

Interview H0235: Surkhang Wangchen Gelek [tib. zur khang dbang chen dge legs], (USA, 1967) : Part No. 1 of 7

The interviewee was one of the most important Tibetan government officials in modern Tibetan history. He served as a Kashag or Cabinet Minister (Kalön) from 1943-1959. He discusses the period of the death of the 13th Dalai Lama.

Q

Today please start from the time when the 13th Dalai Lama died.

A

The history of the 13th Dalai Lama is the most important, but his young age was written about in your books. From 1911-1933, the 13th Dalai Lama was there. During these few decades, Tibet was independent from China and India and kept friendly relations with both of them. The 13th Dalai Lama passed away on the 30th of the 10th lunar month in 1933. Since then the freedom of Tibet was also kind of lost at the same time. When the Dalai Lama was sick, the [Shape](#) didn't know and only his attendants (tib. kundün la dekhon [sku mdun la sdod mkhan]) knew that. The [Shape](#) and the Kudraks (government officials) in Tibet only knew about it on the 29th because Kujar [Künphel La] didn't tell the Kudraks that the Dalai Lama was sick.

Q

When did he get sick?

A

He was sick on the 13th of the 10th lunar month, but he had his audience with the 500 [Gyütö](#) [Upper Tantric College] monks in the Potala on the 24th, and he went there like he was not sick. On the 25th, at the time of the audience with the [Gyüme](#) [Lower Tantic

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Colleghe] monks, all the Kudrak would come and all the people were waiting for him saying that the Dalai Lama was coming, but he didn't come. Therefore, all the people were surprised, wondering why he didn't come because on that day which was the [Ganden Ngamjö](#) holiday, the [ceremony] was very elaborate and there would be one new monk official and one new lay official [who would have their new audience]. It was said that he just got a little bit of a cold which was not that serious. On the 26th, people heard that he recovered well from his illness and the Dalai Lama was going out and doing those things. We, the Kudrak didn't know until the evening of the 29th, that the Dalai Lama had gotten a little bit worse.

At midnight of the 29th, the Dalai Lama was panting a lot and then Kujar thought that the situation was not good and he sent Trekhang [tib. bkras khang] [Tseja](#) who later became the [Kalön](#) Lama to invite the [Nechung](#) Protector Deity [tib. gnas chung chos skyong]. [Nechung](#) came there before daybreak.

Q

What was the rank of Kujar [Künphel La]?

A

Kujar didn't have a rank.

Q

Was he a government official?

A

No, but the Dalai Lama gave him the priority (tib. migse [dmigs bsal]) to be seated like the Talamas [tib. ta la ma]. Although he didn't have any rank, in the [Trapchi](#) Legung Office where he worked, he had all the power. Wherever Kujar send a letter, the Kashag would put the seal on it. Kujar would come to the Kashag and they would put a cushion for him and everyone was extremely scared of him because there was nobody more powerful than he. But on the [in English] political work, [Lungshar](#) was more powerful because the Dalai Lama also liked [Lungshar](#) a lot and he would discuss the important work with [Lungshar](#).

Q

What was Lungshar's [position] at that time?

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A

He was a Tshipön then and there were 4 Tshipön, but although these four were all the same rank, [Lungshar](#) was very important. [Lungshar](#) and Kujar had [says in English] competition and didn't get along well. This was because Kujar thought that [Lungshar](#) was using his power (tib. wangche [dbang byas]) and [Lungshar](#) thought that Kujar was using his power. Just before the Dalai Lama died, Kujar was seriously sick and the Dalai Lama was invited (tib. jendren [spyang 'dren]) and all people said that the reason for Kujar getting sick was because [Lungshar](#) did a sorcery curse (tib. te gya/ thu ngag gyag [gtad rgyag/ mthu sngags rgyag]) because all people believed that [Lungshar](#) practiced [the teachings of the] Nyingma sect [tib. rnying ma] and was good at sorcery curses. Furthermore, among the Tibetan Kudrak, [Lungshar](#) was more highly educated (tib. shetse [tho](#) gi red [shes tshad mtho gi red]) because in 1911 he went to London. So he knew the Western system (tib. nubki drotang [nub kyi 'gro stangs]).

Q

Probably, he knew the English language also?

A

He himself didn't know English well because he was quite old [when he went], but his wife knew a little bit and she was with him then in London. His eldest son Lhalu [tib. lha klu], who later became a [Shape](#), was born in London. At that time, if you have a birth certificate from the hospital you become a citizen. Since Kujar and [Lungshar](#) had [in English] competition, Kujar was suspicious of [Lungshar](#).

At that time, the Dalai Lama made two proclamations (tib. [tsatsig](#) [rtsa tshig]), one in Lhasa and one in [Shöl](#), in which it was written "Thubten [Künphel](#), who is serving me, is sick. I am suspicious that some people here with evil thoughts have done sorcery curses. If [you] have done that, it will be good if [you] behave nicely and get rid of it beforehand. If not, in the future, if there is an inquiry, there will be a bad result." [tib. nga'i zhabs phyi zhu mkhan thub bstan kun 'phel na gi yod red/ 'dir mi bsam blo sdug cag kha shas kyis ngan gtad byas med 'gro bsam pa'i dwogs pa 'dug/ de 'dra yod na/ sngon nas so sos med pa bzos nas yag po byas na yag po yong gi red/ de ma bzos na/ mjug ma rtsad gcod btang na/ las ka sdug cag yong gi red] At that time, other people were thinking that he [the Dalai Lama] was talking about [Lungshar](#).

