

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

CONTESTED AUTHORITY OF A TIBETAN GODDESS:  
NARRATING THE TRAGIC AND NON-TRADITIONAL LIFE STORY OF THE  
LAY MOTHER REINCARNATE KELZANG DRÖLMA

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
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## Preface and Acknowledgements

This dissertation began with a mistake. It was the fortunate kind of error or divine stumble that changed the course of my research in the eastern Tibetan region of Amdo (Qinghai, southwestern Gansu and northern Sichuan provinces in China<sup>1</sup>). I had just finished my master's thesis at Columbia University in New York in May 2010 about the biography of Rindzin Pelmo, (1814-1891), the fourth member of the Gungru Yeshé *Khandroma* female reincarnate lineage.<sup>2</sup> The Gungru lineage, which is one of only two continuous female *trülku* lineages out of hundreds of male *trülku* in Tibetan history,<sup>3</sup> is based at Drakkar Monastery (Chin. *baishiya* 白石崖). Founded in 1644 under a towering rock cliff in Gengya, Gansu, China (Chin. *ganjia* 甘加<sup>4</sup>), Drakkar is a small monastery in the Tibetan Geluk tradition. Drakkar is located 35 km north of Labrang Monastery (Chin. *labulengsi*, 拉卜楞寺) in Xiahe (Chin. *xiahe* 夏河). Labrang is one of the most powerful Geluk monasteries in Tibet as described in the introduction and in Chapter 1.<sup>5</sup> My MA thesis analyzed a text titled *The Biography of the Gungru Yeshe Khandroma called the White Lotus Vine (The Lotus Vine*

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<sup>1</sup> See Ptackova and Sulek, *Mapping Amdo: People and Places in an Ongoing Tradition*, 1-2, for a definition of Amdo as one of the three main Tibetan provinces along with Kham and ütsang. Amdo covers the northeast part of the Tibetan plateau along with Lake Kokonor (Qinghai Lake) and the Yellow River. The area is a large pastoral area with a distinct language dialect.

<sup>2</sup> The town of Gungru is located in the Tibetan region of Kham in the present-day Tibetan Autonomous Region in China).

<sup>3</sup> *Trülku* are “earthly emanations of transcendent bodhisattvas” building on ideas of incarnation/emanation from Mahayana Buddhism. The *trülku* institution in Tibet began around the thirteenth century and expanded in the seventeenth century. Schwieger, *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China*, 11, 13, and 17. See Schneider, “Female Reincarnation Lineages: Some Remarks on their Features and Functions in Tibet,” 464 about Tibetan female *trülku* lineages. See also bKra shis tshe ring, “bSam sding rDo rje phag mo sku phreng rim byon gyi mtshan dang 'khrungs gshegs kyi lo khams star chags su 'god thabs sngon 'gro'i zhib 'jug mdor bsdu,” in *g. Yumtsho* where he lists six female reincarnations: (1) the Gungru Yeshé Khandroma, (2) bSam sding rDo rje Phag mo, (3) rGyal yum O rgyan Bu khrid, (4) rGyal rtse rGyang rod dPal sding rje btsun, (5) La stod pa'i Brag dkar rje btsun, and (6) Shugs gseb rje btsun. For works about the Gungru lineage please see Tshe ring, “Rgan gya'i brag dkar gyi Gung ru Ye shes kyi mkha' 'gro ma sku phreng na rim gyi rnam thar sa bon ngo sprod bde chen mchog grub ces by aba bzhugs so” in *g. Yumtsho* and Chayet, “Women and Reincarnation in Tibet: The Case of the Gung ru Mkha' 'gro ma,” 71.

<sup>4</sup> The area of Gengya consists of 13 villages and extends to today's Qinghai-Gansu border in the north and toward Labrang Monastery in the south.

<sup>5</sup> Labrang is one of six main Geluk monasteries with Sera, Drepung, Ganden, Tashilhunpo, and Kumbum. For more information see Nietupski, *Labrang Monastery: A Tibetan Buddhist Community on the Inner Asian Borderlands*, 17; Makley, *The Violence of Liberation: Gender and Tibetan Buddhist Biography in Post-Mao China*; Yang, *Xunhua zangqu quanli dongzuo jizhi de wenhua kao cha*, 111–18.

henceforth, 1897<sup>6</sup>). The *Lotus Vine* is one of the few biographies in the Tibetan genre of *namtar* (the story of how one attains liberation<sup>7</sup>) ever composed about a Tibetan female exemplar; happily this number has increased in recent years as scholars have gained access to and translated more texts written about and by Tibetan women.<sup>8</sup> (For a complete translation of the *Lotus Vine*, please see Appendix I).

Soon after I finished my MA, I delivered a paper about the *Lotus Vine* and the Gungru lineage at the International Association of Tibetan Studies Conference (IATS) held in August 2010 in Vancouver, Canada. I felt satisfied after my presentation and was eager to meet many scholars in the Tibetan studies field. One of them was Hildegard Diemberger, who wrote an influential book about Chökyi Drönma (15<sup>th</sup> century) in the Samding Dorjé Pakmo lineage—the first female *trülku* lineage.<sup>9</sup>

Then serendipity struck me over the head like the thunderbolt of a vajra. A few nights after my talk, I bumped into Dr. Paul Nietupski, a historian of Labrang. Excited to finally meet him, I told Nietupski about my project about the Gungru lineage. He was intrigued, as I mentioned to him that the Sixth Gungru *trülku* had passed away in April, 2010 at Qinghai Lake, Qinghai, China. I told him that local authorities would soon start searching for a new reincarnation in the Gungru lineage and that I wanted some advice on how to study such a sensitive subject as Tibetan reincarnation in the People's Republic of China (PRC). If anyone

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<sup>6</sup> Zhang ston bstan pa rgya mtsho's four-volume collected works houses contains the 18-folio biography about Rindzin Pelmo. His works were reedited and published in 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Quintman writes that *namtar* "typically recount the lives of religious figures with an emphasis on their practice of the Buddhist path and spiritual awakening." *Namtar* are "stories of the deeds and conduct of an eminent individual that is a biographical narrative." Quintman, *The Yogin and the Madman*, 6. Janet Gyatso describes *namtar* in *Apparitions of Self: The Secret Life of a Tibetan Visionary*, 103 and 116. *Namtar* resemble hagiographies (writings about saints) in Quintman and in Schaeffer's *Himalayan Hermitess: The Life of a Tibetan Buddhist Nun*.

<sup>8</sup> Schaeffer in *Himalayan Hermitess*, 4 writes that there are about 2,000 total *namtar* of Tibetan figures from the eighth to the twentieth century. Less than one percent are *namtar* about women and autobiographies by women. However, more texts have been recently translated, including Diemberger's *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty*; Jacoby's *Love and Liberation*; Bessenger's *Echoes of Enlightenment* and Gayley's *Love Letters from Golok* as some of the recent scholarship about Tibetan women's life writing. See also the recent writings about the nuns in Larungar in *Voices of Larungar*, including works by scholar nuns called *khenmos*, as edited by Gayley.

<sup>9</sup> See Diemberger's *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty*.

would know how to navigate the sometimes rough waters of working in the PRC, then it would be Nietupski, who conducted research for years on Labrang's fascinating history.

But the ever gracious Nietupski seemed genuinely nonplussed with my news about the Sixth Gungru's passing. "I had not heard that the Gungru had passed away or that she had moved to Qinghai Lake (from Gengya and Labrang)," he told me. "I suppose it's possible that she moved to Qinghai Lake, but the last I knew she lived in Xiahe (Labrang)."

Nietupski's response to my claim about the Sixth Gungru's death contained a hint of doubt. Taken aback and feeling a twinge of self-doubt myself, I felt a little more reassured when I told him that a Tibetan friend from Amdo had informed me by email of the the Sixth Gungru Damtsik Drölma's death in April 2010. I told him that I met with Damtsik at her apartment in August 2009 in Xining, Qinghai, and that she was very ill at that time. I also told Nietupski that the Sixth Gungru's monastery was at Gyayé Gön Ngotsar Tardrenling in Gyayé, Qinghai.

Yet, something did not seem right after our conversation. I began to wonder if I had made a blunder and confused the identity of the Sixth Gungru *trülku*. "I'll call my informants in Xiahe," Nietupski told me. I slammed my forehead in disbelief when I discovered that Nietupski's connections in Xiahe told him that the sixth Gungru *trülku* was .... still alive. Her name was not Damtsik Drölma. Her name was Kelzang Damchö Drölma who lived and worked for the Chinese government in Xiahe.

I originally thought that the Sixth Gungru *trülku*'s name was Damtsik Drölma, the woman I met in Xining in 2009 who lived most of the time in Gyayé. Damtsik Drölma was one of four name variants listed as the sixth Gungru in sources, including the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (TBRC) website which is now the Buddhist Digital Research Council, BDRC). One of the other names listed was Kelzang Drölma. Damtsik Drölma died in April 2010 but I thought when I wrote my MA thesis at Columbia University that both

Damtsik and Kelzang Drölma were the same person—not two separate women. (I later found out I was not the only scholar who made this mistake).

After consulting with two Tibetan sources<sup>10</sup> and meeting with two Tibetans from Amdo who lived in Bloomington, Indiana, I realized that Kelzang Drölma and Damtsik Drölma were indeed two different women. Kelzang was born in 1936 in Jiawu, Rebgong, Qinghai. Damtsik was also born in Rebgong but in 1938 in the village of Trangyar. However, I later discovered that a rivalry, not to mention a great deal of identity confusion, had developed between these two women that lasted for several decades. This rivalry would become a focal point to help answer my questions about constructing and legitimizing Kelzang's authority on the ground as stated in the dissertation's introduction.

In any event, my dissertation topic was re-born. Or, more apropos to my topic about the Gungru lineage, it was reincarnated after my mis-identification. A few months later in December 2010, I flew to China over my three-week winter break. I journeyed to Labrang, located at 3,000 meters above sea level. Brutal wind chills notwithstanding and fighting off my own stiff head cold, I had many questions to ask about Kelzang Drölma. Little had been written about her life other than she had served on many Buddhist councils and women's associations in Gansu.<sup>11</sup> I also learned from the short biographical material that she had worked for the local Chinese government for over 50 years starting in 1953, and was a laborer in the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). My goal was to try and meet with Kelzang in person if possible.

I never could have planned the adventure that followed over that winter break. I first emailed a professor in China in December 2010 who promptly gave me the contact information for Könchok Tendzin, a professor of art history at Southwest Nationalities

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<sup>10</sup> See Dgon mchok bstan dzin. "Sprul pa'i bzo bo gung ru mkha ' 'gro ma blo bzang chos sgron dang khong gi sku phreng rim byon gyi nam bsdus" and also "The Monastery of Gyayé Gön Ngotsar Drenling" in *The Concise History of Monasteries in Southern Qinghai Lake Area*

<sup>11</sup> See Dgon mchok bstan dzin's work for a description of these associations.

University in Chengdu, Sichuan. Könchok Tendzin authored an excellent article about the First Gungru *trülku* Sönam Gyen/Lozang Chödrön (See introduction) who sculpted a statue of the Geluk sect founder Tsongkhapa in the late 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century at Kumbum Monastery near Xining (Chin. *Taersi* 塔尔寺). This article also included short sketches of each member of the Gungru lineage. Over a cup of tea in Chengdu, Könchok Tendzin told me who I needed to meet in Amdo in order to set up a possible interview with Kelzang. This included meeting with Kelzang's former colleague in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in Hezuo, Gansu (about 70 km east of Labrang), who in turn would introduce me to Kelzang's third husband Chödzin in Labrang. I had learned from colleagues before leaving the United States that winter break, that Kelzang had married.

A few days after I met with Kelzang's colleague in Hezuo, my Tibetan friend Lhamo and I arrived unannounced one morning at Kelzang and Chödzin's home in Labrang. Their home was nestled in a maze of Tibetan-style houses north of the bus station. (By a twist of good fortune, I met Lhamo via the Internet a week before I left the United States after a colleague at Indiana University provided me with her e-mail address). My heart thumped like a drum as we knocked on their door. I was still unsure what I would ask Chödzin who was the *husband* of the sixth Gungru *trülku*, whom only four months prior I did not know to exist. He greeted us with a big smile. As soon as I told him that I had met the art historian professor in Chengdu and the government worker from Hezuo, Chödzin welcomed me into his living room. This was the first of many visits over the next seven years where we would talk about Kelzang's life and also his own.

Then what I never expected to happen, happened. A few hours later on that same afternoon, I met face to face with the woman who was the actual sixth Gungru lineage holder, Kelzang Drölma. My Tibetan friend Lhamo and I met with Kelzang in her tiny box-sized government office located in an apartment building in Labrang where she at age 74 still



worked for the PRC government in the CPPCC. Sitting behind her desk and wearing lay clothing, Kelzang was extremely gracious to meet with me on such short notice. What she said in that interview—or more importantly what she did *not* say about her unique life—shaped the course of my dissertation going forward, in particular in the wake of her death in 2013 at the age of 76. The only other time I met Kelzang was for a brief hello at her family picnic in August 2012 at her partially rebuilt estate located behind Drakkar. She died a little over five months later from heart failure on January 26, 2013.

In the wake of Kelzang's passing, my life for the next five years (2013-2018) consisted of many trips between the United States and China/Amdo. On one overnight American Airlines flight in 2014 from Chicago to Beijing, I befriended a flight attendant who was surprised when I told her about my research about Kelzang's non-traditional life in Amdo. Shockingly, the flight attendant said to me that she was also a spirit medium in her spare time and that she could talk to Kelzang on my behalf and for free of charge from the airplane. A bit skeptical but open (what else was I to do on a 14-hour nonstop flight?) I waited for the flight attendant to tell me the results of a conversation that she said she had with Kelzang from the back of the half-full plane. The flight attendant told me that Kelzang told her that she (Kelzang) was going to protect me and look after me as I embarked on this work about her life in Amdo.

Looking back on this meeting with the flight attendant (or on the flight attendant's conversation with Kelzang) over seven years later, I can see signs of Kelzang's guidance—guidance to learn as many details about her life as I could, even the difficult and painful ones, as this dissertation analyzes. A few months after Kelzang passed away in 2013, I met Tupten Döndrup, who was then a college student in Lanzhou, Gansu. Tupten was the son of Tsültrim, a Gengya native and close disciple of Kelzang. Tsültrim's father was Lozang Chöpel who was a monk in Kelzang's estate prior to 1958 as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. In 2014 (the

summer of the flight attendant/spirit medium), I lived with Tupten Döndrup and worked for his family for a month as a waiter in their Tibetan restaurant in Labrang. My presence there shocked many Tibetan and Chinese patrons who came in wanting to eat a plate of traditional Tibetan meat dumplings. I did not expect that what started out as an ideal language practice for my rough Amdo Tibetan dialect would become the perfect way for a doctoral student/waiter to learn about Kelzang, the Gungru lineage and Amdo. While working at the restaurant, I also met the daughter of an Inner Mongolian woman. This woman let me stay cheaply in her nearby guesthouse in Labrang (under cover, if you will) to conduct my research in 2016-2017 before she ordained as a nun.

As far as opening doors on this project that consumed thousands of air miles, many academic conferences in Russia, Mongolia, China, the Czech Republic, France, Canada and the United States and three computers (one crashed and two were stolen), the list is long. My research in Amdo and in the United States did not take place in a vacuum. I cannot express my gratitude enough for my first MA Advisor at Montana State University in Bozeman, Montana, Dr. Michelle Maskiell, who inspired me to go to India to do research in 2005. I am beyond grateful for Dr. Gray Tuttle's sage advice at Columbia University. He introduced me to the late Tibetan scholar E. Gene Smith at the then TBRC in New York City who in 2009 sent me the *Lotus Vine* text for my MA thesis. Before I graduated, Dr. Tuttle exhorted me to follow my heart and continue my graduate studies. Around the same time, Dr. Sarah Jacoby of Northwestern University also told me to not give up on my dream to do a Ph.D. I soon enrolled at Indiana University and then moved to the University of Chicago. At Indiana, I am grateful to the late Dr. Elliot Sperling for his guidance and wit and also Tibetan professor Gendün Rapsel, who was instrumental in helping me find my footing on this project. I am also thankful for courses with Dr. Richard Nance, Dr. Rebecca Manring and Dr. Heather Blair in the religious studies department at Indiana that have shaped my research.

At the University of Chicago, I am incredibly thankful for the guiding hand of my doctoral advisor Dr. Matthew Kapstein who has helped me both in Amdo and stateside; Dr. Kapstein's connections to people all over the Tibetan world is astounding as is his guidance on all matters related to research on Tibet and writing. I am also thankful for Dr. Wendy Doniger for her calm and guiding encouragement and wisdom over the years as well as the wonderful time and advice from Dr. Ken Pomeranz, Dr. Alireza Doostdar, Dr. Christian Wedemeyer, Dr. Richard Rosengarten, Dr. Bruce Lincoln, Dr. Paul Copp, Karma Ngodup and Fenpai Cai. I would be remiss not to mention the History of Religions Problems Seminar in the Divinity School that under the leadership of Dr. Doniger and Dr. Wedemeyer always challenged me and improved my work with my esteemed colleagues. Lastly, I want to thank Dr. Jacoby of Northwestern again for her generous time and always allowing me to process my findings from the field (aka a data dump) when I returned from Amdo to Chicago and felt a bit disoriented. Her expertise and kindness has been most helpful.

I also want to thank my dear friend Lhamo of Labrang for her knowledge, her help and good cheer over the years I did fieldwork in Amdo. Lhamo became like a sister to me and made me feel welcome in Amdo when she invited me in 2016 to her family village's ceremony where locals chased me down and tossed me into the air three times for good fortune. I want to thank Professors Raw, Tsomu and Döndrup in China for helping me get my bearings when I arrived in 2016. I am also grateful for the generous support of Fulbright IIE that made this research possible to undertake in Xining where I lived for over two years (2016-2018). Who knew that as a foreign scholar walking down a runway as a model in the middle of a large public street in Xining as I did in May 2016, would pay dividends down the road? Foreign students at Qinghai Nationalities University in Xining were often asked to participate in such "marketing" events. While I could not talk my way out of this exercise in public humiliation/mutual cultural understanding on the runway with professional Chinese

models, the act of wiggling my backside in public to uproarious laughter paved the way for me to do my research because of the goodwill established with my local university.

Speaking of goodwill, I would like to thank my beautiful partner Sharon Crain of Los Angeles whom I reunited with online later in this journey in the middle of a global pandemic. Without her love, wisdom and encouragement, I would never have crossed the finish line. I also want to thank my wonderful parents, Tamara and Edward Faggen, for their kindness and patient support through my many trips overseas to Asia. I would also like to thank my sister Meredith and her wife Claudine and their kids, Solange and Sebastian, for their unflagging support, as well as my late grandfather Milton Cobert. I still cannot fathom that my academic talk about the Gungru lineage in January 2017 at the Amdo Workshop in Prague, Czech Republic would provide me an opportunity before the workshop began to go to Dachau Concentration Camp outside of Munich, Germany. My grandfather Milton helped liberate Dachau as a member of the U.S. Allied Forces in 1945. When I was 11 years old, Milton showed me a haunting photo he took at Dachau. He wanted to let me know what he saw. I never thought one day I would step foot on those grounds remembering that photograph. A colleague from Xining who lived in Munich helped me get to Dachau. Did Kelzang arrange for me to have this meeting to follow in my grandfather's footsteps?

I also want to thank my late wonderful grandmother Rosamond Cobert, my late uncle Mitchell Cobert (my Godfather and partner in fun) and my late great aunt Florence Stein, who at the age of 100, always asked me about the progress of my dissertation. Many thanks, too, to my wonderful cousins Craig and Jessica Smith for their beautiful friendship throughout this entire dissertation and my uncle Jon Cobert for his hospitality when I was at Columbia and his weekly musical online concerts during the pandemic. Last but not least, I owe a debt of gratitude to many friends in New York, Indiana, Virginia, Chicago, Canada, Australia and China. I am most grateful for Dan Benjamin, Chris Kupczak, Tim Krushensky,

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Lastly, I want to thank the people of Amdo who helped me, informed me, supported me, laughed with me and sometimes cried with me—and me with them. I became very close with one family in Gengya near Drakkar Monastery. This family repeatedly welcomed me into their home even after I became very ill from eating yak meat off the bone at dinner. I learned more about compassion and kindness staying with this family as I became a big brother to the family's youngest daughter. She had a polio-like disease and can not stand or walk. She became one of my best friends throughout this entire journey and we still maintain contact today. I can only think that Kelzang had a hand in arranging this meeting.

**Chronology**  
**Dates in the life of Kelzang Drölma, the Sixth *trülku***  
**in the Gungru Yeshe *Khandroma* lineage**

**1055-1149**—Machik Lapdrön lives in southern Tibet; becomes student and teacher of *chö*; three of her children among her disciples, including Tönyön Samdru, Dongdé Ngak Wangchuk and Dröldé Gyelwé Jungné.

**1644**—Drakkar Monastery founded in Gengya.

**Late 16<sup>th</sup>- 17<sup>th</sup> century?**—First Gungru *trülku* Sönam Gyen from Kham Gungru.

**Early 18<sup>th</sup> century/Dates Unknown:** First/Second Gungru *trülku* Lozang Chödrön; likely born in Central Tibet.

**1709**—Labrang Monastery founded by First Jamyang Zhepa

**Note:** Around this time sources suggest that Lozang Chödrön came from Central Tibet to Amdo.

**Dates Unknown**—Second Gungru *trülku* Lozang Drölma born in Gengya.

**1747-N/A**—Third Gungru *trülku* Könchok Chödrön born in Gengya.

**1814-1891**—Fourth Gungru *trülku* Rindzin Pelmo born in Gengya Zhölkor.

**1891-1933**—Fifth Gungru *trülku* Könchok Tenpé Wangmo born in Dobi Changshar, Xunhua, Qinghai.

**1897-1951**—Gengya-Jiawu grassland conflict between herders from Jiawu and Gengya.

**1933**—Fifth Gungru *trülku* Tenpé Wangmo passes away in Drakkar.

**1936**—Sixth Gungru *trülku* Kelzang Drölma is born in Jiawu, Qinghai, in the large Tibetan area of Rebgong.

**1938**—Damsik Drölma born in Trangyar, Rebgong.

**1941-1943**—Search, negotiation and enthronement of Kelzang as the Sixth Gungru *trülku* at Drakkar Monastery in Gengya.

**1947**—Attends *chö* teachings at Kumbum Monastery outside of Xining, Qinghai with Tenth Panchen.

**1953**—Kelzang Begins work in the local Chinese Communist Party in Gannan and Xiahe, Gansu. She worked in the government, including as president of the CPPCC, until **2013**.

**1956**—Kelzang travels to Beijing and Inner Mongolia as part of CCP party training.

**1958**—Kelzang laicizes after she is assaulted by Chinese soldiers/government workers.

**1958-1961**—Kelzang attends college at the Northwest University of the Nationalities in Lanzhou, Gansu, China.

**1961**—Kelzang participates in CCP Party Training in Gansu.

**Circa 1961**—Kelzang's first marriage to a teacher named Gendün from Northwest University of Nationalities whom she later divorced. Not sure on exact date.

**Note:** It is also not clear if Kelzang ever married a Chinese soldier, as some informants suggested. There was a claim that they married and were divorced. This likely would have been around **1958**.

**1962**—Kelzang's first son Dolo is born. Father not confirmed; likely out-of-wedlock. Kelzang's older brother raised Dolo in Gengya.

**1964**—Kelzang's first daughter Tralo is born. Father not confirmed; likely out of wedlock.

**1964 circa in Labrang**—Kelzang marries Tashi Gyatso of the CCP in Labrang.

**1968-1978**—Works as a laborer in Khagya Yeshékhyil outside of Hezuo, Gansu, China during the Cultural Revolution.

**1968**—Kelzang's second son Dépön Tashi born to Tashi Gyatso.

**1970**—Kelzang's second daughter Gönpotso born to Tashi Gyatso.

**1972**—Kelzang meets Chödzin in Khagya Yeshékhyil.

**1976**—Tashi Gyatso dies of liver disease in Khagya Yeshékhyil during Cultural Revolution.

**1978 (?)**—Kelzang Moves back to Labrang from Khagya Yeshékhyil.

**1978**—Kelzang marries Chödzin in Labrang.

**1980**—The Tenth Panchen arrives at Labrang and meets with leaders there, including the Sixth Jamyang Zhepa and Kelzang Drölma, at her Drakkar estate.

**1986-1988**—Drakkar Monastery is rebuilt.

**1994-1997**—Part of Gungru estate is rebuilt at Drakkar.

**1994**—Chougya Nunnery is built in Labrang.

**2002, 2007 and 2009**—Kelzang returns to her native Jiawu for three visits.

**2000 (?)**—The annual *chö* festival is restored in Drakkar estate of the Gungru lineage that is partially rebuilt.

**2007 circa**—Geluk nunnery Géden Tengyéling Nunnery in Labrang is established. Nyingma nunnery Lapsun Dargyé Ling also established.

**2009**—Jamyang Zhepa scolds Drakkar monks and Gengya locals for not supporting Kelzang; Kelzang makes last major visit to people’s homes.

**2010**—Kelzang travels to Zangrikharmar, Machik’s monastery in southern Tibet.

**2013**—January 26, Kelzang Drölma passes away in Labrang.

**2013**—Obituary about Kelzang is written likely by the CPPCC in Labrang.

**2018**—Confirmation that process to write Kelzang’s *namtar* has stalled; reincarnation process delayed.



### Note on Transcription and Translation

For the ease of reading Tibetan words in this dissertation, I use a simplified phonetic spelling adopted by the Tibetan Himalayan Digital Library. The converter can be found at <https://www.thlib.org/reference/transliteration/phconverter.php> Most of the sounds correspond to the English sound of the letter. The exceptions, as Matthew Kapstein notes in *The Tibetans*, are ö and ü which are pronounced as in German; e and é, with the accent signifying that the final e is not silent; and z and zh which sound like s and sh.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, a complete list of Tibetan names and places listed in this dissertation can be found in Appendix II. This list incorporates both the Tibetan phonetic/converter spellings and the Tibetan Wylie, which corresponds with the actual Tibetan spelling. An example of a name from Appendix II would be: Gengya *rgan gya*. For relevant Tibetan footnotes, I mostly use Wylie transcription of texts.

For Chinese, I use Pinyin transcription followed by characters for known names and place names. I use Chinese characters for footnotes.

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<sup>12</sup> See Kapstein, *The Tibetans*, p. xvii.

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Map 2. Labrang's extended community, ca. 1930.  
Courtesy of Tsering Wangyal Shawa, Princeton University.

Figure 1: Map of Amdo: From *Labrang Monastery* (2011)

## Introduction

Most scholarship about Tibetan Buddhist virtuosos, including recent works about Tibetan women, analyzes their exemplarity in auto/biographical life writings. My dissertation introduces an ethnography about the contested creation of a biography of a religious figure whose life did not follow a traditional path. That figure is Kelzang Drölma (1936-2013), the sixth member of the Gungru Yeshé *Khandroma* female reincarnate lineage based at Drakkar Monastery in Gengya in Amdo. And the story of Kelzang's life could not be more contested than it is in the present interregnum period before the Seventh Gungru reincarnate returns to the lineage's home at Drakkar, perhaps in the near future. (The search for the Seventh Gungru *trülku* is still ongoing as of this writing in October 2021 as Chapter 5 discusses). That is because the process to sanctify Kelzang's life in the Tibetan genre of *namtar*, or the story of how a Buddhist figure attains enlightenment, has collapsed. This happened amidst a bitter conflict among the various stakeholders—Kelzang's third husband Chödzin, her youngest son Dépön and the monk author Gendün Darjé of Labrang Monastery—to re-create the conditions of Kelzang's sanctity as Chapter 5 shows.

The fifth chapter elaborates the stakes to legitimate Kelzang's authority in a *namtar* as first established in the Gungru lineage's foundational narrative written about the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo in Chapter 1. This *namtar* titled *The Biography of the Gungru Yeshi Khandroma called the White Lotus Vine* (the *Lotus Vine* from henceforth) legitimates Rindzin Pelmo and the Gungru lineage's authority as a metaphorical mother-like figure. This maternal figure exuded universal compassion as the Buddha would and for whom the Buddhist patriarchy glorified as an exemplar and beacon of unity and peace.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Reiko Ohnuma's *The Ties that Bind*, 2012 for a description of how Indian Buddhist texts deploy motherhood and create a metaphorical depiction contra an actual mother, as explained further in Chapters 1, 3 and 4 of this dissertation.

But reproducing this kind of storyline for Kelzang over a century later, or “reconstituting the tradition” established in what I label as the “Gungru Master Narrative,” has been inhibited at this time.<sup>14</sup> In his vision of writing a story of sanctity about his wife, Chödzin clashed with the author of her now canceled *namtar*, the monk Gendün Darjé from the influential Labrang Monastery. Specifically, they disagreed over what material should be included in Kelzang’s *namtar* and who should write the text, as Chapter 5 relates. The monk author did not want to produce any historical details. Chödzin, who is a writer but does not have institutional backing as does the monk, said that Kelzang’s *namtar* must include political and social information. In the end, the project to write her *namtar* collapsed over these issues related to genre and authorship. It also collapsed because the monk, Chödzin and Dépön, who was in charge of his mother’s *namtar*, did not trust each other’s motives to write Kelzang’s story for many reasons as will be seen in the following chapters.

That this stalemate to produce a celebratory *namtar* about Kelzang occurred is not entirely surprising given the shocking and sad story of her life. Many monks, nuns, herders, farmers, government workers, as well as Chödzin, told me this story, as Chapters 2-4 will illustrate. Some of these interlocutors spoke to me about Kelzang’s laicization in 1958; she was sexually assaulted to force her to break her monastic vows. This happened as the PRC responded to the local rebellion against the new PRC state’s economic reforms as described in Chapter 3. Some told me about Kelzang’s out-of-wedlock first child, her divorce from her first marriage and the domestic abuse inflicted by her second husband before he died during the Cultural Revolution. They talked with me about how Kelzang’s children as adults, led by Dépön, engaged in a prolonged feud with monks at Drakkar over land ownership and development. This resulted in a schism between Kelzang’s family and Drakkar as illustrated in Chapter 4. Further, some mentioned to me two challenges to Kelzang’s Gungru position by

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<sup>14</sup> See Foucault’s *Archeology of Knowledge*, 12 for a discussion on his critique of master narratives.

a woman named Damtsik Drölma. The first challenge occurred in the 1940s and the second after the Cultural Revolution when Kelzang as a lay mother retreated more from the public eye. This second conflict contributed to identity confusion between Kelzang and Damtsik that has persisted (Chapter 4). In the end, discussion for some people about Kelzang's life brought up pain and sadness. For others, these stories elicited anger, guilt, remorse, shame, joy, and catharsis. Some people even raised these issues with me unprompted suggesting that this narrative—the chaos, destruction and the uncertainty of the twentieth century and the apathy of the twenty-first as it related to Kelzang—has long weighed on people's minds.

However, I was not supposed to know this story of pain and sadness when I arrived in Labrang for the first time in December 2010 and met with Kelzang for our lone interview at her government office. Halfway through the interview, Kelzang's youngest daughter Gönpotso called her mother and warned her (I could hear Gönpotso through Kelzang's receiver): "Do not tell them anything, and it is better for them to leave." "Them" was myself and my Tibetan friend Lhamo, a native of Labrang. After Kelzang hung up the phone, her answers to my questions became more terse. This happened especially when I raised questions about what happened to her in 1958 and about Damtsik Drölma who I had then mistaken as the Sixth Gungru as first mentioned in the preface. Soon after the interview ended, I wondered, of course, about the story I was not supposed to know and proceeded to learn as much as I could about Kelzang's life.

Yet, my goal of unearthing Kelzang's non-traditional story has carried far greater purpose than merely excavating details about her unique, conflicted, and, as I would come to find out, tragic life. As I learned about Kelzang and of the struggles to write a *namtar* that would legitimate her authority in the manner of her predecessors, I began to think about Kelzang's authority from the vantage point of people who lived in Gengya, Labrang and across Amdo—people whose voices would not normally appear in a *namtar*. In particular, I

became interested in analyzing how ordinary monks and nuns, herders, farmers, teachers, government workers and Kelzang's husband Chödzin elucidate Kelzang's authority through telling a story that a *namtar* would minimize or neglect. In other words, this story as narrated from lesser known sources would feature the discontinuity of her forced laicization, her marriages, her motherhood and her altered role after the Cultural Revolution. This story would be the anti-master narrative that challenges or even critiques the goal of a text such as a *namtar* to preserve the conditions of Kelzang's sanctity with a more choreographed narrative that silences any dissent.<sup>15</sup> Kelzang's Chinese obituary (2013) marks an example of one such text as analyzed in Chapter 1 in correlation with the *Lotus Vine*. (See Appendix I for a complete translation of the obituary).

In this vein, this dissertation analyzes Kelzang's authority in relation to the myriad ways in which people remembered or mis-remembered the pain in Kelzang's life in the context of the Gengya-Jiawu grassland violence (twentieth century) and the destructions of the Cultural Revolution period (1958-1978). This research focuses on how people proffered various strategies of support and also expressed doubts about Kelzang during these tumultuous times. As a starting point, I expand on Bruce Lincoln's model of authority as he first proposed it in relation to speech as contained in texts. Here, I concentrate on how people in Amdo constructed and/or deconstructed Kelzang's authority on their own terms. I focus on authority not as something to be gained or as an entity automatically given, as Lincoln theorizes about authority in his own work, even though Kelzang always held the title as the Sixth Gungru *trülku* despite her laicized status. Rather, I want to apply more of what Lincoln calls an "effect" of authority produced between a "historically conditioned" audience who judge a figure's speech, actions, costume and other props as right—or not—to Kelzang and

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<sup>15</sup> Said writes in *The World, The Text and the Critic*, 4, that texts, which "are a part of the social world, human life and the historical moments in which they are located," also necessitate critics to the dominant discourse.

the people of Gengya, Labrang and elsewhere in this Amdo region.<sup>16</sup> For Kelzang, this audience consisted of the aforementioned monks, nuns, farmers and herders of all ages whom I spoke with in Gengya and across Amdo—some who knew her well and some who did not.

The following questions serve as the fulcrum for this dissertation: What can we learn about Kelzang's authority from studying how various people reacted to and remembered the tragic rupture in Kelzang's life in relation to the Gengya-Jiawu conflict, the trauma of her laicization and domestic abuse during the Cultural Revolution, her motherhood and later her retreat from public duties after the Cultural Revolution? What strategies and/or doubts did people in Gengya and in other places in Amdo utilize to describe this discontinuity or the fissures in Kelzang's story and how do these strategies and expressions of doubt inform and construct or deconstruct Kelzang's authority? Furthermore, in what ways do the narrative and legitimating strategies as told by people on the ground resemble influential textual narrative strategies as portrayed in Kelzang's obituary and in the *Lotus Vine namtar* before that and in what ways do the oral accounts diverge? Lastly, what do these narrative strategies and doubts about Kelzang illustrate about the political, social and gendered contexts in which to locate her authority in comparison with and in contrast to her Gungru predecessors?

The ensuing chapters will unpack how people's representations of the Gengya-Jiawu conflict, the trauma of the Cultural Revolution period and the uncertain aftermath impacted how they constructed and deconstructed Kelzang's authority as the Sixth Gungru *trülku*. Some people's testimony shows how the turmoil surrounding the transition from the Fifth Gungru Tenpé Wangmo and Kelzang's contested selection during the Gengya-Jiawu grassland conflict in the 1930s was (and still is) imbued with doubt. Many mentioned the pain and trauma of the Cultural Revolution period when Kelzang laicized in 1958 and later married. Others constructed her authority as a mother of four children who worked in the

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<sup>16</sup> See Bruce Lincoln's definition of authority in *Authority: Construction and Corrosion* as an effect between a conditioned audience who judges a figure's speech, actions, costume, props as right—or not; authority is not an entity to be obtained, nor is it automatically given or inherent/passed down in a lineage.



government and spent less time at Drakkar Monastery. Still many others doubted Kelzang for not performing rituals for the public after the Cultural Revolution, an action considered to be standard for a Gungru *trülku*. Significantly, Kelzang participated in this process to legitimate her authority as she encountered the dramatic changes in her life as a religious figure brought about by the implications of breaking her vow and having children. Reserved and steadfast in her stance that as a mother and as someone who had broken her monastic vow (albeit under forced circumstances), Kelzang retreated from doing many of her duties as the Gungru *trülku* after the Cultural Revolution. She instead worked more within the confines of the government. She did not want to meet with the public and enact rituals for others as a lay person and some people looked elsewhere for a new *trülku* to support. She opted not to make a spectacle of herself or of the Gungru lineage and stayed behind the scenes almost to the point of anonymity. Kelzang seemed to prefer it this way.

Yet, while some people criticized Kelzang for not assuming a more public role after the Cultural Revolution, and as Damtsik Drölma seized an opportunity to re-assert her claim as the Gungru *trülku* in the 1990s, to say that Kelzang's authority wholly waned as a lay mother and as a government worker in Labrang would be incorrect. This is because such a monolithic viewpoint that focuses solely on what some might call her diminished authority overlooks those people who united behind her when they described Kelzang's traumas and the major changes to her life. For instance, some people called on various narrative strategies, or they reached into their available narrative repertoire, to tell stories about her that resemble what one might find in a *namtar* to support Kelzang and maintain a semblance of continuity in both her life and their own.<sup>17</sup> Some people rallied around Kelzang and narrated a *namtar*-

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<sup>17</sup> See Company's "Religious Repertoires and Contestation: A Case Study Based on Buddhist Miracle Tales," in *History of Religions*. Company cites on 106-107 Ann Swidler's study that "shows how people, negotiating their way through life, avail themselves of specific elements of their culture as toolkits or repertoires that are available to be used variously by individuals. Important questions include not only what elements are available in a given repertoire, but also how and in what circumstances any given piece in the repertoire is invoked, used or preferred by some actors but not by others." Company writes that "people mull more deeply and creatively"

like story that illustrated how Kelzang transformed into a ferocious tiger to ward off her oppressors who had sexually assaulted her when she laicized in 1958 (Chapter 3). Others conflated stories and re-directed the blame for abuse inflicted on Kelzang in the Cultural Revolution to the Chinese. In this regard, some locals utilized tactics that resemble how the Yi group of Yunnan, China, articulated the violence they endured in the Cultural Revolution as Erik Mueggler shows.<sup>18</sup> Still others supported Kelzang with accounts of her as the triumphant and legitimate Gungru *trülku* in the rivalry with Damtsik.,

Therefore, Kelzang's life and her authority as the Gungru *trülku* became imbricated with people's varied remembrances of the trauma and the disruption that befell Kelzang and their community—some expressed doubt, others support and some fell into both camps. In other words, Kelzang's authority in this community very much laid in the eyes of the beholder. Her authority, or what I call an oral authority,<sup>19</sup> fluctuated and depended very much on the standpoint of the person speaking about Kelzang. It depended, as I found out, on how each person treated and judged her as someone who had been sexually assaulted, was abused by her spouse, was a mother of four children and a worker in the PRC government. Thus, Kelzang's authority became intertwined with the varied strategies of support and doubt that people articulated in correlation with the volatile historical, gendered and social contexts in Gengya and Labrang. A text or a master narrative about Kelzang, such as her obituary or any future *namtar*, would obviate this testimony in favor of a more fixed story that would minimize any discontinuity in Kelzang's life.

Ultimately, my fieldwork shows that Kelzang's authority became conjoined with the structures of doubt and uncertainty (people's reactions to the changing present and turbulent

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during times of uncertainty. See also West's *Ethnographic Sorcery*, 69, for a description of how the Muedans utilize a symbolic repertoire in regards to sorcery discourse to re-make their world.

<sup>18</sup> See Mueggler, *Age of Wild Ghosts*.

<sup>19</sup> I define oral authority to analyze the varied standpoint of each interlocutor/author. Oral authority expands on themes relevant to "textual authority" that as Chapter 1 of this dissertation explains, revolve around the production and re-production of a narrative over time and in relation to various audiences.

past) which we must “catch in mid-air” before they become articulated in a text and the Seventh Gungru *trülku* returns to Drakkar.<sup>20</sup> Or for our purposes here, we must “catch Kelzang’s authority in mid-air” before it becomes smoothed over in a text and we lose sight of the complex process in which to discern how in the face of an uncertain present for the Gungru lineage people across Amdo celebrated or doubted her. This flattening out process has already begun as Kelzang’s obituary sought to preserve a seamless continuity just as the *Lotus Vine* did with the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo as Chapter 1 shows. In this regard, the obituary stitches together the seams of discontinuity and presents Kelzang’s authority as a revered mother-like figure for all who was unaffected by the violence as if everything automatically normalized after the Cultural Revolution, which it did not. Notably, the obituary overlooks the more nuanced and fluid process of how people navigated through the trauma that engulfed Kelzang and this grassland community and their disparate responses of intense doubt, apathy and unflagging support.

Intersecting with the themes of doubt and motherhood, some people’s accounts about Kelzang show that her authority changed in Gengya, Labrang and across Amdo as an actual mother who worked in the PRC after the Cultural Revolution. In fact, Kelzang, who spoke with diffidence when she told me in 2010, “I do not have anything more to do with religion because I have all of these children,” rarely, if ever, performed divinations and healing acts for villagers in need, as Chapter 4 describes.<sup>21</sup> Nor did she serve as a confidant or as a teacher as she and other Gungru lineage holders used to do before 1958. By her own account, Kelzang’s relationship with her monastic and lay constituents grew more distant and her authority with them diminished because she no longer did the things that prior Gungru *trülkus* did; Kelzang’s costume and setting changed as she wore lay clothing and worked more in the government and spent less time at Drakkar or in public settings.

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<sup>20</sup> See Pelkmans’ introduction to *Ethnographies of Doubt*, for analysis of doubt which “tends to vanish with articulation, 5

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Kelzang Drölma on December 28, 2010 in Labrang, conducted by the author.

Clearly, the implications of Kelzang's motherhood played an important role in how people rendered Kelzang's authority in this Amdo Tibetan community. This is fascinating given how any text written about her would minimize if not neglect the fact that Kelzang laicized, married and raised a family. Case in point, Kelzang's Chinese obituary avoids the subject of Kelzang's laicization and subsequent motherhood and instead legitimates her authority as a metaphorical mother figure who exuded compassion for the masses in Gengya, Labrang and elsewhere in Amdo. Significantly, the obituary followed the blueprint established by the *Lotus Vine namtar* (1897) that legitimates the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo's authority as if she were a mother who signified universal compassion like the Buddha but *not* the love of one's own particular biological children, as Chapter 1 shows.<sup>22</sup> And while a study of the effects of mothering and motherhood and religion lie beyond the scope of this dissertation,<sup>23</sup> of great interest here is unpacking how Kelzang's actual motherhood impacted her authority in this community.

In other words, this ethnography about Kelzang has uncovered and I would argue helped to re-center the impact of her motherhood from the margins of institutional power (the state, monastic entities and Kelzang's family) into a focal point of her authority. This is critical for a community that extols the *trülku* in the Gungru lineage as an emanation of the Great Mother Machik Lapdrön, (1055-1149) as the *Lotus Vine* asserts about the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo.<sup>24</sup> Machik was a virtuoso practitioner, teacher and founder of the Buddhist practice of *chö* (severance from ego). Centuries after her death, Machik, who was a

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<sup>22</sup> See Ohnuma's *Ties that Bind* and Chapters 1, 3 and 4.

<sup>23</sup> The nascent field of motherhood and religion has introduced some excellent new scholarship on the influence of motherhood. See Pedrucci's "The Entanglement of Mothers and Religion: An Introduction in *Open Theology*" See also Pasche-Guignard's "The Academic Study of Religions and Mothering, Motherhood and Mothers in Motherhood (s) and Polytheisms and Scapini's *Maternita e Politeismi*. Older sources include Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and as an Institution* and Sered's "Woman as Symbol and Woman as Agents: Gendered Religious Discourses and Practices" in *Revisioning Gender*.

<sup>24</sup> See Janet Gyatso's "The Development of the Good Tradition" in *Soundings in Tibetan Civilization*; Edou's *Machik Labdrön and the Foundations of Cho*; Michelle Sorenson's *Making the Old New Again and Again*; Kollmar-Paulenz's *der Schmuck der Befreiung*; and Sarah Harding's Machik's Complete Explanation for studies on the biographies and practices of Machik Lapdrön.

mother of five children in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, became celebrated as the Great Mother and an iconic figure. In fact, many current scholars label Machik as an “authorizing referent” for noteworthy Tibetan women throughout Tibetan history. This transformation for Machik, who allegedly endured rejection because she broke her nun’s vow and was forced to flee Central Tibet, according to some sources, also likely occurred as the Buddhist practice of *chö* later spread across Tibet, including to Amdo.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, this dissertation, in part, analyzes this convergence of discourses about Buddhist motherhood and the actuality of Kelzang being a mother to construct and deconstruct her authority. Doing so introduces new material about the effects of motherhood in a Tibetan Buddhist context in conversation with scholarship about mothers in Indian Buddhism. For instance, Sarah Jacoby’s recent article about motherhood and the life of another Tibetan female exemplar in Amdo from the twentieth century provides a framework of this new scholarship about motherhood in Tibet. Jacoby introduces the “As-If Model” of motherhood (akin to a metaphorical mother of all beings *as if* they were children) and the “Actual Model” of being a real mother of one’s own biological children.<sup>26</sup> In this vein and in the context of analyzing Kelzang within the Gungru lineage, Machik Lapdrön plays a vital dual role in legitimating Kelzang’s authority as an ideal mother-like personage who also had five children of her own; Kelzang had four. The following chapters will unpack these issues and in particular show how some of Kelzang’s constituents became more doubtful and distant from her as a mother after the Cultural Revolution and why Damtsik, who did not bear biological children, could re-assert her claim as the Gungru *trülku*.

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<sup>25</sup> See Gyatso and Havnevik, *Women in Tibet*, 22 for a discussion on female “authorizing referents.” For greater context on Machik, please see Harding’s *Machik’s Complete Explanation*, 32, 70, 77, 78-81; Edou’s *Machik Lapdrön and the Foundation of Chö*, 3, and also Kollmar-Paulenz’s *der Schmuck der Befreiung*.

<sup>26</sup> My recent article in *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines* discusses relevant narrative and legitimating strategies pertaining to the metaphor of motherhood in Kelzang’s obituary comparing it to the *Lotus Vine*. See Sarah Jacoby’s recent excellent article “Tibetan Buddhist metaphors and models of Motherhood” in *Journal of Feminist Studies of Religion* for a delineation of models of motherhood.

In the end, the implications of Kelzang's motherhood help explain why no one could agree on what to write in a *namtar* about a non-traditional figure whose life and whose authority were as contested as they were extraordinary by elevating the life of a lay woman in the expansive domain of religion. This means that this dissertation discusses people's accounts of issues such as sexual assault, domestic abuse, divorce, widowhood, and the motherhood of four children who engaged in a conflict with Drakkar. These topics or even stigmas facing Tibetan women (and women and men everywhere) counter the more packaged narrative of a text. And while this dissertation does not analyze these issues in depth as they happened in Amdo and across Tibet, Asia and the world, unpacking this discontinuity, i.e., the story that will not be written about Kelzang, helps insert Kelzang's agency—and her authority—as a lay mother into a larger discussion of religion and authority.

On this note, it is important to return briefly to the subject of authority. This distinct story about Kelzang introduces a new case study of constructing her authority as expressed by many people in Gengya, Labrang and other points in Amdo.<sup>27</sup> Analyzing authority as such—and not as proclaimed by any top-down institution—elevates these people's testimony, including Kelzang's, into a wider discussion about the authority of a religious figure. This discussion that has focused more on authority from the position of the leader (or one's charisma) incorporates how people on the ground, or an audience, constructed Kelzang's authority by relating to the tragic story of her trauma, her sadness, her alienation, her resiliency and her heroism as the Sixth Gungru *trülku*. The reward is not just reading a compelling story that challenges the more sweeping master narrative of her obituary and likely any future *namtar* written about her. The benefit of understanding the complexities of

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<sup>27</sup> Scholars have studied authority in terms of legal authority, traditional authority, and charismatic authority. Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 324–82. Furthermore, Weber in *Essays in Sociology* 295, describes charismatic authority as occurring within an audience” but in his description of charismatic authority he elides authority more with the position of the ruler or leader as “rule over men to which the governed submit because of their belief in the extraordinary qualities of the specific person.” See also Richard Sennett's work on authority and power dynamics in *Authority* where authority, according to Sennett is “an act of imagination, it is a search for solidity and security in the strength of others.” 197.

Kelzang's unique story—and also the tale of the local grassland community in Gengya and also Labrang in which she lived—lies in locating Kelzang's authority in the nexus of volatile historical, Buddhist, social and gendered contexts—and not outside.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, this story about the discontinuities of Kelzang's life introduces these gendered dynamics into a larger discussion about authority not just in respect to Kelzang being feted as a great individual woman, but within the context of a society shaped and ruled mostly by Tibetan men and later the PRC.<sup>29</sup> Even more extraordinary is how this study of Kelzang's authority and the challenges to sanctify her life with a textual *namtar* asserts her position as a rare female Buddhist figure and as a lay mother within Tibetan and Chinese historical narratives from the vantage point of these little-studied Sino-Tibetan borderlands.<sup>30</sup> Kelzang's story—and the tale of her accepted, challenged and even rejected authority as spoken by Amdo locals—represents the volatility and importance of this Sino-Tibetan borderlands region around Labrang where the Gungru lineage lived. It is an important history about a unique if not non-traditional female Tibetan Buddhist exemplar who is anything but peripheral.

#### *Oral and Written sources used*

The majority of the sources used in this dissertation were oral interviews which I conducted mostly in Tibetan and Chinese. After obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the University of Chicago in Spring 2013, and in the wake of Kelzang's death, I arrived in Gengya and Labrang for one of many trips there over the next six years. During

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<sup>28</sup> See Lincoln's *Theses on Methods* at [https://www.jstor.org/stable/23551717?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/23551717?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents)

<sup>29</sup> See Makley's study of gender as contextual in *Violence of Liberation*, 11-13 focusing more on "social relations being gendered, not persons or things."

<sup>30</sup> This dissertation introduces a life and a community in a borderland region of Amdo, a place in between the larger metropolises of Beijing and also Lhasa that garner scholastic attention. Yet more studies, including Oidtmann and Weiner's recent monographs, continue to build a scholastic repertoire about Amdo following in the footsteps of Ekval, Petech, Nietupski, Huber, Makley, Pirie, Slobodnik, Tuttle, Yeh, Kvaerne, Ekhard, Ptackova, Robin, Hartley, Jacoby, Fischer, Zenz, Gayley, Willock, Horlemann and Wollenbock.

my long fieldwork stint from 2016-2018, I traveled to conduct interviews in Kelzang's birthplace of Jiawu, Qinghai and also to Khagya Yeshékhyil, Gansu (near Hezuo, Gansu) where Kelzang lived during the Cultural Revolution. I also conducted interviews in Labrang, Gengya Township, Gengya Barta, Gengya Taba, Gengya Ringön and with monks at Gengya Drakkar Monastery. Furthermore, I met many times with Chödzin at Kelzang and his home in Labrang; my lone interview with Kelzang occurred in 2010 in Labrang. In regard to the life of Damtsik Drölma, I conducted some interviews at Gyayé, Qinghai and also at Ngotsar Tardrenling Monastery; I met with Damtsik in 2009 in Xining, Qinghai. As for the Fifth Gungru *trülku* Tenpé Wangmo, I traveled to Dobi Changshar, Xunhua, Qinghai, the birthplace of Tenpé Wangmo, to speak to some of Tenpé Wangmo's descendants. In addition to the oral interviews, the *Lotus Vine* anchors the first chapter. This 18-folio text written by Labrang scholar monk, Zhangtön Tenpa Gyatso can be found in Tenpa Gyatso's collected works. Other Tibetan sources used in this dissertation include secondary sources about the Gungru lineage, including those articles produced by scholars Tashi Tsering, scholar monk Könchok Gyatso (See the next subsection) and Dr. Könchok Tendzin.

As for Chinese material written about Kelzang, an obituary (2013) serves as the most significant text to date about her. While the authorship of the obituary remains unclear (See Chapters 1 and 5), the obituary describes where Kelzang was born, when she ordained and was named the Gungru *trülku* and also whom she studied with prior to her laicizing in 1958. Most of the text discusses activities that she accomplished after the Cultural Revolution.

### *Contextualizing Labrang, Gengya and the Gungru Lineage in Amdo*

Prior to 1958, the Gungru lineage's multi-storied religious estate (Tib: *nangchen*) towered over Drakkar Monastery, Gengya Taba below the monastery and over many of Gengya's herding and farming villages in the valley below. Extant sources do not clarify who



built the Gungru estate and when, although this likely occurred during the life of the Third Gungru *trülku* Könchok Chödrön (1747-N/A) or possibly the Second Gungru *trülku* Lozang Drölma.<sup>31</sup> During one of my visits to the estate, I saw a picture of the estate's multi-storied layout prior to 1958 with many rooms that housed the Gungru *trülku* and monks, including Lozang Chöpel, who lived there as a monk until 1958 (Chapters 2 and 3). The estate also housed numerous cattle, as per the *Lotus Vine* and oral accounts about the Fifth Gungru Könchok Tenpé Wangmo. One such account suggests that many people plundered the Gungru estate of its cattle during the Gengya-Jiawu conflict (See Chapter 2). The estate was eventually destroyed during the Cultural Revolution time and only partially rebuilt in the 1990s. Remains from the old edifice demarcate the outline of the estate as it existed before 1958.

As for the Gungru lineage's history, uncertainty and controversy still cloud the lineage's origin story, according to some current scholars who challenge the prevalent narrative about the lineage's past in Central Tibet and Amdo. Since no *namtar* exists to my knowledge for any of the first three Gungru lineage holders, Sönam Gyen, Lozang Chödrön, Lozang Drölma and Könchok Chödrön, the first reliable source about the Gungru lineage is a religious history called *Yul mdo smad kyi ljongs su thub bstan rin po che ji ltar dar ba'i tshul gsal bar brjod pa deb ther rgya mtsho* or *deb ther rgya mtsho* (*The Oceanic Book: The elucidation of how the Buddhist teachings Spread in the Valley of the Mdo Smad and Country* or *The Ocean Annals* henceforth). Written in 1865, the *Ocean Annals* provided an interesting Amdo-centric origin account of the Gungru lineage. The *Ocean Annals* cited the Fifth Dalai Lama's Ngawang Lozang Gyatso's autobiography (seventeenth century) that criticized the first Gungru *trülku* for forging treasures, for misidentifying when Machik Lapdrön actually lived and for predicting defeat for the Geluk sect of Tibetan Buddhism fighting to rule

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<sup>31</sup> Könchok Gyatso, *Mdo smad rgyan gya'i lo rgyus sngon byung gsal ba'i me long zes by ba bzugs so*, 91.

Central Tibet in the seventeenth century before she left for Amdo. The *Ocean Annals* also mentioned that the Fifth Dalai Lama’s autobiography impugns the First Gungru *trülku* for being a “monkey trying to imitate man” and criticizes the Dalai Lama’s tutor Khöntön (Peljor Lhündrup, 1561-1637) for being “too indulgent” with her. Significantly, the *Ocean Annals*’ account also claims that the First Gungru *trülku* had two names—Sönam Gyen (late sixteenth–early seventeenth century) and Lozang Chödrön (seventeenth–eighteenth century)—when she arrived in Amdo.<sup>32</sup>

Recent scholars, however, have disproved this two-name, one individual theory for the First Gungru *trülku* citing the improbability of a 124-year lifespan for one person. This discrepancy means that the First Gungru Sönam Gyen, a native of Kham Gungru (today’s Tibet Autonomous Region) that serves as the place/identity marker for the Gungru lineage, likely reincarnated for the first time in Central Tibet (Ütsang) and *not* in Amdo. The improbable long individual lifespan also means that Lozang Chödrön (the actual Second Gungru) came to Amdo around the end of the seventeenth century or the beginning of the eighteenth century.<sup>33</sup> To clarify this point, Tibetan scholar Tashi Tsering cites the *Kumbum Monastery Abbot History* to narrow the window as to when a Gungru reincarnate (Lozang Chödrön) could have built a copper and bronze statue of Geluk sect founder Tsongkhapa at Kumbum Monastery near Xining. Tsering writes that the 20-year window existed from 1696-1716 making it impossible that Sönam Gyen built this Tsongkhapa statue, but rather it was the Second Gungru *trülku* Lozang Chödrön.<sup>34</sup> Art historian Könchok Tenzin, who wrote an

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<sup>32</sup> Brag dgon dGon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, *Deb ther rgya mtsho*, 582–83; dGon mchok rgya mtsho, *rGan gya'i brag dkar dgon gsang sngags smin rgyas gling gi gdan rabs lo rgyus*, 60–61; Chayet, “Women and Reincarnation in Tibet,” 72–75.

<sup>33</sup> Lozang Chödrön is considered the reincarnation of Sönam Gyen meaning the lineage actually has seven *trülku* Bkra shis tshe ring, “rGan kya'i brag dkar gyi gung ru,” 37-40; dGon mchok bsTan dzin, “Sprul pa'i bzo bo gung ru mka "gro ma blo bzang chos sgron dang khong gi sku phreng rim byon gyi rnam bsdu” 8; *sKu 'bum byams ba gling gyi gdan raps don ldan tshangs ba'i dbyangs snyan*, 386.

<sup>34</sup> See Tashi Tsering’s 1993 article on the Gungru lineage challenging *The Ocean Annals* and other scholars about the two-name one person theory for the first Gungru. Tsering’s work suggests that these were two separate people. Other scholars, including Könchok Tenzin (2007), separate the first two lineage holders following the *sKu 'bum byams ba gling gyi dan raps don ldan tshangs ba'i dbyangs snyan*. Page 386 states that

article on the artistic abilities of the early Gungru *trülku*, states that Lozang Chödrön in fact “was the reincarnation of Sönam Gyen” (and thus they were *not* the same person) and that Lozang Chödrön is the one who built the Tsongkhapa statue at Kumbum.<sup>35</sup> Both the *Kumbum Monastery Abbot History* and Könchok Tenzin’s work claim that Sönam Gyen reincarnated likely in Gungru in the present-day Tibet Autonomous Region (and not Amdo) hence the Gungru lineage’s name; the First Gungru Sönam Gyen did in fact arrive in Amdo after leaving Lhasa in the early seventeenth century and visited many places but she did not stay. In short, Sönam Gyen, who also went by the name Lozang Tendrön at this time, traveled much earlier to Amdo than did Lozang Chödrön.<sup>36</sup>

This divergence over the identity and lifespan of the First Gungru *trülku* is noteworthy because it shows how the *Ocean Annals* and works by Drakkar monk Könchok Gyatso (2008, 2013) seek to preserve an Amdo-centric origin narrative about the founding of the Gungru lineage in Amdo and *not* in Central Tibet. In merging these first two Gungru *trülku* into one person (Sönam Gyen/Lozang Chödrön) these Amdo scholars promoted a more continuous story of the Gungru lineage that dated to the Fifth Dalai Lama’s criticism of the First Gungru Sönam Gyen and culminated with her and the lineage’s permanent arrival in Amdo. But perhaps this maneuver also reflects the still smoldering regional rivalry between Labrang and the Dalai Lama’s Lhasa government in Central Tibet. This conflict started after the Fifth Dalai Lama died in the late seventeenth century and the First Jamyang Zhepa Ngawang Tsöndrü (1648–1721) opposed the Fifth Dalai Lama’s regent’s selection and enthronement of the Sixth Dalai Lama in 1697.

The ensuing chaos (the Dalai Lama’s regent’s murder) and the Jamyang Zhepa’s challenging the Sixth Dalai Lama’s qualifications led to the First Jamyang Zhépa’s eventual

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these two women were different and that Lozang Chödrön, who was born in Central Tibet, is the reincarnation of Sönam Gyen. This raises speculation that the Gungru lineage actually has seven reincarnates and not six.

<sup>35</sup> See Könchok Tenzin’s article on the Gungru lineage (2007) concentrating more on the first and second Gungru lineage holders who were both artists.

<sup>36</sup> Tsering, “rGan kya’i brag dkar gyi gung ru,” 36.

re-location in Amdo in the early eighteenth century when he founded Labrang.<sup>37</sup> The first chapter discusses the First Jamyang Zhepa's arrival in Amdo with one source, contemporary Labrang monk Trinlé Gyatso, saying that the First Jamyang Zhepa and the First (or second?) Gungru *trülku* Lozang Chödrön arrived in Labrang together, although no text confirms this, including the biography of the First Jamyang Zhepa (See Chapter 1). The Gungru lineage gained its foothold in Gengya likely in the early eighteenth century beginning with Lozang Drölma, who is listed as the second Gungru *trülku* but is likely the third if we count Sönam Gyen as the first and Lozang Chödrön as the second.

Meanwhile, after its founding in 1709 by the First Jamyang Zhepa and Gengya native Ngawang Tsöndrü, Labrang soon became one of the largest centers of monastic learning in Tibet, across Amdo and in Mongolian regions. This resembled at its height a modern-college campus with buildings, streets, courtyards, library, and so forth. Over time, Labrang grew in influence in a large part of present-day southwest Gansu, northern Sichuan and parts of Qinghai. In fact, Labrang's surrounding community—or what could be called its surrounding periphery—expanded outward in a complex series of support communities/networks to places such as Gengya and Drakkar, as Labrang/Amdo historian Paul Nietupski explains in his recent history of Labrang.<sup>38</sup> This expansion led to conflicts that, as the first chapter shows, occurred between Labrang and its neighboring monasteries and regions, including Rongbo Monastery, Chin. *Longwu Si* 隆务寺) in present day Tongren 同仁 and also Terlung (Chin. *Shagou Si* 沙沟寺) near present-day Hezuo. In addition to the Jamyang Zhepa, other Labrang seat lineage holders included the Gungtang, Hortsang and Détri *trülku* lineages, who advanced Labrang's growth and expansion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

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<sup>37</sup> See Pachik Medsam's "sDe srid sangs rgya mtsho dang 'jam bzhad nga dbang brtson 'grus gnyis bar gyi 'gal ba'i 'byung rkyen skor gleng ba/ for an analysis of the Jamyang Zhepa's *namtar* that details a feud with the regent Sanggyé Gyatso, the regent's murder, the Jamyang Zhepa's alliance with Khoshut Mongol leader Lhazang Khan and the dispute over the sixth Dalai Lama. See also Nikolay Tsyrempilov's "Dge lugs pa Divided: Some aspects of the political role of Tibetan Buddhism in the expansion of the Qing dynasty" in *Power Politics and the Invention of Tradition*.

<sup>38</sup> Nietupski's *Labrang Monastery* provides a detailed history of this expansion.

As Labrang grew in size and scope, so, too, did the number of *trülku* lineages of various stature at Labrang and in its periphery, with up to 100 lineages at Labrang's height, including the Gungru lineage at Drakkar, as Chapter 1 explains. These *trülku* all amassed land and wealth and a degree of power that often surpassed local government officials; moreover, prominent *trülku*, such as the Jamyang Zhepa, Gungtang, Hortsang and the Détri lineage, often engaged the Qing court and other regional monasteries, such as Gönlung Jampaling in present day Qinghai. The first chapter discusses many of these issues of Labrang's expansion and conflicts, as they pertain to the production of *The Lotus Vine* biography of the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo. Tensions between Labrang and Muslim warlord Ma Bufang increased during the lifetime of the Fifth Gungru Könchok Tenpé Wangmo (1892-1933) as the region became de-stabilized by the Labrang-Ma Bufang battles in the 1920s.<sup>39</sup> Making matters worse, the Gengya-Jiawu grassland conflict engulfed the region in bloodshed and tension for nearly four decades.

### *Outline of Chapters*

In order to understand the stakes surrounding Kelzang's canceled *namtar* in 2021 and the conditions of Kelzang's sanctity within the Gungru lineage, it is crucial to first consider the *Lotus Vine* about the Fourth Gungru *trülku* Rindzin Pelmo. This first chapter analyzes the *Lotus Vine* as written by Labrang scholar monk Zhangtön Tenpa Gyatso, a disciple of Rindzin Pelmo and tutor of the Tuken and Rölpé Dorjé lineages at Labrang ally Gönlung Jampaling. Foremost, this chapter describes Zhangtön's mission to write the *Lotus Vine* and what I argue is his "invention of a tradition"<sup>40</sup> about the Gungru lineage and specifically Rindzin Pelmo as a venerable mother-like figure primarily as an emanation of Machik Lapdrön. Using theories of hagiography and also analyzing the author's role in writing such a

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<sup>39</sup> See Nietupski, *Labrang Monastery*.

<sup>40</sup> I use Hobsbawm and Ranger's definition of inventing a tradition to constitute a master narrative in *Invention of Tradition*.

text, this chapter focuses on the efficacy of this tradition of the Gungru lineage as Machik as Labrang faced numerous threats in its periphery in the nineteenth century. This chapter locates this tradition about Machik and the Gungru lineage legitimating Rindzin Pelmo's authority as an exemplar in a vast religio-temporal network of *trülku* that maintained Labrang as a vibrant political and cultural center in Amdo and the Qing empire (1644-1911). Another key part to this tradition that extols Rindzin Pelmo as a mother figure links her to the tantric practice of Cakrasamvara at the Drakkar Cave where she acted as the mother goddess *Vajravārāhi*. One other crucial facet to the tradition lauds Rindzin Pelmo as a surrogate mother in the monastic and lay community. Here, the *Lotus Vine* shows how Rindzin Pelmo provided medical and healing rituals, served as a confidante, teacher and peacemaker to help Labrang establish stability in its periphery.

In the end, the first chapter shows how the *Lotus Vine*, or what I label as the Gungru master narrative, links the Gungru lineage to the “authorizing referent” of Machik—an acceptable form of motherhood for the Buddhist patriarchy at Labrang. This is critical to establish a textual authority for Rindzin Pelmo and the Gungru lineage, an authority geared for various audiences of disciples and a wider contemporary group. Understanding this textual authority and unpacking all of the relevant narrative and legitimating strategies is vital because Kelzang's obituary over a century later “reconstitutes this tradition” of motherhood about Kelzang. The obituary prominently legitimates Kelzang's authority to the tradition of Machik and Kelzang being a surrogate mother for the masses in the Labrang and Gengya communities after the Cultural Revolution.

The second chapter discusses how many herders and farmers from Gengya and Jiawu, in addition to monks, talked about the Gengya-Jiawu conflict, the Fifth Gungru *trülku*'s premature death, Kelzang's contested selection in the 1940s and later Damtsik Drölma's challenge of Kelzang in the late 1940s at Drakkar. These voices challenged the master

narrative or the obituary released about Kelzang that proclaimed a smooth transition to Kelzang and her birth/selection. This calm transition from the Fifth Gungru Tenpé Wangmo's life to Kelzang did not happen as people discussed suggesting that Kelzang's authority and that of the Gungru lineage was in fact tenuous in this war-torn community. On the other hand, Drakkar monks and Kelzang's husband Chödzin rallied around Kelzang and strongly asserted her authority as the Gungru *trülku* in the dispute against Damtsik Drölma in the late 1940s when Damtsik arrived at Drakkar and claimed the Gungru seat. They said that Kelzang was the legitimate emanation of Machik as proclaimed by the Jamyang Zhepa thereby affirming Kelzang's authority as the Gungru *trülku*.

Building on Chapter 2, the third chapter discusses her forced laicization that, according to two reliable sources, was a sexual assault—an incident that her obituary avoided and that any future text about her will leave out. Whereas most *namtar*-type texts narrate the triumphant arc of a figure's life traversing from “suffering to sanctity” or show how a figure reaches a moment of conversion or renunciation, oral accounts from the Labrang community depict how Kelzang's life encountered trauma and suffering. It is striking how this community spoke about Kelzang's forced laicization and her resultant marriages, her divorce from her first husband, her motherhood of four children and later abuse from her second husband—occurrences that most Tibetan *trülku* ever endure. In this light, rather than neglect these issues, this chapter discusses the strategies used by people to rally around Kelzang to deflect the blame and re-circulate stories in order to construct Kelzang's authority, or in some cases deconstruct it. Significantly and perhaps unexpectedly, Kelzang's authority was at its strongest within this community as people talked about her most vulnerable point (her laicization and marriages). This was perhaps a part of the community's strategy for coping with the trauma that happened to both Kelzang and in their own lives. This demonstrates how

Kelzang's authority was, and still very much is, constructed within this community and was not separate from it.

The fourth chapter, however, shows how Kelzang's authority waned in the wake of the Cultural Revolution when she retreated more from her public duties as a Gungru *trülku* and spent more time working in the government and less at Drakkar. And while her obituary boasts many of her accomplishments, in particular after the Cultural Revolution when she helped rebuild Drakkar and manage nunneries in Labrang, in actuality, the relationship between her and her constituents grew more distant. Strikingly, Kelzang's motherhood affected her authority in this community, i.e., with her constituents in the lay community and also with monks at Drakkar. Of particular interest is how Kelzang's children engaged in a feud with Drakkar. Also, of note, is how Damtsik Drölma, whom Drakkar monks had rebuffed in the 1940s, re-asserted her claim to be the Sixth Gungru *trülku*. This time, however, Damtsik resided in a monastery setting at Qinghai Lake while Kelzang lived as a lay mother who worked in the government in Labrang. Strikingly, the renewed conflict and resulting identity confusion between Damtsik and Kelzang has persisted. But unlike the first incident in the 1940s when current Drakkar monks rallied around Kelzang and strongly asserted her authority as the legitimate *trülku*, the second incident reflected Kelzang's lay status and her more distant relationship with Drakkar. Motherhood stood at the center of this resumed conflict as stated by those close to Damtsik, even though some people called her a fraud.

The fifth and final chapter discusses the challenges to write Kelzang's *namtar*, providing an ethnography of the process to legitimate Kelzang's authority as a venerable mother figure. This chapter shows that Kelzang's changed authority as a mother and as a lay person greatly impacted upon the process to find the right person to write the appropriate material in a *namtar* about Kelzang. Thus, the effort to legitimate Kelzang's authority in a



text like the obituary and the *Lotus Vine* before it, proved difficult. Each of the stakeholders in the writing project, including the monk author, Chödzin and Kelzang's son Dépön, could not agree on what material to include and who should compose it. The result was a canceled *namtar* that also accompanied the delayed search to find Kelzang's successor, the Seventh Gungru *trülku*, at Drakkar. This delay occurred primarily due to a lack of enthusiasm shown for Kelzang as her constituents became more distant after the Cultural Revolution.

## Chapter 1

### Making Motherhood: Constituting and Re-constituting a Metaphorical Mother's Authority in Gungru Lineage

Kelzang Drölma's life history was highly unusual for a Tibetan *trülku*, so much so that many people doubted her legitimacy both at various points in her life and afterwards as will be seen in the oral narratives elaborated in the following chapters.<sup>41</sup> Others, however, from around Labrang Monastery and the nearby farming and herding villages on the Gengya grasslands have not wavered. They have been determined to re-affirm Kelzang's authority as the Sixth Gungru *trülku* and the continuity in religious and community history that normalizing her would serve. This process of reaffirming her authority, including Kelzang's obituary written in 2013, were due to the extraordinarily turbulent times in which she lived. Much of what was unusual in her life—particularly forced laicization, multiple marriages, and child-bearing—was directly related to the turmoil before and during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) as later chapters will show. Disputes over how to remember Kelzang's life—whether it could or should be represented by a purely religious narrative, or by one that explicitly acknowledges her political and social context—remain contested today, eight years after her death and are intertwined with the question of choosing her successor. This, too, will be addressed in the following chapters and in particular in Chapter 5.

For more than one party in these disputes, an important point of reference is Rindzin Pelmo (1814-1891), the Fourth Gungru *trülku* who while based at Drakkar Monastery in Gengya also lived in unstable times but is unanimously remembered as a figure who healed divisions, promoted peace, and was an unquestionably fit inhabitant of her role. Part of her image became that of a charismatic mother-like figure of all—a much more positive role, in Buddhism, than that of a biological mother of specific people, a dichotomy explained

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<sup>41</sup> As first mentioned in the preface of the dissertation, *trülku* are “earthly emanations of transcendent bodhisattvas” building on ideas of incarnation/emanation from Mahayana Buddhism. See Schwieger, *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China*, 11, 13, and 17.

below.<sup>42</sup> That metaphorical mother image whereby Rindzin Pelmo acted “as if” she was a mother for all beings was partly crafted through the production by Rindzin Pelmo’s male disciple of a religious biography, or *namtar* (the story of how one attains liberation), the type of text that has not yet been produced for Kelzang and may never be.

Rindzin Pelmo’s *namtar* titled *The Biography of the Gungru Yeshe Khandroma called the White Lotus Vine*, or *Lotus Vine* for short (1897), was written by Labrang scholar-monk Zhangtön Tenpa Gyatso (1825-1897), a well-regarded teacher throughout Amdo. (Zhangtön, who was a student of Rindzin Pelmo, became famous as the tutor of the Sixth Tuken *trülku* Shédруп Gyatso (1838-94) at Labrang-affiliated Gönlung Jampaling Monastery in Qinghai<sup>43</sup>). The 18-folio *Lotus Vine* appears right after Zhangtön’s own biography in the four-volume collection of his work draws heavily on the story of Machik Lapdrön (1055-1149). Like Kelzang, Machik, in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, was a biological mother, but one who is now uncontroversially regarded as the “Great Mother of Wisdom” and the “Guru Queen of Practitioners” as the *Lotus Vine*’s opening passages describe.<sup>44</sup> In fact, Machik, who received acclaim for founding the Buddhist practice of *chö* (severance from ego) during her lifetime, has become what scholars Janet Gyatso and Hanna Havnevik label as an “authorizing

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<sup>42</sup> See Ohnuma, *The Ties that Bind: Maternal Imagery and Discourse in Indian Buddhism*, 8, 14–16, 34–36, 43, 50, 116 for a discussion on the presentation of mothers in Indian Buddhist texts contra actual mothers. See also Sarah Jacoby’s recent article “Tibetan Buddhist Metaphors and Models of Motherhood” for a description of models of motherhood, including the “As If Model” and the “Actual Model.” A more in depth discussion of these models occurs in Chapters 3 and 4 in relation to Kelzang Drölma’s motherhood before, during and after the Cultural Revolution. This chapter, as described further below, describes the metaphorical mother who, as Ohnuma writes, acts as if she were a mother and is celebrated as a mother who cares for all beings but significantly not one’s own children. I use Weber’s definition of charisma to describe what I label a “charismatic mother figure much like the iconic Machik, who attains a “certain quality of an individual personality which sets him apart from ordinary men ... he is endowed with exceptional powers. ... and not accessible to ordinary people, but regarded as divine.” Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Chapter 3, section 10. In contrast, Worsley, defines charisma as a social relationship and not an attribute of an individual personality or mystical quality. Worsley, *The Trumpet Will Sound*, xii.

<sup>43</sup> See Zha Zha’s “Labulengsi zhiming gaoseng Xiangdun danba jiacuo” for a great summary of the life and accomplishments of Zhangtön as a scholar, tutor and teacher across Mongolian regions of Amdo. See also Zhangtön’s *Collected Works* that contains his own biography written by one of his disciples and also the *Lotus Vine*.

<sup>44</sup> On Rindzin Pelmo see Zhang ston bstan pa rgya mtsho’s *Gung ru ye shes kyi mkha’ ’gro ma’i rnam par thar ba pad dkar ’khri shing zhes bya ba bzhugs so*, 2009. This 18-folio biography is part of Zhangtön’s four-volume collected works that were re-edited and published in 2009.

referent” to legitimate some of the best known Tibetan female Buddhist exemplars. These women gained significance in Tibet in the context of Tibet’s entrenched male *trülku* system.<sup>45</sup> In this regard, Rindzin Pelmo’s life in the *Lotus Vine* resembles that of the Samding Dorjé Pakmo *trülku* in Central Tibet (fifteenth century) and some other female meditators, yogic practitioners, treasure revealers, and nuns across the Tibetan plateau, as the excellent recent scholarship about their life-writings shows.<sup>46</sup> Whether Machik and/or the example of Rindzin Pelmo can be used to authorize aspects of Kelzang’s life today is currently contested.

But to understand these current conflicts in the representation of Kelzang’s authority in a *namtar* and the contested significance of both her personal history and the violent history of Labrang in the twentieth century, we must first begin by seeing how Machik was deployed to legitimate Rindzin Pelmo’s authority in the *Lotus Vine* in another chaotic period. This occurred when the Gungru lineage transitioned to the Fifth Gungru Könchok Tenpé Wangmo (1892-1933) in 1897 and Labrang, then a major Buddhist cultural center in Amdo and across Tibet, faced many threats including those in its periphery in parts of Gansu, Sichuan and Qinghai provinces. One threat came from rival groups of Muslims in Qinghai who warred at nearby Xunhua 循化 in 1897 and forced the weakened Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) army to quell the fight; groups of Muslims had for decades in the nineteenth century challenged the political and economic status quo in this Sino-Tibetan borderland region.<sup>47</sup> Another danger occurred when Labrang engaged in deadly disputes over territory with neighboring Rongbo (Ch: Longwu Si 隆务寺), Terlung (Ch: Shagou Si 沙沟寺) and Tsö (Ch: Heicuo 黑措/modern Hezuo 合作) monasteries in the second half of the century. These monasteries sought to curtail Labrang’s incorporation of communities and monasteries into its expansive periphery;

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<sup>45</sup> Machik and Yeshé Tsogyel who was the alleged consort of Padmasambhava, are examples of Tibetan female authorizing referents to legitimate women in various lineages. Gyatso and Havnevik, *Women in Tibet*, 22.

