The Tibetan Nun Mingyur Peldrön

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Notes

Introduction

1 Thanks to Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa and Kalzang Dorjee Bhutia for telling me about the throne in the first place.

2 Khenpo Wangyal Dorjee, personal communication, May 2016.

3 A hallmark of Tibetan hagiography is to show the subject as enlightened while simultaneously conveying the challenges that that person faced in their lifetime. In connection with how we depict Tibetan life stories, Bessenger addresses the conundrum of whether or not to use the term saint in this context. She asks whether a person who is identified as always already enlightened can still be described as someone “who achieves his or her community’s estimation of holiness in a lifetime.” Following her, I apply the term saint to this context, as Mingyur Peldrö’s hagiography does offer “a perhaps partially historical record of the difficult existence of a . . . Tibetan woman attempting to create a religious identity.” Bessenger, Echoes of Enlightenment, 24–25.

4 Tib. rje btsun mi’gyur dpal gyi sgron ma’i rnam thar dad pa’i gdung sel/.

5 The calculation is taken from Bessenger, Echoes of Enlightenment, 129, which also borrows from Schaeffer, Himalayan Hermitess, 4; and Jacoby, Love and Liberation, 13.

6 Tib. bod kyi sems chen ma dag gi rnam thar.

7 I refer to the modern-day instantiation of the monastery, constructed in India in the twentieth century, as “Mindrolling.” This is in keeping with how monastery inhabitants spell the name of their institution. Conversely, that which was founded by Terdak Lingpa and Lochen Dharmasri in central Tibet is identified as “Mindröling,” the phoneticization of the Tibetan smin grol gling according to the Tibetan and Himalayan Library’s Wylie phoneticization standards.

8 Dispeller ms.1, 118b–119a. That is, on the third day of the tenth month of the water tiger year.
9 Tib. rdzogs chen a ti zab don snying po.
10 Tib. rdzogs chen a ti zab don snying po’i rtsal dbang skur thabs lhan thabs kyi tshul du spros pa.
11 Quintman, Yogin and the Madman, 7.
12 Tib. rnam par thar pa.
13 For example, the work of DiValerio, Kragh, Quintman, and Willis.
14 For more on this, see the work of Ashton, Byun, Coakley, Geary, Heffernan, Mooney, Renevey and Whitehead, and Tylus.
16 For more on the genre, see Bessenger, Echoes of Enlightenment, 3; Diemerberger, When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty, 17; Quintman, Yogin and the Madman, 7; Roberts, Biographies of Rechungpa, 4; Schaeffer, Himalayan Hermitess, 5; Willis, On the Nature, 304.
17 Geary, Living with the Dead, 28.
18 In the tripartite taxonomy of namtar (that is, outer, inner, and secret), Mingyur Peldrön’s Life most closely resembles the ideal “outer” namtar, although it is not explicitly described as such. The tripartite taxonomy is as follows: outer namtar (phyi’i rnam thar), inner namtar (nang gi rnam thar), and secret namtar (gsang ba’i rnam thar) (Quintman, Yogin and the Madman, 8). Thus far, no inner or secret namtars are known for Mingyur Peldrön, nor have I found any explanation as to why there is only an outer namtar for her.
19 Geary, Living with the Dead, 13, see also 14–15, 17.
20 Schulenburg, Forgetful of Their Sex, 17.
21 Ashton, Generation of Identity, 3.
22 Bynum, Holy Feast, 149.
23 Dalton, Gathering of Intentions, 100 (see also 98–99); and Dalton, “Recreating the Rnying ma School,” 92.
24 Regarding Terdak Lingpa as the son of Yangchen Dorlma, see Jigdrel Yeshé Dorjé et al., Nyingma School, 496; and Lochen Dharmashrī, Lha ’dzin dbyangs can sgrol ma’i rnam thar, 2b–3a.
25 Lochen Dharmashrī, Lha ’dzin dbyangs can sgrol ma’i rnam thar, 9b.
26 Lochen Dharmashrī’s works are compiled into a nineteen-volume collection, including his exegeses on the Gathering of Intentions Sutra (dgongs pa’ dus pa’i mdo). For more on this text, see Dalton, Gathering of Intentions; and Jigdrel Yeshé Dorjé et al., Nyingma School, 732.
27 Although their father was retroactively named the first trichen.
28 Dalton compares the projects of Mindröling and the Ganden Podrang: “Just as the nation of Tibet was gathered and symbolically arranged through these new public ceremonies [established by the Fifth Dalai Lama and Desi Sangyé
Gyatso], so too was the Nyingma School united by the new Mindröling rituals. The scale of Terdak Lingpa and Lochen Dharmāśrī’s work was similarly large” (Gathering of Intentions, 98, see also 98–100).

This required “in-depth historical research, the systematization of the Spoken Teachings canon, and the creation of new, large-scale public rituals.” Dalton, Gathering of Intentions, 99. For more on the invention of tradition during this period, see the discussion of Eric Hobbsbawm in Cuevas and Schaeffer, Power, Politics, and the Reinvention of Tradition, 1.

See Jigdrel Yeshé Dorjé et al., Nyingma School, 898.

Bessenger, “I Am a God,” 86.


Bessenger, Echoes of Enlightenment, 58–59. The comparison of these two texts raises a larger question about the important distinction between multivocality and multiple authorship. In particular, Gyurmé Ösel’s assertions about single authorship, coupled with his reassurances that Mingyur Peldrön contributed by making suggestions for what topics he should cover, are useful for engaging in a discussion about the two concepts. In Dispeller multivocality is used as a means to convey tensions in Gyurmé Ösel’s world, and his direct quotations of Mingyur Peldrön are representative of how he hoped his audience would perceive her.


