Khenpo Losang Kunga. Kumbum Tripa Gendun Dondub XXIV (born 1668) granted him the Kalachakra empowerment. On the right side of the Serlung monastery, he established the Ganden Chodzung hermitage and became the abbot of the same monastery. He conferred the Vajramāla initiation upon local residents and secular patrons from Tibet, Mongolia, and China (Samten Chhospel 2010).

In 1735, Sumpa Khenpo received an invitation from the Qianlong Emperor to visit Beijing, and in 1737, at the age of 34, he made the journey to the imperial capital. This visit and his meeting with the emperor gave rise to another myth surrounding Sumpa Khenpo, which, we may surmise, can be traced to the abovementioned article by Sarat Chandra Das. According to Das, the emperor was greatly impressed by the Mongolian master's knowledge and bestowed upon him the title of "the spiritual guide of all the chiefs of Mongolia" and "authorized him to bear the title of Huthogtu (saint)" (Das 1889: 38). However, the master declined this title, as "according to him" it [was] "intended for those who aspired to worldly glory". "Henceforth he rose high in the esteem of the emperor and was declared to be a real Lama" (Ibid: 39).

However, no mention of this episode exists in Sumpa Khenpo’s autobiography. In fact, his autobiography suggests the opposite—that Sumpa Khenpo was disenchanted with his time at court. During his initial audience with the Qianlong Emperor, Sumpa Khenpo conversed more extensively with Prince Guo, given the emperor’s youthful age at the time. But Prince Guo’s primary interest lay in the Nyingmapa school, which Sumpa Khenpo held a negative opinion of. Consequently, when the prince sought a subsequent meeting, the master declined. As a result, the bestowed title and gifts were not significant (Kim 2018: 80–81; Uspensky 1997: 17–18).<sup>9</sup> The following year, Sumpa Khenpo began experiencing leg pain and sought his release. The emperor granted his request, permitting the master to depart from the capital. The emperor summoned Sumpa Khenpo to Beijing for the second time in 1742, when he was 39 years old. However, the subsequent year, he fell seriously ill and left the capital due to his health. Sumpa Khenpo made his third trip to Beijing in 1755, yet this visit involved performing a healing ritual for Changkya Khutukhtu. After receiving gifts and instructions, he promptly departed. These instances of Sumpa Khenpo’s visits to the capital reveal a complex relationship with the ruling dynasty, portraying a dynamic involving strained associations rather than a model *choyon* (Tib. *mchod yon*, ‘Buddhist master – secular patron’) relationship. His contributions to the propagation of Tibetan Buddhism within the empire’s capital remained quite modest in comparison to the endeavors of the Changkya and the Tukwans Khutukhtus. It appears that Sumpa Khenpo genuinely distanced himself from pursuits of worldly acclaim.

In 1746, at the age of 43, Sumpa Khenpo became the abbot of Gonlung Jampaling Monastery. This marked the first of his three terms as abbot there. In this role, he offered teachings and initiations of the 11-faced Avalokiteśvara at the Ganden Chokhorling and presided over the Monlam Chenmo. Based on the recommendation of Changkya Khutukhtu III, he taught classes in Sanskrit grammar, Tibetan language, poetry, astrology, and medicine in Gonlung. Additionally, he undertook the construction of a new prayer temple at Ganden Dechenling, served as abbot of Shedrup Dargyeling for one month, and received teachings and initiations on the four medical tantras, *Gyushi*, from Menrampa Nyima Gyaltsen. In 1750, Sumpa Khenpo embarked on a pilgrimage to Wutaishan (Samten Chhoshphel 2010).

<sup>9</sup> While his retinue was discontent with this treatment, he personally viewed it as a protector’s blessing, as it facilitated his resignation (Kim 2018: 81).

From 1747 to 1748, Sumpa Khenpo wrote his famous treatise on the history of religion titled “Paksam Jonzang”. This work is one of the best-known sources for the history of Buddhism in India, Tibet, and Mongolia. Another of his historical works is the “History of Kokonor”, which he wrote in his later years. The complete collection of Sumpa Khenpo’s works consists of eight volumes, with its xylographic blocks being carved in the monastery of Chugo Serpo. Apart from these two historical writings, his works include numerous texts on philosophy, the art of statue-making and thangka-painting, medicine, astrology, poetics, epistolography, etc. When considering Sumpa Khenpo’s scholarly career, one cannot overlook his indifference to acquiring high scholarly degrees, which he rejected more than once. He was quite content with titles like Khenpo and Erdeni Pandita.

