

# Research on Historical Value of Tuken · Lobsang Choekyi Nyima Biography\*

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**Abstract**—The Biography of Tuken · Lobsang Choekyi Nyima is a classic work of Tibetan Buddhist monks in the Qing Dynasty. The author of this biography is a disciple of the hero of biography from generation to generation. Based on his personal experience in the contact with Tuken · Lobsang Choekyi Nyima, or personally oral account from the parties, drawing on a large number of literature written by the hero of biography, the biography is rich and detailed. It not only records the life of Tuken · Lobsang Choekyi Nyima, but also gives a detailed description of the event of writing a book. The third Tuken is a famous Buddhist, historian, and writer in the history of Tibetan Buddhism. He wrote extensively in his life. His famous works, such as the origins of the Tuken school, and the Younging Temple Records, etc. are of great historical data value to study the history of Tibet in Qing Dynasty and the cultural exchanges between Tibet and northwest China.

**Keywords:** *Tuken · Lobsang Choekyi Nyima, biography, historical data value*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Tuken · Lobsang Choekyi Nyima (1737-1802) is a famous monk of the Gelug Sect of Tibetan Buddhism in the Qing Dynasty. He successively served Younging Temple, Ta'er Lamasery, and Xia Qiong Temple Fatai, and was a well-known Buddhist, historian and writer in the history of Tibetan Buddhism. His life is rich in writing. The academic research on Tuken · Lobsang Choekyi Nyima is mainly based on the interpretation of his works and the analysis of its contents. Little research has been done on the biography of Tuken · Lobsang Choekyi Nyima. Gung thang bstan pa'isgron me (1762-1823) wrote the Biography of Tuken · Lobsang Choekyi Nyima, which had detailed records of the daily life and historical activities of the hero of biography. This biography has important historical documentary value. "It is also an excellent literary work, Therefore, it has very important value in religious science, historical documents and literary."<sup>1</sup> It is also an important reference for studying

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<sup>1</sup> Xu Changju. On the Literature's Value of the Tibetan Eminent Monks' Biographies —Take the three eminent monk's biographies written by Tuken · Lobsang Choekyi Nyima as examples [J]. Journal of Tibet University (Social Science Edition), 2017, 32 (02): 69- 76. (in Chinese)

local history of Qinghai and Tibet, and Tibetan Buddhist history in the Qing Dynasty. On the basis of previous studies, the paper intends to further explore the historical data value of Biography of Tuken · Lobsang Choekyi Nyima.

## II. THE COMPILATION ORIGIN AND WRITTEN TIME OF THE BIOGRAPHY OF TUKEN · LOBSANG CHOEKYI NYIMA

The author of Biography of Tuken · Lobsang Choekyi Nyima is Gung thang bstan pa'isgron me (1762-1823). He is the the first of the four gser khri<sup>2</sup> in bla brang bkra shis'khyil, an important monastery of the Gelug sect of Tibetan Buddhism in Ando region, and the third living Buddha in the reincarnation system of the Gung thang Living Buddha. The origin of the word "gungthang" in the name of gung thang bstan pa'isgron me is that the first reincarnated living Buddha Chiqingen Duncengcuo lived in Goungthang Temple in Tibet for a long time and eventually died there. From the moment he found his reincarnated spirit boy and welcome the boy back to Goungthang Temple, he was regarded as the second generation of this living Buddha reincarnation system, and the name "Goungthang" began to be in the front, and it was inherited in subsequent generations. Gung thang bstan pa'isgron me and Tuken · Lobsang Choekyi Nyima had a close relationship between teachers and disciples.

The reason why "Biography of Tuken · Lobsang Choekyi Nyima" created by Gung thang bstan pa'isgron me should be closely related to the relationship between Tuken · Lobsang Choekyi Nyima and Gung thang bstan pa'isgron me, as well as the social background at that time. Gung thang bstan pa'isgron me is the disciple of the third Tuken from the generation to generation. "Biographies generally contain profound religious thoughts, and the purpose of the biographies is to make them the textual norms to guide later practitioners."<sup>3</sup> Regarding the completion time of "Biography

<sup>2</sup> "Sai Chi (gser khri)" means "Golden seat" in Tibetan, and is used to specifically honor the successor of dga'Idan khri pa of dga'dan dgon of dga lugs pa.