I occasionally use the term auto/biographical to reference the various forms of life writing that include, but are not limited to, autobiography, biography, and hagiography.


Jacoby, Love and Liberation.

Dates tentative as per Schaeffer “Autobiography,” 85.

Regarding Chökyi Drönma’s aristocratic heritage, see Diemberger, When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty, 116. Regarding Sera Khandro’s heritage, see Jacoby, Love and Liberation.

Diemberger, When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty.

Gayley, Love Letters, 38.

Gayley, Love Letters, 44.

For more on the hierarchical gendering and typology of terms relating to women and men, see Bessenger, Echoes of Enlightenment, 132–33. For connections between women’s bodies, suffering, the Tibetan literary context, and the rest of the Buddhist world, see Schaeffer, Himalayan Hermite, 92–94. Scholars focusing on historical moments and geographic regions
beyond the Tibetan cultural regions of the Buddhist world have also looked at relationships drawn between the experience of suffering, living as a woman, and karma, but they are too numerous to recount in full here.

45 According to Gyatso and Havnevik, the “damning moniker of the ‘low birth (skyê-dman)’” has been “used since at least the eleventh century and in the last several hundred years the standard word in both writing and speech for ‘women,’ often invoked by both men and women as a way of letting etymology prove the fact of a matter” (Women in Tibet, 9). See also Bessenger, Echoes of Enlightenment, 132; Jacoby, Love and Liberation, 133.

46 Diemberger, When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty, 127.

47 For a more detailed exposition on how karma, rebirth, and gender are conceptualized within the context of Tibetan Buddhism, see Makley, “Body of a Nun,” 268–70. See also Schaeffer, Himalayan Hermite, 94; and Jacoby, Love and Liberation, 133.

48 Schaeffer, Himalayan Hermite, 8 and 91.

49 Jacoby, Love and Liberation, 133.

50 Jacoby, Love and Liberation, 133.

51 For more on this phenomenon and how various women responded to and incorporated it in their Lives, see Schaeffer’s chapter on “Women, Men, Suffering” in Himalayan Hermit; Bessenger’s chapter on “Low Birth but High Thought” in Echoes of Enlightenment; and relevant sections in Diemberger, When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty; and Jacoby, Love and Liberation.

52 Schaeffer, Himalayan Hermit, 69, 91–96. Unlike the current moment, in this period of Tibetan history sex and gender are treated as nearly synonymous terms. In keeping with the conventions of the time, I talk about sex and gender interchangeably. Please note that this interchangeability is historically positioned and reflective of the temporal moment of eighteenth-century central Tibet.


55 This term is here used to include both emanation (for example, of a bodhisattva) and incarnation (of an individual), two ways of identifying a living person as the embodiment of another being that can lend weight to their individual authority (religious, political, or otherwise).

56 Langenberg, Birth in Buddhism, 15.


58 Bessenger, Echoes of Enlightenment, 63.

59 Jacoby, Love and Liberation, 17.
For more on auto/biographical voice in Tibetan Life writing, see the work of Gyatso and Jacoby. See Gayley, Love Letters from Golok.

1. A Privileged Life

Epigraph: Dispeller ms. 1, 25b; Dispeller ms. 2, 19.

1 Pomplun, Jesuit on the Roof, 106.

2 Crossley, Köhle, and Petech have all addressed these developments in detail.

3 Pomplun, Jesuit on the Roof, 103 (see also 12).

4 Geary, Living with the Dead, 13–17.


6 Dispeller ms. 2, 16; Dispeller ms. 1, 21a.

7 See, for example, Conze, “Legend of the Buddha Shakyamuni,” 1959.

8 Buswell and Lopez, Dictionary of Buddhism, 986; Jigdrel Yeshe Dorje et al., Nyingma School, 296.

9 Dispeller ms. 1, 22a–b.

10 Dispeller ms. 1, 22b–23a; Dispeller ms. 2, 16–17.

11 Tib. rgyal sras rin chen rnam rgyal gyi rnam thar skal bzang gdung sel.

12 Rinchen Namgyel Namtar, 64, 70.

13 Dispeller ms. 1, 30a–b, 74b–75a; Rinchen Namgyel Namtar, 64, 70.

14 Tib. ’bras ljongs dgon sde’i lo rgyus.

15 Dispeller ms. 1, 23a–23b; Dispeller ms. 2, 17.

16 Tib. re ba chen po.

17 Orgyen Dorjechang—that is, Vajradhara, Padmasambhava.

18 Dispeller ms. 1, 24a–b; Dispeller ms. 2, 8. I have not yet located sources that mention Mingyur Peldrön’s name prior to receiving the name by which she is now known.

