Chapter Five

The Death of Mingyur Peldrön and the Making of a Saint

The Precious Lama, Bliss Queen of the Ḍākinīs, regained her majestic youthful form. She held her right hand up by her ear as though she were snapping her fingers, and her left in the mudra of meditative equipoise. Her eyes had rolled upwards and she had a radiant smile on her face, with the yogic gaze of the dharmakaya.

—Gyurmé Ösel

The year 1769 began poorly for Gyurmé Ösel. According to Dispeller, from the very first month of the new year he witnessed numerous bad omens. These included a strange sound in the heavens like the loud lowing of a bull, comets falling from the sky in a web of light, musk deer taking shelter in the stables, and a white-winged raven hanging about. What’s more, he was beset by prophetic nightmares:

I dreamed I sat in the kitchen of Kachö Dechen Ling near a secret door, happily and completely ready to serve the master’s [Mingyur Peldrön’s] departure. She was preparing to set off right away [when] just below [the building], a river like the Tsangpo overflowed, [and] I thought to myself, “The lama is of an advanced age, and she has but one attendant. She shouldn’t go! I myself will go in service to her.” Just at that moment the master herself went up into the sky, [and] from Drakpoché to Samdentsé, a five-colored rainbow could be seen stretched like a cloth across the sky. The master’s face looked like it had when she was in the prime of life. Her naked body was handsome and bright, adorned with red cloth and bone ornaments, her black hair hanging loose. She sat astride a white lion with
her right index finger pointing at the sky in a threatening manner, and her left hand reaching down to me as though gesturing to help me. She turned her face away and I sensed that she said in a clear voice:

“The free mind, uncontrived
Vajrasattva’s face made real
Truly seeing one’s own face
Seeing these worldly affairs,
Clear them all away.”

Saying this, she flew off at great speed into the westerly sky. I burst into tears of grief and awoke crying. Later, I realized that the most excellent lama is indeed Karchen Yeshé Tsogyel, and she was demonstrating her ability to perform a magical display. Delightfully, this meant that she dwelt [as Mingyur Peldrôn] in her ordinary form body. If her nature is one of wisdom, would she then go to the Blissful Pure Lands [when she died]? Another night I dreamt that the noon sun was falling below the horizon and not in the middle of the sky as it should be. Sinking, it dissolved into darkness. I had this and other similar nightmares.

So begins the final section of the Life of Mingyur Peldrôn. Across a range of religious and historical spaces, including but also far beyond the Tibetan Buddhist context, it was in the death of the individual that the saint was created. In death a saint could still interact with the living through commemoration, visions, and relics. The moment of death was thus definitive in establishing Mingyur Peldrôn’s sainthood. Descriptions of her decline and eventual demise—including the treatment of her body, the arrival of mourners, and discussion of her funeral services—all contribute to her depiction as a fully realized enlightened woman. Here Dispeller takes its most hagiographic tone and becomes driven by reports of signs and portents as well as miracles, all of which were attached to the birth and death of prominent Tibetan religious teachers as a matter of course. Just as in the Life of Shakyamuni Buddha and others, miracles communicated that the natural world was itself responding to the arrival or departure of an enlightened being. Various “signs of saintly death,” according to the Blazing Remains Tantra, point to six classifications for signs of saintly death: images, relics, lights, sounds, earth tremors, and atmospheric phenomena.
The signs in Mingyur Peldrön’s death narrative generally line up with these classifications; all six types crop up, with the exception of earthquakes. Miracles play a role throughout the course of *Dispeller*, not just at the time of her death. Extensive miraculous descriptions also mark the other liminal moments in her life, including her birth, first refuge ceremony, and the first time she gives a teaching. These incidents generally contain multiple miracles listed together. An example is when she first arrived in Sikkim and supposedly gave a teaching to a large crowd:

> More than four thousand faithful men and women went to make offerings to her. She bestowed [on them] the Long-Life Empowerment of the *Deathless Essence Compendium* from [Terdak Lingpa’s] *New Treasures*. At this time, a five-colored rainbow appeared over where the master was, and infused her body. Having completed the long-life empowerment, before they left, in the sky above the master’s head thunder sounded and a vulture circled her head, keeping her on its right side as if in circumambulation. Thus, the seed of faith was planted [in the crowd]. They shouted her name in joy, and prostrated before her. Furthermore, she distributed sacred substances which, in accordance with the teachings, satisfied the desires of each person. The happy crowd broke into dance. 6

This moment in the narrative marks the beginning of Mingyur Peldrön’s teaching career and so includes rainbows, unexplained thunder, and unusual animal behavior. In similar scenes throughout the namtar, flowers fall from the empty sky and rainbows materialize. In this way moments of liminality are set apart and marked with signs that reinforce her divinity. In this case the importance of her teaching career and the strong connection that was formed with the Sikkimese people is highlighted with the narrative tools that define this text as hagiography, and similar descriptions attend the closing section of her *Life*.