Returning to his life story, we observe that the encyclopedia “Treasury of Knowledge” (Tib. *Shes bya’i gter mdzod*; see Mi rigs dpe mdzod khang, vol. 3: 483–487) and the biography of the master compiled by Samten Chhosphe (Samten Chhosphe 2010) contain information that in 1776, at the age of 66, Sumpa Khenpo traveled to Lhasa. During this journey, he received a solemn welcome in all monasteries, occupied a prominent seat in meetings, conducted public teachings and initiations on Lamrim, and engaged in debates with renowned lamas. However, Kim Hanung notes that Sumpa Khenpo’s autobiography does not provide such information. Instead, it indicates that in that year, he traveled to locations within the modern provinces of Gansu and Sichuan (Kim 2018: 57).

The final point, depicted in varying ways across academic literature, pertains to Sumpa Khenpo’s journeys to Mongolia. Samten Chhophel recounts that around 1771, he ventured to Mongolia and stayed for eight years, conducting teachings, initiations, and rituals, among other activities. Conversely, Kim Hanung observes that Sumpa Khenpo extensively traveled in Mongolia, yet he consistently spent no more than a year in any given location, always returning to Gonlung thereafter (Kim 2018: 58). Nevertheless, the noteworthy aspect remains that Sumpa Khenpo embarked on extensive travels to Mongolia, which holds significant implications for the propagation of Buddhism within the Mongolian region. He made trips to Alashan, where he delivered teachings to fellow Khoshots, and ventured to the Khoshuns of Ordos, Hohhot, and Dörben Kheükhed, as well as the lands of the Yugurs.<sup>10</sup> These journeys were prompted by invitations from Mongolian princely families. During these visits, he primarily assumed the role of a cleric, engaging in diverse tantric rituals (Tib.

<sup>10</sup> The Yugur, Chin. *Yuguzu*, the so-called Yellow Uyghurs, one of the 56 officially recognized nationalities in China.

*dbang, lung, rjes snang, khrid*) and disseminating worldly sciences (Tib. *tha snyad*). The rituals he performed for inducing rain and for retrieving souls gained special popularity.

Summing up the life and activities of Sumpa Khenpo after his return from Central Tibet to his homeland, it is worth noting that the orthodox Geluk scholar also gained fame as a renowned teacher and cleric. Sumpa Khenpo's interest in worldly sciences, or practical knowledge, was apparent both in his younger years and during his studies in Lhasa. However, it was only after returning to Kokonor that he fully committed himself to teaching the people, emerging as a central figure in the Amdo cultural renaissance of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and playing a vital role in the widespread dissemination of Buddhism in Inner Mongolia. In 1788, Sumpa Khenpo Yeshe Peljor passed away at the age of 85, leaving behind a substantial scholarly and spiritual legacy.

*Collected works (sumbum) of Sumpa Khenpo  
and his "History of Kokonor"*

We analyzed seven *sumbums* of Sumpa Khenpo preserved in the following Chinese and international libraries and institutions:

1. Chinese National Library (Chin. *Zhongguo guojia tushuguan*);
2. Labrang monastery library (Tib. *Bla brang mdzod dpe*);
3. Potala Library (Tib. *Po ta la mdzod dpe*);
4. Library of the Northwestern University of Nationalities (Chin. *Xibei minzu daxue tushuguan*);
5. Center of Oriental Manuscripts and Xylographs of the Institute for Mongolian, Buddhist and Tibetan Studies of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences (COMX IMBTS SB RAS);
6. *Sumbum* facsimile edition: Lokesh Chandra, ed. *Gsung 'bum of Sum-pa mkhan-po Ye-shes dpal-'byor*; 9 volumes. New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1975.<sup>11</sup>
7. *Sumbum* critical edition: *Sum pa paṇḍita Ye shes dpal 'byor gyi gsung 'bum* [Collected Works of Sum pa paṇḍita Ye shes dpal 'byor]. Zi ling: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang (20 vols.).<sup>12</sup>

A comparative study of these *sumbums* (excluding No. 7) allowed us to conclude that they are almost identical in terms of the number of volumes, their numbering, the number of pages of each volume, and the number of lines per page, with only rare exceptions. The prefaces to Lokesh Chandra's and the BDRC editions both state that Sumpa Khenpo's *sumbum* xylographs were made at the Gonlung monastery,

<sup>11</sup> <https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW29227> (access 31.08.2023).