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Q

What month was that?

A

That was in the summer and the Dalai Lama [died] in that winter. One reason that [Künphel](#) La and [Lungshar](#) didn't get along well was that when [Lungshar](#) was powerful, there was a big [Khamba](#) trader to whom [Lungshar](#) lent a lot of government money for doing trade. Later, Kujar inquired about this and said that he [[Lungshar](#)] lent government money to his friend. For this he [Kujar] fined him [[Lungshar](#)] and caused harm to his government work, but at that time, he [[Lungshar](#)] couldn't do anything to Kujar because Kujar was the more powerful.

Another thing is that [Lungshar](#) was like Lhalu's father and there was a big [kyidu](#) [association] of tailors like a [in English] union where there were about 200 people who liked Kujar. When Lhalu's tailor was told to join this [in English] union, he didn't join because he belonged [tib. mi] to [Lungshar](#). So one day, all the people of that [in English] group went to Lhalu and brought Lhalu's tailor down to a big park. At that time, [Lungshar](#) was not there, but when [Lungshar](#) was coming back riding his horse, all these people jeered and ridiculed (tib. chale [gyab](#) ['phya lad brygab]) him. At this time, [Lungshar](#) was in Lhalu and he didn't dare to come down because if he came outside, there would be many people and they would stone him. Then they [the [kyidu](#)] made him [Lhalu's tailor] to lay down and beat him a lot with switches [tib. rgyug pa] and he died. This made the grudge between [Künphel](#) La and [Lungshar](#) very serious.

Q

Who beat him?

A

The people of the [kyidu](#) beat him and killed him.

Q

This was because he [Lhalu's tailor] belonged to [Lungshar](#), right?

A

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They did that to put down [Lungshar](#). That person was unlucky, but the main point (tib. nying po [snying po]) was [in English] political struggle and [Künphel](#) La was always harming [Lungshar](#). At that time, it was the time Nangchungnga was appointed as [Kalön](#) [tib. gnang byung ba].

Q

Was that the year when the Dalai Lama died?

A

No, that was the year previous to the year when the Dalai Lama died. At that time, [Künphel](#) La was powerful and could talk a lot to the Dalai Lama. [Künphel](#) La himself told me the following. The Dalai Lama said, "Who would be better for the [Shape](#) position?" [Künphel](#) La said, "Jangra [tib. lchang ra] Gusung Depön would be the best. How about appointing him?" He was really a nice person who was related to [Bönshö](#) [tib. bon shod] and all people liked him. Then the Dalai Lama said, "Oh, it is very important for the Gusung Depön to stay near me. In the Kashag there are 4 people, so it doesn't matter. It will be pity and will be wasted for us to appoint him [the Gusung Depön] to that post. (tib. kho phangs kyi red/ nga rang tshor 'phro brlags 'gro gi red). He should be left as Gusung Depön." Then Kujar told the Dalai Lama, "If so, you [Dalai Lama] are asking all the questions to [Lungshar](#). So go ahead and appoint [Lungshar](#) as the [Shape](#)." [tib. zhabs pad lung shar la bsko ba gnang]

Then the Dalai Lama said, "Oh, he is knowledgeable and good in writing, but his mind is very evil and bad (tib. kho da ga se mi yi ge yag po dang/ yon tan chen po red de kho sems zhe drag ngan po dang sdug cag red)." Then Kujar told the Dalai Lama, "No, it will be very good to appoint him as the [Shape](#)."

Q

Why did he say that?

A

Kujar was saying this in a sarcastic (tib. kyag kyag [bkyag bkyag]) manner and telling the Dalai Lama to take him out and not to leave him inside [tib. phyi logs la bton zhog/ nang logs la ma zhog]. But the Dalai Lama didn't appoint him and appointed Nangchungnga. [Künphel](#) La and [Lungshar](#) were fighting (tib. gyamdre shor [rgyag 'dre shor]) every time,

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but when the Dalai Lama was passing away, [Lungshar](#) was getting close (tib. jar [sbyar]) to [Künphel](#) La very much and was flattering him (tib. pele she [dpal lhad bshad]). It was very important to do that because [Lungshar](#) was writing letters on the message board (tib. [samtra](#) [sam khra]) and sending them to the Dalai Lama all the time. In these he wrote that today such and such a person did such and such things.

At that time when the Dalai Lama died, one of the Lungshar's [samtra](#) had arrived there in which he wrote, "In the Kashag, the [Kalön](#) lama Chöthar [tib. chos dar] and [Trimön](#) [tib. khri smon] are very bad people. They are not doing the government's work well and they are [in English] competing to help one's friends and in front of many people the two of them fought a big fight [tib. rgyag 'dre chen po] in the Kashag." That was true, they did fight. Probably, [Lungshar](#) hoped to get a [in English] seat if the [Shape](#) were moved away. [Kalön](#) lama Chöthar was an old man who was called Kündeling [tib. kun bde gling] [Kalön](#) lama. When the Dalai Lama received the [samtra](#), he was very agitated and said, "Kalön Lama Chöthar is a steady [tib. tan tan] person, so he would not do that, but [Trimön](#) is a very evil person [tib. sems zhe drag ngan po] and a very bad person. So he is the one who did all this, so [I] should not leave him at all [tib. kho rtsa nas bzhag rgyu mi 'dug]."