Mingyur Peldrön spent the first three months of the year 1769 in retreat, and the remaining months and days leading up to her death were entirely consumed with passing on teachings to her disciples. At the end of her last retreat, a large group of monastics from Drachi, Mön, and Dagpo arrived to pay reverence to her and receive final teachings. The entire group made offerings and aspiration prayers to her, in response to which she expressed her pleasure in having successfully helped so many beings. She urged them to rely only on the teachings of the Great Perfection, in particular the
Definitive Secret Vajragarbha. At Namdröl Yangtsé she spent three days explaining her last will and testament to the head monastics, before continuing on to Dechen Ling. These last days of instruction are presented as a testament to her dedication to passing on teachings to her disciples and her concern about the continuity of Dzogchen in particular.

According to Gyurmé Ösel, in the fourth month her winds reversed and she began to show signs of illness and then impending death. A group of 160 people had gathered, and a new statue and thangka painting were created in her image. The group included nuns from Samten Tsé, Samten Chöling, and Ardok Gönsar as well as monastics from other regions. There are no non-monastic people mentioned in this particular group, suggesting that Mingyur Peldrön’s next words were directed solely to the community of monks and nuns. In spite of her disciples urging her to rest, she fought back pain, fatigue, and her continually deteriorating condition in order to give them one last teaching. Arguing with pleas that she forgo teaching, she explained:

I have grown old, it is quite difficult to practice, but in [my fatigue], I think about the stream of the doctrine, and in particular, awakening. Now, shall I offer what instruction I have left? Now the body grows weary and my eyesight weak, and soon I will depart to the next life, but it’s possible for me to wait a little while. In this way, I will now teach, and not depart.

Gyurmé Ösel claims that Mingyur Peldrön taught until the very day of her death. Continuing with his penchant for reporting lists of teachings received (senyik), he recalls the teachings she bestowed in these last days and to whom. The texts that he includes in her death narrative reflect her last efforts to pass on the teachings of the Great Perfection before she died. In doing so, he connects Mingyur Peldrön to the next generation of Mindröl Ling religious leadership through the transmissions that she gave to her disciples and an assortment of other people. These include people as varied as the monastery storekeeper, her sister Lady Peldzin, and her nephews the Fourth Trichen Pema Tenzin Rinpoche, and the Third Khenchen Orgyen Tenzin Dorjé. Multiple teachings are mentioned, all of which were closely associated with Mindröl Ling and with Terdak Lingpa’s treasure tradition. For example, the Adon (A-syllable) instructions that she was first authorized to teach as a teenager, the Khandro Nyingtik, the entirety of Terdak Lingpa’s treasure cycles, the Zaplam Deshek Kündü, wrathful empowerments associated with Terdak Lingpa such as the Nyangter Drakmar, and others,
were all bestowed in her final days. Gyurmé Ösel claims that right before her death she gave teachings to a large group of laity and monastics, in addition to her close disciples, who together formed an audience of about four hundred people.

Gyurmé Ösel includes a statement that Mingyur Peldrön reportedly made to her attendants while talking with them about how important it is to continue the monastery’s teachings. In explaining her concern to her attendants and her reasoning for giving so many teachings while she was so ill, she said:

As for this Dzogchen teaching, I am an old woman. After I die, how might it be weakened? Like a lamp-flame in a great wind.

From the beginning of that fateful year, Gyurmé Ösel realized that he would soon be separated from the teacher he had been faithfully attending since he was a child. Ruminating on her death, wondering whether she would make a postmortem journey to a Pure Land, it was as though his sun were falling from the sky. Here we witness the disciple’s grief as he prepares to say goodbye to the woman who had been his teacher since he was eight years old. In final homage to her, he details her funerary rites and the unusual occurrences surrounding them.