<sup>12</sup> <https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW3CN7697> (access 31.08.2023).

while the *sumbum* catalog on the Chinese National Library website notes that the xylographs were made at the Chumig Serpo monastery, located near Hohhot in Inner Mongolia. This information is also supported by Kim Hanung's research. In our opinion, the second point of view is correct.

Therefore, it can be argued that there is only one edition of the *sumbum* of Sumpa Khenpo, produced in the Chumig Serpo monastery and found in libraries of various monasteries and institutes. It consists of 67–69 works spread across 8–9 volumes. According to Lokesh Chandra's description, there are 9 volumes and 67 texts in the *sumbum*, while Bidiya Dandaron indicates 8 volumes and 69 texts, and Kim Hanung specifies 8 volumes and 68 texts. Kim Hanung's research has demonstrated that among the three texts included by Lokesh Chandra in the 9th volume, the first two were not authored by Sumpa Khenpo, and the third one, "The Indian Method of Examining Horses" (Tib. *Rgya gar ba'i lugs bstan rta dpyad dpal gyang zhes by aba bzhugs so*), lacks a serial number. Dandaron included this text in Volume 8 under No. 8 (8–8) and concluded his description of the *sumbum* with it (Dandaron 1965: 53).

"The History of Kokonor", with the full title "New Melodic Song of Brahma Containing the History of Kokonor and Other [Information]" (Tib. *Mtsho sngon gyi lo rgyus sogs bkod pa'i tshangs glu gsar snyan zhes bya ba bzhugs so*), is Text No. 11 of the second volume in Sumpa Khenpo's *sumbum*. The text consists of seven lines per folio and comprises 19 folios, all in the format of 56.2x10.5 cm (COMX IMBTS SB RAS, No TT-11993).

There is also a handwritten version of "The History of Kokonor". Published by the Mongolian lama Guru Deva in Sarnath in 1965 (Sum pa mkhan po 1965), it consists of 33 pages written in blue letters on green paper. Facsimiles of the text were published by Lokesh Chandra and the digital copy by BDRC.

In 1982, "The History of Kokonor" was published in Xining by the National Publishing House of Qinghai (Sum pa mkhan po 1982) in the form of a modern typesetting edition. It was also included in Volume 5 of the Full Collected Works of Sumpa Khenpo, published by the same publishing house in 2015 (Sum pa mkhan po 2015, vol. 5: 220–269).

"The History of Kokonor" was translated into English by Yang Hochen (Sum pa mkhan po 1969), into Russian by B. Dandaron (Dandaron [1972] 2006), into Chinese concurrently by Xie Jian and Xie Wei (Sum pa mkhan po 1983–1984a), and by Huang Hao (Sum pa mkhan po 1983–1984a), and into Mongolian by D. Dashbadrakh (Sum pa mkhan po 1997). It is worth noting that Yang's English translation is partial, covering only the second chapter of the work. Despite its thoroughness and valuable notes, which greatly assisted our work, we identified

numerous semantic errors in Yang's translation, which we have duly annotated in the footnotes to our Russian translation of the text. Yang Ho-chin, like his predecessors, made several mistakes in Sumpa Khenpo's biography, including believing that the Mongolian master was of Monguor origin and served as the abbot of Gomang Datsan during his studies in Central Tibet. Dandaron's translation, on the other hand, contained multiple errors that at times distorted the meanings of entire sentences. Nonetheless, Dandaron's account of Sumpa Khenpo's *sumbum* and the preface to his translation of "The History of Kokonor" proved valuable resources for our research. In 1997, D. Dashbadrakh's Mongolian translation of "The History of Kokonor" was published (Sumpa Khenpo 1997). It remained faithful to the Tibetan original, albeit with scarce accompanying notes.

Evidently, "The History of Kokonor" by Sumpa Khenpo garnered the most attention among researchers studying the author's complete *sumbum*. What factors contributed to such heightened interest in this work? And what is the source's significance in the realm of Tibetan Studies? Let us delve deeper into these questions.

"The History of Kokonor" was composed by Sumpa Khenpo two years before his passing in 1786, when he was 83 years old, at the request of Gushi Khan's descendants—namely, Erdeni Tsetsen, Boshoktu Beiizi, and Tsokye Dorje. In this work, he did not provide references to sources as meticulously as he did in his primary historical work, "Pagsam Jongsang". Instead, he simply noted that the work is written in a narrative style, drawing from the biographies of great lamas, ancient legends, and stories of common people.