19 Tib. don gyi slad.

20 Tib. snying po’i bstan pa.

21 Dispeller ms. 1, 25a–b; Dispeller ms. 2, 18.

22 Dispeller ms. 1, 25b; Dispeller ms. 2, 19.

23 Dispeller ms. 1, 35a.

24 Tib. re ba chen po.

Dispeller ms. 1, 34b.
Dispeller ms. 1, 35a and 29a–37a, Tib. bi ma snying tig.
Dispeller ms. 1, 34b–35b.
Jigdrel Yeshé Dorjé et al., Nyingma School, 734.
Dispeller ms. 1, 33b–34a; Rinchen Namgyel Namtar, 3, 63.
Rinchen Namgyel Namtar, 3–6.
Tib. bzo rig pa, gso ba rig pa, sgra rig pa, gtan tshigs rig pa, nang don rig pa. See Cabezón and Jackson, “Editor's Introduction,” Tibetan Literature, 17.
Cabezón and Jackson, “Editor’s Introduction,” 18.
Rinchen Namgyel Namtar, 3.
Townsend, personal communication, August 29, 2019.
Gayley, Love and Liberation, 35–36.
Dispeller ms. 1, 8a.
Dispeller ms. 1, 36b; Dispeller ms. 2, 2. The Lives of the Mindroling Succession Lineages: A Festival of Victorious Conquerors repeats some phrasing in its brief biography of her, including “bar skabs lo chen dhar+ma shri las rab tu byung ste” (83).
Dispeller ms. 1, 23b, emphasis added; Dispeller ms. 2, 17. sku chung du nas sdom gsum ‘gal med du dril nas bstan ’gro’i dpung gnyen dam par lung gi zin.
Anna Johnson, personal communication, April 14, 2020.
Tib. ’og min o rgyan smin grol gling gi gdan rabs mkhan brgyud rim par byon pa rnams kyi nam thar g.yul las rnam par rgyal ba’i dga’ ston/. 
Festival of Victorious Conquerors, 81. sku nar son pa nas sdom gsum ‘gal med du dril nas thugs nyams su bzhes.
For a detailed discussion of the accessability of the non-tantric path of the sngaags pa for women in the modern day, see Joffe, “White Robes, Matted Hair.”
Dispeller ms. 1, 105b, “bsnyen par rdzogs.”
While one might initially think that this is a short form of jetsünma (rje btsun ma), which can be used for both monastic and non-monastic women, the particular use of btsun ma in Dispeller is in reference to nuns. For example, there are references to “tsünmas and other renunciates” (Dispeller ms. 1, 87b) and discussions of large groups of nuns and monks (btsun ma and gra pa [Dispeller ms. 1, 71b]). Also, while Mingyur Peldrön’s sister and mother might have been likewise referred to as “tsünmas” if it were a short form of jetsünma, they are instead referred to as “lcam” and “yum” and never “tsünma.”
Starling, “Neither Nun,” 278.
For more information on the question of women’s ordination and the impact of ordination on women’s lived experience in Buddhist communities, see

For more on the monastic-lay divide in Tibetan Buddhism, see Jacoby, “To Be or Not to Be Celibate.” On the religious path of the non-celibate tantric practitioner, see Joffe, “White Robes, Matted Hair,” chap. 2.

To be clear, the term *neljorma* can be applied to monastic and non-monastic women alike. But its applicability for those women who were not ordained, and the connections with consort practice, are the focus here.


Makley, “Body of a Nun,” 283–84 and elsewhere.

For a thorough exposition on twenty-first-century discussions about ordination among Tibetan Buddhist communities in the diaspora, see Schneider, “Ordination of the aje slong ma.”

Gyatso and Havnevik, *Women in Tibet*, 16. See also Makley, “Body of a Nun.” While focusing on a twentieth- and twenty-first-century context, Makley’s observations are pertinent for our understanding of premodern and early modern Tibetan historical contexts.

In the fifteenth century Chökyi Drönma was fully ordained and sought to help other women also move toward full ordination. Chökyi Drönma also thought the path of the nun was most ideal for women who sought the life of a religious practitioner. Likewise, Dan Martin has found evidence of full ordination among nuns in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. See Diemberger, “First Samding Dorje Pakmo”; Martin, “Woman Illusion” (66 and elsewhere); and Gyatso and Havnevik, *Women in Tibet*, 15.

Diemberger, *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty*, 130.

Diemberger, “First Samding Dorje Pakmo.” It is likely that there were other women with similar trajectories, but their lives have yet to be studied in detail.


According to Petech, having kept the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama secret for so long exacerbated argumentation and doubt about the validity of the recognized Sixth Dalai Lama, once he was revealed. Throughout the life of the Sixth Dalai Lama, political uncertainty and infighting developed unchecked both within and beyond the Geluk leadership. Petech, *China and Tibet*, 9–14.

Crossley, Petech, Pomplun, Köhle, and others have written extensively on the political strife of this period. What follows here is a very brief summary.
of the political-historical events that were most influential for Mingyur Peldron’s experience.

Different scholars name different dates for Tsewang Rabten’s ascension to rule. For further discussion, see Crossley, Translucent Mirror, 318–19; Petech, China and Tibet, 25. The Dzungars were a subgroup of the larger Oyirod federation, based in Ili, in modern-day Turkestan. Tsewang Rabten sought to influence the political atmospheres of western Mongolia, Turkestan, and Central Tibet. See Crossley, Translucent, 314, 319, 320. I rely on Crossley’s spelling of Oyirod. For a discussion of spelling variance and historical representation of the Oyirod group, see Crossley, Empire, 81; and Petech, China and Tibet, 9.

Unhappy with the choice of the Sixth Dalai Lama and the Desi’s handling of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s death, Lhazang Khan marched to Lhasa in 1705 and executed the Desi but stopped short of dethroning the Sixth Dalai Lama for fear of instigating unrest. He established rule in Lhasa and was supported by the Qing imperium. The Sixth Dalai Lama would die under mysterious circumstances while on his way to Beijing in November 1706, making way for a new Dalai Lama and further unsettling the religio-political order. For further discussion, see Petech, China and Tibet, 9–14; Pomplun, Jesuit on the Roof, 69, 109–10.