<sup>46</sup> See Schaeffer, *Himalayan Hermitess*; Diemberger, *When a Woman*; Jacoby, *Love and Liberation*; Bessenger, *Echoes of Enlightenment*; and Gayley, *Love Letters from Golok*.

<sup>47</sup> Yang Honghui, *Xunhua*, 111–16 and 142–45; Nietupski, *Labrang Monastery*, 137–41.

militias from Rongbo and Labrang fought throughout the century.<sup>48</sup> By the late nineteenth century, Labrang oversaw at least 108 subsidiary monasteries like Drakkar and housed 100 *trülku* lineages in a hierarchy of five classes starting with the Jamyang Zhepa in the first class; Rindzin Pelmo and the Gungru lineage was a Class 5 *trülku* located outside of Labrang.<sup>49</sup> Most of these *trülku* forged political and religious ties to lay leaders in the surrounding pastoral communities that supported Labrang and attained a great degree of wealth (possession of land) and social status.<sup>50</sup>

Understanding this turmoil that served as the backdrop to memorialize the Gungru lineage during its transition in 1897 raises several questions about how Zhangtön utilized Machik and the metaphor of motherhood to legitimate Rindzin Pelmo's authority with monastics and the laity in Amdo. Here, as throughout the dissertation, I employ and expand on Bruce Lincoln's model of authority that states that the effect of one's authority occurs when a conditioned audience judges a figure's speech, actions and props (costume) to be right or not. Authority, according to Lincoln, is not inherent or produced solely from the top down but happens in tandem with a discerning audience influenced by numerous religious and temporal factors.<sup>51</sup> Further, I suggest that the effect of a figure's authority also occurs

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<sup>48</sup> The fighting between Rongbo Monastery (allied with Tso and Terlung) intensified against Labrang in the nineteenth century. Nietupski, *Labrang Monastery*, 141. Yang, *Xunhua*, 112, 141–44.

<sup>49</sup> See Yang Honghui, *Xunhua*, 111. Yang quotes Li An Zhai's work on Labrang that says the number of monasteries in Labrang's periphery "could be as high as 200 monasteries." Yang, 113 provides an explanation of the five classes of *trülku* as stated in the Labrang register. The Jamyang Zhepa is alone in the first class and was known as the "Small Dalai Lama." The Gungtang *trülku* is in the second class and helped develop Labrang's periphery over time securing the loyalty of people who lived in the area of Gansu, Qinghai and northern Sichuan. The third and fourth class *trülku* were scholar *trülku* who lived in and around Labrang. The fifth class *trülku* lived in outlying monasteries that supported Labrang, including the Gungru lineage of Drakkar. It is not entirely clear when this hierarchy began, and although Yang's work suggests that it came to exist during the Qing dynasty, it is not clear if this hierarchy occurred in tandem with or by directive from the Qing, 113.

<sup>50</sup> Yang, *Xunhua*, 113.

<sup>51</sup> Lincoln claims that authority depends on how an audience judges one's costume, speech, and actions as "right," producing the "effect" of authority. Authority is not, according to Lincoln, adjudicated from a top-down position, nor is it inherent or automatically given. Rather, it is relational. Lincoln, *Authority, Construction and Corrosion*, 1–12. Furthermore, Weber in *Essays in Sociology* 295, describes charismatic authority as occurring within an audience" but in his description of charismatic authority he elides authority more with the position of the ruler or leader as "rule over men to which the governed submit because of their belief in the extraordinary qualities of the specific person." See also Weber's *Essays in Sociology 1948*, 65, for a description of charismatic authority.

when a respected author produces an accepted narrative that resonates with an audience (s) of readers and establishes what some call a “textual authority” at a specific period of time. Thus, the full effect of a figure such as Rindzin Pelmo’s authority becomes commensurate with the power and function of a narrative that can serve to bind a community together around a common purpose or theme.<sup>52</sup>

In this vein, how did Zhangtön utilize Machik and the metaphor of motherhood in the *Lotus Vine* to rally and unify the community of Labrang and legitimate Rindzin Pelmo’s authority in Labrang’s periphery? What people, such as famous Amdo *trülku*, monks and the laity, did Zhangtön highlight in the *Lotus Vine* to accentuate the effect of Rindzin Pelmo’s authority as a mother-like figure in this community? Furthermore, why would this narrative of motherhood resonate as right in this patriarchal community of *trülku* at Labrang that one current scholar labeled as the “apotheosis of maleness” and where Rindzin Pelmo could not enter Labrang to study as did men?<sup>53</sup> Along these lines, what religious and temporal factors related to Rindzin Pelmo’s exemplarity influenced how and why Zhangtön used Machik and the metaphor of motherhood to legitimate Rindzin Pelmo’s authority? Further, how does the *Lotus Vine* and its promotion of the compassionate mother serve as an archetype for the Chinese obituary about the Sixth Gungru *trülku* Kelzang Drölma (2013), a text that could be a precursor of any future *namtar* written about Kelzang?

To answer these questions about Rindzin Pelmo’s authority, we must first consider the multiple Buddhist, temporal and social factors that show how, why and for whom Zhangtön wrote an evocative master narrative in the *Lotus Vine* about his teacher Rindzin

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<sup>52</sup> For a discussion on textual authority in different temporalities see Diemberger, *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty*, 4–5. See also Manring’s *Fading Light of Advaita Acarya*, 4–5 for a discussion on how hagiographical texts serve to unite communities around certain themes or principles.

<sup>53</sup> Yang Honghui, *Xunhua*, 111. Makley, *The Violence of Liberation*, 13 and 38. Makley describes the iconicity of maleness of the Tibetan *trülku* establishment that had gained power in Labrang and also within the complex matrix of “interregional politics.” On 55, she describes a masculine taming process that revolved around the *trülku* establishment and later on 65 she discusses that idioms of male lineage became naturalized over generations and engrained in identity of Tibetan lay leadership on the grasslands and within local tribes.

Pelmo and the elite community of Labrang.<sup>54</sup> Zhangtön's *Lotus Vine* contained the type of narrative structure that "seeks origins ... that follow an evolutive curve with constant recourse to metaphors of life."<sup>55</sup> Michel Foucault argued against these overarching storylines or master narratives that portray unity at the expense of highlighting fissures, fragments and discontinuity.<sup>56</sup> In this vein, Zhangtön's *Lotus Vine*, or what I call the "Gungru master narrative," relied on the metaphor of motherhood to constitute or, in following Ranger and Hobsbawm, "invent a tradition" about Rindzin Pelmo and the Gungru lineage, making it a cohesive story in the present.<sup>57</sup> To invent this tradition about his teacher within the then two-century old Gungru lineage that had a controversial history in Central Tibet dating to the seventeenth century, Zhangtön used a version of motherhood that resonated with a patriarchy like Labrang.<sup>58</sup> This is because motherhood signified the Buddha's universal love as if she were the mother for all beings as espoused in Buddhist discourse as opposed to a more particular love shown by mothers for their own children.<sup>59</sup>

Consequently, Zhangtön linked Rindzin Pelmo, who ordained at age four and never had any children of her own, to the iconic Machik Lapdrön the "Great Mother of Wisdom." Zhangtön also presented Rindzin Pelmo as a *khandroma* (Sanskrit: *dakini*, sky goer) because Rindzin Pelmo was a yogic consort and she participated in Cakrasamvara tantric Buddhist

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<sup>54</sup> Master narratives minimize major changes or interruptions. Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 12.

<sup>55</sup> Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 12.

<sup>56</sup> See Lyotard's criticism of a master narratives in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*.

<sup>57</sup> See Ranger and Hobsbawm's work *Invented Tradition*, 1, 12 where they claim that "invented traditions use history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion. Ranger and Hobsbawm describe an "invented tradition" as a set of practices which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. Quintman's work, *The Yogi and the Madman*, 57, 134, 137, 173, 181, 183 describes the process of writing Milarepa's biography four centuries after his death and how the story became part of a tradition that was invented and reflected the present conditions in which it was written.

<sup>58</sup> See Bernard Faure, *Rhetoric of Immediacy*, 14-15 for a discussion about the invention of tradition in a Buddhist lineage relying on the "forgetting of origins."

<sup>59</sup> Buddhist texts rarely feature mothers because of a mother's attachment to their own children as opposed to caring for all beings. Two examples of idealized Buddhist mothers include Maya, who became deified after she died shortly after giving birth to the Buddha, and Mahāprajāpatī, who became a nun after she raised the Buddha. Ohnuma, *The Ties that Bind: Maternal Imagery and Discourse in Indian Buddhism*, 8, 14-16, 34-36, 43, 50, 116.

rituals near Drakkar.<sup>60</sup> To note, a *khandroma* in Tibetan history can, according to Janet Gyatso, assume many roles for women including being “a goddess, a yogini, a consort, a wife or a message-bearer.” Or as Sarah Jacoby writes, a *khandroma* “can be worldly and enmeshed in *samsara* and of questionable virtue, or they can be wisdom *dakinis* who are fully enlightened.”<sup>61</sup> The *Lotus Vine* lionizes Rindzin Pelmo as an enlightened *khandroma* who lived at Drakkar and performed many roles such as that of a surrogate mother who cared for monks and the laity around Labrang.

Thus, the metaphor of motherhood according to which Rindzin Pelmo cared for all beings like the Buddha and *as if* she were their mother figured in Zhangtön’s mission in the *Lotus Vine* to constitute a tradition of sanctity for the Gungru lineage and to impress upon Rindzin Pelmo’s disciples and future Gungru *trülku* how she became enlightened—a common function of *namtar*.<sup>62</sup> Doing so allowed Zhangtön to delineate the conditions for obtaining liberation in the Gungru lineage, i.e., the conditions that legitimated Rindzin Pelmo’s authority as Machik and as a *khandroma* who served and cared for others like a mother. This included celebrating Rindzin Pelmo as an adept who recited numerous Geluk mantra, studied and taught Machik’s *chö* and performed Cakrasamvara tantric rituals around Drakkar. It also included her carrying out myriad functions for both the monastic *sangha* and laity in the Gengya and Labrang communities as a surrogate or substitute mother who performed rituals for local families, healed the ill and served as a teacher of Buddhism.

Yet, Buddhist doctrinal and ritual contexts alone do not convey the whole story of Rindzin Pelmo’s profound authority as a distinguished mother figure in Gengya as

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<sup>60</sup> See David Gray’s *Cakrasamvara Tantra* for a description of the tantra as explained in Part II of this chapter.

<sup>61</sup> For a description of the term *khandroma*, see Janet Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self*, 246 and Jacoby, *Love and Liberation*, 135-137. See also Chayet’s “Women and Reincarnation in Tibet: The Case of the Gung ru Mkha ’ ’ gro ma,” 67-68 for a description of *khandroma* as “either mythical or mundane figures that have an important place in oral and written literature in Tibet and in particular in biographies about Bon figures.”

<sup>62</sup> See Gyatso, Schaeffer, Diemberger, Quintman, Jacoby and Gayley’s recent work on the *namtar* genre.



remarkable as her exemplarity is for a woman in Tibetan and Buddhist history.<sup>63</sup> Nor does her virtuosity as a Buddhist adept sufficiently elaborate the entire effect of Rindzin Pelmo's authority as portrayed in the *Lotus Vine* despite some scholars' assertion that lauding one's Buddhist liberation marks the main purpose of *namtar*.<sup>64</sup> Rather, the legitimizing strategies of the Great Mother Machik and identification as a *khandroma*—the type of principles that hagiographers like Zhangtön use to rally and unite a larger community with a text<sup>65</sup>—helped to constitute a tradition about Rindzin Pelmo and the Gungru lineage. This tradition reveals a more complete view of Rindzin Pelmo's authority as a revered mother-like figure in what had become an unstable religio-temporal context around Labrang.<sup>66</sup> For, in addition to the inter-monastery warfare and the arrival of Muslim groups in Labrang's periphery that raised security concerns for the Labrang establishment in the late nineteenth century, Labrang's relations with its main patrons since its founding in 1709, the Qinghai Mongols, became strained after a Mongolian palace burned to the ground in 1883. This incident resulted in a retaliatory murder of a Tibetan that heightened tensions in a region beset by strife.<sup>67</sup> In fact, these conflicts in the late nineteenth century caused the Jamyang Zhepa and Gungtang *trülku* to leave Labrang for long stretches during a time that Labrang historian Paul Nietupski called “chaotic” at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>68</sup>

Therefore, the unrest that engulfed Labrang when Zhangtön wrote the *Lotus Vine* underscored Rindzin Pelmo's authority as a mother figure within and representative of this

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<sup>63</sup> See Notes 3 and 6 above for a list of the current scholarship about the lives of Tibetan women.

<sup>64</sup> Gayley, *Love Letters*, 78 writes that *namtar* emphasize enlightened activities of a Buddhist master when narrated by a devoted disciple.

<sup>65</sup> Manring, *Fading Light of Advaita Acarya*, 4–5.

<sup>66</sup> Locating texts in the context in which it is produced is one way to analyze authority. *The World, the Text and the Critic*, 4.

<sup>67</sup> See Yang, *Xunhua*, 111–113 for a description of the Mongolian palace incident that strained relations between Labrang Tibetans and their Mongol patrons both inside and outside Labrang.

<sup>68</sup> See Nietupski, *Labrang Monastery*, 141, for a description of this turbulent period in Labrang's history.

imperiled community.<sup>69</sup> Following Patrick Geary's idea that hagiographers often laud saints who live in a community facing outside threats, it is possible to propose that Zhangtön's task in creating a tradition about Rindzin Pelmo's virtuosity as a Buddhist adept also helped him to constitute a tradition about the virtuosity of Labrang and its endangered periphery.<sup>70</sup> Thus, in the midst of all the uncertainty swirling around him, Zhangtön extolled Labrang as a vibrant religious community as epitomized by Rindzin Pelmo's exemplarity and her interactions in a series of what I call family groups (*rikgyü*) composed of many influential *trülku*, monks and laypersons, as featured in the *Lotus Vine*.<sup>71</sup> Zhangtön sought to present a pristine vision of the past in which the core (Labrang) and its periphery (the Gungru lineage at Drakkar) functioned seamlessly as exemplified by many Amdo *trülku*'s relationship with Rindzin Pelmo.

To achieve this, Zhangtön incorporated Machik Lapdrön in a colorful narrative that featured famous figures across Amdo, a move that likely appealed to a wider audience interested in promoting Labrang that legitimated Rindzin Pelmo's authority as a peacemaker in the region. Popular across Amdo, Machik's *chö* practice and her fame as the Great Mother linked Rindzin Pelmo to the renowned Jamyang Zhepa and Détri *trülku* at Labrang and the Tuken at Gönlung, a relevant connection in a nineteenth-century religio-political power dynamic in Amdo as will be explained below. In an ironic twist, Zhangtön highlighted this connection by using Machik's actual motherhood of three sons in the twelfth-century to describe a metaphorical mother-son dynamic that involved Machik and the Jamyang Zhepa, Détri and Tuken in the nineteenth century. In this scenario, Zhangtön listed these Amdo

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<sup>69</sup>Said, *The World, The Text and the Critic*, 4. Said writes that "texts are worldly, to some degree they are events and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life and the historical moments in which they are located."

<sup>70</sup> Geary, "Saints, Scholars and Society: The Elusive Goal," 23.

<sup>71</sup> I use the Tibetan term *rikgyü* (*riks ggyud*) defined as family lineage or group to label the three main groups in this chapter: the Machik Family, the Cakrasamvara Family and the Surrogate Family. I use this term not in a literal sense of the word family in that none of these people were biologically related, but to organize these groups of people in which Rindzin Pelmo plays a metaphorical mother role. For instance, the "Machik Family Group" consists mainly of Amdo *trülku* who have been considered reincarnations of Machik Lapdrön's sons.

*trülku* as reincarnations of Machik’s real sons with Machik (and by association Rindzin Pelmo) as their idealized mother as will be seen in Part I below. This bolstered Rindzin Pelmo’s authority as a reincarnation of Machik in relation to the most powerful *trülku* who strove to protect the Amdo grasslands when they were beset by security concerns.

Yet, in addition to Machik, Zhangtön’s *Lotus Vine* included two other aspects of universal motherhood that likely resonated with readership in Amdo keen on preserving Labrang’s religious diversity and its security in its surrounding communities, while delineating a more complete view of her authority at Drakkar. One aspect revolved around the Cakrasamvara tantric Buddhist ritual in which Rindzin Pelmo assumed the role of a *khandroma*. This entailed Rindzin Pelmo acting as a yogic consort with elite monastics, including Zhangtön, as the second section “The Cakrasamvara Family Group” illustrates. Along these lines, Rindzin Pelmo’s authority as a *khandroma* who practiced Cakrasamvara rituals became linked with Zhangtön’s mission to promote the religious plurality and diversity of Labrang in Amdo and also across the Tibetan plateau.<sup>72</sup> The third section stresses how Rindzin Pelmo acted as a proxy mother of monks and the laity in Gengya and Labrang in the “Surrogate Family Group.” She performed many religious and social roles, including providing rituals and assisting the *sangha*, that helped Labrang maintain order in its periphery.

However, this metaphorical motherhood did not appear out of thin air or as a convenient trope for Zhangtön to advance his agenda in a coherent master narrative. Rather, Zhangtön chose a metaphor that resonated with his audience of male *trülku* and monastics who likely cared about the welfare of their own mothers, i.e., they wanted to help their mothers secure an auspicious rebirth in accord with Buddhist belief. While there is no way of knowing how many of these male *trülku* and monastics in Amdo felt this way about their

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<sup>72</sup> See Tsomu’s *The Rise of Gompo Namgyal in Kham* for a discussion on “peripheral authority.” Tsomu claims in her study in Kham that authority did not occur uni-directional from a metropolitan center imposing it on a peripheral area. Rather that these areas, such as Kham, maintained local structures of power. Tsomu’s scholarship reflects a challenge to studies that consider the borderlands only in relation to their center.

mothers, relevant literature from Amdo, across Tibet and the Buddhist world provides insight about the debt some monastics and yogins felt towards their mothers, particularly as their mothers neared death. An example is the autobiography of the famed yogin Zhapkar (1781-1851) from nearby Rebgong, Qinghai (Ch: Tongren, 同仁), whose life overlapped with Rindzin Pelmo. And some episodes of the epic of Gesar, illustrate how these men acted on behalf of their mothers to procure them a favorable rebirth, as explained below in Part III.<sup>73</sup> Rindzin Pelmo, on the other hand, represented the apex of this continuum in the *Lotus Vine* through the depiction there as an enlightened, compassionate mother and emanation of Machik who acted for the sake of all beings, as a *khandroma* who practiced the Cakrasamvara tantric ritual, and as a surrogate mother who benefitted the monastic and lay community in Gengya and Labrang.

Motherhood, thus became an ideal legitimating and narrative strategy for Zhangtön to represent Rindzin Pelmo's authority, for it signified continuity with the Buddhist faith and temporal prosperity in the region, both of which intertwined with one another and in the production of the text. In this vein, Rindzin Pelmo's authority corresponded with the textual authority of the *Lotus Vine*, a narrative written for various audiences in 1897 and as a story that bears relevance today as the Gungru lineage transitions in the twenty-first century.<sup>74</sup> Therefore it is vital to unpack the religio-social and temporal factors that constructed the narrative in the *Lotus Vine* and informed Rindzin Pelmo's authority while providing a blueprint with which to legitimate future Gungru *trülku*. Remarkably, the obituary of Kelzang Drölma (2013) "reconstitutes the tradition" established in the *Lotus Vine* with many of the

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<sup>73</sup> See Kapstein, "Mulian in the Land of Snows and King Gesar in Hell," 359-62 and Ricard's *The Life of Shabkar: The Autobiography of a Tibetan Yogin*, 201-203. Cole's *Mother and Sons* explains this dynamic from a wider Buddhist perspective of how monks, who were indebted to their mother, worked on behalf of helping their mothers to secure more auspicious future rebirths.

<sup>74</sup> See Diemberger, *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty*, 4-5 for an explanation of textual authority and how the narrative of Chökyi Drönma attained authority as a story that "became embroiled in temporality of texts... a story of life and its celebration of individual persistence." Diemberger writes that Chökyi Drönma became a "foundational character for her community that held them together." Her memory has been kept alive for over 500 years as this narrative was incorporated into rituals, genealogies and landscape mythologies.

same legitimating and narrative strategies of motherhood, including its depictions of Machik Lapdrön, identifying Kelzang as a *khandroma* and a surrogate mother. The fourth section shows how Kelzang’s obituary remains consonant with the *Lotus Vine* by presenting Kelzang’s authority as an elite Buddhist practitioner and as a figure who espoused unity and reconciliation after the Cultural Revolution in Gengya and Labrang.

In the end, the *Lotus Vine*’s presentation of Rindzin Pelmo as a venerable mother for all beings represents the continuity of the Gungru lineage’s past, its present and its future, and serves as a linchpin for historical narratives about this little-studied Sino-Tibetan borderland region.<sup>75</sup> And that future is unfolding now as the Seventh Gungru is expected to reincarnate at Drakkar and people vie to write the *namtar* of Kelzang Drölma (See Chapter 5). If Kelzang’s obituary offers any indication, a big part of chronicling those events—and the lineage’s authority going forward—will be a return to the archetype of the Gungru master narrative in the *Lotus Vine*.

## **Part I**

### **Rindzin Pelmo’s Authority in the “Machik Lapdrön Family Group”**

Perhaps Zhangtön did not know the uncertain history that surrounded the Gungru lineage. Or maybe he overlooked the lineage’s difficult beginnings in the seventeenth century in Central Tibet.<sup>76</sup> At all events, the controversy over the identity of the First Gungru *trülku* Sönam Gyen before the lineage moved to Amdo around the turn of the eighteenth century did not fit with Zhangtön’s goal to establish a tradition about Rindzin Pelmo as the reincarnation of the Great Mother Machik Lapdrön in the late nineteenth century. (As we have seen, sources suggest that it was actually the Second Gungru Lozang Chödrön who came to Amdo and not the First Gungru as some Amdo scholars purport, sometimes even eliding the name

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<sup>75</sup> Faure, *The Power of Denial*, 14. Faure discusses “gendered meanings” of historical narratives and not merely stories about individual women acting in contradistinction to men.

<sup>76</sup> Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism*, 14. In his study of Japanese Buddhist lineages, Faure writes about the invention of tradition being “an active forgetting of origins in order to create more of what appears to be an “optical illusion” in the lineage.

Sönam Gyen and Lozang Chödrön together; the *Ocean Annals* account in 1865 collapses these names, treating them as one individual to promote a more Amdo-centric history of the lineage<sup>77</sup>). Notably, however, Zhangtön disregarded the *Ocean Annals*' attempt to smooth over the lineage's disputed history in Central Tibet and he listed names of the first three Gungru *trülku*, thus contradicting the *Ocean Annals*' account.<sup>78</sup>

Instead, I suggest that Zhangtön's evocative master narrative in the *Lotus Vine* reflected more his goal of solidifying the affiliation of Rindzin Pelmo with the revered and charismatic Great Mother Machik Lapdrön within Labrang's larger community framework. A big part of that tradition centered around Rindzin Pelmo's erudition as a student and teacher of Machik's chö practice, accentuating her authority as a Buddhist virtuoso on behalf of her disciples and the future Gungru *trülku*. For instance, Zhangtön wrote how a young and persistent Rindzin Pelmo learned chö from the Södrak *trülku* Könchok Gyatso (1790-1858) who was renowned for teaching Machik's chö at Labrang.<sup>79</sup> Zhangtön includes an anecdote from Rindzin Pelmo, who in a first-person letter that she provided Zhangtön for the *Lotus Vine*, remembered her excitement at meeting the famed Södrak *trülku* and the devotion she showed him. *The Lotus Vine* states:

One time I pitched a tent and stayed on the spring next to some  
[haunted grounds for chö]. The next day the old cook said, 'That is Södrak  
Tsang.' Upon hearing that, I could not restrain myself and I went to meet  
[Södrak Tsang]. I asked if I could also go with Södrak Tsang as he prepared

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<sup>77</sup> Please see the introduction to the dissertation for a complete listing of the sources and description of the controversy over the Gungru lineage's origin history that is still contentious today. The heart of the controversy lies in some Amdo scholars identifying the First Gungru *trülku* as "Sönam Gyen Lozang Chödrön" instead of two distinct people to avoid the fact that Sönam Gyen, who is from Kham Gungru in eastern Central Tibet (today's Tibet Autonomous Region) reincarnated in Central Tibet and not in Amdo.

<sup>78</sup> See Brag dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, *Deb ther rgya mtsho*, 582-83. Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 183. Zhangtön does not mention the name Sönam Gyen as the First Gungru and instead listed the name Lozang Drölma as the First Gungru followed by Lozang Chödrön. Perhaps owing to the sensitivity around this topic and wanting to preserve a certain Amdo-centric historical narrative, Dkon mchog rgya mtsho in *Gengya Drakkar*, 62, criticized Zhangtön's listing of the early Gungru lineage *trülku*.

<sup>79</sup> See the *Lotus Vine* and the document "la brang bkra shis 'khyil gyi mkhas grub 'ga' zhig gi skor [Some information about scholars at Labrang] about the Södrak *trülku*'s lineage at Labrang.

to return to his house. The Détri *trülku* said, ‘That is not all right, you will fall [on the sharp rocks.>] And I said, ‘It does not matter, I am still going.’ I walked out. ... The first time that I spent together with Södrak Tsang was in his home and it was very auspicious. Södrak Tsang used his Yamāntaka Mālā chord and I explicitly heard him saying the eight verses while he was pulling people [out of evil rebirth].<sup>80</sup>

In addition to illustrating Rindzin Pelmo’s close relationship with the Södrak *trülku*, Zhangtön also described how Rindzin Pelmo became a well-known teacher of chö. She taught chö to Zhangtön and many other eminent *trülku* and monks who would all play a prominent role in what I call the “Machik Family Group” at Drakkar and Labrang. In fact, the Gungru lineage’s identification with Machik Lapdrön and the practice of chö became so strong at Drakkar that Rindzin Pelmo insisted that she build a statue of Machik at the monastery when many locals wanted Rindzin Pelmo to build one of herself.<sup>81</sup>

But in order to understand the full effect of Rindzin Pelmo’s authority as Machik Lapdrön the Great Mother, we must analyze how Rindzin Pelmo’s authority became intertwined with a vital religio-temporal facet of the tradition that Zhangtön aimed to produce: How the Gungru lineage’s link to elite Amdo *trülku* embodied the unity and security of Labrang’s increasingly contested and strife-laden periphery at this time. To do this, Zhangtön elaborated the theme of Machik’s motherhood but with a twist: he incorporated Machik’s actual motherhood of her three sons from the twelfth century into his account. Strikingly, this

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<sup>80</sup>Zhang ston, the *Lotus Vine*, 187-188. Yang skabs zhik gnyan khrod pa 'ga' chu kha nas ras gur phub ste bsdad 'dug phyi nyin ja ma rgad po zhig yod pas de bsod grag tshang red zer bas mtshan thos pa tsam gyis stod mi tshugs pa phyung ste mdun du phebs// gnas khang du phebs grabs byed par 'dug pas nga yang 'gro rgyu yin zhus par// de mi rung khyod lhung gsungs par skyon med nga cis kyang 'gro rgyu yin zhus nas zhabs phyir song ba yin/ gnas khang du dang po khong dang mnyam du song ba de rten 'brel legs 'dugs gshin rje'i 'phreng nas rje de nyid kyis thag pa bsnams te rkang bargyad gsung zhing mi mams yar 'then gin 'dug ces zhal nas dngos su thos so//

<sup>81</sup> Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 198.

linked Rindzin Pelmo-as-Machik to Amdo *trülku* from the nineteenth century because the powerful Jamyang Zhepa and Détri of Labrang along with the Tuken of Gönlung were considered reincarnations of Machik's three sons, according to the *Lotus Vine*. Therefore, in addition to being students of chö, these *trülku*, i.e., Machik's figurative sons, represented a critical nexus of power in Amdo. They denoted Labrang's alliance with Gönlung that strengthened amidst the inter-monastery warfare and the arrival of Muslim groups in the nineteenth century. Thus, Machik became an effective symbol of security for Zhangtön, uniting a wider audience interested in preserving Labrang and thereby legitimating Rindzin Pelmo's authority as the human reincarnation of Machik the Great Mother who protected them all.

*Expanding the Machik Family Group: Machik, the Jamyang Zhepa and Rindzin Pelmo*

This subsection focuses on the Great Mother Machik's connection to the Jamyang Zhepa and the implications that this idealized mother-son relationship has for understanding Rindzin Pelmo's authority as a peacemaker during a time of strife in Labrang's periphery. Zhangtön asserted this metaphor early in the *Lotus Vine*, transferring the charisma of Machik as the Great Mother to Rindzin Pelmo of the Gungru lineage. In the first folio, Zhangtön describes Rindzin Pelmo and one of her three figurative sons (the Jamyang Zhepa):

I prostrate to Prajñāpāramitā the Mother of Wisdom, to Machik  
Lapdrön who is the queen of the Snow Land [Tibet] and whose nature is  
perfect wisdom free from elaborations—the only mother born of the noble  
assembly of the three times [past, present and future]. Guru Queen of  
Practitioners, may you protect us! ... By the ale distilled from the newborn  
lotus, Machik Lapdrön confers bliss on supreme heroes until the end of  
*samsara* clasping tightly [with them] as lovers with joy. Machik, out of



great love you always protect this sacred site here in Amdo known as Drakkar, the celestial realm of the distinguished victorious mother! I wholeheartedly show reverence to the precious Könchok Rindzin Pelmo who willingly assumes human existence. Machik Lapdrön and her son made this barbarian land like their own. Who can fathom the endless extent of the prayers and aspirations that the [All-Knowing Lama] Jamyang Zhepa and Machik Lapdrön [Rindzin Pelmo] shared together?<sup>82</sup>

This fascinating passage that describes Rindzin Pelmo as willingly assuming human existence as a reincarnation of Machik Lapdrön the “Queen of the Snow Land” elaborates Rindzin Pelmo’s authority as a heroine who arrived to protect Drakkar “the home of the distinguished victorious mother.” More fascinating is how this passage links Rindzin Pelmo’s authority to Machik as the metaphorical mother of Labrang’s top *trülku* the Jamyang Zhepa—an arrangement that has historical precedent in the three-century old Jamyang Zhepa lineage. The biography of the First Jamyang Zhepa Nawang Tsöndrö, who left Central Tibet for Amdo in the early eighteenth century after disputes over the murder of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s regent and the legitimacy of the Sixth Dalai Lama, asserts his connection to Machik as his figurative mother. His biography quotes the First Jamyang Zhepa stating: “I can confirm that I am the (reincarnation of the) son of Machik Lapdrön.”<sup>83</sup> A Gengya native, the First Jamyang Zhepa made this claim as he revealed a treasure that was attributed to Machik that prophesied where he should build Labrang Monastery in 1709. His biography, however,

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<sup>82</sup>Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 181. Na mo gu ru phra znya pa ra mi ta ye/ dus gsum 'phags tshogs bskyed pa'i yum gcig bu// rang bzhin spros bral shes rab pha rol phyin// gangs can grub pa'i dbang mo lab kyi sgron// bla ma rnal 'byor dbang mos bdag skyongs shig// Drug ldan mtsho skyes gsar ba'i sbrang chang gis/ dpa' bo'i dbang phyug srid mthar dgyes mdzad cing// Rjes chags dam du 'khyud pa'i dga ba mo// rnal 'byor ma khyod brtse bas rtag tu skyongs// Brag dkar zhes grags mdo smad gnas chen 'dir/ Mkha' spyod zhing gi gtso mo rgyal ba'i yum// bsam bzhin mi yi srid pa bzung pa yi/ dkon mchog rig 'dzin dpal mor snying nas gus// A ma lab kyi sgron ma yum sras kyi/ mtha' 'khob yul 'di bdag gir mdzad pa zhin/ kun mkhyen bla ma mchog dang lhan cig tu// thugs bskyed smon lam pha mtha' su yis dpog//

<sup>83</sup> Ngag dbang bkra shis, *Jams dbyangs bzhad pa'i sde'i rnam par thar ba yong su brjod pa'i gtam du bya ba dad pa'i sgo 'byed ke ta ka'i 'phreng ba*. Folio 141a.

does not mention the Gungru lineage by name. Nor does it mention that the First Jamyang Zhepa met the Second Gungru *trülku* Lozang Chödrön (or the First Gungru according to the *Ocean Annals* and Amdo scholars) at Machik’s monastery Zangrikharmar (Ch: Sangrikama, 桑日卡玛寺) in Central Tibet. Yet, one contemporary monk at Labrang said that the First Jamyang Zhepa met Lozang Chödrön before they came together to Amdo around the turn of the eighteenth century. Another contemporary Amdo man said that the “Gungru lineage’s connection to Machik was solidified at Zangrikharmar before she arrived in Amdo (in the eighteenth century).” However, this man did not specifically link the Jamyang Zhepa to the Gungru lineage.<sup>84</sup>

Nevertheless, Zhangtön elaborated this mother-son tradition in the *Lotus Vine* so that it could be interpreted in a nineteenth-century context as affirming that Rindzin Pelmo (Machik Lapdrön) and the Jamyang Zhepa (Machik’s son) worked together to solve the problems that emerged along Labrang’s periphery. Zhangtön’s line that “they made this barbarian land their own” likely harks back to when Labrang established greater control in its large periphery including monastic and pastoral communities like Gengya and Drakkar. Many threats surfaced under the rule of the Third Jamyang Zhepa Lozang Tupten Jikmé Gyatso (1792-1855) whom the *Lotus Vine* mentions as having studied with Rindzin Pelmo. In addition to his own religious practice, the Third Jamyang Zhepa strengthened Labrang’s connection to its surrounding communities by securing large donations of silver and livestock. This connection to Labrang’s outer communities helped Labrang expand its periphery, a fact that caused militias from Labrang and Rongbo in nearby Rebgong to fight in 1815 and again in 1843.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Two people from different parts of Amdo linked the Gungru lineage’s history to Zangrikharmar and said that Lozang Chödrön studied there before coming to Amdo when the Jamyang Zhepa did in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. One Labrang monk said that Lozang Chödrön and the Jamyang Zhepa arrived together but he did not elaborate.

<sup>85</sup> See Nietupski, *Labrang Monastery*, 136-139 for a good description of the Third Jamyang Zhepa’s life.

The Fourth Jamyang Zhepa Kelzang Tupten Wangchuk (1856-1916), who is also listed in the *Lotus Vine* as someone who studied with Rindzin Pelmo, helped stabilize Labrang’s periphery from the growing threats in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>86</sup> These threats included the violence between militias representing Labrang and the opposing alliance of Rongbo, Terlung and Tso monasteries as well as the arrival of Muslim groups who would later challenge Labrang as the next chapter shows.<sup>87</sup> The security concerns caused Labrang to centralize its government and establish closer oversight of lay communities like Gengya by connecting to wealthy families there.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, alliances between Labrang’s *trülku* and laymen in the periphery proved to be a key strategy to increase the influence of Labrang’s *trülku* establishment. For instance, around 1,000 families in Gengya, which is one of eight *déba* (households that supported Labrang), donated to Labrang.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, to accentuate Labrang’s level of control, many *trülku* and monks at Labrang were re-organized under the Fourth Jamyang Zhepa’s estate. In fact, one current scholar of Amdo described Labrang’s centralization of its monastic government and its increased control in its periphery as an example of a “Tibetan Buddhist civilizing project” that centered around “the central *trülku*’s taming power over subject tribes and monasteries.”<sup>90</sup>

Notably, Rindzin Pelmo as Machik lived when Labrang asserted more control in its periphery so that Rindzin Pelmo’s position—and her authority—at Drakkar took on greater significance as linked to the powerful Jamyang Zhepa. However, Zhangtön also connects Rindzin Pelmo as Machik the mother to the Détri of Labrang and the Tuken of Gönlung as

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<sup>86</sup> See Zhang ston, the *Lotus Vine*, 188.

<sup>87</sup> See Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, and other works, including the edited volume *Muslims in Amdo Tibetan Society*, ed. Hille, Horlemann and Nietupski, as well as Oidtmann’s *Forging the Golden Urn: The Qing Empire and the Politics of Reincarnation in Tibet* that describe some of the political context surrounding the arrival of Muslim groups in this region, in particular in the nineteenth century.

<sup>88</sup> Makley, *The Violence of Liberation*, 62 writes that *trülku* at Labrang established their own connections with lay leaders. Yang, *Xunhua*, 112, 141–44. See Nietupski, *Labrang Monastery*, 141-144 about The Fourth Jamyang Zhepa.

<sup>89</sup> Gengya is also part of one of eight “inner communities” that supported Labrang. Nietupski, *Labrang Monastery*, 67, 71, 82–83 and Yang, *Xunhua*, 142.

<sup>90</sup> Makley, *The Violence of Liberation*, 43, 62-63. Makley describes the Geluk Buddhist civilization process within what she describes as the masculine process of taming.

will be seen in the next subsection, which expands the Machik Family Group to Amdo *trülku* who wielded considerable influence across Amdo, Mongolian regions and the Qing Court in Beijing.

*The Machik Family Group across Amdo: Zhangtön, the Tuken and Rindzin Pelmo*

As part of his goal to assert Rindzin Pelmo as a symbol of unity in Amdo, Zhangtön extended the maternal metaphor comparing her to Machik by including the Détri of Labrang and the Tuken at Gönlung who were also considered reincarnations of Machik's sons who had lived during the twelfth century. This connection that glorified Labrang's renewed alliance with Gönlung, an important Geluk monastery for the Qing Court in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, burnished Rindzin Pelmo's authority during this time of turmoil when Zhangtön wrote the *Lotus Vine*. Here is one passage that defined this relationship:

Furthermore, a reliable source states that Machik's first son, Tongdé Ngakgi Wangchuk is the Jamyang Zhepa. Dröldé Gyelwé Jungné is the Détri and Tönyön Samdrup is the Tuken. Mother and sons came together here in this region, blessed it and hid many treasures [gter] here, and so forth. And similarly, the Jamyang Zhepa founded [Labrang] Tashikyil.<sup>91</sup>

Remarkably, this passage connects Rindzin Pelmo's authority as a trusted mother figure (Machik) to the Détri and the Tuken in the nineteenth century. However, Rindzin Pelmo's authority not only symbolized the Buddhist connection to these *trülku* as described in the *Lotus Vine*, but the important religio-temporal link between Labrang and Gönlung that strengthened during Rindzin Pelmo's and Zhangtön's lifetime. This occurred as part of

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<sup>91</sup> Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 205. de yang yum chen lab kyi sgröl ma'i sras stong sde ngag gi dbang phyug ni kun mkhyen bla ma yin cing grol sde rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas sde khri rin po che dang/ thod snyon bsam 'grub ni rje thu'u bkwan pa yin par tshad ma'i lung las gsungs la yum sras rnam lhan cig phyogs 'dir phebs nas byin gyis brlabs te gter sbed pa sogs gnang ba bzhin kun mkhyen chen bos bkra shis 'khyil phyag 'debs mdzad//

Labrang's goal to preserve peace and stability in its periphery that was beset with security threats in the power vacuum as the Qing dynasty waned.

That Zhangtön exalted Rindzin Pelmo as the Great Mother Machik in relation to the Tuken makes sense given how Zhangtön as the Tuken's tutor helped fortify this Labrang-Gönlung partnership in the nineteenth century. A Qinghai Henan Mongol, Zhangtön served as the Sixth Tuken Shédrup Gyatso's tutor and also as tutor for *trülku* in the Changkya lineage at Gönlung. One recent Tibetan scholar writes that Zhangtön as a teacher "not only cultivated and fostered the relationship between the Jamyang Zhepa and the Tuken in terms of academic study of Buddhism, but that he also improved the relationship between Labrang, the Tuken, and the Qing Court."<sup>92</sup> As the Sixth Tuken's tutor at Gönlung and also from 1850-1853 in Beijing during the reign of the Xianfeng Emperor 咸丰 (r.1850–61),<sup>93</sup> Zhangtön accompanied the Tuken to Mongolian areas in today's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. The Qing Court needed the Tuken to help oversee the Tibet-Mongolian frontier, a function that began in the eighteenth century with Changkya Rölpa'i Dorjé and the Qianlong emperor 乾隆, (Reign: 1736-1795) and helped enact the Qing's "segmentary state policy" in its periphery.<sup>94</sup> With this policy, the Qing utilized different methods to rule diverse peoples throughout the multiple frontier zones across their empire. For example, the Qing used *trülku* to regulate

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<sup>92</sup> Labrang and Gönlung maintained strategic relations that revolved around Zhangtön serving as a tutor for the Tuken and Chankya lineages. Zha Zha, "Labulengsi zhiming gaoseng Xiangdun danba jiacuo," 43. Nietupski, *Labrang Monastery*, 132–34.

<sup>93</sup> Blo bzang tshul khriims, *Bka' drin mtshungs med zhang ston rdo rje 'chang bstan pa rgya mtsho dpal bzang bo'i zhal sang nas kyi rnam par thar ba gzur gnas mkhas pa'i gtsug nor zhes bya ba bzhugs so*, 31. See also Zha Zha, "Labulengsi zhiming gaoseng xiangdun danba jiacuo," for an account of Zhangtön Tenpa Gyatso's life as a renowned scholar and tutor across Amdo, Mongolian areas and at the Qing Court, 42.

<sup>94</sup> See Fletcher for a discussion about how the Changkya lama helped control the influence of Buddhism and regulate power between Outer Mongolia and Lhasa. The Qing's relationship with Tibetan reincarnates helped the Qing govern Tibet and Mongolian regions. Fletcher also notes how embracing reincarnate lineages fit the Qing's overall segmented frontier strategy working with local populations rather than reorienting local religious/political power structures. Fletcher, "Ching Inner Asia circa 1800," 37, 52–53. See also Xiangyuan Wang's "The Qing Court's Tibet Connection: Lcang skya Rolpa'i rdo rje and the Qianlong Emperor" for a description of Qianlong's relation with the Changkya Lama, and Nietupski's *Labrang Monastery*, xx. For a more comprehensive analysis of the Qing dynasty's approach to their borderland areas, see Rawski's *The Last Emperors*, Crossley's *The Rulerships of China* and Farquhar's *Emperor as Bodhisattva*. See also Waley-Cohen's *Exile in Mid-Qing China: Banishment to Xinjiang, 1758-1820* and Dai Yingcong's *The Sichuan Frontier in Tibet: Imperial Strategy and the Early Qing*.

Tibetans and Mongolians as part of the Qing's strategy to work with local power structures to rule each group separately in Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Qinghai-Tibet, Sichuan, and Yunnan. This *trülku* dynamic also played out close to Labrang as the Qing Court granted territory to Terlung's *trülku* Setsang and conferred on him a title of religious leader, likely in order to counter Labrang's expansion across Amdo in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>95</sup>

While I discuss the Détri's connection with Rindzin Pelmo in the next section, it should not be surprising that the *Lotus Vine* featured the Tuken given his importance to the Labrang-Gönlung alliance and his link to Machik Lapdrön (and Rindzin Pelmo) as represented in the Machik mother-son family group. The Tuken's prestige helped legitimize Rindzin Pelmo's authority in the *Lotus Vine*, as she noted in her first-person letter given to Zhangtön and recorded verbatim in the *Lotus Vine*, as introduced earlier in this chapter. A common feature in *namtar*, this autobiographical element mentioned how Rindzin Pelmo's predecessor Könchok Chödrön (1745–1811) received praise from the Third Tuken Lozang Chökyi Nyima (1737–1802), a noted scholar, author, and tutor at Gönlung and at the Qing Court. Rindzin Pelmo also recalled in the letter how her mother received a rosary string from the Third Tuken, an auspicious offering that portended Rindzin Pelmo's rebirth as the Fourth Gungru. Rindzin Pelmo in the *Lotus Vine* states:

Könchok Chödrön said to my mother, 'If you have a yellow silk thread, I will re-thread your mala.' She used the Tuken's [the Third Tuken Lozang Chökyi Nyima's] mala beads to re-thread the mala and she offered it to my mother. The next day when Könchok Chödrön left, she walked out of the tent. She turned her face back and held the tent's entry way with both

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<sup>95</sup> Yang, *Xunhua*, 141–44.

hands and closed the tent. She said, ‘This is auspicious, it is better to keep it [the door] like this,’ and then she left.<sup>96</sup>

While the Fourth and Fifth Tuken died young, the aforementioned Sixth Tuken, Zhangtön’s pupil at Gönlung, maintained a closer relationship with Rindzin Pelmo. One time, according to the *Lotus Vine*, Rindzin Pelmo offered life prayers to the Sixth Tuken at Gönlung. He then gifted fifty ounces of silver to her which she gave to the monks at Drakkar.<sup>97</sup>

This first section shows that as part of the *Lotus Vine*’s goal to invent a tradition about Rindzin Pelmo and the times in which she lived, the widely accepted personage of Machik came to represent both the religious and temporal unity and continuity in the Gungru lineage and in Labrang’s unsettled periphery across Amdo. This continuity with elite *trülku* at Labrang and with Labrang’s affiliate Gönlung legitimated Rindzin Pelmo’s substantial authority at Drakkar as the linchpin of this unique mother-son dynamic. The next section describes how the *Lotus Vine* celebrates Rindzin Pelmo’s authority for performing efficacious actions as a mother *khandroma* who practiced Cakrasamvara rituals that promoted the diversity of Labrang and its periphery in the “Cakrasamvara Family Group.”

## Part II

### Rindzin Pelmo’s Authority as a Mother within the “Cakrasamvara Family Group”

Zhangtön’s master narrative in the *Lotus Vine* also reflected his goal to constitute a tradition at Drakkar about Rindzin Pelmo as the enlightened *khandroma* consort *Vajravārāhi*.<sup>98</sup> A key part of that tradition revolved around Rindzin Pelmo’s acuity in

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<sup>96</sup> Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 184. Khyod la gos skud ser po yod nan gas phreng that spor gsungs nas thu'u bkwan rin po che'i phyag phreng zhig// yod pa de'i phreng lung barjes nas phul// phyi nyin phebs dus sba sgo nas zhal phyir nas sba sgo phyag gnyis kyis bzung nas tho gtug gyang sgo 'di 'dra byas nas zhog dang bzang gsung nas phebs zer//

<sup>97</sup> Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 183 and 184.

<sup>98</sup> The introduction to this chapter states that a *khandroma* in Tibetan culture often refers to women who perform a variety of roles including as an enlightened being, a consort, an important messenger and interlocutor during moments of indecision. See also Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self*, 243-57 and Jacoby’s *Love and Liberation*.

Cakrasamvara tantric rituals that legitimated her authority as a Buddhist virtuoso with her disciples and with future Gungru *trülku*. For instance, Zhangtön cites the *Cakrasamvara Tantra* and *Vajradakinis-Indestructible Skygoers* to laud Rindzin Pelmo as the mother *khandroma Vajravārāhī*, a wrathful form of Vajrayoginī associated in *yab-yum* (father-mother) consort practices with the deity Héruka in Cakrasamvara rituals.<sup>99</sup> To elaborate, Kelzang’s husband Chödzin from Labrang spoke of how the Gungru lineage acted as a mother *khandroma* consort in the Cakrasamvara ritual at the Drakkar Cave or Lokyatün near Linxia 临夏, Gansu. He quoted the Fourth Jamyang Zhepa Kelzang Wangchuk who said, “All Cakrasamvara palaces<sup>100</sup> need a mother (*yum*) to be with the father (*yab*) in union, and because Cakrasamvara requires a consort, the Gungru lineage came (to Drakkar).”<sup>101</sup> The *Lotus Vine* describes her Cakrasamvara practice at Lokyatün:

She went six times to the spot of Lokyatün and partook of the self-empowerment. The first time she went, it was said that she saw that Cakrasamvara’s face was blue and that she thought she saw the actual face of Héruka. While she stayed there, she dreamed that a tall lama wearing a Penzha [long pointed hat of the Pandita] came and said, ‘I am [the Third Tuken] Lozang Chökyi Nyima.’ Since that time, as his [Lozang Chökyi Nyima’s] face became whiter and whiter, she experienced what seemed to be the real perception of him coming. It must have been a meditative experience because she spoke like that.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 183-84. Ordained monastics sometimes engaged in consort practices.

Diemberger, *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty*, 137–38; Jacoby, *Love and Liberation*, 222–38.

<sup>100</sup> Epstein and Wenbin, “Ganjia and Murdo: The Social Construction of Space at Two Tibetan Pilgrimage Site in Eastern Tibet,” 324. The Cakrasamvara cycle is a “Pan-Indian/Tibetan phenomenon: the twenty-four mountains, thirty-two countries and eight graveyards and the representations of these places.”

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Chödzin in 2013 in Labrang by the author.

<sup>102</sup> Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 192, lo kya tun lan drug phebs nas dag 'jug bzhes/ dang po phebs skabs bde mchog gi zhal ras sngon po yin par gzigs gsungs te/ he ru ka'i zhal dingos su gzigs sam snyam mo// der bzhugs skabs hig mtshan lam du bla ma paN zhwa sne ring can sku gzugs ring ba zhig phebs nas// ng blo bang chos kyi nyi ma yin gsung ba hig ris gsungs/ 'di dus nang je dkar la song nas bla ma de nyid mngon sum lta bur phebs byung gsungs pas nyams snang yin pa 'dro//



Yet Rindzin Pelmo's exemplarity in the role of a yogic consort alone does not account for the full effect of her authority as the mother goddess *Vajravārāhī* at Drakkar. Rather, we must analyze how her authority became linked to elite Amdo *trülku* and monastics and how this connection helped Zhangtön distinguish and embody the plurality of the threatened Labrang establishment in the late nineteenth century. (Labrang, as will be shown below, engaged with and supported many groups of various ideological backgrounds, including Muslim, Daoist, Confucian and Christian<sup>103</sup>). Thus, as part of his goal to create a tradition about Rindzin Pelmo and the Gungru lineage as a symbol of this plurality in Labrang and its surrounding communities, Zhangtön's *Lotus Vine* discussed the *Vajravārāhī* (mother) and Cakrasamvara (father) union. This linked Labrang's core as represented by the Jamyang Zhepa, Gungtang, Détri and Tuken *trülku* with the periphery and Rindzin Pelmo in what I call the "Cakrasamvara Family Group." In this vein, Rindzin Pelmo's authority stemmed from her interactions with Amdo *trülku* who promoted these tantric rituals, although textual evidence, including from the *Lotus Vine* cited in this section, does not determine if Rindzin Pelmo and these *trülku* were sexual partners or if they visualized the Cakrasamvara-*Vajravārāhī* consort union as explained below. Clearer for our purposes is the weight that the Cakrasamvara practice carried around Labrang and that Rindzin Pelmo, at least symbolically, participated in these rituals with many *trülku* that helped Zhangtön glorify Labrang's religious plurality in Amdo and across Tibet.

Thus, Rindzin Pelmo's authority as *Vajravārāhī* became intertwined with Zhangtön's goal to constitute a tradition in the *Lotus Vine* about Rindzin Pelmo and the Gungru lineage as part of an eminent religious-temporal community at Labrang and inspire an audience conditioned to judge as right a practice like the Cakrasamvara *yab-yum* rituals. For example,

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<sup>103</sup> Nietupski, *Labrang Monastery*, 16. Nietupski writes that Labrang "in its later years showed a sense of religious pluralism by tolerating and even supporting Muslim, Daoist, Confucian and Christian religious communities, not to mention all four orders of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions and the Bon practitioners .

toward the end of Rindzin Pelmo's life, in 1887, Labrang became more affiliated with the lay *ngakpas* (non-celibate lamas of the Nyingma sect who could marry), who had earned prestige around Labrang for performing social functions such as prognostication, doctrinal consultation, end of life services and ritual medical treatment.<sup>104</sup> In fact, the *Lotus Vine* mentions that a local *ngakpa* once performed rituals to help cure Rindzin Pelmo who was sick as a little girl in Gengya.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, during Rindzin Pelmo's lifetime, the *ngakpa* traveled with the Jamyang Zhepa to "ward off malevolent spirits" and performed more extensive ceremonies at Labrang; the Ngakpa College also opened at Labrang a decade after Rindzin Pelmo's death (1891).<sup>106</sup> In this light, Zhangtön's celebration of Rindzin Pelmo and her practice of the Cakrasamvara ritual fits with Labrang's support of the Nyingma *ngakpa* at this time. Moreover, Rindzin Pelmo from Drakkar and the *ngakpa* living around Labrang also likely helped Labrang to secure its periphery that, as stated above, faced more outside threats two centuries after the First Jamyang Zhepa and others left Central Tibet for Amdo in what Anne Chayet called the Geluk *trülku*'s "desire for independence."<sup>107</sup> By the late nineteenth century, Zhangtön's *Lotus Vine* depicts how many of these same elite *trülku* lineages as part of a vibrant cultural center in Labrang and across the Tibetan plateau interacted with Rindzin Pelmo as *Vajravārāhī* in the Cakrasamvara Family Group that legitimated her authority around Gengya, Labrang and Amdo.

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<sup>104</sup> Nietupski, *Labrang Monastery*, 3, 32–35, 141.

<sup>105</sup> Zla ba gcig gi 'phro nas phung bo ma bde bas sngags pa zhig gis rim gro byas pas nub mo. Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 185.

<sup>106</sup> Nietupski, *Labrang Monastery*, 3, 32–35, 141

<sup>107</sup> See Chayet's "Women and Reincarnation in Tibet: The Case of the Gung ru Mkha ' ' gro ma," 71. See also Pachik Medsam's "De srid sangs rgya mtsho dang 'jam bzhad nga dbang brtson 'grus gnyis bar gyi 'gal ba'i 'byung rkyen skor gleng ba," for an analysis of the First Jamyang Zhepa's biography about the rivalry between the First Jamyang Zhepa, who aligned with Mongol Lhazang Khan, versus the Dalai Lama's regent.

*Zhangtön legitimates Rindzin Pelmo as the mother khandroma Vajravārāhī*

Zhangtön himself played a key role in constituting a tradition about Rindzin Pelmo that legitimated her authority as *Vajravārāhī* at Drakkar and Lokyatün and exemplified Labrang's status as a sponsor of religious diversity. Zhangtön, too, appears to have practiced Cakrasamvara feast rites with Rindzin Pelmo in the Drakkar Cave. Zhangtön's own *namtar* written by one of his disciples recalls him visiting with Rindzin Pelmo in the cave: "On the twenty-fifth day he arrived in the cave and did the primary feast offering in front of the *khandroma* (Rindzin Pelmo)." Another time, Zhangtön met with Rindzin Pelmo at the Drakkar cave shortly before she died. Zhangtön states in his biography that in the western wall of the cave there were "marks of the perfect *yab-yum* (mother-father) union that were very clear, prominent, and wondrous."<sup>108</sup>

The emphasis on Cakrasamvara in Zhangtön's *namtar* signified the ritual's importance within Labrang's community of elite *trülku* and scholars, many of whom appear in the *Lotus Vine* and who accepted Rindzin Pelmo as *Vajravārāhī*. For instance, the esteemed Third Gungtang Tenpé Drönmé (1762–1823) was a prolific teacher, a politician at the Qing Court, and a scholar of various subjects, including Buddhist tantra, astrology, and poetry.<sup>109</sup> He encouraged Rindzin Pelmo to practice Cakrasamvara like her Gungru predecessors after he recognized her as the Gungru *trülku* at age four.<sup>110</sup> She said of their close relationship in the *Lotus Vine*: "Whenever I met with the Gungtang he blessed me with his left hand and gave me a protector's knot with his right hand." Zhangtön narrates in the *Lotus Vine*: "Because (this blessing and knot) are linked with the tantric meaning of

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<sup>108</sup> Blo bzang tshul khriims, *Bka' drin mtshungs med zhang ston*, 111.

<sup>109</sup> *Dictionary of Learned and or Accomplished Beings who Appeared in Tibet: Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me*, <http://www.pktc.org/pktc/tibddiction.htm> Nietupski discusses Gungtang's collected works. Nietupski, *Labrang Monastery*, 25–31.

<sup>110</sup> Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 188.

Cakrasamvara, this is the marvelous liberation story of master and disciple!”<sup>111</sup> Later, Rindzin Pelmo received a Cakrasamvara blessing from the Fourth Gungtang, Könchok Tenpé Gyatso (1824–59), who arrived at Gengya for an enthronement ceremony in 1847. The Fourth Gungtang’s biography says that, “at that time Rindzin Pelmo requested that he come to Drakkar and give a Cakrasamvara blessing.”<sup>112</sup>

Furthermore, the *Lotus Vine* and other sources chronicle both Rindzin Pelmo’s and the Jamyang Zhepa and the Tuken *trülku*’s experiences with the Cakrasamvara rituals that buttressed her authority as *Vajravārāhī*. But Zhangtön does not expound on the Tuken and the Jamyang Zhepa’s link to Rindzin Pelmo as *Vajravārāhī* as do other sources. The Third Tuken’s biography states, “When you arrive at the Cakrasamvara’s summit (deep inside the cave), the *khandroma*’s breast (*Vajravārāhī*) has naturally arisen and nectar descends into the skull and into a pile of clouds. The Lord of Death’s head has naturally arisen clearly and then the self-arising Cakrasamvara and his consort—they (Cakrasamvara and consort) seem like they were built by an artist’s hand.”<sup>113</sup> The Fourth Jamyang Zhepa recalled in his autobiography how he saw a self-arising Cakrasamvara statue (*Vajravārāhī*’s consort) in the Drakkar Cave. Zhangtön, however, does discuss Rindzin Pelmo’s close connection with the Third Détri of Labrang, Jamyang Tupten Nyima (1779-1862), practicing Cakrasamvara rituals as mentioned in the next subsection.

#### *Rindzin Pelmo Practices Cakrasamvara rituals with the famous Third Détri*

The *Lotus Vine* and other texts explicitly describe the mutual devotion shown between Rindzin Pelmo and the Third Détri in which they practiced the Cakrasamvara-*Vajravārāhī*

<sup>111</sup> Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 188. Rje 'di la nam mjal na yang phyag gyon pas mjal kha dang //gyas pas phyag mdud gngang gsungs te bde mchog gi rgyud don dang 'brel ba'i dgos pa khyad par can yod pas bla slob gnyis ka'i rnam thar rmad du byung ba'o//

<sup>112</sup> Lozang Pelden, “The Biography of the Fourth Gungtang Reincarnate,” 66.

<sup>113</sup> Dkon mchog rgya mtsho, *rGan gya'i brag dkar*, 33. This translation is my own. De nas gsham du bde mchog nyag gar slebs na mkha' 'gro ma'i nu ma rang byon dang/ sar de'i bdud rtsi 'bab sa'i thod pa dang bcas pa/ sprin brtsegs kyi bar nas rdo rje 'jigs byed kyi dbu lhang nger gsal ba'i rang byon//

(*yab-yum*) consort relationship. This clearly reflected one of Zhangtön’s goals to create a tradition about Rindzin Pelmo as an effective practitioner of Cakrasamvara as *Vajravārāhī* and how she established authority across Amdo in this role. But, Rindzin Pelmo’s connection with Détri, a known scholar, teacher, and translator of Geluk texts in Mongolia and China who earned the seal from the Xianfeng Emperor, 咸丰 (r.1850–61<sup>114</sup>), also helped Zhangtön glorify Labrang and its periphery as a place of religious plurality, a larger goal that reflects Rindzin Pelmo’s authority at Drakkar. Along these lines, Détri said to Rindzin Pelmo in the *Lotus Vine*: “One day you should come to me and I will bestow on you the permission blessing of Cakrasamvara. The purpose of performing this blessing would be extraordinary.”<sup>115</sup> When she met with the Fifth Détri Jikmé Tupten Nyima (1874–98), the Fourth Détri Lozang Lungrik Nyima (1862-74) having died young, Rindzin Pelmo discussed the importance of her decades-long teacher-student relationship with the Third Détri, who she helped cure on one occasion when he was ill. The *Lotus Vine* states that the Third Détri, “after having removed his robe, she (Rindzin Pelmo) blew a puff of air or nectar (*zhelpu*) on him and he responded with a smile. After that he requested an audience with her.”<sup>116</sup> Rindzin Pelmo hoped that the close relationship established between the Gungru and Détri lineages would continue, as this dialogue with the Fifth Détri reveals:

Said Rindzin Pelmo: “We previously had a close relationship [with the Third Détri Jamyang Tupten Nyima] and I have returned. It is permissible if we consort with each other again and again.”

“How long will we continue to have a close relationship with each other?” the Détri asked.

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<sup>114</sup> Bod rang skyong ljongs, “sde khri 'jam dbyangs thub bstan nyi ma'i mdor bsdus,” 610.

<sup>115</sup> Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 187. Nyin gcig shog dang ngas bde mchog gi rjes gnangs gnang zhig bskur gsung nas de bzhin gnang ba dgos pa khyad par can yod 'dug go//

<sup>116</sup> Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 202. yang sde khri rin po che sku bsnyun skabs shig rje 'di ba mdun du phebs nas/ thugs ka'i na bza bsal te zhal phu zhig btab pas zhal 'dzum mdzad// de'i rjes mjal kha zhus//

Said Rindzin Pelmo: “Until we obtain the integration of skillful means and wisdom [coalescent union],” she said.

“When will we obtain the union?” he asked.

She said, “Similarly, if we stay [close] like that, at some point or another, we will achieve the [coalescent] union.”<sup>117</sup>

The Third Détri elaborated more about his relationship practicing Cakrasamvara rituals with Rindzin Pelmo in a prayer that he gave her. In his history of Drakkar Monastery (2008), Könchok Gyatso recounts this prayer that originally appeared in the Third Détri’s own *namtar* written in the nineteenth century. Prayer verses include:

“I pray to the Lord Héruka the glorious master  
Who bounds the phenomena of all things, the inanimate and animate and  
the pure and impure, solely into the immutable great bliss,  
Please grant me the two *siddhis*.

Enjoying the essence of the mind [of bodhicitta] in the Central Channel at  
the center of the heart, the short letter *A* [*Candali*] unites at *Tilalka* and the  
hero and heroine [the Lord and consort] join together joyously in union in  
the center of the eight-petaled Lotus.

In the domain and channel of the vajra body, without exception, the hero of  
the thoroughly purified Five Cakras with a host of deities makes the  
blessings of the light of wisdom appear in the Yogini.

As the Moon melts in great bliss and blazing clear white light spreads on  
the path, the mantra of the Buddha field gathers co-emergent messengers,  
May the Festival never be unbroken.

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<sup>117</sup> Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 202. yang sku na phra mo'i dus sde khri rin po cher mjal skabs dgyes pa'i nyams kyis rang re tsho sngar yang 'grogs nas 'ong ba zhig yin/ da dung yang 'grogs nas song na chog gsungs/ khong nas ci tsam gyi bar 'grogs zus par/ zung 'jug thob kyī bar yin mod gsungs// zung 'jug nam thob rgyu red zhus par // 'di 'dra byas 'gro gi bsdad na skabs shig thob los yong gsung//

As the fully developed vajra bee enjoys being in the center of the private lotus [female sexual organ], may you always attain intoxication from the subtle essence [semen] that is produced from this co-emergent joy.

From this victorious union of Lord and consort, the sounds of enjoyment from remaining in the state of bliss-emptiness pervade across the sky,  
By practicing the instructions of the great path of union,  
May I obtain Buddhahood in an instant.”<sup>118</sup>

The Third Détri further instructed Rindzin Pelmo that after chanting this prayer: “You can see the hundreds of thousands of *khandroma* statues naturally self-arise, the naturally arising feast substances and feast *torma* offerings in front of the main God (Cakrasamvara), the Lake of Cakrasamvara with consort.”<sup>119</sup>

In his translation of the *Cakrasamvara Tantra*, David Gray writes that textual analysis of the tantra alone “cannot determine what practices (of Cakrasamvara) were undertaken by an individual community... nor understand what literally was put into practice.”<sup>120</sup> However, whether the Détri and Rindzin Pelmo actually enacted or visualized the Cakrasamvara-*Vajravārāhī* consort union is not clear nor is it pertinent to understand the full effect of

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<sup>118</sup> Dkon mchog rgya mtsho, *rGan gya'i brag dkar*, 33–34. The English translation of the third Détri Jamyang Thupten Nyima's prayer/poem is my own. mi 'gyur lhan skyes bde chen nyag gcig tu / 'khor 'das brtan gyo'i dngos kun sdom mdzad pa / bla ma khyab bdag he ru ka dpal la / gsol ba 'debs so dngos grub rnam gnyis stsol // snying dbus byang sems dhu tir dga ba'i dpyid // a thung tsaNa Da li dngos ti lal kar // mnyam sbyor nang gi dpa' bo yab yum zung // 'dab brgyad chu skyes ze'u 'brur rtag rol mdzod // rdo rje'i lus la gnas pa'i rtsa dang khams / ma lus yongs su dag pa'i 'thor lo lnga'i // dpa' bo rnal 'byor mar bcas lha tshogs kyis // byin rlabs ye shes sang ba 'char bar mdzod // haM yig zla ba bzhus pas bde ba che // 'bar ba'i 'od gsal lam bsang spel ba'i grogs / zhing sngags lhan skyes pho nya'i 'du ba yis // de tshe gsang ba'i chu skyes gzhon nu'i dbus // rab rgyas rdo rje bung bas rol ba yis // lhan skyes dga' ba las byung dwangs ma'i bcud // drangs pas rtag tu myos pa thob gyur cig / skyil krung bzhi ldan snyoms 'jug dga' ba'i sgras // mkha' dbyings kun khyab rgyal ba yab yum gyis // gdams pa'i zung 'jug lam bzang goms pa yis // skad cig gcig gis rdzogs sangs rgyas gyur cig //

<sup>119</sup> See Dkon mchog rgya mtsho *rGan gya'i brag dkar*, 34–35. ces pa bton rjes mkha' 'gro ma bye ba 'bum gyi rang byon dang gtso bo'i mdun gyi tshogs rdzas tshogs gtor gyi rang byon // Gray discusses how the thirty-third chapter of the *Cakrasamvara Tantra* discusses “feasting and sexual activity as the gathering and consumption of the mixed sexual fluids, semen and uterine blood.” The twenty-third chapter of the *Cakrasamvara Tantra* notes “that the yogini should be enjoyed by the hero like the earth... taking her as one's support and ground, worship the binding in union.” Gray, *Cakrasamvara Tantra*, 100–113. See also Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self* and Jacoby, *Love and Liberation* for excellent analyses on tantric practices in Tibetan Buddhism.

<sup>120</sup> Gray, *Cakrasamvara Tantra*, 103–104. Gray writes, “It is not possible to assume that textual passages accurately reflect the practices of the communities who created or preserve them, but that they were likely performed to some degree given the criticism of such practices.”

Rindzin Pelmo's authority as *Vajravārāhī*. More relevant is analyzing her authority through her relationships with elite *trülku* like Détri in the Cakrasamvara Family Group that for Zhangtön helped promote Labrang as a diverse Sino-Tibetan borderland community on these strategic Qinghai-Gansu grasslands.

Rindzin Pelmo's relationships within the Cakrasamvara Family Group encapsulated her authority as the mother *khandroma Vajravārāhī* who participated in Cakrasamvara tantric rituals around Labrang. But Rindzin Pelmo's connections within the monastic and lay community around Labrang—another feature of Zhangtön's Gungru master narrative—also legitimized her authority as she acted as a compassionate substitute mother who maintained order in the “Surrogate Family Group” as the next section chronicles.

### **Part III Mother of the Masses: Rindzin Pelmo's Authority in the “Surrogate Family Group”**

Whereas the first two sections depict Rindzin Pelmo's authority as the Great Mother Machik Lapdrön and as *Vajravārāhī* in more elite circles of Amdo *trülku*, this section analyzes Rindzin Pelmo's authority as a surrogate mother in the monastic and lay communities in Gengya and Labrang. Along these lines, Zhangtön portrayed Rindzin Pelmo as an exemplar who performed rituals in the lay community and served as a medical healer, a teacher of Buddhism and a confidant—a main component of the tradition that Zhangtön established about Rindzin Pelmo as a mother-like figure for the masses to edify her disciples and future Gungru *trülku*. While carrying out tasks such as performing rituals for the laity does not fall exclusively in the domain of Tibetan women, women like Rindzin Pelmo often received acclaim for such activities in Tibetan communities.<sup>121</sup> Case in point, the *Lotus Vine's* many anecdotes and miracle tales extol Rindzin Pelmo for using her extraordinary

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<sup>121</sup> Diemberger, “Female Oracles in Modern Tibet,” 167.



powers to heal people who cannot speak as she acted as the human form of the Great Mother Machik Lapdrön and as a *khandroma* figure in Gengya and Labrang.<sup>122</sup>

But in order to appreciate the full scope of Rindzin Pelmo's authority as a surrogate mother, it is imperative to consider her authority in a greater context than that of an extraordinary woman doing untold activities in the monastic and lay community. On the contrary, it is important to discern the larger religio-temporal implications of the tradition that Zhangtön sought to create about Rindzin Pelmo that shows how her actions in Gengya and Labrang became essential to Labrang's mission to secure its turbulent periphery in the nineteenth century. For Zhangtön, Rindzin Pelmo's good deeds as a surrogate mother—the type of figure that many Amdo monastics and yogins would esteem because she represented the Buddhist path that many wanted their own mothers to attain—glorified Labrang's periphery as a paragon of religious, social and temporal order where Rindzin Pelmo had considerable authority. These deeds included caring for the *sangha*, providing rituals for villagers and acting as a peacekeeper, a healer, a teacher and an advocate for future Gungru *trülku* in The Surrogate Family Group.

*Rindzin Pelmo Serves as a Compassionate Caretaker, Teacher and Healer*

As part of Zhangtön's larger mission to establish a tradition about the Gungru lineage and Labrang's periphery at Drakkar, the *Lotus Vine* legitimated Rindzin Pelmo's authority as a surrogate mother who provided order and structure for many monks who left their mothers at a young age to enter Drakkar and Labrang monasteries. For instance, Rindzin Pelmo showed compassion for sheep (plentiful on Gengya's grasslands) and used their wool to make clothes for the monks at Drakkar. The *Lotus Vine* states: "Rindzin Pelmo did not have the

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<sup>122</sup> Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood*, 52 and 64. Kleinberg notes that hagiographers "at least formally [...] all write history and that the hagiographer's interest in edification should not make us forget his claims to historical truth." He writes that while certain events represented in hagiographies should not be understood in a literal sense, historians should not ignore these miracles just because "they can't be true."

sheep and livestock that were offered to her slaughtered and sold until they died naturally. She said, ‘In this way I have formed a connection with (the *sangha*).’<sup>123</sup> Rindzin Pelmo also supplied the *sangha* with food and money and served tea on numerous occasions to the monks at Drakkar and seven times to the monks at Labrang—activities not performed exclusively by women as male *trülku* also gave alms to the *sangha*. Rindzin Pelmo, who helped expand Drakkar’s assembly hall and temple, even provided space for local monks to attend a summer retreat at Drakkar over a seven-year span when, according to the *Lotus Vine*, “there was no other summer retreat at that time.”

In a similar role, Rindzin Pelmo benefited the *sangha* at Drakkar and Labrang by performing rituals for the laity in Gengya’s villages at a time of illness or death, actions that enhanced her authority as a compassionate mother-like figure who cared for her constituents. Rindzin Pelmo used the donations she received to refurbish the dormitory and temple shrine room at Drakkar along with her large multistoried estate above Drakkar—a good economic indicator of her authority with locals who relied on her services.<sup>124</sup> One night, according to the *Lotus Vine*, Rindzin Pelmo dreamed that a monk discussed with her how she could assist Drakkar by going to the villages to do rituals for the laity.

[Rindzin Pelmo] planned to build a new dormitory room and temple shrine room because they were both very old, but since she did not have more than 100 kron [Tibetan currency], she could not find the means to do so. At that moment she dreamt that a monk appeared and said to her, ‘You should build these [shrine room and dormitory] and I will help you.’ From

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<sup>123</sup> Much of this paragraph comes from Zhang ston, *Lotus Vine*, 193, 194, 195, 196. On page 196, zog lug 'bul mkhan byung ba rnam ma shi bar du bsha' ba dang btsong ba sogs gtan nas byed mi 'jug nang nas mdzo mo mi 'dzin cing 'bri 'ga' ri yod pa'i mar gyis tshe 'bar gnang // lug gi bal rnam dge 'dun la bsngos te kho rang tsho la yang 'brel 'jog tu bcug pa yin gsungs// On page 194, bla brang bkra shis 'khyil du mang bskol lan bdun// brag dkar dgon du 'gyed mang bskol lan grangs du ma dang gtor chen yang mang du btang / lha khang dang 'du khang gsar bzos dang 'du khang phyi byams sku// On page 194, Brag dkar du dbyar gnas mi 'dun pas nyid kyi nang du gra ba bdun re gdan drangs nas lo bdun la dbyar gnas bsung//

<sup>124</sup> Interviewed Tendzin in 2012 in Labrang by the author. Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 193–94.

then onwards, she was invited many times [to do rituals and receive donations in the village], and both of them were built well.<sup>125</sup>

That Zhangtön illustrated how Rindzin Pelmo established a great deal of authority as a caretaker with the local *sangha* likely resonated in a society where many monastic sons felt indebted and a sense of filial anxiety owing to their absence during their own mother's deaths and pending rebirths. As mentioned above, Rindzin Pelmo's contemporary Zhapkar's autobiography and episodes from the Gesar epic elucidate this mother-son dynamic as part of the religio-cultural landscape in Amdo, Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist culture.<sup>126</sup> Zhapkar writes about the anxiety that he felt about his mother's passing and the fate of her future rebirth. He felt disconsolate about not seeing his mother, whom he described as being "overwhelmed by affection and thinking of her only son," before she died.<sup>127</sup> To assuage his guilt of tending to his patrons instead of seeing his mother before she passed, Zhapkar prayed "to lead my mother on the Buddhist path." He did Buddhist practice "to accumulate merit and purify obscurations" to affect her positive future rebirth.<sup>128</sup> As for the Gesar epic's resemblance to the Chinese Mulian 目连 legend about a Chinese Buddhist who rescued his mother from Hell, Matthew Kapstein shows how Gesar, too, worried about his mother's future and attempted to free his mother "from the depths to which she has fallen." Overcome with guilt over missing his mother's passing, Gesar aimed to liberate her from the Hell realms. Therefore, in the same way that Zhapkar attained Buddhist merit for the sake of his

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<sup>125</sup> Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 193. Gzims khang dang lha khang ha cing rmying nas gsar // bzheng byed rdzis gnang bar khron brgya med pas thabs ma rnyed par bzhugs skabs mtshan lam du grwa ba zhig gis khyed kyis bzhengs thabs kyis dang ngas grogs byed zer ba byung bas de nas bzung gdan 'dren pa mang du byung ste legs par grub he//

<sup>126</sup> Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism*, 46. Further, in his monograph on Chinese Buddhist mothers and sons, Alan Cole studies how Buddhist sutras, including "The Sutra on Difficulty of Repaying the Kindness of Parents," describe how dutiful monk sons resolved their indebtedness toward their mothers by converting them to Buddhism.

<sup>127</sup> Ricard, *The Life of Shabkar*, 200-201.

<sup>128</sup> Ricard, *The Life of Shabkar*, 202-203.

mother, Gesar acted “on behalf of a parent” and overcame his own sins to eventually help liberate his mother.<sup>129</sup>

Rindzin Pelmo, however, did not need a *trülku* or a monk to act on her behalf and/or convert her to Buddhism in the same way that Indian Buddhist texts portray the liberation of mothers from the suffering of their householder life.<sup>130</sup> Conversely, the *Lotus Vine* depicts Rindzin Pelmo as a cherished surrogate mother who bolstered her own authority as a Buddhist adept in a community that valued mothers within the local religio-family structure. Thus, Rindzin Pelmo embodied the ideal path (progress toward Buddhist liberation) that many *trülku* and monks would have wished for their own mother and which the patriarchy (Labrang) would promote on a universal scale.

*The Lotus Vine* elaborates how Rindzin Pelmo encapsulated these desirable Buddhist ideals and attained authority as a proxy mother who helped Labrang maintain order on the grasslands by serving as a teacher of Buddhist practice. For example, even though she could not study the Buddhist sutras like her male *trülku* counterparts at Labrang did, the *Lotus Vine* illustrates how Rindzin Pelmo taught villagers Buddhist prayers and the *Lam Rim*, a foundational Geluk text that details the stages of the path to enlightenment. She led the villagers to say the Prayer of (Geluk sect founder) Tsongkhapa Lozang Drakpa and the Prayer of Refuge. And on one occasion, a local person named Bochung Pendé (exact identity unknown) learned from Rindzin Pelmo how to tame his mind by using the following method:

In order to control your mind, you should recite prayers,” Rindzin Pelmo said to Bochung Pendé. “My mind is in check,” he said.

Rindzin Pelmo said to him, “You go down [from Drakkar] and ask yourself, ‘What arises in my mind?’ and say 100 refuge mantras and then

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<sup>129</sup> Kapstein, “Mulian in the Land of Snows,” 359-62.