So [Künphel](#) La saw this [samtra](#) and he kept it carefully, although he couldn't erase it because the Dalai Lama might tell him to bring it. One day, the Dalai Lama wrote a [samtra](#) to the Drönyerchemmo [the Lord Chamberlain] saying, "The so called [Trimön](#) have made the [miser](#) suffer a lot when he went to Kham [tib. khri smon zer mkhan de khams la 'gro dus sde mi ser la brdab gsig zhe drag btang bzhag]." He was the Doji in the years 1918-19-20. He also wrote, "After he came back, he practiced unfair law and did all the bad things and recently, they fought in the Kashag. This is very shameful. Therefore, [Trimön](#) will be demoted from [Shape](#) to Dzasa, but he can be seated as the first among all the Dzasa. So the Drönyerchemmo should call [Trimön](#) to the Trungja at the Dalai Lama's simchung gaà [Secretariat office] and tell him this." [tib. yar slebs nas khriims drang po med pa las ka sdug cag zhe cig byas bzhag/ da lam yang bka' [shag](#) nang rgyag 'de brgyab pa 'di [tsho](#) ngo tsha po zhe drag red/ de 'dra yin tsang/ khri smon zhabs pad nas gnas dbyung btang ba yin/ btang ni dza sag yin/ dza sag sgang ga'i ang dang po der sdod yas kyi go sa de yin/ mgron gnyer chen mos de ring gzim chung 'gag la drung ja tshogs dus khri smon dskongs nas skad cha de shod]

This was decided and already written. It was said that [Künphel](#) La was the one who folded up this letter and when he saw that, he asked the Dalai Lama, "Are you going to demote [Trimön](#)?" The Dalai Lama said, "He should be demoted. He is a bad person, doing

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all these disgrace things (tib. shamdren shejig [zhabs 'dren zhe cig]). From last year, I was thinking of leaving him, but I couldn't. He is bad to have a fight in the Kashag."

This [about the fight] was reported by [Lungshar](#). Then Kujar told the Dalai Lama, "Please don't do this. The trouble in the work (tib. leke golog [las ka'i mgo log]) was caused by [Lungshar](#). If you demote [Trimön](#), all the people will come to me and say that I demoted [Trimön](#)." Then the Dalai Lama said, "It doesn't matter. I can appoint a new [Shape](#)." Then [Künphel](#) La stood up and prostrated and said, "I don't like [Trimön](#) and I am not a friend of [Trimön](#), but I am afraid that I will be blamed." [Trimön](#) was lucky because [Künphel](#) La and [Lungshar](#) didn't get along well.

At that time, all people were thinking that [Lungshar](#) would get in the Kashag. So [Künphel](#) La was thinking if there were no vacant seat in the Kashag, [Lungshar](#) could not get a seat there. So they could not demote [Trimön](#) and at this time the Lungshar's [samtra](#) was still there in the Dalai Lama's room when the Dalai Lama died. It was there just before the Dalai Lama got sick. The [samtra](#) was there, but after few days the Dalai Lama was thinking that the matter regarding the [samtra](#) was not yet settled and then he also kind of forgot about it. He couldn't tell [Künphel](#) La frequently to bring the [samtra](#) and then on the 13th he [Dalai Lama] got sick and no one touched (tib. lag pa 'chang) these letters and then the Dalai Lama died and [Künphel](#) La got this letter. Since the Dalai Lama died, the Kalöns got the power. So it was a disaster (tib. pesö [dpe bzos]) for [Lungshar](#). Though [Lungshar](#) didn't like [Künphel](#) La, he thought of trying to get that letter and he acted cleverly (tib. khepo [mkhas po]) to do that.

Q

At that time, wasn't there the Silön?

A

He was there, but he was young and he didn't have much [power]. And the Silön was like an idiot (tib. kugpa [lkugs pa]) and not knowledgeable and didn't know [in English] the political system. So he thought that since the Dalai Lama treated [Künphel](#) La well, he hoped to have [Künphel](#) La as his partner (tib. rogpa [rogs pa]). I heard that [Künphel](#) La cried a lot on the night when the Dalai Lama died. When the Dalai Lama died at 7:30 p.m, all the [Shape](#) and the Silön met and there were some lamas near the remains of the Dalai Lama doing the religious activities.

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Then [Künphel](#) La took a bunch of the keys in his hand and put them on the table in front of the Shapes and the Silön and said, "Until now, I have been serving the Dalai Lama well. Today he died, so from now on in serving the Dewashung [Tibetan Government], my writing is not good and I don't have knowledge. Till now, I worked because the Dalai Lama told me to do that, but I don't know how to do things well. So I am leaving my work from today. Since I am a monk, I am going to stay in a monastery and practice religion." Actually, he was [in English] a millionaire and if he were smart, he would have gone to Switzerland on the sly [laughter]. Otherwise, he wouldn't have any other thoughts.

