

SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF ÖNDÖR GEGĒN JANABAJAR, THE FIRST *ĴĚBCUNDAMBA XUTAGT*

Öndör gegĕn, who is known as the founder of the Mongol Buddhist Church, was an active participant of Mongolian History in the 17th century. He, besides spreading Buddhism, made indisputable steps in order to conserve Mongol traditions and with their help to? protect the cultural and social integrity of the Mongols. From the second part of the 17th century, the foundation of the Church gave an opportunity for the Mongols to preserve their cultural identity even during the Manchu occupation despite of the unifying efforts of the Empire, and later it was an indispensable prerequisite of their political independence, too.

Öndör gegĕn's role in the history of Mongolian art and of Mongolian Buddhism has been already presented in detail, using the biographies which are the bases of this sort article, as well.

Three important texts should be mentioned here:

1. A biography written in Tibetan language by Zaya Pandita Blo bzang 'phrin las in 1702, when Öndör gegĕn was still alive.
2. A biography written in 1839 by Ngag gi dbang po in Tibetan language as well.
3. A Mongol version written in 1859 that partly used for the translations of the previously mentioned works. It was published by Ch. Bawden in 1961.

Öndör gegĕn was born as the second son of Tüsiyetü qan Gombodorĵi of the Khalkha Left Wing on the 25th of the ninth month of the year of the Wood Pig (1635) at the place called Yisün jüil. His father was the offspring of Genghis xan's family. His grandfather was Abatai Sayin qan (Khalkha Awtai sain xan), whose grandfather was Geresenĵe, the founder of all the Khalkha royal houses. Abadai is well-known as the founder of Erdene jü monastery founded in the summer of 1585. He was the one, who first introduced Tibetan Buddhism in the Khalkha territories.

At the age of four (1638), Öndör gegĕn became a pious layman *genen* (Tib. *dge bsnyen*) under Ĵambal lam (Mong. blam-a Ĵimbalig, Tib. byams pa gling). After that, his own name became Janabajar (Skr. Ĵnānavajra, Tib. ye shes rdo rje, Khalkha Išdorĵ). The word of jana derived from Sanskrit terminology *√jñā* which means knowledge and wisdom. Bazar means *vajra* or thunderbolt. So, according to its Sanskrit version in English it meant „the thunderbolt of wisdom”.

In the year of the Yellow? Rabbit (1639) Öndör gegĕn was inaugurated as head of the Mongolian Buddhist religion. Thus, the appointment of the head of a religiously united leadership was of great importance for the further development of Buddhism.

Öndör gegĕn, being anxious to study, left Khalkha-Mongolia for Tibet. On his way to Tibet, he visited many monasteries where Tsongkhapa (Tib. tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa, 1357-1419) lived. He made a pilgrimage to such famous monasteries as Kumbum (Tib. sku 'bum), Sera (Tib. se ra), Galdan (Tib. dga' ldan), and received the consecration of a novice *gecül* (Tib. *dge tshul*) from the Panchen Lama himself at

Tasilhunpo (Tib. bkra shis lhun po) monastery. After reaching Lhasa, Öndör gegēn was granted an audience with the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682). Thereafter, he was recognized as a reincarnation of rje btsun Tārānatha kun dga' snying po (Mong. Gunganambo 1575-1634). After that, he became the first *jebcundamba* (Khalkha *javjandamba*, Tib. *rje btsun dam pa*) of Khalkha-Mongolia, the head of the Mongolian Buddhist Church.

Tārānatha, who is usually referred to as *rje btsun* („revered sir”) was born in 1557 and grew up to be a monk of high virtue in the *Jo nang* sect (Tib. *jo nang pa*, a sub sect of the *sa skya pa*). He is famous in the history of Tibetan Buddhism for the many works written by him. He founded the Takten Dhamchöling (tib. rtag brtan tsogs gling) monastery in 1614.

In 1651, Öndör gegēn returned from Tibet, continued his study and began to work on his creations sculptures. In the same year, he erected the foundation of the future IX xūrē Gandan šadubling with the establishment of Buddhist Centre-following the advice of the Dalai and Panchen Lamas.

In 1662, an internal war broke out in the Khalkha Right Wing. A powerful lord of the Khalkhas Erenčin tayiji attacked and killed Vangčuy Ǧasaytu qan, his kinsman and overlord. Thereupon, other lords of the Right Wing, with reinforcements from Čaqundorji Tüsiyetü qan attacked Erenčin, who escape from his base. Because of the above mentioned reasons, a civil war has unleashed in the Khalkha-Mongol territory. The Oirat Khaganate sided to the Ǧasaytu, the Manchus sided to the Tüsiyetü in this struggle. So, this conflict turned into an international problem. In 1690, Galdan's attacks endangered the whole Khalkha territory, and there loomed also the impending danger of losing their independency. The Tüsiyetü qan was not able to resist them alone, so he was obliged to ask for help from outside of the border.

Öndör gegēn himself supported the Manchu orientation instead of the Russian. This can be proved by the following quotations:

“The Tsarist Russia, the land of white people is a grate and stable empire, but the people are different from the Mongols, our religion is not recognized there. The empire to the south is even greater and quieter; they have the same religion with us. Manchurian country and people are rich. So, if we apply to the south, our country will be rescued and people will be blissful.” (Čoinxor 1995: 133.)

“We have enjoyed the benevolence of the Imperial Court in the greatest manner. Suppose we go over to the Russians seeking refuge from the war. But the Russians, in the first place, do not believe in Buddha, and their customs are not like ours: they have different speech and different dress. It will certainly not be a strategy for an everlasting peace. Rather, we should move inside, bringing the whole tribe along and surrender ourselves to the Great Emperor from the bottom of our hearts. Then, we may get a blessing for ten thousand years.”

“Well, I think that the Manchu Emperor of the East is an especially intelligent and cultivated person. We, the Khalkha-Mongols sent envoys to you the “Ruler

of the State of Ten-Thousand Tranquility”, with respect and clear intention to offer the Nine White Presents of our country to you, and promise to be your servants. The Khalkha-Mongols will be rich and will develop and reach complete happiness. It is written in the Prophecies.”

In 1691, after the victory over the Oirad xan, Ǯaldan (1644-1697) the *qurultai* organized in Dolōn-nūr established a new Manchu - Mongolian alliance. The Manchu emperor, having received the homage of Mongol xans, acknowledged Öndör gegēn as the head of the Mongolian Buddhist church and donated him the name *ebügen qutuγtu* (Khalkha *öwgön xutaγt*, “elderly reincarnation”).

In 1723, the Manchu government established the office of *bogd gegēn*, which later became the most important institution of Mongolian church administration. Kang-xi emperor donated 100 000 *lan* of silver to the *jebcundamba* to establish a monastery. The name of this new Buddhist centre was Amarbayasγulangtu (Khalkha Amarbayasgalant).

In the spring of 1723, the Machu ruler died and his successor was Yongcheng (1678 – 1735, reign 1727-1735, Mong. Nayiraltu töb, Khalkha Nairalt töw). To his invitation, Öndör gegēn came to Peking on 14th of the first month of the year of the Water Rabbit; however, there he died soon.

From 1921 on, it was nearly obligatory to refuse the Russian orientation in Mongolia. That is why this point of view was negatively interpreted by the Mongol historians who worked before the change of regime. Öndör gegēn’s lifework in Mongolian Buddhist work was not important from a political point of view, so it was accepted by the official ideology and tolerated to a certain level, as much as it was possible during the Soviet era in the middle of the 20th century. In this way, his-body of work and its effect on the Mongols’ identity-consciousness or on the survival of Mongol cultural independence was not discussed.

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