<sup>130</sup> See Ohnuma’s work in *Ties that Bind* for a description of this process.

come back up.” ...

Having done this, he came in front of me and said, “My mind is unsettled. I am not able to go from below Labrang to above Salar.”

“Oh, oh, this is it, you are not concentrating,” Rindzin Pelmo said.

“From now onwards, you have to see whether I or Södrak Rinpoche appear in your mind, and then say prayers and you will obtain a peaceful mind.”<sup>131</sup>

Zhangtön also lauded Rindzin Pelmo’s skills as a teacher who bestowed knowledge to others contained in the traditional Buddhist texts without having studied them. The *Lotus Vine* states:

Although Rindzin Pelmo did not study the great texts, due to the power of her wisdom she understood many crucial points of the teachings. She had a great attachment to the tradition of Tsongkhapa. On occasion she gave other teachings to those who requested them and she also granted the Khecari Goddess blessing for one or two people. In the face of Nyang Tsang *Trülku*’s request, she responded, ‘The lama of unflinching refuge and *Vajravārāhī* the great treasure endowed with compassion, because there is no place of refuge other than you, may you lead us to the celestial realm.’<sup>132</sup>

On top of performing rituals for those in need and serving as a teacher, Rindzin Pelmo also showed her authority in Gengya and Labrang by acting as a medical healer to those with serious ailments by using her Buddhist expertise. She brought stability to the community as

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<sup>131</sup> Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 200. bo chung pan de zer ba zhig la sems khug la kha ton re gyis gsung bar// nga'i sems khug 'dug zhus par// khyod mar song la nga sems la e 'char bltas nas skyabs 'gro ba rgya thon la yar shog gsung ba ltar byas te mdun du song nas// sems mi khug/ bla brang man chad/ za lar yan chad la song nas mi thup par 'dug zhus par// 'o 'o de yin khyod kyis sems khug pa ma red bsam shes pa red/ phyin chad nga 'am bsod brag rin po che sems la e 'char bltas nas gsol pa re thob//

<sup>132</sup> Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 199. gzhung chen la sbyangs pa ma mdzad kyang rtogs pa'i stobs kyis bstan pa'i gnad mkhyen pas rje'i ring lugs la thugs zhen shin tu che ba mdzad// gzhan gyi lung phran tshogs re zhus pa nam 'phrel du gnang// re gnyis tsam la mkha' spyod ma'i byin rlabs yang gnang 'dug nyang tshang sprul ba'i skus zhus ngor/ bslu med gtan gyi skyabs gnas bla ma dang// bartse chen thugs rje'i gter chen wa ra hi/ / kyod min re sa'i skyabs gzhana ma mchis pas/ mkha' spyod zhing du 'khrid par mdzad du gsol//

she cared for people as a mother often does for a sick child. For example, Rindzin Pelmo used various Buddhist rituals to heal laymen and women, such as when she cured a servant at Labrang who could not hear or speak. The Jamyang Zhepa told this servant to see Rindzin Pelmo at Drakkar for help with his sickness:

“He went there but because she was in solitary retreat at the time he could not go inside. The next day she gave mantras with a lock of her hair, a black medicinal substance, holy water vase, a protector’s knot and some incense. That night since he dreamed that his sleeve was full of lice, he became afraid. Because he was able to scream, a helper woke him up and said, “You were able to scream, weren’t you?” “Yes, I could.” By praying “Machik Lapdrön” his speech was liberated.<sup>133</sup>

Rindzin Pelmo also healed a girl from the nearby village of Lanak as well as another local woman afflicted with leprosy by using Machik Lapdrön’s *chö* ritual practice.

Rindzin Pelmo performed a *chö* ritual and gave holy water to a girl from Lanak who could not speak. Rindzin Pelmo told her, ‘Tonight, go home and sleep!’ She did exactly as she was told, and the next day she was able to speak!’ As for the woman with leprosy, Rindzin Pelmo put both her hands on the left and right side of the leper’s head and supported her. She said the name [Avalokiteshvara] along with Dharani mantras and blew a puff on the leper’s face. She also gave her a string of copper coins.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 201. bla brang lha sde'ai mi zhig ngag lkug nas kha nas sgra tsam yang ma thon pa la skyabs mgon mchog nas mkha' 'gro ma tshang gi mdun du song gsungs pa ltar der yong yang sku mtshams yin pas ma chud // phyi nyin nyid kyi dbu skra dang bsngags gul thun gcig bdug rgya dang bsrung mdud bum chu bcas gnan// de'i mtshan mo kho rang gi rmi lam du phu dung gi nang shig gis gang ba mthong bas skrak nas skad chen po bton pas zla bo zhig yod pas sang nas khyod kyis kha grags thub pa e red zer bar thub par 'dug byas nas ma gcig lab kyi sgron ma zhes gsol ba btab pas de phyin ngag grol//

<sup>134</sup> Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 201. La nag gi byis mo zhig kyang nag lkug pa la lus sbyin dang bum chu gnan do nub gnas khang nas nyol gsungs pa ltar byas pas phyi nyin legs par grol 'dug/ mdze mo zhig la yang phyag

Furthermore, in the same manner that she exercised authority in the community as a proxy mother by healing others and helping people to tame their own minds, Rindzin Pelmo played an essential role as a peacekeeper/advisor in Gengya as part of Labrang's strategy to secure its periphery. Zhangtön celebrates Rindzin Pelmo's authority as a peacekeeper based in Gengya that resembled the way that Jamyang Zhepa and others adjudicated disputes amidst the increased banditry and ongoing inter-monastery and grassland warfare during her lifetime. This shows how Rindzin Pelmo helped pacify Labrang's periphery from her position at Drakkar and that her actions epitomized Labrang's strategy to establish greater links to monastic and lay leaders in Labrang's surrounding communities. In addition, Zhangtön elaborates how locals and *trülku* visited Rindzin Pelmo at Drakkar and sought advice in personal matters leading to favorable results, i.e., a peaceful outcome.

In that way, from the power of her internal experience, many people assembled in front of her coming from all directions, and local bandits [robbing] Drakkar Monastery were eliminated. People afflicted with demons, in particular, sought her protection, and there was no one that was not liberated. Because well-known lineages of *trülku* lamas usually came to meet her, prosperity [blessings] came in this direction here. This land became an abode that brought auspiciousness to the earth through the happiness of one's self and the aspiration for others.<sup>135</sup>

Representing Rindzin Pelmo's authority as a surrogate mother who acted as a compassionate caretaker for the *sangha* and as a teacher, a healer and a peacekeeper

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gnyis kas mgo'i gyas gyon nas brten te mtshan dang gzung sngags gsungs shing zhal phu btab// dong tshe khron 'ga' ri yang gnan//

<sup>135</sup> Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 196. De ltar nang gi nyams bzhes kyi mthus phyogs thams cad nas mjal ba mang du 'dus shing dgon par dgra jag gi gnod pa rgyan chad// khyad par sri can gyi rigs khong la bskyabs pa mi thar ba med pa zhik 'dug bla chen grags can gyi rigs phal cher phebs pas phyogs 'dir yul la gyang chags// sa la bkra shis pa'i rang skyid gzhan smon gyi gnas su gyur//

correlates with Zhangtön's goal to constitute a tradition about the Gungru lineage and the lineage's prominent religio-temporal role at Drakkar in the nineteenth century. So, too, did showing how Rindzin Pelmo wielded her authority by calling for change about how future Gungru *trülku* should study Buddhist texts more as the next subsection discusses.

*Rindzin Pelmo as an advocate for future Gungru hierarchs*

Even though Rindzin Pelmo did not have any children of her own, the *Lotus Vine* legitimized her authority as a surrogate mother who sought to change the amount of time future Gungru *trülku* spent going to villages to perform rituals at the expense of studying Buddhist texts like men. Toward the end of her life as she discussed whether the Gungru lineage will reincarnate or not, Rindzin Pelmo wrote (for future Gungru *trülku* and their teachers) in one of her many first-person statements in the *Lotus Vine*: “When the next reincarnation is a child, absolutely do not take her to do village rituals.”<sup>136</sup> Although she did not elaborate on her request in the *Lotus Vine*, Könchok Gyatso's history of Drakkar (2008) confirmed why Rindzin Pelmo told her future reincarnates not to go to the villages to perform rituals.<sup>137</sup> Gyatso cites the short biography of Rindzin Pelmo's successor, the Fifth Gungru *trülku* Tenpé Wangmo, who stated that she “did not go to villages as a little girl until she was twenty years old and that I retained a tutor to study texts.”<sup>138</sup> Rindzin Pelmo wanted to bring about this change—a prime example of her authority in the Gungru lineage as her words mattered and were judged to be right—because performing rituals in the villages detracted from her studies of Buddhist texts. However, in addition to the time away from studying texts, perhaps Rindzin Pelmo wanted future Gungru *trülku* to avoid the burdens of interacting with local villagers, a conundrum that some Amdo *trülku* faced as Matthew Kapstein raises in his

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<sup>136</sup> Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 203. Chung dus grong chog la gtan nas ma 'khyer// Dkon mchog rgya mtsho, *rGan gya'i brag dkar*, 79.

<sup>137</sup> Dkon mchog rgya mtsho, *rGan gya'i brag dkar*, 79–80.

<sup>138</sup> Dkon mchog rgya mtsho, *rGan gya'i brag dkar*, 80–81.



study of the *namtar* of Dūjom Dorjé (late 19<sup>th</sup>, early 20<sup>th</sup> century). Kapstein shows that Dūjom Dorjé doubted the value of performing practices for villagers, in particular rites for families of the deceased. Dūjom Dorjé's *namtar* said that he felt “boxed in a pen with no freedom of movement” to bring in riches from the wealthy, whom Dūjom Dorjé said “cursed me” and “treated me like a servant.”<sup>139</sup> In the end, Dūjom Dorjé felt that the rites that he performed for others caused him to lie and “be full of avarice” and he eventually renounced being a *trülku*.

Moreover, in addition to not wanting to go into the villages at such a young age, Rindzin Pelmo also likely wanted to be known for more than being a stellar ritual performer, mantra reciter, and meditator—activities in which Tibetan women have earned authority throughout Tibetan history—as opposed to being learned in Buddhist texts like men.<sup>140</sup> That Rindzin Pelmo broached this subject with Zhangtön suggests that she felt the freedom to challenge the status quo. Or from Zhangtön's perspective, perhaps including this anecdote showcases Rindzin Pelmo's authority within his larger narrative framework that promoted a more liberal and diverse community at Labrang.

Along the lines of advocacy for her future Gungru *trülku*, Rindzin Pelmo, in another first-person dialogue attributed to her in the *Lotus Vine*, discussed her pain at being born a woman, a pain that linked her to other Tibetan women across the Tibetan plateau while also showcasing her freedom and authority to comment on her gendered status. Rindzin Pelmo responded to the plea of Labrang's Akhu Rinpoche that she be reborn as a woman at Drakkar by saying, “In that case, it would be good if a male hero comes because they can stay in each monastery. Because the monastery has good support, whatever that reincarnation would do, it

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<sup>139</sup> See Kapstein's “ATulku's Miserable Lot” in *Amdo Tibetans in Transition*, 106, 108.

<sup>140</sup> Gyatso and Havnevik, *Women in Tibet*, 18–20.

would be fine. But a heroine (female) is not good. If a little girl arrives, it is nauseating.”<sup>141</sup> Strikingly, Rindzin Pelmo’s words parallel those of seventeenth-century nun Orgyen Chökyi of Dolpo (present-day Nepal), who in her autobiography equated the female body with the miseries of suffering, and Sera Khandro, the famed treasure revealer from Golok, who in her writings often claimed to be of an “inferior female body.”<sup>142</sup> Sera Khandro mentioned her “inferior body” fifty-nine times in her autobiography, often in dialogues with *dakinis* (*khandroma*) trying to encourage her on the path of treasure revelation.<sup>143</sup> Like Rindzin Pelmo a few decades before her, Sera Khandro wrote, “If I were to transform into a male hero with a supreme body, I would certainly accomplish great benefit for all beings who have been my mother.”<sup>144</sup> Sarah Jacoby writes that if Sera Khandro’s focus on the “lowly nature of her female body was a rhetorical device that occasioned other powerful figures’ praise,” this position “was also a reality.” Jacoby notes that Sera Khandro’s emphasis on her body also reflected the gender inequality that remained for her as a lay woman just as it did for Rindzin Pelmo even as an ordained *trülku* who could not practice and study Buddhism like men.<sup>145</sup>

Rindzin Pelmo’s varied roles and functions as a surrogate mother demonstrate the considerable effect of her authority in the monastic and lay community at Gengya and Labrang. Significantly, the relationships described in numerous anecdotes and miracle tales provide the fabric of Zhangtön’s master narrative that promoted a reincarnate community (Labrang) that accepted and needed a compassionate mother-like figure—Rindzin Pelmo—at Drakkar. What’s remarkable is that over a century later, similar legitimating and narrative

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<sup>141</sup> Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 201. de lta na dpa' bo zhig yong na bzang rgyu red grwa sa re la bsdad na chog// rten bzang bas gang byas kyang legs po yongs rgya red dpa' mo mi bzang// byis mo zhig yong na skyuk bro po byas yong// de 'dra'i ched du a lags gling tshang la 'dul ba'i gleng 'bum mnyan pa yin gsungs//

<sup>142</sup> Schaeffer, *Himalayan Hermitess*, 34 and 74.

<sup>143</sup> Jacoby, *Love and Liberation*, 133.

<sup>144</sup> Jacoby, *Love and Liberation*, 131.

<sup>145</sup> Jacoby, *Love and Liberation*, 133. Jacoby writes that Tibetans “imported misogynist attitudes toward women and nuns in Indian Buddhist scriptures into their own conceptions of gender categories,” including Tibetan nuns “being considered a lesser field of merit than monks.”

strategies regarding the metaphor of Buddhist motherhood provided the fabric of the obituary written in 2013 about the Sixth Gungru *trülku* Kelzang Drölma as the next section shows.

#### **Part IV**

#### **Re-constituting Kelzang Drölma's Authority as a Mother Figure in her Obituary**

Despite the large gap of over a century, the 14-page obituary written in Chinese about the Sixth Gungru *trülku* Kelzang Drölma in 2013 exhibits the vital legitimating and narrative strategies that illustrate her charismatic authority—strategies first established in the *Lotus Vine namtar* about Rindzin Pelmo. With no confirmed author or publication history, Kelzang's obituary, like the *Lotus Vine* before it, strikingly presents Kelzang as a reincarnation of the "Great Mother" Machik, or (Chin. *zunmu majiulazhong* 尊母玛久拉仲) and as someone who acted as surrogate mother (Chin. *fomu* 佛母,) in the local community in a 21<sup>st</sup>-century context in Labrang and Gengya. (Kelzang's son Dépön gave me an electronic copy of Kelzang's obituary in July 2013, a factor analyzed in Chapter 5 in relation to writing Kelzang's *namtar*). In this light, the obituary "reconstitutes a tradition" about Kelzang as a Buddhist mother virtuoso who helped foster unity in Labrang after the Cultural Revolution—just like the *Lotus Vine* did with Rindzin Pelmo in the nineteenth century.<sup>146</sup>

Thus, the *Lotus Vine* proved to be a valid model for the obituary to legitimate Kelzang's authority in her obituary written by an anonymous author over a century later. Due to its meticulous detail about Machik Lapdrön, the Gungru lineage and local history, the obituary's author was likely a member of the monastic establishment or within the Chinese Consultative Political People's Conference (CPPCC) of the PRC government where Kelzang worked since 1961.<sup>147</sup> Either way, Kelzang's obituary linked her to the Gungru lineage's past, the lineage's present and to its future in Amdo and in the PRC as the Seventh Gungru *trülku*

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<sup>146</sup> See Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge*, 12. Makley, *The Violence of Liberation*, discusses how *trülku* who once maintained great power assuming many different roles in-and-around Labrang, faced a new level of status within the new "father" PRC state.

<sup>147</sup> Two people in Labrang and one in the United States suggested that the obituary is likely a PRC government sponsored narrative since the first few pages of the document resembled an official government presentation.

prepares to return to Drakkar perhaps by 2021. Just like the *Lotus Vine*, motherhood—and the authorizing power of its charisma with others—proved to be the linchpin of her story starring Machik Lapdrön.

*Re-adapting a mother's authority as Machik Lapdrön*

Likely taking a cue from the *Lotus Vine* of the nineteenth century, the author of Kelzang's obituary prominently features Machik Lapdrön at the outset of the text. In fact, the obituary includes a lengthy and detailed biographical section about Machik right after the opening segment that detailed Kelzang's 35 km funeral procession in January 2013 from Labrang to Drakkar and before any further mention of Kelzang's life. This strategic placement illustrates Machik's significance as a religious and temporal symbol and also as a vital authorizing referent to legitimate Kelzang's authority after the destructions of the Cultural Revolution including Drakkar and Labrang monasteries.<sup>148</sup>

Whereas the *Lotus Vine* opens by beseeching Machik saying, “Machik out of great love you always protect the sacred site of Drakkar, the home of the distinguished victorious mother *khandroma*”—words that can be interpreted as both a religious and temporal plea for help when Zhangtön wrote the *Lotus Vine*—the obituary adopts a more didactic tone.<sup>149</sup> The obituary's section on Machik linked the Gungru lineage's authority to Machik stating:

The successive generations of the [four-century old] Gungru Yeshé *Khandroma* lineage is a reincarnate lineage of Machik the Supreme Mother of Tibetan Buddhism and the founder of the chö Buddhist practice. The chö Buddhist practice originated from Padampa Sanggyé who is from south India. Machik is one of the most famous female tantric Tibetan Buddhist

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<sup>148</sup> Slobodnik “Destruction and Revival,” 9.

<sup>149</sup> Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 181-182.

practitioners in Tibetan history and is the only woman in Tibetan history to establish a tradition; this is rarity in human religious history.<sup>150</sup>

Furthermore, the author includes more detailed information about Machik and the spread of the chö tradition that the *Lotus Vine* did not. The obituary mentions:

As for the chö tradition, by using the unique teaching method and having a distinct practice, it became distinguished from other traditions in Tibetan Buddhism. Machik Lapdrön not only deeply influenced the various schools of Tibetan Buddhist thought, her teachings were also popular in Tibetan areas and had a huge influence among Tibetans—and Tibetan society and livelihood—such as the sky burial being the most popular way to bury the dead. The custom of sky burial arose in Tibetan areas and the fact that it spread is directly due to Machik and the chö tradition.<sup>151</sup>

In another key move that resembled the legitimating strategies of the *Lotus Vine* or what could be interpreted as “reconstituting the tradition” established by the *Lotus Vine*, the obituary represents Kelzang’s authority as a renowned practitioner of Machik’s chö practice. While the *Lotus Vine* shows how the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo studied chö with the famed Södrak Könchok Gyatso *trülku* of Labrang and then became a well-known teacher of chö herself, the obituary illustrates how Kelzang, too, studied with top teachers as a young girl. Kelzang recited chö in 1946 at Kumbum Monastery near Xining with the Tenth Panchen Lozang Chökyi Gyeltsen (1938–1989) in attendance. The author quotes her teacher the Lagu

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<sup>150</sup> Kelzang’s Obituary, 2-3. 历代光日益西堪召玛为藏传佛教尊母玛久拉仲的转世世系，玛久拉仲一为藏传佛教息解派的创建者，息解派源于南印度著名僧人帕丹巴桑杰，由藏族著名的女密宗大师玛久拉仲所创立，是藏传佛教史上唯一由女性创立的一个宗派，这在人类宗教史上尚属罕见。

<sup>151</sup> Kelzang’s Obituary, 2-3. 该宗派，以自己独特的教法义理和别具风格的修持方法，成为藏传佛教中独树一帜的宗派。她不仅对藏传佛教诸宗派产生过深刻影响，而且曾几度风靡整个藏区在藏族社会生活中产生过巨大影响，天葬是本民族最普及的丧葬方式，天葬习俗在藏区的产生和传播直接归功于玛久拉仲及其息解觉域法，在全世界唯有藏族有此习俗。

*trülku* Dorjé Jikmé Gyatso (1877–1949) praising Kelzang and linking her to Machik, the “owner of this great teaching.”

Kelzang was able to recite from memory Machik Lapdrön’s composed text [*The Conduct and Logic of chö*, *xijiejaoyujiaofa yilidapin*, 息解觉域教法义理大品] and religious classics. In 1946 Lagu Rinpoché Dorjé Jikmé Gyatso performed a Kalachakra Ceremony at Kumbum. At that time, the Tenth Panchen Lama and other reincarnate figures, including Kelzang sat in the front of the hall. [At the *kālacakra*], he [Lagu] told the *khandroma*, who was only ten years old, to recite chö. After she finished, Lagu let her sit next to him, and from that time, he started to teach chö to the reincarnates who were assembled there [including the Tenth Panchen]. After the teachings ended, Lagu held her hand and said, “Today I have returned this chö practice back to the owner of this great teaching.”<sup>152</sup>

However, in order to understand the full effect of Kelzang’s authority as Machik in Labrang it is imperative to unpack the obituary’s most stunning adaptation of the *Lotus Vine* that featured the metaphor of Machik acting as a mother of elite Amdo *trülku* as her figurative sons. Kelzang’s obituary states:

In [Machik’s] biography, the author said, “Her disciples together are boundless.” She is really proud of her 18 favorite disciples, and so forth, including her second son, “To Ning Sang Gu,” [Tönyön Samdru] and “Dong Da E Ge Ang Xiu,” [Dongdé Ngak Wangchuk] who is the Jamyang

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<sup>152</sup> Kelzang’s Obituary, 6. 能背诵始祖空行母玛久拉仲撰著的《息解觉域教法义理大品》等教法经典，此为觉域法的根本教法。一九四六年多杰强久美嘉措（拉阔）仁波切在塔尔寺举行时轮金刚灌顶大法会，届时聚集十世班禅等金座大活佛在前厅，仁波切当众点十岁的光日堪召玛祈颂息解觉域法开场。祈颂完觉域法后多杰强久美嘉措（拉阔）仁波切让堪召玛就做与自己身边，给众活佛授权觉域大法，授受完毕，多杰强久美嘉措（拉阔）仁波切拉着佛母之手扬言说道：“我今将息解觉域大法归还给了大法的主人了。”

Zhepa's previous incarnation; "Shao Dai Jiangnai" [Dröldé Gyelwé Jungné] who is the Dewa's previous reincarnation, and "Ro sai Yang Zhen" [Jo sras] who is the Setsang reincarnate at Terlung.<sup>153</sup>

The *Lotus Vine*'s passage as studied in the first section is as follows:

Furthermore, a reliable source states that Machik's first son, Dongdé Ngak Wangchuk, is the Jamyang Zhepa. [Her second son], Dröldé Gyelwé Jungné, is Détri Rinpoché and [her third son] Tönyön Samdrup is Tuken. Mother and sons came together here in this region, blessed it and hid many treasures [*gter ma*] here, and so forth. And similarly, the Jamyang Zhepa founded [Labrang] Tashikyil.<sup>154</sup>

Just as the *Lotus Vine* passage bolstered the Fourth Gungru's authority as a heroic mother who represented the unity of Amdo and elite Amdo *trülku* in the chaotic nineteenth century at Labrang, Kelzang's obituary does the same over a century later in the wake of the Cultural Revolution. Linking Kelzang to these three Amdo *trülku* legitimizes her authority with a revived Labrang *trülku* establishment that maintained many religious and temporal roles in Gengya and Labrang within the new PRC government (See Chapter 4). Moreover, this tactic helps to legitimate Kelzang's authority as an exemplar of the unity and reconciliation in Amdo and throughout Tibetan areas after the Cultural Revolution.

Therefore, to better reflect the present conditions in Labrang and across Amdo, the obituary replaced the Détri *trülku* of the *Lotus Vine* with Dewa and included the Setsang

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<sup>153</sup> Kelzang's Obituary, 3. 其传记中写道：“她的徒众与天共齐，无边无垠”，众弟子中有尊母次子托宁桑珠，有“东代额个昂秀”[加木央大师前世]，“召代江乃”[德哇仓前世]，“柔赛央真”[赛仓活佛]等十八位得意门生，众门徒学成各自为业，弘扬息解觉域法，遍及整个雪域高原。

<sup>154</sup> Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 205. de yang yum chen lab kyi sgröl ma'i sras stong sde ngag gi dbang phyug ni kun mkhyen bla ma yin cing grol sde rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas sde khri rin po che dang/ thod snyon bsam 'grub ni rje thu'u bkwan pa yin par tshad ma'i lung las gsungs la yum sras rnam lhan cig phyogs 'dir phebs nas byin gyis brlabs te gter sbed pa sogs gnang ba bzhin kun mkhyen chen bos bkra shis 'khyil phyag 'debs mdzad//

*trülku* from nearby Terlung (Labrang's old rival) in place of the Tuken of Gönlung. This switch likely reflected the changed circumstances in which the Détri and Tuken no longer maintained close religious and temporal ties with the Gungru lineage and with Labrang as they did in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, linking Kelzang to the prestigious Jamyang Zhepa, Dewa and Setsang *trülku* connects her authority to the present *trülku* establishment and by extension to the PRC in which all of these *trülku* including Kelzang now operated; the status of *trülku* changed within the PRC as Chapter 4 describes.<sup>155</sup> For example, the Sixth Jamyang Zhepa Lozang Jikmé (1947-present) still wields political, religious and social influence in the Tibetan community as a lay married government official based in Lanzhou, Gansu and in Beijing; he visits Labrang once a month and offers Buddhist teachings across Amdo (See Chapters 3 and 4). Kelzang maintained a close relationship with the current Setsang *trülku*, who was 82 at the time of this writing in 2021.

This first subsection demonstrates how Kelzang's obituary, like the *Lotus Vine*, utilized the right maternal symbol of Machik the Great Mother to legitimate Kelzang's authority in Gengya and Labrang as both an elite practitioner and a symbol of temporal unity. As part of the obituary's goal to reconstitute a tradition about the Gungru lineage and the times in which she lived, Machik came to represent both the continuity in the four-century old Gungru lineage and also the post-Cultural Revolution period in Gengya and Labrang. The next subsection describes how the obituary lauds Kelzang for performing the right actions or deeds as a needed and valued surrogate mother among this audience of *trülku*, monks, nuns and laity in Labrang and Gengya after the Cultural Revolution.

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<sup>155</sup> Yang, *Xunhua*, 112.



*Presenting Kelzang as a Surrogate Mother of the Masses in Gengya and Labrang*

While the obituary does not elaborate Kelzang's role as a practitioner of Cakrasamvara—even though the text briefly mentions that she practiced at the Drakkar Cave and at nearby Lokyatün like her Gungru predecessors—Kelzang's obituary presents her authority as a mother of the masses like the *Lotus Vine*. Along these lines, the obituary extols Kelzang for performing numerous activities or good deeds in the monastic and lay communities in Gengya, Labrang and across Amdo. These activities include rebuilding Drakkar in the 1980s, managing two nunneries in Labrang, donating to Machik's monastery in the Tibet Autonomous Region, acting as a teacher and solving numerous local grassland disputes around Gengya, as will be explained below and also in Chapter 4.

However, the significance of these events for how the obituary presents and legitimates Kelzang's authority, while important from the perspective of Buddhist ritual efficacy and interaction with monks, nuns and the laity, must also be interpreted from the vantage point of the post-Cultural Revolution period in Amdo. In other words, Kelzang's actions carry a significant temporal meaning in the Gengya and Labrang community that, once again, reconstitutes the tradition first established in the *Lotus Vine* master narrative about the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo. Recall how the *Lotus Vine*, as shown in the third section of this chapter, describes how Rindzin Pelmo provided rituals for the laity, acted as a caretaker for the *sangha*, was a Buddhist teacher and a medical healer in Gengya. Now, Kelzang's obituary depicts her helping to maintain peace, harmony and security in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. Or this is how the obituary's author, perhaps a member of the monastic establishment and/or the PRC government, would want to reconstitute the tradition around the Gungru lineage acting as an agent of peace in this rebuilding community. Accordingly, the obituary illustrates Kelzang's authority as a *trülku* who like her predecessors took the initiative to rebuild Drakkar through the help of the Jamyang Zhepa

and the PRC government. The obituary describes this restoration process that began in the 1980s:

In 1986, the *Khandroma* brought Gengya lay representatives with her to go to Lanzhou where she sat before the Jamyang Zhepa to apply for permission to repair the main hall of Drakkar monastery. The *Khandroma* also applied to the government for 100 cubic meters of wood to build the monastery main hall, and in two years (1988) the monastery's main hall was built.<sup>156</sup>

Furthermore, Kelzang's obituary touts her authority as the right person as a *trülku* to manage two nunneries from two different Tibetan Buddhist sects (Gelukpa and Nyingma) under trying logistical circumstances in Labrang in the 1990s. These circumstances, according to the obituary, included sectarian conflict between the local nuns who did not have a permanent place to build and establish a consistent Buddhist practice.

The Jamyang Zhepa in 1994 entrusted Kelzang to raise money to build Chougya (Jiujia 九甲) Nunnery. But the nuns were not very rigorous and were also impoverished. Kelzang carried a heavy burden and made a sincere wish to build a nunnery, but she experienced many hardships. It took 13 years before two nunneries from two sects—the Geluk nunnery Géden Tengyéling (Ch: Danjielin 丹杰林) and the Nyingma nunnery Lapsun Dargyé Ling nunnery (Ch: Lasen Dajielin 拉森达杰林)—were built. These two nunneries had over 120 people living there year-round, and each nunnery built a sutra hall. Nowadays, many Buddhist worshippers continually come to make offerings to the nuns helping to ensure their

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<sup>156</sup> Kelzang's Obituary 7. 1986 年佛母携甘加僧俗代表前往兰州嘉木央坐前申请重修寺院大殿并获准，佛母又向国家申请了建寺用的 100 方木材，历时两年 88 年建成了寺院大殿。

livelihood. The atmosphere of [each] nunnery is genuine and sincere with incense burning vigorously. Each nunnery's management is in good order, and the current [management] standard in these nunneries is magnificent and unprecedented [in their history].<sup>157</sup>

Moreover, Kelzang's work in the lay and monastic community as a problem-solver and a peacemaker elucidates her authority as the obituary details how she solved several deadly grassland disputes beginning in the 1980s. This list that includes the exact number of deaths incurred in each dispute shows that Kelzang and the Gungru lineage still held jurisdiction and appreciable authority, i.e., she maintained trust with local herders who counted on her to solve these disputes. The obituary states:

Because of the increase in animal output [in the 1980s], grassland disputes between Gengya and neighboring villages and between villages in different provinces (Gansu and Qinghai) occurred and many people died. The disputes enveloped Gengya in a dark cloud of uncertainty and violence. In order to [preserve] this herding area's peace and to prevent further loss of husbands and fathers, the Gungru *Khandroma* had the power to rally support among the people. She used her kindness and energy to take the initiative herself to mediate the grassland conflict and end the dispute. Because they were touched by her leadership ability and the power of her strong personality, the dispute ended peacefully for both sides and the

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<sup>157</sup> Kelzang's Obituary, 7. 为此，1994年嘉木样大师委托光日仓活佛筹建九甲尼姑寺，拉卜楞尼姑僧众有宁玛派和格鲁派共有两百多人众，两派都无正规诵经场所，也无完整的规章制度，面对如此松散、贫穷的尼姑僧众，活佛担此重担，发大愿心，着手建设，历经千辛万苦，历时十三年，建成了两座派系尼姑寺寺院，即格鲁派尼姑寺丹杰林与宁玛派尼姑寺拉森达杰林，拉卜楞庞大的僧尼群体纳入规范的国家民族宗教寺院体系，并制定寺院内部各项管理制度，建立了规范的寺院管理。两寺常住僧众各达到一百二十多人，两派僧尼有了各自的经堂，现如今香客施主络绎不绝，供养不断，众僧尼生活有了保障，寺院道风淳正，香火旺盛，寺院管理井然有序，管理规范，盛况空前。

matter was resolved with her even-tempered reason.<sup>158</sup> ... In the 1980s, a dispute developed between Gengya township and Qinghai's Gangtsa township gradually leading to bloodshed where two people died. At the invitation of the local area government and a group of herders, the Gungru *Khandroma* and the Tenth Panchen Lama helped mediate between Gengya County in Gansu and Gangtsa Township (in Qinghai) for three years. They confronted the hardships and were fair and impartial to both sides.

Another passage details the prevalence of these disputes across Gengya and in the region:

Since the 1980s, the Gungru *Khandroma* successfully mediated several grassland disputes, including a dispute in Sangkhok, (Ch: Sangke, 桑科) south of Labrang) and Doba, (Ch: Duowa, 多哇,) Township in Qinghai where two people were killed. One person died in fighting between Gengya Ringön, (Ch: Renai, 仁爱) and Qinghai Gartsé (Ch: Guaerze, 瓜尔则). There was a dispute between Gengya Zhölkor (Ch: Xike, 西科) and Pudi (Ch: Fudi, 伏地) outside of Labrang, but no one died. She mediated a dispute between Gengya Township and Hortsang Mardang, (Ch: Madang, 麻当) where one person died, and also many other disputes.<sup>159</sup>

Kelzang's obituary also elaborates her distinct role as a healer and benefactor in the greater Labrang community and across Tibetan regions. For example, the obituary shows

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<sup>158</sup> Kelzang's Obituary, 7-8. 为了这片地区的安宁祥和，为了更多的牧民家庭不再失去孩子、丈夫、父亲，光日仓活佛发挥她在群众的精神号召力，用一颗仁慈之心，积极、主动地参与甘加地区每件草场纠纷和矛盾的调解，向参与争端的双方晓之以理、动之以情，在她的循循善导和人格魅力的感召下，争端双方都心平气和、理性的接受调解，化解了事态。上世纪八十年代，甘加乡和青海岗察乡发生草山纠纷造成冲突，酿成血案（二条命案），在当地政府和牧民群众邀请下，光日仓活佛与十世班禅共同参与调解的青海岗察乡与甘肃甘加乡历经三年之久，不辞辛苦，公正严明，双方永结友好，一笑泯恩仇，从此换来了双方地界长达三十多年的祥和。

<sup>159</sup> Kelzang's Obituary, 8. 自八十年代以来，光日仓活佛亲自参与调处成功的草场纠纷还有：甘肃桑科乡和青海多哇乡的草山纠纷（两条命案）、甘加仁爱和青海瓜尔则的草山纠纷（一条命案）、甘加西科和伏地的草山纠纷（无命案）、甘加乡和麻当乡的草山纠纷（一条命案）、还有诸多甘加乡内部纠纷、桑科乡内部纠纷、卡加道乡内部纠纷的调节并一一调和化解成功。

how she cared for those living in her native community of Gyelwo, Rebgong, Qinghai, (Ch: Jiawu 加吾) and also Machik's home monastery of Zangrikharmar in southern Tibet. This illustrates how she not only strengthened her link to her home herding village where she was chosen as the Sixth Gungru in the early 1940s, but how she also became a benefactor to Machik's monastery. The audiences in these places welcomed Kelzang back after many years:

During the summers in 2002, 2007 and 2009, the *Khandroma* was invited three times to return to her homeland in Jiawu, a place where she had left over 50 years before. The Jiawu tribe's troops greeted her with a grand welcome and she went in person to greet every family.<sup>160</sup>

The following passage is about Kelzang at Zangrikharmar:

In 2010, *Khandroma* (Kelzang) raised money in Gengya and in Jiawu and in the tenth month of the lunar calendar, representatives from these two places, *Khandroma* and her son Dépön Tashi, and a disciple named Jinpa accompanied student Tenpé Wangmo Gyatso to Zangrikharmar to make offerings and to teach and spread chö teachings more broadly.<sup>161</sup>

On top of her role as a benefactor and healer, Kelzang's obituary shows that she was a teacher who helped monastics and others along the Buddhist path, including as her health failed toward the end of her life. Here is one example from the obituary that describes Kelzang, who was sick at the time, imparting wisdom in her role as a teacher in the community (and also as a member of the PRC government) at the annual *chö* festival in 2009

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<sup>160</sup> Kelzang's Obituary, 9. 2002 夏季、2007 年夏季、2009 年夏季前后三次佛母应邀回归了阔别五十多年的故乡青海加吾，加吾部落盛大阵容迎接佛母，佛母亲临加吾部落每一个家庭。

<sup>161</sup> Kelzang's Obituary, 10. 2010 年佛母在甘加和加吾部落筹集资金，十月委派两地民众数名和佛母次子德红扎西、门生金巴护送佛母高徒旦巴嘉措前往西藏桑日卡玛寺经行供养和圣地觉域法的普及。

held at her estate. She even scolded her students as a teacher would his/her students or as a mother might her own children:

Kelzang was propped up with a crutch under her arms and she benevolently greeted every visitor who came to see her at the *chö* festival. As she became extremely fatigued during the festival, she only laid down after the last visitor left and she showed up again [to the festival] the next day. While Kelzang lay on her couch, [Kelzang] did not resign from trying to solve the local grassland disputes. She advised the monks, nuns and the laity gathered there to not participate in politics. She told them to not instigate and induce any harmful activities and the *Khandroma* admonished the monks and nuns that the benefits of Buddhism must in turn be of benefit to the people and that the goal of Buddhism is to benefit humanity. Buddhist figures must take it upon themselves to promote human happiness and to lead prayers for the prosperity and stability of the great masses.<sup>162</sup>

Finally, Kelzang's obituary legitimates her authority as a surrogate mother who bestowed love and care for her followers as she neared her death and even afterward, a literary tactic that resembled the ending of the *Lotus Vine*. One such verse from Kelzang's obituary uses imagery that describes her remaining to protect others:

Mother, you have not left! Your appearance and smiling face have already been engraved in the pupil of everyone's eye. Whenever the sun rises, we will think of You and recall your love. Our long life is like an endless river and there is always a ray of warm sunlight shining on us. That

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<sup>162</sup> Kelzang's Obituary, 10. 又拄着腋下杖慈祥地为每人摸顶，一天下来佛母身体疲惫不堪，信众走完便一头躺下，次日又一如既往。卧榻期间，不辞辛劳的调节民间纠纷，集结信众和僧尼劝阻不要参与时世政治当中，不要被煽动和诱导所迷惑，实施不良举动，佛母告诫僧众和僧尼：佛教的利益必须与人民的利益结合起来，佛教的宗旨是要造福人类，佛教人士当以人间和平和幸福为己任。

warm light is like gold cast in our heart that lingers from age to age. Mother, you have not left! Every time the darkness falls, a bright moon lingers over the heads of our bed, and the love that you showed us for a century reappears in the light. In the same way that smoke [from guns] lingers [as] in the movies and television, your body image is like that of a Venerable Mother surrounded by bright light who lingers for a long time and descends slowly from the top of the cloud. You are the benefactor to whom we will sing our praises forever.<sup>163</sup>

This paean corresponds with the end of the *Lotus Vine* that relied on the figure of Machik Lapdrön to legitimate Rindzin Pelmo's passing and the telling of her *namtar* in the nineteenth century. The *Lotus Vine* states that the "sweet name of the Great Mother Machik Lapdrön prevails in all directions and is the basis of the *namtar* of Rindzin Pelmo whose good reputation is announced by the Gods."<sup>164</sup>

### Concluding Thoughts

Despite a 116-year gap, Kelzang's obituary exhibits the vital legitimating and narrative strategies that illustrate her authority—strategies first established in Zhangtön's *Lotus Vine* about the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo in the nineteenth century as this chapter focuses. As part of Zhangtön's project to establish a tradition about his teacher's exemplarity as part of a vibrant Sino-Tibetan borderland community at Labrang, Zhangtön relied on the metaphor of motherhood to craft what I label the Gungru master narrative. He specifically

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<sup>163</sup> Kelzang's Obituary, 11-12. 佛母你没走，您的音容笑貌已镌刻在每一个人的明眸中，每当太阳升起的时候我们会想您，想起佛母的爱，在我们生命的长河里始终有一缕灿烂的暖阳照耀，那暖阳象金子一样浇铸在我们的心头萦绕在我们心头生生世世。佛母你没走，每当夜幕降临，就会有一轮明月萦绕在我们的床头，那月光里会浮现出你一个世纪对我们的牵念，影视般的硝烟中你的身影像尊母身带光环伫立于云翔顶缓缓飘落的情景，你是我们永远歌颂不止的恩人。

<sup>164</sup> Zhang ston, *The Lotus Vine*, 207. yum chen lab kyi sgrol ma'i mtshan snyan po//bsgrags pa min par phyogs kun khyab pa ni// grags snyan lha yis bsgrags pa'i rnam thar yin//

relied on the right type of mother figure—a compassionate protector figure with whom his male audience at Labrang would accept because this mother-figure espoused Buddhist discourse such as universal compassion. Moreover, Zhangtön sought to edify Rindzin Pelmo’s disciples and other Gungru hierarchs of her virtuosity in practicing *chö* founded by the Great Mother Machik. In this vein, Zhangtön also extolled Rindzin Pelmo as the goddess *Vajravārāhī* who performed the Cakrasamvara tantric ritual and assumed myriad roles in both the monastic and lay community in Gengya and Labrang.

But I suggest that narrative and legitimizing strategies referring to the Great Mother Machik and a mother *goddess*—or the type of principle that hagiographers like Zhangtön use to rally and unite a larger community—also helped to create a tradition about Rindzin Pelmo that reveals her considerable authority in a wider religio-social context. Promoting Rindzin Pelmo as such likely resonated with members of the patriarchy at Labrang and across Amdo where some literary evidence suggests that monastic sons in Amdo worried about the fate (rebirth) of their actual mothers as they neared their death; Rindzin Pelmo represented the high standard of Buddhist exemplarity for many to aspire to, in particular as the Fifth Gungru Könchok Tenpé Wangmo arrived at Drakkar in 1897. Significantly, this metaphor of motherhood also enabled Zhangtön to glorify his teacher and the endangered community around Labrang in which they both lived, suggesting a greater religio-temporal meaning to unpacking the effect of Rindzin Pelmo’s authority at Drakkar. This occurred during a chaotic time of increased inter-monastery warfare in Amdo, the arrival of groups of Muslims in Labrang’s periphery that challenged the political and economic status quo and other destabilizing events and incidents around Labrang that happened during Rindzin Pelmo’s lifetime. In this vein, Zhangtön deployed the metaphor to legitimate Rindzin Pelmo’s authority as a figure who healed divisions and promoted peace and security on these contentious Amdo grasslands.



Over a century later and in the aftermath of another chaotic period around Labrang, this metaphor of Buddhist motherhood still resonates as exemplified by Kelzang's obituary written in Chinese in 2013 and likely within the PRC government structure. The *Lotus Vine's* template to legitimate authority in the Gungru lineage has proven to be a useful archetype for the Sixth Gungru Kelzang's obituary that strikingly legitimated Kelzang's authority as Machik, as a *khandroma* and a surrogate albeit in the post-Cultural Revolution era. The unknown obituary writer composed a narrative—or reconstituted parts of the Gungru master narrative—that presented Kelzang as a Buddhist mother figure both as an exemplar practitioner/teacher and as a beacon of peace, unity and reconciliation in the aftermath of the chaotic Cultural Revolution period.

Just as powerful today and going forward is what Kelzang's obituary does not discuss in detail: Kelzang's forced laicization in 1958 and her subsequent marriages and motherhood of four children. While the text mentions that she attended college in Gansu (1958-1961), joined the CPPCC in 1961 in Labrang (Xiahe) and that Drakkar was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution where Kelzang worked for ten years as a farm laborer, the obituary glosses over the major impacts of Kelzang's laicization, i.e., what actually happened to her during this period.<sup>165</sup> The omission of this story is not surprising given the high stakes of producing her obituary let alone a possible *namtar* about her life (See Chapter 5). Nor is the omission surprising given the present political realities in the PRC and the Tibetan aversion to mentioning actual mothers in texts about Buddhist figures like Kelzang. At least two contemporary stories about Tibetan women, including the Samding Dorjé Pakmo female *trülku* and Treasure Revealer Taré Lhamo in Golok, Amdo, did not focus on having a family (or becoming a mother) or the perils and changes wrought by the Cultural Revolution. In Taré Lhamo's case, she is portrayed in her *namtar* as a Buddhist heroine who was

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<sup>165</sup> Kelzang's Obituary, 7.

“unscarred” by the chaos of this period, according to Holly Gayley’s analysis discussed more in later chapters.<sup>166</sup>

But fieldwork in Gengya and Labrang during the interregnum before the Seventh Gungru returned to Drakkar—and Kelzang’s story becomes codified in a possible *namtar* (See Chapter 5)—has revealed the value in highlighting the fascinating story and the voices that will get left out. This heretofore untold story shows the scars within the community raising fascinating questions about the construction of authority on the ground—and people’s various strategies and doubts contained therein—against the narrative and legitimation strategies proffered by a text. In other words, alternative voices in the local monastic and lay community also have a big stake in this fight to represent and legitimate Kelzang Drölma’s authority to best understand how this audience judged her actions and also her insignia as right or not. And these voices who consist mainly of lower-level monks and local lay men and women that do not often appear in texts like a *namtar*—in other words the primary constituency for Kelzang—show that the effect of her authority was definitely not as automatic or as seamless as a *namtar* or any hagiographic text would make it out to be. This is particularly true during the first part of Kelzang’s life, including when she was selected as the Sixth Gungru in the early 1940s amidst rampant grassland warfare and local rivalry and power struggles. The next chapter details the fraught story of how Kelzang’s selection—and a challenge to her legitimacy as the Gungru *trülku*—were borne.

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<sup>166</sup> Diemberger, *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty*, 299–312. Diemberger recounts the oral version of the life story of the current Samding Dorjé Pakmo as told by the *trülku*’s sister. See Gayley, *Love Letters from Golok*, 78-83, 104-115 for a good analysis about the details that Taré Lhamo’s *namtar* does not mention the hardships of the Maoist period before and during the Cultural Revolution.

## Chapter 2

### Authority Threatened: Difficult Transition, War and Doubt Imbue Kelzang's Authority

Gönpotso's warning to her mother Kelzang Drölma “not to tell [me] everything and that I should leave [Kelzang's office] right now” in 2010 garnered greater significance after Kelzang's death in 2013.<sup>167</sup> This is because as the PRC published Kelzang's obituary that legitimated her authority as a mother-like figure as the *Lotus Vine* did the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo (Chapter 1), and people wrangled over what to include in the Sixth Gungru *trülku* Kelzang's *namtar* (Chapter 5), oral accounts from across Amdo revealed a far more complex story about her. And while the thrust of these stories has centered on what happened to Kelzang before, during and after the Cultural Revolution—when she became a laicized *trülku* and a mother who worked in the PRC government, as later chapters will show—many people also told stories about Kelzang's difficult earlier years.

For example, I met with people in Kelzang's native Jiawu, Rebong, Qinghai, a high grassland herding area located near the current Gansu-Qinghai border (est 1929), that for four decades in the early twentieth century engaged in a deadly grassland dispute with Gengya. During one interview at a *manikang* temple in Jiawu, a small group talked with me about how the dispute between Jiawu and Gengya (located 60 km from Jiawu) over the use of grassland called the Hualiqiha 化里其哈 near the Qinghai-Gansu border resulted in 100 deaths, a major loss of livelihood and influenced the selection of Kelzang as the Sixth Gungru *trülku* in the early 1940s.<sup>168</sup> On another occasion, some monks at Drakkar also told me about how a young girl from Rebong named Damtsik Drölma (1938-2010) arrived at Drakkar and challenged Kelzang for her Gungru seat in the late 1940s.

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<sup>167</sup> As first mentioned in the introduction to the dissertation, I interviewed Kelzang Drölma at her office in December 30, 2010 in Xiahe, Gansu. During that interview, Kelzang's daughter called her and told her not to tell me everything and that it is better that I should leave. My Tibetan friend Lhamo (name changed) and I heard this warning through the receiver of Kelzang's cellphone.

<sup>168</sup> The obituary mentions the general parameters of the fighting between Gengya and Jiawu without getting into specifics, although it does discuss the tragic loss of life and damage to the economy. PRC sources from this time include the *Qinghai Wenshi Ziliao* and the *Huangnan Wenshi Ziliao*, that detail the dispute over the Hualiqiha area, 华里其哈 near the current Gansu-Qinghai border that did not end until the arrival of the PRC in 1951.

Whereas Kelzang's obituary legitimates her authority as a "Buddhist heroine" whose birth and arrival at Drakkar ended the violence between Gengya and its neighbor Jiawu as if the Gungru lineage was unscarred by the fray, these locals in Gengya, Jiawu and Labrang told a much different tale.<sup>169</sup> A random selection of herders, farmers and lower-ranked monks of all ages in Gengya and Jiawu talked with me about how the bloody conflict over grazing rights in the Hualiqiha territory most likely hastened the death of the Fifth Gungru Tenpé Wangmo at age 41 in 1933. They spoke about how Kelzang's contentious selection as the Sixth Gungru *trülku* in Jiawu resulted in heavy negotiation between Drakkar and Jiawu's leaders before Kelzang finally went to Drakkar in Jiawu's enemy Gengya. Some, including Kelzang's husband Chödzin and a group of monks at Drakkar, discussed Damtsik's challenge to Kelzang at Drakkar in the wake of this chaos in the 1940s that resulted in a rivalry between Kelzang and Damtsik that resurfaced after the Cultural Revolution and has persisted to this day (Chapter 4).

In other words, many herders, farmers, school workers and lower-ranking monks—voices not normally featured in a *namtar* about a *trülku* like Kelzang—helped to uncover stories that exposed people's doubt, their scars and in some cases their still-festering wounds that engulfed the region and the Gungru lineage at that time.<sup>170</sup> They introduced a degree of uncertainty, complexity and conflict, or as Bhri Gupta Singh calls an "intensity" or flashpoint, into Kelzang's life story that her obituary overlooks and that any future *namtar* written about

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<sup>169</sup> Holly Gayley uses the term "Buddhist heroine" to analyze the *namtar* written about one of Kelzang's contemporaries, the treasure revealer Taré Lhamo (2003), who according to Gayley's study, was "unscarred" by the chaotic Cultural Revolution in which Taré Lhamo lived. One could argue that Kelzang's obituary accomplishes a similar function. The obituary presents Kelzang's authority as a heroine who as unscarred by the events around her and who ended the fighting between Gengya and Jiawu in a seamless story that resembles *The Lotus Vine* about Rindzin Pelmo.

<sup>170</sup> See Pelkmans' introduction to *Ethnographies of Doubt*, for analysis of doubt which "tends to vanish with articulation, 5. Many naturalistic disciplines, Pelkmans suggests, register articulated thought and performed action and ignore doubt. In other disciplines, doubt is an obstacle to faith or a resolution to doubt. Moreover, on page 11, he discusses the tendency for scholars/ethnographers to want to find coherence that does not include ill-fitting or fragmentary evidence that is incomplete. Doubt often occurs when "authority structures are eroding and how it becomes imminent when rapid changes in the political and social environment demand reinterpretations of reality and how uncertainties and ambiguities are sidelined for more purified beliefs. Doubt, ultimately is located in the actor, the agent doing the doubting, 17.

Kelzang will most likely neglect (Chapter 5).<sup>171</sup> Along these lines, they freely talked about how the violence between Gengya and Jiawu in the early twentieth century directly impacted the Gungru lineage's rough transition from Tenpé Wangmo to Kelzang as explained below. And they alluded to how the decades-long inter-regional clash between Labrang and the Xining Muslim warlord Ma Bufang, 马步芳) exacerbated the Gengya-Jiawu conflict that did not end until 1951 after the PRC's arrival.<sup>172</sup> Some said that Ma Bufang, whose army lost to a combination of Labrang and Chinese forces in a struggle to seize Labrang in the 1920s, influenced the Gengya-Jiawu dispute in the 1930s and consequently Kelzang's selection; Gengya joined Xiahe (Gansu) County in 1929 with the creation of the new border.<sup>173</sup>

Yet, while many people's stories helped expose the gap or the discontinuity between Kelzang's obituary and what actually happened prior to Kelzang's selection in the 1940s and afterward, others rallied around her and depicted a sense of continuity with the obituary and also the *Lotus Vine namtar* about the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo (Chapter 1). For instance, a man from Jiawu who supports Kelzang referred to Tenpé Wangmo dying young and being reborn in Jiawu in the person of Kelzang as an act of compassion in order to end the violence between Gengya and Jiawu. Others, such as an old childhood friend of Kelzang's, spoke of premonitions and rumors that surrounded Kelzang's definite selection as the Sixth Gungru *tulku* in Jiawu. Still others defended Kelzang as she withstood a challenge from Damtsik in

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<sup>171</sup> Singh's fieldwork in India talks about intensities or flashpoints that wax and wane in localities, in various relationships, including the contestation of authority in divine or human forms, within families, castes, negotiating. I use his term in my dissertation as a way to label these flashpoints of authority to show their volatility from multiple causes. *Poverty and the Quest for Life*, 26.

<sup>172</sup> See Nietupski, *Labrang Monastery*, 175-177 for a description of the Labrang-Xining conflict. Conflicts between Muslims and Labrang Tibetans increased coming to a head in the 1920s, including a battle between Labrang Tibetans and Xining Muslims (Ma Qi) in Gengya in 1924, that caused the Fifth Jamyang Zhepa and his brother Apa Alo (a key negotiator) to flee Labrang in 1924. The fighting deteriorated in 1925 and 1926 to the point that the nascent Nationalist Chinese regime (the Labrang Tibetans' ally against the Muslims) incorporated Labrang under Lanzhou (and not Xunhua) leading to the creation of Xiahe County in Gansu, the current Qinghai state and Qinghai-Gansu border in 1929. The situation remained dangerous into the 1930s as Nietupski said, "it was not safe to travel outside of Labrang at this time," as skirmishes persisted and as Chinese interest in this contested region (both Nationalist and Communist) increased.

<sup>173</sup> See also Weiner's dissertation, *The Chinese Revolution on the Tibetan Frontier*, 107-114, for a description of sources that discuss Ma Bufang's regime and how it tried to build a modern nation state. The bulk of this dissertation has now become Weiner's recent monograph, *The Chinese Revolution on the Tibetan Frontier*.

the 1940s when Damtsik arrived at Drakkar and said, “I am the real Gungru *Khandroma*,” as explained below.

These oral narratives raise important questions about the construction of Kelzang’s authority in her early years and people’s various narrative strategies to support Kelzang and also express doubts about her amidst the stakes to legitimate her authority in a *namtar*. Using Bruce Lincoln’s model of authority as a guide, what do these oral stories reveal about how and why an audience of monastic and lay men and women accepted and judged Kelzang as the “right” Gungru *triilku* at the beginning of her life—or not? How do people’s stories that expose strategies to rally around Kelzang and/or doubt her in the transition from Tenpé Wangmo to Kelzang during the Gengya-Jiawu conflict, Kelzang’s selection in the 1940s and her later challenge from Damtsik construct Kelzang’s authority? Conversely, in what ways do people’s accounts about Kelzang’s birth and selection converge or diverge with the extant narrative legitimating strategies and how does this coalescence or divergence implicate Kelzang’s authority and that of the Gungru lineage?

The short answer is that many of these stories show that Kelzang’s authority wavered and was not automatic as part of a seamless transition from Tenpé Wangmo to Kelzang in the 1940s. This was a time of great uncertainty due to the lengthy Gengya-Jiawu conflict, the residual tensions of regional warlord rule in Labrang’s periphery and changing Chinese empirical/nation states. Introducing these stories that help to re-center this challenging period and the Gungru lineage’s role in it provides a cogent example of catching people’s expressions of doubts “in mid-air,” as Pelkmans writes, before evidence of that doubt can be articulated or smoothed over in a text.<sup>174</sup> Or perhaps these stories help describe the more complex process of catching Kelzang’s authority in mid-air before it gets legitimated in a text like it already has in Kelzang’s obituary and the *Lotus Vine* before. For a *namtar* is the exact

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<sup>174</sup> Pelkmans, *Ethnographies of Doubt*, 11.

type of text that will strive to “reconstitute a tradition” or a set of truths that obviate doubt, difference and discontinuity.<sup>175</sup>

Conversely, many stories described in this chapter elucidate how Kelzang’s authority became imbricated in people’s doubt and the uncertain conditions that affected Tenpé Wangmo’s death in 1933, Kelzang’s contested selection in the 1940s and the later challenge from Damtsik. In this vein, the majority of these stories convey how herders, farmers, lower level monks and nuns not normally tethered to the production of an obituary or a *namtar* imbued their own truths and meanings from this time rife with fear and resentment that delineated the efficacy of Kelzang’s authority as the sixth *trülku*. Unbound by the constraints of a text such as Kelzang’s obituary or the *Lotus Vine*, their stories illustrate the complicated process of how Kelzang’s authority was never automatic, but negotiated, doubted, rejected and restored in relation to the chaos of the Gengya-Jiawu conflict, Ma Bufang’s destabilizing influence and Drakkar’s monks who rebuffed Damtsik’s challenge.<sup>176</sup> For instance, stories from those who lived in Gengya and Jiawu expose the silence or “amnesia” about the Fifth Gungru Tenpé Wangmo that reveals her own waning authority as the Gungru lineage transitioned to Kelzang in the 1940s.<sup>177</sup> Thus, oral narratives show that from the beginning, Kelzang’s authority fluctuated in the center of this uncertain religio-temporal storm, which immersed the region and did not spare the Gungru lineage and how people relied on it and ultimately judged its effectiveness.

Strikingly, however, some people who knew Kelzang well and have a vested interest in legitimating her within the annals of the Gungru lineage ascribed a more positive Buddhist meaning to these events and thereby constructed a more decisive depiction of her authority as

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<sup>175</sup> Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 12.

<sup>176</sup> See Pelkmans’ introduction for a discussion on how people’s expressions of doubt often becomes elided with temporal circumstances, *Ethnographies of Doubt*.

<sup>177</sup> See Faure, *Rhetoric of Immediacy*, 14-15 for an analysis of the creation of lineage stories that often suppress certain figures. In this case, the main issue is not about the lineage’s origin story but about the transition and the forgetting of this difficult process.

the Sixth Gungru *trülku*. They narrated stories that supported Kelzang and converged more with a textual model of the obituary showing fidelity to what I label as the “Gungru master narrative” introduced in the *Lotus Vine* (Chapter 1).<sup>178</sup> For example, Labrang monk Gendün Darjé tried to explain Tenpé Wangmo’s death in 1933 from a more certain perspective of Buddhist philosophy (at least for him as a monk), as the first section discusses below. The author of Kelzang’s now-stalled *namtar*, Labrang monk Gendün Darjé, seemingly reached into his “toolkit” or available narrative repertoire and suggested to me that Tenpé Wangmo died suddenly and was reborn in the person of Kelzang in Jiawu as a compassionate act in order to end the war with Gengya.<sup>179</sup> This story fits more with the “Buddhist heroine” narrative model espoused by Kelzang’s obituary (and the *Lotus Vine* before about the Fourth Gungru) that presents both the Fifth and Sixth Gungru *trülku* as agents on the continuum of compassion: Tenpé Wangmo for dying and Kelzang for being reborn. Doing so stitches the seam of Kelzang’s narrative and her authority within the continuity of the Gungru lineage together.

However, reading between the lines of this account suggests that events on the ground directly implicated Tenpé Wangmo’s own lack of authority and the subsequent contested selection of Kelzang in Jiawu. Tellingly, some people who are related to Tenpé Wangmo and who still live in her native Dobi Changshar in Xunhua, Qinghai, chose not to comment about her death. Others changed the subject because this situation was likely still too sensitive and unresolved, at least publicly.<sup>180</sup> On the other hand, many local lay Buddhists from Labrang, Gengya and Jiawu who were not as connected to Tenpé Wangmo or Kelzang and to the idea of representing Kelzang’s authority in a certain laudatory way—described the

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<sup>178</sup> See Ong in *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World* and Goody’s *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* for a discussion on the interface between the written text and oral narratives.

<sup>179</sup> See Campany’s “Religious Repertoires and Contestation: A Case Study Based on Buddhist Miracle Tales,” in *History of Religions* for a discussion about how people avail themselves of specific elements of their culture as toolkits or repertoires that are available to be used variously by individuals.

<sup>180</sup> Pelkmans, *Ethnographies of Doubt*, p. 11.



hostilities between Gengya and Jiawu over the Hualiqiha grassland that left many riddled with bitterness. In short, they described the harsh conditions that likely affected the Fifth Gungru's decision to allegedly end her own life as Gendün Darjé suggested and as explained below. They also described the conditions that actually complicated Drakkar's decision to select Kelzang as the sixth *trülku* in Gengya's enemy territory of Jiawu instead of showing how she arrived at Drakkar as a hero. And they described the circumstances that led to Damtsik's first challenge to Kelzang at Drakkar in the 1940s that turned out to be more than just an innocent visit to the monastery, although many people who discussed this dispute nearly 60 years after the fact rallied around Kelzang and decisively legitimated her authority as the real and legitimate Gungru *trülku*. In the end, they described the complexity of Kelzang's authority contingent on the standpoint of the person speaking—as opposed to a text (Kelzang's obituary) that presents her authority strictly as a Buddhist heroine and mother-like figure for all. Therefore, the full effect of Kelzang's authority during the Gungru lineage's transition and her contested selection lied (and very much still does) in the eyes of the beholder and was never automatic or inherent.

What became apparent is that nearly 80 years after Kelzang's selection in the wake of the Fifth Gungru's death, memories of these tensions remained raw. Moreover, these memories show that Kelzang's authority both at the time and now as someone chosen in Jiawu did not occur only because Drakkar monks selected her and the Jamyang Zhepa of Labrang confirmed her. Rather, these stories illustrate what I call a “difficult transition” in the Gungru lineage, a re-working of Bernard Faure's concept of a lineage's “difficult beginnings” as he introduced it in his work about Japanese Buddhist lineages.<sup>181</sup> Building on Faure's analysis about how official lineage histories often express a form of “amnesia and repression of historical figures,” stories from across Amdo reclaim the voices of people to

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<sup>181</sup> Faure, *Rhetoric of Immediacy*, 14-15.

explain the difficult transition from the Fifth Gungru *trülku* to Kelzang. These stories pay attention to a wider cast of characters and to their expressions of doubt about Kelzang and her predecessor before any *namtar* codifies or legitimates Kelzang's authority with a story vetted by those in power (the PRC and the monastic institutions).

Just as critical, uncovering this amnesia about the Gungru lineage's transition that shows the complexities of Kelzang's authority helps elaborate the current stakes to reconstitute the Gungru lineage's tradition about Kelzang in the writing of her *namtar* (See Chapter 5). The previous chapter unpacks the important facets of this tradition in the *Lotus Vine namtar* that revolved around the virtuoso Machik Lapdrön to legitimate the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo's authority in both elite and lay circles. Recall also how this tradition—and the full effect of Rindzin Pelmo's authority—correlated with an author who wrote the *Lotus Vine* at a certain historical moment and glorified a threatened elite monastic community, i.e., the patriarchy of Labrang in the late nineteenth century.<sup>182</sup> In other words, the invented tradition about Rindzin Pelmo and the Gungru lineage extolled Labrang and its surrounding communities as a vibrant Buddhist cultural center in Amdo and across Tibet and smoothed out any rough spots or discontinuities in Rindzin Pelmo's story. Thus, given the textual precedent in the *Lotus Vine* that describes Rindzin Pelmo as a heroine who helped pacify the grasslands, it is not surprising that Kelzang's obituary over a century later would fete her in the same fashion. The obituary celebrates her as a heroine who ended the hostilities between Jiawu and Gengya with her birth as if a big band-aid were placed on the wound and everything miraculously healed.

If that were only the case. Stories on the ground from people who knew about the violence, Kelzang's contested selection and Damtsik's challenge for the Gungru throne attest to the difficulty of substantiating such a truth claim about Kelzang's birth. For this band-aid

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<sup>182</sup> See Edward Said in *The World, The Text and the Critic*, 4. See also Patrick Geary in "Saints, scholars and Society" who links the production of Christian hagiographies with events viewed as threats to a specific community.

approach that props up the evocative tradition of Machik overlooks the Gungru lineage's difficult transition from Tenpé Wangmo to Kelzang in the 1930s and 1940s that was permeated with doubt, drama and suspicion. It disregards Kelzang's tense and negotiated selection and the dramatic challenge to Kelzang in the 1940s that over 60 years later has persisted and elicited accusations of Damtsik committing identity fraud, breaking her monastic vow to get married as well as participating in acts of larceny.

In essence, this band-aid approach ignores the accounts from an important segment of the non-elite lay and monastic population that highlight what Foucault calls the discrepancies and disruption in grand narratives. Moreover, this approach disregards a vital element to establishing authority in the Gungru lineage, Tenpé Wangmo's loss of social and symbolic capital during this period of strife and transition to Kelzang born in Gengya's enemy territory.<sup>183</sup> For such a Bourdieuan analysis about capital (social networks and symbolic prestige) helps elaborate the Fifth Gungru's own lack of authority during the conflict and why people no longer trusted her to solve the violence and also Kelzang's own struggle to assert her authority and the stakes of Damtsik's challenge to Kelzang's authority at Drakkar in the 1940s. Understanding this helps explain why the Gungru lineage struggled to maintain authority before, during and after the transition from Tenpé Wangmo to Kelzang focusing more on the temporal conditions as vital components of the construction of authority in the Gungru lineage.

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<sup>183</sup> See Bourdieu, trans. Richard Nice, chapter 9 in John G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, 251 for a definition of social capital as one who obtains access to larger collective networks that enhance the power of an individual. I also use this quote of Bourdieu's as translated from Bourdieu by Cécile Ducher in her dissertation *A Lineage in Time*: "The structure of distribution of capital is the structuring principle of a field" and "this structure of the principles of hierarchical organization is meant to make [us] understand what is it that makes people be where they are and that, given where they are, they do what they do," 137-8. This helps to unpack how Bourdieu's definitions of capital can delineate why the Gungru lineage struggled at this time to maintain authority in this region. Ducher's dissertation provides excellent definitions of Bourdieu's usage of capital. She writes that "Capital is any resource effective in a given social arena that enables one to appropriate the specific profits arising out of participation and contest in it... and comes in economic (material and financial assets); cultural (skills and titles) and social capital (resources accrued from group membership)," 137. See Bourdieu's *The Logic of Practice* for a definition of symbolic capital as a person's accumulated prestige and honor, 16, 68.

And while some scholars treat these stories about temporal conditions as separate from those that appear in a *namtar*, the reality is that they inform that religion—or in this case Buddhist virtuosity and enlightenment—cannot be divorced from the political and social complexities on the ground that adjudicate the authority for a figure like Kelzang.<sup>184</sup> In fact, most people in Jiawu and Gengya did *not* avoid this problematic or fragmentary evidence (the disruption and dissension) that divulges the volatility of Kelzang’s authority and shows how religious lineages function, change and become contested in real time. By narrating this narrative arc of doubt and conflict, they remembered how this turmoil affected the Gungru lineage’s transition, Kelzang’s selection as the sixth *trülku* and the challenge at Drakkar from Damtsik in the 1940s and again decades later (See Chapter 4) that impacted Kelzang’s fluctuating authority. They told their story and their truth on their own terms.

Today, the tension between the truths revealed from these oral stories about Kelzang’s challenging early years and the text (Kelzang’s obituary) and the goal to produce her *namtar* on a grand scale consists of the fulcrum of this chapter. While the story of Machik Lapdrön still has purchase with the Gungru lineage’s constituents in Amdo, and remains an important narrative strategy, i.e., a focal point, among some in Amdo to legitimate Kelzang’s authority during the transition, her selection in the 1940s and later defending her against Damtsik at Drakkar, more stories from the field show that Kelzang’s authority did not occur so seamlessly and without a fight. This chapter delineates the comprehensive story of how Kelzang’s wavering authority was primarily built on the structures of people’s doubt, discontinuity and conflict that began, as the first section discusses, with the difficult transition in the Gungru lineage and the recounting of the Fifth Gungru *trülku*’s abrupt death in the midst of the warfare. The second section describes the more chaotic scene around Kelzang’s

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<sup>184</sup> Gayley in her excellent work on Tare Lhamo’s *namtar* in *Love Letters from Golok* suggests that *namtar* should not include details that would be considered political and temporal. See also Lincoln’s *Theses on Method* of the study of religion in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*. See the first chapter of this dissertation for discussion how Patrick Geary in “Saints, scholars and Society” suggests how hagiographers often use outside threats to a community where a saint lives as impetus to write and fete that saint with a hagiography.

selection as the Sixth Gungru in the 1940s in Jiawu and the third section discusses the genesis of the conflict that developed between Kelzang and Damtsik at Drakkar.

## **Part I**

### **A Heroic Arrival or Complicated Ending? Lineage's Authority in Turmoil**

Kelzang's obituary adopted a well-known approach to present her birth in war-torn Jiawu, as the *Lotus Vine namtar* did about the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo in the early nineteenth century. Where the *Lotus Vine* promotes Machik Lapdrön to legitimate the birth of Rindzin Pelmo “to protect Drakkar, the celestial realm of the distinguished victorious mother” in the chaotic nineteenth century (See Chapter 1), Kelzang's obituary legitimates her authority as a heroine unscarred by the war that swirled around her in the 1930s.<sup>185</sup> In fact, the obituary suggests that Kelzang's birth in 1936 ended the violence that harmed the local community and its economy. The text also suggests that the Gungru lineage's transition from the Fifth Gungru Tenpé Wangmo—of which Kelzang's obituary and other texts say conspicuously little—was seamless just like the *Lotus Vine* presented Rindzin Pelmo's birth in 1814. Kelzang's obituary chronicles her birth, in part:

The wind blew softly and the clouds were clear. The water plants were abundant, the grass was lush and the grassland was poetic and picturesque. This was the scene at the birthplace of the Sixth Gungru *Khandroma* Kelzang Drölma in Qinghai's Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous region, (Chin. *Huangnan zangzu zizhizhou Tongren xian Jiawu*, 黄南藏族自治州同仁县加吾) of the Luqi tribe (Chin. *Luqi* 鲁其部). This hill named “The pile of 100,000 Buddhas” was the actual birthplace of the Sixth *Khandroma* in the sixteenth Fire Rat year (1936) in the winter. She was born at home to a nomadic herding family and later named Dorjétso. ...

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<sup>185</sup> See Gayley's *Love Letters from Golok* about Taré Lhamo being “unscarred” from the events of her time.

There was a lot of fire and smoke from people's guns because of the dispute between the Jiawu and Gengya tribes. Many people from both sides died tragically in the chaos of war and families were wrenched apart. It is not known how many people still have lingering fears today, but 90 men from Jiawu and Gengya died in the dispute, over 70 people were seriously injured, and over 100 people were slightly wounded. All of the livestock were killed and the economy sank toward the edge of collapse. In a split second, many happy families were ruined and their livelihood was lost. Because many people died, you could hear children crying in the ruins—their crying echoed over the burning of the ruins. The mothers held their children as they ran and shouted out their father's name looking for him only to find that he was dead. The years of war caused many people from both sides to earn a slender living and the livelihood and safety of the herders was unstable and unsafe. Two generations of people felt a high level of anxiety because of the injuries and the damage of war that caused people of both sides to tremble with fear. ...

The birth of the Sixth Gungru *Khandroma* Kelzang Drölma and her enthronement at Drakkar eliminated the former hatred between the two sides and bid farewell to the firearms; the wailing sounds of tears and extreme anger was replaced by complete peace and calm.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>186</sup>Kelzang's obituary, 4-5. 这片风淡云清，水草丰足、青草盈盈，如诗如画的草原就是第六世光日堪召玛·格桑丹曲卓玛出生的草原—青海省黄南藏族自治州同仁县加吾鲁其部落，这座“十万佛堆”下就是活佛出生的实地，于藏历第十六绕迥火鼠年（1936年）冬季出生于一牧民家里，出生后取乳名多杰措...当时的加吾部落和甘加部落之间因草山纠纷而硝烟弥漫，烽烟四起的战时之秋，一幕幕悲剧演绎在双方部落中，家破人亡，妻离子散不知多少人到今天还心有余悸，双方在争执中死亡90多人，重伤70多人，轻伤100多人，牲畜几乎损失殆尽，经济陷入崩溃边缘，一个个幸福的家庭在一瞬间破裂，一条条鲜活的生命在这场战事中失去，孩子凄惨的哭声回荡在废墟上，母亲怀抱孩子，边跑边呼唤孩子的父亲的情景屡屡再现...多年战事使得双方两地民不聊生，牧民生命安全得不到保障、人心惶惶近二代人，战事的残酷和危害足以让双方的人们胆战心惊。六世光日堪召玛·尕藏丹却卓玛的诞生，坐床白石崖昂乾，两地战事随之而消，泯灭了两地的旧日仇恨，告别了硝烟弥漫、哭声与怒。

Despite a dearth of detail about how Kelzang ended the warfare over the disputed Hualiqiha grassland, this passage claims that her birth and enthronement (1943) as the Sixth Gungru *trülku* “eliminated the former hatred” between Gengya and Jiawu. And while no other text or oral account substantiates that she actually stopped the violence or eliminated the animosity, the obituary’s version of these events credits her as the primary agent of peace. This position nonetheless promotes the standpoint of the PRC, Drakkar and Labrang Monasteries and even Kelzang’s family, i.e., the main institutions with the most at stake to legitimate her authority in the obituary or a future *namtar* as a peacemaker who represented unity and security in this war-torn region. Notably, the obituary’s narrative construction resembles the *Lotus Vine* that praises the Fourth Gungru in the ilk of Machik Lapdrön who tamed these same Gengya grasslands and symbolized peace in the fractious Amdo region beset by inter-monastery warfare (Chapter 1).

Conversely and more significant to the purposes of this chapter, oral narratives from those who knew Kelzang and or were familiar with the local hostilities, complexify the lineage’s transition in the 1930s and 1940s and the reality of Kelzang’s vacillating authority. More to the point, instead of merely lauding Kelzang’s heroic arrival in Gengya, these stories as told to me by herders, farmers and monks in Gengya, Jiawu and Labrang, relate a much more fraught story about the region and the Gungru lineage’s authority. They elaborate the doubt and anxiety of the flashpoint that surrounded the Gungru lineage as it transitioned to Kelzang amidst the Gengya-Jiawu conflict and the tension wrought by the war between Labrang and Ma Bufang in the beginning of the twentieth century. Critically, these accounts show that the violence not only disrupted the nomadic herding economy in this region as the obituary states, but also impacted the authority of Tenpé Wangmo, who died suddenly in 1933, and later the selection of Kelzang in the early 1940s.

In other words, these new stories from Gengya and Jiawu about the rough transition from Tenpé Wangmo to Kelzang imbricate Kelzang's authority with the effects of this grassland violence and help prove that her authority was never inherent as her obituary claims and as any *namtar* about her will surely suggest. On this front, these heretofore undocumented stories that many close to the writing process of Kelzang's *namtar* would want to keep under wraps recover more stark local truths about Kelzang, the Gungru lineage and the temporal vicissitudes that swept through their community and region. Further, these truths that counter the more traditional story of Kelzang's birth expose the anonymity or amnesia about Kelzang's predecessor Tenpé Wangmo. They bring to light a figure who was all but forgotten in most texts but who was ironically praised by some close to Kelzang as a Buddhist hero for dying and being reborn in Jiawu to end the war. Recovering these truths about what was a difficult transition shows how Kelzang's authority was (and still is) linked to her predecessor and the conditions in which Tenpé Wangmo died and Kelzang was born as this first subsection about Tenpé Wangmo's own lack of authority depicts.

*Lost in Transition: Reclaiming Fifth Gungru's (lack of) authority in Gengya*

The silence in Kelzang's obituary and in other texts about the Fifth Gungru *trülku* Tenpé Wangmo speaks volumes. This reticence calls into question Tenpé Wangmo's own lack of authority and what could be construed as her irrelevancy to legitimate Kelzang's life and authority as the sixth *trülku*. To this point, the obituary mentions only one sentence that Tenpé Wangmo "provided subsidies for Drakkar, including supplies and food for the monks at Drakkar, and that her bright reputation spread because of her many accomplishments," but does not elaborate.<sup>187</sup> Nor does the obituary elaborate on the timing or the circumstances surrounding Tenpé Wangmo's death. In fact, prior to the obituary, only a handful of sources

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<sup>187</sup> Kelzang's obituary, 4. 第五世光日堪召玛·贡确丹贝旺茂常年资助白石崖寺院，补给和供养白石崖寺院僧众等声誉远播的鲜明事迹。



described the life and deeds of Tenpé Wangmo, who died at age 41 in 1933, as the battle between Gengya and Jiawu continued. For instance, Harrison Forman in his travelogue through Amdo (1935) called Tenpé Wangmo “buxom” and “The Female Buddha” and was surprised when he saw how patrons “valued her words infinitely more than the bit of medicine (that she gave them).”<sup>188</sup>

Further, most Tibetan accounts of the Gungru lineage include only the basics about Tenpé Wangmo, who did not receive a *namtar* like the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo in the *Lotus Vine*, for reasons about which I speculate below. Scholar Tashi Tsering mentioned Tenpé Wangmo in one short sentence in his lengthy chronicle of the Gungru lineage: “The Fifth Gungru was born in approximately 1892 or 1893”—nothing about how she lived, died or who she studied with, and so forth.<sup>189</sup> Art historian Könchok Tendzin said in his article on the Gungru lineage that Tenpé Wangmo “studied numerous Dharma teachings, produced many Buddhist images and had a lot of disciples.”<sup>190</sup> Well-regarded Drakkar scholar monk Könchok Gyatso’s two works (2008, 2013) contain more substantive excerpts about Tenpé Wangmo. Gyatso wrote in his 2008 text about the Gungru lineage that she built a three-story assembly hall at Drakkar and twice expanded the Gungru estate. Moreover, he notes that she practiced Cakrasamvara rituals and Machik Lapdrön’s chö<sup>191</sup>—two key narrative markers to legitimate her authority in the Gungru lineage as the first chapter asserts with the *Lotus Vine*. His longer 2013 work about Gengya’s history mentions that Tenpé Wangmo studied

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<sup>188</sup> See Forman’s *Through Forbidden Tibet* for an account of his meeting with Tenpé Wangmo on his journey through Amdo in the 1930s. While his account has received criticism for its language from Anne Chayet in her article in her article “*Women and Reincarnation in Tibet: The Case of the Gung ru Mkha' 'gro ma*” it does provide a glimpse into the life of Tenpé Wangmo.