<sup>3</sup> Xu Changju. On the Literature's Value of the Tibetan Eminent Monks' Biographies —Take the three eminent monk's biographies written by Tuken · Lobsang Choekyi Nyima as examples [J]. Journal of Tibet University (Social Science Edition), 2017, 32 (02): 69- 76. (in Chinese)

of Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima", there is a specific time in the biographical post. The postscript records:

In 1815, the monk Gung thang bstan pa'isgron me finished this book at the practice site of Great Temple in Zhaxiqu at the beginning of the first lunar month. The recorder was a great wise man named Anran Bagongquegenga.

The author of the biography is a disciple of Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima, and disciples around Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima have requested biographies to the lord. Most of the information is provided by the disciples around the Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima. Therefore, the age is detailed and the text is clear. It follows that writing was completed in 1815 AD.

### III. THE CONTENT STRUCTURE AND HISTORICAL SOURCES OF THE BIOGRAPHY OF TUKEN ·LOBSANG CHOEKYI NYIMA

As a monk biography in the early 19th century, Biography of Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima is a common biography, with a relatively stable frame structure and a relatively unified narrative language. It is an important Tibetan biography at that time. The content of the biography can be summarized into four parts: birth, study of Buddhist doctrine, altruistic career, and death. At the beginning of birth content, it described the strange scenes before and after the birth of Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima. The study of Buddhist doctrine mainly included Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima's study of the Dharma and Vajrayana Buddhist. Also, it made a detailed narrative of the achieved great success. The altruistic career recorded the religious activities of Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima, such as building temples and disseminating the dharma. Especially, in the 26th year of Qianlong period (1761), Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima was 25 years old, returned to Youning Temple from Tibet. Songbu III and the vast number of monks demanded that the 26th Fatai of Youning Temple be appointed. In the twenty-seventh year of Qianlong period (1762), he enters Beijing with imperial decree or edict. In the 28th year of Qianlong period (1763), he was favored by the Emperor Qianlong in Beijing, and was honored as the title of "Retreat Zen Master", and the attendant Zen master before the Emperor. At the same time, he also took part in the translation and compilation of the four-body Qing literature and Tripitaka presided over by the third Zhang Jia ·Hutuketu. The translation and compilation of these great works is of great significance in constructing the thoughts of the Han, Tibetan, Manchu and Mongolian ethnic groups, exchanging and developing the cultures of various nationalities. In addition to the description of the death of Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima in Youning Temple of Qinghai, the construction of a spiritual tower was also recorded in detail.

From the structural arrangement point of view, the author wrote the life story of the Buddhist figure Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima. The structure is relatively simple. It is only the life of Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima. The hero of biography is an important and influential figure in the history of Tibetan Buddhism. At the age of 6 years old, he is

considered a reincarnation of the second Tuken Awang Quejijiacuo, and was invited to take a bed at Tuken Aung of Youning Temple. In the twelfth year of Qianlong period (1747), he became a monk in front of the 3rd Songbu Yixi Banjue Living Buddha (1704-1788) at Youning Temple and officially entered the temple. He was clever and intelligent, learned the Buddhism deeply, and received worship by the monks of the temple. In the fourteenth year of Qianlong period (1749), Zhang Jia ·Hutuketu came from Beijing to Youning Temple and presided over the religious affairs of the temple. During this period, at the request of Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima, Zhang Jia ·Hutuketu gave him the Sharma precepts. In the twenty-first year of Qianlong period (1756), he was 19 years old. And he went to Tibet for further studies. After worshiping the seventh Dalai Gesangyatso and the sixth Panchen Luozang Huadanyixi, he entered the Guomangzang of Zhebang Temple. During his six years in Tibet, he has learned from the monk Dade Duoren, carefully studied the classics, read the scriptures seriously, and argued deliberately, all of which are worth it. He also took part in various kinds of dharma assembly. He cited the classics, and replied without fail. Tibetan scholars highly admired him. At the same time, he had gained a good reputation. In twenty-sixth year of Qianlong period (1761), he was 25 years old, returned to Youning Temple from Tibet. At the request of Songbu III and the majority of monks, he served as the twenty-sixth Fatai of Youning Temple. In the twenty-seventh year of Qianlong period (1762), he entered Beijing with the Emperor's order. He is closely related to the emperor of the current dynasty and the prince of Zhang Jia ·Ruobi Duoqi, who was very important to the local political and cultural exchanges between the Central and Tibet. Therefore, the value of the biography was highlighted.