I heard that then all of them said, "You don't need to do that. We don't want the keys, please, you keep them." There were many lakhs of Indian rupees and gold, etc. stored there. They gave him the keys, but he said he would not keep them and gave them back because he was kind of powerful. Then they kept the keys. But at that time, they did a bad thing and harmed [Künphel](#) La very much (tib. kho tshos las ka sdug cak cig byas nas kun 'phel lags la gnod chen po cig bskyal song]) and they called [Künphel](#) La and served him [in English] lunch and dinner with the Silön and he ate with the Silön.

Q

Were there two Silön?

A

There was one Silön and [Künphel](#) La was eating with the Silön. The [Kalön](#) were asking [Künphel](#) La what would be better to do so [Lungshar](#) and those people didn't like that. As for [Lungshar](#) himself, although he didn't like [Künphel](#) La, he didn't think long-term (tib. samlo thag ringpo [bsam blo thag ring po]).

At that time, [Lungshar](#) was thinking that if he didn't get the [samtra](#) letter back, even if [Künphel](#) La would be arrested, he would not be killed right away. If he were to be shot right away after he was arrested, it would be okay. But if not, and if they told [Künphel](#) La that he did something, [Künphel](#) La might say, "I am not the person who did that. It was [Lungshar](#) who did that." Therefore, [Lungshar](#) acted cleverly and sent one of [Künphel](#) La's close friends to him and through him he told [Künphel](#) La, "It is too bad the Dalai Lama passed away. You don't need to worry. You and I are the same. We are the ones who the Dalai Lama liked. I will help you and you should help me. You don't have to be afraid of the Tibetans. We should do well." [Lungshar](#) was very knowledgeable. [Künphel](#) La was a kind person (tib. sem yagpo [sems yag po]) and thought that was true. [Lungshar](#) also gave

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something to [Künphel](#) La and told lies and made some good suggestions saying, "Please do your work well."

And then [Lungshar](#) told [Künphel](#) La, "Please give me that [samtra](#). If you do not bring that [samtra](#) and if some other people see it, people might think that even the Dalai Lama was listening to my suggestions. Please also give me the other [samtra](#) letters that I sent to the Dalai Lama."

As for [Künphel](#) La, he didn't care about [Lungshar](#), but he thought the competition between [Künphel](#) La and [Lungshar](#) would be no more because the Dalai Lama died. So his anger kind of subsided and he gave him the other letters, but he kept the most important one in his house and hid it [in English] underground. He [Künphel La] thought that there would be no other Kudrak who would harm him, but maybe [Lungshar](#) would come to harm him. If he comes, he thought, on that day I am going to show that [samtra] letter and tell him. "I have this letter. Now what are you going to do?" Then [Lungshar](#) would say, "Please, I will keep quiet." [Künphel](#) La kept this letter, but he told [Lungshar](#), "Your letter was here, but since the two of us are friends, I was afraid that other people would see it so I have already erased it." The letter was written on the [samtra](#) message board where lime is applied [on polished wood as a writing surface]. According to custom, all the letters the Dalai Lama sent to the Panchen Lama were also written on [samtra](#). So, [Lungshar](#) thought, "Now I can relax [tib. da blo bde po red] because the black [samtra](#) was erased." So according to the law in the [in English] court, there was no danger at all.

Q

And those [Kalön](#) were all saying that [Lungshar](#) was bad [unclear], right?

A

Yes, the [Kalön](#) were all saying that [Lungshar](#) was bad because [the power] was in their hands.

Q

At that time, they [Lungshar] didn't know that, right?

A

Yes.

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Q

At that time, how many days passed after the Dalai Lama died before he took the letters?

A

The Dalai Lama died on the 30th and it was on the 2nd when they took the letters. On the 3rd, the [Kalön](#) and Silön harmed [tib. gnod bskyal] him [Künphel La]. If they had let [Künphel](#) La leave [work], he wouldn't have had any problems, but they told [Künphel](#) La, "You are very knowledgeable. If you don't help us, it will not be alright. You have set up the [Drongdrag](#) Magar {"Better family regiment") with many soldiers and you bought many guns for them. You also set up many factories and the mint for printing money and you have done many great jobs so it will not be alright without you. The most important work is to build the golden stupa (tib. serdong [gser sdong]) for the Dalai Lama's remains. That is your duty." This was the most difficult work in Tibet. He was very good at building stupas and houses so they told him to do that job. The [Shape](#) and the Silön told him that; the people didn't say that. Our people didn't think much about things and they were just staying there inattentively [tib. yang ngi [ying](#) gni].

Lunshar was thinking if [Künphel](#) La didn't get the power, he would keep quiet and will not harm him. So he just left him like this. When the Dalai lama died, people were in mourning; the women didn't wear earrings and they didn't wear red or various colored [chupa](#) (dresses); they only wore black [chupa](#). And even the [Kalön](#) were not allowed to wear their yellow [chupa](#); they had to wear a black [chupa](#). They also removed the buttons on the hats. This was done for a week. At that time, the higher up people looked at the dates [astrologically] and said that in order to have the Dalai Lama's reincarnation come soon, we should not mourn more than one week, so on the 4th the mourning should be over.

Q

Who said that?

A

The Kashag might have said that according to religion and astrology. Then the mourning was over and they had to move the Dalai Lama's remains from one place to another place. At that time, there were 6-7 palaces in [Norbulinga](#). In the Jensal Phodrang, [tib. spyang bsal

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pho brang] there were 3-4 palaces. He died in a small palace with only one room and a garden, so they had to move the Dalai Lama's remains to a bigger palace.