<sup>189</sup> Tashi Tsering, *rgan gya'i brag dkar gyi gung ru ye shes kyi mkha' 'gro ma a sku phreng na rim gyi rnam thar sa bon ngo sprod bde chen mchog grub ces bya ba bzhugs so* [The introduction to the biographies of the lineage holders in the Gungru Yeshi *Khandroma* lineage at Drakkar], 33.

<sup>190</sup> See Könchok Tendzin, *sprul pa'i bzo bo gung ru mkha' 'gro ma blo bzang chos sgron dang khong gi sku phreng rim byon gyi mam bsdu* [The brief history of the reincarnate artisan Gungru Lozang Chodron and the succession of her lineages], 8.

<sup>191</sup> Könchok Gyatso, *rGan gya'i brag dkar* 81, skyabs mgon sku phreng bzhi ba dang/ yang thugs nang shin tu nye zhing// skyabs mgon mchog dang bde mchog tshogs 'khor lhan cig mdzad pa dang/ thengs gcig skyabs mgon mchog rang gi bla brang du gdan drangs te de dngul srang lnga bcu'i 'bul ba btegs pa sogs// nang chen lang bskyar bzhengs rgya gang che mdzad pa sogs 'khor lo gsum gyi bya ba'i sgo nas bstan 'gro'i don rlabs chen gngang yang sa bon med pas zhib tu 'bri ba'i skal ba ma shar ro//

numerous texts, performed many practices and rituals and met with key *trülku*, including the Fifth Jamyang Zhepa, before she “died peacefully after benefiting sentient beings” in 1933.<sup>192</sup>

Significantly, some recent oral narratives in Amdo support Könchok Gyatso’s assertion that “(Tenpé Wangmo) died peacefully” after benefiting other beings. But reading between the lines of these *namtar*-like accounts that illustrate the interface between textual and oral stories and the goal to project continuity in the Gungru lineage suggests that Tenpé Wangmo’s sudden death occurred because of the Jiawu-Gengya conflict that she could not solve.<sup>193</sup> Therefore these accounts that try to legitimate Tenpé Wangmo’s authority as a compassionate Buddhist heroine ironically expose Tenpé Wangmo’s more challenged authority as a peacemaker due to the violence that later adversely affected Kelzang’s authority in the same region. For instance, Labrang monk Gendün Darjé reached into his available toolkit or repertoire and praised Tenpé Wangmo as a compassionate figure who died for the sake of sentient beings—the exact type of story that any *namtar* about Kelzang would reproduce. In fact, Gendün Darjé said that an old man from Gengya is the person who told him the story how Tenpé Wangmo acted as a compassionate *trülku* who took an action that could be understood as ending her own life because of the mounting stress and her inability to curtail the struggle. Even though this account has not been substantiated, it remains the only oral or written claim (to my knowledge) that describes Tenpé Wangmo’s death aside from Drakkar’s Könchok Gyatso’s statement “that she died peacefully.” Gendün Darjé said in a personal interview in 2017:

This story is true, Tenpé Wangmo did not have a sickness [like many *trülku* toward the end of their life including Rindzin Pelmo in the *Lotus Vine*]. She was healthy and then one day she died. [Gendün Darjé made a

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<sup>192</sup> Könchok Gyatso, *mdo smad rgan gya'i lo rgyus sngon byung gsal ba'i me long* [The Clear account of Gengya’s history in Amdo], 110-11.

<sup>193</sup> These stories mark an example of Goody and Ong’s claims that textual narratives often interface with oral narratives.

gesture to suggest that her life ended quickly and likely on her own behalf in a suicide]. At that time the fighting between Gengya and Jiawu was severe and had been so for 30 years. Alak Gungru [Tenpé Wangmo] didn't have the solution to solve the battle. A lot of people from Jiawu came to the Gungru estate and stole [animals]. And the Gengya people went to Jiawu Luqi and stole sheep and yaks. The Gungru *Khandroma* [Tenpé Wangmo] was very sad about this. There were so many people who died between Gengya and Jiawu so she decided to die and be born in Jiawu Luqi thinking that this would be a good solution. The next reincarnation [the Sixth Gungru Kelzang] was born in Jiawu Luqi, so Gengya needed to search for her there [Jiawu] and the problem between these two areas was solved.<sup>194</sup>

A lay Jiawu man named Sönam validated aspects of Gendün Darjé's story. Or at least Sönam, who has a lot at stake to depict Kelzang and the Gungru lineage in a favorable light, corroborated the part that could explain the Gungru lineage's succession to promote and legitimate Kelzang's authority and also, I suggest, Tenpé Wangmo's authority. Sönam, who spoke with me at a different time and place from Gendün Darjé, called Tenpé Wangmo "a compassionate lama" for dying in order to end the violence. Sönam stated in 2016:

One woman from Gengya said that her only son was killed in the battle with Jiawu and that she felt very sad. She brought some of the ashes of their son to the Fifth Gungru at Drakkar. This lady said to the Fifth Gungru, 'My only child was killed and I am all alone.' She expressed her sadness to Tenpé Wangmo who was a compassionate lama and decided to be born in Jiawu. That is the reason she was born here and people from

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<sup>194</sup> Interview with Gendün Darjé in September 2017 in Labrang by the author.

Jiawu were very happy. The battle continued for 37 years and she (the Fifth Gungru's *trülku*) was born in Jiawu and solved the problem.<sup>195</sup>

Significantly, in presenting Tenpé Wangmo's death as a compassionate act by a Buddhist heroine, Gendün Darjé, who has been loath to talk about "non-religious factors" in relation to Kelzang's *namtar* (Chapter 5), alluded to the turbulent climate when Tenpé Wangmo died. His re-telling of the story as shared with him by a Gengya elder helps explain how the frustrations, fears and grief of locals from both sides of the conflict ultimately affected the Fifth Gungru's authority in Gengya both then and now. Locals no longer relied on Tenpé Wangmo to resolve the dispute over grazing rights on the Hualiqiha grassland in the way that her predecessors and other *trülku* could solve such grassland disputes. Although, as it will be shown below, no one person or *trülku* ever stopped or could have been realistically expected to end this bitter fight until the PRC government's arrival on the scene in the early 1950s. And while no account describes how anyone confronted Tenpé Wangmo about her inability to stop the warfare, the fact that people from Jiawu stole cattle from her Gungru estate and that people from Gengya retaliated illustrates her vulnerability and her questioned authority with the local populace.

Many accounts in this section show the severity of the violence and insinuate that the Fifth Gungru did not hold enough symbolic capital, or what Bourdieu would describe as prestige and honor, as the Gungru *trülku* to stop it as other Gungru *trülku* ended disputes. Thus, these stories that depict Tenpé Wangmo as a compassionate *trülku* to depict a seamless continuity in the Gungru lineage actually, if we read between the lines, show the volatility of her authority across the grasslands. They show how the warfare impacted her authority with her lay constituents in Gengya despite her ability as a Buddhist virtuoso at Drakkar. In fact,

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<sup>195</sup> Interview with Sönam in July 2016 in Jiawu, Qinghai by the author.

stories from herders, farmers and school workers in Gengya and Jiawu nearly 65 years after the conflict ended in 1951 with PRC intervention illustrate the fear and tension that gripped the region and the Gungru lineage during this transition as the next subsection shows.

*Recalling the horrors of the Gengya-Jiawu conflict and Ma Bufang's influence*

People from Jiawu and Gengya provided their voices to Kelzang's life story, sharing their truths about the violence between these two regions over a 30-kilometer stretch of disputed grassland (the Hualiqiha section) on the Gansu-Qinghai border. In doing so, these locals not normally associated with the production of a *namtar* elaborated on the Gengya and Jiawu conflict, as well as the iron-fist rule of Ma Bufang based in Xining—horrors that impacted the authority of the Fifth Gungru Tenpé Wangmo and later Kelzang. Moreover, these locals countered the obituary that projected a sense of continuity that culminated with Kelzang's prophesied arrival, i.e., the type of narrative found in most *namtar*.<sup>196</sup> On this front, locals of all ages, background and gender in Jiawu and Gengya discussed the intense fighting that Tenpé Wangmo could not solve in the late 1920s and 1930s that led to her abrupt death. Jiawu's Tashi Gyatso recalled the fighting in a personal interview:

In the beginning of the conflict there were 26 or 27 people killed in Jiawu while Gengya had 22 people dead. The fighting continued for 37 years. All told, both sides' horses were killed and 80 people died. If people from Gengya saw their counterparts from Jiawu, they would kill them. If Jiawu people saw people from Gengya they just killed them. There was no other reason. If one Jiawu person was killed in battle, then that Jiawu

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<sup>196</sup> Many *namtar* include stories that describe dreams or fortuitous encounters with a predecessor that foreshadow a specific person's arrival such as how the *Lotus Vine* discusses the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo's mother's meeting with the Third Gungru *trülku* as a sign portending Rindzin Pelmo's birth in the early nineteenth century.

person must kill one person from Gengya [in retribution]. It went like this.<sup>197</sup>

A meeting with Kelzang's childhood friend Karmagya, 83, at her house in 2016 in Jiawu confirmed the horrors of the fighting that altered her life. This resembled the section in Kelzang's obituary (mentioned above) about children who lost their father. She stated:

At that time, the battle between Jiawu and Gengya was very furious. My father was killed by people from Gengya. We were robbed—everything was stolen and we didn't have a place to stay. All of my family's livestock was taken away by people who came from Gengya. And all of the wooden bowls and valuables were stolen, too. We were always afraid of [Gengya men] and that they would come rob us. We had to sneak around. When Alak Gungru [Kelzang] was recognized [1940s] she told people in Gengya to give back my family's tent [that was stolen]. They gave it back, but smashed the pot and then left. The [returned] tent didn't have a door, so we put a bush in the doorway. When it was windy we hid behind my mother, but [the bush] didn't stop the wind.<sup>198</sup>

One Jiawu man recalled how “[Gengya herders] took away everything but the tent and sometimes they took the tent.” Another Jiawu Tibetan Nyima said:

Yes, there was fear everywhere. We feared that they [people from Gengya] would steal our livestock and kill us. At that time people came from Gengya and took all of the livestock and killed family members and they left only one person. This was common. People from Jiawu took

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<sup>197</sup> Interview with Tashi Gyatso in July 2016 in Jiawu, Qinghai by the author.

<sup>198</sup> Interview with Karmagya in July 2016 in Jiawu, Qinghai by the author.

livestock from those in Gengya and killed family members and left only one person.<sup>199</sup>

An older man named Ösel from the more populated Gengya township (one of 13 Gengya villages) that did not participate in the Gengya-Jiawu battle described the tensions and how people dealt with the constant state of anxiety. Ösel stated:

Our village stood back for the Jiawu-Gengya conflict, but we fought in other battles. In the old times, there were no houses, there were tents. It was very hard for people to just go and travel by themselves. You would not do that. You would have to make a group and go [together] to one place because if your enemy villages saw you they would just grab and kill you; that's the way it was. So you had to travel in groups together.<sup>200</sup>

Compounding matters was how Gyelwo (Jiawu) Dorjé, the Ma Bufang-appointed Tibetan leader in the Rebgong, Qinghai region, exacerbated the Jiawu-Gengya grassland battle in 1932 and further exposed Tenpé Wangmo's waning authority. In 1932, seven years after the Labrang-Ma Bufang conflict ended, Ma helped Gyelwo (Jiawu) Dorjé consolidate his power over all of the Jiawu tribes and throughout Rebgong in 1932<sup>201</sup>). Historian Benno Weiner notes that Ma, who still ruled territory in Qinghai after the new Gansu-Qinghai border was formed in 1929, gave Gyelwo (Jiawu) Dorjé 100 guns and rounds of ammunition for the Jiawu herders to use against Gengya in the 1930s before Tenpé Wangmo died.<sup>202</sup> This

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<sup>199</sup> Interview with Nyima in July 2016 in Jiawu, Qinghai by the author.

<sup>200</sup> Interview with Ösel in July 2016 in Gengya Township, Gansu by the author.

<sup>201</sup> Weiner, *The Chinese Revolution on the Tibetan Frontier*, 125. Weiner cites the *Tongren Xianzhi* about Gyelwo (Jiawu) Dörjé's consolidation of power in the region.

<sup>202</sup> See the 青海文史资料, Qinghai Wenshi Ziliao, 267 that discusses how Ma gave 100 guns and ammunition to Jiawu Dorjé. See also Weiner, *The Chinese Revolution on the Tibetan Frontier*, 114-115. Weiner challenges the predominant historical narrative that suggests that Ma's regime was borne purely out of ethnic hatred but rather out of a more complex state-building project not too dissimilar from other Chinese projects and even the one Labrang had established in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He situates his study within analysis of this

act intensified what in effect turned into a proxy war over the disputed Hualiqiha territory between Ma's regime (Jiawu) and Labrang (Gengya). Not surprisingly, PRC documents blamed Ma Bufang, who was a member of the Nationalist Party (KMT), for the Gengya-Jiawu conflict. The documents criticize Ma for currying favor from both sides over the disputed pasture, which originally belonged to Jiawu before 1915. One document says that "Ma gave rifles to Jiawu but at the same time accepted bribes from the Gengya tribe. He then gave the pasture to Gengya because of the bribes. Both sides thought they owned the pasture and then they killed each other."<sup>203</sup> Another document said that "Ma was not interested in solving the dispute because he took bribe money from both sides."<sup>204</sup> Further, Benno Weiner's research posits that Republic of China (ROC) sources show that monasteries affiliated with Labrang along with other regional leaders became involved and exacerbated the conflict between Gengya and Jiawu in the early 1940s.

In the end, this widespread violence and uncertainty in the region not only affected Tenpé Wangmo's authority as the Gungru *trülku*, but sheds insight as to why so little, including a *namtar*, has been written about her. One reason for the lack of a *namtar* could be that Tenpé Wangmo died suddenly amidst the battle between Jiawu and Gengya and the residual conflict between Labrang and Ma Bufang still elicits hard feelings today as these oral stories and even Kelzang's obituary attest. Moreover, Tenpé Wangmo's death and the transition to Kelzang occurred during a period of Chinese and Tibetan history that signifies the instability of the changing Chinese states (the late Qing dynasty, Republican era of 1912-1949 and the PRC) and the constant turmoil at Labrang (war with Ma Bufang) and in Labrang's periphery (the Gengya-Jiawu conflict). Thus, even though she never lost her office as the Gungru *trülku*, Tenpé Wangmo came to symbolize this grave uncertainty that both

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time period as a modernizing nation state along with Horlemann, Hass and Cooke and countering claims by scholars, such as Hunsberger, who Weiner says "dismissed this effect" of Ma's regime as a modernizing state.

<sup>203</sup> *Qinghai Wenshi Ziliao*, 266-7.

<sup>204</sup> 黄南文史资料 *Huangnan Wenshi Ziliao*, 2-3, 9-10.



Chinese and Tibetan narratives want to minimize or forget altogether.<sup>205</sup> This not only reflects her lack of authority in the community, but Tenpé Wangmo no longer possessed the symbolic capital (honor and prestige in a Bourdiean framework) with people in this region to stop the fighting and was deemed dishonorable and unworthy of an elaborate *namtar*.

Further fueling the uncertainty and silence, Tenpé Wangmo, who had estates at Labrang and Drakkar, likely also lost her access to Labrang's elite *trülku* network that previous Gungru *trülku* utilized (Chapter 1). To elaborate, Tenpé Wangmo's social capital diminished with the dispersal of these reliable networks of powerful *trülku* at Labrang that her predecessor Rindzin Pelmo benefited from in the nineteenth century. In fact, the Sixth Gungru Kelzang's husband Chödzin said in 2014 that "during Ma Bufang's time (early twentieth century), Labrang was destroyed and the (Labrang) *trülku* left for other places." Thus, the dismantling of this religio-social structure likely affected Tenpé Wangmo's authority in this war-torn community. Many of the key networks (lay and *trülku*) fell apart resulting in a collapse of her authority and later amnesia about her that followed.<sup>206</sup>

Therefore, given the likelihood that this warfare impacted Tenpé Wangmo's life and consequently her authority as the Gungru *trülku*, it is little wonder that Kelzang's obituary skipped over Tenpé Wangmo's passing and jumped to promote Kelzang's heroic arrival. In fact, descendants of Tenpé Wangmo's family in 2018 in Changshar (Dobi, Xunhua) became taciturn when the subject of her passing arose and curtly said, "I don't know (about it)." Monks at Changshar Monastery brusquely changed course to talk about how the First Gungru *trülku* Sönam Gyen had arrived at Changshar Monastery in the seventeenth century rather than discuss the ending of Tenpé Wangmo's life.<sup>207</sup> But herders from Gengya and Jiawu and

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<sup>205</sup> See Pelkmans' analysis on doubt and temporal changes and also Faure's discussion of amnesia about figures or time periods that do not fit into a lineage holder's origin story or as Foucault calls it a master narrative.

<sup>206</sup> Interview with Chödzin in July 2013 in Labrang by the author.

<sup>207</sup> Oral conversations/interviews with Tenpé Wangmo's relatives at the place of her birth in Changshar, Dobi, Xunhua in 2017 and 2018. Monks at Changshar Monastery in September 2018 discussed how the First Gungru *trülku* arrived at the monastery there in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

even Gendün Darjé, the monk who offered a Buddhist explanation for Tenpé Wangmo's death, provided yet another key reason for the silence about Tenpé Wangmo: her death and rebirth in Jiawu illuminate that this warfare never ended with Kelzang's birth and selection in Jiawu. In fact, the herders credit the PRC's arrival in 1951 thereby throwing into question the notion of a smooth transition, as the next subsection shows.

*Seamless authority? Kelzang's birth did not end the Gengya-Jiawu conflict*

Despite the obituary's claim that Kelzang's birth (1936) and later enthronement in 1943 (See Part II) ended the Jiawu and Gengya war, oral stories challenge the veracity of these accounts. People in Gengya and Jiawu show that this transition—and the Gungru lineage's authority—was never smooth nor did the violence end with Kelzang's arrival. For instance, an older man from Gengya township said that the PRC's Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC, Chin. *zhongguorenmin zhengzhi xieshanghuiyi* 中国人民政治协商会议), solved the Gengya-Jiawu conflict and not Kelzang's birth and enthronement at Drakkar.<sup>208</sup> Others also debunked the idea that her birth ended the conflict and said it was not until 1951 before an agreement between the new PRC officials and local Gengya and Jiawu leaders to cease the fighting took hold, as this section explains. Still others cited the PRC's forceful intervention to stop the fighting rather than a peaceful entreaty.

Thus, while Kelzang's obituary lauds Kelzang's heroic birth, oral accounts from local Amdo Tibetans ironically credited the PRC and its strongarm tactics for ending the Gengya-Jiawu conflict. The divergence is noteworthy in that these locals cited the PRC while the likely PRC-written obituary praises the Tibetan *trülku* Kelzang for stopping the fighting in spite of extant PRC documents that praised the state's intervention in 1951. Perhaps by crediting Kelzang, the obituary author, who might have been a Tibetan (Chapter 5), wanted to

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<sup>208</sup> Interview with man in Gengya in July 2016 in Gengya by the author.

maintain continuity in how Tibetan texts legitimate Gungru *trülku* in a narrative devoid of discontinuities like the *Lotus Vine*. Or maybe the author sought to present a Tibetan figure like Kelzang as an agent of peace that serves the security interests of the PRC and affirms the state as a strong supporter of local religion.

Conversely, some Tibetans from Jiawu did not hesitate to discuss the PRC's somewhat forceful tactics with both sides of the Gengya-Jiawu conflict that the PRC documents ignored. Perhaps these locals' acknowledgement of the PRC as the purveyor of peace allowed them to assert their own relevancy and legitimacy in this conflict. They could claim that it took the new outsider PRC government to stop the fighting and *not* their enemy in Gengya (and Labrang) with their keen plan to search for Kelzang in Jiawu. For instance, Samten from Jiawu said:

It has never been talked about [here] that Kelzang's birth helped end the conflict. In recent years when she [Kelzang] came back [to Jiawu] and gave a [Buddhist] teaching and said that Jiawu and Gengya should not fight each other, she was always teaching and speaking along these lines. But, there was no one here who ever said that the [Gengya-Jiawu] battle was solved because [Kelzang] was born here. There was nothing said like that.<sup>209</sup>

One Tibetan man said: "When I was 18, the PRC came and when I was 20 years old, the Gengya-Jiawu problems were solved and that was in 1951."<sup>210</sup> Dawa from Jiawu also spoke about this scenario about when the PRC solved the problem:

The PRC came in 1949 and said to those who lived in Jiawu, 'If you [Jiawu herders] fight again, then 25 people from Jiawu will be killed. If

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<sup>209</sup> Interview with Samten in July 2016 in Jiawu by the author.

<sup>210</sup> Interview with local in July 2016 in Jiawu, Qinghai by the author.

there is no father then the son will be killed. If Gengya herders fight again, then 25 Gengya people will be killed. If there is no father, then the son will be killed. They won't kill anyone's mother, only the men. I heard these details about the fighting from my father-in-law who was a representative from the Jiawu side. He [my father in law] met with representatives of Gengya. So, the Gengya-Jiawu battle was forcibly solved by the PRC.<sup>211</sup>

Tsewang of Jiawu said that this battle with Gengya was so severe that the official record of the agreement to end it does not exist in Rebgong, Labrang or even in Xining or Lanzhou, but rather in Beijing. The exact location of this agreement in Beijing has not been procured as of this dissertation, but the claim that it allegedly exists there reflects the PRC's involvement to stop this warfare. Also, this PRC involvement reflects on the collapse of local leadership, i.e., the lack of authority in the Gungru lineage and the absence of effective Labrang *trülku* who worked with local lay leaders and often solved these disputes. For instance, the Fifth Jamyang Zhepa Lozang Jamyang Yéshé Gyeltsen (1916-1947) came of age during this crisis. Tsewang stated:

The agreement that solved the conflict between Jiawu and Gengya is not in Rebgong or Labrang, it is in central China. [The CCP leader and first Foreign Minister and Premier] Zhou Enlai (周恩来, 1898-1976) worked with the case [in the late 1940s and early 1950s]. [The agreement] is in the archives. People around here talked about the matter in that framework [of this warfare being solved by Beijing]. In recent years, people from the local Chinese Communist party came to investigate the Gengya and Jiawu border. And in the process of examining the situation at the border, they went to

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<sup>211</sup> Interview with Dawa in July 2016 in Jiawu, Qinghai by the author.

Beijing to bring this letter and saw the mark and the agreement over the border [from the fighting in the early twentieth century].<sup>212</sup>

While further research in the PRC archives might yet uncover the exact details of the agreement and the extent of the central Chinese government's arrival to stamp out this conflict between Gengya and Jiawu, the PRC documents as mentioned above outline the parameters of the settlement. The agreement involved several high-ranking leaders in Lanzhou in 1951, including Wang Feng from the Northwest Affairs, county leaders (Tongren and Xiahe) and village leaders demarked a clear boundary of this disputed territory.<sup>213</sup> Not surprisingly, the PRC's version of this agreement did not mention the PRC's threatened immediate retribution for killing someone from the other side as discussed in the oral accounts.

Many of these accounts expressed in this first section show that Kelzang's birth did not in fact end the violence between these two herding areas and instead elaborate the Gungru lineage's difficult transition and Kelzang's obituary's impulse to present her as a heroine who saved the day. The obituary avoids this transition that shows the uncertainty that defined the lineage's diminished state of authority when Kelzang was born in 1936 as oral stories show. By this time, evidence suggests that many lay constituents no longer trusted or could rely on the Fifth Gungru Tenpé Wangmo to solve what had become a major regional problem on these grasslands—hence her challenged authority as someone who could not be counted on to solve the conflict, her abrupt death and the eventual transition to Kelzang in Jiawu. Dodging this difficult transition from Tenpé Wangmo to Kelzang as if the lineage were not scarred by the temporal chaos also avoids the actual fluctuating state of Kelzang's authority with the same laity, a vital segment of her audience. Authority was not automatic like the obituary

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<sup>212</sup> Interview with Tsewang in July 2016 in Jiawu by the author.

<sup>213</sup> *Huangnan Wenshi Ziliao*, 1-13.

claims and as the next section illustrates about the thorny process to search for Kelzang in Jiawu and enthrone her in 1943 at Drakkar.

## **Part II**

### **Negotiated Authority: To Accept or Not Accept Kelzang as the Sixth Gungru *trülku***

In the same vein that Kelzang's obituary lauds her as a heroine whose birth ended the Jiawu-Gengya violence, so too, does the text present and legitimate her authority arriving at Drakkar in 1943—with guns blazing—as a simple and smooth process. On this front, the obituary describes the spectacle on the Gengya grasslands that occurred when Kelzang left her native Jiawu for the 60 km overland journey to Drakkar after the Fifth Jamyang Zhepa confirmed her as the *trülku*. The obituary recounts Kelzang's emergence at Drakkar as that of a conquering heroine, a key part of her continuous origin story that legitimates Kelzang's authority just like the *Lotus Vine* did with Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo and Kelzang's future *namtar* will likely follow (Chapter 5). A sampling of Kelzang's obituary is as follows:

When [Kelzang] was seven, the Fifth Jamyang Zhepa with firm resolution recognized Dorjétso as the female reincarnation of the Fifth Gungru Tenpé Wangmo. [Kelzang] had a head shaving ceremony, took the vows of a nun and received the Buddhist name Kelzang Damchö Drölma and was welcomed to Drakkar Monastery where she was enthroned. Both sides made a large spectacle when Kelzang Damchö Drölma was welcomed in Gengya. The Jiawu leader summoned 500 warriors who were dressed in splendid holiday attire with their weapons drawn and mounted on horseback to give her a big send off. They escorted her up Gang En hill where she was welcomed by the Gengya tribe. Gengya invited the six tribes of Khagya who lined up to make the spectacle even more impressive. In addition to the support of monks who lined up to greet her, the procession turned away

from Gang En [the Qinghai-Gansu border] and toward the rugged “Da Shan” where locals fired shots into the air and yelled to welcome her. The scene of mulberry leaves burning and making smoke on the mountains from Gang En to Gengya to welcome her was spectacular.<sup>214</sup>

Yet, in the same way that stories challenged the obituary’s attempt to reconstitute a narrative about how Kelzang’s birth ended the fighting (it did not) many people’s accounts challenged the notion that her selection occurred with a “firm resolution” or that her authority was inevitable (it was not). These stories describe people’s doubt about the selection process and ultimately show that Kelzang’s authority with others in Gengya vacillated with the winds of this turbulent grassland region and was not inherent or automatic. Some stories show how the deep-seated stormy nature of the constant warfare and inter-regional tensions that engulfed her actual selection and move to Drakkar in 1943 affected how Kelzang’s audience of mostly lay farmers and herders supported her as the right *trülku*—or not—on both sides of the conflict. Some in Gengya rejected her and were upset at how the Labrang (Drakkar) establishment chose a *trülku* from a bitter rival in Jiawu. Others in Jiawu did not want to let her go to the enemy in Gengya.

In a nutshell, people from Gengya and Jiawu talked about her selection and the mutual suspicion among people who now had to welcome—not so easily it turns out—a little girl from a poor herding family who lived in enemy territory to Drakkar as the Sixth Gungru *trülku*. Locals shared how monks from Drakkar paid a transaction fee to the leader of Jiawu, presumably to the Jiawu leader Gyelwo (Jiawu) Dorjé, although it has not been confirmed if

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<sup>214</sup>Kelzang’s Obituary, 4-5. 7 岁时，由第五世嘉木样·丹贝坚赞认定多杰措为第五世贡日堪召玛·贡确丹贝旺茂女活佛的转世灵童，并剃度受戒，赐法名为格桑丹曲卓玛，迎至白石崖昂乾坐床…相传六世光日堪召玛·尕藏丹却卓玛迎接甘加时两方摆设了宏大场面，加吾宏包（加吾地方土司）召集其麾下五百名壮士身着盛装，枪械齐备，毛色一致之彪悍坐骑的盛大恭送阵容，送至“岗恩”山梁，甘加部落在此摆场迎候，甘加邀请了“卡加六部落”撑其阵容，除了前来恭迎的僧俗长队以外，还将在从“岗恩”山头往眼甘加的各个大山山尖燃起熊熊桑烟，呐喊鸣枪致意，场景尤为壮观。

he or someone accountable to him received these payments. According to Benno Weiner's research, Gyelwo (Jiawu) Dorjé's influence in Jiawu and across Rebgong during Ma Bufang's regime at the time of Kelzang's selection and enthronement makes it plausible that Drakkar's monks dealt with Gyelwo (Jiawu) Dorjé to secure Kelzang's release to Drakkar. Fascinatingly, this story resembles the search for the current Fourteenth Dalai Lama that occurred around the same time in Qinghai near Ping'an 平安.<sup>215</sup>

While the Gungru lineage does not carry the same political and religious prestige and authority as the Dalai Lama, Kelzang's departure to rival Gengya still needed to be negotiated with Ma Bufang and the leaders of Jiawu in light of the ongoing fighting. In fact, locals from Jiawu remember the fear and uncertainty that surrounded Kelzang's selection in Jiawu, a process led by Drakkar's monks but ultimately decided by Labrang's Fifth Jamyang Zhepa.<sup>216</sup> Tibetans from Jiawu spoke candidly about the search for Kelzang in Jiawu illustrating the precariousness of her beginning under less than serene circumstances. One local, Tenpa from Jiawu, who was about 16 when Kelzang was selected and left for Drakkar, remembered the anxious conditions in which a payment was needed to secure her release to Gengya and the fear surrounding her selection in enemy territory. Tenpa stated:

There was hardship at that time and the Jiawu leader said, 'I will not send her to Gengya.' And I heard that the Jiawu leader took all the payment [to secure Kelzang's release] for himself. I was one of the representatives and I was poor; I did not get any of the payment. I was poor and Alak Gungru was also very poor. And then we worried that the people from

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<sup>215</sup> See Tendzin Gyatso, *My Land, My Land, My People and Freedom in Exile* The Fourteenth Dalai Lama's autobiography mentions the negotiations between the Tibetan government in Lhasa and Ma Bufang in the late 1930s and early 1940s, around the same time that a search party found Kelzang in Jiawu; the Dalai Lama's autobiography states that the Tibetan government made payments before the Dalai Lama could travel to Lhasa. This is an important contextualizing detail for understanding Kelzang's selection in Amdo.

<sup>216</sup> In 2007, Könchok Tendzin writes, kun mkhyen sku phreng lnga pas gung ru mkha' 'gro ma dkon mchog bsdan pa'i dbang mo'i yang sprul du ngos bzung/ Tashi Tsering in 1994 writes that the Fifth Jamyang Zhepa identified her. It is interesting that Könchok Gyatso's works do not claim the Fifth Jamyang Zhepa identified her, perhaps because of the political implications/sensibilities of doing so.



Gengya would come steal her away. I [my family] was among the people who took her to a certain area to make they sure that they didn't steal her. And then the Jiawu leader said, "I will not let her go. Two monks from Drakkar offered a *khatak* [white scarf] to Alak Gungru."<sup>217</sup>

A Jiawu man named Tupten corroborated Tenpa's account. Tupten stated:

At the beginning when Alak Gungru was recognized by Drakkar monks, they gave one sheet of felt and silk. The Jiawu people didn't want the gift [the silk], so they put the silk in my house. When she went to Gengya, her brother was 18 years old and they left together. He's around my age. Alak Gungru was very young when she left for Gengya, but because of the fighting, I do not know how they were able to get there [safely]. They must have been able to sneak away because during this time of the battle, the people of Gengya could not come to Jiawu and welcome them. And the people from Jiawu people could not send them off. If anyone from Gengya came, they would be killed. And if anyone from Jiawu came to Gengya, they were killed. It was too dangerous.<sup>218</sup>

Tupten and Tenpa each introduced a new level of doubt about how Kelzang's family members furtively left Jiawu for Gengya to contrast, or to at least complexify, the obituary's account of the lavish welcome for Kelzang at Drakkar. Sönam, who knew and served Kelzang's family in Jiawu, suggested that the leader of Jiawu threatened to make sure that Kelzang stayed in Jiawu and did *not* go to Drakkar. While Sönam revealed the intense negotiation to secure her release, he also significantly and strategically invoked the iconic

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<sup>217</sup> Interview with Tenpa in July 2016 in Jiawu, Qinghai by the author.

<sup>218</sup> Interview with a man in July 2016 in Jiawu, Qinghai by the author.

Machik Lapdrön, the main Gungru lineage legitimating marker, in an attempt to stitch up the seam of discord and doubt. Sönam stated:

After the Drakkar monks recognized her as a *khandroma*, the Jiawu people gave yellow robes to her [to signify that she is a lama]. But they didn't let her go to Gengya. As the Jiawu herders changed their pasture people from Gengya shot them from the front and back. There was conflict! Because Alak [Kelzang] wore yellow clothes, Gengya herders saw that and immediately the shooting stopped. Even though Gengya people stopped shooting they wanted to take her to Gengya, but were not able to do that. And then the people of Gengya prostrated to Alak Gungru. This period took one year to initially recognize her and for her to go to Gengya. The monks came and give a *khatak* to her and then they planned to ask her to come to Gengya. The leader of Jiawu, said, 'No, we will not let her go [because of the conflict]. In Rebgong, I have a 35 monasteries in this place and I have 18 *nangchens* [estates]. All of the 18 *nangchen's* lamas are from Rebgong.' Then, the Jiawu leader said, 'I will not let her go to go Gengya. Alak Gungru will live in a monastery here and I will give her a *nangchen* here to make it 19 *nangchens*.' She is not going to go to [an area run by] Labrang because of the conflict.' He refused to give her away. Meanwhile, the people from Gengya said, 'We must get our lama [*trülku*] back. The [Gungru lineage] is not just an inconsequential *trülku*. This is Machik Lapdrön's emanation and we must take her to Gengya.' The people of Gengya paid a lot. The payment was divided into each monastery [in Rebgong] and each lama [of the Jiawu leader's monastery/*nangchen*]. The

payment was given to the Jiawu leaders and he divided it. Alak Gungru's estate and Drakkar Monastery made the payment.<sup>219</sup>

The response from Jiawu locals to Kelzang's selection and the tense negotiation that ensued consists of only part of the story that shows how her authority was not as automatic or considered to be as right as the obituary presents it to be. People from Gengya, or the community of herders, farmers and other monastic lay men and women who historically relied on the Gungru lineage to perform rituals and other blessings did *not* immediately want Kelzang as their *trülku*. A retired herder from a small village outside of Labrang and under the jurisdiction of the Gungru lineage, Tsering Dorjé, recalled how people in Gengya were reluctant and not overjoyed to welcome their next Gungru *trülku* from the enemy in Jiawu and instead of Gengya like the second, third and fourth Gungru *trülku*. Tsering Dorjé stated:

[The Fifth] Jamyang Zhepa recognized Alak Gungru and the people of Jiawu said, 'We will not give her to Gengya.' And the people from Gengya said, 'Our own lama wasn't re-born in Gengya, our own place? Why was she born in Jiawu? In Gengya there is a long line of Gungru *trülku* [second, third and fourth]. We don't need her!' The people from Gengya were angry that she wasn't born in Gengya. The people of Gengya did not say that she was not the [actual] Gungru *khandroma*, but they did say, 'We don't need you, why don't you return to your place in Jiawu.' The people of Jiawu said, "We are not giving her to you in Gengya, you are our enemy. Why should we give her to our enemy? The Gengya people said, Between us so many people and animals died, we don't need you."<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Interview with Sonam in July 2016 in Jiawu, Qinghai by the author.

<sup>220</sup> Interview with Tsering Dörjé in July 2016 near Labrang by the author.

Tsering Dorjé said that it took around two years for people in Gengya to accept Kelzang from their rival territory of Jiawu, although it is not entirely clear if this two-year adjustment/cooling off period occurred before or after 1943 when Kelzang’s authority with local people gained more traction upon her enthronement at Drakkar—and the fighting appeared to ease. However, temporal tensions and negotiations aside, the mere act of finding the right candidate in Jiawu was far from certain. In fact, oral accounts interject people’s rumors, doubt and even discussion about Kelzang’s lower social status as a poor servant into the process of finding the Sixth Gungru *trülku*, a story conspicuously missing from any text about Kelzang, as the next subsection shows.

*Doubt with the process to search for the Sixth trülku in enemy territory*

Even though Kelzang’s obituary and a handful of texts about the Gungru lineage assume the inevitability that she would be chosen as the *trülku*, thus asserting continuity in the lineage and legitimating her authority as such, they do so by merely noting her arrival. They do not say anything of the more complicated process of how and why Drakkar monks chose her as the sixth *trülku* or Kelzang’s family’s poverty in Jiawu.<sup>221</sup> Interestingly, Sönam of Jiawu provided some substance to the story of Kelzang’s search—the type of story often featured in a *namtar* such as the *Lotus Vine*—to legitimize and represent the continuity and authority in the lineage and identity of the correct *trülku*.<sup>222</sup> Sönam, who lives in a family that served Kelzang and has a lot at stake in memorializing/sanctifying her, told a *namtar*-like story that he said “has not been written anywhere.” He spoke about how Drakkar monks discovered auspicious signs that legitimated her selection in Jiawu as if it were pre-ordained in this community. He again discussed the search in the context of Kelzang ending the Gengya-Jiawu conflict. Sönam stated:

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<sup>221</sup> See the *Lotus Vine*. See also Gayley’s analysis of the *namtar* written about Tare Lhamo.

<sup>222</sup> See Quintman’s work in the *Yogi and the Madman* for a discussion on the composition of a *namtar* and how such a story took on a life of its own, primarily the needs of the yogin Heruka who wrote the text.

This story is not written anywhere but I know it because Alak Gungru was born here and we know all of the stories about her. She was born here because Jiawu and Gengya had fought for 37 years and afterward the conflict was solved. Three monks from Drakkar came to Jiawu and Alak Gungru's home in Jiawu and brought the Fifth Gungru *trülku* [Tenpé Wangmo's] chanting beads and chanting book. When the three monks arrived at her house, there was a raven flying over their heads—they knew that the Fifth Gungru's protector bird was a raven. Then the monks put the scripture and beads at that spot [Kelzang's family's home] and asked the father, mother and daughter's name; Kelzang's name was Dorjétso. The monks said that they were looking for the sixth Gungru lineage holder of Machik Lapdrön. Her father said, 'No, no no, my daughter is not a reincarnation of Machik Lapdrön. My daughter is my mother's reincarnation.' But [Kelzang] saw the chanting beads, grabbed them and said "These are mine! Look at my book here!" Before that, the monks said, 'We just followed the instruction and searched [in Jiawu], but we did not want any of the [candidates] because of the fighting/enmity between the areas. But then when [Kelzang] said, 'Look at my book and my beads,' the monks suddenly began to prostrate to her. And the former teacher of the Fifth Gungru *trülku* [Tenpé Wangmo] cried.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Interview with Sönam in July 2016 in Jiawu, Qinghai by the author.

This story represents the traditional search process to find the Sixth Gungru *trülku*, the type of dramatic tale that often appears in *namtar* and most famously in the story of the current Dalai Lama to legitimate the correct *trülku* and alleviate any doubt.<sup>224</sup>

But other locals from Jiawu suggest that the process to find the Gungru *trülku* in Jiawu was much more complicated and imbued with uncertainty than Sönam's grand portrayal of Drakkar's monks arriving with auspicious symbols which Kelzang recognized. Kelzang's childhood friend Karmagya discussed the rampant rumors that accompanied the selection of Kelzang. Others talked about how she was raised in a very poor servant's home without a father contra Sönam's claim that her father was involved and objected to Kelzang's selection. Further, while Karmagya and others remembered the premonitions that surrounded Kelzang's birth (typical of most searches), including some that were allegedly spoken by Kelzang to Karmagya during their childhood, others doubted if Kelzang was the actual Gungru *trülku*—also not uncommon in searches for *trülku* as finalists emerge. They spoke of the poor conditions in which she lived and elucidate the socio-economic stakes for one of these finalists to become the prestigious Gungru—social details often washed out of *namtar*. One Jiawu Tibetan said:

Alak Gungru did not have a father at all, or if the father was there, [her mother and father] were not married. When she was recognized [as the sixth Gungru], her mother cried in the corner and felt very sad because when [Kelzang] was taken away she would be there all alone and that no one would accompany her.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> See the Dalai Lama's autobiographies *My Land and My People* and *Freedom from Exile*.

<sup>225</sup> Interview with man in July 2016 in Jiawu, Qinghai by the author.

Kelzang's friend Karmagya recalled the poverty and people's doubt if Kelzang was the right choice or not. But Karmagya also discussed signs of inevitability that Kelzang indeed was the *trülku*. [Note: Alak is Kelzang the *trülku*.] Karmagya stated:

As children, every time we herded we both picked wild garlic and went back to my house because Alak Gungru's house was very poor. We came back here to eat *tsampa* and yogurt. We played together over there on the hill [as Karmagya pointed out the window]. At that time, we still doubted if Kelzang was a lama and said, 'Oh, maybe you are not a real lama,' stuff like that. Because I am talkative and people think I am loose-lipped, I told her, 'If you are an Alak [a *trülku*], then why do you eat garlic? Or, if you are an Alak, why don't you sit lotus style? Alak [Kelzang] simply said, "I am Alak." One time when we were young before she was recognized, we played in the summer pasture and made clay butter lamps out of dirt and Alak Gungru was able to do that very well. Her friends said to her, 'Why do you [make butter lamps] so beautifully?' And she said, 'Because I am an Alak, I can do this and you can't.'<sup>226</sup>

As for the search to find the Sixth Gungru *trülku* and as per tradition of Tibetan reincarnation, rumors began to emerge about the final three known candidates to become the sixth Gungru *trülku*. Karmagya stated:

I don't know all of the other [candidates], but Alak [Kelzang] and Tashi Chelo's daughter, they [community rumors] said that it was either this girl (Kelzang) or that one [Tashi Chelo's daughter]. Then there was a rumor that Tashi Chelo's daughter was a reincarnation of Alak Gungru's dog.

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<sup>226</sup> Interview with Karmagya in July 2016 in Jiawu, Qinghai by the author.

Later, [after not being chosen], Tashi Chelo's daughter married someone from Gyentsa, 尖扎 in Qinghai and her family moved there.<sup>227</sup>

These rumors help show the stakes for a young girl (and her family) to advance in social status to the coveted Gungru position and attain the attendant wealth, access to networks of high-ranking figures culminating in authority in the community and region that came with the position. Leonard van der Kuijp claims in a recent article that some Tibetans from lower backgrounds became teachers, tantric exemplars and scholars, hence illustrating a path of upward mobility that occurred for some in a monastic milieu. His analysis helps explain the stakes for these final three girls in Jiawu to become the sixth *trülku* even though most *trülku* seemingly have little choice in the matter.<sup>228</sup> Although in addition to accumulating economic capital that came with holding the Gungru position, the stakes for these finalists also included amassing social capital by participating in elite *trülku* networks and the commensurate prestige (symbolic capital) of holding a high-ranking religious, political and social role.<sup>229</sup> The next section further unpacks these stakes by describing a challenge from one of the girls (Damtsik) who was *not* chosen as the sixth *trülku* in the 1940s—a de-stabilizing challenge or flashpoint that has directly impacted Kelzang's authority today (See Chapter 4). It is not entirely clear given the name changes if Damtsik, who was also born in the servant class in Jiawu, was one of these final three girls, and she never claimed to be a finalist when I spoke with her in 2009.<sup>230</sup> Regardless, the next section discusses this never-written story of conflict between Damtsik and Kelzang, a story that many people associated with Kelzang and with

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<sup>227</sup> Interview with Karmagya in July 2016 in Jiawu, Qinghai by the author.

<sup>228</sup> van der Kuijp, "Notes on the Spiritual Teacher," 7-9 discusses how scholarship and intellectual achievement and expertise in tantric ritual presented an opportunity for those from a lower classes status to attain upward social mobility, although he cites Hansen's work that suggests this was not easy and restrictions on an individual's economic situation occurred.

<sup>229</sup> See Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 16, 35, 68, 124-5. See also Ducher's dissertation for a clear breakdown of Bourdieu's definitions of capital.

<sup>230</sup> Interview with Damtsik Drölma in August 2009 in Xining, China by the author.



the production of her *namtar* do not want divulged because of the controversy and uncertainty that it shows.

### **Part III**

#### **Contested Authority: Kelzang Challenged by Damtsik at Drakkar**

The first two sections demonstrate how a community of monks, herders, farmers and workers in Gengya and Jiawu did not automatically confer authority on Kelzang in the Gungru lineage's difficult transition amidst the Gengya-Jiawu conflict. This section illuminates a soap opera-like saga that most people close to Kelzang, as well as the PRC and Tibetan monastic institutions, would rather keep buried because of the drama it reveals about Kelzang's doubted authority in the 1940s. The story with many different versions and wild accusations centers around how a girl named Damtsik Drölma challenged Kelzang to be the Gungru *trülku* and the genesis of a 50-year long dispute that has persisted (See Chapter 4). While competition is not unprecedented in *trülku* lineages throughout Tibetan history, this dispute or still-festering wound in the Gungru lineage, has implicated Kelzang's authority to this day, as the fourth chapter discusses when Kelzang became a lay mother while Damtsik did not.<sup>231</sup>

The introduction to this dissertation claims that at least two name variants "Damtsik Drölma" and "Kelzang Drölma" appeared for the Gungru lineage in a prominent internet Buddhist database (Buddhist Digital Resource Center) and in many cases these names are used interchangeably to identify and confuse the Sixth Gungru *trülku*. And while the fourth chapter unpacks the more recent aspects of this competition and confusion that re-emerged after the Cultural Revolution, this section shows the history and the political and social

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<sup>231</sup> Competition or the recognition of multiple candidates in reincarnate lineages has occurred in Tibetan history most famously known in the most elite lineages, including the Dalai Lama, Karmapa and Panchen *trülku*. One alleged case involving the Dalai Lama and analyzed in more detail in Chapter 4 of this dissertation came in the late eighteenth century when the Gara Lama's alleged candidacy was withdrawn and leading to later conflict. Tashi Tsering in Diemberger's *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty*, 299-300, discusses the ramifications of multiple reincarnates recognized in the recent Samding Dörjé Pakmo lineage. See also Gamble, Schwieger and Wylie's works on reincarnation for discussions about the institution of reincarnation in Tibet.

contexts from whence this rivalry began in the 1940s. Moreover, the story, which includes rampant rumors and even charges of fraud and thievery committed by Damtsik, serves as a microcosm of the strife that occurred between Gengya and Jiawu and wider disputes between Labrang and Rebgong and also Labrang's war with Ma Bufang in the early twentieth century. This shows, once again, that the embers of this bitterness embroiled the Gungru lineage and its authority on the ground as Kelzang represented Gengya (and Labrang) while Damtsik represented Jiawu, Rebgong and Ma Bufang.

Yet, at the same time, this challenge in the 1940s for which Kelzang emerged the victor provided a cogent focal point for monks at Drakkar and Kelzang's husband eight decades later to unite around Kelzang and decisively defend her authority. They used this first incident between Kelzang and Damtsik to highlight many of the known narrative and legitimating strategies or tools in their repertoires to promote and construct Kelzang's authority as the legitimate sixth Gungru *trülku*. For example, they declared Kelzang as the true emanation of Machik Lapdrön as confirmed by the prestigious Jamyang Zhepa of Labrang. They also extolled Kelzang as the young Gungru *trülku* who studied Machik's chö practice with the renowned Lagu Rinpoche at Kumbum Monastery located outside of Xining with a young Tenth Panchen *trülku*. Meanwhile, Damtsik, according to some, did *not* have any of these requisite identifying markers of the Gungru *trülku* as this first subsection attests.

*Narrating the genesis of conflict: Damtsik arrives saying she's the "real" Gungru*

Even though Kelzang did not confirm or deny if she knew Damtsik in our interview in 2010—she likely kept silent as a party cadre in the PRC, and also, no less significantly, per her daughter's reminder not to tell me material that could challenge any story being written about her—her husband Chödzin was more than willing to speak. Chödzin, who has been more or less estranged from the rest of Kelzang's family as later chapters discuss, did not

hold back in his attempt to curate and narrate Kelzang's story and in particular when asked about this incident between Damtsik and Kelzang in the 1940s. He immediately jumped at the chance to defend and assert Kelzang's authority by saying that when Damtsik showed up at Drakkar claiming to be the real Gungru *trülku* the situation resolved in Kelzang's favor and without any doubt. Doing so allowed Chödzin to promote himself as a purveyor of information about Kelzang's early history that other stakeholders writing Kelzang's *namtar* today will likely not divulge—as all vie to legitimate Kelzang's authority as the Sixth Gungru *trülku* (See Chapter 5). Chödzin recalled how Kelzang's older brother Jamyang Gyatso (d. 2003) told him about how Damtsik arrived at Drakkar in the 1940s and said, “I am the real Gungru *Khandroma*.” Chödzin stated:

[Kelzang's older brother] Jamyang Gyatso said that Damtsik came to Drakkar and the *nangchen* [estate] and said, ‘Now you [Kelzang] are recognized as the *khandroma*, but actually I am the real [trülku]. Instead, they put you [Kelzang] on the throne.’ [Damtsik] was very shameless in saying that. I don't know how old she was when she came [to Drakkar], but it's very true that she came to Drakkar to tell Alak Gungru [Kelzang], ‘Now you are the one on the throne [as the Gungru *trülku*] but the real [Gungru *trülku*] is me.’ [Damtsik] said a lot of nonsense and at that time Alak Gungru was already ordained in Drakkar. Many of the servants who took care of [Kelzang] at Drakkar said to each other, ‘Damtsik says that she is the real *Khandroma*?’ Then the Drakkar monks said to Damtsik, ‘Given that Alak Gungru [Kelzang] was recognized by [the Fifth] Jamyang Zhepa, did our [Drakkar] monks and the Jamyang Zhepa make a mistake not to

recognize you?' Then several monks tried to beat [Damtsik] for saying this nonsense [about being the *trülku*] and she ran away and never returned."<sup>232</sup>

Chödzin, who also played a role in solving the resurgent conflict between people associated with Damtsik and Kelzang after the Cultural Revolution (Chapter 4), expanded on why Kelzang did not share anything about Damtsik in my 2010 interview with her and about how Damtsik arrived at Drakkar. This story brings up a slew of issues that Kelzang, the PRC, Drakkar and Labrang would not want her to disclose, i.e., the many religious and political entanglements that this competition and resultant identity clash discloses as Chapter 4 discusses. Furthermore, Kelzang publicly addressing Damtsik's challenge at Drakkar could cast doubt about Kelzang's authority as the Sixth Gungru *trülku* today if more people knew that this incident took place in the 1940s and then the confusion that transpired decades later, so Kelzang stayed quiet. Chödzin said:

Of course [Kelzang] cannot say, I am the real [Gungru *trülku*] and she's not. But the truth is that the Fifth Jamyang Zhepa recognized her and the Tenth Panchen Lama's teacher [Lagu Rinpoche] said that Alak Gungru is the real Machik Lapdrön. What more can you say to make sure Alak Gungru is the real *khandroma*? Labrang gave a lot of money to Jiawu and said that she [Kelzang] must be seated as the Gungru *trülku*. After this, the fighting between Gengya and Jiawu ended. [Note: Other sources in the second section said that Labrang did not give money to Jiawu, but rather it was Drakkar that paid the sum]. Later, when there was freedom to practice religion after the Cultural Revolution, Damtsik did not [yet] have her own monastery, but Kelzang was at Drakkar. Aröl Rinpoché Lozang Lungtok

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<sup>232</sup> Interview with Chödzin in 2016 and 2017 in Labrang by the author.

Jétsün Tenpé Gyeltsen died in 1958 so I don't know if [Damtsik] was recognized by him or not. [*The Concise History of Monasteries of Southern Qinghai Lake* says that Aröl Rinpoche recognized her]. [Damtsik] went to rural areas in Qinghai for a while and then she went to Chapcha prefecture in Gonghe, 共和 Qinghai to spin the mani prayer wheel.<sup>233</sup>

Here, Chödzin called on many powerful narrative strategies or tools available in his repertoire to legitimate and construct Kelzang's authority, in particular invoking Machik and the renowned Tenth Panchen Lama.<sup>234</sup> Several Drakkar monks also corroborated Chödzin's account about how Damtsik came to Drakkar in the 1940s and claimed to be the correct Gungru *trülku*. An impromptu gathering of monks at Drakkar in July 2016 recounted how Damtsik came there and proclaimed her identity as the Gungru *trülku*. Strikingly, this story resonated with many of these monks and was at the forefront of their minds. Or perhaps the story became jarred after I told them that I had just traveled to Jiawu, as if the name Jiawu was synonymous with Damtsik's challenge to Kelzang in the 1940s.

**Author (the present writer):** We just came back from Jiawu Luqi.

**Monk A:** There was the Alak Gungru (Damtsik Drölma) who said that she is our [Drakkar Monastery's] Alak Gungru!

**Monk B:** Oh? (expressing surprise about this).

**Monk A:** But [Damtsik] was later put on the throne in Qinghai Lake [in the 1980s at her monastery Gyayé Gön Ngotsar Tardrenling].

**Group of Monks gathering around:** Yes, we heard something like this [about how Damtsik arrived at Drakkar], too. There is something like this that happened here [with Damtsik].

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<sup>233</sup> Interviews with Chödzin in 2016 and 2017 in Labrang by the author.

<sup>234</sup> See Campany's "Religious Repertoires and Contestation: A Case Study Based on Buddhist Miracle Tales," 106-107.

**Another monk:** I don't know [Damtsik's] history, but I heard that she came here [to Drakkar].

**Author to group of monks:** Do you know when exactly she came here and what she said at that time?

**A monk:** You should go to [Drakkar scholar monk] Könchok Gyatso or you can go to an old monk here who knows, too. He will know the other Alak Gungru's [Damtsik Drölma's] story.

**A monk to Author:** Does the Qinghai Lake *Khandroma* [Damtsik] have a [*trülku*] lineage?

**Author:** She has a monastery [in Gyayé, Qinghai Lake], but her reincarnation will [allegedly] soon be discovered. The earlier *trülku* in her lineage, I don't know.

**Monk:** There is no lineage before this one [Damtsik]! Just go ask the old monks, they will know. There's a monk from Labrang, who is from [Gengya] Zhölkor, and he will know."

**Author:** Is that Trinlé Gyatso [a Labrang monk who was from Gengya Zhölkor and a friend of Kelzang's family]?

**Drakkar Monk:** No, Gendün Darjé [Labrang monk and author of Kelzang's *namtar*], will know. He knows about her history.<sup>235</sup>

While these monks at Drakkar spoke openly about this conflict and were ready to resolutely re-affirm Kelzang's legitimate authority as the Gungru *trülku* others tried to conceal it. Some, like the Labrang monk Gendün Darjé and other monks at Drakkar denied or minimized this conflict so as to diminish the meaning of what happened between these two

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<sup>235</sup> Interview with a group of monks at Drakkar in July 2016 in Labrang by the author.

women at Drakkar in the 1940s. They did so likely because of what this type of explosive history could reveal about the still-unresolved issues between these two women after the Cultural Revolution (Chapter 4), and hence provide a window into the state of Kelzang's actual challenged authority. Thus, Gendün Darjé, whom one of the younger Drakkar monks said "will know" this history, abruptly responded, "No, they didn't (have a conflict)." Perhaps Gendün Darjé denied this account because he wanted to smooth over any incident or fissure in Kelzang's story in order to legitimate, memorialize and sanctify Kelzang's authority in a textual format as the author of Kelzang's *namtar* (Chapter 5). Or maybe he avoided this conflict because as someone supporting the person on the prevailing side of this contested claim (Kelzang), Gendün Darjé opted to efface this history, as the case of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and the Gara Lama shows (See Chapter 4). To this point, one of the older monks from Drakkar who knew Kelzang well said curtly, "I don't know," when asked if Damtsik came to Drakkar (in the 1940s). It seems implausible that Drakkar's younger monks would willingly share this story that clearly was passed down to them and that an older monk and contemporary to Kelzang would "not know" other than he did not want to divulge any details that could harm Kelzang or himself. Meanwhile, the scholar monk Könchok Gyatso at Drakkar adopted a distant if not more nuanced position as a published author about Gengya and Drakkar who wanted to avoid any blemishes in Kelzang and the Gungru lineage's grand narrative. He said, "I have heard about this (conflict), but from Labrang's side it is not possible that there are two reincarnates for the Gungru position."<sup>236</sup> Finally, another Drakkar monk acknowledged that Damtsik came to Drakkar, but as soon as he started talking he began to backpedal, likely in an effort to downplay the incident and/or smooth over the bumps in Kelzang's early story. He stated:

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<sup>236</sup> Interviews with Könchok Gyatso in July 2011 and July 2012 in Drakkar Monastery. The interview with the older monk occurred in July 2016 at Drakkar. I interviewed Gendün Darjé in 2017 in Labrang by the author.

There was no conflict. She just came here to Drakkar. These days there are a lot of people like that who say, “I am [a reincarnation of] this *khandroma* or that *khandroma*. They just come [to a place] with that [saying she is a *khandroma*] as their purpose. She was just roaming around and she came here. They [Kelzang and Damtsik] are from the same village, I had heard that. Oh, [they are] not from the same village but they both come from servants—they both have that servant status in Jiawu Luqi. Okay, I’m going now, bye-bye.”<sup>237</sup>

This monk’s abrupt end to our conversation signaled his obvious discomfort with the controversial topic of when Damtsik came to Drakkar. And while he did not want to continue, Gengya native and Labrang monk Trinlé Gyatso expanded on the conflict with a more explosive story based on his own research as the next subsection shows.

*Labrang monk accuses Damtsik of theft and identity fraud in Jiawu*

Labrang monk Trinlé Gyatso, who grew up in a house in Gengya Zhölkör that belonged to the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo and wants to promote Kelzang as the legitimate *trülku*, introduced some incendiary detail. He provided a more sinister motive for Damtsik to claim that she was the “real” Gungru—identity fraud—showing that this incident was no innocuous matter at that time, or today, in terms of elucidating Kelzang’s authority in Gengya and Labrang. Trinlé Gyatso’s main point of contention has been to counter current Labrang monk Jamyang Gyatso’s claim that Damtsik is “the real Gungru *trülku*” as explained further in the fourth chapter.<sup>238</sup> Therefore, unlike fellow Labrang monk Gendün Darjé who is not interested in historical or social details, Trinlé Gyatso uncovered evidence to disprove

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<sup>237</sup> Interview with monk in July 2016 at Drakkar by the author.

<sup>238</sup> This Jamyang Gyatso is a monk at Labrang but not the same Jamyang Gyatso who became famous as a teacher in Labrang and who dedicated Kelzang’s *chöten* after her death (See Chapter 5).



Damtsik's claim to the Gungru throne rather than opt to neglect or smooth over any issue. And Trinlé Gyatso made sure others, including monks at Drakkar, knew some of the obstacles that Kelzang overcame to be the Gungru *trülku*, a tale of triumph he wants known likely in light of the current confusion explained in later chapters. Trinlé Gyatso stated:

I have been stopping [Jamyang Gyatso] from saying these types of things [that there is a Qinghai Lake Alak Gungru who is the real one]. Then, I did some research about our Alak Gungru [Kelzang] and found out that she was born in a poor family in Jiawu, she was born to a servant. Do you [Drakkar monk Jinba] know that Alak's mother is from a poor family? The woman [Damtsik] who said, 'I am Alak Gungru' is also from the same servant class there. The Tibetan government recognized [Kelzang] and gave a letter [likely written by Tibetan religious leaders at Labrang] that said that, "You are Alak Gungru" to the leader of Jiawu Luqi and to Alak Gungru. Later, this certificate somehow got into the hands of the person [Damtsik] who said, "I am the real Alak Gungru." Then [Damtsik] said, "I am the real one because I have this certificate and [Kelzang] is the fake one."<sup>239</sup>

Trinlé Gyatso, who did not answer any follow up questions or numerous phone calls about this matter, introduced this more dramatic story of fraud and doubt into the larger narrative about Kelzang and the Gungru lineage. This account re-affirmed Kelzang's authority as the real Gungru *trülku* insofar as this incident/confrontation at Drakkar was resolved in the 1940s in Kelzang's favor, at least from Gengya's standpoint. However, this story attains greater significance today in that some people's doubts about Kelzang's

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<sup>239</sup> Interview/conversation with Trinlé Gyatso in August 2013 at Drakkar by the author.

authority resurfaced as Damtsik again stated her claim to be the Gungru *trülku* after the Cultural Revolution (See Chapter 4).

Yet, when asked about this specific incident of identity fraud introduced by Trinlé Gyatso, Gendün Darjé said tersely that he “did not know” before he added that, “Trinlé Gyatso is not a normal (or true) monk or a good person.” Gendün Darjé did not explain why he felt that way about Trinlé Gyatso but perhaps Trinlé Gyatso’s friendship with Kelzang’s son Depön, a figure that Gendün Darjé and many monks at Drakkar dislike (Chapters 4 and 5), influenced his response. Or, it is possible Gendün Darjé wanted to discredit Trinlé Gyatso’s claim that shows the contested nature of Kelzang’s authority in the Gungru lineage. For this type of drama does not fit with the seamless narrative that Gendün Darjé wants to tell as the author of her *namtar*—the one that reconstitutes a tradition about her in the pantheon of the Gungru lineage, legitimates her authority as an emanation of Machik Lapdrön and most important for Gendün Darjé avoids “non-religious details” (Chapter 5).

In fact, Trinlé Gyatso’s accusation of Damtsik’s identity fraud exposes more fissures about the difficult transition in the Gungru lineage than the story Chödzin and the monks at Drakkar confirmed about Damtsik claiming to be the real Gungru before Drakkar monks rebuffed her and allegedly beat her. Notably, Chödzin did *not* discuss the stolen certificate incident and when I asked him about it, he instead referred to his prior answer about Damtsik’s claim to be the Gungru *trülku* at Drakkar—a story with a clear and resolved outcome in Kelzang’s favor, i.e., the preservation of Kelzang’s authority. Perhaps Chödzin avoided this incident of identity fraud for how, in the end, it marked the genesis of a life-long conflict between Kelzang and Damtsik that has *not* and may never be fully resolved in Amdo as stakeholders (including himself) want to sew everything up in a packaged narrative (See Chapter 5). Or maybe Chödzin simply did not know this more explosive story that Trinlé Gyatso said he researched on his own. In this case, it is possible that Trinlé Gyatso’s story

threatened Chödzin's status as the main curator of Kelzang's story and the triumphant tale of how her authority withstood such challenges from her foe.

Furthermore, Trinlé Gyatso's account about the certificate shows that Kelzang's selection became embroiled in local class and status/mobility issues casting doubt on the search process that was not as automatic or simple as the obituary propagates. A member of the servant class, Damtsik's tactics to obtain the Gungru seat and the attendant authority, i.e., the proper insignia, exemplify how, as Leonard van der Kuijp claims in his own work, some Tibetans advanced their social mobility in a monastic milieu.<sup>240</sup> Although van der Kuijp does not address how one could obtain such status by possible illicit means of fraud. Maybe Damtsik's tack represents a fine example of her seeking to gain access to social and symbolic capital and the networks previously unavailable to her. These networks would afford Damtsik access to the elite *trülku* class at Labrang and across Amdo who interacted with previous Gungru *trülku* as the *Lotus Vine* attests about Rindzin Pelmo as shown in the first chapter. On this front, a Bourdieuan analysis applies well to Kelzang, too, who given her own servant status, could not access this *trülku* class—or the *trülku* networks of authority—until she was chosen and enthroned at Drakkar. Yet, one of Damtsik's contemporaries from Gyayé, Qinghai questioned Damtsik's claim to be the Gungru *trülku*—or any *trülku* for that matter—adding more intrigue and doubt to the drama involving Kelzang and Damtsik in the 1940s and 1950s and setting the stage for the later conflict, as discussed in the next subsection.

*A retired Tibetan official from Gyayé labels Damtsik a liar and a thief*

The now late Püntso, who was influential in Gyayé government affairs and knew Damtsik for nearly five decades, illuminated more of the context of this competition that bolstered Kelzang's authority as the Gungru *trülku* and impugned Damtsik as a liar. He said

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<sup>240</sup> “See van der Kuijp's “Notes on the Spiritual Teacher.”

in an interview at his home in Gyayé that he did not know about Damtsik going to Drakkar to proclaim herself as the Gungru *trülku* in the late 1940s or if she ever possessed a stolen certificate. But he doubted that Damtsik ever was a *trülku* or if she was ever recognized by Aröl Rinpoché. Püntsok stated:

She likes to tell many lies. Aröl Rinpoche recognized her? In which book does it say that? What is written in the article is a lie. They are just making this up that Aröl Rinpoche recognized her. If [Aröl Rinpoche] recognized her, then in which monastery did she stay? Who's the owner of the monastery and where's her *nangchen* [estate]? We should have this information in the written history, but we do not. What's written in these articles is meaningless. I have that book [that tells these lies]. If Aröl Rinpoche recognized her, then why did she get married at 17 years old? There's nothing about where she was when she was 9-years-old.<sup>241</sup>

For the record, Püntsok did not specify what article he referred to, but “The Monastery of Gyayé Gön Ngotsar Tardrenling” in Gyayé, Qinghai from the volume *The Concise History of Monasteries in Southern Qinghai Lake Area* says that “when (Damtsik) was young Aröl Rinpoche recognized her as the *trülku* of the “Gungru lineage and that she received ordination vows at age nine.”<sup>242</sup> And while Chapter 4 discusses this name change (from Gungru to Gungri to Gangri) and Damtsik’s use of Aröl Rinpoche on her identity card as it relates to understanding Kelzang’s authority today, it is important to first unpack the stakes and the precedent of how Damtsik used the names Aröl and Gungru early on. In particular, it is noteworthy that Püntsok questioned Damtsik’s character and especially her getting married.

He stated:

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<sup>241</sup> Interview with Püntsok in August 2012 in Gyayé, Qinghai by the author.

<sup>242</sup> See *Mtsho lho khul gyi dgon sde khag gi lo rgyus snying bsdus* [The Brief Histories of Monasteries in Southern Qinghai] 423, for the entry on Damtsik’s monastery Rgya ye dgon ngo mtshar thar 'dren gling.

“Damtsik is not a *trülku*! I asked the government [village leader] if I could bring her to Gyayé, [in the 1960s]. The leader said if you can bring her [to Gyayé], then it’s okay. I am the one who took her here. The government rules changed [in 1980s] and in Hainan 海南 there’s a leader named Döndrup Gyel [not the twentieth century-writer from Xining by the same name]. And he sent me somebody from the Prefecture Religious Department and Hainan County Religious Department and a driver to go back to Rebgong to figure out what happened to her, to understand her background. People in Rebgong said that she is not a *trülku* because she was married at age 17 and that later she stole several strings of coral from [the family she married into]. The family noticed that she stole the coral and she ran away. They chased after her, caught her and beat her up. And [because of this] she couldn’t return to Rebgong, but later she roamed around and said that she’s Gungru *Khandroma*. She’s not a *trülku*! The Rebgong villagers said that there was nothing further to be researched about whether she was a *trülku* or not. The villagers told [the government, in an apparent joke], ‘If you need brides to get married or some young nuns we can help you. She’s not a lama, she’s not Gungru *Khandroma*.’ They said, “Because you are rich in Qinghai Lake villages, so you can treat somebody who is not a *trülku* as a *trülku*.”<sup>243</sup>

Not surprisingly, people close to Damtsik, and even Damtsik herself in an interview with me in 2009 in Xining, Qinghai before she died in April 2010, either denied Püntso’s explosive account or they provided a counter version of Damtsik’s early adventures. Damtsik, with whom I spoke before I knew the parameters of this conflict with Kelzang, said that she

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<sup>243</sup> Interview with Püntso in August 2012 in Gyayé, Qinghai by the author.

was a nun at nine years old. But then she abruptly said to me, “Why do you want to know about these details (of my early life?)” in a clear attempt to change the subject or to perhaps cover up any dubious material she did not want me to know such as her arrival at Drakkar or that she had been married and broke her vow.<sup>244</sup> It is not entirely clear if Damtsik (her birth name is unknown) is the girl who Kelzang’s childhood friend Karmagya in Jiawu referred to above as “Tashi Chelo’s daughter.” Recall from Part II that Tashi Chelo’s daughter was one of the three finalists not chosen as the Gungru *trülku* and was said to have married and moved with her entire family to Gyentsa, Qinghai. On a broader scale, Karmagya and Püntsock’s stories match up in relation to someone who did not attain access to the Gungru throne and later moved and married. But one of Damtsik’s close relatives, Tsering, who still lives in Rebgong, vehemently denied that Damtsik ever married. In an interview in 2016, Tsering states:

She was never married, I am very clear about this. We are close in age [two years] and I know clearly she was not married. This is a lie. Some people who like her will write [or say] good things about her. Some people who don’t like her will write [or say] bad things about her.<sup>245</sup>

In the meantime, a *trülku* from Jakhyung Monastery in Qinghai, whose mother Réku was adopted by Damtsik after the Cultural Revolution, emphatically claimed that Aröl Rinpoche had “recognized (Damtsik) as the Gungru *Khandroma*.” His oral account from 2017, which did not mention Damtsik’s marriage and will be detailed in Chapter 4, said that Damtsik met some well-known Chinese figures and that “a high-ranking Mongolian family from Qinghai who knew Ma Bufang adopted Damtsik when she was nine.” Notably, the Jakhyung *trülku*’s version links Damtsik to Labrang rival Ma Bufang and also likely to Jiawu

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<sup>244</sup> Interview with Damtsik Drölma in August 2009 in Xining, Qinghai by the author.

<sup>245</sup> Interview with Tsering in July 2016 in Tongren, Qinghai by the author.

Dorjé, the Ma Bufang-backed leader at that time in Jiawu, Gengya's longtime adversary. This also lends credence to how Damtsik could have possibly obtained the Gungru certificate as per Trinlé Gyatso's charge as stated above and then challenge Kelzang at Drakkar. Moreover, the Jakhyung *trülku* said that Damtsik stayed in Rebgong until she was 20 which contradicts Püntsok's claim of her marriage and her running away at age 17 after stealing coral from her husband's family.<sup>246</sup>

Despite the Jakhyung *trülku* and Damtsik's relative Tsering's denial of Püntsok's account about how she had married, Tsering confirmed that Damtsik did in fact go to Drakkar after Aröl Rinpoche identified her, even though Tsering said that she was *not* discovered as a *trülku*. Here, Tsering contradicts the Jakhyung *trülku* and *The Concise History of Monasteries* and apparently confirms which girl (Damtsik or Kelzang) was a legitimate *trülku*: Kelzang. But Tsering's words nonetheless muddied the waters about the current status of Kelzang's authority in Amdo and the quest to present Kelzang's authority in a *namtar*. He said that Aröl Rinpoche, who himself was not chosen to be a high *trülku* at Rebgong's Rongbo Monastery (he was a finalist in the early twentieth century<sup>247</sup>), identified Damtsik in the 1940s. After that, Damtsik went to Drakkar. Tsering stated:

There's no one who said she's a *trülku*, there's no one who recognized her [as a *trülku*]. Earlier she stayed here in this place, her birthplace is Trangyar [near Rebgong]. She didn't have a father but she did have a mother and a brother. Since her family was not rich, she came with my mother to stay here. Then she went back to her home and roamed around and went to many monasteries and stayed there. Aröl Rinpoche recognized her and said, 'You go in that direction [to find a monastery]. At

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<sup>246</sup> Interview with a *trülku* in September 30, 2017 in Gyayé, Qinghai by the author.

<sup>247</sup> Discussion in 2017 with a professor who currently teaches in Lanzhou, Gansu by the author.

that time, I was really young so I am not so clear about what he said [other than that] he said, ‘You go around and finally you will get somewhere.’ ...

“Yes, [Damtsik] went to Gengya Drakkar to practice meditation and from there she slowly went to other places. We didn’t know what she was thinking at that time. I don’t know the details about [that story where she said, ‘I am the Gungru *Khandroma*’]. She went there and later to Gyayé,, but no one recognized her as a *trülku*.<sup>248</sup>

While Tsering offered a more benign version of Damtsik’s “visit” to Drakkar, his version at least confirms that Damtsik went there; he’s the only person from Damtsik’s side to admit as much. Significantly, like the Jakhyung *trülku* above, Tsering made the extraordinary claim that underscores the identity confusion that existed—and still does—regarding Kelzang’s authority as the sixth *trülku*. He said, “(Kelzang and Damtsik) are different people but their name “Gungru” is the same. They have the same name but different birth places and different monasteries.”<sup>249</sup> With his comment, Tsering not only exposed a big part of the conflict in the 1930s and 1940s, but also the foundation for the dispute that re-emerged after the Cultural Revolution—the exact type of story laden with doubt that most people seeking to reconstitute and legitimate Kelzang’s authority in her *namtar* want to avoid like a hot stove. For this is the type of story that exemplifies the erosion of Kelzang’s authority in conjunction with her loss of symbolic capital (lack of prestige). Therefore, it is necessary here to unpack Kelzang’s authority and all of the attendant controversies, i.e., the stolen certificate and rebuffed challenge at Drakkar; issues of affiliation and Damtsik’s alleged marriage in spite of the possible “damage to the institution” of the Gungru lineage

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<sup>248</sup> Interview with relative Tsering in July 2016 in Tongren by the author.

<sup>249</sup> Interview with relative Tsering in July 2016 in Tongren by the author.



that such controversies can cause, according to scholar Tashi Tsering.<sup>250</sup> Seeing this discontinuity—and attempts to resolve these challenges and doubt—provides a more accurate read that Kelzang’s authority as the Sixth Gungru *trülku* was not inherent or located away from these temporal conditions and the commensurate human drama that came with them.

### Concluding Thoughts

The ensuing years after the challenge between Kelzang and Damtsik at Drakkar (and allegedly before with the stolen certificate) marked the calm before the next storm and where Kelzang performed many of the duties of past Gungru *trülku* or the ideals attributed to past *trülku* as presented in the *Lotus Vine* and the scant material about the Fifth *trülku*. After Damtsik allegedly married in the wake of being rebuffed at Drakkar, Kelzang acted as the official Gungru *trülku* from her estate at Drakkar like previous Gungru *trülku*. She did this in spite of the still on-going warfare between Jiawu and Gengya and the whirls of revolution stirring throughout Republic of China in the 1930s and 1940s.

Around the time Kelzang received the challenge from Damtsik, Kelzang embarked in traditional religious training as her obituary states and that she herself noted in one of the few topics she discussed in our 2010 interview at Labrang. Her obituary shows that Kelzang became an accomplished practitioner of Machik’s chö with her teacher Lagu Rinpoche and alongside the young Tenth Panchen Lama—a key legitimating strategy in reconstituting the tradition about Kelzang’s authority within the annals of the Gungru lineage (Chapter 1). Kelzang said that she “chatted with the Tenth Panchen Lama like they were kids” when they studied at Kumbum Monastery outside of Xining while Kelzang’s husband Chödzin aimed to legitimate her authority as the Great Mother Machik Lapdrön.<sup>251</sup> Chödzin said that “(Kelzang’s) voice was so beautiful and that Lagu, who became her chö teacher after the

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<sup>250</sup> Diemberger, *When a Woman*, 300, cites Tsering’s contention that the controversy over the Twelfth Dorjé Pakmo *trülku* caused damage to the institution and contributed to the “loss of the spiritual authority.”

<sup>251</sup> Interview with Kelzang in December 2010 in Labrang by the author.