"The History of Kokonor" is composed of four main parts along with an extensive separate afterword, which can be seen as an additional chapter. All these sections employ a mixed genre, blending a narrative tone with enumerations of chronological events, poetic interjections, praises, geographical descriptions, folk literary examples, and biographical references. In this relatively concise treatise, a wide range of information is presented, making it challenging to fully comprehend. In the first chapter, the author delves into ancient legends about the origins of Lake Kokonor (ff. 1b1–3a3). The second chapter discusses both secular and religious life in Tibet and the Kokonor region spanning from 1612 to 1786 (ff. 3a–10b6). The third chapter offers an exceedingly poetic portrayal of Kokonor and Amdo (ff. 10b6–14a1), while the fourth chapter extols the contentment of the region's inhabitants, who, according to the author, live in accordance with the primary precepts of Buddhism (ff. 14a1–14b7). The afterword provides a succinct overview of the history of Dzungaria and China, along with geographical insights into these regions (ff. 14b7–19a6). Consequently, this treatise can be approached

from various disciplinary perspectives, including history, religious studies, folk literature studies, geography, and rhetoric. Yet, it appears that delving into the Mongolian master's work from a viewpoint of historical anthropology could yield the most productive analysis, as such an approach could offer deeper insights into the text and its academic significance.

Given that Sumpa Khenpo's work primarily drew the attention of historians, let us initially focus on its historical aspect, particularly the second chapter of the text. This chapter scrutinizes a pivotal period in Tibet and Kokonor's history, occurring during the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, when the head of the Geluk school, the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Losang Gyatso (1617–1682), and the Khoshot leader, Gushi Khan (1582–1654), established a formidable Tibeto-Mongolian alliance. This alliance successfully united all the regions of Greater Tibet (Ü-Tsang, Kham, and Amdo) into a single state. Nevertheless, in the first quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this alliance began to crumble due to the Manchu pressure, leading both the Mongols and Tibetans to succumb to the authority of the Manchu empire.

The value of Sumpa Khenpo's work lies, firstly, in the fact that, in contrast to traditional Tibetan historiography, it focuses primarily on secular rather than religious history in Tibet and Kokonor. Secondly, it stands as the first work in Tibetan historiography dedicated to the Amdo region. Thirdly, it exhibits a distinct 'sectarian' character. What the author presents is not merely history but its interpretation from the perspective of a devoted follower of the Geluk school and a representative of the Oirat-Mongolian community. He was also a contemporary witness to many of the events he describes. This narrative offers comprehensive detail on some events while significantly overlooking others that are equally important. This dual nature defines the paradoxical uniqueness of this work—showcasing its encyclopedic breadth on one hand and, on the other, its distinct viewpoints on events and personalities that differ from the Tibetan historical tradition.

The first notable characteristic of the work is its apparent disregard for the role of the Fifth Dalai Lama in Tibet's history, particularly when compared to that of Gushi Khan. Sumpa Khenpo mentions the Dalai Lama only a few times. While extolling the virtues of Gushi Khan, the author acknowledges that the Dalai Lama bestowed upon the Khan the title of Dharmaraja, Tenzin Chogyal, and that the Khan became Tibet's king (*gyalpo*). However, he remains utterly silent about the fact that Gushi Khan offered Tibet as a gift to the Dalai Lama—a central theme in Tibetan historiography, tracing back to "The History of Tibet" by the Fifth Dalai Lama and reiterated in "Tibet: A Political History" by Tsepon Shakabpa (Shakabpa 1984). This omission can be



explained, in part, by Sumpa Khenpo's affiliation with the Khoshot Mongols and his desire to please his benefactors—the descendants of Gushi Khan. However, by the time he penned his work, Sumpa Khenpo had already established a reputation as an erudite scholar—Erdeni Pandita. It is unlikely that he would have so blatantly distorted historical facts solely to appease his secular patrons. Consequently, it is plausible that the well-known account of Tibet being presented as an offering to the Dalai Lama, the earthly incarnation of Avalokiteśvara, might be a historical myth or an event later embellished significantly within Tibetan historiography.

Behind the façade of this discourse, it is not difficult to discern the Tibetan-Mongolian antagonism that emerged after the death of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama. And it is clear where Sumpa Khenpo's sympathies lay. Describing the conflict between the regent of the Dalai Lama, Desi Sangye Gyatso (1653–1705), and Lhasang Khan of the Khoshots (who ruled from 1703 to 1717), he strongly criticizes the regent's policies. Narrating the events when a grand retinue of Manchu dignitaries from the imperial capital Beijing and Mongol princes from Kokonor accompanied the Seventh Dalai Lama Kelsang Gyatso (1708–1757) to Lhasa under orders from Emperor Kangxi (1654–1722), he refers to stories of his Kokonor tribesmen in poetic form. According to these accounts, for their role in discovering the Dalai Lama, ensuring his safety, and placing him on the religious throne, the Kokonor Mongols expected nothing less than the secular throne of the King of Tibet. However, in response, they received only a disdainful attitude from the local Tibetan authorities. This led them to vow revenge in front of the Buddha image in Lhasa.