Q

When did they move it?

A

They moved it on the 4th. It was told that on this day all the people had to get dressed up. At that time, all the [in English] military were pro-Künphel la because the Gusung Depön (Bodyguard Regiment Commander) was Jangra who was liked by the Dalai lama and very close with [Künphel](#) la. And the [Drongdrag](#) Commanders (Depön) were Taring [tib. phreng ring] and Yuthog [tib. g.yu thog]. At that time [Lungshar](#) didn't have any [in English] military power.

Q

Did those Depön have real power; would they [the soldiers] listen to them?

A

Yes, but that was not certain (tib. tempo [brtan po]). There was a custom that when they said [in English] "Attention!" they stood up with the sound "trag."

On the 4th, they said that the mourning was over and all people came to have the audience with the Dalai Lama's remains which were covered with red silk so we couldn't see his real face. At that time, all people cried a lot. And although [Künphel](#) la was not a member of the Kashag, he was acting (tib. trab ['khrab]) as if he were. On that day, all the [in English] military lined up in formation and people were saying that today they would arrest [Künphel](#) la's enemies, that is, the pro-Lungshar people. They were instigating this (tib. trug [dkrug]) and making talk to that effect (tib. kecha so [skad cha bzo]).

Q

Was it the pro-Lungshar people who did that?

A

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I wonder who was doing that? I don't know. Some people might have been just making it up. On that day, all the Kudrak were there and all the abbots of [Sendregasum](#) were also there.

Q

Did they come to the [Tse](#) Potala Palace?

A

They came to Jensal Phodrang located below [Norbulinga](#). We were also there, but we were young and were not afraid, but later we heard that probably [Lungshar](#) was afraid. On that day, the [Drongdrag](#) Regiment soldiers lined up in formation wearing their [in English] uniforms. Ngabö was a Rupön and they all were [in English] very handsome and the music was also good. They beat the drums and when the soldiers lined up in formation, they did the [in English] present arms and blew the horns. In the big [in English] garden, the soldiers lined up in formation. Some people were saying that probably the soldiers were given bullets and maybe they would arrest some people. People were very scared.

Q

Was that in the morning?

A

Yes. This was the most troublesome day (tib. nyogtra cheshö [rnyog dra che shos]). The [Kalön](#), Silön and [Lungshar](#) didn't have any ideas (tib. samlo bsam blo)). They were like idiots [tib. lkugs pa] and were showing off (tib. trog trog [krog krog]) acting as if they had [in English] military power. Actually, they [the pro-Künphel la people] could have fought and arrested [Lungshar](#) and some people on that day, and then it would have been finished.

Q

But they were doing it to show off, right?

A

Yes. They [the pro-Künphel la people] thought that if they did that much, they [the pro-Lungshar people] would be scared and would keep quiet. After that, all the people sought an audience with the [Dalai Lama's remains] and cried very much. Then the Kudrak held

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the Tsondu Assembly and at that time [Künphel](#) la didn't have any ideas [of what to do]. He was thinking of staying together like that. He didn't have any thoughts of using his power.

On the day the Dalai Lama died, he had the thought of leaving [his position], but for 2-3 days he ate together with the Silon and when people asked him questions, he thought, "Even though the Dalai Lama has died, there won't be any problems for me." So he had the idea of staying for a little bit more. He didn't have thoughts of harming [Lungshar](#) and those people. Do you understand? At that time, on the 4th, Kujar hadn't given the letter to [Lungshar](#) and he had told [Lungshar](#) that he had erased the letter. At that time, [Lungshar](#) was talking about the letter, but it was not that easy to tell him [Künphel la] because [Lungshar](#) was a lower fourth rank official, a Tshipön. while [Künphel](#) la was staying with the Silön.

Q

At that time, did he [Künphel la] give the previous letters [to Lungshar]?

A

No, [Künphel](#) la at that time was keeping all the letters carefully in his home. [Lungshar](#) had told him before that, so he [Künphel la] had already got rid of the unimportant letters. There were many letters.

Q

Lungshar told him about the letter before that, right?

A

He told him about that just after the Dalai Lama died. Although he [Künphel la] gave the keys back, he still had the power. If he told somebody to bring the keys, nobody dared to touch them because all people were scared of [Künphel](#) la.

On the 4th, they held a Tsondu and they discussed what would be better to do regarding leading Tibet politically in the future.

Q

Was the Tsondu comprised exclusively of Kudrak?

A

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There were lay officials, monk officials and all the abbots of [Sendregasum](#). This was a big Tsondu.

Q

Do you have a name for that?

A

It was called Tsondu gyenzom.

Q

Was there any talk about the people and those things [unclear]?

A

No, it was a lie. The people did not even know that those people had the power. Most of the monk officials were saying, "When the Dalai Lama dies, we need a regent for Tibet who is a Lama."

Q

Were the Kashag and the Silön in the Tsondu?

A

No. The Kashag and the Silön were like the [in English] House of Lords. This [Tsondu] was the [in English] House of Commons.