Sodrak *trülku* left Labrang during the Muslim-Labrang conflict, would stand when she entered the monastery since (Kelzang) was the real Machik Lapdrön.<sup>252</sup>

Moreover, in addition to her authority as the reincarnation of the Great Mother Machik, Lozang Chöpel, 74, of Gengya's Tawa village near Drakkar, illustrates Kelzang's authority as a surrogate mother figure with others and especially monks. Lozang Chöpel arrived at Kelzang's estate (*nangchen*) when he was 6 years old in 1952 because of his family's connection with the Fifth Gungru *trülku* and he soon became a monk. He developed a close relationship with Kelzang with whom he said "was like my mother" until 1958 when the PRC closed the multi-storied estate. Lozang Chöpel said that around 15 people lived at the Gungru estate and that Kelzang supported the monks who lived there with donations that she received from locals. He also said that she studied chö.<sup>253</sup>

Lozang Chöpel's account portrays a sense of continuity in the Gungru lineage as his own story links the Fifth and Sixth Gungru *trülku*, not to mention provides a rare look at how the lineage functioned from her Drakkar estate before 1958. He helps elucidate Kelzang's authority as the official *trülku* who came into her own studying chö and established her estate in the 1940s under the duress of the grassland conflict between Jiawu and Gengya. So, too, did Kelzang act as a surrogate mother of the community at large performing rituals like previous Gungru *trülku*, a major way that Kelzang maintained authority with her lay audience. Tsering Dorjé, 75, from Pudi (near Labrang) remembered how his fellow villagers relied on Kelzang just like they did earlier Gungru *trülku* to bless their harvest and that she came to Pudi when he was 7 or 8 years old. Tsering Dorjé said, "That's the only time I ever saw her in monk's robes. She chanted prayers during that visit and each household gave small sacks

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<sup>252</sup> Interview with Chödzin in August 2016 at his house in Labrang by the author.

<sup>253</sup> Interview with Lozang Chöpel in November 2018 at his house in Drakkar by the author.

of barley to her (a yak-hair bag of barley). She came to my house when we lived in a different part of Pudi.”<sup>254</sup>

These three accounts that show Kelzang’s Buddhist acuity, her work with monks at her estate and in the local villages elaborate how members of the monastic and lay audiences judged her actions as right after she became the *trülku*, hence producing the effect of her authority in Gengya and Labrang. Therefore, it is not surprising that the obituary emphasized similar stories and that any *namtar* written about Kelzang will surely spotlight these tales as compared to many accounts highlighted in this chapter that tell a more fragmented and fraught story. In this vein, this chapter uses oral narratives from lower-ranked monks and the lay audience in Gengya, Labrang and Jiawu—voices not normally featured in official texts about *trülku*—to assess the wider and more nuanced impacts of Kelzang’s authority. These stories from home workers, herders, farmers, school workers and lower-level monks showed that the Gungru lineage’s authority was not seamless and was riddled with doubt during the difficult transition. They discuss the Fifth Gungru Tenpé Wangmo’s life and how her own (lack of) authority was imbricated in the temporal turbulence of the grassland warfare and thus impacted the transition. They show that Kelzang’s birth and enthronement did not miraculously end the war despite attempts to portray her as a heroine. They show that Kelzang’s selection in enemy territory was not automatic and some rejected her or believed that she was the right *trülku*. And they demonstrate the genesis of a conflict as Damtsik challenged Kelzang for her seat and was rebuffed but not before seeds of doubt were planted.

While these stories about Kelzang’s early years, including many that Kelzang’s family likely did not want me to know, challenge the master narrative that seeks to reconstitute Kelzang’s authority, the next chapter reclaims events and a person—Kelzang—from the amnesia of the Cultural Revolution period. Oral narratives discuss Kelzang’s actual

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<sup>254</sup> Interview with Tsering Dörjé in July 2016 at his house outside of Labrang by the author.

motherhood, including the trauma of what happened to her after the PRC forcefully put down the Amdo rebellion in 1958 and later through the Cultural Revolution where she worked as a farm laborer. Oral stories show that the narrative arc of Kelzang's life took a major detour, or a hairpin turn to be more exact, in an extraordinary recounting of what she endured and how she became a mother of four children who worked in the government; some people in the field expressed doubt about Kelzang at this time but strikingly many in this community utilized various strategies to unite behind her. The next chapter unpacks that story that her obituary has already completely neglected and that her future *namtar* will surely nix—the recounting of the tragic story that elides the questions of gender, motherhood, womanhood and religion into the intricate nexus of her authority within the Gungru lineage.

### Chapter 3 Navigating Trauma, Motherhood and Kelzang's Authority in the Cultural Revolution

As my fieldwork progressed in Gengya, Labrang and across Amdo, I learned that an unspeakable tragedy occurred in 1958 when Kelzang was forced to laicize. I heard from two people close to Kelzang that Chinese government workers/and or soldiers had sexually assaulted Kelzang and made her drink alcohol to break her monastic vow. This occurred as the PRC put down the Amdo Rebellion that started in July 1958 in Qinghai where 4,600 Tibetans rose up against the PRC and spread through all of the six counties in Gannan, Gansu (near Labrang). Locals, and in particular elite herdsmen, protested the Chinese Communist Party's socialism and collectivization and the PRC's political prosecution of elite leaders after the suppression was intense. The suppression led to the shuddering of monasteries and the forced laicization of many *trülku* and monks. Most of the monks in Labrang were either imprisoned or forced to "wear trousers" rather than their customary maroon robes. Drakkar Monastery, Kelzang's estate behind Drakkar and other monasteries in the region, including Labrang, were at least partially destroyed in reprisal for the local protests.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> See Benno Weiner's new monograph *The Chinese Revolution*, which discusses the Amdo Rebellion that spread in 1958 and was forcefully put down by the PRC. On pages 160,161, Weiner describes the beginning of this conflict, which, he said, had erupted during the 1950s with many skirmishes. Weiner cites Chinese secondary sources that claimed that the "Amdo Rebellion" was a "primarily a pastoral affair prompted by elite resistance to collectivization." On page 169, Weiner describes the fighting as severe and states that it had spread to all of Gannan's six counties (southern Gansu). See also Martin Slobodnik's article on the destruction of Labrang Monastery titled "Destruction and Revival: The Fate of the Tibetan Buddhist Monastery Labrang in the People's Republic of China." An article from the pro-PRC 赣南文史资料 [*Gannan Wenshiziliao (GWZL)*] from October 1959, 中国人民政治协商会议甘南藏族自治州委员会历届委员会概况 1953年-1999年, *zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi gannanzangzuzhizhou weiyuanhui lijieweiyuanhui gaikuang 1953 nian-1999 nian* [The survey of the previous PRC CPPCC committee meetings of the Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Region from 1953-1999], 114 also details the tensions that preceded the 1958 rebellion in this region as reflected in government meetings. The *GWZL* confirmed the presence of "armed riots" and referred to one of the meetings that chronicled the "criminal evidence of the counter-revolutionary group... and that religious communities must observe the law." After these disturbances, the *GWZL* said, "Some ethnic religious leaders who love the country made use of their reputation and their social networks to protect CCP Party members, assist the Party and convince the protesters/rioters to surrender. They have made outstanding contribution, and some even sacrificed their lives." The *GWZL* described the "increased disturbance" and labeled the 1958 "riots" as "anti-feudal." The *GWZL*, 115, also criticized the PRC's response for expanding it and "mistakenly arresting" people "who love the country" and "reversing the great work of the United Front."

Kelzang said during our only interview in 2010 that the time around 1958 in Amdo “was an intense period” but she did not elaborate; I had no inkling of the tragedy that she had suffered when the PRC forced her to laicize.<sup>256</sup> But in the ensuing years, two men who knew Kelzang very well, Kelzang’s husband Chödzin and Hortsang Lhogyel, divulged to me that the Chinese soldiers or government workers had sexually assaulted her. Hortsang Lhogyel, who married Kelzang’s personal attendant and lived with Kelzang and her husband Chödzin in Labrang in the early 2000’s, befriended Kelzang. In the meantime, Lozang Chöpel, 74, of Gengya, who was a former monk with Kelzang at her Drakkar estate from 1954-1958 as mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, was overcome with emotion when Kelzang’s laicization came up during my interview with him at his Gengya home. This subject was excruciating for Lozang Chöpel, who earlier in our conversation said that Kelzang had treated him like a mother would a child when he was a young monk living at her estate. He said that the two spent a lot of time together at Drakkar—he a novice monk and Kelzang an ordained *trülku*—until everything drastically changed for Kelzang, Lozang Chöpel and many others in Gengya, Labrang, across Amdo and later all of Tibet and China. Life when Kelzang regularly practiced chö (severance from ego) and Cakrasamvara rituals at the Drakkar Cave and elsewhere (See Chapter 1) and visited local villages to enact a variety of rituals for lay men and women came to a jarring halt.

However, while Kelzang did not expound about this traumatic time in her life, others in Amdo elucidated the impact of Kelzang’s laicization and her later marriages. Some discussed with me unprompted Kelzang’s three marriages and her mothering of four children from multiple fathers. Some talked to me about Kelzang’s divorce in the 1960s from her first husband, a Tibetan teacher from Northwest University of the Nationalities in Lanzhou, Gansu, China, which she attended from 1958-1960. Some mentioned how her second husband, a

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<sup>256</sup> Interview with Kelzang in December 2010 in Labrang by the author.

Tibetan man from the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC, Chin. *zhengxie* 政协) in Labrang, abused her during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) when she worked as a farm laborer in Khagya Yeshékhyil, a remote area about 50 km from Labrang. Some also spoke about how Kelzang’s third husband Chödzin left his own family in Khagya Yeshékhyil to accompany Kelzang in the 1970s. For these issues—Kelzang’s laicization, her divorce, the abuse and her motherhood along with the commensurate confusion, silence, denial and smoothing over that occurred as people recounted these items—represented *the* story that weighed on people’s minds when I embarked on my fieldwork shortly before and mostly after Kelzang died in January 2013.

But no discussion of any depth of these matters appeared in Kelzang’s obituary (2013), as first introduced in Chapter 1. Nor will this content likely show up in any text written in a *namtar* about Kelzang, a vexed process that has been controversial for many invested in writing such a text precisely because of the impacts of the tragedies that beset Kelzang as Chapter 5 discusses. In fact, Kelzang’s obituary said little about the climactic changes that occurred in her life in 1958 besides the brief statement that she studied at the Political Institute and at Northwest University of the Nationalities from 1958-1961, as detailed below. For her obituary attempted to present a seamless account of Kelzang’s life during this time, in part, to re-create the conditions of her sanctity within the annals of the four-century old Gungru lineage for which Kelzang’s life now no longer so seamlessly fit. In doing so, Kelzang’s obituary, as Chapter 1 shows, sought to “reconstitute the tradition<sup>257</sup>” about Kelzang as an emanation of the Great Mother Machik Lapdrön.<sup>258</sup> A key part of this

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<sup>257</sup> See Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 12.

<sup>258</sup> See Ohnuma’s *The Ties that Bind*. See also Sarah Jacoby’s new article on motherhood “Tibetan Buddhist Metaphors and the Models of Motherhood” for an insightful delineation of the chasm between actual motherhood and “as-if” motherhood.

tradition revolved around depicting Kelzang an enlightened “Buddhist heroine,” who was unscarred by the tumultuous events around her.<sup>259</sup>

Yet, it became clear from visiting with people from around Amdo (herders, farmers, administrators, businessmen and-women) who were not involved in the process of recreating the conditions of Kelzang’s sanctity in a *namtar*, that Kelzang’s story defied continuity. It also became clear that one of the pivotal moments in Kelzang’s life was not that of conversion or renunciation or adhering to the established tradition of Machik, but rather one of heartbreak and tragedy—or the opposite of the narrative trajectory found in most *namtars* of “suffering to sanctity.”<sup>260</sup> From understanding this heartbreak it became apparent that many scars, if not open and festering wounds, existed. People in Amdo still grappled with the trauma that befell Kelzang and their own lives during the tumultuous Cultural Revolution period (1958-1978), including “The Great Leap Forward” (collectivization and industrialization), which began in 1958 and lasted roughly four years, yielding disastrous results such as famine.

People tried to make sense of the rupture that happened in Kelzang’s life after 1958 as some described how Kelzang was sexually assaulted and beaten by her husband. Others, interestingly, offered contradictory renditions about what happened to Kelzang as some seemed to bundle these stories into a larger narrative frame that placed most of the blame on Chinese outsiders. Still others offered miracle tales that described how Kelzang transformed into a super heroine tiger to overcome her perpetrators. Or that Kelzang’s first son, who was born out of wedlock in 1962, was known as the reincarnation of a famous Amdo *trülku*. And

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<sup>259</sup> See Gayley’s *Love Letters from Golok* for a terrific account of Tare Lhamo’s *namtar* and noting how the text, for various reasons and strategies, presents her as not being scarred by the Cultural Revolution. Of great interest here is understanding the impact of scar literature or “tales of wounds to the Tibetan psyche” and from a Tibetan exile perspective, “accounts of human rights violations experienced under Communist rule,” 83-84. Conversely, the *namtar* for Tare Lhamo focuses more on her heroism rather than her personal suffering. For instance, on 85, Gayley states that Tare Lhamo’s *namtar* portrays the famine of the Great Leap Forward as being caused by karma, an assertion of agency within a Buddhist framework. Along these lines, Tare Lhamo’s *namtar* “narrates the Maoist period” through the usage of miracle tales, “presenting her as a dauntless heroine addressing the immediate crises in her local community.”

<sup>260</sup> Jacoby defines this narrative trajectory well in *Love and Liberation*, xx.



that some, like Chödzin, tried to smooth over Kelzang's motherhood (four children with three fathers) with a coherent story that lists only one father and shows how he heroically saved Kelzang from her sorrow after her second husband, who had abused her, died of liver disease in 1976.

Fascinatingly, unpacking these diverse stories that expose the chasm between people's testimony on the ground and the silence of her obituary raises many questions about the construction and production of authority of a religious figure (Kelzang) whose life did not follow a traditional path. Even more so, these stories raise questions about understanding what I label as "oral authority" as many people from various positions expressed doubts and utilized diverse strategies to assess, promote and celebrate Kelzang during this tumultuous period.<sup>261</sup> What do different strategies or tactics as revealed in many people's accounts of Kelzang's trauma—revelatory stories, accounts of miracles and smoothing over the rough spots—reveal about Kelzang's authority within this local community in Gengya and Labrang at that time in 1958 and now? How do these strategies diverge and strikingly converge with those narrative strategies put forth by a written text? Moreover, what do these accounts reveal about the role that gender and motherhood play in assessing Kelzang's authority, in particular addressing the differences between Kelzang's actual motherhood and the obituary's presentation of Kelzang as a mother of all as per the tradition in the Gungru lineage? Along these lines, how do these stories account for trauma, such as sexual assault, domestic violence, divorce and bearing out of wedlock children, that are not normally included in a discussion

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<sup>261</sup> Authority builds on Bruce Lincoln's model in *Authority, Construction and Corrosion* where an audience judges a figure's speech, acts and/or costume as right or not in certain historical and social contexts. I expand on Lincoln by claiming that authority also must be assessed from the position of an author of a text, or here in this chapter, an orator of speech. I use the term "oral authority" to analyze the strategic position or standpoint of each interlocutor/author. Oral authority expands on themes relevant to "textual authority," as explained in Diemberger's *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty*, 4-5, that defines the text or a narrative as the source of authority based on an author's agenda in a specific time and place.

about religion and a religious figure's authority,<sup>262</sup> and in comparison to elite Tibetan men from Amdo who also endured disruption and laicization at this time?

One response might conclude that Kelzang, who did not discuss any of these details when we met in 2010,<sup>263</sup> lost all of her authority when she was sexually assaulted, forced to laicize, work in the PRC government, attend college, marry and have children. For this trajectory did not mark the path that Kelzang thought she would take when she arrived at Drakkar in 1943 as the Sixth Gungru *trülku*. Moreover, none of these activities would be viewed in the eyes of many in Kelzang's constituency as "right" for a Gungru *trülku* even though she never lost her title or insignia as the Sixth Gungru despite her laicized status.<sup>264</sup> Understood in this manner, the fate of Kelzang's authority became imbricated with the horrors of 1958 when Tibetan society irrevocably changed and *trülku* like Kelzang were either jailed or forced to become lay. Further, her authority became intertwined with the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution when she worked as a laborer, was forced to wear an "anti-religion hat" and endured abuse from her second husband who later died. In this vein, this stark reality from this tempestuous period in Chinese and Tibetan history resembles many stories from Chapter 2 that linked Kelzang's authority to the deadly Gengya-Jiawu grassland conflict in the early twentieth century despite her obituary's attempt to present her birth as the agent that solved that dispute—it did not.

Yet, to conclude that Kelzang's authority wholly diminished or waned solely because of these hardships that befell her during the Cultural Revolution period would be incomplete. Such a reading ignores the process of *how* Kelzang's authority was negotiated and located in

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<sup>262</sup> *The Sky Dancer: The Secret Life and Songs of the Lady Yeshé Tsogyel* as translated by Dowman writes that Yeshé Tsogyel encountered rape and sexual assault. See <http://keithdowman.net/books/sky-dancer.html#conception> and specifically the section "The Rape of the Dakini."

<sup>263</sup> See Diemberger, in *When a Woman*, 299-310, for an account on the most recent Samding *trülku* that did not mention or detail what she endured during the Cultural Revolution period. Diemberger spoke with the *trülku*'s sister who narrated a *namtar*-like story but with a dearth of personal details of this time period, or details that would oppose a PRC narrative of events.

<sup>264</sup> See Lincoln, *Authority: Construction and Corrosion* for a discussion on insignia.

the eyes of the beholder or stakeholder in a local community—and the narratives people tell—today. Along these lines, I suggest that the full effect of Kelzang’s authority is commensurate with the stories that people from various backgrounds, occupations and lifestyles reveal about her and the myriad reactions and remembrances—or misremembrances—of the incidents and events that occurred. These range from sober recounts of her sexual assault, domestic violence and the mothering of children, to miracle stories about Kelzang fighting off her perpetrators and stories that deflect blame and try to smooth over what happened to her as Part I and II shows. This shows that Kelzang’s authority fluctuated and was and still is articulated in people’s varied remembrances or the telling of her story—and not separate from.

And in the same way as some people called on miracle stories, or who reached into their toolkit or repertoire to render such a response about Kelzang’s heartache—and also their own<sup>265</sup>—so, too, did Kelzang’s husband Chödzin utilize his own tactic that helps articulate Kelzang’s authority. He strategically narrated a coherent *namtar*-like story that patched over how he left his own family during the Cultural Revolution to serve Kelzang and eventually marry her—a hero story that some rejected as Part III illustrates. Perhaps because Chödzin has been ostracized by members of his own family, in particular by his stepson Dépön (Kelzang’s third child) and monks at Drakkar, Chödzin during one interview articulated a winding story about where he left his wife and children to take care of Kelzang. In the process, Chödzin said that Kelzang cured his heart ailments and they lived together for over 30 years until she died in 2013. The irony is that as Chödzin tried to whitewash the discontinuity in Kelzang’s life, including her divorce, her motherhood and the fact that his old Tibetan teacher, Kelzang’s second husband Tashi Gyatso, abused Kelzang, Chödzin himself became the protagonist in Kelzang’s, or his, story. Furthermore, Chödzin’s insertion

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<sup>265</sup> See Robert Campany’s article “Religious Repertoires and Contestation: A Case Study Based on Buddhist Miracle Tales,” in *History of Religions*, 106-107.

into Kelzang's story would impede the project to recreate the conditions of Kelzang's sanctity in a *namtar* (Chapter 5) for now a lay man and the third husband of a *trülku* offered a biographical story about Kelzang—and a coherent one at that—with him as the star. In fact, for some, this outcome proved to be untenable and so a story circulated in the community suggesting that Kelzang and Chödzin never officially married and that Chödzin was merely a helper but *not* a husband, further minimizing Chödzin's role.

Fascinatingly, all of these disparate accounts and narrative strategies help to, as Mathijs Pelkmans asserts in his own ethnography, “capture the doubt in mid-air,”<sup>266</sup> or in this case, to capture the process of understanding Kelzang's authority before a text smooths over this discontinuity. Articulating this discontinuity invites new understanding of the process of how people on the ground help construct religious authority in concert with relevant political, social and gendered contexts, contexts we must understand as scholars of religion as Bruce Lincoln advises.<sup>267</sup> In this vein, ethnography enriches our understanding of this nexus through stories that illustrate a strategic and variegated oral authority that unpacks what people think, feel, remember and believe about Kelzang. Thus, like a text and the authority that it can attain (textual authority) with the production and reproduction of a narrative tradition, I suggest that oral authority correlates with the narratives that people strategically remember (or mis-remember) about the most crucial time in Kelzang's life and that of her community during the Cultural Revolution.

Moreover, any future text about Kelzang will likely discount these voices that counter the prevalent master narrative in the PRC that the Cultural Revolution was a mistake and the Tibetan master narrative that Machik Lapdrön has arrived to preserve peace and propagate the Gungru lineage as shown in Chapter 1. For these voices on the ground in Amdo elaborate

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<sup>266</sup> See Pelkmans' *Ethnographies of Doubt: Faith and uncertainty in contemporary societies*.

<sup>267</sup> See Lincoln's "Theses on Method," in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 225-227. See also Makley's *The Violence of Liberation* for a description of gendered contexts as "mutually interpreted framed by people's activities and encounters, 11-12.

what happened to Kelzang, or versions of it—the violence, the grief, the sadness and the triumph—that counter these grand stories. These voices show how important it is to acknowledge what happened beneath the surface, including accounts of horrific violence and people’s (mis) understanding of it in the Gungru lineage, and that this community rallied around Kelzang and the indignities that she and they all faced—together. She was in many ways a focal point for them and their suffering—uniting them in their suffering, their understanding and perhaps their way of resisting or overcoming this painful time period—in the same way that Rebecca Manring cites how figures in hagiographies (the protagonists) often rallied and united communities and were celebrated as such.<sup>268</sup>

In this regard, Kelzang became a central point in Gengya, Labrang and across Amdo on distinctly Tibetan terms and within Tibetan gendered contexts. And while a comprehensive study of societal issues regarding motherhood, trauma, domestic abuse and divorce lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, they are, in fact, vital to understanding Kelzang’s authority in this community. They are important insofar as what people shared, denied, deflected and smoothed over accounts about motherhood, abuse, sexual assault and domestic violence—issues that undoubtedly affected many other men and women in Amdo (and all over Tibet, China and the world) then and now.<sup>269</sup> Overlooking the discontinuity, or arresting these tales in the way that Carole McGranahan describes about histories of Tibetan resistance from the 1970s, obviates the violence—and the voices—of the Cultural Revolution and within the Gungru lineage, and in particular the violence suffered by women.<sup>270</sup>

Therefore, Kelzang’s story, at the very least, helps to center these issues and challenges the patriarchal domain of religious authority that wants to separate motherhood from patriarchal power in the same way that Reiko Ohnuma illustrates this dichotomy in her

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<sup>268</sup> See Manring, *Advaita*, 4-5.

<sup>269</sup> Hamsa Rajan’s rich ethnography “When Wife-Beating is Not Necessarily Abuse” details aspects of domestic violence/assault in Tibetan families suggesting that women’s voices have often been silenced.

<sup>270</sup> See Carole McGranahan’s *Arrested Histories: Tibet, the CIA and Memories of a Forgotten War*.

groundbreaking study on motherhood in Indian Buddhist texts. But Kelzang’s story also challenges the idea of motherhood being viewed entirely as a negative in that it blurs the distinction between the “As-If” model (the model supported by the patriarchy) and the “Actual” model. Sarah Jacoby shows how the gap between the Treasure Revealer Sera Khandro’s actual motherhood in the early twentieth century in Golok, Amdo and any metaphorical presentations of motherhood in a more universal Buddhist context (the As-If model) narrowed in that Sera Khandro’s actual motherhood, often portrayed as unclean, was viewed as a source of purity.<sup>271</sup> In other words, Jacoby shows that the binary, or the chasm, between the As-if and Actual models of motherhood is not as stark as it is often portrayed. Some of these stories mentioned in this chapter point in that direction for Kelzang, whose liberation story, over time, might one day legitimate her authority as a heroine like Machik the Great Mother and Machik the Actual Mother with an entirely different set of meanings and authorizing referents: survivor of sexual assault and domestic violence. This first section unpacks the trauma—and the telling of the trauma—of Kelzang’s sexual assault in 1958.

## **Part I**

### **From Sanctity to Suffering: The Trauma of Kelzang’s Laicization**

Most Tibetan *namtar* describe an exemplar’s dramatic renunciation, a vital moment in the narrative arc of a virtuoso’s path from “suffering to sanctity” or enlightenment. For example, the fifteenth-century biography of the famous Tibetan saint Milarepa (11<sup>th</sup> century) depicted a story of Milarepa’s renunciation and redemption from his villainous past where he committed murder to become a cloth-clad meditator in a cave. This narrative frame based on the story of the original Buddha’s renunciation of suffering provided the archetype for many future *namtar* including the first one written about Chökyi Drönma (fifteenth century) in the

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<sup>271</sup> See Jacoby, “Tibetan Buddhist Metaphors and Models of Motherhood,” 61. See Schaeffer’s *Himalayan Hermitess*, 143, for a discussion on how Orgyen Chökyi, in her words, depicts her female body as a “broken vessel.” See also Langenberg’s *Birth and Buddhism* and Jose Cabezon’s *Sexuality in Classical South Asian Buddhism* for discussions on Buddhist attitudes toward procreation and attitudes toward women’s bodies.

Samding Dorjé Pakmo female *trülku* lineage in Tibet. The climactic moment for Chökyi Drönma came when she renounced her householder life as a princess in a southern Tibetan kingdom to ordain as a nun. Chökyi Drönma left her protesting husband and even feigned madness to become a monastic.<sup>272</sup> Five centuries later, the autobiography of Sera Khandro followed a similar trajectory of “suffering to sanctity” when she ran away from her elite lifestyle in Lhasa, Tibet, in the early 1900s to become a Treasure Revealer with a guru in Amdo.<sup>273</sup> Furthermore, the *Lotus Vine* about the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo adhered to this narrative frame as Rindzin Pelmo returned to the place of sanctity in Drakkar in 1814 where she became enlightened as an emanation of Machik Lapdrön, a paragon for future Gungru *trülku* as Chapter 1 asserts.

Kelzang’s life, however, veered far from this script of suffering to sanctity as people’s accounts in Amdo attest. Some were grief stricken like Lozang Chöpel who could not talk about how Kelzang was forced to laicize in 1958 as mentioned at the outset of the chapter. Others told what they knew about Kelzang’s sexual assault like Kelzang’s third husband Chödzin and Hortsang Lhogyel, a Tibetan scholar from Lanzhou who married Kelzang’s personal attendant in the early 2000’s. Others told different accounts about this incident in 1958 citing abuse but not sexual assault. Still others brought up a story of where Kelzang transformed herself into a tiger and fought off her perpetrators, perhaps as a way to cope with and unite behind the pain, and or to revive or recreate the conditions for Kelzang to be a *trülku* in the aftermath. In this way, Kelzang, as the ferocious tiger, became a focal point for this wounded community to rally behind decades after this incident, or incidents, took place. All of these stories, as this first section will show, illustrate the variegated nature of Kelzang’s authority as located in and judged within a community still coming to grips with this unimaginable and heartbreaking discontinuity in her life.

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<sup>272</sup> See Diemberger’s *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty*, 123-130, 171.

<sup>273</sup> See Jacoby’s *Love and Liberation* for her analysis of the Treasure Revealer Sera Khandro’s trajectory of suffering to sanctity. At one point, Sera Khandro contemplated suicide before she left for Amdo.

*The Trauma of 1958: Kelzang laicizes in wake of 1958 protest*

Kelzang's obituary mentions some facts about what happened to her in 1958 when she became an official member of the CCP in China and studied at university. The obituary says:

In 1956, Kelzang Damchö Drölma went to Beijing, Inner Mongolia and the North East areas to visit and study when she was 20 years old. In 1958, the sixth Gungru *Khandroma*, Kelzang Damchö Drölma became an official national cadre. From 1958 to 1960, she first went to Lanzhou in Gansu Province to take cadre classes at the Political Institute and then later she went at Northwest University of the Minorities in Lanzhou to study. Starting in 1961 she worked for the CPPCC in Xiahe County.<sup>274</sup>

Whereas Kelzang's obituary describes in this one paragraph how she attended college in Lanzhou and trained in the Communist party, several people from Amdo elaborated about her tragic laicization process. They discussed the incident of sexual assault that the obituary, a document at least tacitly approved by the PRC in 2013 and therefore loath to describe the Cultural Revolution time, avoids. However, Chödzin and Hortsang Lhogyel both spoke about the sexual assault (s) during a period that she would not comment on. Perhaps Chödzin and Hortsang Lhogyel served as Kelzang's informants, two people who she likely knew one day might tell what really happened to her given her silence as a worker in the PRC government and the political and personal sensitivities that surrounded her discussing issues related to the Cultural Revolution period. Not to mention that this traumatic incident, more than anything, directly implicated her authority as the Gungru *trülku*, with her being forced to break her vow. Hortsang Lhogyel said that Kelzang told him how people had sexually assaulted her during

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<sup>274</sup> Kelzang's Obituary, 6. 1956 年，尕藏丹却卓玛 20 岁时曾到北京、内蒙和东北等地方参观学习。1958 年，第六世贡日卡卓玛·格桑丹曲卓玛，成为一名国家干部。1958 年至 1960 年，她先后在甘肃兰州政治学院干训班、西北民族学院干训班学习；1961 年开始，在夏河县政协工作。



this rupture in Amdo when the PRC suppressed the local Tibetan protest to PRC reforms.

Hortsang Lhogyel said:

Why did Alak Gungru become lay? She was a woman and bullied by many people [to have sex]. After the protest was put down in 1958, many *trülku* were caught [in jail]. Then, they had to get re-educated [in the Chinese Communist Party]. And then they could not [live as an] ordained [person]. They all became lay and if they became lay they would need to raise a family. She was a woman and she was assaulted. People took advantage of her. She told this to me. If someone forced you to have sex, it was something that people could do. She did not tell me specifically about what they did to her, but others did. And this did not only happen to Alak Gungru, a lot of women experienced this type of assault.<sup>275</sup>

Notably, Hortsang Lhogyel did not mention the ethnicity of Kelzang's perpetrators. However, Chödzin attributed the incident (or possibly incidents) to members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) although the exact identity of her assailants is not clear as of this writing. In one interview (2016), Chödzin said that the people who assaulted her were members of the Communist party and/or government workers and in another interview (2017) he said that they were Chinese soldiers. In the following excerpt, he told a longer story about how she worked well with the Chinese government and saved the lives of two CCP party members before mentioning the assault. Chödzin stated:

Kelzang was one of the Tibetan lamas that the Communist party took to visit a lot of places in 1956, including Inner Mongolia and Beijing. In 1957, she put all of her property in the center of Gengya [at the beginning

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<sup>275</sup> Interview with Hortsang Lhogyel in September 2018 in Lanzhou, Gansu by the author.

of the time known as the Great Leap Forward]. This was ordered by the PRC Government. In 1958, a robber tried to steal many things from the local Communist Party and two party members were injured. She saved their lives. And because of that, the village shop that was located at her *nangchen* remained open. At that time every township had only one shop where people could go and buy things. She saved the shop at the *nangchen* in Drakkar. Others were arrested, but her brother [Jamyang Gyatso] and her were not [arrested] because they had done many good things [for the government]. ...

Kelzang was very pretty at the time, she was 22 years old. The Communist Party took her and forced her to smoke and they made her drink [alcohol]. If she said, 'I am not drinking,' they said to her, 'Do you still want to be ordained? Do you still want to keep your vow?' Then they kissed her and did many things to her. And after she became drunk, they forced her to have sex with them. This story is known [in foreign countries], this is the truth. The government workers forced her to do these things. If you ask Alak's peers they will share the same story. If you ask Alak, she will say they did this. This story was not told by me, but it's been told by many [people] who live overseas. At that time, she told her [Buddhist] teacher, 'I cannot keep this vow going forward; they made me break the vow.'<sup>276</sup>

While the second subsection below discusses how Kelzang's breaking her monastic vow impacted her authority as the Sixth Gungru *trülku* going forward, Chödzin's statement in

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<sup>276</sup> Interview with Chödzin in July 2016 in Labrang by the author.

the August 2017 interview suggests that the people who assaulted Kelzang were Chinese soldiers and not government workers. Chödzin said:

The soldiers made her smoke and drink. They said, “Oh, you still want to be a *trülku*?” And then they forced her to have sex. It is my understanding that foreigners talk more openly about this kind of [an assault] which we are not accustomed to doing. It was a Chinese soldier who made her do that, he put a lot of pressure on her. She wore monk’s robes and was forced to do this. The Chinese government told her, ‘Now it’s the Communist era, so you have to marry!’ This is all true.<sup>277</sup>

It is noteworthy that Chödzin spoke of Kelzang’s story “being known abroad” but not in Amdo eliciting the question of how well locals knew about this trauma. And while a few people close to Kelzang talked about the sexual assault, most interlocutors in Gengya and Labrang either did not know the story or they opted for silence. Or some like Kelzang’s old childhood friend Karmagya of Jiawu, Qinghai mentioned a different story than Chödzin and Hortsang Lhogyel. Karmagya, who was in her 80s in 2016, told a harrowing story of how a Chinese soldier had abused Kelzang in 1958, but she did not specifically mention that the soldier had sexually assaulted Kelzang. Speaking through tears, Karmagya unprompted recalled how a Chinese soldier had “badly beaten” Kelzang. Notably, Karmagya referred to the Chinese soldier as Kelzang’s “first husband” while Chödzin and Hortsang Lhogyel did not refer to Kelzang’s perpetrator as her husband. It was not clear if these three interlocutors were referring at all to the same person, an issue that Part II addresses in relation to the confusion surrounding who Kelzang married and when. Karmagya said:

Yes, it’s true. A Chinese soldier was her husband and [he] beat her so badly. She was forced to marry—all the monks were forced to marry. I

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<sup>277</sup> Interview with Chödzin in August 2017 in Labrang by the author.

wanted to visit her and was able to. I saw her in lay clothes and the soldier was Chinese. There was no freedom for her, he beat her so badly. When the situation was better [in the early 1960s] they were able to divorce. I don't know how long they were married but I just heard people saying that Alak was beaten during this time. At that time you couldn't worship lamas and get [their] blessings, but I had heard that her husband beat her so much. A lot of people talked about this so that's how I heard. At that time, there were many lamas who were forced to get married and there were many lamas who ran away and hid from this situation. This all took place in 1958 and Kelzang lived in Labrang at the time.<sup>278</sup>

Karmagya's story and the other two accounts about Kelzang's sexual assault discussed in this first subsection describe this trauma that took place when the PRC quashed the rebellion and forced many elite *trülku* to laicize as the next subsection discusses. Notably, Karmagya says that Kelzang was forced to laicize and marry this Chinese person with whom she later divorced, an assertion repeated by another Tibetan man from a different locale, as shown in Part II, but *not* by Chödzin and Hortsang Lhogyel.

### *The forceful response and “struggle sessions” in Gengya and Labrang*

In order to contextualize what happened to Kelzang during this time, it is important to understand why the PRC responded to this widespread rebellion in Amdo in July 1958 against PRC reforms to, as Benno Weiner says, “wipe out feudal powers and herdlords,” and then to enact a political submission to elites. A major part of this strategy was what Weiner called, “The Speaking Bitterness” strategy (*suku douzheng*), “a mass-line strategy” where

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<sup>278</sup> Interview with Karmagya in July 2016 in Jiawu, Qinghai by the author.

citizens would “recount exploitations of the old and arouse class-consciousness and class hatred. Foment toward elites increased to topple the “feudal and religious ruling power.”<sup>279</sup> “Upper-level figures,” such as *trülku* like Kelzang and others across Labrang, were in that elite class and considered to be reactionary and part of “the old society” as Weiner explains. Some of the elites were assigned to do labor in remote work areas or were imprisoned. Monks were “forced to wear trousers” and monasteries were destroyed. In Qinghai, 42 of the area’s 51 *trülku* were “forcibly returned to secular life,” a pattern that was widespread across Amdo.<sup>280</sup> At Labrang, 1,000 of the 3,269 monks were arrested and the other 2,000 were forced to disrobe and sent to their homes. The results of this bitterness strategy were tragic that robbed Kelzang’s authority as the Gungru *trülku* who had been sexually assaulted.

Some locals provided critical context about these struggle sessions and the period of collectivization known as “The Great Leap Forward” that led to destruction, starvation and death from 1958-1961 in Gengya and Labrang. For instance, Hortsang Lhogyel said that Kelzang told him that at least 30 *trülku* were imprisoned and/or forced to laicize at this time.<sup>281</sup> Moreover, the PRC’s destruction of Labrang and Drakkar monasteries along with the Gungru estate above Drakkar severed the vital religious, social and economic ties in the local communities, as Martin Slobodnik explains.<sup>282</sup> The effects rippled into the lay community. A retired herder named Tsering Dorjé from a village located outside Labrang in his early 70s recalled the fear wrought by the new redistribution of wealth. He remembered the public struggle sessions (tests of loyalty toward the PRC) held against the wealthy as instigated by the masses of locals. Tsering Dorjé, who was around 10 at the time, said:

The activists were formed in 1958 and the rich people along with the monks and lamas had struggle sessions. The poor people scolded the

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<sup>279</sup> See Weiner, *The Chinese Revolution*, 174-175.

<sup>280</sup> Weiner, *The Chinese Revolution*, 176.

<sup>281</sup> Interview with Hortsang Lhogyel in September 2018 in Lanzhou with the author.

<sup>282</sup> See Martin Slobodnik’s article “Destruction and Revival: The Fate of the Tibetan Monastery Labrang in the People’s Republic of China” about Labrang that describes this.

rich people and the lamas and said, ‘In the past you suppressed us.’ They threw stones at them [rich people, lamas, monks]. I saw this struggle session personally. When I went down to the lower end of my valley, I saw some people yelling and fighting. There was a man from my village and two others from other villages who endured the struggle session. The rich people were all part of the resistance to the PRC. Then the activists said to them, ‘Do you oppose the PRC? You did this to [exploit] me!’ The poor people scolded [the rich people] and the [activists] beat them. I saw one guy from Labrang carry a gun and walked in front of three people being beaten. The [activists] were Chinese and Tibetan. The PRC arranged this and we had to watch the struggle sessions. ...

At that time a lot of Alaks [*trülku*] also endured struggle sessions. Many rich people were also put in jail because the PRC [activists] said that this is a poor people’s world now. It was a big mess. Later in 1961 and 1962, the times relaxed and when Alak Gungru [Kelzang] came back [from school in Lanzhou] she was a layperson. Alak Kampu [of Labrang] did not study, rather he was put in jail. Alak Gungtang [of Labrang] was put in jail for 20 years. That’s why he didn’t become lay, he was in jail. I know that Alak Kampu was in jail because during the time of severe starvation [1959-1960], I went to the Labrang jail near the bus station and I saw Alak Kampu carrying the corpses of many people who had died in a wheel cart. Soldiers chased after him and pointed a gun at him. The soldiers kept telling him, ‘Go faster, you can do this!’ They followed him. This is all information that I witnessed, but is not directly related to Alak Gungru’s experience.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Interview with Tsering Dorjé in July 2016 outside of Labrang by the author.

Tsering Dorjé's family suffered through this period of collectivization where everyone put their wealth, including cattle and cows, into the village center and later suffered severe starvation. He said that his grandfather was shot by the PRC while working on a road crew and his grandmother died of hunger during the worst period from 1959-1960. He said:

I heard that the men who were still in the village were told to build a road in this valley, which at the time was only a horse road. Some men in the village went to the Gengya Zhölkor and Pudi border [on the way to Drakkar] to dig out the road and my grandfather was brought to the end of the valley. He was caught and didn't come back. [He was shot]. Everyone was hungry, rich or poor. If you had sheep or yak or took care of barley, your family might not suffer as much. But otherwise everyone was hungry. Under the PRC, everybody did the same thing and ate the same thing. My grandmother and another relative died from hunger. You couldn't make a fire at home, for if you did you would be caught. In the Fall of 1960 barley and potatoes were grown, but they were not given to you. Everybody stole it. Everybody ate raw barley and this allowed us to survive.<sup>284</sup>

Like Tsering Dorjé, Hortsang Lhogyel discussed the anti-rich campaign but in the context of Kelzang's life and the destruction of Kelzang's multi-storied *nangchen* at Drakkar that housed many monks, cattle and stored a lot of silver. Hortsang Lhogyel said:

All the lamas were caught and they were made to go against feudalism so that everybody would be more equal. At that time, Alak Gungru had a very high status in Tibetan society and her *nangchen* had

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<sup>284</sup> Interview with Tsering Dorjé in July 2016 outside of Labrang by the author.

accumulated a lot of silver. All of the *nangchen* had this type of wealth in this feudal society. The PRC took all of this wealth and put it into the center so everybody was now equal. She told me that the government took all of the silver coins. The *nangchen* was destroyed and [the estate manager] Akhu Darjé, who had a lot of money, was caught and put in the jail. The rest of the monks ran away and a lot of *trülku* were caught and put in jail. Alak Gungru was not. Alak Gungru was so young and young people including the Jamyang Zhepa did not go to jail. Alak Gungru talked about how 30 *trülku* were caught at that time and that the Jamyang Zhepa was the youngest and had to be a cook. He poured tea. At that time, the government put a hat [a paper hat that symbolized anti-religion status] on the Jamyang Zhepa and made him walk across the street while wearing it with his hands tied behind his back.<sup>285</sup>

While the Jamyang Zhepa endured the indignity of wearing the anti-religion hat (a dishonor Kelzang also endured in the Cultural Revolution), and was later forced to marry, no account to my knowledge suggests that he or any male was sexually assaulted like Kelzang. Two locals talked about the implications of Kelzang's assault (and the breaking of her monastic vow) in this patriarchal milieu and how this affected Kelzang's authority going forward, in particular in comparison to male *trülku* who laicized and those who did not. Hortsang Lhogyel stated:

It doesn't matter if you wanted to [break your vow] or not. Alak Gungtang and Alak Tse [Setsang] were [both] tortured during this time and put in jail, but they did not laicize. After the Cultural Revolution, they were

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<sup>285</sup> Interview with Hortsang Lhogyel in September 2018 in Lanzhou, Gansu by the author.



able to come back and become monks again. A lot of monks were tortured during the Cultural Revolution period, but afterwards, they became monks again. The society was like that at that time. Alak Gungru [Kelzang] couldn't become a nun and retain that status again because she was abused [sexually assaulted] by many people. She didn't tell me a lot about this. She won't tell many people about this. Once that sexual assault happened, she could not retain the nun status again. But, if Alak Gungru were a man, she would have become a monk again after the Cultural Revolution.<sup>286</sup>

An Amdo woman from a village outside of Labrang named Dékyi, 37, discussed the gendered implications of Kelzang's status as a lay woman who broke her vow by means of assault compared to her male *trülku* counterparts, including the Jamyang Zhepa of Labrang. Dékyi, who said that her family worships the Jamyang Zhepa, pointed to the gendered reasons and comparisons as to why the Jamyang Zhepa could overcome the stigma of breaking his monastic vow and Kelzang could not. A worker in many women's organizations in Xining and later as a project manager in NGOS across Tibetan areas, Dékyi understands the shame associated with assault and violence. She said that she has not experienced such violence firsthand but knows women who have. Dékyi stated:

[Many] *trülku* were forced to get married and the causes of their laicization were external. But because [Kelzang] was a woman, she suffered more than the other men [Jamyang Zhepa and Alak Tse]. She suffered because she was raped, which is the absolute worst case. Emotionally she was hurt in addition to being physically hurt. Then she likely became depressed. There was no other person like her [no other female *trülku*] to

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<sup>286</sup> Interview with Hortsang Lhogyel in September 2018 in Lanzhou, Gansu by the author.

come to her and say that this situation was not your fault. There was no one to come and comfort and identify with her. But there are so many *trülku* [the Jamyang Zhepa, Hortsang *trülku*] who had laicized—there are more than that—and this situation [of laicized *trülku*] became normal. For Alak Gungru [Kelzang], she had many kids with many different fathers [discussed in Part II] and from a woman’s perspective of someone who is raped, they have a deep wound. To heal takes time, but if you always keep it to yourself, then you lose confidence and start to think, ‘I am nothing.’ She had no support for people to really understand her. ...

Alak Gungru is a *trülku*. She is very rare. She couldn’t just talk about this with a regular lay woman. The level of hurt is different and because she’s a *trülku* it hurt even more [for her and the community]. I don’t mean that when [sexual assault/violence] occurs with a regular woman that it doesn’t hurt, but it’s different [with Kelzang] as a *trülku*. She hurt more than a regular woman. And she was never able to open up about it.... Talking about this is taboo and in particular between a mother and a son, they won’t talk about it. A father can tell a son and a mother can tell a daughter talking about sex.<sup>287</sup>

Dékyi pointed out the liminal state in which Kelzang straddled as a survivor of sexual assault—that of being an elite *trülku* who now was a lay woman—and the loneliness that Kelzang most likely felt. While Hamsa Rajan’s recent ethnography in Amdo focuses on domestic violence and not explicitly sexual assault, her claims help to contextualize treatment

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<sup>287</sup> Interview with Dékyi in December 2018 outside of Labrang by the author.

and attitudes toward Tibetan women.<sup>288</sup> Rajan’s analysis elucidates how and why many in the Tibetan community might react to and assess an act of sexual assault to Kelzang—it would be silenced. The next subsection, however, discusses an opposite reaction within the same community that suggests that Kelzang was not silent, rather she roared in resistance to her perpetrators.

*Making sense of the unspeakable: Kelzang’s roar as a tiger*

Strikingly, as Hortsang Lhogyel and Chödzin said that a Chinese soldier sexually assaulted Kelzang and that Karmagya spoke about how a Chinese soldier abused Kelzang, others in the community found a way to speak the unspeakable, rallying around Kelzang as a super heroine who stopped the assault. At least three people at different times and places, including Lozang Chöpel’s grandson Tupten Döndrup and Karmagya’s relative Drölkho from Gartse, Qinghai (about 15 km from Jiawu), narrated a miracle tale that would fit into the mold of a hagiographic *namtar*. In fact, they mentioned a story that resembled the “Buddhist heroine” model described in Holly Gayley’s work, proving, once again, how texts can and often do influence oral discourse in various situations as Walter Ong shows us.<sup>289</sup> On two separate occasions, Tupten Döndrup and Drölkho narrated how Kelzang transformed into a ferocious tiger to ward off her perpetrators. A restaurant worker in Labrang who was close with Kelzang before she died, Tupten Döndrup twice told this story to me. In 2016, Tupten Döndrup told myself and a group of Chinese tourists on a day hiking trip that he led to Drakkar Monastery and the cave where he said, “Alak Gungru became a tiger and the Chinese soldier ran away upon seeing this.”<sup>290</sup> He mentioned this story about Kelzang as he told this tour group a similar tale about the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo from the nineteenth century (Chapter 1). Tupten Döndrup said that Rindzin Pelmo left her footprint on the path to

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<sup>288</sup> See Rajan’s “Violence Against Women,” 19.

<sup>289</sup> See Walter Ong for a description of secondary orality in *Orality and Literacy*.

<sup>290</sup> Interview with Tupten Döndrup in July 2014 in Gengya by the author.

the Drakkar Cave located behind her estate—a miraculous marking of her clairvoyancy.<sup>291</sup> Drölkho, who to my knowledge does not know Tupten Döndrup and said that she did not know Kelzang well, also spoke of how Kelzang rose up as a tiger to fend off her aggressors. Drölkho said:

We heard that the soldier beat her so badly and that one time when the Chinese soldier came to beat her she became a tiger. The soldier said that [Kelzang] became a tiger. Then the soldier thought that Tibetan lamas were very powerful and that he couldn't control them [Kelzang].<sup>292</sup>

And Sönam, of Jiawu, whose family served Kelzang when she was born and selected as the Gungru *trülku* in the 1940s, offered his version of the tiger story where Kelzang overcame her perpetrator who was her husband. He said:

The Chinese army leader ordered a soldier to force [Kelzang] to have sex.. The soldier said , ‘She is in that room and said, ‘Force her to have sex.’ And the Chinese soldier saw a tiger on the bed [instead of Kelzang] ... This person was her first husband.<sup>293</sup>

No evidence confirms that Kelzang ever transformed into a tiger to fight off her aggressors or if she more realistically rose up to resist them at this time; evidence from above sadly suggests she could not. Rather, this storyline resembles the type of tale that Aviad Kleinberg in his study of Christian hagiographies warns scholars not to discount “just because it can't be true.”<sup>294</sup> Understood in this light, this tiger-heroine story afforded Tupten

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<sup>291</sup> Interview with Tupten Döndrup in September 2016 in Gengya by the author.

<sup>292</sup> Interview with Drölkho in July 2016 in Gartse, Qinghai by the author.

<sup>293</sup> Interview with Sönam in July 2016 Jiawu, Qinghai by the author.

<sup>294</sup> Kleinberg in *Prophets in Their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, 52, 64, discusses that hagiographers “formally write history ... and that hagiographers claims to edification are historical truth.”

Döndrup, Drölkho and Sönam, and presumably many others in this Amdo region who knew the tiger story or some version, a viable way to represent the trauma and the pain that befell Kelzang when she was sexually assaulted and forced to laicize. It afforded people a way to deal with the pain (and the residual scars) caused by the rupture in Kelzang's life as a Gungru lineage holder but within the community used to interacting with its religious *trülku* in a certain way—as leaders, as healers and as a progenitor of the miraculous and the divine. Moreover, this story allowed them to remember Kelzang as a heroine who with her powers in tact could still efficaciously perform miracles in adverse circumstances.

Furthermore, this storyline marked an ideal way for them and others to celebrate and rally around Kelzang as a symbol of perseverance throughout this tragic and turbulent time, a chance to conjure a sense of continuity in Kelzang's life (and their own) for a community still grappling with the wounds of this rupture. Moreover, this type of story of overcoming such a horrible obstacle helped to legitimate her authority within the entire Gungru lineage like her obituary does and any future *namtar* about her most likely will. Along these lines, and in spite of the chaos, these three accounts of this tiger-heroine story speak to a standard of this continuity—or what could be termed a condition of sanctity within the Gungru lineage—revolves around this miracle tale of Kelzang becoming a tiger to fend off her aggressors. This clairvoyant super power resembled how the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo left her footprint in the rock near the Drakkar Cave.

Significantly, while Tupten Döndrup, Drölkho, Sönam and likely many others represented Kelzang's trauma with the tiger story, they did not discuss any other details about her like Hortsang Lhogyel and Chödzin did above. The tiger story signified their way to discuss this pain and rally around Kelzang—and start to revive or recreate the state of her authority as the Gungru *trülku* in the process—on their own terms. Only by unpacking the discontinuity of this tragic time period is it possible to begin to see a sense of unity in this

chaos. The next section unpacks more strategies along these lines as people describe, deflect, deny, minimize and smooth over the elephant in the room, or the inconvenient truth:

Kelzang's motherhood of four children to multiple fathers over the course of her life and the horrors of domestic violence.

## **Part II**

### **(Mis)-remembering Motherhood and Violence in Cultural Revolution**

The first chapter of this dissertation shows how Kelzang's obituary (2013) "reconstituted a tradition" of metaphorical motherhood in order to legitimate her authority as the Sixth Gungru *trülku*. Following the archetype established about the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo in the *Lotus Vine namtar*, the Chinese obituary bolstered Kelzang's authority by representing her as an emanation of the Great Mother Machik Lapdrön. Motherhood, according to this metaphor, became aligned with Buddhist discourse of universal compassion for all beings. Significantly, it did not include raising one's own particular children as Reiko Ohnuma describes in her work on motherhood in Indian Buddhist texts and recently Sarah Jacoby and I also discuss, as first addressed in Chapter 1.

The problem with utilizing this legitimating strategy of metaphorical motherhood (or as Jacoby calls the As-if model) for Kelzang is that she became an actual mother of four children before and during the Cultural Revolution—an inconvenient truth for those wanting to recreate the conditions of her sanctity in a *namtar*.<sup>295</sup> For being a mother like Kelzang who married three times, divorced once, had two children out of wedlock and was beaten by her second husband (and/or her first husband) did not fit with the acceptable (to the patriarchy) presentation of motherhood as synonymous with universal compassion. Actual motherhood, or the motherhood of one's own particular children, represented the suffering that mothers

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<sup>295</sup> See my article "Re-Adapting a Buddhist Mother's Authority in the Gung ru Female Sprul sku lineage" about Kelzang's obituary that describes the legitimating strategies that revolve around Kelzang's motherhood building on the tradition established in the *Lotus Vine*. Jacoby's recent article "Tibetan Buddhist metaphors and models of Motherhood" provides an excellent description of this binary, the "As-If" and "Actual" models of motherhood, in correlation to Sera Khandro, who as a real mother attained liberation.

needed to renounce, according to Ohnuma's reading of motherhood and many other texts and studies, as we have seen in chapter one. (Although Charlene Makley showed that actual motherhood for lay women in the specific context of Labrang carried greater prestige than becoming a nun because mothers helped propagate the endangered Tibetan culture after the Cultural Revolution<sup>296</sup>). And while the chasm between these two types of mothers often seems irreconcilable, Jacoby's recent work about the noted Sera Khandro in Amdo proves otherwise. Jacoby provides a compelling blueprint to show how Sera Khandro embodied both the actual and metaphorical models of motherhood illustrating that they are not mutually exclusive.<sup>297</sup>

Yet, there is no denying that Kelzang's motherhood impacted her authority and perhaps more so after the Cultural Revolution when monasteries were rebuilt and *trülku* assumed a position in Tibetan society, albeit in a new state order as Chapter 4 discusses. But in order to understand what happened afterward, it is first necessary to unpack what occurred during this period that began in 1958 and continued into the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) where Kelzang was expelled from her government job in Labrang and forced to become a farm laborer in Khagya Yeshékhyil.

Strikingly, none of my interlocutors derided Kelzang for her marriages as it was clear that many people still grappled with the shock of these major changes for a Tibetan *trülku* and how to discern a middle ground between the ideal of motherhood in a Buddhist context (the ideal of Machik) and Kelzang's actual motherhood. For, just as striking as uncovering what actually happened to Kelzang, and no less significant to understanding Kelzang's authority in this community, is unpacking this story of her marriages and motherhood. This

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<sup>296</sup> See Makley's article "Nunhood and Gender in Contemporary Amdo" in *Women in Tibet*, 259-284 for an interesting account on how lay women/mothers in Labrang attained higher status than nuns, the opposite of Nicola Schneider's conclusion about nuns in her ethnography in Sichuan "Le monachisme comme alternative au mariage: le cas des nonnes tibétaines d'une région nomade du Kham" in *Moines et Moniales de Par le Monde: La vie monastique au miroir de la parenté*. See also, Zhapkar, Gesar's epic and other life writing, including Diemberger's *When A Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty*.

<sup>297</sup> See Jacoby, "Tibetan Buddhist Metaphors and Models of Motherhood."

highlights the obfuscations, the deflections, the blame, the smoothing over and the minimizations that occurred from people who struggled with, were curious about or defended these major changes in Kelzang's life. Through the telling of their stories, people rallied around Kelzang, becoming more united in their remembrances and also in the cacophony and dissonance of their mis-remembrances; in other words, people had many opinions and positions about this matter. Kelzang and her marriages and motherhood became a focal point of the Cultural Revolution for this community, a focal point of survival.

*Kelzang becomes a mother before the Cultural Revolution*

Within a few minutes of meeting Ösel at his home in Gengya Township (one of Gengya's 13 villages), the retired herder broached the subject of Kelzang's motherhood. Unprompted, he brought up the story that was never to be printed (and to this date has not been) about whom Kelzang married, whom she divorced and who were the fathers of Kelzang's children before and during the Cultural Revolution period. Remarkably, we spent most of our time discussing a topic (Kelzang's marriages and motherhood) that Ösel admitted was "hard to discuss," yet also hard *not* to discuss about Kelzang with whom he said he enjoyed a "respectful relationship." Circumspect, yet also curious, Ösel wanted to understand what happened to Kelzang during this chaotic time leading up to the Cultural Revolution in Labrang. Perhaps for Ösel, speaking about Kelzang's marriages and motherhood was a moment of catharsis for him as a member of this community still grappling with how her life's course changed so drastically for a *trülku*.

Not surprisingly, Ösel's recollections about Kelzang's marriages and the identity of the father of each of Kelzang's four children differed from other people's accounts. This includes Kelzang's husband Chödzin who has long considered himself to be the gatekeeper of Kelzang's story. Although Chödzin was noticeably more guarded about these sensitive



matters regarding Kelzang's marriages and motherhood as discussed below and also in Part III. For instance, Ösel and others said that Kelzang's first husband was a Chinese soldier who badly abused Kelzang and that Kelzang and the soldier had one child together (this is unconfirmed). Significantly, Ösel's account resembles that of Sönam and Karmagya who all said that Kelzang's first husband was Chinese and had beaten/assaulted her. Ösel said:

Kelzang met her first husband around 1958, he was Chinese. At that time the policy was very strict,<sup>298</sup> but if you were Chinese it was okay [to marry]. [Kelzang] was a great lama and the only *khandroma* in the Amdo area. The Chinese government forced her to marry, but we Tibetans would never force a *trülku* to break their vows and marry. He was a [member of the] CCPCC where she met him in Labrang. He had a violent personality and attacked her. I didn't see this [personally] but I heard it. I heard that her first husband beat her. ...

[Local] people said that because he beat her so badly, his karma ended and he died young. Elders talked [about this situation] like that. People in the villages were not allowed to try and stop it. People were afraid and could not interfere with this. Maybe the village leader could try and help or talk about it, but we were not allowed to say anything. In any event, it was impossible for her to divorce him because Alak Gungru was always obedient, she was timid. She was not able to leave this marriage because she couldn't oppose this [government policy] that forced all *trülku* to become lay and leave her husband. This is the main reason she couldn't get a divorce. Also, getting a divorce was not very popular. After that, she married a Tibetan guy [Tashi Gyatso] in the 1960s ...

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<sup>298</sup> As of this writing, I do not know the exact policy that Ösel referred to here. In a general sense, Ösel is likely referring to the forced laicization or imprisonment of most *trülku*. Many *trülku* who laicized were forced to marry.

But she and this Chinese man [whom Ösel called Kelzang's first husband] had a son together, I'm pretty sure it's [Kelzang's third child] Dépön Tashi. And people said that [Kelzang's first son] Dolo is not the Chinese [husband's] son. At that time [the situation] here was a mess, people were going crazy. If you were an Alak there was no freedom for you. Alak later met a man named, Akhu Dortsamet, who was from the same department in CPPCC in Labrang. He was a very crazy guy from her office. They met and had [Kelzang's first son] Dolo together.<sup>299</sup>

While Ösel's story resembled Karmgya's tale about the Chinese soldier as stated in the first section above and Sönam corroborated it by saying that Kelzang married the "Chinese soldier" for a short time, Chödzin proffered a more benign account about the identity of Kelzang's first husband, although certainly no less sensitive of a story. He said that Kelzang's first husband Gendün was actually one of her Tibetan teachers at Northwest University of the Nationalities in Lanzhou where Kelzang studied from 1959-1960. Notably, Chödzin was the only person to talk about this scenario with a Tibetan husband perhaps because no one else knew that Kelzang had married in the early 1960s and also divorced. In this vein, many seemed to know some version about a "Chinese husband," a narrative thread analyzed in the next subsection. Although it is interesting that Chödzin said that Gendün claimed to be the father of Kelzang's first son, a claim disputed by locals who say this child was born out of wedlock to another Tibetan man. Chödzin stated:

In 1961, there was a lot of hunger and she had a lot of difficulties.

After she graduated [from Northwest University of the Nationalities] she married a teacher from Northwest University, a Tibetan man. The marriage did not last long as they married for one year and divorced. First there was a

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<sup>299</sup> Interview with Ösel in July 2016 in Gengya by the author.

big difference in age and then they didn't have a lot in common. She had never married before. Someone had told her that it was a good idea to marry a teacher, so she married and found out that [they didn't have much in common]. There were a lot of difficulties and Kelzang said she wanted to get divorced. Both parties agreed. After she graduated [around 1961] she was appointed to work in the CPPCC in Labrang and the teacher was still in Lanzhou University. So they agreed to divorce. Kelzang was in her 20s and he was in his 30s. They didn't fall in love with each other in a romantic sense because someone introduced them. At first it seemed like a good idea to marry him because he was a teacher, but it wasn't like that in reality. His name is Gendün and he's from Qinghai. He says that he is the father of Dolo [a claim that has been disputed.] After she divorced him, she planned to marry another guy from the CPCCP, but did not [Tserchok Dik Met?]. Then, after that she married Dépön's father [Tashi Gyatso].<sup>300</sup>

Chödzin did not explain the details of Kelzang's divorce, nor did he expand on whether Kelzang's teacher Gendün was in fact Dolo's father. Yet the fact that Chödzin stood by the claim that Gendün *said* he was Dolo's father is interesting for it would then cover up that Kelzang likely had her first (and also second) child out of wedlock. Meanwhile, two Tibetan locals on separate occasions said that Dolo was born in Ringön, a village in Gengya closest to the Gengya-Jiawu (Gansu-Qinghai) border with its own monastery and *trülku* not connected to Drakkar and the Gungru lineage. (Historically this monastery aligned with Rongbo Monastery in Rebgong and not with Gengya and Labrang). Sönam said that Dolo was "born out of wedlock in Ringön, but that he was the reincarnation of the Tuken *trülku*

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<sup>300</sup> Interview with in Labrang in July 2016 in Labrang by the author.

(who died in 1958).” Weima Tashi, of Ringön, said that a Tibetan man named Tupten was the father of Kelzang’s first son Dolo in 1962. On a trip to Ringön, Weima Tashi [to the current writer] pointed to Tupten’s house as we passed it, but did not elaborate.

For Chödzin, discussing issues surrounding Kelzang’s motherhood—and in particular the identity of the fathers of Kelzang’s children—represented an immediate peril to the propagation of her authority and the project to recreate the conditions of her sanctity in any possible *namtar* written about her (See Chapter 5). In addition to Kelzang’s first son Dolo who was raised by Kelzang’s brother in Gengya Tawa, Kelzang’s second child, her oldest daughter Tralo (born in 1964), was also born out of wedlock to the head of the CPPCC in Labrang, Chödzin said. Even though he admitted this situation, Chödzin did not want to elaborate primarily because this reality points to one of the main reasons why Kelzang’s authority became more diminished. He instead wanted to figure out a viable strategy to smooth over this stigma of there being multiple fathers in a text going forward. Chödzin said:

Tralo’s father is not the same as [Dolo’s]. [Tralo’s] father is the leader from the CPPCC. I don’t know clearly, but I heard this. It’s really bad that all of the kids have a different father. We [the family and I] are discussing that we will make it one [father of all of her children] in any future publication because it’s not a good impression for future Gungru *trülku*. Before Machik had four or five kids, but the father of all her children was the same, so we will make all the father the same [in any future publication.]<sup>301</sup>

Chödzin’s impulse to utilize Machik’s complete life story of her motherhood as a narrative and legitimating strategy helped him smooth over the personal tumult in Kelzang’s

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<sup>301</sup> Interview with Chödzin in July 2016 in Labrang by the author.

life and to present a sense of normalcy—authority even—for what happened to Kelzang. (I analyze this tactic in greater detail in the third section of this chapter and also in Chapter 5 in relation to writing Kelzang’s *namtar*). For if the venerable Machik could have children—and more importantly overcome the shame of breaking her vow and having five children in the twelfth century—so, too, could Kelzang. In this scenario, Machik as an “authorizing referent” of her actual motherhood can work when a religious figure like Kelzang marries and has children like Machik and also attain enlightenment. Along these lines, Kelzang could emerge into a focal point as a real mother who overcame many hardships/stigma on the path to attain liberation.

But executing this framework will likely take time—and perhaps a lot of time—before this reference to Machik as an actual mother can legitimate Kelzang, whose life as a *trülku* deviated away from the idealized tradition, as she was now a lay woman. This is because, in part, of the palpable effects of her divorcing and having two children born out of wedlock and later being abused by her second husband (as the next subsection shows). Two women in Amdo, Lhamotso, 64 and Dékyi, also discussed the implications of divorce in Tibetan society and how this and having an affair would be viewed for a woman in Tibetan society—even for a *trülku*.<sup>302</sup> Lhamotso said:

At that time, divorce was considered very bad. In a divorce situation [even today], people will scold the woman and blame her for the marriage breakdown. It’s like ‘Nobody wants her.’ Even a ghost doesn’t want you. A woman’s final destiny is to marry. If you didn’t marry between ages 15-18, you are considered very bad. Marriage is the only thing to strive

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<sup>302</sup> See also Rajan, “The Impact of Household Form” 151 for a discussion on how Tibetans described “the stigma of divorce.”

for. If you didn't marry at that age, people would say this woman is bad, that no man would want her.<sup>303</sup>

Dékyi also spoke about these issues and bearing children out of wedlock:

Divorced women are [today] considered to be bad because people generally don't treat divorced women as eligible to be married again. In my village, a divorce would be considered to be a woman's problem. ... If a man has an affair, generally it's considered okay because men often do that. But, if you are a woman who does that, then you are considered to be dead; people will consider you to be very bad. Men can have an affair while they are married, but women cannot. [Alak Gungru] was very harsh on herself because of this situation [out of wedlock children] maybe even more than people were hard on her. People might have thought, 'Okay, she's a *trülku*, maybe she had her own reasons for this [out of wedlock situation],' but she was very hard on herself.<sup>304</sup>

In addition to possibly utilizing Machik as an authorizing referent for Kelzang, Chödzin mentioned another tactic to smooth over Kelzang's earlier marriages and affairs. He referred to a prayer that Zhangtön allegedly wrote in the *Lotus Vine*, the foundational text in the Gungru lineage (Chapter 1). Chödzin said that Zhangtön prophesied that in the future a Gungru *trülku* might have to marry one day. I could not find evidence of this prayer and Chödzin could not verify it when I asked him to show me. Perhaps this alleged prayer is part of his overall strategy to call on the *Lotus Vine* and its famous author Zhangtön to legitimate Kelzang's marriages and motherhood, in particular given what happened for Kelzang during

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<sup>303</sup> Interview with Lhamotso in July 2016 outside Labrang by the author.

<sup>304</sup> Interview with Dékyi in July 2016 in Labrang by the author.

the Cultural Revolution when she was expelled to Khagya Yeshékhyil and where Chödzin entered her life.

*The Cultural Revolution: Remembering, or mis-remembering the trauma of abuse*

Kelzang's obituary mentions in one brief line how she worked as a herder and farm laborer in Khagya Yeshékhyil during the Cultural Revolution from around 1968-1978 and that Drakkar Monastery and her estate were destroyed. Kelzang and other Tibetan *trülku*, including Labrang's Jamyang Zhepa, were expelled to remote Tibetan regions in Amdo during the Cultural Revolution. The obituary states:

During the Cultural Revolution, Drakkar Monastery was destroyed and the Drakkar sutra teachers became lay householders, entered prison or passed away. Brothers and sisters were dispersed, and many animals owned by the monastery and by farms were distributed among the local people. Due to this circumstance, Alak Gungru [Kelzang] also became a rural shepherd in Khagya Yeshékhyil and participated in production of labor for more than ten years' time.<sup>305</sup>

Whereas the bulk of scholarship about the Cultural Revolution has focused on the PRC state and Mao's intentions versus the reality of the tumult, newer works have questioned this top-down perspective and critically added new voices, including those of persons living in Tibet and elsewhere.<sup>306</sup> For instance, Tsering Woesser's anthology of photographs and

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<sup>305</sup> Kelzang's obituary, 6-7. 文革间白石崖昂乾被毁，经师，管家相继入狱谢世，兄妹离散，昂乾之牲畜，部分财产和庄田分散到当地群众中，佛母也由此成为一名农牧民，在卡加地方参加生产劳动达十余年之久。

<sup>306</sup> Meisner's *Mao's China and After*, Dreyer's *China's Forty-Millions* and Spence's *The Search for Modern China* recount the Cultural Revolution but told almost exclusively from standpoints that evaluate the ideology of Mao and seldom from the position of what happened on the ground in areas outside of the main metropolitan areas. See also John Wu's recent *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins* that questions the PRC's attempt to stifle and silence the Cultural Revolution and the Mao-centric representation of the Cultural Revolution. Rather, he suggests, the Cultural Revolution must be understood as a more complex and "thinkable" event located beyond the center and its main figures and focusing more on people and issues/demands not usually discussed in

commentary about the Cultural Revolution (2020) illustrates the public “struggle sessions” in front of masses that many Tibetans, including the most famous female *trülku* the Samding Dorjé Pakmo of Tibet, endured in Central Tibet at the hands of the revolutionary Red Guards.<sup>307</sup> Woesser’s work serves as an unveiling to this time period that Kelzang’s story fits, a time of trauma for Tibetans and many other minorities in China, including Muslims in Xinjiang and Mongolians in Inner Mongolia.<sup>308</sup> Along these lines, oral narratives from those who lived in Labrang, Gengya and in Khagya Yeshékhyil described Kelzang’s life during the Cultural Revolution. They added new Tibetan voices to the story of Kelzang and also those from Gengya, Labrang and Khagya Yeshékhyil during the Cultural Revolution that have heretofore been silenced.

Thus, some people who knew Kelzang in Khagya Yeshékhyil elaborated the extreme hardship that Kelzang endured as a single mother of three children—a major departure from the norms or the trajectory of her life as a Gungru *trülku* where she lived at her multi-storied estate at Drakkar. Kelzang found herself living in this remote village with her second husband Tashi Gyatso, a Tibetan man with whom she met in Labrang (Xiahe) while they both worked in the CPPCC. And the situation that she encountered with him in Khagya Yeshékhyil—one in which Tashi Gyatso regularly beat her—marked another tragic turning point for Kelzang. In fact, many people in Labrang, Gengya and across Amdo still grapple with this incident today, as explained below.<sup>309</sup> Strikingly, many people discussed this story

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the political discourse of this time. This includes people and/or ideas located in the “margins” that contradicted and/or complexified what is more commonly presented as a top-down revolution instigated by a leader Mao.

<sup>307</sup> See Woesser’s *Forbidden Memory Tibet During the Cultural Revolution*, an anthology of photographs about the Cultural Revolution that adds Tibetan voices into the discourse of the Cultural Revolution. It puts names and faces to the violence that most state-sponsored research wants to excise or relegate/simplify as a mistake. From pages 98-106, these photographs describe struggle sessions that the recent Dorjé Pakmo endured by the masses, including by the factional group Gyenlong in Lhasa. See also Goldstein’s *On the Cultural Revolution in Tibet* and Shakya’s *The Dragon in the Land of the Snow*.

<sup>308</sup> See the dissertation of Wang, Jiangxin. *Uyghur Education and Social Order: The Role of Islamic Leadership in the Turpan Basin* that describes the destructions of the Cultural Revolution in Xinjiang. Jiangxin recounts details of the destructions in Inner Mongolian regions.

<sup>309</sup> I had to reconstruct this narrative about Tashi Gyatso through a series of interviews with many people who spoke of this sensitive situation. No one would call him by his given name, but it became clear that the



as they did the trauma when Kelzang was sexually assaulted in 1958, as mentioned in Part I. Just as striking, however, many people offered different and confusing accounts of the domestic violence and some even minimized, deflected and/or denied what had transpired. Sönamgyid, a Tibetan woman who grew up in Gengya Tawa and knew Kelzang well given their later jobs in the PRC government, recalled what she heard about Kelzang in the 1960s and 1970s. Not surprisingly, Sönamgyid was guarded due to the sensitivity of domestic violence and who it involved (Kelzang) and her Tibetan husband Tashi Gyatso in the context of the Cultural Revolution. Notably, Sönamgyid never mentioned Tashi Gyatso by name and only referred to him as “the husband.” Sönamgyid said:

I was a herdsman like a normal villager and I remember that Alak Gungru came there to give teaching [before 1958]. And then later I became a government worker in Gengya Township and she was a CPPCC worker so we supported each other, we had a [good] connection. If Alak came to the township from Labrang with the CPPCC, she came to stay with me in Gengya township. ... Alak suffered a lot at that time in the late 1950s and early 1960s. She had difficulties and while she was expelled to Khagya Yeshékhyil my situation was a little better. I don't know exactly when she was expelled. At that time, Alak was on the government list so she moved the family and kids to Khagya Yeshékhyil, but we still continued our relationship. I helped her when she needed help. I let my son drive our three-wheel truck to drive her around. ...

During this time, Weima Gya, who was a government leader in Gengya and then in Khagya, helped her. He didn't make Alak Gungru work a lot of labor but she was still able to attain the credit [and get food on the

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description was that of Tashi Gyatso in Khagya Yeshékhyil, who drank alcohol heavily, abused her, and died in 1976.

credit system that was established.] So Alak took care of the kids. He gave Alak Gungru some cows for milk and butter. Even though she also had to wear a [anti-religion hat], Weima Gya helped her. This is what [Alak Gungru] told me. She and the kids did not suffer from hunger. ...

But later I heard [from people] about [Tashi Gyatso beating her] and I asked Alak and she didn't tell me. I asked her, "Did he beat you and treat you badly and really make you suffer? I told her, 'You are an Alak, is this true? You are our lama. You can do something about this, you have some power.' Alak Gungru said, "Don't mention that, he's my kids' father, Let it go. We are married, we are husband and wife. When he was sick, I took care of him very well since we were married.' But later [Tashi Gyatso] passed away because he was so sick [with liver disease.] There are villagers who said that this husband passed away because he beat Alak so much, that this is cause and effect and he deserved that. But Alak never talked like that to me."<sup>310</sup>

It is telling that as a *trülku* Kelzang did not feel that she had the power or authority to stop her husband despite Sönamgyid's plea to Kelzang that she had "power to stop this... you are our lama." Kelzang disagreed or as a lay person she no longer felt that she had the authority as a *trülku* to stop him. She acted in a way similar to what Hamsa Rajan describes in her recent ethnography on domestic violence in Amdo. Rajan writes that victims often justify beating as a form of discipline or as one person who suffered severe trauma told her, "his beatings

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<sup>310</sup> Interview with Sönamgyid in July 2016 in Labrang by the author.

didn't hurt me, because we loved each other.”<sup>311</sup> Rajan writes that “violence is used as a means to maintain men's dominance and superior role within the household.”<sup>312</sup>

Lhamotso, who lives in a village outside Labrang, recalled conversations that she had with Sönamgyid about Kelzang's abuse in Khagya Yeshékhyil and she added some new details. But in a fascinating twist, Lhamotso raised doubt about the ethnicity of the person who beat Kelzang and suggested that Kelzang's husband who abused her was Chinese and not Tibetan. Remarkably, this tale about a “Chinese husband” resembled the accounts mentioned above from Karmagya and Ösel who spoke about a Chinese husband who had beaten Kelzang. Lhamotso said:

Yes, I heard about this. [Sönamgyid] told me that the husband before Akhu Chödzin [beat Alak]. I don't know if he's Chinese or not. This person beat her so much. He called her to come in and pulled her hair and beat her until he was satisfied. He was on the bed sick. Then later he died because he did terrible things to Alak, it's cause and effect. At that time I didn't know anything about Alak Gungru. ... Yes, [ I think ] it must have been a Chinese [person] who beat her because how can a Tibetan beat a *trülku* [Kelzang] like that? This guy beat her until he was satisfied. She [Sönamgyid] won't tell you all the details because it's not good for the family.<sup>313</sup>

Lhamotso could not believe or she chose not to believe that a Tibetan person would have abused Kelzang, a *trülku*. Perhaps Lhamotso said this as a way to deny or cover up the terrible rupture that had occurred in Kelzang's life as the Gungru *trülku* and in the Tibetan community. In this regard, Lhamotso's account to blame to the Chinese oppressor could be

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<sup>311</sup> Rajan, “Violence Against Women” 15, 19.

<sup>312</sup> Rajan, “Violence Against Women” 19.

<sup>313</sup> Interview with Lhamotso in July 2016 in Labrang by the author.

seen in context with those stories revealed in Erik Mueggler’s ethnography of the Yi minority in Yunnan, China and the strategies contained in their narratives to help the Yi “find their place after a century of violence.”<sup>314</sup> Moreover, Lhamotso’s instinct to suggest that a Chinese person had abused Kelzang resembled the exact story put forth by Ösel and also Karmagya as told in the first section of this chapter. The only difference is that Ösel and Karmagya said that Kelzang’s first husband, a Chinese person (soldier), had abused her. Recall, too, that Ösel said that this person (the first Chinese husband) died young because of what villagers had said was (the Chinese person’s) “bad karma,” a story that strongly resembles what Sönamgyid said about Kelzang’s second husband Tashi Gyatso. Could Ösel have confused Tashi Gyatso’s abuse of Kelzang with what Ösel referred to as Kelzang’s first husband in order to avoid discussing that a Tibetan person (and not a Chinese person) had abused Kelzang during this time? It is entirely possible that tragically both a Chinese person and later a Tibetan abused Kelzang, in particular since reliable accounts (Kelzang’s husband Chödzin and Hortsang Lhogyel) said that she was sexually assaulted by a Chinese soldier in 1958 as the first section denotes. It is also plausible that given the events of this period that many people bundled together memories of these events as most did not know the identity of Kelzang’s three husbands and when they married. Confusion reigned and still does. In her introduction to her anthology about the Cultural Revolution, Woesser said that one Tibetan said, “back then everything was insane, it was as if we had been drugged.”<sup>315</sup>

In this vein, this denial of “unimaginable malevolence” in Kelzang’s life is not unusual, putting this situation in eastern Tibet (and across all of Tibet) in context with other tragic and violent periods in recent world history, such as Partition in India in the 1940s.<sup>316</sup> That Sönamgyid, Lhamotso and likely many others, including Karmagya and Ösel, wanted to

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<sup>314</sup> See Mueggler, *Age of Wild Ghosts*, 4-6.