Shakabpa, One Hundred Thousand Moons, 374.

Petech, China and Tibet, 44–45.

Sweet and Zwilling, Mission to Tibet, 138; Pomplun Jesuit on the Roof, 138; Petech, China and Tibet, 25, 27–29, 38. Tsering Dondrup was the brother of the “Dzungar King,” Tsewang Rabten, and leader of the Dzungar expedition into central Tibet. Shakabpa, One Hundred Thousand Moons, 418. It is unclear how involved Tibetans actually were in the sack of the region that followed the Dzungar occupation of Lhasa. See Pomplun, Jesuit on the Roof, 112–14, 116, for discussion.

Shakabpa, One Hundred Thousand Moons, 423; Petech, China and Tibet, 42–45.

Petech, China and Tibet, 53, 65–66; Shakabpa, One Hundred Thousand Moons, 431.

Dispeller ms. 1, 39b; Shakabpa, One Hundred Thousand Moons, 420–21.

Dispeller ms. 1, 40a.

Dispeller ms. 1, 41a–43a; Dispeller ms. 2, 30–31.

History of Sikkimese Monasteries, 127.

khrag ’thung dpa’ bo ’jigs med rdo rjes, sometimes referred to as “the Sikkimese Dzogchenpa” in Dispeller. First mention of him is in the list of teachings Mingyur Peldron received from various people. Jikmé Dorjé is mentioned in Dispeller ms. 1, 37b.

’bras ljongs rgyal rabs, 86.
75 See Gyurmé Namgyel’s namtar, in ‘bras ljongs rgyal rabs, 86. See also History of Sikkimese Monasteries, 127; and Mullard, Opening the Hidden Land, 170.

76 ‘bras ljongs rgyal rabs, 86. This is described as “phar gsan tshur gsan.”

77 Dispeller ms. 1, 46b; and personal communication with Wangyal Bhutia, May 2016. I later learned from Dominique Townsend that Mindröling Monastery’s monastic code of conduct (chhayik) strictly bars all women—including family members—from entering monastery grounds. Thus, Mingyur Peldrön’s refusal to enter Pemayangtse is in keeping with the rules of her home monastery. Personal communication, August 29, 2019.

78 I visited this site in May 2016. Nothing currently remains of Mingyur Peldrön’s original residence, but new construction is underway for a meditation center associated with Mindrolling Monastery, India.

79 ‘bras ljongs rgyal rabs, 87. According to Gyurme Namgyel’s rnam thar, this was on the twenty-fifth day of the seventh month.

80 Dudjom Rinpoche corroborates this commonly held notion: “Mingyur Peldron was largely responsible for the restoration of Mindroling following the Dzungar invasion of 1717. A brilliant teacher, she authored several important meditation manuals” (Jigdrel Yeshé Dorjé et al., Nyingma School, 81).

81 Tib. zhabs rim pa. This can be translated literally as “virtuous ones” but can also refer to servants.

82 Tib. sman brjid. The name and location of this institution is unclear. It does not seem to be a short form of Mindröling (smin grol gling), as the monastery is referenced in long form elsewhere in the text. Moreover, the spelling is consistent throughout all three of the manuscripts of Dispeller that I reference, which is not the case for other misspellings. With that said, it is potentially just a short form of Mindröling or might refer to a different site altogether.

83 In terms of detail, what could have been a protracted physical illness is glossed over briefly. These health concerns were not nearly as prominent in Gyurmé Ösel’s mind as the religiopolitical dangers that Mingyur Peldrön faced. In comparison, her escape from the Dzungars takes some ten pages, including how they evaded the army at each turn as well as vivid descriptions of Mingyur Peldrön’s emotional experience and the divine intervention that protected her. The result of this treatment is that we have little information about what might have been a continuing health factor throughout Mingyur Peldrön’s life.

84 Dispeller ms. 1, 52b.

85 Dispeller ms. 1, 52b; Dispeller ms. 2, 38.

86 Dispeller ms. 1, 30b; Dispeller ms. 3, 179.

87 Tib. na rag dong sprugs.

88 Mingyur Peldrön, “na rag,” 1a; Dudjom, Nyingma, 731; Ronis, Celibacy, 233.
2. Authorizing the Saint

Epigraphs: Lochen Dharmaśrī, Dispeller ms. 1, 31b; Gyurmé Ösel, Dispeller ms. 1, 2a.

1 Tib. skyed dman; Benard “Born to Practice,” 6. See also Bessenger, Echoes of Enlightenment, 132.

2 Jacoby, Love, 143.

3 See Jacoby, “This Inferior,” 145; and Schaeffer, Himalayan Hermitess.

4 Here I follow Severs, Celis, and Erzeel, who further an ontology of power based upon “a relational conception of political power that locates the constitution of power relations within social interactions, such as political representation” (“Power, Privilege, and Disadvantage,” 346).