Q

There were the [Trunyichemmo](#) and Tshipön, right? starthere

A

Yes. The Kashag and the Silön called the [Trunyichemmo](#) and Tshipön and they discussed the topic first. [Künphel](#) la was doing something from behind not [in English] officially. So the Kashag told the Trungtsi, "What would be the better way to govern Tibet politically in the future?" You tell the Tsondu (Trungtsi) and write a note [tib. yi ge]. They said yes and went down and say, "Now, according to the order from the Sawangs [tib. da lta sa dbang rnam pa tshos bka' phebs yag la]..." And then they asked them [the members of the

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Assembly]. When most of the people said that we needed a Lama, they said we should divide the Tsondu into small [discussion] sub-groups (tib. tsogchung [tshogs chung]).

Q

It was a like a committee, right?

A

Yes. There were the sub-group of the ordinary officials (tib. kyüma [dkyus ma]), the sub-group of fifth rank Letsenpa [tib. las tshan pa], the monk officials, the Khenjung, etc. Some of them I think were a little different [in their views], but about 60% were saying that we needed a Lama, though I don't remember this well. Some said that from among the better Kudrak there should be one who helps [tib. rogs pa] the Silön so there should be two Silön, one a monk official and one a lay official. The [in English] group of Senampa and the Rimshi seems to have [in English] sympathy for [Künphel](#) la because all were from better (tib. tragpa [tib. drag pa]) households.

At that time, [Kapshöba](#) [tib. ka shod pa] was among the Rimshi. He was very smart, but actually he was an idiot (tib. kugpa [lkugs pa]). So he thought that [Künphel](#) la would have the power. He himself was also pro-Künphel la and he was the staff member (tib. lecha [las bya]) of the [Trapchi](#) Regiment, and [Künphel](#) la treated him well. So he thought, "Today if I do something strong, there will be hope to become a [Kalön](#)." But when the other people didn't dare to speak out, [Kapshöba](#) said, "What is the use of appointing a Kudrak as the partner of the Silön? It will be good to appoint [Künphel](#) la." He said that in his sub-group, and then all said that this would be good because if someone said no it would be dangerous. First [Kapshöba](#) said that among the 4-5 people [in his sub-group] and then some said, "Now, there is talk that [Künphel](#) la will be better. How about this? And then [Kapshöba](#) also said, [Künphel](#) la will be good." Actually, all this was done by [Kapshöba](#).

Q

Did the sub-groups tell their suggestions or opinions (tib. samchar [bsam 'char])?

A

Each team told their opinions and all the opinions were collected and then they told the Tsondu Assembly about the opinions of each sub-group. On that day some monks said, "Can [Künphel](#) la do that?" [tib. kun 'phel lags kyis yong gi red pas] And some abbots said,

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"It will not be good if [Künphel](#) la did that [tib. kun 'phel lags kyis byas na yag po yong gi ma red] because from the religious point of view a Lama is needed." This was like [in English] Christian Fathers saying something for religion. On that day it was kind of unsettled [tib. ya re yo re] and the Tsondu Assembly was adjourned. That night [Lungshar](#) was very scared.

Q

Supposing an abbot had an opinion to tell. Would he raise his hand or stand up?

A

No. First the abbot would talk to others among the abbots and then they would say, "Is this the point of view that we decided?" Then they asked whether there are [in English] objections and some might say we should reduce this point, and then they made the correction. Then some might say we must add something to it. They did not raise their hands.

Q

Supposing among the Senampa and Rimshi when some said [Künphel](#) la is good, if you wanted to say he would not be good, how would one say that? Would you stand up?

A

One or two people said, "Künphel la is not a government official so probably he can't do that." [tib. kun 'phel lags zhung zhabs ma red/ ga'i e yong]. When they said that, Janglojan [gung](#) [tib. lchang lo can gung], who was a Senampa after he was demoted, said, "If you appoint a lama as the regent, how would it be okay if his [chandzö](#) who is an idiot without any knowledge comes there and says that he is the [dzasa](#) [of the regent] and they would [just sit and] take snuff, about one [bo](#) of snuff [a large amount, about 30 pounds]." [tib. red/ rgyal po bla ma gcig la bskos tsang/ de'i phyag mdzod yon tan rtsa nas med pa dza sag yin zer mkhan de 'dra yong/ de tshos sna tha 'bo [gang](#) tsam 'then mkhan lkugs pa de 'dra yong na ga 'dra yong gi red]. They said that there was no consensus (tib. don dag snying po mi 'dug) so they collected the notes [from the sub-groups] and submitted them to the Kashag and the Silön. When they read these, the majority had said that we needed a lama.

starthere * So when it was not settled, [Lungshar](#) thought that [Künphel](#) la would control the power of the Kashag. If he did that, then it will be a disaster for him, because those

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two were [basically] enemies. So he acted very cleverly and told [Künphel](#) la to give him the letter. It was probably delayed for about 5-6 days until the 8 or 9th. Then one day [Künphel](#) la told [Lungshar](#), "Some of your letters are here, so I am giving you some of them. As for that [samtra](#) letter, since it belonged to the Dalai Lama, I have erased it so you don't need to worry about it at all." So [Lungshar](#) was kind of mentally happy and thought if [Künphel](#) la had [eally] erased the letter on the [samtra](#), his work regarding that was done. But still it was not okay for him if [Künphel](#) la used his power, so he had to get rid of him. However, he thought that he should not say that himself. [So he turned to he monasteries] He knew that Drepung and Sera monasteries were powerful, and that in Drepung, the most powerful monk was Sog Jiso Könjog [tib. sog spyi so dkon cog]. He had white hair and was very knowledgeable and was a very rich Jiso [Note: the Jiso was the top economic manager for the monastery as a whole] who didn't know [pecha](#) (religious texts) and also had a wife. But he had many young student disciples (tib. [gidru](#)) wherever he went in Drepung ... [some words unclear]. He was powerful in Drepung and was close to [Lungshar](#). I heard that [Lungshar](#) told Sog Jiso what would be the better way to deal with [Künphel](#) la. Sog Jiso had been to India, and at that time he was in Dam [tib. 'dam] [a nomad area north of Lhasa] buying wool. He was very close to Lhalu.