<sup>315</sup> See Woesser, *Forbidden Memory*, xii.

<sup>316</sup> See Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 35, 39. Pandey’s study of the violence of Partition in India in the 1940s challenged fixed nation-state (nation building) narratives of India and Pakistan.

either by strategic choice or by repeating widely circulated stories blame a Chinese person for the violence rather than on a Tibetan, bears scrutiny. For in the same way that Gyanendra Pandey in his study of Partition in India reclaims the non-elite voices and the violence they endured as victims and also as perpetrators as part of a nation building story so, too, does this account of violence afflicted by a Tibetan man help reclaim Kelzang's story that has been effaced.<sup>317</sup> While assigning blame to an outsider is understandable given the magnitude of this offense, doing so, however, can negate the reality that Kelzang and the Gungru lineage's authority persevered through and have been shaped by these events. Moreover, domestic violence, as Hamsa Rajan has shown in her work in Amdo communities, is prevalent in Tibetan society and Kelzang's high-profile case brings that to light in a new domain, as understanding its representation—or intentional mis-representation—becomes intertwined in terms of preserving the Gungru lineage and its authority.

Therefore, understanding this story in context with the violence that had already occurred is critical to analyze the effects of Kelzang's authority on Tibetan terms (as both victims and perpetrators) even though Kelzang herself did not want to talk about this and was warned by her youngest daughter Gönpotso not to do so in my only official interview with Kelzang in 2010. And while the impulse to silence this story is logical given the stakes to smooth this chasm over and recreate Kelzang's sanctity in the Gungru lineage, the reality of what happened to Kelzang (and likely many others) in this community was undeniable. Even the (former) author of Kelzang's *namtar*, Gendün Darjé, said that "People told me that Tashi Gyatso was not good to [Kelzang] and that he died of liver disease because he drank heavily."<sup>318</sup> Another woman from Gengya Zhölkor said something similar, although she referred to this person as Kelzang's first husband, perhaps not aware that Kelzang had married and divorced in the early 1960s. She said, "the first husband, who was a Tibetan and

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<sup>317</sup> Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 182 discusses the violence of Indian Partition.

<sup>318</sup> Interview with Gendün Darjé in September 2017 in Labrang by the author.

is from Khagya Yeshékhyil, did not treat her well.”<sup>319</sup> In the meantime, Tashitso from Khagya Yeshékhyil, who knew and worked with Kelzang in the fields during the Cultural Revolution, said little, perhaps because her husband stood next to her with three other men for the first part of our 2016 interview. Tashitso said, “I wasn’t familiar with [Tashi Gyatso], he was a good, easy going person, literate. But because I was in the field so much, I didn’t know him.”<sup>320</sup>

Significantly, Chödzin said little about the domestic violence with Tashi Gyatso, who taught Chödzin’s Tibetan in Khagya Yeshékhyil before Tashi Gyatso met Kelzang as a member of the CPPCC, for reasons Part III of this chapter elaborates. Instead, Chödzin reached into his toolkit or repertoire and brought up a *namtar*-like miracle story of how his stepson Dépön, with whom Chödzin does not get along, actually saved Kelzang from a struggle session in 1968. Kelzang was pregnant with Dépön at the time, Chödzin said, a fact that allegedly spared her the worst of a struggle session that would have publicly humiliated her as Tsering Dorjé talked about and Woenser’s volume shows. One photo in Woenser’s book shows a woman, Ani Lhadrön, with a fist in the face of the Twelfth Dorjé Pakmo in Central Tibet as if Ani Lhadrön were going to punch her.<sup>321</sup> Chödzin said that Dépön was “Kelzang’s protector” and that she was therefore spared because of this and then was expelled to Khagya Yeshékhyil unharmed. Chödzin said:

During the Cultural Revolution, everybody had to participate in struggle sessions in Gengya. And the [Xiahe government] wanted to have a struggle session with Alak Gungru. At this time there were also struggle sessions toward the Gengya township leader. But Kelzang was pregnant with Dépön Tashi and almost due. The Xiahe leader did not make her go [for the struggle session]. Dépön stopped that, this is good, he was

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<sup>319</sup> Interview with a Tibetan woman in July 2016 in Gengya Zhölkör by the author.

<sup>320</sup> Interview with Tashitso in July 2016 in Khagya Yeshékhyil by the author.

<sup>321</sup> See Woenser, *Forbidden Memory*, 100.

protecting her even then. And she did not have to get a struggle session. Then she gave birth and she could not go to Gengya because the policies in Gengya were very strict. Then she went to upper Khagya Yeshékhyil Dépön's father [Tashi Gyatso] is from Upper Khagya. We were friends and relatives. Tashi's father was my Tibetan teacher and I his student. He was a monk before and I became a monk at 8 years old.<sup>322</sup>

Chödzin noticeably pivoted more to a heroic story about Kelzang and said nothing negative about his teacher (Kelzang's husband Tashi Gyatso) because this fits more with his goal to smooth over this dire part of Kelzang's story—the part that has already been silenced and left out of her obituary—and will continue to be in any *namtar* that he might contribute. As one of the main curators of Kelzang's story, Chödzin wanted to negate parts of her story and the violence perpetrated by his own teacher (and the father of his two step children Dépön and Gönpotso) because it did not help his cause to recreate the conditions of her sanctity. Yet another reason for his reticence soon became apparent. Chödzin himself became a main protagonist in the narrative, and his version of this story, challenged by locals, is featured in the next section as Chödzin narrated a version of how Kelzang's story—and his—could go.

### **Part III**

#### **The Lay Protagonist Chödzin Narrates *Namtar* as the Heroic Husband**

Garrulous and always eager to talk, Chödzin met many times with me at his home in Labrang (Xiahe) located about 2 km from the monastery. A former printer and researcher, Chödzin often pulled out his scrapbooks of pictures and anecdotes that he put together about Kelzang. Like clockwork, he began to speak at length about various topics about Kelzang's

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<sup>322</sup> Interview with Chödzin in July 2013 in Labrang by the author.

life before and after 1958—or pre and post Kelzang’s laicization. Chödzin, who was also a monk from 1954-1958, became animated when he spoke about how he met Kelzang in the early 1970s. He said that he was sick with a heart ailment when they both lived in the Khagya Yeshékhyil outside of Hezuo during the Cultural Revolution and that she helped cure him. Significantly, Chödzin, who was a government administrator during this time, often made it a point to tell me that he did not leave his own family to be with Kelzang for the money (or the wealth attached to Kelzang’s estate). This, of course, arouses suspicion that he did exactly that or has been accused of doing so, perhaps by his stepson Dépön, who has not returned any message/text to me since 2014. Their relationship has been fraught over issues surrounding the control of her estate, a tense dynamic detailed below and more in Chapter 4 that pertains to the feud that developed between Kelzang’s children and the monks at Drakkar after Drakkar was rebuilt in the 1980s and 1990s.

In this vein, Chödzin, who has been relegated to the sidelines of the writing process about Kelzang (Chapter 5), welcomed the chance to speak about Kelzang at every opportunity. He shared sensitive details about Kelzang’s life that others in her family, including Kelzang herself, did not divulge. Recall from the introduction to this dissertation, and above, that Kelzang’s daughter Gönpotso had warned Kelzang in 2010 not to say anything to me during my interview with Kelzang. It is also noteworthy that Gönpotso did not speak to me at all about Kelzang for this dissertation while Kelzang’s oldest daughter Tralo often declined comment and Dolo and Dépön were both very guarded about Kelzang’s life and this time period. Yet, Chödzin always wanted to talk, perhaps in an attempt to win my favor and portray himself as an expert on her life compared to others. For Chödzin seemed to pride himself in knowing the complexities of Kelzang’s story during a complicated time in Tibetan and Chinese history. He talked openly, including, as mentioned, about Kelzang’s sexual assault in 1958, her divorce from her first husband and how she gave birth



to her first two children out of wedlock. Although as the second section showed, Chödzin avoided the circumstances about Kelzang's second marriage and abuse afflicted by Tashi Gyatso likely because of the conflict of interest (Tashi Gyatso was his teacher) and the tense family dynamics that stemmed from that time.

Yet, as Chödzin spoke about these painful occurrences and admitted his desire to smooth over how Kelzang had four children from three different fathers, a fascinating development occurred during our interviews: Chödzin narrated a *namtar*-like story about Kelzang with himself acting as the main protagonist or hero in the story. Or put another way, Chödzin presented himself as the man who saved the day and help Kelzang in her time of need as a single mother who raised three kids in the Cultural Revolution. Perhaps he narrated such a coherent story as one clear way to rub out the cracks and fissures in Kelzang's own life, including the fact that he is one of her three husbands. What better way to use a traditional Tibetan narration technique of *namtar* (or something akin to it) to discuss such a non-traditional scenario such as this one involving Chödzin and Kelzang?

But as we will see in Chapter 5, this exact circumstance of Chödzin telling his own story—or writing and speaking himself into Kelzang's story—concerned others who wanted to craft Kelzang's *namtar*, i.e., the project to sanctify her and legitimate her authority within the Gungru lineage. Drakkar monks and Kelzang's children feared that Chödzin would make himself the center of attention, the humble hero who saved Kelzang from the rigors of the Cultural Revolution. This development became even more problematic (at least for the monks) because Chödzin was a layman/husband—certainly not a typical writer/author of a Tibetan religious figure's *namtar* as Chapter 5 delineates. This section analyzes some of these issues, but in particular the critical moment in Chödzin's *namtar*-like story about Kelzang when Chödzin left his own family during the Cultural Revolution and then married Kelzang in 1978, according to their wedding certificate, and moved to Labrang. Other

accounts, however, revealed cracks in his story as one person suggested that Chödzin and Kelzang never actually married. Some impugned Chödzin's decision to leave his own original family (his first wife and children) to join Kelzang or how Kelzang as a single mother managed more by herself—without a man to make it all right.

*Narrating a namtar: Chödzin the hero saves the day*

As a lay man, husband and stepfather, Chödzin is certainly not a conventional source to speak about a Tibetan *trülku* like Kelzang. Yet the former monk and government administrator in Khagya Yeshékhyil and later Kelzang's third husband attempted to do just that during many of our sit-down sessions at his house in Labrang. Perhaps he narrated a coherent story about how he met Kelzang during the Cultural Revolution to show how he ushered in more stability in her life amidst the chaos; he minimized Kelzang's previous two marriages and the major discontinuity in her life as outlined in the first two sections to bolster *his* own authority. Or it is possible that he tried to overcome the discontinuity and the awkwardness of the situation in which he found himself, what with him leaving his own family (to their ire) to marry Kelzang in the 1970s and the strained relations that ensued with Kelzang's four children, in particular Dépön. Or maybe Chödzin did so to prove to Kelzang (even posthumously) that he was a capable writer just as she had praised his co-authored book about monasteries in Amdo in the 1980s. In this vein, the more Chödzin shared his story about how he met Kelzang during the Cultural Revolution (and afterward), the more he became a central figure rather than a bit part—a factor of authorship not altogether unusual in *namtar* or in similar type texts. Chödzin said:

Yes, I was married at that time [when I met Kelzang], my wife was very nice and we had two kids, a son and a daughter. And my [financial] condition was really good, I had no difficulties at all. But at that time I was

sick, and [Kelzang] cried all the time [because she was a single mother/taking care of Tashi Gyatso]. I had no solution [to my illness and to help her]. So, I asked for some advice from other lamas. They said, ‘You have to leave your family.’ Then I gathered my relatives and said, ‘I have been sick for six years and still haven’t recovered, I need to leave. My son needs to be the heir and take care of the property.’ The family said, ‘Please don’t leave.’ I said, ‘Please don’t say that, I treated my disease for six years and can’t recover. This disease has killed two people and I am next. If I can recover there then I will go to Alak Gungru.’ Then my mother said, ‘We will kick you out [of the family].’ Ten other relatives also said, ‘We will kick you out and you can’t take anything [money], you will have to go as you are.’ I said, ‘But I am the one who made the family rich.’ Finally, I said, ‘Okay, kick me out...and then I left and came to Alak Gungru and I worked hard. ...

She had many meetings in Labrang, but did not have a house. Other lamas had houses, but Alak Gungru didn’t have one. Then, I built her a house. I had a lot of experience working in the village and I knew how to [save money] and then build a house. Later, I could have worked in a government job because the village leaders asked me to come back and work. But I could not do so because I did a lot of print work and took care of the kids. Since 1979, Alak needed to go out and solve grassland disputes. I came to her in 1977 and we had a marriage certificate in 1978.

At that time I was 40 years old and I am the only one who stayed such a long time with her. Even though she gave birth to the kids, the kids went to school and later worked. They didn’t stay with her that much. I am

the only one who stayed with her for such a long period of time. For her entire life I served her really well and I never let her carry a bucket to fetch water or let her to do any labor. I didn't take any salary for myself. All of my money went to the family. In 1982 I built a house for [Kelzang's first daughter] Tralo. ...

Since I am not the father of the kids, Alak Setsang [from nearby Terlung] asked me at that time to concentrate on printing. When The Tenth Panchen Lama visited Labrang in 1982, Alak Setsang introduced me to the Panchen Lama and said to the Panchen, 'Chödzin has printed a lot, please remember him.' And then the Panchen told people that I am the person who did a lot of printing. During the Cultural Revolution the [Red Guards] burned all the scriptures. In 1981 when they started to rebuild, I went to many places to ask about the mode of printing and I started to print many scriptures. And then people said, 'Akhu Chödzin s very good.' And then Alak Setsang said, 'From now on, you are a printer.' ... This is how Kelzang and I met. The problem I had is I got sick [in Khagya Yeshékhyil]. Alak's difficulties were that her husband died and the kids were young and there was no way for her to take care of it all; she cried all the time. Even though she is an Alak, she promised a lot to me in order to make me come to her. In our lay people's language, she promised a lot and cried a lot.<sup>323</sup>

Strikingly, Chödzin, in his attempt to smooth over the major discontinuity in Kelzang's life, spoke more about why he left his family to care for Kelzang and her children, as well as his own ability as a printer of Tibetan texts, than he does about Kelzang. Along

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<sup>323</sup> Interview with Chödzin in July 2016 in Labrang by the author.

these lines, Chödzin cited two famous Tibetan figures, namely Alak Setsang and the late Tenth Panchen, to legitimate himself as a printer of Tibetan scriptures destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. In doing so, Chödzin attempted to augment his own authority as Kelzang's husband and said little about Kelzang—other than to describe her in a position of need, i.e., as struggling and crying. Instead, he spoke more about his own pivotal move to leave his own wife and children to help Kelzang (and himself get better) as if to justify what was admittedly a contentious decision. Chödzin detailed why he left his family and cited that Tibetan lamas told him he could leave and go to Kelzang to cure his illness. While I have not verified if these lamas ever sanctioned his departure from his family to receive a medical cure from Kelzang, Tashitso, who knew both Kelzang and Chödzin when they all lived in Khagya Yeshékhyil during the Cultural Revolution, cited Chödzin and his first wife's marital problems as a reason for his departure. She did not know whether he was sick or not. Tashitso said:

It's okay to talk about this; it's not that we are not allowed to talk.

After Chödzin left, his wife re-married. At the beginning, their relationship [Chödzin and his first wife] was not good. Their marriage had problems; they had conflict in the marriage. Alak Gungru had three [four] kids and Chödzin had two kids. So, Chödzin and his first wife separated and [Chödzin's ex-wife's second husband] died a few months ago. Since [Chödzin and his first wife] had conflict in their marriage, they came up with the arrangement: You can find another husband, and I will go with her. Both sides were able to move forward.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Interview with Tashitso in July 2016 in Khagya Yeshékhyil by the author.

Marital and family drama aside, the fascinating element here is how Chödzin deftly made himself into the protagonist, the person who needed help and who was called (like many renunciates are) to act by any means necessary to take that next big step on the path. Here, however, Chödzin apparently left an unhappy marriage to serve Kelzang through his connection through Tashi Gyatso, his old Tibetan teacher and Kelzang's second husband. Another interesting part of Chödzin's version of how he met Kelzang during the Cultural Revolution—aka his own *namtar* or autobiography that focuses more on himself—discusses how he helped the then-sick Tashi Gyatso. Whereas others above said that Tashi Gyatso drank too much alcohol and abused Kelzang before he died—although confusion has persisted as some wondered if this perpetrator was indeed a Chinese person and not a Tibetan—Chödzin adopted a much more amiable tone. He spoke in reverence of Tashi Gyatso, saying that it was Tashi Gyatso who gave him the mission to “take care of Alak Gungru.” Chödzin said:

When my teacher [Tashi Gyatso] was sick, he told me to take care of Alak Gungru. Tashi's father was my Tibetan teacher and I was his student. He was a monk before and I became a monk at 8 years old in Khagya. I was very familiar with him. In 1976 Mao Zedong died and at that time I was a local administrator in Khagya Yeshékhyil. Dépön's father [Tashi Gyatso] was very sick at that time. I was his friend and always helped him; I was an administrator and he was a laborer. He shared his circumstances with me and said he might die. He said before he died,, ‘You need to help [Alak Gungru].’ I was a little bit sick too. And Alak said to me, ‘If you come here, I will help you get better.’ Alak Gungru shared many difficulties with me; she had a lot of debt and had many kids with no husband. She also had to wear the hat (anti-religion hat). She told me about

a lot of hardships. The people of Gengya couldn't help her because of the [strict struggle sessions] at that time. Since I was young, I have always liked religion. If I can help others, I decided that even though I had my own family, I wanted to help her. Then, I came to help her as she asked. ...

I let her do whatever she wanted to do and took care of her for 40 years. Now I have done my duty. I told the people of Gengya that I came here and never stole a single sheep from her; I didn't sell any pieces of sheep skin. I never took any clothes from Alak Gungru. At the beginning, my only purpose was to be a servant for Alak Gungru and protect her. Otherwise I am not the father of these kids. I am not a greedy person. Some people asked me, "Gold and water, which one would you choose? I would choose water because I need water every day."<sup>325</sup>

In a way, Chödzin's second account reads like a rebuttal to people (perhaps even his own stepson Dépön) who likely questioned his motives for leaving his own family to be with a prestigious Tibetan *trülku* like Kelzang. He spoke very fast and came off as defensive saying that he's "always liked religion" and that he did not steal anything from Kelzang to explain why he left his own family to serve Kelzang. A few years later, Chödzin revealed that his relationship with his stepson Dépön had deteriorated precisely because Dépön, who was the heir to Kelzang's estate, did not trust Chödzin and Dépön was upset that Chödzin (instead of Tashi Gyatso's brother) married Kelzang after Tashi Gyatso died in 1976. Chödzin said that Dépön became embittered when Dépön found out that Tashi Gyatso's brother wanted to marry Kelzang, but that Kelzang chose Chödzin instead of Tashi Gyatso's brother. This created resentment that has lasted to this day and is perhaps one reason why Chödzin has

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<sup>325</sup> Interview with Chödzin in July 2013 in Labrang by the author.

adopted a more positive tone about Tashi Gyatso so as to not provoke any more tension between him and Dépön than what already exists. (The next chapter further analyzes these dynamics in conjunction with Dépön's conflict with Drakkar). Chödzin said:

Tashi Gyatso's brother told Dépön some bad things about me. Tashi Gyatso's brother hated me because I married Alak Gungru. He told Dépön and the kids that I bullied Tashi Gyatso because I had power. This caused Dépön to be angry at me and for two years Dépön didn't talk to me and acted really badly toward me. I told Dépön it is better for you to not act like that toward me. Then Dépön really held things back and didn't share anything with me. Then the family pictures didn't include any of my pictures. But some relatives said to him, 'You should put Chödzin's photos in there because he stayed [with Kelzang] for 30-40 years. But he didn't take action. Dépön doesn't like me, but he can't find any of my mistakes that I have made here. I cleaned well and did everything well. He can't point out any mistakes of mine.'<sup>326</sup>

Hortsang Lhogyel, meanwhile, who lived with Kelzang and Chödzin when Hortsang was married to Kelzang's second attendant, poked some holes in Chödzin's seamless narrative. He did not mince his words nor take sides in the matter but assessed this problem as a matter between a stepfather and step son. Hortsang Lhogyel stated:

It was difficult for Akhu Chödzin to be her husband because Dépön didn't like him at all. Akhu Chödzin received an order from Alak Setsang to not think about this situation too much, to just stay with her to finish this life. Chödzin really respects Alak Setsang a lot. Chödzin didn't have any

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<sup>326</sup> Interview with Chödzin in January 2019 in Labrang by the author.



conflict with Alak Gungru, but he did have one with Dépön. He's not Dépön's father, therefore Dépön does not like him. Chödzin is the husband but he doesn't have any power in the family. Rather, Dépön has all the power in the family. Chödzin is really powerless in this situation and he also didn't have any money. In fact, Alak Gungru sometimes gave money to him. Sometimes Dépön scolded him, "Get away from my house, you are not my father!" Chödzin was hurt so much by that, but he didn't go because Alak Setsang told him to stay. The reality is such that Chödzin is the husband and the elder, he should be the powerful guy in the family, but was not.<sup>327</sup>

But Sönam from Jiawu, perhaps in a way to override this family drama, i.e., the conditions that would hinder the legitimation of her sanctity and challenge her authority, denied that Kelzang and Chödzin ever married; Chödzin, for the record, showed me a copy of the certificate from 1978. Sönam, whose family served Kelzang when she was selected as the Gungru *trülku* in the 1940s, said that Chödzin "did not marry Kelzang" and that Chödzin returned to Khagya Yeshékhyil to take care of his own family. Sönam said:

I heard that Alak and Chödzin were not married. Since he was a patient of Alak Gungru, they were not married. Chödzin's wife offered him to her and she cured him. Last time in Drakkar, they invited Alak to the picnic, Chödzin said, "I'm *not* the husband, so I will not go!!! Alak Gungru visited by herself. Drakkar Monastery invited her to rebuild [after the Cultural Revolution] and the Gengya Tsowa invited her to rebuild. Chödzin said, 'I am not the husband, so I will not go.' Because they are not married

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<sup>327</sup> Interview with Hortsang Lhogyel in September 2018 in Lanzhou by the author.

Chödzin can go back to his Khagya [Yeshékhyil] family whenever he wants.

Alak Gungru knew this when she was alive that Chödzin would go and see his family often.<sup>328</sup>

Sönam’s stunning denial that Chödzin ever married Kelzang, a story that he attributed to others in the Amdo community, further diminished Chödzin’s roles (his authority?) as Kelzang’s husband, as her children’s stepfather and as a spokesperson for the Gungru lineage going forward. Notably, Sönam when he discussed Kelzang’s marriages never mentioned any of Kelzang’s Tibetan husbands and only the one “Chinese husband.” He likely did this because the notion that Kelzang would marry a Tibetan (her first husband) and have children out of wedlock (presumably to two Tibetan men) and then marry two more Tibetan men did not fit with the proscribed story—that it was the Chinese who forced her to marry. From Sönam’s view (and presumably others), none of these marriages occurred on Kelzang’s own volition, which would have been harder to reconcile for a Tibetan *trülku* of the more traditional Geluk sect that was prevalent around Labrang (and Amdo) although not uncommon during this Cultural Revolution period. Along these lines, Sönam poked fun at Chödzin’s personal drama by suggesting that Chödzin’s wife “offered him to Kelzang to cure him” so as to minimize Chödzin’s decision to leave his family to join Kelzang as a Buddhist offering. In short, Sönam’s account served to de-legitimize Chödzin as her husband, a move that helps explain why Chödzin rarely showed up at Drakkar in the years after the monastery and the Gungru estate were rebuilt in the 1980s. Meanwhile, Hortsang Lhogyel challenged the notion that Chödzin saved Kelzang from her hardships. Hortsang Lhogyel said that Chödzin, while helpful, did not assume all of the responsibility and that Kelzang acted as a single mother prior to his arrival. Hortsang Lhogyel said:

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<sup>328</sup> Interview with Sönam in July 2016 in Jiawu, Qinghai by the author.

As Alak told me, she bought a house in Labrang Tawa and sent Gönpotso and Dépön to the school. She had a hard time and had a lot of responsibilities and difficulties. Chödzin didn't take much responsibility, he came much later when the [children] were older. Things were better by the time Chödzin came. In Khagya [Yeshékhyil], she had a lot of help, but when she went to Labrang Tawa, she had a lot of difficulties. She had no money and she had three kids. She said her life was so hard as there was no man in the family. She was a single mother. According to Amdo [this was a woman's family, a single mother; mother raising kids]. After the Cultural Revolution ended, she had a lot of difficulties."<sup>329</sup>

All told, Chödzin's project to speak himself into Kelzang's story serves the purpose to deflect away from Kelzang's life and smooth over or sanitize many of these events. Presenting himself as a hero—to the disdain of his family and also many monks—allowed him to curate and mollify what came before him, which as we have seen, was traumatic for Kelzang. This was his intervention into Kelzang's story, an attempt to patch over her own cracks and crevices with as traditional of a story as possible with one unconventional problem: The story became about him, although people from within the Amdo community challenged his account, as well.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Chödzin's rendering of his and Kelzang's life together demarcates one of the major storylines of the traumatic Cultural Revolution period from 1958-1978—a time of destruction, hunger and drastic change in Gengya, Labrang and across Amdo. His story (among others

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<sup>329</sup> Interview with Hortsang Lhogyel in September 2018 in Lanzhou, Gansu by the author.

seen in this chapter) marks an attempt to present some form of coherency out of the incoherent, or some sense of continuity out of the discontinuity of this time period when Kelzang's life turned upside down, or suffered extreme reversals. Some people spoke soberly about how Kelzang was forced to laicize and have sex in 1958 and become a lay person who worked in the PRC government. Others spoke about how she married and divorced her first husband, who was a Tibetan teacher named Gendün, and later in 1962 and 1964 had her first two children out of wedlock. Still others discussed how she later married her second husband, Tashi Gyatso, who she had met at the CPPCC in Labrang in the 1960s and later moved to Khagya Yeshékhyil when she was exiled to work as a laborer and he as a herder. Accounts began to emerge that Tashi Gyatso had abused Kelzang during this time when she took care of him before he died in 1976.

And while some people filled in details of the tragic events that ensued in Kelzang's life—the events that her obituary has already left out because they do not fit the script to legitimate her authority as a Gungru *trülku* like her predecessors—others shared deflections, denials and confusion about what happened to Kelzang. For example, some people said that Kelzang transformed into a tiger, a super-heroic story of her standing up to her aggressors who sexually assaulted her. Others, if they talked about this issue of abuse and violence at all, placed blame on the Chinese for having beaten her. Some confused, bundled or blurred the stories of abuse, marriage, motherhood, the identity of the fathers together, perhaps collapsing all the chaos that happened into one event or one person: a Chinese perpetrator rather than a Tibetan.

Gyanendra Pandey in his studies of narratives about the Partition in India in the 1940s, shows that locals denied that such violence could ever occur in their village, that it was afflicted on them but not by them. By uncovering voices that were silenced or relegated irrelevant, Pandey brings to light stories that were as Tibetan historian Carole McGranahan

writes, “arrested” from the meta narrative for what they reveal about it—that they played a vital role in the building and articulation of a nation (s). And in the case of the Gungru lineage, voices emerged in a Tibetan community trying to grapple with the reality that their sixth *trülku* had been sexually assaulted, married three times, and abused by her husband. Voices that show the depths to which their community was wounded but also to a degree unified behind the focal point of Kelzang—on many people’s own strategic terms. What has emerged are long silenced questions of gender, motherhood and trauma usually neatly cordoned away from the domain of religion and religious authority about a Tibetan figure—or any religious figure for that matter. Kelzang’s story and the remarkable process of how locals deal with the tragedies and major changes that occurred in Kelzang’s life complicates these boundaries and the question of her authority as a *trülku* who was also a survivor of sexual assault and a married mother of four children.

All of this makes up Kelzang’s story in the Gungru lineage, as Sönam from Jiawu described with one telling anecdote in our 2016 interview. In fact, he began our conversation with an account of how the Second Gungru *trülku* Lozang Drölma left her husband who had beaten her to ordain at Drakkar in the eighteenth century.<sup>330</sup> I had not heard this story before and the extant short biographies about earlier Gungru *trülku* mention nothing of the sort. It was striking, then, that Sönam on his own volition shared this story about Lozang Drölma overcoming domestic violence to find sanctity. Perhaps he did so given the realities of what Kelzang had experienced in the same locale 150 years later suggesting that *this* story (transcending domestic violence) constituted the Gungru lineage’s authoritative narrative (at least in the present) instead of the story featured in the *Lotus Vine* about the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo. And while Sönam did not explicitly link these two Gungru *trülku*, perhaps

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<sup>330</sup> Interview with Sönam in July 2016 in Jiawu, Qinghai by the author.

his story about Lozang Drölma provided a model—or a strategy—to legitimate Kelzang’s authority going forward and a framework to write Kelzang’s *namtar* as Chapter 5 discusses.

But following this model has proven difficult at present because of the reality that befell the Gungru lineage after the Cultural Revolution as the next chapter shows. For the reality of this discontinuity, i.e., of the tragedy of what happened to Kelzang, drastically impacted her authority as the Gungru *trülku* going forward. That is while Drakkar and other monasteries, including Labrang, were rebuilt in the 1980s, Kelzang as a mother spent less time at her rebuilt estate and more time raising her family and working in the government. She also spent less time acting as the Gungru *trülku* for she now lived in a lay person’s world and found that straddling both spaces was difficult, as she herself admitted.<sup>331</sup> This proved difficult for many people in Gengya and Labrang who were used to seeing her in public settings, worshipping her and relying on her counsel in various matters. And in the vacuum of her changed status, she faced another subtle, yet no less significant, challenge to her authority: a resumption of the rivalry with Damtsik Drölma, who did not relinquish her claim to be the Sixth Gungru even after monks at Drakkar rebuffed her in the 1940s, as Chapter 2 illustrates. The events of this heretofore unwritten story that resulted in formal complaints in 1994 and an article in *China’s Tibet* (1995) denoting a “new female *trülku* lineage” in Damtsik as “The Snow Mountain Goddess” in Qinghai mark the fulcrum of the next chapter with the guiding question as to how and why this competition resumed and new announcement occurred. Paramount to this discussion will be how issues relating to Kelzang’s trauma and her motherhood—issues introduced throughout this dissertation and in this current chapter—impacted this resumed competition and ultimately challenged her authority in Gengya, Labrang and across Amdo.

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<sup>331</sup> Interview with Kelzang Drölma in December 2010 in Labrang by the author.

## Chapter 4

### The Vicissitudes of Kelzang’s Authority in Gengya and Labrang

My mission was simple when I arrived in Labrang for the first time in December 2010. I wanted to investigate a possible conflict between Kelzang Drölma and Damtsik Drölma, a dispute first raised in the introduction to this dissertation and again in Chapter 2. I realized that after meeting with Kelzang’s husband Chödzin and others that any conflict that occurred between Kelzang and Damtsik did not in fact end in the 1940s when Damtsik claimed to be “the real Gungru *trülku*” and Drakkar’s monks allegedly beat her as she left Drakkar as Chapter 2 shows. I learned that Chödzin protested Damtsik’s continued use of the name “Gungru” on the sign “Built By The Gungru *Khandroma*” in the mid-1990s at her monastery Ngotsar Tardrenling in Gyayé, Qinghai. (Damtsik helped found Ngotsar Tardrenling in the 1980s). Chödzin also told me that he corrected writers in Qinghai who called Damtsik “Gungru” and that he objected to Damtsik still using the name “Gungru” on her identification card that she allegedly stole in the 1940s in Jiawu, Qinghai.<sup>332</sup> (To note, this type of conflict among rival *trülku* candidates is not uncommon in Tibetan history as the third section shows below with a case study involving the Thirteenth Dalai Lama<sup>333</sup>).

Given these protests in the mid 1990s, Chödzin emphasized to me that he called for Damtsik’s name to change to “The Snow Mountain Goddess” from Gungru to *Gangri* (Tibetan for Snow Mountain), although it is not clear what role the PRC government played in this name-changing process. Fascinatingly, around the time Chödzin objected to Damtsik’s continued usage of the name “Gungru,” the PRC magazine *China’s Tibet* (1995) spotlighted Damtsik as the Snow Mountain Goddess at age 57 as if she were a newly-discovered *trülku*

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<sup>332</sup> Interview with Chödzin on January 1, 2011 in Labrang by the author. See also Chapter 2 and my interview with Trinlé Gyatso, a monk at Labrang, who raised the issue of Damtsik stealing the identification certificate in the 1940s.

<sup>333</sup> The third section of this chapter analyzes the case study of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, Tupten Gyatso, and the Gara Lama, who was a rival candidate and the aftermath of that competition. It is not known if any such competition occurred among Tibetan women given the dearth of contiguous female *trülku* lineages in Tibetan history.

in Gyayé.<sup>334</sup> But just as fascinating is that this conflict and the resultant confusion between Kelzang and Damtsik has persisted despite the name change and *China's Tibet* article in the 1990s. The well-known Buddhist Digital Resource Council (BDRC) still conflates the names “Kelzang Drölma” and “Damtsik Drölma” as the “Gungri *trülku*” with the final suffix changing the “u” to an “i” per the local Amdo dialect.<sup>335</sup> Some people in Qinghai still refer to Damtsik by the title “Gungru *Khandroma*.”<sup>336</sup>

As I continued my fieldwork, I discerned that issues related to Kelzang’s laicization and her motherhood in the new political and religious landscape after the Cultural Revolution played a critical role in this renewed competition/identity conflation between Kelzang and Damtsik. (Charlene Makley’s recent ethnography at Labrang shows how Tibetan *trülku* returned after the Cultural Revolution but in a subservient role in the new PRC state<sup>337</sup>). For example, I heard accounts that described how Kelzang had retreated more from her public duties as the Gungru *trülku* at Drakkar and in the community. In fact, Kelzang herself told me in 2010 that “I no longer have a responsibility in terms of religion because I have been a layperson since 1958 and I have all of these children.”<sup>338</sup> I heard about a dispute between Kelzang’s children (primarily her youngest son Dépön) and Drakkar over income from the Drakkar Cave and developing land near the Cave that resulted in a schism in the community in which Kelzang was in the middle. I found out about how in 2009 that the Sixth Jamyang

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<sup>334</sup> See Doje Rinqen’s “A Female Living Buddha in Qinghai” in *China's Tibet*. Notably, this magazine is produced in English to likely in part inform or convince an English audience about the PRC’s involvement/development in Tibet. The content and tone of this article speaks to PRC propaganda.

<sup>335</sup> <https://www.tbrc.org/#!rid=P6770> This site conflates the names Damtsik and Kelzang with Kelzang Damchö Drölma as the personal name. Strikingly, this site does not use the name “Gungru” but rather “Gungri” which could reflect the pronunciation of “u” in Amdo Tibetan more like a short “i.”

<sup>336</sup> See the BDRC (formerly the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center) for its entry on the history of the Gungru lineage. It cites the two name variants for the Sixth (or Seventh) Gungru *trülku* as Kelzang Drölma and Damtsik Drölma. It does not offer citations for how it came to this conclusion. This does lend credence to the fact that Damtsik and many people/writers in Qinghai did not abide by the name change to Snow Mountain Goddess.

<sup>337</sup> See Makley’s excellent ethnography in *Violence of Liberation* about changing gender roles/contexts for men and women in post-Cultural Revolution Labrang. Makley discerns new gendered roles for *trülku*, monks and lay men and women in Labrang in a post-Mao setting where *trülku*, who in the past maintained a higher status than many local government officials, as Chapter 1 asserts. With a larger and new state presence, Tibetan *trülku* found themselves in a subservient role to the PRC state.

<sup>338</sup> Interview with Kelzang Drölma December 2010 in Labrang by the author.



Zhepa of Labrang scolded Drakkar monks and Gengya lay elders for allowing Kelzang to sit in the audience at one of the Jamyang Zhepa's public Buddhist teachings wearing lay clothes and not on the main stage with him and other *trülku*. Furthermore, I discovered that people close to Damtsik proclaimed her to be the real Gungru *trülku* precisely because she did not break her vow of celibacy, marry and have biological children as Kelzang did. Although some accused Damtsik of using dishonest tactics to re-assert her claim to the Gungru seat in the 1980s and 1990s.

Suffice to say, these anecdotes from the field and from understanding this renewed competition between Kelzang and Damtsik did not represent the seamless continuity that Kelzang's hagiographic obituary portrayed after her death in 2013 (See Chapter 1). As first introduced in Chapter 1, the obituary legitimated Kelzang's authority in the Gungru lineage by lauding her accomplishments and in particular those impressive deeds that she performed after the Cultural Revolution. These deeds included how Kelzang rebuilt Drakkar in the 1980s, helped manage new nunneries in Labrang in the 1990s and solved local grassland disputes. Critically, the obituary also showed how Kelzang re-established ties with her native Jiawu (Gengya's old rival) in 2002, 2007, 2009 and how in 2010 she visited Zangrikharmar, the home monastery of Machik Lapdrön in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). This visit linked Kelzang to Machik, the twelfth-century virtuoso who became the fulcrum of the tradition created about the Gungru lineage in the *Lotus Vine namtar*, or what I call the "Gungru master narrative," about the Fourth Gungru *trülku* Rindzin Pelmo (1897), as Chapter 1 asserts.<sup>339</sup>

And yet despite the obituary's rendering of Kelzang's authority as a Gungru *trülku* who performed many estimable deeds, this conflict between Kelzang and Damtsik became a focal point through which to analyze the changing state of Kelzang's authority from the

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<sup>339</sup> See Chapter 1, Part IV for translated sections of Kelzang's obituary and Appendix I for a full translation of the document.

viewpoint of those living on the ground after the Cultural Revolution. For unpacking the causes of this conflict helped reveal how Kelzang's authority as the Gungru *trülku* changed as a lay mother who spent less time at Drakkar and more working in the CPPCC government and raising her family after the Cultural Revolution. From this vantage point several interesting questions emerge including: How, according to people's varied accounts across Amdo, did Kelzang's authority change after the Cultural Revolution when she first returned to Labrang in 1978 and later as a mother who worked in the PRC government after Drakkar was rebuilt? Or put another way, how did various people's strategies, representations and doubts of the impacts of Kelzang's motherhood, such as her having biological children, raising a family away from the monastery and her children's later dispute with Drakkar, as well as Kelzang's own interpretation of her motherhood, affect renderings of Kelzang's authority? Along these lines, what role did the impacts of Kelzang's actual motherhood as a lay *trülku* play in the renewed competition between Kelzang and Damtsik after the Cultural Revolution that has resulted in an identity crisis that has persisted to this day?

It became apparent as I analyzed this renewed conflict between Kelzang and Damtsik that issues surrounding Kelzang's motherhood—and people's representations of it including Kelzang's—were vital to understand Kelzang's changing authority after the Cultural Revolution, i.e., how people in this Amdo community constructed her authority. To be clear, I do not suggest that Kelzang becoming a mother was the sole reason that her authority fluctuated, but rather that the changes brought about by her having biological children reshaped the dynamics of Kelzang's relationship with the monastic and lay community. The very reserved and measured Kelzang clarified her position in our only interview together in 2010. She said that she no longer bore responsibility for religion as a mother with four children and that this precluded her from doing many activities that would be considered by her constituency to be the standard or “right” for a Gungru *trülku* to perform, thus bolstering

her authority as Part I delineates.<sup>340</sup> These activities included her studying and teaching *chö* at Drakkar, practicing the tantric deity Cakrasamvara, attending and giving Buddhist teachings in public, performing healing rituals for the masses and giving advice, and so forth. Instead, accounts from many people around Labrang and Gengya showed that Kelzang actually retreated more from the public eye and spent less time at Drakkar and in teaching Buddhism with monks and the laity. She avoided attending large gatherings and performing rituals for her constituents. In the end, Kelzang worked more in the PRC government as a member of the CPPCC and stayed close to her family in Labrang while Damtsik lived in a monastery with monks—a more normal setting for someone considered to be a *khandroma trülku* in the public.

Strikingly, the dispute that Kelzang's children engaged in with Drakkar's monks over income distribution from the Drakkar Cave and developing land there impacted on Kelzang's authority with the monastic and lay community, resulting in a greater distance between the monastery, the laity and Kelzang, as Part II describes. Drakkar disagreed with Kelzang's children's claims that the Cave belonged to the Gungru estate and that the family should be receiving more money from income generated at the site. These parties also disagreed over Kelzang's children's desire to turn the area near the Cave into a tourist destination. In this vein, the monastery cited the lineage's historical connection to the monastery and that a division of land between the Gungru estate and Drakkar did not exist—until Kelzang's children tried to claim one. Furthermore, the resultant discord between Kelzang's children and Drakkar revolved around tense family dynamics including the strained relation between Chödzin and his stepson Dépön, as introduced in the previous chapter. And even though Drakkar scholar monk Könchok Gyatso said that the monastery and others still supported Kelzang but *not* her children, this rift contributed to her withdrawal from Drakkar, the main

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<sup>340</sup> Interview with Kelzang Drölma December 2010 in Labrang by the author. See Lincoln's *Authority: Construction and Corrosion*, 1-12.

institutional backer of the Gungru lineage since the early eighteenth century, and the general public thus greatly impacting her authority.

Yet this dispute between Kelzang's children and Drakkar notwithstanding, evidence also exists that Kelzang maintained authority with some in the monastic and lay community by performing many deeds for the benefit of all *as if* she were a real mother.<sup>341</sup> For instance, Shéráp Drölma, the head nun at Labrang's Géden Tengyéling Nunnery which Kelzang helped direct, said that she felt indebted to serve Kelzang who treated her as if Kelzang were her own mother. Their connection marks a good example of the more accepted version of motherhood in a patriarchal Buddhist society like Labrang, an example that would fit with Reiko Ohnuma's work on motherhood in Indian Buddhist texts as introduced in previous chapters. Shéráp Drölma's account as analyzed in Part I along with Tupten Döndrup's testimony about how Kelzang acted like a mother (or a grandmother) and encouraged him to stop drinking and smoking strengthened Kelzang's authority as the Gungru *trülku*. Another example lies in how Kelzang solved active grassland disputes, an act that I personally witnessed when a herder called and sought her counsel during Kelzang's family's picnic in 2012 at her estate merely months before she died; Kelzang still had authority in the

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<sup>341</sup> See Reiko Ohnuma's *The Ties that Bind* as discussed in earlier chapters that help inform the idea of motherhood as a metaphor for the Buddha and therefore acceptable to the Buddhist patriarchy; Sarah Jacoby's new article further explains this model of motherhood in a Tibetan context for which there is very little published scholarship. I am grateful for Sarah Jacoby's assistance in finding sources from an Indian Buddhist context. For example, see Karen Derris' "Interpreting Buddhist Representations of Motherhood and Mothering" in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* and Barbara Andaya's "Localising the Universal: Women, Motherhood and the Appeal of Early Theravada Buddhism" in the *Journal of Southeastern Studies*. See Reiko Ohnuma, "Debt to the Mother: A Neglected Aspect of the Founding of the Buddhist Nuns' Order" in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* and Vanessa R. Sasson, "Māyā's Disappearing Act: Motherhood in Early Buddhist Literature," and Liz Wilson, "Motherhood as Character Coach: Maternal Agency in the Birth of Sīvali," both in *Family in Buddhism*; Shayne Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*; Pascale Engelmajer, "Motherhood in the Ancient Indian Buddhist World: A Soteriological Path," in *Motherhood in Antiquity* and Amy Paris Langenberg, *Birth in Buddhism: The Suffering Fetus and Female Freedom*. As for East Asian Buddhism, see Alan Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism*, as first mentioned in Chapter 1 in the context of monastic sons and their indebtedness to their mothers. Chien-yu Julia Huang and Robert P. Weller, "Merit and Mothering: Women and Social Welfare in Taiwanese Buddhism," *Journal of Asian Studies*; Kyu-taik Sung, "The Kindness of Mothers: Ideals and Practice of Buddhist Filial Piety," *Journal of Aging and Identity*; Alan Cole, "The Passion of Mulian's Mother: Narrative Blood and Maternal Sacrifices in Chinese Buddhism," in Wilson, *Family in Buddhism*; and Ping Yao, "Good Karmic Connections: Buddhist Mothers in Tang China," *Nan Nü*.

community to solve these disputes like many of her Gungru predecessors. (I cannot verify how Kelzang solved this dispute).

But whereas Sarah Jacoby complicates the reification of the binary between the “As-If” and the “Actual” models of motherhood and shows that the Treasure Revealer Sera Khandro’s actual motherhood enhanced her enlightenment, many people in Labrang and Gengya, including Kelzang, developed a more strident stance about the implications of Kelzang’s motherhood—that she had biological children who became involved with monastery issues—given how far her life deviated from the norm.<sup>342</sup> For most, if not all, of the established Gungru tradition revolves around legitimating its *trülku*’s authority as a venerable mother-like figure who exhibited compassion for all beings and earned acceptance in Labrang as opposed to a mother raising one’s own children. Of particular interest is how the Gungru lineage became affiliated with the Great Mother Machik Lapdrön, a tradition that Kelzang’s obituary reconstituted from the blueprint set by the *Lotus Vine namtar* (1897) as introduced in Chapter 1. Strikingly, some interlocutors in Labrang constructed Kelzang’s authority in this manner with one person often calling Kelzang by the name “Machik Lapdrön.” But for most, and significantly for Kelzang herself, the changes in her life brought about by her own motherhood symbolized the rupture in her life that could not be so easily smoothed over with the iconic Machik as Kelzang’s obituary did and surely any *namtar* written about Kelzang will try to do (Chapter 5). For Kelzang, there was no blurring or merging of her own motherhood on the path of enlightenment—at least not for the public to see at this time. The reserved Kelzang, who had endured untold tragedy as she was forced to break her monastic vow in 1958 (See Chapter 3), seemingly insisted on keeping these domains separate.

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<sup>342</sup> See Sarah Jacoby’s “Tibetan Buddhist Metaphors and Models of Motherhood.”

Therefore, as compared to the other tension points in Kelzang's life, namely the Gengya-Jiawu conflict that enveloped the Gungru lineage's transition and her birth in the 1930s and 1940s (Chapter 2), and the destructions of the Cultural Revolution period (Chapter 3), the reconstruction after the Cultural Revolution has proven to be the hardest for many in the local community to reconcile, or in the words of Rebecca Manring, rally around.<sup>343</sup> This is primarily because Kelzang's role as the Gungru *trülku* dramatically changed after religion (at least publicly) was reintroduced in the wake of the Cultural Revolution: monasteries were rebuilt, including Drakkar and the Gungru estate in partial form.<sup>344</sup> Kelzang, however, pulled away more from this public role and did so as a layperson/mother on her own accord and in context with being an actual mother and a Buddhist *trülku*. Thus, rallying around Kelzang, who avoided doing the activities that most people expected a Gungru *trülku* to do, became harder as the relationship between Kelzang and monastic and lay locals in Gengya and Labrang grew more distant; Kelzang withdrew from the public and the public withdrew from her. Kelzang, in following the premise established by Matthew Kapstein's article "A Tulku's Miserable Lot" where an Amdo *trülku* felt pained to do rituals in villages for people for whom he felt contempt, seemingly wanted no part in performing rituals for the locals.<sup>345</sup> Nor did she want any part in sitting on a stage as a lay person with luminaries like the Jamyang Zhepa or the Tenth Panchen Lama when they came to give Buddhist teachings in front of the masses in Amdo.

Owing to the fact that Kelzang retreated more from the public eye and spent less time at Drakkar, it is not overly surprising, then, that in this vacuum the conflict and later

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<sup>343</sup> Rebecca Manring in *The Fading Light of Advaita Acarya: Three Hagiographies* talks about the role of hagiography and serving as focal points for a community, 4-5.

<sup>344</sup> Makley's *Violence of Liberation* provides an excellent ethnographic portrait about the changes and issues that Tibetans living in the Labrang community endured as the political, religious and economic landscape changed in the post-Mao period post 1976.

<sup>345</sup> See Kaptsein's "A Tulku's Miserable Lot" in *Amdo Tibetans in Transition*, 106 for a discussion about how Düjom Dorjé renounced his role as a *trülku* because he felt burdened by the responsibility to provide rituals for local people whom Düjom Dorjé said "treated him like a servant."

confusion recurred between Kelzang and Damtsik in the 1980s and 1990s. For Kelzang's motherhood, as the third section of this chapter will show, became a wedge issue for people in Qinghai to claim Damtsik as the legitimate Gungru *trülku* while others, such as Chödzin and Püntso, of Gyayé, criticized Damtsik's motives and actions, in effect boosting Kelzang's authority. But the Jakhyung *trülku* in Qinghai, who is the son of Damtsik's adopted daughter Réku, claimed unequivocally that Damtsik is the Gungru *trülku*. He said so because Kelzang laicized, married and had biological children thus breaking her monastic vow while Damtsik did not.<sup>346</sup> Moreover, the Jakhyung *trülku* said that many people in Qinghai still to this day refer to Damtsik as the "Gungru *Khandroma*" and that only a few people from Labrang protested the sign at Ngotsar Tardrenling Monastery that said "Built by the Gungru *Khandroma*."

To this final point, fewer people in the local community defended the lay Kelzang against Damtsik as compared to how Chödzin and Drakkar's monks decisively promoted her authority when they talked about how Kelzang in monastic robes prevailed over Damtsik in the 1940s. However, in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution when Chödzin asked people in Qinghai in the 1990s to change the name "Gungru" on the sign at her monastery, notably no one from Drakkar, to my knowledge, participated in this endeavor. Moreover, despite the protest and consequentially Damtsik's name change to The Snow Mountain Goddess as reported in *China's Tibet* in 1995, confusion persisted for the rest of Kelzang and Damtsik's lives (Damtsik died in 2010 and Kelzang in 2013) and exists today as people, books and the Internet (primarily the BDRC Website) still refer to Damtsik as "Gungru" or "Gungri." Many people likely confused these two women because Damtsik lived at Ngotsar Tardrenling with monks *as if* she were a *khandroma* (she had the props and the ideal setting) while Kelzang lived in relative obscurity in Labrang and within the confines of her job at the CPPCC.

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<sup>346</sup> Interview with the Jakhyung *trülku* at Ngotsar Tardrenling Monastery September 2017 by the author.

Further, this conflict and its interesting backstory that epitomized the discontinuity in Kelzang's life contrasts her obituary's presentation of a seamless continuity that legitimates her authority as a rebuilders of Drakkar, a manager of nunneries and a solver of grassland disputes. To only look at this more celebratory presentation as the obituary did and that any *namtar* about Kelzang will do obviates how this community, including Kelzang, assessed her authority as the Gungru *trülku* after the Cultural Revolution and thereby in the words of Mathijs Pelkmans, "captured people's doubts" before they were articulated in a text.<sup>347</sup> The reality is that many people grew more distant from Kelzang as illustrated when she chose to sit in the audience wearing lay clothes at the Jamyang Zhepa's Buddhist teaching in 2009 in Gengya. She acted more as a lay person in this scenario and the Jamyang Zhepa criticized Drakkar's monks and Gengya locals for allowing this to happen, to which a Drakkar monk responded that it was Kelzang's decision to sit in the main crowd and not Drakkar's. Further, a man from Lanzhou who knew Kelzang well, Hortsang Lhogyel of Lanzhou, said that many locals paid more attention to a nun who lived for nearly 50 years in the retreat cave above Drakkar (different from the Drakkar Cave) made famous by the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo in the nineteenth century while Kelzang lived as a householder in Labrang. Therefore in the eyes of some, this nun (who died in 2018) had more authority *as if* she were the Gungru *Khandroma* than did Kelzang as a lay woman and a mother.

On the surface, this outcome might seem bleak, a sad rendering of Kelzang's authority as waning or even usurped by Damtsik and to some degree the older local nun who lived in a cave at Drakkar. I suggest that this is not entirely the case for Kelzang's story reclaims what happened to her and by her after the Cultural Revolution on her own terms and also the community's terms, just as it did in the time of Kelzang's birth in the 1930s amidst the Gengya-Jiawu grassland conflict and the trauma of when she was forced to laicize in

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<sup>347</sup> See Pelkmans' introduction in *Ethnographies of Doubt*, for analysis of doubt which "tends to vanish with articulation, 5.



1958. Her story after the Cultural Revolution epitomizes change (and people's resistance to change) in this Tibetan community and also, I posit, the breaking down of the cordoned off area of religion as confined primarily to the monastery (and doctrine) and away from the domain of family and motherhood. Rather, the story of Kelzang's authority occurs at the critical nexus of these gendered and political contexts that centers around the implications of her motherhood. While Kelzang did not want these domains of motherhood and religion to merge, analyzing them together as this chapter does widens the scope of authority and how one receives it, keeps it and loses it—all at the same time depending on one's positionality with Kelzang and in the community. Kelzang's authority, thus, as has been shown previously in this dissertation, existed primarily in the eyes of the beholder and was never automatic or seamless, but rather imbricated in people's strategies to rally and defend her as a lay mother *trülku* after the Cultural Revolution in Gengya, Labrang and across Amdo—or not.

## **Part I**

### **The Effects of Motherhood and Kelzang's Retreat as the Gungru *trülku***

Like many Tibetan *namtar* and hagiographies written about luminaries across the religious spectrum, Kelzang's obituary chronicles her good deeds accomplished for the benefit of others. In this regard, her obituary presents a sense of continuity with previous Gungru *trülku* in that it shows how Kelzang helped the monastic community and lay community in Gengya, Labrang and across Amdo after the Cultural Revolution. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter and in Chapter 1, the obituary lauds Kelzang for rebuilding Drakkar in the 1980s, a deed that linked her to the Fourth and Fifth Gungru *trülku*, Rindzin Pelmo and Tenpé Wangmo, respectively, who each repaired and expanded Drakkar during their lifetimes. Further, the obituary highlights Kelzang's management of two newly-built nunneries in Labrang (the Geluk nunnery Géden Tengyéling and the Nyingma nunnery Lapsum Dargyé Ling), and how Kelzang solved grassland disputes, another act of continuity

with previous Gungru *trülku*, in particular with Rindzin Pelmo. The text also lists the numerous activities and committees/councils she participated in. In short, the obituary legitimated Kelzang's authority as a figure, who like a mother, served the greater common welfare and linked her to the main tradition and standard of sanctity of the Gungru lineage.

While some like Tupten Döndrup of Labrang referred to Kelzang by the name "Machik Lapdrön," thus tapping into a relevant narrative "repertoire" to construct Kelzang's authority as the Great Mother Machik like the obituary, evidence of a more nuanced story appeared about Kelzang's actual motherhood.<sup>348</sup> In particular, I heard accounts of how Kelzang seldom appeared in public as a Buddhist teacher or with her constituents, raising questions about how Kelzang's motherhood implicated her authority at Drakkar and in the lay community. Along these lines, Kelzang's retreat from the public exposed the gendered contexts that she herself delineated when she said that as a mother, "I do not have any responsibility in terms of religion" or that she did not have a role at Drakkar because she said, "I have so many children." And while Sarah Jacoby's article about models of motherhood shows that the chasm narrowed between the Treasure Revealer Sera Khandro's actual motherhood and the motherhood as presented in metaphorical terms, this section demonstrates that the distinction between the "Actual" and "As-if" models as drawn by Kelzang herself became more reified and embroiled in understanding Kelzang's authority.

#### *Motherhood and Kelzang's retreat from her duties as the Gungru trülku*

Kelzang offered a striking response in our interview in 2010 about how her own motherhood influenced her role as the Gungru *trülku*. She said, "In terms of religion, I do not

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<sup>348</sup> See Campany's "Religious Repertoires and Contestation: A Case Study Based on Buddhist Miracle Tales," in *History of Religions*. Campany cites Ann Swidler's study that "show how people, negotiating their way through life, avail themselves of specific elements of their culture as toolkits or repertoires that are available to be used variously by individuals. Important questions include not only what elements are available in a given repertoire, but also how and in what circumstances any given piece in the repertoire is invoked, used or preferred by some actors but not by others." See also West's *Ethnographic Sorcery* for analysis of "symbolic repertoire" in relation to the Muedans usage of sorcery discourse to re-make their world.

have any role because I have been a lay person since 1958 and I have so many children.”<sup>349</sup> Notably, she stated that the male Jamyang Zhepa, the top *trülku* at Labrang who also laicized and had a family and works in the PRC government, assumed a more active role at Drakkar than she did as Drakkar’s main *trülku*. This change resulted in a growing distance between herself and Drakkar that over time implicated her authority as the Gungru *trülku* with Drakkar’s monks and also with those in the lay community. Kelzang said:

I can’t practice at the monastery or take a role in the monastery because since I became a lay person, I lost the power to lead monks to follow my advice in religious terms. The Jamyang Zhepa has assumed more of a leadership role at Drakkar; he looks after all the monasteries in and around Labrang. ... If local people respect me as a lama, if they ask questions, then I will sincerely give advice to them. But, I don’t go to villagers in Gengya and Xiahe and say [to them], ‘I am a lama, you must listen to me [because] I have some advice and I think you should do this and that.’ I have no responsibility in terms of religion, I am a lay person already.<sup>350</sup>

Kelzang’s comment established that as a lay person and specifically as a mother she did not feel that she had any influence in the religious arena, including at Drakkar, or with the public which she said seldom sought her counsel.<sup>351</sup> In doing so, she elaborated the changing status of her authority as the Gungru *trülku* on her own terms: as a lay mother she was not going to perform any public role at Drakkar as the Gungru *trülku*. Nor was she eager to fulfil the wishes of those in the community who wanted her to perform rituals, including healing rituals for which most Gungru *trülku* were renowned and through which they attained authority for

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<sup>349</sup> Interview with Kelzang Drölma on December 2010 in Labrang by the author.

<sup>350</sup> Interview with Kelzang December 2010 in Labrang by the author.

<sup>351</sup> Interview with Kelzang December 2010 in Labrang by the author.

doing, as Kelzang's friend and neighbor Sönamgyid of Labrang recalled. Sönamgyid said that Kelzang made an exception to perform a *chö* ritual to help Sönamgyid's granddaughter. Sönamgyid said:

The hospital said that [my granddaughter] would die. I went to Alak [Kelzang] and told her and then she took out some instruments and made a divination. Kelzang told me, 'I never do this for people, but I will do it for you. [Kelzang] said, 'Bring the baby home, I will chant *chö* for her and she will not die.' During the night she secretly chanted *chö* and [my granddaughter] recovered.<sup>352</sup>

On another occasion, Ösel, a retired herder from Gengya, recalled how Kelzang had to be convinced by her husband Chödzin to help distribute medicine to cure headaches. Ösel said:

Alak Gungru made this medicine for headaches and every year she would just make one batch. This medicine was really effective for people who have a headache where if you would wear this [the medicine], you would cure the headache. Then her husband [Chödzin] asked her to make more of it because it helps a lot of people. They discussed this and she listened to her husband [and made more].<sup>353</sup>

Even though Kelzang eventually performed these rituals that re-affirmed her authority as an efficacious healer as the Gungru *trülku* in this community, she did so reluctantly and had to be convinced to take action. Perhaps Kelzang acted this way because as a lay person she no longer felt that she could perform these healing duties for the masses that previous ordained Gungru *trülku* did for the infirmed members of the community. And while it is not clear if

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<sup>352</sup> Interview with Sönamgyid in July 2016 at Labrang by the author.

<sup>353</sup> Interview with Ösel in July 2016 at Gengya by the author.

anyone ever told Kelzang that she should avoid doing these activities—in fact the above evidence suggests that people wanted her to still carry out this role—Kelzang hesitated, or at least she narrowed the circle of people for which she was willing to do them.

Kelzang also hesitated to perform rituals at Drakkar, the main monastic institution aligned for centuries with the Gungru lineage, and one of the lineage's prime markers of her authority. People (monastic and lay) over time expected that a Gungru *trülku* would be present at Drakkar, but Kelzang seldom came after the Cultural Revolution when Drakkar was rebuilt. An older monk named Akhu Jamyang, who was one of eight monks to return to Drakkar in the 1980s, said that the monastery tried to invite Kelzang back to participate in Buddhist ceremonies and practices but that she always declined. The monk also remembered when Kelzang did not sit on the main stage with other *trülku* when the famous Tenth Panchen *trülku* Lozang Chökyi Gyeltsen (1938-1989), who also married and had a daughter, arrived in Amdo in the 1980s to give a public Buddhist teaching. Akhu Jamyang said:

When the Panchen Rinpoche gave a teaching, Alak Gungru refused to sit in the front [with the Panchen], so she sat among the monks in the audience. The people in the audience saw that she was sitting with the monks and not the *trülku* in the higher seats. I understand that she was a lay person and if people saw her [on the stage], they would worship her and want to get a blessing from her. She tried to hide behind people. She was very uncomfortable. But this uncomfortable feeling depended on [her] individual courage. Some men like the Jamyang Zhepa and also the Panchen who became lay were able to continue to sit on the throne and give a [public Buddhist] teachings and talks. Alak Gungru didn't do that. ...

She's a *chö* lama; and I and Akhu Gendün Gyatso [of Drakkar] both invited her and asked her to teach *chö* [at Drakkar]. She didn't say yes; she

didn't teach. Also, they had the *chö* festival [re-started at Drakkar in the early 2000's at her estate] where the Drakkar monks led the chanting. She never sat there among the monks. Usually, the *chö* [prayer] is done by Alak [Kelzang] but she never did it; every year she would not do [certain prayers] that a lama should do. She never agreed to do it by herself and asked a monk to do it. She also refused to sit on the throne at Drakkar; she never sat there. So, it depends on that person's courage and maybe it depends on being a male or female, too. Otherwise, some others [men] can sit on the throne and can give teachings. For her, she never did that. She's really humble.<sup>354</sup>

Notably, the monk's remarks about Kelzang having courage (or presumably not?) to assume the throne and teach at Drakkar and about Kelzang being a woman also need scrutinizing. His comments insinuate that Kelzang could have or should have automatically overcome the historical gendered contexts in Labrang (and seemingly in most patriarchal Tibetan/Buddhist societies) that precluded the melding of religion and family/motherhood. They also insinuate that Kelzang could somehow forget the trauma of sexual assault and domestic violence that she survived during the Cultural Revolution period and return to Drakkar when the stigma of what happened to her likely forced her to stay back as Dékyi of Labrang noted in the previous chapter. And while it is not clear if anyone at Drakkar ever told Kelzang she could not return to the monastery, Kelzang drew the line, in part, because as someone who was forced to break her monastic vow, Kelzang did not want to bring attention to herself. Therefore, she did not perform at the *chö* ceremony or guide monks in a monastery setting, per the monk Jamyang's account. Meanwhile, some male *trülku* who also laicized and married like the Jamyang Zhepa, participated in public religious settings primarily

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<sup>354</sup> Interview with the monk Jamyang in July 2016 at Drakkar by the author.

because men could separate family from the monastery, according to Hortsang Lhogyel, the independent scholar from Lanzhou, and Dékyi, the NGO director from Labrang.

In this vein, Hortsang Lhogyel and Dékyi elaborated on these gendered contexts in a Tibetan society that Dékyi, a 37-year old woman, said values men over women. These two Amdo natives help explain why Kelzang did not return to Drakkar in an official capacity and why she felt embarrassed to be seen in public in a religious setting with a high-profile *trülku* such as the Tenth Panchen Lama or the Jamyang Zhepa. Hortsang Lhogyel said:

[The Jamyang Zhepa] has a family, he has a son and I don't know their connection. But, the Jamyang Zhepa didn't let his family have a connection with the monastery: family is family, the monastery is monastery. They are separate. He would not let his family become involved in the [affairs] of the monastery. Kelzang was different. She needed to stay in the *nangchen*. And then she had a lot of kids who needed to stay in the *nangchen* [religious estate]... [Kelzang's son] Dépön stayed there.<sup>355</sup>

Dékyi stated:

Because Tibetan society elevates men higher than it does women, Alak Gungru took [society's view of women] to heart and thought to herself, 'I'm a woman, I have kids, I am not a good *trülku*, I'm not a good lama.' The Jamyang Zhepa didn't need his family to stay in the *nangchen*. There is a clear division with monastery and family and the Jamyang Zhepa's family lives in Lanzhou far from Labrang. His son never came to the monastery to do things formally. In fact, not many people know that he has a son. My father said, 'I heard that he [the Jamyang Zhepa] has a son but I've never seen him.' But everyone knows Alak Gungru's kids. Alak Gungru's family

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<sup>355</sup> Interview with Hortsang Lhogyel in September 2018 in Lanzhou, Gansu by the author.

is close to Drakkar and they were involved in the monastery affairs about the [Drakkar] Cave and other development [See Part II]. The Jamyang Zhepa is respected by all of Labrang while Alak Gungru is respected by Gengya and part of Labrang. He's a man and this is a patriarchal society where men managed everything. Looking at the big picture, Tibetan society as a whole values men more than a woman. My father said the fact that the Jamyang Zhepa is married doesn't affect my father's opinion of him.<sup>356</sup>

But Kelzang did not want to integrate being a mother with Drakkar and doing anything in a public setting that would call attention to herself while men, such as the Jamyang Zhepa, could separate family from the monastery. The main difference here is that the Jamyang Zhepa did not raise children or take care of them and he could ostensibly separate his family duties from his duties as a *trülku* while Kelzang could not. The Jamyang Zhepa resumed his post (or his throne at Labrang) and offered Buddhist teachings across Amdo and in particular around Labrang. And while some people outside of Labrang, such as Tsering from northern Sichuan (a pastoral region historically connected to Labrang's large monastery network), questioned the Jamyang Zhepa for "becoming too political in the PRC government,"<sup>357</sup> the Jamyang Zhepa's authority as a Buddhist exemplar in this region remained largely intact while Kelzang's changed. However, in the face of Kelzang's retreat from public duties at Drakkar and with the laity, other locals from across Amdo nonetheless legitimated her authority as a mother-like figure who acted as a teacher, a protector and a confidant who exhibited kindness and compassion for all, as the next subsection shows. This marked an attempt by some people who knew Kelzang well to maintain a level of continuity

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<sup>356</sup> Interview with Dékyi in October 2018 at Shangrila, Yunnan by the author.

<sup>357</sup> Interview with Tsering on August 2018 at Xining, Qinghai by the author.



with the Gungru lineage's past, and in particular linking Kelzang to the authorizing personage of Machik Lapdrön.

*Constructing her authority as a metaphorical mother after the Cultural Revolution*

Whereas the first subsection describes how Kelzang retreated more from her public duties as a lay mother, other interlocutors depicted Kelzang as a compassionate mother-like mother—*as if* she were a mother—to construct Kelzang's authority as such in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. For example, Shérap Drölma, the head nun at Géden Tengyéling Nunnery in Labrang, and Tupten Döndrup shared stories about Kelzang acting *as if* she were a mother that resembled the obituary and the *Lotus Vine* both in content and in tone. In fact, they both narrated stories that in the words of Ong and Goody's description of residual orality mark a good example of how oral narratives often interface with and reflect the written text.<sup>358</sup> Moreover, Shérap Drölma and Tupten Döndrup, like many people who spoke about Kelzang's trauma during the Cultural Revolution period in Chapter 3, resorted to available repertoires to “imagine” the tradition of Kelzang and the Gungru lineage during this period of flux, i.e., Kelzang's changed status as a real mother after the Cultural Revolution period.<sup>359</sup> For instance, nun Shérap Drölma legitimated Kelzang's authority as she discussed her close relationship with Kelzang like a “mother and child” as they worked in the CPPCC together and how Kelzang helped guide the Geluk nunnery Géden Tengyéling. Shérap Drölma said:

Later [Kelzang] worked in CPPCC in Labrang and the [Sixth] Jamyang Zhepa told her to be the manager of the nunnery. She was not a teacher or a chanter per se, but when the nunnery had difficulties, she came to solve the problem. [Kelzang] took the biggest responsibility to ask for

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<sup>358</sup> See Ong and Goody for their work on how texts often interact with and influence oral discourse.

<sup>359</sup> See Company's “Religious Repertoires and Contestations,” 108. Company talks about how people as agents “make and do things with referent to many elements available to them in religious repertoires rather than seeing religion as agents acting on people.” Religions, thus, take on the characteristics of an imagined community and in particular so “in situations of flux or when people's lives are uncertain,” 107.

money from the government to rebuild the nunnery and purchase [materials] for the nunnery. ... When she was alive I was able to serve her and I knew her really well. We were like a mother and a child in that we liked each other and cared for each other a lot. When Alak Gungru went to Gengya, I went and served her. I also went with her to [Kelzang's native] Jiawu. In all, I served with her for 15-20 years and knew her family very well. When Alak Gungru was a high member as president of CCPPC and I was a member of the CPPCC, I went to serve her and we stayed in one tent or [hotel] room. One time we went to Lanzhou [Gansu] to join a Buddhist Association activity. I became a translator when I was 30 and in the last 15 years, whenever Alak needed to go places, I represented the nunnery and was able to serve her. The nunnery chose me to go because I knew her well.<sup>360</sup>

Tupten Döndrup, 28, the grandson of the herder Lozang Chöpel who lived with Kelzang as a monk at Drakkar in the 1950s (Chapters 2 and 3), said that Kelzang helped him to overcome his struggles with smoking, drinking alcohol and his general waywardness as a teenager in the early 2000's. He also chronicled how Kelzang assisted his family when he became ill as a baby and needed urgent medical attention. Tupten Döndrup stated:

My father is from Gengya and my mother is from Lanak [near Gengya] and they were very poor. When I was little, my parents worked labor jobs in Labrang and in Henan County [Qinghai]. One of my father's friends looked after me. We were very poor and some people in Gengya didn't like me. They didn't like my father and mother. Alak Gungru told my parents when I was 8 years old that, 'You need to bring [Tupten] to school.'

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<sup>360</sup> Interview with Shéráp Drölma in July 2016 at Labrang by the author.

My grandfather [on my mother's side] was not a nice man and did not care for me when I was little and I became sick. At that time, we had no car and no horse and Alak Gungru's son [Dépön] Tashi helped me and gave my family money so I could see the doctors. When my father was little, Alak Gungru really liked him and my father always listened to her. She is the one who told my father to open up this [Tibetan food] restaurant in Labrang. And I met with her every week. She told me to go to school and not to smoke and drink beer, or play 麻将, majiang. She told me all of this in 2012 [before she died].<sup>361</sup>

Strikingly, Tupten Döndrup, whose family owns a Tibetan restaurant in Labrang, often used the proper name Machik Lapdrön (the twelfth-century Buddhist virtuoso) to refer to Kelzang as the Great Mother. In fact, he used the names Machik and Alak Gungru interchangeably when he talked to me about Kelzang, an important part of his toolkit or repertoire in which to construct and legitimate Kelzang's authority at this particular time.<sup>362</sup> This strategy to depict Kelzang's authority as the Great Mother Machik the protectorate *as if* Kelzang were a mother for all resonated with Kelzang's obituary and also with the Gungru lineage's main tradition created in *Lotus Vine namtar* (1897) about the Fourth Gungru *trülku* Rindzin Pelmo. Notably, however, this strategy to rely on the As-If Model or the Machik Model did not match with the reality of Kelzang's actual motherhood at this time mainly because Kelzang's four children engaged in a prolonged conflict with Drakkar over money

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<sup>361</sup> Interview with Tupten Döndrup in July 2014 in Labrang by the author. I spent one month with Tupten Döndrup and his family.

<sup>362</sup> See Company's "Religious Repertoires and Contestations," 107-108, to help understand how Tupten Döndrup utilizes the narrative repertoire or "Machik" as part of what Company in this article describes as a "toolkit" at this specific time. Company writes: "Seeing religions as repertoires means seeing people as the agents, making and doing things with referent to many elements available to them in religious repertoires, rather than seeing religion as agents acting on people."

and land development. This conflict strained Kelzang's relationship with the Gungru lineage's main institutional backer and implicated her authority with the monastery and the lay community, as the next section analyzes.

## **Part II**

### **Assessing Kelzang's Children's Feud with Drakkar's Monks**

Another major reason that Kelzang retreated from the public eye stems from a feud that emerged between her four children (primarily her second son Dépön) and Drakkar that lasted until after Kelzang's death in 2013. And while the obituary presents continuity by showing how Kelzang spearheaded the rebuilding of Drakkar in the 1980s, this feud and the tense family dynamics embroiled in it show the fissures between Kelzang, her family and Drakkar that reflected her altered authority as the Gungru *trülku* at this time. Two decades after the Cultural Revolution, Kelzang's adult children, who were then in their 30s and 40's, assumed more control of Kelzang's estate and wanted to receive a higher percentage of the income from the Drakkar Cave (now a tourist/pilgrimage site) and develop land near the Cave. The ensuing strife over land ownership led to considerable strain between Kelzang's family, the monastery and also the lay community in Gengya that supported both Drakkar and the Gungru lineage. The resulting chasm engulfed Kelzang's authority at Drakkar and with her constituents.

While neither Kelzang nor her children discussed these matters with me, monks at Drakkar, Chödzin and others shared how this conflict hindered relations between Kelzang and Drakkar and ultimately constrained her authority at Drakkar and with her monastic and lay constituency. This conflict epitomized how Kelzang did not and could not separate her family and the gendered dynamics from monastery dynamics in ways that some men, including the laicized Jamyang Zhepa, could. This lack of separation led to an imbroglio between Kelzang's family and the monastery, the exact type of entanglement that did not sit

well with monks at Drakkar (the Buddhist patriarchy) or with the laity in that the monastic and lay communities doubted Kelzang's children and Kelzang by default.

*The background of the feud between Kelzang's children and Drakkar*

This subsection unpacks how this heretofore undocumented conflict between Kelzang's children and Drakkar impacted Kelzang's authority as the Gungru *trülku*. While Dépön did not return calls or texts seeking comment about this conflict and Kelzang did not mention this when I met with her in 2010, Chödzin; Drakkar scholar monk Könchok Gyatso and others described the cauldron that boiled beneath the surface. In doing so, they provided a more nuanced view of Kelzang's motherhood and authority, elucidating the complicated mixture of family/motherhood and monastery that help show how and why her authority changed. For instance, Könchok Gyatso, the author of books about Drakkar and Gengya's history (2008, 2013), blamed Kelzang's children for the conflict in two separate interviews in 2011 and 2016. Könchok Gyatso said in 2011:

Drakkar Monastery and Alak Gungru's children have had a conflict about money—not Alak Gungru, but her kids [have instigated the conflict]. This is not a conflict between Alak Gungru and Drakkar, but she has many kids and they have had difficulties with the monastery. The conflict is that Alak Gungru has land here and the kids want to develop that area. The monastery doesn't allow them to develop whatever they want around the monastery. Before, Alak Gungru's kids wanted to build shops and a reception for travelers and a hotel. Later [Drakkar] did not allow them to build there. The problem hasn't been completely solved but it has diminished in that no new problems have arisen. However, this conflict has been one of the reasons for the distance between Alak Gungru and the

Monastery. The villagers don't support Alak Gungru's kids, but they support Alak Gungru. On this issue, the villagers have remained on the Drakkar Gompa's side.<sup>363</sup>

Notably, Könchok Gyatso explained the parameters of this conflict that occurred between Kelzang's children and Drakkar, but that he also twice affirmed in 2011 and 2016 that Drakkar still supported Kelzang. In other words, Könchok Gyatso delineated a clear boundary between Kelzang's children and Kelzang stating that the problems revolved around Kelzang's children who wanted to develop this area and receive more of the Cave's income as discussed below and *not* anything that Kelzang herself did. However, the problem for Kelzang was that she found herself in the middle of a family issue (income/land dispute) with Drakkar, the first of its kind in the Gungru lineage's history given that previous Gungru lineage holders did not have children, only an estate and an estate manager. This new arrangement contributed to the growing distance from Kelzang and even what Könchok Gyatso described below as (local) people's "change of attitude toward her because she is a lay person" that culminated in her fluctuating authority. Könchok Gyatso said:

Kelzang's life was different from the previous Gungru lineage holders and this problem [with Drakkar] occurred because she had a retinue of family members with a [biological] connection. Family blood relations instigated this problem with the monastery and now it's a part of the Gungru lineage's history. The local people respected [Kelzang], but because she became lay, in their heart [the situation] was different. The situation changed when she became lay and people's attitude changed toward her. Then in the 1980s when religion was re-established, the

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<sup>363</sup> Interview with Könchok Gyatso in January 2011 about this argument at Drakkar Monastery by the author.

monastery ran like it did before [1958] and the Drakkar monks cleaned the Cave while Alak Gungru stayed in Labrang with her kids. Drakkar also had donors who gave 5 RMB to each of the monks and the Gungru lineage received part of that income, too, even though Kelzang did not come to the monastery. Then, Drakkar took the income of the Cave and a percentage was given to Kelzang.<sup>364</sup>

Kelzang's husband Chödzin, on the other hand, claimed that Drakkar did not fulfil its promise to distribute a higher amount of income from the Cave to the Gungru estate/Kelzang's family. In doing so, Chödzin, who did not directly become involved in the conflict, sought to bolster Kelzang's authority (and likely his own) by encouraging her children, and primarily Dépön, to challenge Drakkar on the issue of the income generated by the Cave. In a July 2013 interview, Chödzin suggested that the monastery did not uphold an agreement to compensate the Gungru lineage for revenue incurred by tourist visits to the Cave. The situation became so heated between Kelzang's children and Drakkar that after Kelzang's death in January 2013, Dépön threatened to move Kelzang's commemorative *chörten* (reliquary) elsewhere away from Drakkar. Chödzin said:

Kelzang said that one-third of the income from the Gungru [Drakkar] cave was allotted for her, but Drakkar didn't give it to her. Later they gave her 5,000 RMB per year and at the time they were earning around 80,000 RMB per year (12,900 U.S Dollars today). We had a big disagreement on this. After 2009, Alak Gungru was supposed to be given a key to the Cave but the monastery didn't give it to her. But, we didn't fight or quarrel like [most] lay people do [about these kinds of issues of finance]. Then she

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<sup>364</sup> Interview with Könchok Gyatso in July 2016 at Drakkar Monastery by the author.

passed away [in 2013]. Last year, Dépön and Drakkar really disagreed about this [lack of a key]. And they came to me and said they want to go back to Drakkar again and get the key. And I said, ‘Go and tell them about it, it depends on you, but I will not join this [dispute].’ ...