**Funerary Rites**

In reporting Mingyur Peldrön’s death and the funeral services held for her, Gyurmé Ösel is building an argument about her sanctification. He reports that she died in the seventh Tibetan month of the year 1769. Her body was not moved or touched for nine days.

At that time, on the tenth day just as the sun was rising, the precious lama, Bliss Queen of the Ḍākinīs, regained her majestic youthful form. She held her right hand up by her ear as though she were snapping her fingers, and her left in the mudra of meditative equipoise. Her eyes had rolled upwards and she had a radiant smile on her face, with the yogic gaze of the Dharma-kaya. From the top of her head rushed more and more clear drops, along with her life force and phlegm and so forth, and other demonstrations of her high attainment of wisdom and successful transmigration. I and the other students were completely amazed.
Observing this miraculous physical transformation, Gyurmé Ösel claims that he and the nineteen other disciples who were present in the room immediately experienced realization of the true nature of reality and recognized that their master had attained nirvana. A group of blood relatives and close members of the monastic community performed funeral rituals for her remains. Her body was treated with all the reverence due to a great teacher.

First a couple of monastics and a doctor together washed her corpse then anointed it with camphor, saffron, and other sweet-smelling herbs. Then the family brought some long white ceremonial scarves, red mourning clothes, and perfumed Benares muslin, which they wrapped tightly around her. They offered tea and incense, the scent of which pervaded the air. On the outside they adorned her upper and lower body in fine red garments. They adorned her with precious ornaments, placing these over her clothes, and seated her body on the throne. Then they made mandala offerings.

Gyurmé Ösel’s account of funeral preparations gives us a sense of the reverence exhibited by Mingyur Peldrön’s family and disciples and speaks to her high standing in the community. During the cremation itself, Gyurmé Ösel claims that the smoke rising from the site took the shape of conch shells, dharma wheels, lotuses, horses, and jewels. After the cremation, a completely intact crown was found among Mingyur Peldrön’s cremains. Likewise, they discovered that her bones were covered in tracings of divine images and syllables. Monastics made tsa-tsas (small devotional sculptures of relics mixed with clay) from the ash and interred them in a reliquary stupa. The story of her death is filled with rainbows. Rainbow-colored clouds come into view, lights emerge from her residence, and multiple funeral attendants report unusual rainbows witnessed throughout the region during the time of her death. During her cremation, ravens followed the rainbow-colored smoke, and two weasels were observed circumambulating the area. Gyurmé Ösel reports that all of these miraculous signs and portents instilled deep faith in all those gathered.

In Tibetan narrative accounts of the death of a saint (as in many other contexts of Buddhist death narratives), it is usual for different types of miraculous signs to play a prominent role. Images of deities or of the saint herself might appear in the sky or elsewhere as a means for relating to observers that she has achieved a high level of realization. Gyurmé Ösel’s dream vision of Mingyur Peldrön in the sky before him fits into this category, as
does her body regaining its youthful form in the week after her decease and a lack of odor emanating from her corpse. Among the other miraculous sights that reportedly induced faith in all of her mourners were the relics found in her cremains and the animals that exhibited strange and devotional behavior at her funeral. The category of “lights,” including rainbows and other lights that might emanate from the corpse or near where it lies, abound at the nun’s death. The account is somewhat thin on the subject of mysterious sounds and earth tremors, although Gyurmé Ösel does report having heard strange sounds earlier in the year, sounds he likened to a roaring bull and later attributed to her impending death.

In discussing the death of Mingyur Peldrön, Gyurmé Ösel also describes who attended her funeral and in what capacity. People from all over central Tibet came, including representatives from every single monastery in the region of Ü, regardless of denomination. He claims that all members of Mindröling’s branch monasteries, all blood relatives (and their servants), were in attendance as well as a collection of other faithful people from Drachi. He takes care to note that among the throngs were religious leaders, government officials, and ordinary laypeople. Regional governors were there, including an army general from Yuthok and other political figures such as Polhané’s daughter Deden Drölma and her husband. The large number of mourners—many of whom held high social status—suggests the life of a woman at the center of the religious elite, respected by religious and political institutional leaders as well as the aristocracy more generally. In *Dispeller* the references to important political figures and their relatives reinforce her connection with these families. Appearing as they do at the end of the story, these details work to establish Mingyur Peldrön’s position of prestige both within and beyond the Mindröling community one last time.