5 The self-humbling references were of course funneled first through the pen of Gyurmé Ösel.


7 Gyurmé Ösel uses variations of the Tibetan sprul (e.g., emanated, emanation).

8 For a detailed discussion, see Bessenger, “‘I am a god.’”

9 Bessenger, Echoes of Enlightenment, 148.

10 Gayley, Love Letters, 50.

11 Diemberger, When a Woman, 241.

12 For example, Sangyé Gyatso’s Life of the Fifth Dalai Lama begins with a detailed description of the subject’s previous lives; see Ahmad, Life of the Fifth Dalai Lama, 43–126 (with a summary on 126). Although the tradition goes much further back, the hagiography of the Fifth Dalai Lama likely served as a timely representative model for authors writing in the mid- to late eighteenth century, and it is likely that Gyurmé Ösel was at least familiar with Sangyé Gyatso’s work.

13 Weber, Economy and Society, 241 and 247. It is worth noting that when Weber discusses routinized charisma, he points to the incarnation lineage of the Dalai Lamas, which was the most internationally famous of the tulku lines in the twentieth century.

14 Jacoby, Love and Liberation, 91.

15 Tib. yum chen mo; Tib. rdo rje rnal’ byor ma; Bessenger, Echoes, 25 and 148–49.

16 Diemberger, When a Woman, 239; and Jacoby, Love and Liberation, 80–91. While she was identified as other figures later in her life, these are not included in her namtar, and Diemberger does not think these additional associations had much impact on her lived experience. In comparison, Chökyi Drönma’s reincarnation was more emphatically associated with additional historical women. Diemberger, When a Woman, 240.
Regarding Samantabhadra, Gyurme Dorje further explains that “the Nyingma hold that buddhahood is attained when intrinsic awareness is liberated just where it is through having recognised the nature of Samantabhadra, the primordially pure body of reality. This buddhahood is endowed with the pristine cognition of the expanse of reality (chos-dbyings ye-shes, Skt. dharmadhātujñāna), for it is free from all conceptual elaborations, and the pristine cognition of sameness (mnyam-niyid ye-shes, Skt. samatājñāna) which remains pure through the extent of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa” (19). Moreover, “Samantabhadra is the teacher in whom both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are indivisible, the antecedent of all, who holds sway over existence and quiescence in their entirety, and who is the expanse of reality and the nucleus of the sugata” (115–16). Samantabhadrī only appears in Tibetan contexts, whereas Samantabhadra is also prevalent in several East Asian Buddhist traditions; see Buswell and Lopez, Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism, 745.

Dispeller ms. 1, 3a–b.

Gyurmé Ösel furthermore specifies that Nangsa Öbum was a speech emanation (Tib. gsung sprul) of Yeshé Tsogyel. Dispeller ms. 1, 15b.

See the work of Cuevas, Pommaret, and Prude.

For examples, see Cuevas, Travels in the Netherworld; Pommaret, “Delok (‘das log) Women”; and Prude, “Death, Gender, and Extraordinary Knowing.”


Dispeller ms. 1, 51a.

See Bessenger, Echoes of Enlightenment, 163; Jacoby, Love and Liberation, 316; and Schaeffer, Himalayan Hermitess, 40.

Jacoby, Love and Liberation, 80, 87–89.

Gayley, Love Letters, 35.


Jacoby, Love and Liberation, 96.

Jacoby, Love and Liberation, 96. See also 204–7, where Jacoby explains the “substantial connection between sex and text, more specifically between channel and wind practices involving sexuality and the revelation of scriptures and religious artifacts” (205).


Gayley, Love Letters, 35 and 50.

37 Gayley, *Love Letters*, 50. “I would aver that such appropriation allows Nyingma masters to make room for women who enter their circle of close relations as wife, consort, or daughter in order to constitute them as authorized participants in an otherwise male-dominated milieu.”

38 Gayley, *Love Letters*, 160. See also 50: “It was also pivotal to her status as a tertön later in life, since those who reveal treasures necessarily trace their past lives to the imperial period as a direct disciple of Padmasambhava or a comparable master.”


40 *Dispeller* ms. 1, 8a–b; *Dispeller* ms. 2, 6. I have not yet located this quotation in the text to which he ascribes it.

41 *Dispeller* ms. 1, 10b, bdud `dul drag mo rtsal/ ye shes mtsho rgyal/.

42 *Dispeller* ms. 2, 7.

43 For further discussion, see Jigdrel Yeshe Dorjé et al., 394; and Dowman, *Sky Dancer*, 4.


45 Rinchen Namgyel Namtar, 3.


47 Cooper, “Intersectionality,” 392.

48 Dalton, *Gathering of Intentions*, 100.


50 The most salient comparison that I have found in the Tibetan tradition is with the Samding Dorje Phagmo; see Diemberger When a Woman.

51 Cooper, “Intersectionality,” 398.


54 *Dispeller* ms. 1, 36b.

55 On Rinchen Namgyel's return, see *Dispeller* ms. 1, 52a.

56 This is not to deny the importance of mothers and wives in the functioning of the family. For example, while Yangchen Drölma was lauded for her role in maintaining the household prior to the founding of Mindröl Ling, she did not further the family’s goals by engaging in religious teaching, nor does her form of leadership appear to be focused on the spiritual or political realms. With that said, the role that Mingyur Peldrön would ultimately take is more reflective of the activities of her father, uncle, and brothers, rather than that of her grandmother, mother, or sisters.