Then we had some conflict when the family built the *chörten* of Alak Gungru [six months after her death in January 2013]. The kids said that we will build the *chörten* by ourselves and not leave it at the monastery or the cave. The kids said, ‘Since [Drakkar monks] don’t care about Alak Gungru and didn’t even give her the key [to the Cave], that there’s no point to put the stupa [in the *nangchen*].’ They told this to the Gengya tribal leaders and said to them, ‘If the monastery really wants the *chörten* at Drakkar, then let’s go to the Jamyang Zhepa and let him [Jamyang Zhepa] decide about the Cave. Or, another [solution] is that when the next [Gungru] reincarnation comes you need to give the Cave back to her. If they do this, then we will withdraw our claims. But, if the monastery [Drakkar] disagrees, then we will bring the *chörten* back and not leave it [in Drakkar].’

Ultimately, the monastery said they will return the Cave to Alak Gungru and the next reincarnation. Two Gengya villagers witnessed this agreement: one from [Gengya] Khagya Village and another from [Gengya] Suruk Village named Dorjé Tsemer. Then they put the *chörten* in Drakkar. This was the decision. My two kids are so young and at that time they should have gotten a letter about this disagreement from the monastery. They didn’t know that. So we don’t have this in writing.<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Interview with Chödzin in 2016 at Labrang by the author.



Perhaps the monastery made this oral agreement in order to avoid the spectacle of a lay family building and housing the *chörten* of a Gungru *trülku* in a location other than at her estate at Drakkar, the home of the Gungru lineage for three centuries. Or perhaps Drakkar knew that it needed to play the long game with Dépön and his siblings given that, according to Könchok Gyatso, the majority of lay people had already sided with the monastery in this affair. Therefore, Könchok Gyatso in another interview three years after her death in 2016 was unequivocal when asked if the Gungru lineage would own the Cave. Könchok Gyatso said:

No, the [Drakkar] Cave will not be completely returned to the Gungru *Khandroma* and there won't be any type of tourist hotel developed there. So now it is hard for one side [Drakkar and Kelzang's family], to say that this belongs to you and that belongs to me. Right now, it's common land: both belong to Gungru and [Drakkar]. If one side said, 'Let's divide this property,' and didn't satisfy all parties, then the result would be a dispute. If only one party wants to make that kind of division and proclaim, 'This is mine and that yours,' it will be a mess. Right now, neither party is asking for this division. Before it was a problem, but for now it's calmed down. ... Alak Gungru has already passed away. Her kids and Drakkar's monks had a dispute about the Cave and developing the monastery. There's nothing that has been decided that says this land belongs to the Gungru estate and that to the monastery. There is no example [or precedent] that [states] that this is the Gungru's land and that is Drakkar's since in the past the Gungru lineage and the monastery were together. If you want to divide the land, doing so does not fit with the historical custom and it will be a big mess. ...

As for the next lineage holder [the Seventh Gungru *trülku*], it's hard to guess now if this will become a problem [in the future]. But one way that is clear that this can be solved is if both parties can sit down and discuss the matter of revenue [who gets what share] and it actually happens [this party gets the exact money]. If one party says they will give this much and the other party doesn't accept it and still wants more, or if one party wants a division of land in which the monastery won't agree to, then there will be a problem. Then the issue of dividing the land will come up and the conflict will exist.<sup>366</sup>

Könchok Gyatso noted above that the “retinue” of Kelzang’s family and the tense family dynamics that accompanied it contributed to Kelzang’s more distant relationship with Drakkar that thereby impacted her authority. Both Hortsang Lhogyel, who witnessed this tension within Kelzang’s family and especially between Chödzin and Dépön in the early 2000’s, and Dékyi, of Labrang, commented on how this “family retinue” impacted Kelzang’s authority. Hortsang Lhogyel said:

Alak Gungru lived with Dépön which meant that he needed to take care of the Cave. There was a lot of income [at the cave] and the tourists came and paid 10 RMB [to take a tour]; I saw all the money Dépön collected. Around 10 years ago, a tourist spot opened there; there was a tent and a shop there [in the land near the Cave]. After four years, Dépön managed the situation there and Drakkar said ‘No, this is not okay, this is our place and then they argued. This is the root of the conflict. Now, there is no conflict. Alak Gungru said that when I am not here [passed away],

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<sup>366</sup> Interview with Könchok Gyatso in July 2016 at Drakkar by the author.

someone should take care of the *nangchen*. ... She said that Dépön's family shouldn't take care of it and that some monks from Drakkar should. There's a monk named Jinpa who was there when Alak Gungru was there. ... Alak Gungru loved and protected Dépön a lot. She spoiled him and did whatever he wanted. Dépön was the most beloved son and [Kelzang] and he had the closest connection among the four kids. But Dépön's wife's parents and Dépön's family had a conflict and Dépön uncle's [his father Tashi Gyatso's brother] and Dépön's wife's family had a conflict. Dépön's wife is not good to Alak Gungru. ...

Dépön is narrow minded. Otherwise, if he was a good person, he would see that Chödzin is his mother's husband. But he always thought of Chödzin and said, 'You are not my father, you are the *makba*, (husband who married into my mother's estate), we don't have a connection.' They did not have a father-son connection.<sup>367</sup>

Ironically, despite all the strife and Kelzang's relative lack of power to solve the problem given her changed status as a lay person who as a mother and member of the PRC government no longer lived at her estate at Drakkar, Kelzang may have found a viable solution when she named Drakkar monk Jinpa to run her estate and *not* Dépön. But she did not stop Dépön from feuding with Drakkar prior to her death in 2013. Here, Dépön acted as the patriarch on behalf of his *trülku* mother that culminated in a dispute between Kelzang's family and Drakkar. Dékyi wondered why Kelzang could not curtail her son Dépön and achieve a greater separation between her family and a monastery, although Dékyi pointed to

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<sup>367</sup> Interview with Hortsang Lhogyel in 2018 at Lanzhou by the author.

Chödzin's weakened position in the household as Kelzang's third husband and stepfather as a main reason why. Dékyi said:

[Kelzang] couldn't achieve the separation [of family and monastery]. I don't know why she let her children be involved in the monastery. If she could separate this, then it would be different, but her kids became involved in the monastery. For example if the Jamyang Zhepa's son came to Labrang and said, 'My father is the big boss there and I will do [or claim] something,' the monks would respect [the Jamyang Zhepa's son] but there would be some conflict. The same is true with the Tenth Panchen. He had a daughter and she sometimes visited, but she was not involved in the [affairs of the ] monastery. She visited and had nothing to do with monastery affairs.

If Kelzang were a man, the man would [not have taken care] of the kids. These kids wouldn't have done any of [this conflict with Drakkar]. But she was a mother and the kids were with her. Maybe this also has something to do with the fact that Chödzin is not the father of her kids. He had no power at all; he didn't go to Kelzang's family's [annual] picnic at Drakkar. If they were Chödzin's kids, it would be easier because at least they would respect the father. He would somehow have some control. But with the situation of Chödzin being a stepfather, a lot of mistrust developed and it became hard for both sides to control each other. For example, if Dépön were Chödzin's real son then Dépön wouldn't go that crazy over the money [in Kelzang's estate and the Drakkar Cave]. Chödzin would have controlled it. But Chödzin has zero power. He couldn't help her to raise

those kids. All of the pressure was on Kelzang to do these things. That's maybe one reason her kids got involved in the monastery.<sup>368</sup>

Hortsang Lhogyel and Dékyi each raised a number of significant points about Kelzang's authority as the Gungru *trülku* who now was a mother living in a family in Amdo society. One such point revolved around how Chödzin as a stepfather was powerless to challenge Dépön. While Hamsa Rajan's recent ethnography does not address the issue of a stepfather marrying into the family (a matrilocal marriage), her study explains how someone like Dépön, who disliked Chödzin for marrying Kelzang in the 1970s and never trusted him (Chapter 3), could gain power in their household and over the Gungru estate: Dépön was the son who looked after his mother Kelzang.<sup>369</sup> And even though women, according to Rajan, have "more protection in matrilocal marriages," Rajan claims that "deep seated problems within Tibetan society exist in which men act as if they automatically deserve decision-making power and attention within the household while women must prove exceptional capabilities beyond the heavy burden of labor they are already undertaking."<sup>370</sup> Kelzang did not perform the kind of household/farming labor that many women with whom Rajan interviewed did—Kelzang worked in the PRC government and did little work at home. Yet, Kelzang had little power in her own matrilocal situation in the struggle with Dépön and Chödzin likely because Dépön viewed himself as protecting Kelzang's and her family's interests/estate income; she did not and could not stop him.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> Interview with Dékyi in December 2018 at Labrang by the author.

<sup>369</sup> Rajan, "Discourse of Tibetan Women's Empowerment Activists," 136-137. Much of Rajan's findings show that mothers in Amdo became empowered more as agents of modernity and representative of success in today's society with more educational and professional opportunities but that men still made many of the decisions in regards to the family

<sup>370</sup> Rajan, "Discourse of Tibetan Women's Empowerment Activists," 140.

<sup>371</sup> Rajan, "The Discourse of Tibetan Women's Empowerment Activists," 141. See also Rajan's "The Impact of Household Form and Marital Residence," 155, discusses how men usually control the finances in a household.

This section introduces some of the principal gendered family dynamics that influenced Kelzang's changing authority as a laicized mother who became more distant from Drakkar. These dynamics, and in particular the tension that ensued between Chödzin and Kelzang's son Dépön, help ascertain why this conflict over developing land and collecting income at the Drakkar Cave became such a contentious issue that, in the end, implicated Kelzang's authority. And while understanding all of the issues facing lay women in Amdo and Tibet lies outside the scope of this dissertation, unpacking some of these ideas here in concert with Rajan's study of women in Amdo, helps to contextualize why Kelzang's authority changed—and why another woman, Damtsik Drölma of Gyayé, Qinghai, could step into the vacuum and re-assert her claim to be the Gungru *trülku*. The next section describes how Damtsik continued to state that she was the Gungru *trülku* after the Cultural Revolution—and how various people responded to this claim both pro and con—nearly 50 years after Drakkar monks rebuffed Damtsik's initial claim that Damtsik was the “real” Gungru *trülku* at Drakkar in the 1940s.

### **Part III** **Kelzang's Conflict with Damtsik after the Cultural Revolution**

With the appearance of a breaking news story, an English article in *China's Tibet* titled “A Female Living Buddha in Qinghai” proclaimed Damtsik Drölma as the “Snow Mountain Goddess *trülku*” in 1995 at Ngotsar Tardrenling Monastery in Gyayé on the southeastern corner of Qinghai Lake. On the surface, *China's Tibet's* announcement of “the grey haired” Damtsik Drölma introduces Damtsik as the Snow Mountain Goddess despite her relatively advanced age of 57 years old. The article quotes Damtsik as saying that “I [Damtsik] was discovered by Kanquen Xiwaco at the age of three to be the Snow Mountain

Goddess and given the name Damtsik Drölma before I ordained at age nine.”<sup>372</sup> Furthermore, the article says that the late Tenth Panchen *trülku* Lozang Chökyi Gyeltsen named her monastery “Ngotsar Tardrenling,” a small Geluk monastery with about 22 monks and that Damtsik was a member of the Hainan Country Prefecture CPPCC.<sup>373</sup>

But I soon questioned the premise of the *China’s Tibet* article as I uncovered a much more complex backstory that involved the resumption of Damtsik’s claim to be the Sixth Gungru *trülku* in the intermittent years after she first arrived at Drakkar in the 1940s. Recall from Chapter 2 how many people from Drakkar and Labrang said that Damtsik arrived at Drakkar in the 1940s claiming to be the “real Gungru *trülku*” only to be rebuffed and allegedly beaten by Drakkar monks who supported Kelzang Drölma. Recall also how Damtsik claimed on the identification card that she allegedly stole from the local Rebgong government that Aröl Rinpoché Lozang Lungtok Jétsün Tenpé Gyeltsen had identified her as the Sixth Gungru *trülku*; notably Aröl Rinpoché’s name differs from the *China’s Tibet* article that credits Kanquen Xiwaco for identifying Damtsik as the Snow Mountain Goddess at age 3. (To note, *The Brief Histories of Monasteries in Southern Qinghai* says that “when (Damtsik) was young, Aröl Rinpoché identified Damtsik as the reincarnation of the “Gungru Khandroma”<sup>374</sup>). These oral accounts about the first conflict in the 1940s at Drakkar bolstered Kelzang’s authority as people decades later rallied more around Kelzang and declared the then-ordained Kelzang to be the legitimate Gungru *trülku* as rendered by Drakkar’s monks who were backed by Labrang’s Fifth Jamyang Zhepa.

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<sup>372</sup> I was not able to find the identity of Kanquen Xiwaco or Mkhan chen Zhi ba ' tsho in Amdo. Sources link this exact name to an eighth-century Indian pandit, but I could not find anyone in Amdo who would be seen as a reincarnation of this Pandit or who goes by this name. This, of course, raises speculation, that this story in *China’s Tibet* is made up or a way to forge a new identity that contrasts other sources that claim that she as the Gungru *trülku* was recognized by Aröl Rinpoché (See Chapter 2).

<sup>373</sup> See Doje Rinchen’s “A Female Living Buddha in *China’s Tibet*.”

<sup>374</sup> As introduced in Chapter 2, *The Brief Histories of Monasteries in Southern Qinghai*, 423, cites Aröl Rinpoché for identifying Damtsik as the reincarnation of the Gungru Khandroma.

Yet, while Damtsik never returned to Drakkar she nonetheless reasserted her claim to be the Gungru *trülku* after the Cultural Revolution. This resulted in another conflict between Kelzang and Damtsik but under vastly different political and cultural circumstances. After a stint in jail from 1958-1960, Damtsik wandered to many different places in Qinghai before a man named Püntsook of Gyayé helped her settle in the small village of Gyayé and eventually in Ngotsar Tardrenling Monastery. At the same time, Kelzang, who lived in Labrang and worked in the CPPCC as a married mother of four children, spent less time at Drakkar for reasons outlined in the first two sections above. The conflict between them flared when Kelzang's third husband Chödzin and other writers objected to Damtsik's continued usage of the name "Gungru *Khandroma*" at Ngotsar Tardrenling Monastery in the mid-1990s.<sup>375</sup> This breach and other offenses, including Chödzin accusing Damtsik of co-opting parts of Kelzang's story, resulted in Damtsik's name change or what I have deduced as the creation of "Snow Mountain Goddess" (in Tibetan this would be Gangri) lineage. This, in turn, resulted in the *China's Tibet* article, although no other source has confirmed this trajectory.

But even as the *China's Tibet* article portrayed what appears to be a separation between Kelzang (Gungru) and Damtsik (Gangri), major questions remain as to why this conflict—the kind that has precedence in Tibetan history as a case study involving the Thirteenth Dalai Lama shows below—re-emerged and continues in certain circles. The Jakhyung *trülku* of Qinghai, who was close to Damtsik given that Damtsik adopted his mother Réku, refers to Damtsik as "Gungru." I concluded from speaking with people about Kelzang's life that the causes of the second flareup revolved more around Kelzang's changed status as a lay woman and mother and how some people, including the Jakhyung *trülku*, said in 2017: "How could she [Kelzang] be the Sixth Gungru if she married and had all of these kids?" Meanwhile Damtsik, who adopted Réku, did not break her vow to have biological

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<sup>375</sup> Interview with Chödzin in 2011 in Labrang by the author.



children like Kelzang, as the Jakhyung *trülku* asserted.<sup>376</sup> Thus, motherhood and the maintaining of monastic vows contributed to this renewed conflict where as a lay mother Kelzang retreated from the limelight and her relationship with Drakkar became more distant due in large part to her children's dispute with monks as the first two sections illustrate. At the same time, about four hours away from Kelzang in Gyayé, Damtsik capitalized (both socially and symbolically) in that she lived at a monastery with a network of monks despite claims that she did so by dishonest means, according to some.

*The competition between Kelzang and Damtsik resumes after the Cultural Revolution*

While Kelzang did not comment on this competition with Damtsik as first introduced in Chapter 2, Chödzin of Labrang; Püntsook of Gyayé; and the Jakhyung *trülku* in Qinghai, each passionately discussed this resumed conflict. A self-proclaimed gatekeeper of Kelzang's story who fought to protect and strengthen Kelzang's authority, Chödzin discovered in the 1990s that writers in Qinghai referred to Damtsik Drölma as the Gungru *trülku*. This occurred when Chödzin and a few others discovered that Damtsik used the name "Gungru" on her monastery sign that read "Built by the Gungru *Khandroma*." Chödzin also said that Damtsik still used her identification card that she allegedly stole from the Jiawu government in the 1940s that said "Gungru" and that Aröl Rinpoché Lozang Lungtok Jétsün Tenpé Gyeltsen of Rongbo Monastery in Rebgong, Qinghai discovered her (Chapter 2). In an interview in 2011, Chödzin elucidated the trajectory of this renewed conflict, which he states was clearly decided in the 1940s after Damtsik wandered around Qinghai and ended up in Gyayé. Chödzin said:

After [she left Drakkar in the 1940s], she went to Qinghai Lake and said that she's a *Khandroma*. She practiced mani [mantra] and was a great

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<sup>376</sup> Interview with the Jakhyung *trülku* in 2017 in Gyayé, Qinghai by the author.

practitioner in Chapcha [Qinghai]. Slowly, everybody [in Qinghai] said she's a *khandroma*. Then, the Tenth Panchen Lama arrived there and called her the Tsolho *Khandroma* [The Southern Qinghai *Khandroma*], a name that means she is special. ...

Then [in the 1990s with the sign at her monastery] I said, 'This is incorrect to write that she is Gungru *Khandroma*. In the past there was a conflict in Gengya where she came to Drakkar and said that she was also Gungru *Khandroma*. And she left. Generally, it is OK to have two Gungru *Khandroma* if it is real, but [Kelzang and Damtsik] already had a conflict in the past, so the real one is the Labrang one, so you have to correct it.' I said to the writers in Qinghai, 'This is not right, please change it, she is not the Gungru *Khandroma*.' Yet even though Damtsik's identification said, 'Aröl Rinpoche recognized her as a Gungru *Khandroma*,' the Tenth Panchen Lama had already given her the name as Tsolho *Khandroma*. Now, it's changed. I am the one who made them change the name. Not only am I a writer, but I am from Labrang and a protector of the Labrang Gungru [Kelzang]. Later, Damtsik recognized that the Gungru *Khandroma* [Kelzang] has an independent lineage. And we [group of writers from Labrang] told them [Qinghai writers] 'This is not correct. The process [of changing her name] became official and she slowly changed her name to Gangri *Khandroma*.<sup>377</sup>

Chödzin, who said that the monastery sign changed to "Gangri" by 2006 at a ceremony to dedicate the Maitreya Statue at Ngotsar Tardrenling, used this opportunity to

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<sup>377</sup> Interview with Chödzin in January 2011 in Labrang by the author.

reinforce Kelzang's authority as the legitimate Gungru *trülku* and also, I suggest, his own authority as Kelzang's guardian. To do this, Chödzin acted as a protector figure, a main tool in his own narrative repertoire or in his toolkit to promote Kelzang in the face of Damtsik's renewed challenge and present identity conflation.<sup>378</sup> Recall from Chapter 3 how Chödzin praised Kelzang's son Dépön as a protector for saving Kelzang from enduring a struggle session in 1968 when she was pregnant with Dépön during the Cultural Revolution. Further, Chödzin described himself as Kelzang's protector when he helped Kelzang, who then was a single mother of three young children in the 1970s, and later married her and served her (See Chapter 3). Now 20 years later in the 1990s, Chödzin, once again, arrived as a hero to protect Kelzang's authority by confronting Damtsik and writers in Qinghai for using the name "Gungru" at her monastery when he said that this dispute had already been decided (1940s) once and for all.

In this vein, Chödzin rallied around Kelzang in the wake of the Cultural Revolution to counter people like the Jakhyung *trülku* who referred to Damtsik as the Gungru *Khandroma trülku* and *not* the Snow Mountain (*Gangri*) Goddess. Strikingly, the Jakhyung *trülku*, who delineated this conflict along gendered lines and in particular the effects of Kelzang's motherhood, said that the author of the *China's Tibet* article erred in calling Damtsik "The Snow Mountain Goddess." By referring to Damtsik as the Sixth Gungru *trülku*, the Jakhyung *trülku* boldly made the case that Damtsik was the legitimate Gungru *trülku* because she did *not* marry as Kelzang did and that Damtsik did *not* break her vow when she adopted a daughter (the *trülku*'s mother Réku). The Jakhyung *trülku* said in an interview at Damtsik's monastery in 2017:

It shouldn't be written as *Gangri*. It should be Gungru. In written forms it is always Gungru all the time. Maybe orally it was changed to

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<sup>378</sup> See Campany's "Religious Repertoires and Contestation: A Case Study Based on Buddhist Miracle Tales," in *History of Religions*.

‘*Gangri Khandroma*,’ but I never heard about *Gangri*. Maybe [the article’s author] didn’t understand the history and also he was afraid to have the conflict [with Chödzin]. So he wrote that this one was *Gangri* and the other one was *Gungru*. But actually it should be *Gungru*. ...

I heard [about the conflict over the sign at the monastery], but actually there’s no need to change the sign. There are two *khandromas* who live in two different systems, one is lay and lives at home [Kelzang] and one is at a monastery [Damtsik]. People who were not happy about that sign [at Ngotsar Tardrenling] were from Labrang and there were only a few. They didn’t solve the problem. This couldn’t be solved because there was no way for them to solve this problem....

The local people won’t change the name. People from Rebgong, Shamdo near the Yellow River all know [Damtsik] as the *Gungru Khandroma*. They call her *Ani Khandroma* [Nun Goddess] The Panchen Lama gave her the name *Tsolho Khandroma* [tran: South of the Lake in the 1980s]. He did that when Lhasa’s Tashilhünpo Monastery (Ch. 扎什伦布寺, *Zhashilunbusi*) was finished in the 1980s [in Zhikatsé, TAR, Ch. 日喀则, *Rikaze*]... On the invitation it said, ‘Welcome, *Tsolho Khandroma*.’ But Kelzang Drölma in Labrang married and this *Ani Khandroma* did not marry. This is a question of faith. One reason is because of the belief. If you have strong belief, you won’t get married. But, a lot of *trülku* got married because of the situation [1958 Amdo Rebellion]. Damtsik didn’t marry, she remained a nun. They call her *Khandroma* in Labrang, but they don’t call her *Ani Khandroma* like ours.<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Interview with the Jakhyung *trülku* in 2017 in Gyayé, Qinghai by the author.

Significantly, the Jakhyung *trülku* was the only person close to Damtsik to speak so openly and decisively about Damtsik’s identity as the Gungru *Khandroma* and *not* the Snow Mountain Goddess. He also cited Kelzang’s actual motherhood and her having biological children to bolster Damtsik’s case. Perhaps because he was a *trülku*, the Jakhyung *trülku* used his status to promote such claims about Kelzang and Damtsik—his words as an ordained *trülku* carried weight in Qinghai. In the meantime, Kelzang’s husband Chödzin protested Damtsik’s usage of the name Gungru on the sign at Damtsik’s monastery and *not*, to my knowledge, anyone who represented the monastic institution of Drakkar that had distanced itself from Kelzang.

Yet, in addition to discussing the name Gungru and his role in protecting Kelzang, Chödzin also flagged Damtsik and likely others by proxy for doing more than just using the name Gungru: Chödzin claimed that Damtsik co-opted Kelzang’s story and published it on the internet. While I could not find direct evidence to back Chödzin’s accusation, Püntsok of Gyayé, who impugned Damtsik as a liar and said that she was not a *trülku* but rather someone who got married at age 17 and then stole her husband’s coral for which she was beaten (See Chapter 2), corroborated aspects of Damtsik’s strategy of deceit. Chödzin recalled a story when Damtsik pretended to be Kelzang’s oldest daughter Tralo’s mother when Tralo visited Damtsik in Gyayé. Chödzin said:

When the Gengya people went to Damtsik’s monastery in the 1990s to see her, they saw that sign that said, “Built by Gungru *Khandroma* and saw the picture on the monastery was not our Gungru [Kelzang]. The people from Gengya said that she was stealing the history. My eldest [step] daughter Tralo is a bit naive and one time Damtsik took her hands and said, ‘You are my daughter,’ when they all went to visit [Damtsik’s] monastery.

Then my other [stepson] said, ‘Since she’s calling you ‘my daughter,’ then she’s your mother, go to her. She’s stealing our story, so you go to her.’

Then Tralo got quiet and said nothing. Alak Gungru’s birthdate is clear.

Damtsik dug the story of Alak Gungru and published it on the internet and stole it.<sup>380</sup>

While Tralo did not answer questions for this dissertation nor did Chödzin elaborate further on his claim about her, Püntsook, who admitted that he helped Damtsik in 1960 when she arrived there upon being released from prison, challenged Damtsik’s character. He called Damtsik a liar about many topics, including whether Aröl Rinpoché Lozang Lungtok Jétsün Tenpé Gyeltsen ever discovered her (Chapter 2) and whether she could read Tibetan beyond a grade school level. Püntsook also questioned if Damtsik had ever studied with the Tenth Panchen *trülku* Lozang Chökyi Gyeltsen as Damtsik said she did in my interview with her in 2009 in Xining, Qinghai. I spoke with Damtsik at her apartment in Xining before I knew about a conflict between Kelzang and Damtsik and the resultant identity conflation. At that time, I thought Damtsik, who died in April 2010, was the actual Gungru *trülku*. Damtsik said in August 2009:

I got to know the Panchen Lama in Kumbum Monastery [near Xining]. Sometimes all of the reincarnation lamas got together in Kumbum, and I met the Panchen Lama when he was 10-12, when [we] were very young. We got to know each other in Kumbum. So the Panchen Lama and I are [about] the same age, the year of the Tiger. Kumbum Monastery is a very important monastery. Sometimes all the reincarnate lamas visit

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<sup>380</sup> Interview with the Chödzin in 2016 in Labrang by the author.

together on special days and then we would meet each other. That's how I was able to meet all the reincarnate figures.<sup>381</sup>

Notably, Damtsik's account resembles that of Kelzang about her studies with the Tenth Panchen at Kumbum. Kelzang's words from our interview in 2010 correlate with her later obituary's account of this teaching as first mentioned in Chapter 1. Kelzang said:

I knew the Tenth Panchen Lama. I [studied] under Lagu Rinpoche who was also the Panchen Rinpoche's teacher. Once at Alak Rinpoche's teachings we studied [*chö*] together at Kumbum. We were both young kids and we chatted like kids.<sup>382</sup>

As of this writing, I do not know if Damtsik ever attended this teaching at Kumbum or if she simply co-opted Kelzang's story into her own as part of her strategy to become the Gungru *trülku*. In fact, the Jakhyung *trülku*, who most likely would have known if Damtsik had ever studied with the Panchen *trülku*, hedged a bit and said, "I don't exactly know (if) Damtsik went there to Kumbum, but she did meet the Panchen and Arjya *trülku*, yet she did not study Machik Lapdrön's *chö*." For Püntso, who clearly grew to dislike Damtsik but did not offer any specific reason why, the case was already closed. Püntso did not believe anything that Damtsik said. Püntso said:

It's not true that she studied with the Panchen. Let her lie, let her lie! She doesn't know Tibetan; how would she study with the Panchen? I knew that when she was young she knew a little bit of Tibetan, but [in reality] her Tibetan was not better than any primary school grade one kid [now]. She can't write Tibetan at all! She had some Mongolian friends and they all

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<sup>381</sup> Interview with Damtsik Drölma in 2009 in Xining, Qinghai by the author.

<sup>382</sup> Interview with Kelzang Drölma in 2010 in Labrang by the author.

asked me to take her to Gyayé. Then I asked the government (village leader) if I could bring her to Gyayé—she was living a miserable life. The leader said if you can bring her, then it’s okay. I am the one who took her here [ in 1960]. [After her marriage where she got caught stealing coral], she couldn’t return to Rebgong, but later she roamed around and said that she’s Gungru *Khandroma*. She’s not a *trülku*. In 1957 she was in Guide (Ch. 贵德 *Guide*), then after 1958 she was caught and put in the prison for saying ‘The [CCP] Party will go away soon.’ A lot of people were caught at that time. After that she was in a place called Shari and then she came to Gyayé where she got the name ‘Gyayé *Khandroma*’ without any real reason. ...

She came right here after she was let out of prison in the early 1960s. At that time there was an army campus in my village and I told the army leader that we needed a herder. If we get a letter from the army campus saying that we needed a herder we could easily get her here. That is how she came. There’s a man called Nyendrak who worked at the police bureau in Xining who was the [Tenth] Panchen Lama’s assistant. At that time he reported to the Tenth Panchen that there is a *Khandroma* and she has a gönpa [monastery] and to give a name to this monastery. The Panchen Lama gave the monastery a name Ngotsar Tardrenling. Maybe that’s the time she met the Tenth Panchen Lama. But other than that, it’s all a lie.<sup>383</sup>

Strikingly, Püntso’s blistering account in 2012 about Damtsik diminished her attempt to usurp Kelzang’s authority as the Gungru *trülku*—or as any *trülku* for that matter—and bolstered Kelzang’s. In fact, the late Püntso did not speak much about Kelzang with whom

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<sup>383</sup> Interview with Püntso in 2012 in Gyayé, Qinghai by the author.



he said he was not too familiar. Nonetheless, Kelzang's authority as the legitimate Gungru *trülku* received a boost in that Püntsoik excoriated Damtsik for resorting to underhanded tactics to attain her position as a *trülku* (and in many cases the Gungru *trülku*) decades after this conflict with Kelzang was supposedly adjudicated in Kelzang's favor in the 1940s. However, losing candidates who utilize these kinds of crafty methods against the declared winners is not unprecedented in Tibetan history as the case study between the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and the Gara Lama who was not chosen to be the Thirteenth Dalai Lama in the nineteenth century illustrates in the next subsection.

*Damtsik-Kelzang's Conflict in Context: The Dalai Lama/Norlha Dispute in the 1930s*

The competition and conflict between Damtsik and Kelzang is not the first such incident in Tibetan history, although it is likely one of the few known conflicts between Tibetan women given the overall dearth of female *trülku* lineages.<sup>384</sup> Nor is the Damtsik-Kelzang competition the first time that a losing candidate later retaliated and either caused or exacerbated conflict with the declared winner. One prominent example in recent Tibetan history comes from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when the Norlha or Gara Lama (Gara Lama henceforth) fled to China in 1924 after he escaped prison in Lhasa where he was captured for aiding Chinese Nationalist forces in a war against Central Tibet in 1917.<sup>385</sup> A native of Riwoché in Kham (near Chamdo) in today's eastern Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), the Nyingma Gara Lama was exiled in China where over time, according to Gray Tuttle (2005), he attracted a large following of lay Chinese Buddhist

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<sup>384</sup> Diemberger in *When a Woman*, 246-250, discusses reincarnation in the Samding lineage, in particular after Chökyi Drönma's passing leading to the selection of and legitimation of her reincarnation in Kunga Sangmo. But Diemberger does not mention the possibility of any other candidate rumored for this position or her successors until later in the twentieth century with the Twelfth Dorjé Pakmo. She cites Tashi Tsering, 299-300, citing Tsering's discussion about the controversy and qualifications surrounding the selection of multiple candidates for the Twelfth Samding Dorjé Pakmo.

<sup>385</sup> See Gray Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhists and the Making of Modern China*, 56, for an explanation of this war between Central Tibetan forces and Chinese Nationalist forces over territory in today's eastern Tibetan Autonomous Region. Central Tibet, or the Lhasa government of the Dalai Lama, wanted to recapture its territory that had been taken by China and fought Chinese Nationalist forces in 1917.

followers. Gara Lama even attained a position in the Chinese Nationalist government as “a member of the Commission of Mongolian and Tibetan affairs” to establish the Xikang Province (Kham areas in today’s eastern TAR). He was given the title of “Kham Pacification Commissioner” to help mobilize against the Red Army but sources claim that the Gara Lama’s ultimate goal was to establish rule near his native Riwoché. He eventually raised an army to overthrow warlord Liu Wenhui (Chin. 刘文辉) in Kham and fight the Communists before being captured by the Communists and dying in 1936.<sup>386</sup>

However, the motive for Gara Lama’s harsh stance against the Thirteenth Dalai Lama’s government in Lhasa and for Gara Lama wanting to govern a territory closer to his home near Riwoché independent of Lhasa is fascinating for it allegedly involves the process to choose the *trülku* of the Twelfth Dalai Lama. Scholar Kelzang Tashi in his work (1996) notably starts his nine-page essay on the Gara Lama by saying that “Gara Sönam Rapten (Norlha) was recognized by the Tibetan *kashak* (government) as the reincarnation of the Twelfth Dalai Lama Trinlé Gyatso, which offered him religious clothes with the three supports, but (the Gara Lama) was not determined to be a suitable choice and (his name) was withdrawn (to be the Thirteenth Dalai Lama).”<sup>387</sup> Kelzang Tashi, who says that the Gara Lama was born in 1876, does not speculate further as to why Sönam Rapten (Gara Lama) was ultimately not chosen. This development sparks interest because it provides a key motive

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<sup>386</sup> See Tuttle in *Tibetan Buddhists and the Making of Modern China*, 94-96, 134, 136, for a fascinating analysis of how Norlha, as one of several Tibetan lamas who gained a large Buddhist following in China during the Nationalist period, performed rituals for many lay patrons across China while he was in exile for 12 years after his escape from a Central Tibetan prison after Norlha was captured. Critically, Tuttle shows how Norlha took on more of a political role and in particular in the “Commission of Mongolian and Tibetan affairs.” Tuttle shows how over time and with various Chinese leaders—Duan Qirui, the Warlord Liu Xiang and later Jiang Kaishek, Norlha gained influence in the government for “securing the loyalty of Tibetans in Kham.” Later, Alex Gardner in his short biography of Norlha in <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Gara-Lama-Sonam-Rapten/13072> wrote that Norlha sought local rule in Kham (Kham self-rule) and waged fights in order to try and attain this status before being captured and dying in 1936 at the age of 73.

<sup>387</sup> Kelzang Tashi “Mgar ra bla ma Lu'u cun dmag Khams khul 'byor skabs mnyam 'brel dang Go min tang skabs Bod Sog u yon lhan khang u yon sogs byas skor” [On Gara Lama and the Lu Army Corp in Kham and the Guomindang Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission], in *Bod kyi lo rgyus rig gnas dpyad gzhi'i rgyu cha bdama bsrigs*, 10 [Material on the Culture and History of Tibet, new ser., vol. 10], 113, “rab byung bco Inga pa'i me byi 1876 lor mgar ra bsod nams rab brtan de nyid tA la'i bla ma sku phreng bcu gnyis pa 'phrin las rgya mtsho'i yang sris yin par ngos 'dzin gyis bka' shag nas khong la maN+Tala rten gsum dang chos gos sogs phul yod/ 'on kyang de rjes rgyal ba'i yang srid du dngos gtan 'khel med rung/'”

(Gara Lama's candidacy to be the Dalai Lama was withdrawn) for why there would be future enmity between Gara Lama and the Lhasa government as both Tuttle and Carmen Meinert (2009) show in their respective footnotes.<sup>388</sup> Although, as Tuttle points out, other sources, including a biography of Gara Lama by one of his own students, states that Gara Lama's birth date was 1865 which would have precluded him from being the Twelfth Dalai Lama's *trülku* because the Gara Lama would have been too old to be considered the Dalai Lama's *trülku*.<sup>389</sup>

While we still need more information about the Gara Lama's alleged candidacy as the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, this assertion (possibly made by an author writing a Kham-centric history and therefore pro-Gara Lama?) shows the bitterness that can ensue on behalf of someone who is not chosen as the *trülku* as stories from Amdo in the Gungru lineage attest. The story of the Gara Lama helps to contextualize how and why Damtsik would find a way (by any means necessary apparently) to gain access to the Gungru lineage. It shows that how Damtsik, like the Gara Lama, seized on the political instability in the 1940s (Gengya and Jiawu conflict) and much later in the vacuum of the Cultural Revolution when Kelzang worked more in the government and less as a *trülku* who performed public duties at her estate in Drakkar.

Strikingly, however, a similar competition to the Kelzang-Damtsik conflict happened after the death of the First Jamyang Zhepa at Labrang in the early eighteenth century.

Controversy brewed after the Jamyang Zhepa's death in 1721 among his disciples about the

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<sup>388</sup> See Meinert's article "Gangkar Rinpoche Between Tibet and China: A Tibetan Lama among Ethnic Chinese in the 1930s and 1950s" in *Buddhism Between Tibet and China* about Gangkar Rinpoche for a description of the Gara Lama *trülku*'s activities as a popular and efficacious ritual performer in Kham that ended up taking on a political dimension in China. She cites numerous sources, including the above-mentioned article by Kelzang Tashi, Feng's *Xikang shi shiyi*, oral interviews and Peng Wenbin's article "Frontier Process, Provincial Politics and Movements for Khampa Autonomy."

<sup>389</sup> Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhists and the Making of Modern China*, 258. In his detailed footnote, Tuttle speculates on the difference between the older Tibetan sources that claim that Gara Lama was born in 1865. More recent Tibetan sources list the year 1876, including Kelzang Tashi's account. Also the Tibetan account Rje drung 'Jam dpal rgyal mtshan, "Ri bo che dgon pa dang Rje drung sprul sku Mgar ra bla ma bcas kyi lo rgyus rags bsdus" [A brief History of Riwoche Monastery, the Jedrung Incarnation and Gara Lama in *Bod kyi rig gnas lo rgyus dpyad gzhi'i rgyu cha bdams bsgrigs, 'don thengs drug pa* [Materials on the Culture and History of Tibet, volume 6, 1985, p. 111.

legitimate candidate to be the Jamyang Zhepa's successor. This conflict that took years to resolve officially by the Lhasa government and also within various localities in Amdo bred later mistrust between Labrang, Terlung and Rebgong resulting in intra-monastery warfare as the first chapter attests.<sup>390</sup> Meanwhile, in the Gungru lineage, Damtsik in some parts of Amdo capitalized on the schism between Gengya and Jiawu who fought over disputed grassland in the early twentieth century and also, as this chapter shows, the schism in Tibetan society caused by the havoc of the Cultural Revolution to lay her claim to the Gungru throne.

In the end, Damtsik advanced her social status and her social network, or her social capital in a Bourdieuan sense, as a Tibetan *trülku* who said that she was the Gungru *trülku*. In this regard, Damtsik continued to exercise a great deal of social mobility in step with Leonard van der Kuijp's analysis of how some Tibetans improved their lot/their status if they became a monastic. As Chapter 2 describes when Damtsik arrived at Drakkar and claimed to be the real Gungru *trülku*, Damtsik much later attained this position—or re-asserted her claim for the Gungru *trülku*—even by alleged fraudulent tactics and lived in a monastery with monks while Kelzang's network of *trülku*, monks and nuns diminished and was replaced by her family. Damtsik, who as noted in Chapter 2 came from a poor family in Jiawu like Kelzang, now lived in a monastery in Gyayé allegedly named by the esteemed Tenth Panchen and with monks. She maintained the appropriate setting and props and she also performed public actions such as visiting with children in schools that gave her authority to assert her claim as the Gungru *trülku*—the opposite of Kelzang who lived as a lay mother and worked for the CPPCC in Labrang. In other words, Damtsik acted *as if* she were the Gungru *trülku* in a monastery while Kelzang retreated more from public duties, worked in the government and raised her family.

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<sup>390</sup> See Nietupski, *Labrang Monastery*, 126, for a description of the conflict that ensued over the controversy to select the Second Jamyang Zhepa. A split emerged between Setsang and Détri, who were disciples of the First Jamyang Zhepa, over the First Jamyang Zhepa's successor. The successor, who was from Ngangra, Qinghai, was eventually confirmed by Tibetan authorities, but Nietupski writes the conflict between Setsang and Détri lasted and eventually broke out in a dispute between Labrang and Terlung.

## Concluding Thoughts

Damtsik's name change from Gungru to Gangri did not seem to hold much weight in particular since the Jakhyung *trülku* said that many people in Qinghai still referred to Damtsik by the name Gungru. Moreover, confusion still persists about the identity of the Gungru *trülku* despite the *China's Tibet's* likely attempt to delineate a clear separation between the Gungru and the new Gangri lineage; no such version appears in Tibetan or Chinese to my knowledge. In fact, the move to make Damtsik change her name and create the appearance of a new female lineage in Amdo as Chödzin claims he instigated in order to protect the Gungru lineage (it is unlikely he did this without PRC intervention) only served as a tactic to enhance and/or preserve Kelzang's authority. And this might have been Chödzin's last best chance to bolster Kelzang's authority given the stark reality of what happened to her after the Cultural Revolution when Drakkar and other monasteries were rebuilt and *trülku*, monks and nuns returned: Kelzang's authority wildly fluctuated and even more so depending on with whom I spoke, including Kelzang herself. Some interlocutors like Shérab Drölma, the head nun at Géden Tengyéling, constructed Kelzang's authority as a mother figure at the nunnery and from their time attending functions in the CPPCC, as did Tupten Döndrup, who cited Kelzang's kindness. Both the nun and Tupten Döndrup, whose parents were disciples of Kelzang, talked about and constructed Kelzang *as if* she were a mother figure; Tupten Döndrup often called Kelzang "Machik Lapdrön." Along these lines, others in the community still relied on Kelzang to solve grassland disputes like her Gungru predecessors, an act that I witnessed in 2012 at her family picnic at Drakkar. Her cellphone rang that day with someone alerting her of a problem. Kelzang clearly still had authority to solve such disputes like her Gungru predecessors.

Yet Kelzang's authority was always uneven and even more so after the Cultural Revolution. While her obituary reports that she rebuilt Drakkar in the 1980s and re-

established connections in Amdo and across Tibet, Kelzang claimed that she no longer had anything to do with religion, or that religion was “not my responsibility.” She adopted this stance because, as she said, “I am a lay person with all of these children.” In this vein, Kelzang, who worked fulltime in the CPPCC in Labrang, withdrew more from performing public Buddhist ceremonies and healing rituals due to the realities of her lay motherhood. She seldom interacted with locals creating more of a distance and/or apathy in relation to Kelzang. For instance, Dorjé Sönam of Labrang, said that Kelzang, “who did government work and had a salary with the CPPCC, didn’t do any activities with religion and that the people from Gengya slowly became more distant from her. (Locals) said that (Kelzang) is a lama but they didn’t support her. They didn’t ask her to chant rituals or to do any activities in Drakkar.”<sup>391</sup> Another man from Amdo who currently lives in the United States said that when he met Kelzang in Amdo in the 1980s that he did not feel any pull to receive her blessing because she wore lay clothing.<sup>392</sup> Along these lines, one Gengya native who lives in Labrang, Weima Tashi, told me in 2016 that “each person has to decide for themselves” if they want to support Kelzang proving that her authority was never an automatic given and it was clearly not automatic with him.<sup>393</sup> Furthermore, Dékyi, of Labrang, raised the long-term effects of Kelzang’s marriages and having children with multiple fathers as an issue affecting her authority, issues first raised in the previous chapter. Dékyi said:

If you are a *trülku* and not wearing a robe, that’s okay, but if you have many kids with different fathers, that’s not acceptable. Having kids who have a conflict with the monastery, that’s even worse. The Jamyang Zhepa had a child, but he never brought his child to the monastery. But

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<sup>391</sup> Interview with Dorjé Sönam in January 2011 in Labrang by the author.

<sup>392</sup> Interview with Nyima in August 2012 in the United States by the author.

<sup>393</sup> Interview with Weima Tashi in November 2016 in Labrang by the author

Alak Gungru's kids were involved with the public monastery affairs and they had that conflict over money.<sup>394</sup>

Finally, a Chinese woman from Beijing and Tibetan Buddhist practitioner who went by the Tibetan name Sanggyé Drölma, talked about how she looked elsewhere to find a female *khandroma* to support rather than accept Kelzang who was a lay woman. Sanggyé Drölma said that when she came to Labrang in 2012 she wanted to meet the elderly nun who lived in a cave behind Drakkar for nearly 50 years (the nun has since passed away), and not Kelzang. “I didn’t have much thought in my heart because Kelzang worked for the government and was married.”<sup>395</sup> As for that elderly nun, many people, according to Hortsang Lhogyel of Lanzhou, confused this nun as the real “Gungru *trülku*” because of Kelzang’s lay status. The nun ironically had all of the proper accoutrements for a Gungru *trülku*—monastic robes and she lived in a cave as a practitioner—while Kelzang did not.

This distance and lack of support for Kelzang all came to a head in 2009 when the Jamyang Zhepa scolded Drakkar monks and Gengya locals for how they treated Kelzang at his teaching in Gengya. Chödzin recalled how the Jamyang Zhepa was upset that locals did not give donations to Kelzang like they did to the Jamyang Zhepa. However, Dorjé Sönam, who works in the PRC government in Labrang, offered a more detailed account than did Chödzin who likely wanted to avoid such a negative story, i.e., one that shows how Kelzang’s authority waned for many people. Dorjé Sönam recalled the Jamyang Zhepa’s message during those teachings. Dorjé Sönam said:

As for Kelzang [sitting in the audience], the Jamyang Zhepa said,  
‘Do you think she is not a real lama? Is she not good enough for you? Why  
are you so distant from her? If she is not that important or real then we can

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<sup>394</sup> Interview with Dékyi in October 2018 in Shangrila, Yunnan, by the author.

<sup>395</sup> Interview with Sanggyé Drölma in August 2018 at Drakkar by the author.

take her to Labrang. You don't need to have her anymore.' They woke up.

Last year (2009) all of the tribes of Gengya invited *Khandroma* to their home and if they had 100 RMB, they gave it to her (as a donation).<sup>396</sup>

However, the monk Jamyang of Drakkar spoke right to the heart of the matter as to why Kelzang withdrew from being in the public doing activities. He said that Kelzang struggled to overcome the changes in her life as a lay person (and likely all of the trauma that happened to her prior) and withdrew more from the public limelight. Jamyang said:

It wasn't like that [where the Jamyang Zhepa criticized us]. She never was willing to sit up (with the monks), she always sat in a lower chair. If we put her in a higher seat, she would move down. It was all because she wore lay clothing, not because we didn't respect her. She always sat lower or in a corner because she was a lay person and no longer wore a monk's robe. She did not feel comfortable sitting in a higher seat or in front of the Jamyang Zhepa where he could see her. This has nothing to do with respect or not [for Kelzang]. In Gengya, when you give a gift to the Jamyang Zhepa, Alak Gungru should have been the first [in the line], but she refused to go up there. Then the Jamyang Zhepa saw this and said something. He didn't scold the representatives, but he said Alak Gungru needed to sit up front.<sup>397</sup>

Understanding this episode and how it impacted Kelzang's authority in Gengya raised many issues going forward in the wake of her passing in January 2013 from complications due to heart failure, in particular the vexed effort to write her *namtar*. For now, a diverse group of stakeholders, including a monk author from Labrang, and members of Kelzang's

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<sup>396</sup> Interview with Dorjé Sönam in January 2011 at Labrang by the author.

<sup>397</sup> Interview with Jamyang in July 2016 at Drakkar by the author.



family, primarily her son Dépön and her husband Chödzin, wrangled with how to sanctify and codify her life in a *namtar* like the *Lotus Vine* about Rindzin Pelmo. The next and final chapter chronicles the ethnography of the complicated and fascinating experience to write Kelzang's *namtar*. What I found was that the reality on the ground—the distance that Kelzang the lay mother witnessed from her constituency and in particular Drakkar as the main institution that supported Kelzang directly impacted the production—or lack thereof—of her life story and the ability to legitimate her authority in print. Finding the right author to write the appropriate material in a *namtar*—and agree on all of this—proved to be no easy task.

## Chapter 5

### Authority on the Brink: Kelzang's *Namtar* Canceled, Seventh Gungru *trülku* Delayed

Anticipation mounted for the final session of the five day *chö* festival held in August 2013 at the estate of the Gungru *Khandroma* nestled behind Drakkar Monastery. I sat alongside many Gengya locals for the first four days and we listened to Drakkar monks chant the Buddhist practice of *chö* founded by the Tibetan female virtuoso Machik Lapdrön (12<sup>th</sup> century), an important figure introduced in Chapter 1. The monks recited *chö* in the estate's main shrine room, a space filled with many statues of the Jamyang Zhepa and Gungtang *trülku* of Labrang that surrounded the room's centerpiece, a large white image of Machik Lapdrön. The atmosphere at the festival grew more festive with each day and one local in attendance told me that people would cram into the brick courtyard of the partially-rebuilt Gungru estate to hear the climactic *chö* fire blessing on the fifth and final day.

Despite the warning, I was quite surprised at the carnival-like mood of the last session, an event that galvanized the community nearly seven months after the death of Kelzang Drölma in January, 2013. About 1,000 Tibetans, including many dressed in traditional garb, traveled by motorcycle, by horseback and by foot from all over Amdo to attend the final day; strikingly there were as many horses as motorbikes parked at the estate. Vendors sold Tibetan dumplings filled with sheep and yak meat, as well as other candy, snacks and fruit outside the estate. I saw kids holding balloons that they bought in a tent store set up on the estate's winding driveway. Soon after arriving, I lined up in a field adjacent to the estate with men, women and children, including infant babies, to receive the coveted *zhalpu* blessing from Drakkar monks who blew a combination of blessed nectar and water on each person. This blessing all took place before the big fire *chö* ceremony held in the estate's courtyard where true to form the crowd of Amdo Tibetans filed into every corner. After Drakkar's monks finished the *chö* blessing, an event where many Gengya elders put large quantities of rice and

tree branches into the large fire, everyone partook in a festive *tsok* feast that consisted of candy, cookies and dried and fresh fruits.

Significantly, right after the *tsok*'s conclusion, I noticed that many locals stayed at the estate and prostrated in front of the *chöten* (a reliquary) of Kelzang Drölma who helped re-start this popular *chö* event in 2000 after a lapse of 40 years. (A few weeks prior to the *chö* event, well-known Labrang monk Jamyang Gyatso, (1935—) dedicated Kelzang's *chöten* in a ceremony at her estate in July 2013 and said, "The Gungru lineage is one of the most special lineages in Amdo and will quickly reincarnate here"<sup>398</sup>). In fact, the line to lay a white *khatak* (scarf) at Kelzang's *chöten* placed in the estate's shrine room extended outside the main gate like a snake and remained that way for nearly two hours.<sup>399</sup> As if on cue, a rainbow appeared under a light mist as people paid their respects. Some people wept, including Kelzang's four children (and their spouses) and four grandchildren, who were moved by the public's reverence shown toward Kelzang.

The process to memorialize and canonize Kelzang within the annals of the Gungru lineage and among the pantheon of Tibetan virtuosos/religious saints more broadly seemed to be proceeding without a hitch. Around this time, Kelzang's youngest son Dépön handed me an electronic copy of Kelzang's obituary, an unsigned and unpublished 14-page document written in Chinese as introduced in the first chapter and translated in full in Appendix 1. Given the presence of this elaborate obituary that was likely written by someone in the Tibetan religious establishment or the PRC government (the CPPCC) where Kelzang worked for decades, it seemed only a matter of time before a *namtar* appeared about Kelzang like *The Lotus Vine* about the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo as discussed in the first chapter.<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> Observation by author on July 6, 2013 at Drakkar and consultation with Kelzang's son Dépön.

<sup>399</sup> Observation by author in August 2013 at Drakkar in Gengya.

<sup>400</sup> See Zhang ston bstan pa rgya mtsho's *The Biography of the Gungru Wisdom Dakini called The White Lotus Vine*.

In addition to edifying readers of her enlightenment, a *namtar* about Kelzang would be the perfect bookending to analyze the narrative and legitimating strategies that represent Kelzang's authority like the *Lotus Vine* or what I call the "Gungru master narrative" as raised in Chapter 1. Moreover, it would be interesting to see how a *namtar* about Kelzang re-deploys these legitimating strategies from the *Lotus Vine* and Kelzang's obituary to stitch together a story of continuity or to as Michel Foucault writes "reconstitute a tradition" about a religious figure (Kelzang) whose life was far from traditional. These strategies would include presenting Kelzang as an emanation of the "Great Mother" Machik Lapdrön, a mother *khandroma* who practices the Cakrasamvara tantric rituals and as a surrogate mother of the masses to bolster Kelzang's authority in Amdo. Furthermore, such a *namtar* about Kelzang would provide the ideal interface with the oral narratives about Kelzang's unconventional life as contained in the previous three chapters—stories that any "official" text will most likely overlook. These narratives show, in sum, how Kelzang's contested selection in the 1940s, her forced laicization in 1958, her three marriages and four children during the Cultural Revolution as well as Kelzang receiving a challenge from another woman to her throne dramatically affected Kelzang's authority in Gengya, Labrang and across Amdo and beyond.

But the plan to produce Kelzang's *namtar* and welcome the swift return of Kelzang's *trülku* back to Drakkar vanished in a blink. As of the time of this writing (October 2021), the project to write Kelzang's *namtar* has been canceled amidst a sea of acrimony between the various stakeholders who want to write, sponsor or curate Kelzang's story and it is unclear if her biography will ever get written let alone published. The author, a monk at Labrang named Gendün Darjé who reluctantly agreed to write the *namtar* despite never having authored one before, told me in September 2018 that he stopped writing Kelzang's biography. He did so after a series of clashes with Kelzang's son Dépön and Kelzang's third husband Chödzin over

what material should be included in the text and who is most qualified to write the *namtar*. As it turns out, a great deal of mutual mistrust and personal animus had developed between all three parties, a dynamic explained in detail below.

Yet, this was not the only major change that affected the Gungru lineage in late summer of 2018. Around the time that I confirmed the news about Kelzang's canceled *namtar*, word on the Gengya grasslands revealed that the Seventh Gungru *trülku*, the very figure that Labrang's Jamyang Gyatso had prophesied would quickly return in his dedication of Kelzang's *chöten* in 2013 at Drakkar, was delayed. This occurred because of a confluence of political and social issues including community apathy about Kelzang and the Gungru lineage among Gengya's 13 herding and farming villages and Drakkar's monks. Sources suggested that the Seventh Gungru *trülku* could return by August 2020 but this did not happen as of October 2021 despite some Drakkar monks saying that the search to find the new *trülku* has progressed toward a final outcome.<sup>401</sup>

What at first seemed like a sure bet—the publishing of Kelzang's *namtar* and the swift return of Kelzang's reincarnation—became shrouded in uncertainty and doubt during the 5-7 year interregnum period before the Seventh Gungru *trülku* returned to Drakkar. Notably, these new developments raise key questions in step with those discussed previously about the construction of Kelzang's authority in Amdo before, during and after the Cultural Revolution. These questions revolve around the challenges of representing Kelzang's authority as a *trülku* who laicized and became a mother in a *namtar* and applying established narrative and legitimating strategies used in Kelzang's obituary and the *Lotus Vine namtar* to do so. In once again using Bruce Lincoln's model of authority as a guide, how did Kelzang's

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<sup>401</sup> Conversations with Chödzin, Gendün Darjé, Dolo and various monks at Drakkar have discussed the situation regarding the Seventh Gungru *trülku*. It is not known if the conditions of the global pandemic COVID-19 in 2019-2020 have delayed the arrival of the Seventh Gungru *trülku*. In talking with the populace in Gengya before the pandemic, most people did not know for sure when the *trülku* would arrive, although some monks at Drakkar seemed to think it would happen soon. In most occasions, the interregnum is five or six years before the next *trülku* arrives. Part IV of this chapter discusses these issues.

changed authority as a mother affect the process to legitimate her authority in a *namtar* like the *Lotus Vine* did with Rindzin Pelmo? Specifically, how did Kelzang's altered status and her more distant relation with Drakkar (the main institutional support of the Gungru lineage) and with her local constituency, or what Bourdieu would define as a loss of symbolic capital, affect both the writing of Kelzang's *namtar* and the process to identify her reincarnate? How can we further assess the effects of Kelzang's authority as the Gungru *trülku* through understanding the stakes of producing her *namtar*, i.e., from discerning what different stakeholders write or attempt to write about her in an effort to sanctify Kelzang in the Gungru lineage? Along these lines, what do the stakes of this conflict reveal about the competing roles that genre (what stories make up a *namtar*) and gender (the conflict between real and discursive motherhood) play in adjudicating Kelzang's authority on the ground and in a *namtar*? Or put another way, what do the stakes of this conflict tell us about what legitimating strategies would be considered correct to include in a *namtar* written by a qualified author at the proper time to determine the full effect of her authority?

The short answer is that the great discontinuity in Kelzang's life as reflected by her altered authority as a *trülku* who laicized, married, divorced, had children, was abused and worked in the government after the Cultural Revolution dramatically influenced the effort to recreate the conditions of her sanctity and present a narrative of continuity in a *namtar*. For starters, no one in the monastic establishment at Drakkar or at Labrang seemed to want to write Kelzang's *namtar*. This reflected what in reality was her waning authority and the monastic and lay community's lack of enthusiasm about her aside from the public outpouring displayed after her death at the *chö* festival mentioned above. This indifference left the job of writing Kelzang's *namtar* to the reluctant author Gendün Darjé, a conundrum elaborated in the second section below. Furthermore, Dépön Tashi, who had feuded with Drakkar over money and land development (Chapter 4), took charge of his mother's *namtar* project instead

of Drakkar or one of Kelzang's disciples/students, resulting in still more resistance and overall community apathy about Kelzang and writing her *namtar*. Third, Chödzin, a self-proclaimed writer and historian, wanted to write his own history about Kelzang leading to tensions all across the board—and the collapse of Kelzang's *namtar*.

The clash, or what some might call the lighting of a long fuse that exploded between Dépön Tashi, Chödzin and Gendün Darjé, boiled down to competing agendas, schisms of institutional power and/or lack of support for Kelzang. It also elucidated disputes over the constraints of the *namtar* genre and enduring gendered tensions exposed by the implications of Kelzang's motherhood, all of which are inter-related. These layered tensions explain the disputes between three institutions of power (the monastic establishment, the PRC and Kelzang's family) over controlling the process to sanctify Kelzang in a *namtar*, i.e., the presentation of her authority as the Sixth Gungru *trülku* within the Gungru lineage. Moreover, these tensions underscore how the profound effect of Kelzang's declining authority became imbricated in and representative of the complex process of writing her life story in a *namtar*—these processes could not be separated, and as we shall see, overcome at this time.

Exposed in this conflict are competing visions of what material should be produced or what legitimating strategies would be considered appropriate to be published in a *namtar*: Should a *namtar* written about a *trülku* figure only contain a religious/Buddhist framework as the monk author Gendün Darjé asserts? Should it expand and contain political and social details as Chödzin wants to include? Or should there be a balance of both? A local researcher and former printer of Tibetan materials, Chödzin wanted to include many political and social details about Kelzang's life in her biography to the disdain of the monk Gendün Darjé. Gendün Darjé, meanwhile, wanted to chronicle accounts of Kelzang's Buddhist doctrinal prowess and what he described as her "religious activities." His standpoint expresses fidelity to what Bauman and Briggs in their work on genre and authority call a "traditionalizing

discourse” of a genre much like how the *Lotus Vine* portrayed the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo’s Buddhist acumen at Drakkar (Chapter 1). As a monk, Gendün Darjé aimed to avoid any stories about Kelzang’s actual motherhood, her work in the government or especially about the layman Chödzin acting as a protagonist in Kelzang’s story that would expose any “leaks” in the genre.<sup>402</sup> In short, Gendün Darjé wanted to stick as close to the traditional discourse of the *namtar* genre and pay homage to the textual authority of the narrative of the *Lotus Vine* while Chödzin sought to stretch the boundaries or conventions of the genre.<sup>403</sup>

Exposed, too, in this conflict are competing representations of motherhood. Here, the metaphorical representation of a compassionate mother-like figure who was supported by the Labrang patriarchy collided with the realities of Kelzang’s actual motherhood as both her son Dépön and husband Chödzin sought to propagate Kelzang’s biography. For Dépön as the leader of Kelzang’s *namtar* project, the irony could not have been more pronounced. By disseminating Kelzang’s well-crafted obituary in 2013 to me, Dépön promoted the latest version of what I label “the Gungru master narrative” about his own mother. In other words, he advanced a storyline that promoted the effective narrative and legitimating strategies of the iconic Machik Lapdrön and also Kelzang serving as a mother-like figure for the masses to represent Kelzang’s authority. Furthermore, for Dépön Tashi, this master narrative depicts his mother as a beacon of peace and unity in Labrang, Gengya and across Amdo in the spirit of reconciliation after the chaotic Cultural Revolution. Remarkably, however, as earlier chapters illustrate, Kelzang’s obituary omits any mention of her actual motherhood of her four

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<sup>402</sup> Richard A. Bauman and Charles L. Briggs, “Genre Intertextuality and Social Power” in *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, Vol 2, No. 2, 1992, 148-149.

<sup>403</sup> See Diemberger’s description of textual authority in her work on the biography of the First Samding Dorjé Phakmo female *trülku* in *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty*, 4-5. Textual authority, according to Diemberger, occurs when a narrative can gain a foothold for various audiences in a community, including disciples and a more contemporary group. Thus, a narrative like the teachings of the Buddha that were written down in textual form became a source of authority for the Samding lineage at that time and going forward centuries and for generations into the future.



children, a dichotomy that Reiko Ohnuma unpacks in her work about mothers in Indian Buddhist texts as raised in Chapters 1 and 3 and explained more below.<sup>404</sup>

The result in 2018 was akin to what Bhrigupati Singh labeled as an “intensity”<sup>405</sup> or what I call a “flashpoint” that serves as a commentary on Kelzang’s fluctuating authority contingent on inter-related political, social, literary and gendered factors, i.e., Kelzang’s motherhood as juxtaposed to a more idealized version. Strikingly, the residual effects of Kelzang’s laicization, the impacts of her marriages and her motherhood and the challenge she endured from Damtsik, directly contributed to the cancelation of Kelzang’s *namtar* and the delay of her reincarnation. In short, Kelzang being caught between three institutions (Drakkar, the PRC government and her family) that showed varying degrees of support for her, substantially influenced her authority on the ground in Gengya and Labrang—and the eventual writing of her biography.

Meanwhile, the main stakeholders Chödzin and Gendün Darjé were also caught in the middle between these same institutions (Drakkar/ the PRC and Kelzang’s family) culminating in their divergent positions about what material would be considered appropriate for a *namtar* and who is the most qualified person to write it. As a married man and stepfather, Chödzin did not possess what Bruce Lincoln in his work would call the right costume or the relevant insignia to write Kelzang’s *namtar*. Chödzin was not a monk or a disciple who could promote her Buddhist acumen. Moreover, Chödzin did not have any authority (or honor or prestige) within his own family as strained relations with his stepson Dépön carried over into the memorialization process of Kelzang. Furthermore, Chödzin said

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<sup>404</sup> Motherhood in Indian Buddhist texts emphasizes women who have renounced householder life and their attachment to raising children. Most of these texts do not emphasize what Ohnuma labels as “particular mothers.” Note that Maya, the mother who gave birth to the Buddha, died one week afterward and became more of a non-threatening deity while Mahapajapati renounced householder life later in her life and became a nun. Ohnuma *Ties that Bind: Maternal Imagery and Discourse in Indian Buddhism*.

<sup>405</sup> Singh’s fieldwork in India talks about intensities or flashpoints that wax and wane in localities, in various relationships, including the contestation of authority in divine or human forms, within families, castes, negotiating. I use his term in my dissertation as a way to label these flashpoints of authority to show their volatility from multiple causes. *Poverty and the Quest for Life*, 26.

that Dépön did not trust him to write the *namtar* out of fear that Chödzin's version would include stories about himself as Kelzang's caretaker during the Cultural Revolution when she worked as a laborer outside of Hezuo (Chapter 3). Nor would Chödzin produce the right kind of material in a *namtar* especially if he incorporated aspects of Machik Lapdrön's life story as a real mother in the twelfth century to legitimate or even rehabilitate Kelzang's story and her authority as a married *trülku* with children, a tactic first introduced in Chapter 3. In other words, Chödzin's ideal *namtar*—or what could be seen as a hybrid text that highlights both religion and politics—would incorporate Kelzang's actual motherhood *into* the story much like a biography about Machik Lapdrön in the nineteenth century did, as shown below. Yet Gendün Darjé did not want to discuss anything that would shift the focus of Kelzang's *namtar* to the stories that he wants to sweep under the rug because they do not help him recreate the conditions of her sanctity in the Gungru lineage.

But recreating these conditions of Kelzang's sanctity proved to be impossible at this time for many reasons. One reason is community and institutional apathy about Kelzang that enabled this flashpoint between an unlikely group of stakeholders to write her *namtar* (a reluctant monk, Kelzang's son Dépön and her husband Chödzin) to boil over. In reality, this multi-faceted flashpoint over the collapse of Kelzang's *namtar* and the stakes of sanctifying her non-traditional life in a text correlates with the preceding flashpoints or discontinuities described earlier with oral stories from voices not normally included in a *namtar*.<sup>406</sup> To this point, the canceled production of Kelzang's *namtar* fits with the breaks, fissures and doubt exposed in Kelzang's story—from her birth, to her contested selection, to her challenged seat, to her forced laicization, to her three marriages and later to her retreat from the public eye.<sup>407</sup>

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<sup>406</sup> By discontinuity I refer to Foucault's critique in *Archeology of Knowledge*, 12 of the master narratives that tend to present stories in an evolutive curve and overlook fissures and discontinuity or the fragment. This dissertation looks more at the fragment—the story that will not be told in the text, the story that will be minimized contra a more packaged presentation that smooths over these rougher edges.

<sup>407</sup> Mathijs Pelkmans, *Ethnographies of Doubt: Faith and Uncertainty in Contemporary Societies*, 8, 16. Doubt and knowledge, i.e., the opportunity to advance knowledge, lies in understanding doubt that often times is

In the end, the production of Kelzang's *namtar* could not divorce itself from these complexities that defined Kelzang's vexed authority and contributed to her loss of honor and prestige—complexities that caused the cancelation of her *namtar* in what would have been a re-adaptation of the Gungru master narrative in the twenty-first century.

As it turns out, producing or reproducing a master narrative in a *namtar* about Kelzang became synonymous with the stakeholders' competing agendas over genre (what material fits a *namtar*) and gender (competing discourses of motherhood) as the first three sections show beginning with Kelzang's obituary in Part I. The second and third sections analyze the conflict over Kelzang's *namtar*—what to write and who should write it. Notably, these competing agendas not only elucidate the vacillating nature of Kelzang's authority in Gengya and Labrang seven years after her passing, but how the process to produce Kelzang's authority in a *namtar* in a reconstituted master narrative unraveled at its seams.<sup>408</sup>

Therefore, instead of minimizing or forgetting this interregnum process as if it never happened as any future text about Kelzang is sure to do, this chapter re-centers the unraveling of Kelzang's *namtar*, i.e., the complex process to memorialize her within the annals of the Gungru lineage. Furthermore, if understood in tandem with the tale of the delayed search to find the Seventh Gungru *trülku* that elaborates community and institutional disinterest in Kelzang and the Gungru lineage as the fourth section describes, it is possible to better understand that writing Kelzang's *namtar* could not happen at this time. Rather, the (un)-making of Kelzang's *namtar* and the slow search for the Seventh Gungru *trülku* symbolized and represented a community—and Kelzang's authority—still very much in a state of flux.

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overlooked in the quest for continuity. Doubt often emerges when authority structures are eroding due to rapid changes in political and social environment.

<sup>408</sup> See Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 12 for the discussion about how master narrative “reconstitute a tradition evolutive curve.”

## **Part I**

### **Authority Promoted: Kelzang's Son Dépön Uses Obituary to Laud his Mother**

Dépön Tashi handed me an electronic copy of his mother Kelzang's obituary in July 2013 in what was to my knowledge the first attempt to produce an official coherent narrative about Kelzang. Even though it is not clear if Dépön helped write any of Kelzang's unsigned and unpublished obituary that was likely produced by the PRC due to its demarcation as an official government presentation about Kelzang, he nonetheless became one of the main gatekeepers of the text. And while it is also still unclear when and where this obituary was ever published across Amdo, Tibet, China or on the Worldwide web as internet searches have come up empty, Dépön clearly had a purpose in handing out this text. He wanted to disseminate this story (at least to me) that stitches together the rough edges about what he told me was his mother's "strange story."<sup>409</sup>

Despite Dépön never elaborating to me what he meant by his mother's strange story—he never returned my calls or answered texts after 2014—the previous three chapters illustrate many reasons why he and his family (his three siblings) would want to get out in front of Kelzang's story and shape the narrative-making process as soon as possible and smooth over any doubt about Kelzang. These reasons include accounts of her contested selection as the Sixth Gungru in the 1940s amidst the grassland violence between Gengya and her native Jiawu (Chapter 2). They comprise her forced laicization in 1958 (a sexual assault) followed by her three marriages, four children and the trauma that she experienced during the Cultural Revolution period (1958-1978) including, sexual assault, divorce and domestic violence (Chapter 3). They encompass the massive identity confusion with Damtsik Drölma who challenged Kelzang for her throne first in the 1940s and then again in the 1980s and 1990s (Chapters 2 and 4). They include stories of how Kelzang sat awkwardly in the

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<sup>409</sup> I spoke to Dépön in July 2014 in Labrang; we have not met since that time. Before that in 2013 he met with me in a restaurant in Labrang and gave me the obituary on a zip drive.

audience as a lay person for one of the Jamyang Zhepa's teachings in Gengya instead of on stage with him (Chapter 4). And significantly, they include Dépön Tashi's bitter feud with Drakkar as detailed in Chapter 4 over land development at Drakkar that created a wedge between Kelzang's family and the monastery and a sense of distance and apathy that has been hard to overcome; Dépön also feuded with the manager of Kelzang's estate for whom he has had little contact.

Thus, given the oddities of Kelzang's story and Dépön's own controversial role in it, it makes sense that he would be eager to sponsor an official document that utilized the main legitimating and narrative strategies contained in the *Lotus Vine* or what I have labeled to be the "Gungru master narrative." Ironically for Dépön, these strategies included him promoting her obituary that represented his own mother's authority as an emanation of the famous Machik Lapdrön and also as a figure who acted like a mother for monks, nuns and the laity around Gengya and Labrang. For this evocative story presents an arc of continuity about Kelzang within the Gungru lineage and also checks all the boxes in that it promotes the interests of the PRC and the Tibetan monastic establishment more broadly by celebrating Kelzang as a beloved compassionate agent of peace.

Therefore, given the high stakes for Dépön to control the narrative about his mother within the Gungru lineage, it is not surprising that he supported a story that would minimize any impact of Kelzang's motherhood, including his own contentious part in feuding with Drakkar. It made sense for the somewhat unpopular Dépön to propagate the type of story about Kelzang that ironically left him and his siblings and any notion of what happened to Kelzang after she laicized in 1958 and through the Cultural Revolution out of the text. This is because the trauma that befell Kelzang and the life-altering experiences she lived through, was not the story that the Tibetan religious establishment would support. Kelzang's motherhood would not, in the end, legitimate her authority in the type of continuous narrative

storyline within the pantheon of the Gungru lineage like a story that linked Kelzang to the prominent “authorizing referent” of Machik would. Additionally, the current political realities in the PRC necessitated that the obituary not discuss Kelzang’s actual motherhood of her four children that occurred during the Cultural Revolution period—a hot button topic that the PRC would just as soon never see exposed in this context.

For Dépön, what better way to elevate his mother Kelzang’s authority as the Gungru *trülku* than to support a story in her obituary that re-deployed this same legitimating strategy as the *Lotus Vine* attests. On this front, the obituary aims to “reconstitute a tradition” of Kelzang as the Great Mother Machik including a lengthy and researched account of Machik’s own life and accomplishments as the founder and teacher of chö at Zangrikharmar in the TAR. This appeared before a description of Kelzang’s life as the Gungru *trülku* and right after an account of Kelzang’s funeral (See also Chapter 1 and also Appendix I, Part II for a translation). The strategic placement of Machik’s life story (or short biography) near the top of Kelzang’s obituary illustrates the primacy of the iconic Machik in legitimating Kelzang’s authority as an important venerable mother-like figure in Gengya and across Amdo. In this vein, the obituary depicts Kelzang as a surrogate mother figure who performed many good deeds in the local community as a Buddhist exemplar and a heroine who helped rebuild Drakkar after the Cultural Revolution. In addition, the obituary depicts Kelzang managing new nunneries in Labrang, solving numerous deadly grassland disputes around Gengya and helping to re-establish local relations between Tibetan communities on the same grasslands that her Gungru predecessors once lived, as the first chapter illustrates.

Thus, by linking Kelzang’s obituary to the Gungru lineage’s past, by tapping into the *Lotus Vine namtar* that was (and remains) one of the main sources of authority in the Gungru lineage,<sup>410</sup> the obituary for Dépön’s purposes exemplifies the ideal storyline that would help

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<sup>410</sup> See Diemberger’s definition of textual authority, *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty*, 4-5.

him best represent the conditions that would recreate Kelzang's sanctity in the Gungru lineage. Moreover, in paying fealty to the textual authority of the *Lotus Vine* and the Machik-centric narrative contained therein, the obituary also accomplished another important goal that Dépön and others in Kelzang's family would stand behind. By stitching together a narrative of continuity about Kelzang's non-traditional life story, the obituary proffered a model of redemption for Kelzang, if not rehabilitation, that resembles other prominent auto/biographical and hagiographical works across the religious spectrum through space and time. For example, in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As told to Alex Haley*, Haley, a Civil Rights advocate who was Malcolm X's collaborator, helped mediate Malcolm's story to smooth over the rough spots and normalize his life into a narrative of redemption and conversion. Haley presented the story of the Nation of Islam leader Malcolm's conversion from his criminal past and more strident positions on Civil Rights in the 1960s to be a beacon of a unified and inclusive pan-African Islamic viewpoint; Malcolm's daughter Ilyasah Shabazz furthered this redemptive process by contributing a new forward to the autobiography in the 1990s that coincided with the release of the movie *X*.<sup>411</sup>

Striking a similar chord, one could argue that Catholic Saint Bonaventure's famous biography of Saint Francis of Assisi in the thirteenth century shows how Francis redeemed his materialistic ways to pursue the path of serving others, including the very poor and sick, thereby legitimating Francis' authority as a Franciscan Catholic exemplar going forward.<sup>412</sup> The most prominent Tibetan example in *The Life of Milarepa* describes how a Tibetan yogi from the fifteenth century redeemed the authority of onetime villain Milarepa into a hero of the Kagyü Buddhist sect as the Kagyü strove for power against the Geluk sect in Central Tibet with a *namtar*.<sup>413</sup> Based loosely on the story of the Buddha who renounced suffering

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<sup>411</sup> See *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as told to Alex Haley*, 1965.

<sup>412</sup> St. Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis of Assisi: The Biography of St. Francis of Assisi and the Story of his Followers*, 2010. This text was originally published in English in 1867.

<sup>413</sup> See Quintman's *Yogi and the Madman*, 2013.

for enlightenment, the Milarepa story became the foundation for many *namtar* going forward, including the *Lotus Vine* and also strikingly Kelzang's coherent obituary that in many ways reads like a proto-*namtar*.

Yet despite possessing many of the appropriate elements in terms of the narrative and legitimating strategies to promote Kelzang's authority within the Gungru lineage, Kelzang's obituary cannot stand in for a *namtar*. This is because the obituary that chronicles Kelzang's birth, her enthronement, her Buddhist acumen and the many meritorious deeds that she performed in the monastic and lay communities like a *namtar* was most likely authored within the PRC government and not by a traditional monk or disciple. In the end, even though the obituary afforded Dépön a chance to influence the narrative (at least with me) about his mother, an author who would be considered the appropriate or right author did not write the text. This detail of authorship proved to be a crucial ingredient to producing Kelzang's *namtar* and ultimately legitimating her authority as explained in the next two sections.

On the other hand, Kelzang's obituary signified the model story that could produce Kelzang's authority within the Gungru lineage, the type of story that stitches together the discontinuity of Kelzang's non-traditional life as a laicized *trülku* mother. However, replicating the obituary in the form of a *namtar* has proven to be much easier said than done. This is because the doubt of Kelzang's life as a laicized *trülku* mother—the complicated story of the discontinuity of the political, social and gendered contexts of Gengya and Labrang—could not be eradicated from the process to produce and legitimate Kelzang's authority in a *namtar*. The next section shows what happens when this process—finding the ideal author to write the pitch-perfect narrative—completely falls apart.