The author followed the traditional Tibetan historian's writing method, that is, the opening tribute was used as the opening part of the biography. It used the Buddhist method to briefly describe the extraordinary personality and Buddhist attainments of the hero of the biography. In addition to the opening tribute, the author also cited a large number of Buddhist classics to prove that the hero of this biography came to promote the dharma. His birth had been predicted by Shakyamuni Buddha and Manjushri Bodhisattva. This form of prophecy was common in the later Tibetan buddhist monk's life and had become one of the indispensable contents.

The "Biography of Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima" is divided into 17 chapters, with the opening tribute and postscript. The specific chapter are as follows: opening tribute, birth, returning to Youning Temple to sit on the bed, being a monk and learning the dharma, learning the dharma in the Dome region, being initiated into monkhood or nunhood, going to Lhasa to seek the dharma, being invited to Beijing to serve the officials, being ordered to make a Buddha statue, went to Beijing for the second time, wrote a book, went to Beijing for the third time, promoting secret dharma, promoting the dharma in Inner Mongolia, death and aftermath, identification of reincarnated spirit boy, and postscript.

"Biography of Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima" is a relatively long work among Tibetan biographies. It basically takes the life trajectory of the third generation of Tuken as the main line, and describes each historical event in detail. It is basically similar in style and writing to contemporary biographical works such as Biography of the Seventh Dalai Lama Gesangyatso and Biography of the Sixth Panchen Lama.

Regarding the source of historical data for the biography of Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima, it is rumored that at the request of the disciples of third generation of Tuken, Gung thang bstan pa'isgron me wrote this book because he was a disciple of Tuken from generation to generation. The personal experience in the interaction with Tuken, or the personal narration from the parties, or the parties' records, or the information provided by the waiters around them, is highly credible. Especially the description of some details, non-author personal experience can't be known.

#### IV. HISTORICAL DATA VALUE OF BIOGRAPHY OF TUKEN ·LOBSANG CHOEKYI NYIMA

The value of historical data of Biography of Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima is mainly manifested in the following three aspects:

A. *The detailed process of Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima's activities in Beijing is detailed in "Biography of Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima", which provides an important reference for studying the relationship between the government of Qing Dynasty and Qinghai-Tibet region*

Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima went to Beijing three times from 1763 to 1768, 1771 to 1763, and 1784 to 1787 to report his job. However, due to various reasons, he did not stay in Beijing for long time like Tuken Awang Quejijiacuo. He received the title of "Hutuktu in Beijing" and the title of "Jingwu Zen Master" in Beijing. His duties mainly focused on assisting the third Zhang Jia ·Ruobi Dduoji to deal with political and religious affairs and extensive Buddhist affairs. The second Tuken was once regarded as the "Hutuktu in Beijing with the seal". However, Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima did not repeat this position as the "Hutuktu in Beijing with the seal", nor in the list of "Eight Hutuktu in Beijing"<sup>4</sup>.

Why did the Qing government not strengthen its support for the third generation of Tuken, not only did it not repeat its position as "Hutuktu in Beijing with the seal", nor was it included in the "Eight Hutuktu in Beijing". Qing government did not support other religious sect monks like the Yuan dynasty. Some people thought that it was "to divide the forces" to weaken the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama's dominance in Tibet. In Dalai Lama ordered by the Emperor Gao Zongchun:

If we were to prosper the Buddhism, it would not be like this. The Mongolian believes in Buddha, and I believe in the

<sup>4</sup> Lv Qijun. Research on Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima [D]. Graduate School of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 2012.