Mingyur Peldrön’s saintliness was later cemented in the annual memorials for her. These commemorations established her as a figure both significant and worthy of remembrance. A brief description of Mingyur Peldrön’s annual commemoration rites is mentioned in the Mindröling catalog (*kar-chak*) and stands as a testament to her continued importance in the official memory of the institution. For five years after Mingyur Peldrön’s death, annual memorials were held in her honor on Guru Rinpoche commemoration days of the summer rains retreat. After that, less extravagant commemoration rites were held annually, beginning on the seventh day of the seventh
month and lasting for seven days. During this time offerings were laid out in the great hall, culminating in a large feast on the last evening.\textsuperscript{32}

Mingyur Peldrön was also memorialized beyond the Mindröling community in the years and centuries following her death. Two references to her appear in Chökyi Gyatso’s (1880–1923/25) early-twentieth-century Pilgrimage Guide to Ütsang,\textsuperscript{33} which mentions her jewel-encrusted tomb among the architectural wonders of Mindröling. He also reports that Mingyur Peldrön’s seal can be found at the Pelchen temple in Rulugang, a temple affiliated with Mindröling.\textsuperscript{34} Today Mingyur Peldrön’s image memorializes her in modern-day Nyingma communities, including at Mindrolling Monastery in Dehradun, India. At Mindröling in central Tibet, she is represented as a nun, with red robes and a shaved head. There a bronze statue also depicts her sitting in lotus posture, with her hands in \textit{dhyana mudra}, dressed in monastic robes and donning a “\textit{paṇḍita}” hat. But very different images can be found at Pemayangtsé Monastery and Sangnak Choeling Monastery in Pelling, West Sikkim. At Pemayangtsé she appears in a mural painted by master craftsman Khandu Wangchuk in the late twentieth century. Mingyur Peldrön is depicted in the style of lay practitioner, with long hair and golden earrings, but also wearing the red robes and fanned hat of a religious specialist. At Sangnak Choeling a statue depicts her as a female tantric deity, with her right hand in \textit{vitarka mudra} and her left holding a skullcup. Her breasts are bare, but she is bedecked in the scarves and jewels of a goddess.

In each of these images, a different aspect of Mingyur Peldrön’s identity is emphasized. In one she is a tantric goddess, with flowing hair and bared breasts. In another she fully represents the monastic world, with shaved head and red robes. And in the third she sits somewhere between the two—as a respected religious practitioner and laywoman.\textsuperscript{35} The image of her that appears on the second page of the Chinese printing of her collected works reputedly comes from the original site of Mindröling Monastery, outside Lhasa, but I have not been able to verify its existence there. In this image Mingyur Peldrön is depicted as a nun, with shaved head and red robes and her hands posed in \textit{dhyana mudra}. What is most interesting about this image is its true-to-life quality. Her left eye crosses inward, as though in life she suffered from amblyopia. Since the provenance of this image has not yet been verified, we cannot be sure of its age or relation to her actual likeness, but rather than a perfected depiction, the image seems to be representing her as realistically as possible. The presence of these and other images at Nyingma institutions across the Tibetan Buddhist world show that Mingyur
Peldrön continues to be important to at least some degree in the modern Buddhist community. The variety of depictions attest to her connection to different aspects of Nyingma life, including monastic and non-monastic representations, and her relevance for religious communities.

The potential for sainthood was established in the events surrounding an individual's death across a range of religious historical and temporal contexts. In Tibetan namtar the death narrative was likewise a moment to reiterate the saint's high religious status while placing them in a larger historical moment. The miracles surrounding Mingyur Peldrön's funeral convey her divine nature, while the host of mourners in attendance establish her as an enlightened religious teacher, a recognized Mindröling representative, and a friend to many powerful political and religious leaders. While the significance of relics has been interpreted in a variety of ways, it is clear that Gyurmé Ösel considered relics to be an important means for reinforcing the legitimacy of his master's sainthood and the hagiography itself. His points of evidence for her high status included all of the elements discussed earlier, including signs and portents, the relics found in her cremains, and lists of the people who came to witness the relics alongside him.