57 Tib. rje bla ma.

58 Tib. rje nyid; Tib. nga ba'i bla ma; Tib. rje bla ma mchog.
59 See Martin, “Pearls from Bones,” 301.
60 Tib. *rje bla ma dam pa dA ki’i gtsmo*. References include, for example: “Excellent Master, Supreme Blissful Ḍākini Queen” (*rje bla ma dam pa bde chen mkha’ gro’i gtsmo*). In other cases he uses the Sanskrit loan *dA ki’i* instead of *mkha’ gro*. *Dispeller* ms. 1, 82b–83a.4b, 49a and b, 50a, 64a, 116b. For more on this loan word, see Gyatso, *Apparitions*.
61 Tib. *bla ma dam pa bde chen Dā k+i’i gtsmo*. *Dispeller* ms. 1, 4b.
62 *Dispeller* ms. 1, 49b.
63 In this case she is *skyabs rje bla ma dam pa bde chen Dā ki’i gtsmo*. *Dispeller* ms. 1, 64a.
64 Again, in this case there is a slight variation, as she is described as “skyabs kyi mchog gyur rje bla ma dam pa bde chen DĀ ki’i gtsmo.” *Dispeller* ms. 1, 116.
65 Tib. *bu mo, sras mo*.
66 *Dispeller* ms. 1, 31b.
67 I define this term according to Dan Martin: “‘Lineage holder’ is here defined not only as a person who holds the main teachings (secret precepts and the like) from a particular teacher, but one who also passed them on in a lineage significant for posterity.” “Woman Illusion,” 62–63.

### 3. Multivocal Lives

1 For more on Sōnam Peldren’s multiauthored *Life*, see Bessenger, *Echoes of Enlightenment*; and for more on Sera Khandro’s auto/biography, see Jacoby, *Love and Liberation*.
2 This brief piece is included in Lochen Dharmaśrī’s collected works, or sung-bum, in a section dedicated to Mindröling’s history and hagiography. It appears chronologically after *Lives* of the brothers’ contemporaries Jagöpa Chökyong Gyeltsen (1648–90), written in 1699, the year of Mingyur Peldrön’s birth; and Dingri Lodrö Tenpa (1632–87), written in 1700; as well as the *Lives* of all those in Lochen Dharmaśrī’s *vinaya* transmission lineage; and Lochen Dharmaśrī’s namtar. The texts in this section are all ordered chronologically according to when they were written. Based on its placement in the sung-bum, we can surmise that Yangchen Drölma’s *Life* was written shortly after 1701, when Mingyur Peldrön was a toddler.
3 *Dispenshri*, “yum,” 2b, 6a–7a, 9b.
4 *Dispeller* ms. 1, 96b.
5 That is, the *Lives* of Christian saints between 1200 and 1500 CE.
7 See Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*. 

**Notes to Pages 97–108**
See Mooney, *Gendered Voices*.

Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel.”


*Dispeller* ms. 1, 55a–b.

*Dispeller* ms. 1, 86a–b.

*Dispeller* ms. 1, 78b.

*Dispeller* ms. 1, 28b.

Respectively, Jackson, “Poetry,” 369; Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self*, 101; Ardussi, “Brewing and Drinking,” 115; Quintman, *Yogin and the Madman*, 58. See also Jackson, “Poetry,” 369, 381; and Sujata, *Tibetan Songs*, 116. Gur are written in many meters, including lines of anywhere between four and ten syllables per line and also with varied syllables per line.


That is, the later diffusion of Buddhism (*chidar*, eleventh to fourteenth centuries).


The form was used extensively by Sakya Pandita and Milarepa as well as being the most common meter for the Gesar epic. Sujata, *Tibetan Songs*, 123–25. Sujata goes so far as to refer to it as “the meter of Mi la ras pa.”

*Chandah*. I refer here to his *sdeb sbyor rin chen’ byung gnas kyi’ grel pa don gsal me long*.


Other well-known authors who lived during Mingyur Peldrö’s lifetime include the Seventh Dalai Lama Kelsang Gyatso, and Changkya Rölpé Dorjé (1717–86). Sørensen, *Divinity*, 16; and Sujata, *Tibetan Songs*.

Thanks to participants of the 2018 Lotsawa Translation Workshop for their help in developing this translation.

*Dispeller* ms. 1, 45b.

Quintman, *Yogin and the Madman*, 59, 84; Jackson, “Poetry,” 372–73.

Ardussi, “Formation of the State of Bhutan,” 115. Ardussi explains that yogins were associated with the “great Tantric magician-saints (*siddhācārya*; Tib. *grub-thob*) of India.”

See also Jackson, “Poetry,” 374. Döndrup Gyel defines seven general goals for gur composition delineated as (1) remembering the guru’s kindness, (2) indicating the source of one’s realizations, (3) inspiring the practice of
Dharma, (4) giving instructions on how to practice, (5) answering disciples’ questions, (6) urging the uprooting of evil, and (7) serving as missives to gurus or disciples.

Ardussi explains the connection thus: “Having gained control over their ‘subtle physiology,’ the cakras or mystical centers symbolically located along the axis of their bodies, and the ‘winds’ or forces which move along the mystical ‘veins,’ they are able to concentrate this force in the center located at their neck, usually identified with the Sambhogakaya (Tib. longs-spyod-sku) or ‘Enjoyment Body’ of the Buddha. The process is a meditative one, and the practitioner at this level is regarded as partaking of Buddhahood and becomes able to produce songs of the Absolute Truth spontaneously; they simply appear in his mind as mental experience (Tib. nyams) natural to one who has achieved the longs-spyod level of Buddhahood.” Ardussi, “Formation of the State of Bhutan,” 117.


Jigdrel Yeshe Dorje et al., Nyingma School, 81 n. 1137.