Detailing the subsequent Kokonor Mongol uprising in 1723, which was brutally suppressed by the Manchus (when Sumpa Khenpo was 19 years old), he avoids mentioning the leader of the uprising, Losang Tenzin, the grandson of Gushi Khan. Instead, he notes the senselessness of the uprising and subtly expresses sympathy for his fellow Khoshots. Yet, this event marked a pivotal moment in Amdo's history. It forced the Kokonor princes—*wangs* and *gongs*—to become vassals of the Qing and serve as a key instrument for governing the Tibetan and Mongol residents of Amdo. Regarding Sumpa Khenpo's position during the civil war of 1727–1729, we have already mentioned it in the narration of his biography. In that context, despite his affiliation with the Yellow Hats, *shaserwa*, he actively opposed the Tibetan 'nationalists' represented by the ministers of the Tibetan government. He urged the monks of Lhasa not to join the army, thereby rendering significant service to Polhane (1689–1747), a loyal companion of Lhasang Khan.

Also of great interest, as we have previously mentioned, is Sumpa Khenpo's position in relation to the Manchu court as recounted in his biography. It was ambivalent: hostile on the one hand, and reverent on the other. As noted by Yang Ho-chin in his preface to the English translation of the work, Sumpa Khenpo likely aimed to be very precise in expressing his thoughts due to the strict 'literary inquisition' (Chin. *wenziyu*) (Yang 1968: 8). Nonetheless, he frequently emphasizes the extreme cruelty of the Manchus towards the Kokonor Mongols and their monasteries. Simultaneously, he fully acknowledges the rule of the Manchu Empire in Tibet and Kokonor, resulting in long-term peace for the region. Sumpa Khenpo dedicates significant portions of his work to poetic praise of this peace.

Regarding other non-historical aspects of the work, they are covered in the first, third, and fourth chapters. Each chapter is written in a distinct literary genre and merits special examination. Let us highlight their defining features. The first chapter elucidates the universe based on the Abhidharmakośa and the Kālacakra-tantra. It discusses Tibet and Greater Tibet, with Amdo situated to the north. The author critically attempts to explain the origin of Lake Kokonor using rational logic and references to Buddhist scriptures, ultimately arriving at a reasonable conclusion that refutes certain existing oral traditions. The third chapter presents the initial description in the Tibetan written tradition of Kokonor and the broader Amdo region, situated in the northeastern parts of the Tibetan plateau. Here, the author exhibits an uncommon level of geographic knowledge for his time, conveyed in a grandiose poetic style. He eloquently describes mountains, rivers, valleys, and plains, highlighting the region's distinct characteristics when compared to Nepal in the south and Russia in the north. Sumpa Khenpo portrays the people of Kokonor as content and prosperous folk dedicated to virtuous deeds. The fourth chapter aptly exemplifies the genre of praise. In it, Sumpa Khenpo portrays himself as an enthusiastic devotee of the Geluk school and the Oirats. He strongly asserts that the Geluk school represents the "apex of all other Buddhist schools in the Land of Snows" and emphasizes that the rulers of Kokonor are descendants of the divine family of Genghis Khan, comparable in wealth and power to the "splendor of the deities" (f. 14a). The epilogue returns to a more historical genre. It presents a rather unstructured, yet extensive, treatment of historical events and geographical attributes of Dzungaria, Kham, Ü-Tsang, Mongolia, China, and even India.

In conclusion, we assert that "The History of Kokonor" by Sumpa Khenpo Yeshe Peljor is a unique work in the Tibetan writing tradition. Its primary value lies in being the first work dedicated to the history and culture of Amdo, with a predominant focus on the descendants of

Gushi Khan. These descendants arrived in Tibet and Kokonor during the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, becoming kings and rulers of these lands. An outstanding characteristic of this work is that it was authored by one of the most learned scholars of that era, an Oirat Mongol and a fervent follower of the Geluk school. This combination of factors gives this work its distinctiveness, rendering it a clear mirror of the medieval history of Amdo during a turbulent period of wars and alliances.

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