Gyurmé Ösel's dream accounts surrounding the death narrative of his beloved teacher are also a potent example of how hagiography can be used to solidify the sanctity of the saint and show how he bookends the narrative with reminders of Mingyur Peldrön's connection to Yeshé Tsogyel. In interpreting his nightmares, he becomes convinced that it is evidence that she is enlightened, that she has realized the true nature of her mind (as conveyed in the song she sings to him). Accompanied by the strange signs that he witnessed in the same month, these dreams become evidence that she was an emanation of Yeshé Tsogyel. Her death narrative acts as a bookend with the introductory section of Dispeller to assert her status as an emanation of Yeshé Tsogyel and therefore a female divinity. However, whereas in the opening section a great number of female buddhas and historical women are mentioned, in the closing she is likened to Yeshé Tsogyel alone. Yeshé Tsogyel is a common presence throughout Dispeller, and she is the deified figure most prominent in Mingyur Peldrön's death. Gyurmé Ösel points out that all mourners took refuge in Mingyur Peldrön as a recognized and true activity emanation of Yeshé Tsogyel and explains that he became fully convinced of her accomplished yogini status upon awakening from his prophetic dream. At the very end of the text, he describes Mingyur Peldrön as
the “unmistaken reincarnation of Padma’s Wife Karchen [that is, Yeshé Tsogyel], the most high Great Bliss Ḍākinī Queen herself.” In working to establish her veracity as an emanation of Yeshé Tsogyel, he presents her as worthy of the same reverence as the iconic figure. In the context of her death narrative, this reiteration establishes Mingyur Peldrön as Yeshé Tsogyel and acts as an apotheosis of sorts. Her identification as Yeshé Tsogyel acts as the frame narrative for Dispeller, offering a final argument about the historical woman through her connection with the divine.

A Dispeller of Distress for the Faithful as Legacy

After framing Dispeller as a story of Mingyur Peldrön–as–Yeshé Tsogyel, Gyurmé Ösel turns to a brief explanation about why he wrote the hagiography in the first place. He closes with a colophon explaining the circumstances surrounding his completion of the work in 1782:

Thus goes the namtar of Mingyur Peldrön, lord of the hundred buddha families and all-pervasive sovereign, called A Dispeller of Distress for the Faithful. Initially, the Tibetan Ruler Miwang Gyurmé Sönam Tobgyé [Polhané] and the Lhagyari Zhabdrung Chakdor Wangchen had supplicated at the feet of my excellent Lama [and requested a namtar of her]. Then, a year before she passed into the Great Expanse of Peace, I asked twelve times for it, and she granted [permission]. “A lama’s namtar should be written by their disciple, so it should come from you.” Again, she exhorted me with the words, “Compose it!” Although I began, demons interfered and I abandoned [the project]. Then from the direction of Yeru, in Tsang, the ears of Deden Dorjé’s mendicant student Gyurmé Chöpel were continually oppressed [meaning unclear]. [Then there was the birth of] the lineage son of that lord of all beings Rigidzin Pemalingpa, the incarnation of the renowned victorious dharma master [Terdak Lingpa], the one called Rigidzin Pema Wangyel Dorjé Pel Zangpo, gift of the gods. His speech urged me on. In particular, this aroused in me undivided scorching faith to plant seeds of faith for the sake of distant future generations, so that they could hold this immutable illustration of Mingyur (Peldrön) in their minds.49

In describing his reasons for writing Dispeller, Gyurmé Ösel first invokes the names of Polhané and a member of the Lhagyari family.40 Although
Polhané (here referred to by his full name, Miwang Gyurmé Sönam Tobgyé) had died in 1747, Gyurmé Ösel references him as one of the influencing forces behind the hagiography’s completion. This final reminder of Polhané’s relationship to Mingyur Peldrön reinforces Gyurmé Ösel’s assertions that he was important in her life and in the creation of her hagiography. In reading it, one wonders whether one of Polhané’s living family members—perhaps his daughter or another family member—had urged Gyurmé Ösel to write the Life. This final reference also suggests that Polhané’s role as a legitimating supporter of Mingyur Peldrön continued to be important long after both of them had died. In the colophon Gyurmé Ösel outlines his reasoning for not completing Dispeller until thirteen years after her death. He explains that a variety of difficulties kept him from composing it, even after many years of discussing it with her during her lifetime and working to earn her definitive permission to write it the year before she died.