Lama most. The inheritance of the Hutuktu is based on the fact that the monk has no son, and the apprentice same as the son. Therefore, he must find a clever and blessed person ... This boy grew up and become Hutuktu. This is a convenient way without any other methods. It has been a long time and cannot be described. ... Buddha has no rebirth, how can there be reincarnation? However, if there is no reincarnation Hutuktu, tens of thousands of monks have nowhere to convert. We have to deal this thing like this.<sup>5</sup>

From the above, on the one hand, the Qing government's support for the Gelug Sect was based on national stability and unity. The Mongolian religion adopted the conciliation policy of Gelug Sect of Tibetan Buddhism. On the other hand, with regard to the reincarnation of the living Buddha, the ultimate goal of Buddhist is to achieve the release of nirvana. There is no reincarnation of the living Buddha, but it is a refuge for the souls of monks. It is enough to find a smart and blessed person among the children of the appropriate age. As for who does not matter, it only needs to be cultivated from an early age and act as the government's agent in managing Tibetan and Mongolian affairs. During the period of the third generation of Tuken, Qing government had mastered the political situation. The use of Lamas to manage Mongolian and Tibetan affairs had been completed, and many Tibetan Lamas had come to ask for closure, and competition was fierce. Therefore, Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima did not obtain the title of the second Tuken. It can see the social and political environment of the Qing government at that time. And the arrangement of the reincarnation Lama was also affected by the general environment.

B. *"Biography of Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima" provides valuable information to study the history of Tibetan Buddhism in China*

Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima learned extensively and superbly, and also studied Buddhism, history, astronomy, calendar, medicine, literature, statements, rhetoric, phonology and other studies. It is admired by monks in Tibet and Mongolia. He is fluent in four languages: Han, Manchu, Mongolian, and Tibetan. He has written many books in his lifetime. In addition to the well-known book "The Origin of Tuken Sect", he also has seventeen works such as "Yuning Temple Chronicle" and "Biography of second generation of Zhang Jia ·Yixi Danbeizhongmai", Biography of third generation of Zhang Jia ·Ruobei Duoji". These works were once edited into stereotypes of "the Complete Works of Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima". The Origin of Tuken Sect is an integration of Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima's exposition of the history, sects, rituals, and deities of various denominations of Tibetan Buddhism, as well as the deeds and contributions of the great deities of various schools. It has always attracted attention from all aspects because of its excellent writing and textual research, extensive solicitation, well-grounded speech, and relatively objective and fair attitude towards other sects of Tibetan Buddhism.

<sup>5</sup> Biographies of Zhang Jiaguo's Master Ruobei Dorje [M]. Translated by Chen Qingying and Ma Lianlong. Beijing: the Ethnic Publishing House, 1988: 312

The attitude of Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima in the view of religious history is fair and objective, which mainly manifests in the interpretation of major historical issues and the equal treatment of religious sects. His works are of great reference value for studying the Buddhist history of Younging Temple and the national history and culture of Qinghai, Tibet, Mongolia and other places today, and they have also affected the cultural development of Qinghai area to a certain extent, and become precious materials for studying the history of Chinese Tibetan Buddhism.

C. *"Biography of Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima"*

*provides important clues to study some historical events*

In 1788, the third generation of Tuken was appointed as Fatai of Younging Temple for the third time. After taking up the post, he became a great speaker, and believed that "Muslims living near Younging Temple would endanger the temple. He ordered to destroy the village buildings and drive Muslims back. He divided the boundaries, set up marks, and protected the temple from both the political and religious sides. During his tenure at the Xiaqiong Temple of the third generation of Tuken, Xiaqiong Temple was "the birthplace of the Gedan sects". He wrote the emperor. The temple was given a plaque of Dan Jilin (Xia Qiong Mahayana). At the same time, the Emperor also issued a decree that the religious law of all religious sects should not be disseminated in Duomai region except for the promotion of the Gelug sect.

## V. CONCLUSION

In summary, the use of Tibetan Buddhism to strengthen and consolidate the rule of Mongolia and Tibet was the main content of the Qing government's ethnic policy. It had extensive influence on the historical process of the unification of the multi-ethnic states in the Qing dynasty, the Mongolian and Tibetan nationalities and the political, economic and cultural development of the Mongolian and Tibetan areas.

"Biography of Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima" not only preserved the lifetime of the third generation of Tuken, but also recorded the local history of the Qinghai and Tibetan regions, as well as the deeds of Tuken ·Lobsang Choekyi Nyima, who taught dharma in Tibet and Mongolia. It was also an important historical material to understand and study the relationship between the central government and the Qinghai-Tibet region in Qing dynasty and the spread of Tibetan Buddhism in the central plains.

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