They also send a person on horseback to call Chamön [tib. byams smon] in Sera, who was close to Lhalu and was verbally eloquent. He also didn't know [pecha](#), but knew politics. So [Lungshar](#), Sog Jiso, Chamön and a few others among the Kudrak like the Lord Chamberlain discussed how to get rid of Kujar ([Künphel](#) la). [They decided that) Sendre should get rid of [Künphel](#) la, so Chamön went to Sera and said, "People didn't know that the Dalai Lama was sick and then he passed away, so maybe he was poisoned or something else happened to him. So don't we need something that makes us believe this [believe how he died]?" [tib. nga [tsho](#) yid ches pa zhig dgos kyi ma red pas] Monks usually didn't think too much, so when somebody said something, they would feel extremely happy.

Sog Jiso Könjog went to Drepung and gave a little bit of money [to the monks]. If somebody didn't have money and he was given 5-6 [dotse](#), that would be okay. When there was a disturbance in Hong Kong, they were paying one [yuan](#) when people broke [windows] with stones. If you broke 10 windows you got 10 [yuan](#). It was like that when bad people got money. In Drepung, there was the Tsogchen [Shengo](#) [the chief disciplinary officer] ... but it was strange. It was like when the soldiers were lining up in formation they did whatever was ordered like [in English] "present arms". When the Shengo's law was

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there, the monks were also doing the same and keeping quiet. It was the same in Drepung and Sera. But one day, when there was a disturbance (tib. sa ngi sing ngi [zang ngi zing ngi]) [the monks were yelling to find out what happened to the Dalai Lama], and even the [Shengo](#) was scared because this concerned the Dalai Lama's death. Some monks had come to the [chöra](#) debating grove because when they were called, all would come. They said, "Isn't it a serious matter that the Dalai Lama passed away? " [tib. rgyal ba rin po che gshegs yag 'di [gang](#) min tshad ma red pas] Then all would say, "Yes," and all would come thinking that if others went and they didn't go [to demonstrate at the Assembly], they would do something to them. Even the [Shengo](#) would come.

Q

At that time, why did they omit Ganden?

A

Because it was far away. However, the abbot was there and there were also two representatives of Ganden [who stayed in Lhasa]. They didn't know much and if they were told to send one person and they would just say yes.

Q

Did the abbots of [Sendregasum](#) sit together, or did they sit separately [at the Assembly]?

A

They sat separately. Sog Jiso and Chamön sat there as if they didn't know about this. Then when the monks came and said "woo woo," [demonstrated asking about the Dalai Lama's death], the abbots would ask them what happened and they would say, "Oh! The Dalai Lama passed away, oh oh [unclear] so the government has to ask about that." Then they [the abbots] would say, "Don't worry, we will ask." And then the abbots asked what should be done? When they held the better [tib. yag pa] Tsondu Assembly, Chamön and those people would attend.

Q

Do you have a name for this Tsondu?

A

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In the monastery, it is the [Laji](#) of the Trasa [tib. grwa sa]. All who had the power [the [Laji](#) was the highest monastery council and consisted of abbots, the Shelngo, the Jiso and the Umdze]. They would be there and they would tell the monks not to do that. We would gather together in the Trasa and discuss it. At that time, Sera and the Drepung were there, but Ganden didn't know much. They [those from Drepung and Sera] were telling the Ganden monks that they should do whatever the Sendre monks were doing.

Q

Did Sera and Drepung hold a meeting together?

A

Yes. They held a meeting together and wrote a note [tib. yi ge]. At that time, they had already told [Künphel](#) la to build the Golden Stupa tomb, so [Künphel](#) la acted show-offish. He put much gold in a car and drove it up there [to the Potala]. At that time, only the Dalai Lama and [Künphel](#) la had cars, and after the death of the Dalai Lama, people did not hear the sound of a car, but on that day, [Künphel](#) la used the car. So people saw that he still had the power and he went to [Tse](#) [Potala] and melted a lot of gold.

At that time, [Lungshar](#) was like a burning fire [his anger] when he heard that [Künphel](#) la and the Silön were eating together. He thought that now he must hurry [to do something to get ride of [Künphel](#) la] because [he could since] his crime was erased [from the [samtra](#) message board] though he would not say that to other people. [Lungshar](#) was also thinking that because his crime was already erased, he could relax and keep quiet, so he acted cleverly towards [Künphel](#) la. [he worked through the monks]

The monks wrote in the note: "The 1st point: building the Golden Stupa for the Dalai Lama's remains is very important. It is not okay to build it recklessly or wantonly. It should be built in accordance with the [pecha](#) [religious texts] and tradition." [tib. rgyal ba rin po che'i gser sdong bzheng yag de gal chen po zhe drag red/ 'di [gang](#) byung mang byung byas nas bzhengs pas 'grig gi ma red / dpe cha'i gzhung dang mthun pa dang lugs srol dang mthun pa zhig dgos kyi 'dug]" This implied that they should not let [Künphel](#) la to do this.