Tib. rin chen gter mdzod.

Mingyur Peldrö, Ambrosial Feast, 192–93.

Siddha Yolmowa is Tenzin Norbu, b. 1598.

Mingyur Peldrö, Ambrosial Feast, 193–94.

Tib. ’dam mkhan (muck expert).

Tib. thugs dpal be’u stim pa.

Dispeller ms. 1, 62b–63a; Dispeller ms. 2, 46.

That is, the mkha’ gro gsang ba ye shes kyi khrid yig. Elsewhere it is referred to as the mkha’gro gsang ba ye shes kyi rnal byor rim bzhis i lam zab mo nyams su len pa’i khrid yig man ngag gsal sgron/, or simply as the rim bzhis’i lam zab mo nyams su len pa’i khrid yig. Dispeller ms. 1, 63a.

chos kyi dbang phyug, “tshe dbang nor bu’i,” 74–75. For a brief discussion of Tsewang Norbu, see also Garry, “Rigdzing Tsewang Norbu,” Treasury of Lives.

She appears multiple times in prayers and lineage lists found in the works of the nineteenth-century scholar Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo.

These are her “rdzogs chen a ti zab don snying po’i khrid dmigs zin bris su spel ba kun bzang dgongs rgyan” and “gar tshe’i brgyud ‘de’i lde b.” She is also listed in several lineages found in his gdamgs ngag mdzod.

Dispeller ms. 1, 47a.


Dispeller ms. 1, 59b, 67b, 71b, 92a, and elsewhere.

Khenpo Wangyel Dorjee and Tshering Bhutia, personal communication, May 2016.

Schaeffer, Himalayan Hermitess, 94.
In particular, Terdak Lingpa’s revealed treasure cycles focusing on the Embodiment of All the Sugatas ( thugs rje chen po bde gshgs kun ’dus).

Dispeller ms. 3, 62a.

Dispeller ms. 3, 124–25.

Dispeller ms. 3, 73a; Dispeller ms. 1, 95a–b.

Dispeller ms. 1, 85b.

Dispeller ms. 1, 60b–61a; Dispeller ms. 3, 80; Dispeller ms. 2, 44.

Dispeller ms. 2, 45.

Dispeller ms. 2, 45.

Dispeller ms. 2, 45.

Dispeller ms. 1, 55a; Dispeller ms. 1, 83a.

Dispeller ms. 1, 83b–84a.

Dispeller ms. 1, 83a–b.

Khenpo Sherap Konchok, personal communication, April 2012.

Dispeller ms. 1, 94a.

Dispeller ms. 1, 94a.

Dispeller ms. 1, 94a.

Dispeller ms. 1, 84 a–b.

Dispeller ms. 1, 87b–88a.

Ashton, Generation of Identity, 4–5, 13–15, 46.

4. Mingyur Peldrön the Diplomat

Epigraph: Dispeller ms. 1, 54a.

Gyatso and Havnevik explain it thus: “There is a long history of the Buddhist monastic order (that is, despite its enduring androcentrism) and other renunciate communities serving as an alternative life-space for women, where they could escape their unhappy circumstances in society. The classic Pali collection Therīgāthā clearly connected the monastic life to deliverance from specifically female predicaments such as oppressive husbands and misogynistic disparagement. One finds similar aspirations among Tibetan nuns.” Women in Tibet, 15.
3 Shakabpa, *One Hundred Thousand Moons*, 634; Kapstein, “Seventh Dalai Lama.”
4 Shakabpa, *One Hundred Thousand Moons*, 440.
7 Shakabpa, *One Hundred Thousand Moons*, 431–32.
8 Not to be confused with the Sikkimese king of the same name.
9 Kapstein, “Seventh Dalai Lama.”
10 Shakabpa, *One Hundred Thousand Moons*, 432–33. See also Kapstein, “Seventh Dalai Lama.”
12 Stoddard, “Rig’dzin dpal ldan bkra shis,” 107.
13 *Rinchen Namgyel Namtar*, 18, 33, 113, and elsewhere.
14 Terdak Lingpa Gyurmé Dorjé, *o rgyan smin grol gling gi ‘dus sde’i bca’ khrims kyi yig blang dor gsal bar byed pa’i nyi ma*, 95.
15 Townsend, “How to Constitute a Field of Merit,” 4.
16 Townsend, “How to Constitute a Field of Merit,” 3–4, 11, and elsewhere.
17 Jigdrel Yeshe Dorje et al., *Nyingma School*, 731.
19 He received teachings from Rinchen Namgyel when he fled to Kham during the civil war and also from Pema Gyurme Gyatso at some point. Ronis, “Celibacy, Revelations, and Reincarnated Lamas,” 93.
21 Stoddard, “Rig’dzin dpal ldan bkra shis,” 92.
24 ‘bras ljongs dgon sde’i lo rgyus.
25 *rje btsun sku zhabs* ("jetsun of high family"); *History of Sikkimese Monasteries*, 127.
27 Shakabpa, *One Hundred Thousand Moons*, 403. Polhané put down an attempted rebellion by the Hor leader Uicing Taiji around 1714 and played an important role in Lhazang Khan’s war against Bhutan in 1714. See also Petech, *China and Tibet*, 22.
28 Dr. Jampa Samten, personal communication, April 19, 2012.
30 Jigdrel Yeshe Dorje et al., *Nyingma School*, 81 n. 1137.
31 *Dispeller* ms. 2, 38. See also Petech, *China and Tibet*, 110.
32 The phrase *a kha kha!* is difficult to translate. Here I have rendered it as well as possible in order to convey Polhané’s shock and dismay.
33 *Dispeller* ms. 1, 53a–b; *Dispeller* ms. 2, 39; *Dispeller* ms. 3, 70–71.
34Dispeller ms. 2, 38.
35Tib. zhabs rim pa (virtuous ones). This term is intentionally left ambiguous, as it might be referencing a servant or another member of the household, but their virtue is emphasized elsewhere in this section of the text.
36Dispeller ms. 1, 53b–54a.
37Shakabpa, One Hundred Thousand Moons, 439.
38Shakabpa, One Hundred Thousand Moons, 440.
39Dispeller ms. 2, 41; Dispeller ms. 1, 56a–b.
40Dispeller ms. 2, 42; Dispeller ms. 1, 58a–b. The term geshes (dge bshes) refers to monks in the Geluk denomination who have proceeded through the monastic education system and have undertaken their final examinations, somewhat akin to a doctor of philosophy or doctor of theology degree in the United States. For more on the geshe system of monastic education in the Geluk denomination, see Dreyfus, Sound of Two Hands Clapping.
41Dispeller ms. 2, 46–47.
42Dispeller ms. 1, 49a.
43Dispeller ms. 2, 67.
44According to Gene Smith’s introduction to the Autobiography of the First Pan-chen Lama, “Tibetan sectarian and political rivalries were increasingly aired to Mongol patrons; and, in turn, these princes implored manifestations of the magical powers of their favored lamas, sometimes against their enemies, more often against their closest kin” (2).
46Shakabpa, One Hundred Thousand Moons, 432.
47Shakabpa, One Hundred Thousand Moons, 432.
48For more on Polhané’s two sons, Gung Gyurmé Tseten and Gyurmé Namgyel, see Shakabpa, One Hundred Thousand Moons, 463.
49Dispeller ms. 1, 91b; Dispeller ms. 3, 120.
50Petech, Aristocracy, 54.
51Secret Wisdom Ḍākinī Instruction Manual, Tib. rim bzhi’i lam zab mo nyams su len pa’i khrid yig; Dispeller ms. 1, 63a.
52Tib. tshe dbang drag dmar.