While the role of prominent politicians and their aristocratic families is clear, it seems that the preservation of lineage memory was Gyurmé Ösel’s impetus for finishing Dispeller, and the person who inspired the composition of the hagiography was a boy who was likely an infant or young child when the book was completed. Gyurmé Pema Wangyel was the son of the Fifth Trichen, Gyurmé Trinlé Namgyel (1765–1812), and Mingyur Peldrön’s grand-nephew. He would ultimately be identified as an incarnation of Terdak Lingpa and would go on to become the Sixth Trichen of Mindröling in his adulthood. It is possible that the year 1782 coincided with the baby’s birth, although this is not stated directly. In any event Gyurmé Ösel mentions that he hoped writing the hagiography would mean that the next generation of Mindröling would have access to the stories of their ancestors and that these stories would serve as an inspiration for future generations. If we also take into consideration his insistence that her next birth would be male for one generation in order to better serve the Mindröling cause, we might surmise that Gyurmé Ösel was hoping for the boy to be identified as her reincarnation. In the end Gyurmé Pema Wangyel was the newest member of the family in 1782, and the boy’s arrival prompted Gyurmé Ösel to write about the Life of the child’s deceased great-aunt. Some years later his sister, Trinlé Chödrön, would be born. Her role at Mindröling has been likened to that of Mingyur Peldrön’s.

What little we know about Trinlé Chödrön echoes similarities with her great-aunt. Like Mingyur Peldrön, Trinlé Chödrön was the daughter of a
trichen. She was born to the Fifth Trichen and an unnamed mother sometime in the late eighteenth century. Her dates are unclear, although she finished one of her works in 1825 and was said to have died young. In *A Festival of Victorious Conquerors* she is remembered for having dedicated her short life wholly to the dharma. According to the modern-day narrative of Mindrolling Monastery in India, Trinlé Chödrön was an ordained nun who was known to be a great teacher and in particular a Dzogchen master. She reportedly acted as a teacher to Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo and Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye and wrote at least one ritual text for the *sevasadhana* of Vajravarahi Kalikruddha, one instruction manual for the practice of Transferrence of Consciousness, or Powa, and an explanation of Anuyoga. She is also mentioned as part of the Mindröling lineage of Atiyoga in Dudjom Rinpoche’s *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*. According to the *Lives of the Mindröling Succession Lineages*, “After Jetsün Mingyur Peldrön, she is the Mindröling Jetsünma to whom [Mindröling is] most indebted.” This text lists three women among its thirty-seven figures. One of them is Mingyur Peldrön. The others are her grandmother Yangchen Drölma and her granddaughter Trinlé Chödrön. Other than this, I have found no Tibetan-language accounts of Trinlé Chödrön’s life, and she has no namtar. It seems that her brother’s namtar was destroyed by a “barbarian force” at an undisclosed time, and it is possible that any *Lives* about her might have met the same fate, if they had ever been written at all. From what little we know of her, Trinlé Chödrön’s trajectory was similar to Mingyur Peldrön’s. She was educated alongside her elder brother, bestowed with kama and terma teachings at Mindröling, and eventually became a nun. She wrote several texts and was reportedly a teacher herself, and who knows what kind of impact she might have made had she lived longer. The existence of Mingyur Peldrön’s namtar could have served as an example for her as she was growing up. Today she is still considered to be second only to Mingyur Peldrön as an important woman for their institution.

In spite of the clear importance of Mingyur Peldrön, Yangchen Drölma, and Trinlé Chödrön in the development of Mindröling as a viable religious institution, no formal reincarnation lineage has ever been established there that is filled exclusively by women. The women of the family all receive the title of jetsünma, but this serves more as a mark of respect, rather than identification with a specific set of responsibilities or forms of engagement with institutional stewardship. In contradistinction, there are expectations that come along with being named trichen or khenchen, both positions that
have always been occupied by men. Mindröling’s jetsünmas are nevertheless treated as a lineage of sorts and the third most important Mindröling line after the trichens and the khenchens. Mingyur Peldrön is considered the first in the jetsünma lineage and therefore very important indeed.\(^{46}\) With the jetsünmas the tradition of strong female leadership has persisted at Mindröling, as most recently embodied in the lives and works of Jetsün Khandro Rinpoche and her sister, Jetsün Dechen Paldron. Born in India in 1967, Khandro Rinpoche has continued in Mingyur Peldrön’s footsteps by becoming a nun and has been an active proponent of religious practice throughout her adulthood. In addition to founding and directing the Samten Tsé retreat center for nuns and international practitioners in Mussoorie, India, she maintains the Lotus Garden Retreat Center in Stanley, Virginia. While not identified as an incarnation of Mingyur Peldrön,\(^ {47}\) Khandro Rinpoche is certainly carrying on the traditions of women’s education, dedication to monastic life, and female leadership at Mindröling. In 2012 or 2013 Dechen Paldron gave birth to the eldest in the next generation, a baby girl named Gautami Thrinley Choedron, currently the youngest Mindröling jetsünma. Hopefully, these traditions will continue.

