The Tibetan Nun Mingyur Peldrön

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Born to a powerful family and educated at the prominent Mindröl Ling Monastery, the Tibetan Buddhist nun and teacher Mingyur Peldron (1699–1769) leveraged her privileged status and overcame significant adversity, including exile during a civil war, to play a central role in the reconstruction of her religious community. Alison Melnick Dyer employs literary and historical analysis, centered on a biography written by the nun’s disciple Gyurmé Ösel, to consider how privilege influences individual authority, how authoritative Buddhist women have negotiated their position in gendered contexts, and how the lives of historical Buddhist women are (and are not) memorialized by their communities. Mingyur Peldron’s story challenges the dominant paradigms of women in religious life and adds nuance to our ideas about the history of gendered engagement in religious institutions. Her example serves as a means for better understanding of how gender can be both masked and asserted in the search for authority—operations that have wider implications for religious and political developments in eighteenth-century Tibet. In its engagement with Tibetan history, this study also illuminates relationships between the eighteenth-century Geluk and Nyingma schools of Tibetan Buddhism and nonsectarian developments of the nineteenth century.

Alison Melnick Dyer is assistant professor of religious studies at Bates College.

“The issue of women’s ordination status continues to be central in discussions of gender equity in Buddhism around the world today, and this book provides essential clues that will be of keen interest to scholars and practitioners alike.”
—Karma Lekshe Tsomo, author of Women in Buddhist Traditions

“Melnick Dyer’s study of the life of Mingyur Peldron, a nun from an important Tibetan religious family, enhances our understanding of the lives of Tibetan women saints. Exceptionally well researched and lucidly written, the author’s command of the relevant Tibetan literary sources is superb. More than a simple retelling of Mingyur Peldron’s life, the book is a sophisticated analysis of the role of gender, authority, and privilege in the life of Tibetan religious adepts. A real contribution to Tibetan and Buddhist Studies.”
—José Ignacio Cabezón, coauthor of Sera Monastery

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