5. The Death of Mingyur Peldrön

Epigraph: Dispeller ms. 1, 81b.
1Dispeller ms. 1, 81b.
In other words, that the mind has an adamantine nature.

Dispeller ms. 1, 82a–83a; Dispeller ms. 3, 134–36.

Geary, *Living with the Dead*, 2.

Tib. *sku gdung ’bar ba* (Blazing Remains Tantra). Martin, “Pearls from Bones,” 281–82. Atmospheric phenomena include “rain, storms, hail, wind, mist, fog, rings around the moon.” As an aside, the Blazing Remains Tantra is a Precepts Class, or *menakdé*, text of Atiyoga.

Dispeller ms. 1, 47b–48a.

Tib. *nges gsang rdo rje snying po’i bstan*.

Dispeller ms. 1, 84b–85b.

Dispeller ms. 1, 86b.

Dispeller ms. 1, 88a.

Dispeller ms. 1, 87a.

Dispeller ms. 1, 47b–48a.

Tib. *nges gsang rdo rje snying po’i bstan*.

Dispeller ms. 1, 86b.

Dispeller ms. 1, 88a.

Dispeller ms. 1, 87a.

Tib. *nges gsang rdo rje snying po’i bstan*.

Dispeller ms. 1, 88a.

Dispeller ms. 1, 87a.

Tib. *nges gsang rdo rje snying po’i bstan*.

Dispeller ms. 1, 84a–85b.

Dispeller ms. 1, 85a.

Dispeller ms. 1, 85b.

Martin, “Pearls from Bones,” 281.

Dispeller ms. 1, 84b–85a.

Martin, “Pearls from Bones,” 282.

Dispeller ms. 1, 81b.

Dispeller ms. 1, 83a–b.

Dispeller ms. 1, 83a–b.

See Tenpé Drönmé, *gsang chen*; and *Festival of Victorious Conquerors*, for descriptions of commemoration days.

Dispeller ms. 1, 85b–86a.


Tib. *dbus gtsang gnas yig*. 

Thanks to Natasha Kimmet for discussing some of these images.

Martin, “Pearls from Bones,” 290.

Dispeller ms. 1, 83a–b.

Dispeller ms. 1, 89a.

Dispeller ms. 1, 87b, 88a.

His title suggests that he was a person of importance from Lhagyari, although his specific station remains unknown.


*Festival of Victorious Conquerors*, 112.

Jigdrel Yeshe Dorje et al., *Nyingma School*, 734.

*Festival of Victorious Conquerors*, 112.


Jetsün Khandro Rinpoche, personal communication, September 2011.

Rather, she is considered to be an incarnation of Urgyen Tsomo (1897–1961), who was herself identified as an incarnation of Yeshé Tsogyel.


Jetsün Khandro Rinpoche was enthroned in 1976 at the age of nine, in Kalimpong. There was discussion about whether she should be enthroned in the Mindröling (Nyingma) or Karma Kagyu lineages. Ultimately, she was enthroned thrice, which leads to further questions about sectarian differentiations, even in the present day. Simmer-Brown, *Dakini’s Warm Breath*, 183 and 399.

For example, see Haas, *Dakini Power*; and Chodron, *Blossoms of the Dharma*.