The writing of a *Life* is always necessarily an act of creation. There are details that are included and omitted, communiqués that do and do not land for different audiences, and the inherent biases of both the author and the subject. This is true for Gyurmé Ösel’s *Dispeller* and for this book. In the words of musician Ani DiFranco: “A life, anyone’s life, is vast and uncontainable and I’ve discovered that you can make a whole book full of people and things and still there will be that much left over. . . . Let the record show that there are, in fact, whole other girls with the same face and the same name, who lived concurrently to this one in this story, but that this is the one that got written down. . . . History is not only a story told but a story chosen.”\(^ {48}\)

I assuredly have omitted some aspects of Mingyur Peldrön’s literary and historical existences. That said, as a story chosen, this study has had several goals. First, it has sought to bring forth the story of Mingyur Peldrön’s life in as full a light as possible, as it is presented in the hagiography penned by Gyurmé Ösel. Also, in analyzing the narrative of this *Life* as a literary and historical creation, I have worked to discover what hagiography can tell us about the lives of historical women of privilege and about the Mindröling community in the eighteenth century. As an unusually long example of a
woman’s life story that adheres to a strict chronology and includes biographical accounts, the hagiography shows us a bit more about what life was like for one privileged Tibetan woman. While we cannot generalize based on a single narrative, Mingyur Peldrön’s case offers a counterpoint to more frequent accounts of overt gendered oppression, familial ostracization, and related struggles that were frequently faced by women seeking the life of the religious practitioner. Instead, we see the ways that privilege and gender interact in her life, the actions she took in a variety of challenging contexts, and the ways that her hagiographer leverages all of these parts of her story when presenting the narrative of his beloved teacher.

Dispeller gives us a rare literary example of a privileged and highly educated woman in Tibetan history who advocated for the survival of her tradition and asserted monasticism-centered ideals. Hers is among a handful of such Lives, although others exist that have not yet been explored by scholars in the twenty-first century. Based on what is found in Dispeller, we can assume that socioeconomic and cultural privilege determined one’s access to religious education alongside the strictures of gender and other factors. One’s ability to participate in institutional development or to access systems of education, for example, is influenced by a host of intersectional factors that play upon a personal and communal experience. Mingyur Peldrön’s story reminds us that sexual virtue (here in the form of abstinence) and a strong inclination for female religious leadership can indeed coexist within one personality.

Mingyur Peldrön’s role in her religious community was that of eminent teacher of the masses, of other religious and political leaders, and of individual men and women of the aristocracy. Her position as a religious educator imbued her with an influence akin to leadership, which she exercised by asserting her ideals for proper conduct and dedication to the Great Perfection. She furthered her monastic mission and urged women to take positions of leadership. Gyurmé Ösel’s hagiography of her is as much an exploration of his perceptions of the religious tensions of the mid-eighteenth century as it is a description of her life. The emphases in Dispeller suggest that he was concerned with asserting monasticism among the Nyingma and portraying the personality of his beloved and compassionate teacher. It is understood that any literary work will reflect the views of its author, and Gyurmé Ösel’s representation of non-monastic tantric communities suggests that he was involved in disagreements about proper conduct and practice during his lifetime. While the true extent of these conversations remains unknown, his
message to the next generation is clear: be like Mingyur Peldrön. And what did that mean, according to Gyurmé Ösel? In a quickly changing world, she worked with single-pointed focus to further her soteriological goals and did so in a way that allowed for her practical survival. She actively urged other community members to adhere to the rules of celibacy and chastised those who consumed any amount of alcohol. Gyurmé Ösel's anachronistic representation of the Fifth Lelung suggests a tension within the community to the point that an otherwise respected—if somewhat controversial—figure is presented as a charlatan and playboy in Mingyur Peldrön's namtar. Afforded many of the tools to participate in the maintenance of attendant goals and traditions, Mingyur Peldrön published several ritual texts and used her religious and aristocratic connections for the sake of her community and herself, and as a result she was able to rebuild Mindröling after its decimation. Her texts are evidence of her contribution to and effective support of Mindröling. Paired with Dispeller, her works suggest an institutional influence that likely contributed to the continued support of female leadership in Mindröling's education. Like her stone throne at Pema-yangtsé, they have persisted through the generations to bring us a piece of the work of her lifetime.