Q

Did they write the name of [Künphel](#) la?

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A

No, they didn't. At that time, [Künphel](#) la was starting his work by doing things like melting the gold, so they [monks] wanted to participate in this work. The 2nd point: "Not knowing what happened to the Dalai Lama other than that he was sick, it was said that he passed away. For this, we, the Tibetan people and the [Sendregasum](#) are extremely worried. So we need [in English] proof to make us believe that the Dalai Lama really died [was not killed]." [tib. rgyal ba rin po che ga re byas pa dang snyung pa ha ma go ba la/ gshegs song zer ba de nga [tsho](#) bod mi dmangs dang gdan sa gsum sems khral zhe po cig byung song/ mi dmangs rnam nas rgyal ba rin po che dngos gnas gshegs pa yid 'ches pa zhig dgos kyi 'dug].

The 3rd point: "As for the future ruler of Tibet, according to the tradition from the early times, we need a lama to be the regent of Tibet. This should be decided soon and definitely." [tib. phyis 'byung bod kyi dbang byed mkhan de/sngar mo nang bzhin bod kyi rgyal po bla ma zhig dgos kyi red/ 'di tan tan tig tig mgyogs po thag chod pa zhig dgos kyi red]. They submitted this note to the Kashag.

At that time, the abbots were afraid and they didn't have ideas or thoughts. They just knew how to maintain (tib. sung [srung]) their abbot's position. Otherwise, they didn't have any other [ideas]. The other people in the Tsondu also didn't have many ideas and they just considered attending the Tsondu as one day to be like finishing one day's work. They said that they need to make representatives from [Sendregasum](#) who would submit the note [rather than all go to deliver it]. The representatives (tib. 'thus mi ['thus mi]) of Drepung included Kanden Thöndrub [tib. skal ldan don grub] who was the partner of the Sog Jiso Könjog. He was an eloquent person and there were also some other representatives. From Sera, there was Chamön himself and another representative who was a tall [Khamba](#) nicknamed "Big Horse" (tib. tibija [ti pi cag]). There were also several other people [from Sera] and several from Ganden. These people were said to be representatives. There were 4 representatives from Drepung, 3 representatives from Sera and 2 representatives from Ganden. They were told to represent [Sendregasum](#) in dealing with the Kashag. So they got the power.

Q

Did the abbots send the representatives?

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A

The ordinary members (tib. mang [dmangs]) didn't know about the matter, and they were just for shouting in the Tsondu and saying things like, "Yes, we have to do that." After they shouted, the abbots heard that, but they didn't have any ideas. There were only 2-3 people who made this happen [the plan]. It had been arranged for them [to speak in the Tsondu].

Q

These people were the eloquent ones, right?

A

Yes. When they chose them, one of their friends would say, "Mister (tib. kushog [sku zhabs]) Chamön is very good, right?" And the others said, "of course, he is" (tib. yingo chung [yin dgos byung]). Chamön was indeed famous. Sog Jiso Könjog was the Drepung representative in 1914 in Simla and [Chamön] was the Sera representative in 1914 in Simla.

Q

The abbots didn't have the power to select the representatives themselves, right?

A

Yes. When one person nominates another person [to be the representative] , nobody would make an [in English] objection because they didn't dare to say that Chamön is not okay. The monks who attended the Tsondu didn't have any idea who would be good or bad to be the representative. They just thought about doing cooking at home after the Tsondu. Sog Jiso and Chamön were induced to do that by giving a lot of money, so these people were sitting there very sharp (tib. trungpo [grung po]) whereas the other people in the Tsondu were not like that.

Q

Did the Tratsang (monastic colleges) have representatives in the Tsondu?

A

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Deyang and Ngagpa [tratsang](#) were small and they didn't have much. Usually, when they mention the names of people like Chamön and say isn't he good, other people say yes and even the abbots would not dare to say anything. If someone said something against this, they will say that the abbot is a reactionary [tib. log spyod pa]. So all the people kept quiet. Then the representatives came to the Kashag and reported this. The Kashag was astonished and was wondering what should be done. They had the power, so they could arrest people, but they said, "If so, we will hold the Tsondu gyenzom." [the largest General Assembly]. At that time, they [the monks] also wrote in the note, "Please allow us, the representatives of [Sendregasum](#), to attend the Tsondu with the abbots." The Kashag said, "You are allowed to attend."

When they were told to hold the Tsondu, [Lungshar](#), Sog Jiso, Chamön and the Lord Chamberlain Tendzin Chönyi [tib. bstan 'dzin chos nyid] who didn't like Kujar, had the power and the other people didn't have any power.

Q

How about the [Trunyichemmo](#) and the Tsipön?

A

They were afraid because [Sendregasum](#) was standing behind them and among the Kudrak, there was [Lungshar](#). Even the [Shape](#) were afraid.

Q

What date was that when the monks came to the Kashag?

A

That was probably on the 14th or 15th.

Q

When did they hold the Tsondu?

A

The Tsondu was held on about the 16th.