Rather than a wholly deified Mingyur Peldrön, the nun of Gyurmé Ösel's hagiography had strong opinions regarding the public religious establishment and her role within it as a teacher and representative of monastic ideals. Her humanity is conveyed through her experiences with the religious and political instabilities of her time and accounts of her frustration with disciples who stray from her ideal path. The result of the combined presentation of her as perfected master and concerned teacher is an active interplay in the construction of public identity that takes into account both the subject's and narrator's intentions for the Mindröling audience. What emerges is a dialogue about how best one might create the public persona of an influential religious leader who also happens to be a woman. The presence of her own voice emphasizes the dialogic potential of Tibetan Life writing. The miraculous aspects of the narrative inform a sense of how one mid-eighteenth-century devotee sought to successfully glorify his master to the extent that she and her teachings would be remembered. Looking at Mingyur Peldrön's Life brings us one step closer to a critical mass of women's Lives, the analysis of which could eventually lead to broad conjectures about religious women and their educational, spiritual, and economic opportunities throughout Tibetan history.
As a “bridge” between two previously studied time periods (that is, the long seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries), Mingyur Peldrön’s hagiography presents an interim in which many things were changing in the political, social, and religious landscapes of the Nyingma world. During the transition from the rise of the Ganden Podrang and the founding of Mindröling in the seventeenth century to the nonsectarian (rimé) developments of nineteenth-century Kham, leaders continued to argue questions of proper conduct and the interpretation of doctrine. Gyurmé Ösel’s placement of Mingyur Peldrön within a larger historical context is significant for our understanding of her but also adds to our historical understanding of the period in which they both lived. By tying her to widespread sociopolitical events, he gives the reader a new perspective of the time period. By placing her at the forefront of the Nyingma struggle for survival, she and her family members become symbols of the changing tradition itself. By emphasizing her support of monasticism, he also reveals his own late-eighteenth-century concerns.

The historical memory of women such as Mingyur Peldrön can shift how we think about women’s lives in the present and future as well as the past. This was clear to Gyurmé Ösel when he wrote Dispeller for the youngest generation of Mindröling. Mingyur Peldrön’s life story and those of other historical Buddhist women continue to offer inspiration and advice for those living in the twenty-first century. Historical memory has persisted among the active community of Mindröling descendants living today at Mindrolling Monastery in Dehradun, India, which includes three living jetsünmas. Jetsün Khandro Rinpoche and her sister, Jetsün Dechen Paldron, hold leadership positions there. Khandro Rinpoche is a nun and has an active teaching career that has often meant world tours, during which she spent significant time in Singapore, Eastern Europe, and North America. A charismatic teacher, she has been written about in several popular contexts. Dechen Paldron is a laywoman who has directed a project collecting and distributing information about Mindröling’s history. Her daughter, Gautami Thrinley Choedron, who was born in the winter of 2012–13, is currently the youngest living Mindröling jetsünma. If we ask whether Gyurmé Ösel was effective in solidifying his master’s authenticity, the roles of Jetsün Khandro Rinpoche, her sister, and niece, and the continuing prevalence of the jetsünma tradition of Mindröling, are an indication that he was indeed effective in helping to cement women’s importance in the tradition. There is no plaque at the throne at Pemayangtsé Monastery, but Mindrolling is
currently directing a reconstruction of Mingyur Peldön’s former retreat on a nearby mountaintop. The fact that she is remembered today by modern female religious leaders as an important teacher and practitioner and that her memory remains alive at Pemayangtsé and Mindrolling suggests that her impact was far-reaching in the long eighteenth century. Her *Life* depicts a woman who lived through a very difficult historical moment and managed to benefit the world through her teachings.