## Part II

### Authority, Contested: *Namtar* Falls Apart as Monk Author Quits

Gendün Darjé told me in September 2018 in a restaurant in Labrang that a sore shoulder had prohibited him from writing and finishing Kelzang's *namtar*. But the Labrang monk's body language that afternoon signaled a much more pained story. I suspected that due to his long pause to my initial question about him finishing Kelzang's *namtar* that a different kind of piercing pain had blocked the *namtar*-writing process and had done so for some time. I sensed that going into our second interview (the first was in 2017 in Labrang) that Gendün Darjé did not really want to write the *namtar* about Kelzang with whom he was friendly but was not a disciple. Disciples often serve as authors of their teacher's *namtar* and then procure documents like a dossier to write the text.<sup>414</sup> For Gendün Darjé, this *namtar* assignment seemed like it was just that to him—an unwanted burden of an assignment for which he wanted to say no but did not.

Finally, after multiple re-phrasings of the original question, Gendün Darjé revealed to me one of the main reasons why he stopped writing Kelzang's *namtar*—and the moment was rife with tension. He said in a voice barely audible above a whisper that he had not worked on the *namtar* for nearly a year because of a bitter conflict with Kelzang's son Dépön Tashi, who as mentioned above, was in charge of Kelzang's *namtar*. Gendün Darjé said in the 2018 interview that Dépön and his half-brother Dolo (Kelzang's first son from a different father) called him one night in 2017. Gendün Darjé stated:

“Those two [Dépön Tashi and Dolo] called me up and demanded to know when [Kelzang's] *namtar* would be finished. I told them, ‘I don't know!’ and then I hung up the phone. I have not spoken to them since.”<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> Two interviews with Gendün Darjé, the first in September 2017 in Labrang by author. The second was in September 2018 in Labrang by the author.

<sup>415</sup> Interview with Gendün Darjé in September 2018 in Labrang by the author.

Gendün Darjé said in our first interview in 2017 that Dépön and Dolo had called him to ask if they could see what he had written for Kelzang's *namtar*; I could not confirm if this was in fact the same call or from a different call. Gendün Darjé stated:

I said to them, ‘This is my piece [of writing] why should I give it to you? I said I wouldn’t give it to them and they were angry with me. Dépön Tashi is not a good person and he only wants to make money from [publishing] her *namtar*.<sup>416</sup>

Gendün Darjé did not elaborate to me on what he meant by Dépön “making money” off of Kelzang's *namtar*. And Dépön has not answered any of my calls or returned my texts to multiple phone numbers since 2014 in my attempt to corroborate Gendün Darjé's version of his phone call (s) to Gendün Darjé; Dolo answered his cell phone in 2018 but he did not agree to meet with me in person. Local sources in Drakkar say that Dépön has not been seen around Drakkar much in recent years as the feud simmered between him and the monastery and also between him and the monk manager at the Gungru estate (Chapters 3 and 4).

Yet, as it turned out, Gendün Darjé's dispute with Dépön was not the only conflict that hindered Kelzang's *namtar* at this time. A clash ensued between the Labrang monk Gendün Darjé and Kelzang's third husband Chödzin over who would become the main author of Kelzang's *namtar* and what type of material would be considered appropriate in the text. Or said in another way, a battle ensued over who was more qualified to write Kelzang's *namtar*—a monk or a lay man—with each impugning the other's abilities to write the text. Chödzin said that he wanted to contribute historical and social details in Kelzang's *namtar* and perhaps tell part of his own story including how he married Kelzang during the Cultural Revolution (Chapter 3) and later took care of her. This proved to be a non-starter for Gendün Darjé who as a monk at Labrang only wanted to include what he labeled as “religious details”

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<sup>416</sup> Interview with Gendün Darjé at restaurant in September 2017 in Labrang by the author.

about Kelzang performing various rituals and doctrine as per the convention of *namtar*. Strikingly, they each expressed different ideas about how to best deploy the prominent Tibetan female authorizing referent Machik Lapdrön, in Kelzang's *namtar*. Gendün Darjé's standpoint aligned more with Kelzang's obituary and also with the *Lotus Vine's* portrayal of the Great Mother Machik Lapdrön as a Buddhist practitioner and as a unifying figure. Chödzin, however, hinted at strategically using the story of Machik's actual motherhood of five children in the twelfth century as reflective of Kelzang actually having four children of her own, as explained below.

In the end, the process to write Kelzang's *namtar* and to re-create the Gungru master narrative could not overcome what some might call the controversy surrounding her life, i.e., the reality that Kelzang's authority had diminished with her audience in Gengya and Labrang as a thrice-married mother and a PRC government worker. Nor could this process overcome the multitude of stakeholders who wanted to lay their own claim to her story at this juncture. The result is a riveting look into the crafting of a biography that raises questions about authorship, gender and constraints of the *namtar* genre with the high-stakes production of religious authority on the ground—authority that is not seamless as it is often projected to be.

#### *Gendün Darjé and writing of Kelzang's namtar: Finding the "right" author*

Gendün Darjé stared at his food when I asked him in 2018 why he agreed to write Kelzang's *namtar*. During our first interview in 2017, Gendün Darjé said that no one coerced him into writing Kelzang's *namtar* and that Kelzang's son Dépön asked him to do it sometime before Kelzang passed away in 2013. But Gendün Darjé also admitted that he was not the first or even the second choice for the job—a task usually assigned to a disciple or a scholar-monk like Zhangtön who wrote the *Lotus Vine* about the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo (See Chapter 1). To this point, one of Zhangtön's disciples, Lozang Tsultrim, wrote

Zhangtön's *namtar*. In some cases, a group of disciples, religious leaders and monks contribute to write a *namtar* as Hildegard Diemberger posits as a possibility in the fifteenth-century biography of Chökyi Drönma, the first female *trülku* of the Samding Dorjé Phakmo *trülku* lineage.<sup>417</sup>

But unlike Rindzin Pelmo, Zhangtön and Chökyi Drönma's cases, Kelzang, who said in 2010 that, "I don't have anything to do with religion because I am a mother with all of these kids," did not have many Buddhist disciples or knowledgeable scholars who wanted to write her *namtar*. It is not clear if monk Jikmé Tenpa (dates unknown), who is Kelzang's student of chö from Qinghai but is not affiliated with Drakkar or Labrang, was ever asked to write Kelzang's *namtar*. Moreover, Gendün Darjé said that scholar/monk Könchok Gyatso of Drakkar, who would have been the ideal author to write Kelzang's *namtar* since he published books in 2008 and 2013, respectively, about Gengya, Drakkar and the Gungru lineage, declined to write her *namtar*. An accomplished gëshé (an advanced monastic degree holder), Könchok Gyatso told Gendün Darjé that he would not write the *namtar* because he did not like Dépön Tashi. This occurred in the wake of Dépön Tashi's feud with Drakkar monks over ownership and development of land near the Drakkar Cave (See Chapter 4). Thus, Könchok Gyatso stayed out of the literary fray. Gendün Darjé said:

Könchok Gyatso did not want to write [Kelzang's] *namtar*. He didn't like Dépön Tashi because they had the conflicts about the Drakkar Cave. Könchok Gyatso said something to me like this, 'If Dépön Tashi is involved, I will not write it.' So, I had to do it. Dépön Tashi had tried to control Drakkar's development, the [land development] issues with the cave. He would come up to Drakkar and say, 'I am Alak Gungru's son, this house [Kelzang's estate] is mine, Alak Gungru's property is mine, it's all mine.

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<sup>417</sup> Diemberger, *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty*, 2007, 84.

When she was alive he was like this and he is still like this. The Drakkar monks don't like him. Könchok Gyatso doesn't like him.<sup>418</sup>

Könchok Gyatso chose his words carefully in our interview in 2016 at Drakkar when I asked him whether he would write Kelzang's *namtar*. This interview occurred prior to my confirming that Labrang's Gendün Darjé had agreed to write Kelzang's *namtar*. In fact, Könchok Gyatso cleared his throat and paused for several seconds that day before he answered the question about the status of Kelzang's *namtar*: "I don't know this at the moment (2016). I myself don't have any plan to write about this yet."

Könchok Gyatso's judiciousness in speaking about Kelzang's *namtar* not only highlighted the sensitivity around writing her life story in a *namtar*, but also the residual effects of Kelzang's waning authority at Drakkar with monks from the Gungru lineage's main institutional support in Drakkar. Könchok Gyatso seemed reticent to say that he did not intend to write Kelzang's *namtar* let alone bring up his criticism of Kelzang's children; he previously expounded on Drakkar's conflicts with Kelzang's children (primarily with Dépön Tashi) over land development near the Drakkar Cave (Chapter 4). Moreover, Könchok Gyatso did not discuss with me who had agreed to write Kelzang's *namtar*, perhaps because he did not know that Gendün Darjé consented to do it. Or more likely, Könchok Gyatso did not want to interject his own critical comment about the increased tensions surrounding the production of Kelzang's *namtar*, in particular due to his enmity toward Dépön Tashi, or be seen as questioning Gendün Darjé's abilities to write the text.

Therefore, given the tense backdrop surrounding Könchok Gyatso's abstention from writing Kelzang's *namtar*, the question remained as to why Gendün Darjé, a monk who had never authored a text, agreed to write Kelzang's *namtar*. Or phrased another way, a question

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<sup>418</sup> Interviews with Gendün Darjé in September 2017 and September 2018 in Labrang by the author.

remained as to why Dépön ever asked the inexperienced Gendün Darjé to write her *namtar*. Was it because no one else in the monastic establishment wanted to do it due to the friction with Dépön that had caused Kelzang to retreat more from Drakkar? Or to be more blunt was it because no one else cared about Kelzang and the Gungru lineage enough to write her *namtar*? Aside from being a monk who donned the appropriate costume of monastic robes, perhaps Gendün Darjé agreed to write Kelzang's *namtar* before she passed away in 2013 because both he and Kelzang's family hail from the same home herding village of Gengya Zhölkor; Kelzang's family moved to Gengya Zhölkor after arriving in Gengya from Kelzang's birth area of Jiawu in the 1940s. Significantly, Gengya Zhölkor was also the hometown of the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo, a fact that gave Zhölkor and even Gendün Darjé by extension an added layer of identification and legitimacy with the Gungru lineage and a reason to write the text. Gendün Darjé said that he knew Kelzang but did not maintain a close connection with her. He said that, "I know her and she knows me, so that's the reason I decided to write this. We are not close, we're not personal friends."<sup>419</sup>

Gendün Darjé's situation, however, is not too out of the ordinary since being a close disciple is not always a prerequisite to write a *namtar* as the biography about non-monastic lineage holder Tokden Shakya Shri (1853-1919) shows in the twentieth century in Kham. Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa illustrates in her analysis of Shakya Shri's biography that his main biographer, the *trülku* Katok Situ (1880-1925), was not a disciple of Shakya Shri but a renowned scholar within the larger Nyingma Buddhist community.<sup>420</sup> Therefore, even though Shakya Shri maintained a large following, Holmes-Tagchungdarpa shows that when it came time to write his biography that a group of Shakya Shri's disciples decided upon the "learned and eloquent Katok Situ" to legitimate Shakya Shri's authority within the parameters of perpetuating and promoting his lineage. But for Kelzang's *namtar*, Gendün Darjé did not

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<sup>419</sup> Interview with Gendün Darjé in September 2017 in Labrang by the author.

<sup>420</sup> Holmes-Tagchungdarpa, *The Social Life of Tibetan Biography*, 8.

have the pedigree as a learned scholar in Gengya and Labrang. In fact, a Tibetan scholar Hortsang Lhogyel of Lanzhou who knew both Kelzang and Chödzin well and lived with them in Labrang when he was then married to Kelzang's attendant in the early 2000's, said in an interview that he had never heard of Gendün Darjé or that he was writing Kelzang's *namtar*.<sup>421</sup> Hortsang Lhogyel said, "Who is he (Gendün Darjé)? He's not a scholar because if he was, I would surely know him." Making matters worse for Gendün Darjé was that Gendün Darjé's relationship with both Chödzin and Dépön Tashi, who was in charge of his mother's *namtar* just like Shakya Shri's son commandeered the project to write his father's *namtar*, was frayed if not completely fractured (Chapters 3 and 4).

In any event, Gendün Darjé's tepid decision to write Kelzang's *namtar* soon encountered an even greater level of turbulence as he started to gather information about Kelzang—a battle of *who* should write *what* material in the text. Gendün Darjé said that he spoke with Kelzang about her life at Kelzang and Chödzin's home in Labrang and that Chödzin disapproved of the monk's efforts. Chödzin said that he had already written parts of Kelzang's history and did not like the monk's intrusion into what Chödzin thought was his own domain as the curator of Kelzang's life story. Gendün Darjé and Chödzin's disagreement became so pronounced during a meeting at Kelzang and Chödzin's home in Labrang that Kelzang, according to Gendün Darjé, told both men that they could each write their own materials. This solution seemed entirely plausible given the presence of multivocality in the *namtar* genre as recent scholarship about Tibetan life-writing illustrates, although this scholarship does not show any precedent of how a monk (Gendün Darjé) and a lay husband (Chödzin) could serve as authors of the same *namtar*.<sup>422</sup> Gendün Darjé discussed with me this tension that exposed the high stakes over who should write what material in

Kelzang's *namtar*:

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<sup>421</sup> Interview with Hortsang Lhogyel in September 2018 in Lanzhou, Gansu, by the author.

<sup>422</sup> See Diemberger, *When A Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty*, 83. Jacoby, *Love and Liberation*, Chapter 3; Janet Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self*, 103; Bessenger, *Echoes of Enlightenment*, Chapter 2.

I met with Kelzang, three, four, five times at her house. I said to her, ‘You are not a regular person, you have to have a definite history [written properly in a *namtar*]. You tell me what you did when you were young and I will write about it.’ If you tell me information, I will write about it.’ When I talked to Alak Gungru like this, Chödzin was there and he did not like it. He said, ‘This is my job, I will write it, you please leave.’ Kelzang said, ‘You both can write.’ So, I didn’t care. I stopped and let him write. Chödzin did not like [me being there].<sup>423</sup>

Yet the tensions between these two men over who should write what material in Kelzang’s *namtar* never subsided even after Kelzang’s directive at a détente. In fact, Gendün Darjé told me in both interviews (2017 and 2018) that he did not want to rely on nor include any historical and political materials in Kelzang’s *namtar* because *namtars*, he said, “should be about religion” and not include political and historical material. Gendün Darjé criticized Chödzin’s writing when he finally read it (the piece that included details about Kelzang’s life until the year 2005) and stated:

When Alak Gungru [Kelzang] passed away [2013], I went to look at Chödzin’s writing. I saw it and it wasn’t good. He cannot write. It’s not the style of a *namtar*. He didn’t write it as a *namtar* should be written. He wrote it his way and he wrote it very badly. A *namtar* should not have a lot of history. But what he wrote is not history, he just randomly wrote whatever he wants to write about. What he wrote, I disagree with.<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>423</sup> Interviews with Gendün Darjé in September 2017 and September 2018 in Labrang by the author.

<sup>424</sup> Interview with Gendün Darjé in September 2017 in Labrang by the author.



While I discuss Chödzin’s response to Gendün Darjé’s criticism in the third section, Gendün Darjé’s disapproval of Chödzin’s writing exposed the conflict over what material is considered suitable for her *namtar*. The dispute between Chödzin and Gendün Darjé seemed to break down along the lines of protecting the conventions of the *namtar* genre from what Briggs and Bauman call possible “leaks” in the genre as influenced by temporal conditions—conditions that Gendün Darjé did not want to include in the text.<sup>425</sup> In fact, Gendün Darjé’s standpoint about *namtar* aligns more with Holly Gayley’s recent claim about *namtar* from her analysis of the *namtar* about the female Treasure Revealer Taré Lhamo written in the early twenty-first century. Taré Lhamo was a contemporary of Kelzang and she endured the Cultural Revolution in the nearby Golok region of Amdo in Qinghai province like Kelzang did. Gayley writes in her 2017 monograph that (political and social details) “do not serve the purpose of *namtar*. . . In its classical form, *namtar* is not meant to be a testimonial of an ordinary person who survived tragedy. Instead, the genre emphasizes the enlightened activities of a Buddhist master, particularly when narrated by a devoted disciple.”<sup>426</sup>

In this vein, Gendün Darjé wanted to fulfil his mission as the author of Kelzang’s *namtar* “to go around and ask people” their impressions of Kelzang as it pertained to her being a good Buddhist figure/religious practitioner—not an ordinary person. Gendün Darjé said that the people he talked to all said to him, “She’s a good person, she’s a good person, she’s a good person,” without the author elaborating the content of the questions/topics he asked and to whom. Despite the lack of specifics, this interviewing methodology adopted by Gendün Darjé fits somewhat with what Hildegard Diemberger described as the mission of the unknown biographer in her work on the First Samding Dorjé Phakmo Chökyi Drönma’s *namtar*. Diemberger notes that “once a biographer decides to embark on a project, he drew upon whatever was available of such preexisting notes as well as oral accounts of people who

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<sup>425</sup> Bauman and Briggs, “Genre Intertextuality and Social Power” in *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 148.

<sup>426</sup> Gayley, *Love Letters from Golok*, 78.

had shared experiences with Chökyi Drönma.”<sup>427</sup> Moreover, this model also corresponds with the blueprint of the *Lotus Vine* of 1897 when the author Zhangtön included copious dialogue and/or anecdotes from a variety of sources to comprise his master narrative about his teacher the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo as shown in the first chapter.

Yet, even though Gendün Darjé did not discuss what he asked others nor would he say if he used the *Lotus Vine* as a model for Kelzang’s *namtar*, he did offer some clues as to what would be considered copasetic in her *namtar*: Buddhist heroes. Gendün Darjé felt at ease when he talked about Machik Lapdrön and other Tibetan luminaries, thereby elucidating aspects of what Gayley terms as a “Buddhist framework” in a *namtar* for Kelzang. For example, Gendün Darjé spoke about Kelzang as an emanation of the venerated Machik as per tradition of the Gungru lineage as shown in the *Lotus Vine* and also in Kelzang’s obituary. “Kelzang is (an emanation of) Machik Lapdrön who created chö and she’s a great religious figure...and she practiced Buddhism very well,” Gendün Darjé said.<sup>428</sup> Even though Gendün Darjé did not discuss to what extent he would utilize Machik in Kelzang’s *namtar*, the fact that he mentioned what current scholars have called an “authorizing referent” of Machik shows the salience and the resilience of Machik as one of the consummate Buddhist and temporal symbols to legitimate Kelzang’s authority in the *namtar*.

Furthermore, Gendün Darjé also discussed with conviction and detail when the current Fourteenth Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso (1936-) and the Tenth Panchen Lozang Trinlé Lhündrub Chökyi Gyaltzen (1938-1989) visited Labrang in 1955. He said that he would mention how Kelzang met the Dalai Lama when she was 18 or 19 years old at Labrang, although Gendün Darjé did not specify what she and the Dalai Lama discussed or what teachings she might have received from him. Moreover, Gendün Darjé said that he would

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<sup>427</sup> Diemberger, *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty*, 84.

<sup>428</sup> Interview with Gendün Darjé in September 2017 in Labrang by the author.

talk about how the young Sixth Jamyang Zhepa met with Kelzang at her *nangchen* (religious estate) at Drakkar at the directive of the Dalai Lama. Gendün Darjé stated:

The Dalai Lama came [to Labrang] in 1955 and then the Panchen Lama came here. At that time, the Dalai Lama told the Jamyang Zhepa not to stay in Labrang and that he should go out and visit many places. When he was eight years old, the Jamyang Zhepa went to Gengya and stayed at Alak Gungru's *nangchen* for two months when Alak Gungru was 19-20 years old. ... The Dalai Lama went from Lhasa, Beijing, Lanzhou and Labrang on that trip. That is the last time he came here [Labrang].<sup>429</sup>

In this vein, Gendün Darjé's version of Kelzang's *namtar* resembles the *Lotus Vine* and Kelzang's obituary by legitimating Kelzang's authority as the Gungru *trülku* alongside the presence of elite male *trülku* like the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama. This fits with the *Lotus Vine*'s depiction of the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo who, as the first chapter shows, maintained ties in the nineteenth century with an elite group of *trülku* in Amdo that had religious and temporal meaning in Amdo, across Tibet and beyond.

However, Gendün Darjé, who said that in 2017 that he would make available to me any drafts of his *namtar* to peruse but never did so, also emphasized what would *not* be in the *namtar*—stories that showed the volatility and complexity of Kelzang's authority on the ground and in particular as a laicized *trülku* during and after the Cultural Revolution. He said there would be no discussion about Kelzang's laicization in 1958 nor her ensuing three marriages and motherhood of four children—not surprising given that Buddhist texts rarely if ever highlight real mothers. The biography would also not include Gendün Darjé's own account of how the Fifth Gungru *trülku* Könchok Tenpé Wangmo allegedly took her own life under pressure from locals in the 1930s who were upset that she could not curtail the deadly

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<sup>429</sup> Interview with Gendün Darjé in September 2017 in Labrang by the author.

grassland violence between herders in Gengya and Jiawu (Chapter 2). Nor would the biography feature stories about Kelzang's contested selection in the 1940s amidst the grassland violence and how another woman Damtsik Drölma of Qinghai challenged her throne, Gendün Darjé said.

In the end, my two intense interviews with Gendün Darjé were captivating both for what he said and significantly for what he did not say. Reading between the lines of his many terse answers and awkward pauses, Gendün Darjé clearly never felt comfortable writing Kelzang's *namtar*. He never outright said why he accepted this large responsibility, in particular given the bitter triangular conflict that ensued with Dépön and Chödzin. Perhaps owing to the fact that other monks had already turned him down, Dépön acted out of desperation and asked—or maybe even cajoled—Gendün Darjé to write the text. For, if we are to believe Gendün Darjé's accusation that Dépön wanted to make money off of Kelzang's *namtar*, then it stands to reason that Dépön likely wanted to publish *any* story written about Kelzang even if Gendün Darjé was not the most qualified author. Moreover, this drama also raises important questions about how much (or little) the monastic institutions of Drakkar and Labrang cared about Kelzang and writing her *namtar* at this time. The fourth section of this chapter offers some insight to this question when interviews detect a deep apathy about searching for Kelzang's *trülku* (the seventh Gungru) as an indictment on Kelzang's diminished authority as a lay mother within the monastic and lay community.

Despite Gendün Darjé's reticence, these two interviews were also captivating for what they revealed about his interpretation of the *namtar* genre, i.e., what he considers to be proper material for a *namtar* written by the appropriate person. The next section unpacks Chödzin's diametrically opposing view about what would be considered the best type of material for a *namtar* including his interpretation and a different use of Machik Lapdrön's actual motherhood to explain Kelzang's own motherhood of four children.

### Part III

#### The Right Material? Kelzang's Chödzin Makes Case to Write Wife's *Namtar*

As a foil to the more reticent Gendün Darjé, Kelzang's husband Chödzin rarely ran out of material to tell. Just as in the previous chapters where Chödzin attempted to curate Kelzang's life story and assert control of the narrative from the proverbial sidelines, Chödzin spoke at length with me about Kelzang's *namtar* and his role—or lack thereof—in the writing process as a former researcher and printer. For example, Chödzin discussed how he would incorporate Machik Lapdrön, who had five children in the twelfth century, into Kelzang's *namtar* to explain Kelzang's three marriages, her motherhood and his role as her husband as introduced in Chapter 3 and also below.

Eschewing a personal computer and other electronic devices in favor of scrapbooks of documents and photographs, Chödzin wrote two long essays by pen about Kelzang, including the second piece in 2018 that details her work in the PRC government. In fact, Chödzin said that the *namtar* author Gendün Darjé once waited for hours in front of his house in Xiahe to procure Chödzin's first document—the very document that Gendün Darjé said that he rejected because it was not written as “a *namtar* should be written.” Chödzin, meanwhile, said that this type of political and historical information should not be excluded from Kelzang's biography and that even Dépön Tashi, who had promoted the grand story contained in Kelzang's obituary, approached Gendün Darjé about including some historical information in Kelzang's *namtar*. At stake was the battle to present what each person deems to be the correct content in a *namtar*—or in some related form of biographical genre—that in turn would help legitimate Kelzang's authority within the Gungru lineage. Chödzin states:

Gendün Darjé doesn't know anything about politics; he is different from me, he doesn't have that kind of ability. [Dépön Tashi and Gendün Darjé] made the cancellation [of Kelzang's *namtar*] happen. I heard that a few years ago that Dépön Tashi had asked Gendün Darjé to write about

Kelzang's history and the monk said no. I heard that they were quarreling about it and Dépön Tashi has a bad temper. ...

My biography about Kelzang involves politics and I wrote all the government meetings that she attended. In 1956, Alak Gungru went to Beijing to study when she was 20 years old and she managed both politics and religion at this time. I don't know what Gendün Darjé is writing. I wrote my piece and told him, 'I will not contact you.' If we saw each other on the street, we wouldn't contact each other. It's not good to only write about the social aspects [of Kelzang's story], but I wrote about a combination of religion, politics and social. [An author] who knows religion and doesn't know politics, that's not good. Someone who only knows politics and not religion, that's not good. This is where we are stuck. ...

Through the years, I wrote the combination of religion and politics. But, what I wrote is not a *namtar*, it is a *baryik* [written document or combined document]. It's [a genre] that combines politics and religion. Later if my [step children] need to know about the religion they can read the religion part, if they want to know the political part they can read the political part. This monk [Gendün Darjé] doesn't like politics so he doesn't like what I wrote. We don't get along. But they [Gendün Darjé and Dépön Tashi] can't convince me to change or write as they want me to. If they write anything about the historical, political and cultural aspects of Kelzang's life, the government will not accept it and most local people won't accept it as true. They [Gendün Darjé and Dépön Tashi] don't have the credibility of a writer, they are just normal people and no one will read it. I have a draft. I am a writer and I have something to pass on. And

because I am a writer, the government will accept it and the local people will accept it, as well. I don't care what [Gendün Darjé and Tashi] do, I can publish my document. But I will wait to see what they will write about Alak Gungru.<sup>430</sup>

Chödzin's comment about writing a "*baryik*," or what some Tibetan scholars might call a "*benluk*" about the combination of religion and politics in various Tibetan contexts,<sup>431</sup> uncovers the gulf between Chödzin and Gendün Darjé on what material would be considered appropriate to publish in Kelzang's *namtar*. For Chödzin's "*baryik*," with "bar" meaning literally "middle or between," the document that straddles religion and politics works well as he considers the PRC government to be the arbiter of what gets published about Kelzang and accepted by readers. Along these lines, Chödzin's comments raise questions about the constraints of the *namtar* genre and the impact that these constraints have on understanding the construction of a religious figure's authority: Can and should the *namtar* genre bend to include some aspects of *baryik* or *benluk* (religion and politics) or should they remain mutually exclusive entities? In their work on genre and authority, Bauman and Briggs address the question of genre establishing a traditional textual authority and what happens when genres "leak" as genres become influenced by "elements of contextualization, social interaction and social relations."<sup>432</sup>

For example, some *namtar* like the one written about the First Jamyang Zhepa Nawang Tsöndrö (1648–1721) contain or "leak" controversial political information relevant to when the text was produced, the type of leak that Gendün Darjé wants to plug. In the case of the Jamyang Zhepa, contemporary scholar Jikmé Sam claimed that this *namtar* about the First Jamyang Zhepa "was not suitable for publication" at the time of his passing because it

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<sup>430</sup> Interviews with Chödzin from 2014-2017 in Labrang by the author.

<sup>431</sup> One Tibetan author used *benluk* to describe the lack of an inclusion of religion and politics when it came to describing in his research the life of Yéshé Tsogyel. I have found no other concrete usage of this term *benluk*.

<sup>432</sup> Bauman and Briggs, "Genre Intertextuality and Social Power" in *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 149.

would have questioned the First Jamyang Zhepa's reputation for his dispute with the regent to the Fifth Dalai Lama, Sanggyé Gyatso (1653-1705), who was later murdered in 1705. This controversial *namtar* also highlights the Jamyang Zhepa's allegiance to Mongolian leader Lazang Khan (d. 1717) and the Jamyang Zhepa's ardent opposition to the legitimacy of the regent-backed Sixth Dalai Lama Tsangyang Gyatso (1683-1706).<sup>433</sup> In short, this *namtar* described the dramatic political split in the ruling Geluk sect that eventually led to the Jamyang Zhepa leaving Central Tibet for his native Amdo and starting Labrang Monastery in 1709. As for the case of Kelzang's *namtar* in 2018, Gendün Darjé clearly wanted to control the scope of the text to prevent any further leakage about what actually happened to Kelzang before and during the Cultural Revolution and what some people across Amdo would deem as controversial. And while the monk author wanted nothing to do with this type of delicate material, avoiding it altogether proved to be challenging, if not impossible, given that Kelzang laicized, married, started a family, endured a challenge to her throne and worked in the CPPCC for over fifty years prior to, during and after the Cultural Revolution.

Yet, the dispute over content and conventions of genre notwithstanding, I suggest that the heart of this conflict between Gendün Darjé and Chödzin over the material in Kelzang's *namtar* revolved more around the question of *who* is the right person to write a *namtar* and the not so subtle gendered contexts that influenced this judgment. While Gendün Darjé donned the right costume as a robed monk even though he was not the top choice to write the text (or likely even the second), the question about Chödzin as a potential author or contributor to Kelzang's *namtar* seemed more clear cut from a monastic standpoint: as Kelzang's husband, Chödzin would never be worthy to write Kelzang's *namtar*. Nor was Chödzin ever deemed to be a suitable candidate to write Kelzang's *namtar* within his own family and in particular by his stepson Dépön who still has, as previous chapters show, deep-

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<sup>433</sup> See Jikmé Sam's analysis of the *namtar* written by the First Jamyang Zhepa's disciple in article titled, "A discussion about the conditions of the conflict between the regent Sanggyé Gyatso and Jamyang Zhepa Nawang Tsöndrü," year, NA.



seated ill feeling toward Chödzin since he left his wife and children and married Kelzang after Dépön's father Tashi Gyatso died in 1976. Dépön's feeling of antipathy toward Chödzin has not subsided and Dépön's decision to take charge of Kelzang's estate (Chapter 4) serve as the underbrush for this sustained conflict and a further determination to limit Chödzin's role in writing Kelzang's *namtar*.

Along these lines, Chödzin claims that both Dépön and Gendün Darjé fear that Chödzin would write himself into Kelzang's story and present himself as a savior to Kelzang who was a single mother with three children (Kelzang's first child lived in Gengya) working as a laborer outside of Hezuo, Gansu in the Cultural Revolution. Dépön and Gendün Darjé's suspicions have some merit. Chödzin has in many interviews portrayed himself as a humble servant of Kelzang perhaps to assuage any guilt he might have felt (or still does) for leaving his own family. He spoke as if he narrated a *namtar* where he himself was the main protagonist who served Kelzang well (Chapter 3). To be clear, it is not uncommon for authors to insert themselves into a *namtar* about the subject they write about, as scholars of such texts assert.<sup>434</sup> For instance, the *Lotus Vine* about the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo can be read as a story about the monk author/disciple Zhangtön who wanted to preserve the vibrant borderland community at Labrang in which he played a major role as a scholar and teacher in the nineteenth century (See Chapter 1). Chödzin addressed Dépön and Gendün Darjé's concerns about Chödzin inserting himself into Kelzang's *namtar*. Chödzin states:

They [Dépön Tashi] were afraid that my story would be in Kelzang's biography, so they asked Gendün Darjé to write it. Me being a lay person affected their decision not to let me write [for the official *namtar* project].

But I don't care about that. As a writer, there's a line that we cannot cross

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<sup>434</sup> James Taylor's "The Textualization of a Monastic Tradition: Forest Monks, Lineage and the Biographical Process in Thailand," in Juliane Schober, ed. *Sacred Biography and the Buddhist Traditions*, 1997, 291. See also the *Life of Milarepa* and Quintman's analysis separate analysis of how the story about Milarepa was very much the story of Tsangyun Heruka, a Kagyu yogi wanting to maintain power against the ruling Geluk Tibetans at that time in the fifteenth century.

as far as what I should and should not write. I know that line, they [Dépön and Gendün Darjé] don't. They think that if I write a *namtar* it will hurt the product because I am a lay person and Alak Gungru's husband. I have a remarkable success in religion and culture, so if I write [the *namtar*] they are afraid that I will write Alak Gungru's success as my success and it will affect the result of the *namtar*. Even though they are writing about Alak Gungru's achievements they [Dépön and Gendün Darjé] still need to ask me about them. The reason why Dépön asked someone from the outside [Gendün Darjé] to write the *namtar* is because he is a *tombawa* [a vow holder], and that Dépön Tashi is worried that I may write about my own achievements in it. That [the legitimacy of having a good monk at Labrang write it] is the only purpose [to get an outside writer to do it].<sup>435</sup>

While Chödzin said that he finished a draft of Kelzang's history in 2018, he has been loath to share with anyone a copy of his work (I asked him four times). Further, Chödzin said that he might publish an article that includes political and social details after the Seventh Gungru returns to Drakkar. This next subsection, however, describes one of Chödzin's tactics (at least one that he has used orally thus far) to re-deploy the authorizing referent of Machik but in a different way—by incorporating Machik's actual motherhood in Kelzang's *namtar* to legitimate Kelzang's own motherhood.

*Re-deploying Machik: strategy to rehabilitate and legitimate Kelzang's motherhood*

Whereas Gendün Darjé said that Kelzang's *namtar* will not mention her three marriages, her four children and her many other relatives, Chödzin alluded to a possible

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<sup>435</sup> Interview with Chödzin in 2016 in Labrang by the author.

successful legitimating strategy that would smooth over and redeem Kelzang's family life (an element that contributed to her loss of authority) in a text. He said that Kelzang's *namtar* will claim that her four children were born from the same father instead of two fathers (or likely three). Chödzin also cited Machik's motherhood of five children from the twelfth century, a story that was allegedly considered controversial at that time since Machik broke her monastic vow, as an example of how to legitimate—or even rehabilitate—Kelzang's authority in a text, as shown below. Remarkably, this tactic that would incorporate elements of Machik's story as a mother into Kelzang's story, could open the door for someone to one day write about the sensitive Cultural Revolution period and Kelzang's role as a mother in it. Chödzin stated:

If there is something wrong, you can smooth it over since that is the 'religious way' of writing a *namtar*. In an artistic way, you can write that Alak Gungru was a *khandroma* who had love and compassion and that she arrived to the human realm with her deep compassion. You can't write that the Cultural Revolution made her life very difficult and sad [because of political constraints]. And it's really bad to have multiple fathers for all the kids. Therefore, we [Kelzang's family] are discussing that we will say that all of the kids come from the same father. [Having more than one father] does not look good for future generations [of the Gungru lineage]. Before Machik Lapdrön had four or five children, but all of them came from the same father.<sup>436</sup>

Chödzin's allusion to Machik's motherhood in addition to the Buddhist version for which she later became famous marked a key move to re-deploy the authorizing referent of Machik to

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<sup>436</sup> Interview with Chödzin in 2016 in Labrang by the author.

legitimate and rehabilitate Kelzang's authority in a text. Chödzin said that Kelzang's story resembles Machik's noting that, "Machik's story is very, very big," meaning that it also includes her mothering of five children who then became a key part of Machik's liberation tale. To this point, Machik's story as a mother would help explain Kelzang's own marriages and motherhood and by extension Chödzin's role as her third husband for which he felt marginalized at times as an outsider (See Chapter 3 and 4).

However, Chödzin's move to utilize Machik's motherhood in a narrative has an actual published precedent from the nineteenth century in Sichuan. Tibetan yogi Jikdrel Chökyi Sengé (nineteenth century<sup>437</sup>) incorporated how Machik broke her monastic vow and mothered five children into her biography in the *Religious History of Zi Jé*, or *ZBCB*, in the Kham region of Sichuan. Whereas other historical sources mentioned Machik's "entering into a relationship" and discussed her children,<sup>438</sup> the *ZBCB* details Machik meeting yogi Topa Bhadra, engaging in consort practice and later having children together. The following translated section from the *ZBCB* (from Tibetan to German into English) elaborates this story and features her teachers and *dakinis* as agents who helped Machik overcome her anxiety about breaking her vow. Notably, this level of dialogue resembles Sera Khandro's consultation with *dakinis* to affirm her own path as a Treasure Revealer in Golok, Qinghai in the early twentieth century, as Sarah Jacoby analyzes in her work.<sup>439</sup> The *ZBCB* states:

Machik went to see this childless couple [a couple that was unable to have children] when she was 33 years old in E chung; the wife's name was Lhamo Drönma. Machik recited the *Bum* and the *Nitri* text for this

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<sup>437</sup> Few sources exist about Jikdrel Chökyi Sengé. Kollmar-Paulenz, *Der Schmuck Der Befreiung*, 32, says that most of the information she attained was from oral sources and that he was a figure in a non-sectarian movement that emerged in the nineteenth century in eastern Tibet in Sichuan, primarily in Kham. Kollmar-Paulenz's work written in German deduced that one of his famous students was the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and also the Rinpoche from Drakkar named Lozang Pelden Tendzin Sangdrak

<sup>438</sup> See Kollmar-Paulenz, *Der Schmuck Der Befreiung*, 72-81 for a list of sources that describe Machik's relationship with Topa.

<sup>439</sup> See Sarah Jacoby's *Love and Liberation*, 2014 for a discussion on *dakinis* serving as agents in Tibetan autobiographical works.

couple and in the area lived a man named Topa Bhadra who was born in Dkar in E in India. Lhamo Drönma asked him to come do a ritual and Machik was reciting the *Bum* when Topa did the ritual. He was paralyzed in astonishment by Machik and he stopped reciting the text. Lhamo Drönma asked, “Master Topa why didn’t you do the ritual?” He replies, “My spirit is happy and calm, I don’t feel like doing the ritual. Lhamo Drönma replied, “My husband and I feel similar.” Topa replies, “This nun [Machik] is blessed and her light rays of this blessing have touched us.” In that night a *dakini* of red color who had an eye in the forehead says to Machik, “You, the nun who is doing this ritual, because you have the *pranidhana* of the earlier and current existence, do *tapshé* consort practice. You have the karmic disposition to do it.” Machik said, “If I do so, something bad will come out of that because I am a nun and people will criticize me.” The *dakini* turned into white light and she said, “Because there will be benefit for all beings you will have a lineage of sons and those sons without meditating will become Buddhas. They will have magical skills without having to learn much, that’s why you have to practice *tapshé*, so later you will go into the heavenly spheres.” ...

After that the *dakini* made many other prophesies and she disappeared by rainbow and light. The next day, Topa came down and prostrated in front of Machik. It seems like he prostrated in front of her all day and as soon as night came he went to Machik and said, “You are blessed that you can recite perfect scripture, you are blessed that your speech is famous and you are blessed through the compassion and truth of the Buddha. Please give me Abhiseka, the teachings and empowerments.”

After Machik put the *Nitri* text on [Topa's] forehead, during the Abhiseka he would hold Machik's hand and said, "I ask you for an empowerment blessing so I can receive Buddhahood in this lifetime and in this body." After that, they did the *tapshé* and because of that the whole temple was filled with light. Then Lhamo Drönma came to the temple and thought, "Oh there's a fire in the temple!" And when she went there she saw Machik and Topa in *tapshé* and said, "That's impossible! One says that even the Jomo goddess keeps the ordained rules. Is she not seduced by a male demon?" Machik had this ticklish feeling in her feet. And Machik composed the verses: "The prophecy is mostly a temptation of a demon, of man and a woman." Also Lhamo Drönma became tempted when she saw Topa and Machik and believes [Machik] is seduced by the demon: "How seeing their *tapshé* is benefiting anyone I don't know," she thought. ...

Lhamo Drönma kept it a secret and didn't tell anyone. After that Lhamo Drönma gave some gifts to Machik which she gave to [her teacher] Garvapa in Yoru. The teacher says now, "Now Jomo, before you would honor those vows and keep them pure. Because of your earlier aspiration, Topa has the right karmic disposition to do *tapshé* with you. And don't be afraid and be friendly with him." When she met Kyotön Sönam she said, "After this, Topa, who knows the ritual and unified with me, it seems as all people from ü and Tsang are full of hatred." To which he responded, "I have heard a proverb that says, 'Defamation rides quickly on the horse of the winds.' I had a vision and a dream that through you there will be great benefit for all sentient beings and another prophecy that says, 'In the future a family lineage through the two of you [their lineage of disciples] will

appear that leads sentient beings to religion. Don't be afraid, practice *tapshé* with Topa.”<sup>440</sup>

Strikingly, this passage about Machik meeting Topa Bhadra provides a blueprint on how to possibly rehabilitate a figure like Kelzang whose life did not follow a normative narrative arc. Further, this passage shows how Machik's authority became entwined with the production of a story in the opportune context over eight centuries after Machik lived. To that point, Jikdrel Chökyi Sengé, who was also known as “The Crazy Madman from Senge,” legitimates Machik's authority as a virtuoso who practiced *tapshé* when Kham, as part of a non-sectarian movement, sought to distinguish itself from the traditional Geluk sect in Central Tibet.<sup>441</sup> The *ZBCB* quotes Machik as allegedly saying, “The people of Central Tibet are full of hatred,” in response to Machik's teacher Kyotön Sönam who tried to assuage her guilt of breaking her vow. This type of quote would have resonated with readers at this time in the nineteenth century in Sichuan although it is not known who exactly read the *ZBCB*. Furthermore, while there is no known link, the *ZBCB* came off the press around the same time as the *Lotus Vine* (1897) about Rindzin Pelmo that also incorporates Machik into the *Lotus Vine* narrative as well as allusions to Machik's real family. As the first chapter shows, the *Lotus Vine* praises elite Amdo *trülku* as reincarnations of Machik's three sons, a depiction that helped represent Rindzin Pelmo's authority and that of the Gungru lineage going forward as Kelzang's obituary illustrates.

Moreover, this type of strategy to rehabilitate the authority of Machik as exhibited in the *ZBCB* resembles stories from across the religious spectrum that depict how prominent figures can overcome controversy and scandal at the right time. Let's consider again the

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<sup>440</sup> See Kollmar Paulenz's, *Der Schmuck Der Befreiung*, 142-147 for her translation of the *ZBCB* in German; the entirety of her book is written in German. The translation from German into English is my own with the assistance of a native German speaker.

<sup>441</sup> See Tsomu, *The Rise of Gönpö Namgyel* and also the Gara Lama's resistance against Central Tibet and desire for self-rule in Kham as outlined in the dissertation's fourth chapter.

example of how Israeli kabbalist rabbi Baruch Abuhitzeira prevailed in the 1980s over the scandal of having an extramarital affair and going to prison for corruption to assume the mantle of the family lineage as the son of revered saint Israel Abuhitzeira. And while an official biography has not been written that details a version of this rehabilitation (to my knowledge), Yoram Bilu and Eyal Ben Ari illustrate how Baruch Abuhitzeira's most scandalous elements might one day be converted into a redemptive narrative framework as part of his life's journey. Thus, much like Machik's story that showed how she overcame the anxiety of breaking her vow and then started a family before becoming a renowned teacher, the account of Baruch Abuhitzeira shows how he utilized his scandals—corruption and adultery—as a strategy to garner authority with his followers at the appropriate time.<sup>442</sup> Or closer to home in Amdo, Sarah Jacoby analyzes how Treasure Revealer Sera Khandro (early twentieth century) represented public opinion about Sera Khandro's consort behavior with celibate monks in her autobiography to as Jacoby writes, “regain control of the storyline by presenting (Sera Khandro's) version of the scenarios that held the greatest potential to cause scandal.” To do this, Sera Khandro references her dialogues with *dakinis* who in some cases encouraged her to pursue the path of wisdom and bliss with a man; in short, Sera Khandro, as Jacoby asserts, “ventriloquized the *dakinis*' directives.”<sup>443</sup>

Whether someone will one day produce a similar type of redemptive tale about Kelzang is not yet clear. Far more straightforward is the story from the first two sections that maps out the compelling reasons why Kelzang's *namtar* was canceled as of September 2018. Chief among them are battles among the main stakeholders—the monk author Gendün Darjé, her son Dépön and Kelzang's third husband Chödzin—over what material should be included in a *namtar* and who should tell that story. The result illustrates how the volatility of Kelzang's authority—the complex reality of her selection, her laicization and having a

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<sup>442</sup>Yoram Bilu and Eyal Ben-Ari, “The Making of Modern Saints: Manufactured Charisma and the Abu Hatseiras of Israel, *American Ethnologist*, 1992, 675-680.

<sup>443</sup> See Jacoby, *Love and Liberation*, 227, 240-241.



family—implicated the attempt to present Kelzang as a beloved mother-like figure in the monastic and lay community as in her obituary and the *Lotus Vine*. However, this conflict surrounding Kelzang's *namtar* was not the only item of discord that beset Kelzang's memorialization during this interregnum period, nor was it the only dispute impacted by Kelzang's diminished authority. The process to find the Seventh Gungru *trülku* at Drakkar has also been delayed and affected by political, religious and economic factors in Labrang and Gengya as the next section discusses.

#### **Part IV**

#### **Authority, Delayed: Search for Kelzang's *trülku* on Hold in Amdo**

In the same way that Kelzang's *namtar* became embroiled in the realities of Kelzang's altered authority as a mother, so too, did the fraught process to search for the Seventh Gungru *trülku* at Drakkar. The delay in the Gungru search, or what I label as a less than enthusiastic approach toward finding Kelzang's *trülku*, has resulted in yet another conflict or flashpoint that has hindered the propagation of the lineage and the legitimation of the Gungru lineage's authority going forward. In fact, the residual effects of Kelzang's altered authority in Gengya and Labrang that as we have seen directly implicated the lack of production of her *namtar* also affected the arrival of her eventual *trülku* at Drakkar. As of October 2021, no new information exists about the Seventh Gungru *trülku* in what would be a fascinating new case study of how the six-century old Tibetan institution of reincarnation operates today within the PRC.<sup>444</sup> To note, a Drakkar monk in 2019 told me that possibly by September 2020 that the Seventh *trülku* would arrive but it is not clear to what extent the Covid-19 global pandemic has slowed this process.

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<sup>444</sup> See Peter Schwieger's *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China* and Turrell Wylie's "Reincarnation: a Political Innovation for Tibetan Buddhism" for discussions about the system of Tibetan reincarnation that has been a fixture of Sino-Tibetan relations since its inception around the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries and later expansion through the Ming and Qing dynasties and various Chinese state apparatus down to today.

However, as Kelzang's obituary and the *Lotus Vine* represent the process of Tibetan reincarnation as a seamless event portended by a series of auspicious dreams (See Chapters 1 and 2), fieldwork has revealed a more harrowing story influenced by thorny affairs in Gengya and Labrang. That tale shows the reality of how Kelzang's waning authority as a *trülku* mother with her monastic and lay audience and other mitigating economic factors caused the delay of her reincarnation. This is critical to study now before the arrival of the Seventh Gungru *trülku* returns to Drakkar and this process to search for this little girl becomes a distant memory or gets swept under the rug. In fact, the story of the delayed Gungru *trülku* search must be studied alongside the story of Kelzang's foiled *namtar* because these two primary legitimating apparatus as per Tibetan tradition both go hand in hand to propagate authority in the Gungru lineage and so far neither has occurred.<sup>445</sup>

*Kelzang's altered authority affects the search for the Seventh Gungru trülku*

Sources in Gengya and Labrang, including Kelzang's granddaughter Drölkartso, linked the delayed search for Kelzang's *trülku* to Kelzang's changed authority as a mother, revealing tensions between Kelzang's family and her lay constituents in Gengya. During the annual chö festival held in 2018 at the Gungru estate, Drölkartso noted how many people in Gengya's laity who judged Kelzang for being a laicized married government worker now wanted Kelzang's *trülku* to quickly return to Drakkar. But the Seventh Gungru *trülku* has not yet arrived primarily because of many of these same people's longstanding judgements of Kelzang that allegedly angered the Sixth Jamyang Zhepa, Drölkartso said. The Jamyang Zhepa, who will choose the next Gungru reincarnate in concert with an office in Labrang known as the 司工会 Sigonghui and other relevant PRC government structures, was upset about how the locals treated Kelzang while she was still alive. Drölkartso said:

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<sup>445</sup> Scholars, including Diemberger's *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty* and Janet Gyatso in *Apparitions of Self*, along with Jacoby's *Love and Liberation* and Gayley's *Love Letters from Golok* have shown that *namtar* and the propagation of *trülku* lineages often accompany each other.

The Jamyang Zhepa criticized the locals. Before she passed away many Gengya locals were still confused if [Kelzang] was a true *khandroma* because she wore lay clothing. That's the problem. Some of them gave a *khatak* to her but their heart was not open completely [because of Kelzang's laity]. The local people this year prayed to Jamyang Zhepa and the 13 village leaders set up a team to inquire about the *trülku* but the [Jamyang Zhepa] was very angry. The Jamyang Zhepa said, 'Before Alak Gungru passed away you didn't care about her because of your [lack of] heart, but now that she's gone you miss her. Everyone wants her to come back as soon as possible. It's not that simple, so you need to wait.' The Jamyang Zhepa scolded them when Alak Gungru was alive saying, 'You didn't take good care of her when she was alive, now you want her back in a hurry.'<sup>446</sup>

Drölkartso expanded on her sentiment about Gengya's locals that confirmed that Kelzang's authority had waned to the point where many villagers wanted to find another *trülku* to follow instead of Alak Gungru who married and had a family. Drölkartso again called out the locals for now wanting Kelzang's *trülku* to return as fast as possible. She said:

Because she had married and had a family, the local people refused my grandmother because she had a family and she worked. Local people are traditional, they think that a *trülku* who gets married and has a family is bad. Maybe their hearts are not so open. It was not so convenient for her to stay in the monastery like a man. Before she passed away, maybe some people wanted to look for a more famous Rinpoche [to follow]. They said that Alak Gungru was not so famous, but now that she's passed away they

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<sup>446</sup> Conversation with Drölkartso at Gengya Drakkar, August 2018 with the author.

miss her. Jamyang Zhepa was very angry about this. He was angry because before she passed away the locals didn't respect her very much. Now he says, 'Now that she's passed away, you have regret for rejecting her!' Originally they rejected her and in their hearts they didn't respect her because she married, had kids and a large family. She doesn't have the presentation of a real nun [a real *khandroma*]. Other Rinpoche have good cars, a good house and good faith. Many locals think like this because our Rinpoche [Alak Gungru] doesn't have enough. Some people had a lot doubt like this.<sup>447</sup>

Strikingly, Drölkartso mentioned that locals from around Gengya rejected Kelzang because Kelzang had married and started a family but also ironically for what Kelzang did not have: a fancy car and a big house. Thus, while Drölkartso showed that her grandmother's authority as the Gungru *trülku* changed for many in this community as a lay woman/mother, Kelzang's authority also changed because she did not possess (at least outwardly) signs of modern material wealth like other *trülku* did. And while many *trülku* have always possessed land and wealth in Tibetan society, including the Gungru *trülku* at her multi-storied estate at Drakkar pre Cultural Revolution, Kelzang did not meet this re-adapted economic standard of authority for a *trülku* as a married mother of four children who lived in Labrang and worked in the PRC government. In fact, Kelzang and Chödzin's house located north of the bus station in Labrang blended in with their neighbors—you would never know that a *trülku* lived there amidst the masses. Yet, in addition to the issues of Kelzang's laicization and motherhood, Drölkartso alluded to another factor on the ground in Gengya, namely economic hardship in

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<sup>447</sup> Drölkartso at Gengya Drakkar, 2018 with the author.

these nomadic herding villages that also tempered enthusiasm to expediently find Kelzang's *trülku*. Drölkartso suggested:

If the local people want to ask Alak Gungru to come back, they need to offer money to set up a work team [search team] to secretly look for her [300 Chinese RMB per family, about 50 U.S. Dollars]. This takes a lot of time and they need money. They need a separate team to do this. There are thirteen villages [in Gengya] but each of the different villages have different economic situations. Some villages have no problem and some villages far from here are nomadic and they don't have too much money.<sup>448</sup>

Upon hearing Drölkartso's words, Drölkartso's mother and Kelzang's oldest daughter Tralo, who has rarely spoken about Kelzang for this dissertation, interjected, "It's not money, it's their (Gengya locals) heart," alluding to the contexts of Kelzang's laity and motherhood that Drölkartso raised above.<sup>449</sup> To which Drölkartso responded: "When Alak Gungru was alive, Gengya's grasslands had fertile grass and a fertile harvest. But when she passed away, within these years, everything became bad. Now they want her (Alak Gungru) to come back as soon as possible." Drölkartso and her mother Tralo both expressed frustration about Gengya locals who no longer supported Kelzang or who expressed apathy or little knowledge about the situation. To this point, when the subject of Kelzang's *trülku* was broached to locals in Gengya, many people said that they "did not know" about the search and one poorer family living in Gengya's Barta (Ch: 哇尔塔, Huaerta) herding/farming village expressed neutrality about the matter—they were not overly eager or against her return. They did not comment on the 300 yuan requirement to facilitate the search process.<sup>450</sup>

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<sup>448</sup> Conversation with Drölkartso in August 2018 at Drakkar with the author.

<sup>449</sup> Conversation with Tralo in August 2018 at Drakkar with the author.

<sup>450</sup> Conversations with a family in 2016 in Gengya Barta with the author.

But the laity in Gengya were not the only group who expressed doubt and apathy about Kelzang that reflected her waning authority and ultimately contributed to the Gungru *trülku*'s delay. Drakkar's monks, too, according to sources, acted slowly in regards to the search for the Gungru *trülku* and the Jamyang Zhepa criticized the monks for their lack of care and attention to the matter. (The reproach from the Jamyang Zhepa resembled the event in 2009 in Gengya when he criticized Drakkar monks for allowing Kelzang to sit with lay attendees when he gave a Buddhist teaching as described in the previous chapter). In fact, the monks' scant enthusiasm about Kelzang marked perhaps the biggest sign that her authority with Drakkar as the lineage's most important institution that supports the lineage was at a low point. Kelzang's Chinese female patron, Sanggyé Drölma of Beijing, discussed how the Jamyang Zhepa criticized Drakkar's monks, a fact that Drölkartso confirmed as "true." Sanggyé Drölma stated that one monk told her that in light of the Jamyang Zhepa's criticism, "they need to do more (blessings) than they have." Sanggyé Drölma said:

The monks said that they should come back to the *nangchen* once a month to bless the Protector [Gods and goddesses]. The monks said the Jamyang Zhepa told them they haven't done enough if you want [Kelzang] to come back. One Drakkar monk said that the Jamyang Zhepa said, 'It's not time yet because we have some problems—the blessings aren't sufficient to have her come back. The faith from the local people is not enough.' The Jamyang Zhepa said if they open their heart their faith needs to be greater because [the Great Mother] Machik lives in Drakkar. They need to do more [for her]. The time for looking for her is not now. ... The [status] of the [Gungru] *nangchen* is good as the workers have started to

make some repairs, but they still have obstacles to overcome before they look for the new reincarnate.<sup>451</sup>

Another Drakkar monk who did not comment on whether he or others received criticism from the Jamyang Zhepa said in 2019 that a search for the Gungru *trülku* will take place but that Drakkar's monks will not lead the search process. Rather, *trülku* and monks from Labrang Monastery's Sigonghui will conduct the search. The Drakkar monk said, "This is not something we can do. Many high level *trülku* will do the search." The monk did claim that September 2020 was a target date for the Seventh Gungru *trülku*'s return if the search and confirmation process proceeded smoothly. But, this did not happen as of this writing perhaps because the initial application process to the Jamyang Zhepa seeking the return of the seventh Gungru *trülku* has been bumpy, as Kelzang's husband Chödzin describes in the following subsection.

*Chödzin, the trülku search and using the Machik narrative*

Ever the curator of Kelzang's life story, Chödzin offered his own critical take about the delayed search for the Seventh Gungru *trülku*. He spoke about how a group of elder laymen in Gengya made a series of mistakes when they first applied to the Jamyang Zhepa to initiate the search for the Seventh Gungru *trülku*. Perhaps because of his position as an outsider to this lay group, Chödzin pointed out what he said were the group's main errors in this *trülku*-application process. Chödzin said that the elders did not sufficiently invoke the Gungru lineage's most prominent narrative and legitimating marker of Machik Lapdrön and then properly ask the Jamyang Zhepa to welcome Machik to come back as a little girl (Gungru *trülku*). Chödzin discussed the Gengya elders' foiled first attempt in 2017 to ask the Jamyang Zhepa to start the search process for Kelzang's *trülku*. Chödzin stated:

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<sup>451</sup> Interview with Sanggyé Drölma in August 2018 at Drakkar by the author.

An experienced applicant for the Gungru *trülku* should say, ‘The Gungru *trülku* is the reincarnation of Machik Lapdrön Drölma. For the sake of six realms of living beings, she came to Drakkar Cave to be the owner, to protect the cave. And she has a really good connection with the Jamyang Zhepa, and has made a strong religious contribution. The last Gungru *trülku* generation [Kelzang] passed away and now we do not have her support and we want her to come back. Since it has been five or six years already, we now wish to meet the new reincarnation really soon. And we hope you will make a decision on it.’ You should ask the Jamyang Zhepa like that. That’s what a good applicant will say. ...

I teased them about the previous time they didn’t do well with the application in 2017. They went to see the Jamyang Zhepa and the Jamyang Zhepa asked them, ‘Why did you come here?’ They told him, ‘We came to ask about Alak Gungru’s reincarnation, it’s been seven years, now it’s time for her to come back, correct?’ When the Jamyang Zhepa heard this request, he was not very happy. He said to the elders, ‘Maybe she’s not born yet.’ I teased [the elders] and now they followed my suggestion [about Machik]. This time [2018] the local representatives did well [the group consisted of 12 lay elders and five Drakkar monks]. The Jamyang Zhepa said, ‘Don’t be in a hurry and write the applications for all these [government] departments.’ The Jamyang Zhepa really considers her coming back to be important to him. He told them to chant many sutras and then he would decide.<sup>452</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> Interview with Chödzin in September 2018 in Labrang by the author.



This move to re-deploy Machik as part of the reincarnation process for the Seventh Gungru *trülku* served the agendas of both the Gengya elders and Chödzin well. For Chödzin and others interested in stitching together a narrative in a *namtar* about Kelzang, linking the powerful story of Machik with the arrival of a Gungru *trülku* tapped a proven strategy to legitimate the Gungru lineage's authority within a *trülku* lineage.<sup>453</sup> On this front, acting as an unofficial advisor to the Gengya elders allowed Chödzin to help hasten the return of the Gungru *trülku* in step with the lineage's well-known narrative about Machik and therefore present a sense of continuity with the past. For the Gengya elders, incorporating (or re-incorporating for many) the story of the revered Machik alongside the arrival of a young *trülku* would help enhance the Gungru lineage's authority in the villages of Gengya and at Drakkar.

Chödzin, however, was not the only person associated with Kelzang to proffer the Machik narrative in regards to the Seventh Gungru *trülku*'s future arrival at Drakkar. As an attendee at the annual chö festival in 2018 at Drakkar, the Chinese patron Sanggyé Drölma also invoked the figure of Machik in relation to Kelzang and the Gungru lineage. Sanggyé Drölma states:

This [Drakkar] is the home of Machik Lapdrön and she [Machik through the Gungru lineage] needs to come home. I had a dream last night and a white color appeared, the image was white. She [Alak Gungru] is real. She is Machik Lapdrön. Her story is Machik's story; she married and had five kids. When I met with her in 2012, I looked at her face and I could tell that she had the karma of the Cultural Revolution on her face. She had the pain and suffering of everyone. It was very powerful. I realized that the problem was us, not her. If we don't accept her, it's our problem. I was

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<sup>453</sup> See Diemberger 2007, Quintman 2013 and Jacoby 2014. Diemberger links the biography of Chökyi Drönma to the formation and legitimation of the Dorjé Pakmo *trülku* lineage.

looking for a *khandroma* for a long time, I wanted to meet one [for my own practice]. I am very grateful for an older woman in Labrang for opening up the door to my karma, to overcome the obstacle to meeting Kelzang in 2012. Now I know that she is a real *khandroma*, that she had the power. I am very glad I met her because the next year I came back.... She was gone.<sup>454</sup>

### Concluding Thoughts

While the Seventh Gungru *trülku* will likely soon return to Drakkar it is far less certain if and when Kelzang's *namtar* or any other kind of text about her will ever be written. This is because the complexities of Kelzang's authority on the ground, i.e., the effect of her fluctuating authority as a laicized *trülku* mother, directly impacted the production of her *namtar* during the interregnum and delayed the arrival of the Seventh Gungru *trülku*. Thus, the cancelation of Kelzang's *namtar* and the delay in the Seventh Gungru *trülku*'s arrival to Drakkar—two events that would both publicly promote and propagate Kelzang's authority—became imbricated in the society in which it was produced and not separate from.

Fascinatingly, a closer view into the un-making of Kelzang's biography revealed that tensions between the monk author Gendün Darjé, Kelzang's son Dépön and Kelzang's third husband Chödzin boiled over what consists as the right material to include in a *namtar* and who should write the text. So, too, did tensions boil over about gender and specifically over how to present Kelzang's motherhood in a religious text about a *trülku*. And while Kelzang's obituary followed the *Lotus Vine* that legitimated the Gungru lineage's authority as an emanation of Machik Lapdrön, as a mother goddess in the Cakrasamvara network and as a surrogate mother of the masses, her *namtar* could not seamlessly adopt such a position—at least at this time. In fact, the schism between Gendün Darjé, Kelzang's son Dépön and

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<sup>454</sup> Interview with Sanggyé Drölma in August 2018 at Drakkar by the author.

Chödzin proved too difficult to resolve. Dépön, who was in charge of Kelzang's *namtar* and also one of the sponsors of her obituary that was likely written by the PRC in 2013, aimed to present and legitimate his mother Kelzang as an emanation of the Great Mother Machik. Meanwhile, Chödzin wanted to incorporate Machik's actual motherhood to help legitimate Kelzang's three marriages and four children in Kelzang's *namtar* or a hybrid text. He also wanted to add copious political and social about Kelzang's life that author Gendün Darjé vehemently opposed. Throw into the cauldron that neither Gendün Darjé, Dépön and Chödzin seemed to like or trust each other for myriad reasons as explained in this and prior chapters and it is not surprising that the prospect of Kelzang's *namtar* being written at this time dissolved.

At the same time, this foiled process to write Kelzang's *namtar* and the delayed search for the Seventh Gungru *trülku* has also provided tremendous value for understanding the complexities and the high stakes of writing a religious biography, not to mention a story about a figure whose life did not follow a traditional path. In other words, it is vital to understand this process now—the clash of intricacies on the ground in Gengya and Labrang with the literary project to smooth out those intricacies—before an official biography sweeps this entire intricate story about writing her biography under the rug. Along those lines, chronicling the discontinuity as exhibited by the writing process and the fascinating factors that led to the disintegration of her *namtar*, links the flashpoint of Kelzang's canceled *namtar* to the litany of flashpoints mentioned in previous chapters. These extraordinary points of tension all illustrate, in sum, the profound effects of Kelzang's authority as a *trülku* who was discovered in Labrang and Gengya's enemy territory (Chapter 2), who later became a laicized *trülku* mother (Chapter 3) and endured a renewed challenge to her throne (Chapter 4).

In the end, this chapter shows how the cumulative effect of these flashpoints, i.e., the complicated political, social and gendered contexts that elucidate Kelzang's authority with an

audience on the ground, dramatically affected the textual presentation of Kelzang's authority within the Gungru lineage in a *namtar*. These two realities—her authority in Gengya, Labrang and across Amdo and the attempt to smooth it over in a biographical text—could not be neatly parsed or separated. And now, this fascinating interface that culminated in the conflict among the main stakeholders and the delay of the Seventh Gungru *trülku* will not be minimized or worse forgotten altogether.

### **Concluding Remarks: The Future of the Gungru lineage**

I arrived at the International Association of Tibetan Studies (IATS) Conference in July 2019 in Paris, France with a mission. At the end of my presentation about Kelzang Drölma on a panel about feminism in Tibet, I confessed to the mistake I made at the IATS in 2010 in Vancouver, Canada when I mis-identified the Sixth Gungru *trülku*, as mentioned in the preface. To my amazement and admittedly to my relief, one of the attendees at my talk in Paris confided that they, too, had made the same mistake in confusing the identity of the Sixth Gungru *trülku* as a woman name Damtsik Drölma instead of Kelzang Drölma. We shared a good laugh.

Today, I view this error as a blessing. It propelled this dissertation and introduced me to Kelzang Drölma whose life I discovered (accidentally) was an extraordinary, non-traditional and tragic one for a Tibetan *trülku* and the community in which she lived in Gengya. Just as significant, my mistake eventually introduced me to many monks, nuns, herders, farmers, homemakers, teachers and government workers who talked with me about the Gengya-Jiawu grassland conflict and the transition of the Gungru lineage in the 1930s and 1940s when Kelzang was born in Jiawu and enthroned at Drakkar. They also talked about the tremendous hardships of the Cultural Revolution period (1958-1978) when Kelzang tragically was sexually assaulted and forced to become a lay person, eventually marry, have children and work in the PRC government.

In short, these men and women of Gengya, Labrang and from elsewhere around Amdo spoke the unspeakable about Kelzang. They put words to the pain and grief that Kelzang was afflicted that elicited varying responses such as doubt, criticism, apathy, empathy, sadness, denial, anger, blame and shame that became intertwined with how people constructed her authority that as this dissertation shows lies in the eyes of the beholder. Thus, authority for Kelzang can best be understood from the margins of institutional power and

expressed from people who elucidated the stark discontinuity, i.e., the fissures and cracks that beset Kelzang and also those living in the local community. In light of this uncertainty brought about by the ruptures of the grassland war and the destructions of the Cultural Revolution, many people shared with me their skepticism and doubt about Kelzang. Others expressed their shock about what happened to her and still others their wonderment as if they were writing their own hagiographic *namtar*, such as when Kelzang became a tiger to ward off her oppressors in 1958. For instance, many people told me the “tiger story” suggesting its ubiquity as a tale about Kelzang and also about a community still reeling from the uncertainty of the violence on the grasslands and later with the Cultural Revolution. As a heroic tiger, Kelzang became a strategic rallying point for the community that wanted something to unite behind and some people constructed her authority as the Gungru *trülku* as such. The tiger, as I came to find out, was an important part of their narrative repertoire just like the Great Mother Machik Lapdrön, another iconic heroine, who as this dissertation shows, was a powerful protector mother worthy of devotion in Amdo and across Tibet.

As I learned these stories about Kelzang and the resiliency of this community through this chaotic time, I became more inspired by Kelzang’s unique life as a laicized figure and as a mother and a grandmother. I came to admire Kelzang for what she and the people who supported her and also criticized and doubted her endured and still work to reconcile—the violence, the chaos, the tragedy—that afflicted their lives throughout most of the twentieth century. I came to admire that Kelzang’s authority was located on the ground—and not imposed on her by any one institution—but intimately by voices who usually go unrepresented or unheard. These voices mark the fulcrum of this dissertation.

And Kelzang’s voice, nearly went unheard. For Kelzang, not surprisingly, did not discuss this assault. She said to me that this time of 1958 was a “tense period” but did not expound on anything about the Cultural Revolution era during my one and only interview

with her in late 2010 at her office in Labrang. She also did not share much about herself that day other than to say, with diffidence, that she did not have much to do with religion anymore because she had all of these children. I say that she spoke with diffidence because I could tell even back then and before I knew more of what happened to her that Kelzang was conflicted over her role. I sensed that she felt sad that she did not or could not perform some of the actions that Gungru *trülku* do, such as perform rituals, give blessings, and so forth.

Yet Kelzang also lived with a deep sense of conviction. Over the years during many more interviews about Kelzang, I discovered that she truly wanted to keep as anonymous of a profile as possible (despite the impact it had on her authority) so much so that when she passed away she instructed her husband Chödzin not to broadcast or tell any of her story on the *Voice of America*. Ironically, Chödzin told me that people associated with Kelzang's longtime rival Damtsik Drölma broadcasted Damtsik's death in April 2010 on *Voice of America* when she passed away in Qinghai.<sup>455</sup> Clearly, the very discrete Kelzang did not want to be in the public eye; she did not want to make a spectacle of herself or the Gungru lineage, in particularly given all of the trauma and the major changes (marriages, motherhood and government work in the PRC) that she withstood and distinguished her from her predecessors. She did not want the story of her life (or the end of her life) to be broadcast almost as if she as a lay woman who broke her vow did not exist as a *trülku* figure anymore as others were accustomed to worshipping and supporting one—and she wanted it that way. She wanted to control her story.

Yet, I was struck when I heard that Kelzang said (not to me directly) that she eagerly wanted to reincarnate as a little girl, according to Chödzin, who as this dissertation has shown, has an agenda to be the curator and promoter of both Kelzang's and his own story. In other words, Kelzang, as Chödzin said she told him, wanted to come back to Drakkar as the

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<sup>455</sup> Interview with Chödzin in August 2014 in Labrang by the author.

Seventh Gungru *trülku*. Perhaps Kelzang viewed this period of transition (taking the form of a new human body) as the best opportunity for her to continue her life where it left off in 1958 when she lived at her Drakkar estate as an ordained figure. Or perhaps coming back in the form of a new girl would be the ideal opportunity to restore her and also the Gungru lineage's reputation with a clean slate if this happened. It would be an opportunity for her to act, according to Tibetan tradition, as an agent in her own healing process, i.e., to control where and to which family she will reincarnate. It would be her chance to re-write the ending, if you will.<sup>456</sup>

And yet while propagating the Gungru lineage is important for the Gengya community in the twenty-first century (although that is debatable given the delayed search as Chapter 5 shows), doing so, as this dissertation contends, should not come at the expense of remembering Kelzang's own life that just ended—and how others remembered it, shaped it and represented it. This dissertation fills that gap or that could have been lost or closed—not only with the arrival of a new reincarnate figure, but with the over-reliance on Kelzang's obituary and any possible *namtar* to determine the storyline and the discourse about her and the Gungru lineage, no matter how evocative the *Lotus Vine* or what I call the “Gungru Master Narrative,” is.

Arguing along these lines, this dissertation brings Kelzang's story into light not as a spectacle or as an expose but rather as a story that helps to advance our knowledge about authority and also religion as being imbricated with political, economic, social and gendered contexts—and not separate from them. In doing so, this dissertation highlights Kelzang's story to advance our knowledge about the study of religion that melds ethnographic methods with the study of hagio/biographical literature and the commensurate political, cultural and gender issues embedded within a local community. Thus, this dissertation brings Kelzang's

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<sup>456</sup> Interview with Chödzin in August 2014 in Labrang with the author.



story into context within a community of her constituents (and not just a traditional monastic setting) who followed her, supported her and doubted her for a variety of reasons, for it became apparent that Kelzang's story was also their story and vice versa. Critical here, as this dissertation shows, is ascertaining how Kelzang's authority brings the study of motherhood into this conversation of religion and authority. This includes analyzing discourses of motherhood as understood more in a metaphorical sense, or as Sarah Jacoby refers to as an "As-If" model, based on the iconic female virtuoso, Machik Lapdrön, and contrasting this discourse with the one's actual motherhood of particular children.

Given all of this, it is not altogether surprising that, over time, Kelzang's identity after the Cultural Revolution became confused with Damtsik who lived at a monastery in Gyayé Qinghai (Chapter 4). It is also not shocking that no one could agree on who should write Kelzang's *namtar* and what material should be in it resulting in Kelzang's canceled *namtar*. Thus, if Edward W. Said's claim is correct that texts are a reflection of a community in which they are produced, the same is true for Kelzang's non-text or canceled *namtar*. For it, too, is a reflection of the community in which the text was *not* produced, a community of varied voices who adjudicated Kelzang's multivocal and fluctuating authority.

But what of the state of Kelzang's authority going forward in both textual and oral forms? The figure of Machik Lapdrön could very well be the linchpin of this discussion going forward to write a text about Kelzang. For in the same way that Machik the Great Mother has been deemed an authorizing referent for Tibetan Buddhist virtuosos as Chapter 1 delineates, so, too, could Machik the Actual Mother become a vital authorizing referent for Kelzang in the future. Might the strategy of Machik's motherhood of five children, who over time became interwoven into the narrative of Machik as the Great Mother, work for Kelzang the mother of four children? Notably, Kelzang's third husband Chödzin has already narrated a version of Kelzang's story along these lines, citing Machik's own motherhood as a

reference point for Kelzang (See Chapters 3 and 5). But would Chödzin be the person to write such a text?

In a way, the figure of Machik straddles the boundaries between the metaphorical version of motherhood as a compassionate protectorate and the actual version of motherhood suggesting that in the future it could be possible to view Kelzang's actual motherhood not as a hindrance but an integral part of her story and her authority in this community going forward. Doing so also raises an interesting question in correlation with the discussion of feminism in Tibet. Might someday Kelzang's motherhood as Machik one day be viewed as a part of her virtuosity and enlightenment (an idea Jacoby mentions in her own work about the famed Sera Khandro in Tibet) as opposed to being ignored or minimized altogether? Or, might someday Kelzang's laicization and the trials and trauma she was afflicted with, and her raising four children, someday mark her life as a feminist focal point, i.e., as someone to rally around as part of a discussion about feminism from a Tibetan perspective, a theme discussed at the IATS in Paris mentioned at the outset of these remarks? In other words, could Kelzang as a *trülku* who also was a mother someday become a focal point for a Tibetan feminist discourse and might her authority be adjudicated by others along these lines? Or in addition, might Kelzang someday become a feminist focal point for women more broadly around Asia and also the world living in many different religions and cultures?

It will be fascinating to see what happens on this front and others that could possibly reposition or even rehabilitate Kelzang's authority as the Sixth Gungru *trülku*. Along these lines, it will be fascinating to see how Kelzang's story changes over time like other figures from across the religious spectrum whose lives encountered scandal, controversy or disrepute, as mentioned in this dissertation. And as raised above in regards to Kelzang's intention to reincarnate, it will indeed be extraordinary to see the Gungru *Khandroma* as an emanation of Machik Lapdrön come back to Drakkar as a little girl to once again protect the people of

Gengya and Labrang in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and in turn become a figure whom many in Gengya, Labrang and across Amdo—and maybe across Tibet and China—worship. In this regard, this search will mark a new example of how the process of Tibetan reincarnation works in the PRC. This is critical as Tibet's Fourteenth Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, who presently lives as a refugee in Dharamsala, India, advances in age and his own succession has become a story imbricated in Chinese history and politics and also world politics.

All of these items raise many interesting questions for the future of Kelzang's life story, the legitimization of her authority and the propagation of the Gungru lineage in 21<sup>st</sup> century Tibet in the PRC. However, none of these questions are more important than the questions raised about the extraordinary story that will not be written (until this dissertation), or the story that I was not supposed to know about Kelzang Drölma whose life veered so far off the script of a typical Gungru *trülku* that it fell into relative obscurity in Amdo. And that if it were not for the voices of this local Tibetan community, including monks, nuns, herders and farmers who spoke with me during the interregnum before the Seventh Gungru *trülku* returns to Drakkar and everything seems to return to normal in the Gungru lineage, i.e., the discontinuity of Kelzang's story fades into memory. Kelzang's captivating story and the story of her authority would be lost forever. And while some people (members of the Drakkar monastic community and Kelzang's family) might not mind this outcome (a lost or forgotten story) many people's willingness to talk about Kelzang hinted otherwise—that her Life mattered and it mattered greatly. And now, it always will.

## Appendix I: Translations of *The White Lotus Vine* Tibetan *namtar* and Kelzang's Chinese Obituary

This appendix provides the complete English translation of the Tibetan *namtar* titled *The Liberation Story of the Wisdom Dakini of Gungru called the White Lotus Vine* (the *Lotus Vine*). Written by Zhangtön Tenpa Gyatso in 1897 after the death of the Fourth Gungru Rindzin Pelmo, the *Lotus Vine* became the foundational text of the Gungru lineage as outlined and analyzed in Chapter 1. The second part of this appendix includes an English translation of the obituary written in Chinese in 2013 about the Sixth Gungru *trülku* Kelzang Drölma. I have not yet been able to verify the exact author of this text as also introduced and analyzed in Chapter 1, although it was very likely produced in the CPPCC government where Kelzang worked for decades prior to her death in January 2013.<sup>457</sup> The following translations are original meaning that, to my knowledge, no other English renditions exist of either document. The *Lotus Vine* consists of Part I with and Kelzang's obituary makes up Part II.

### Part I: Translation of *the Lotus Vine namtar* (1897) from Tibetan to English

གུང་རུ་ཡེ་ཤེས་གྱི་མཐའ་འགོ་མའི་རྣམ་པར་ཐར་བ་  
པད་དཀར་འཁྲི་ཤིང་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་བཞུགས་སོ། |

The Liberation Story of the Wisdom *Dakini* of Gungru,  
called the White Lotus Vine<sup>458</sup>

འཇོ་གུ་རུ་བླ་རྣམ་པར་མེ་ཏ་ཡེ།      ལུས་གསུམ་འཕགས་ཚོགས་བསྐྱེད་པའི་ཡུམ་གཅིག་གྱ།      །རང་བཞིན་སྦྱོར་བྲལ་

<sup>457</sup> The translations in this appendix are my own and all errors are my own. For the *Lotus Vine*, I am most grateful for the guidance and expertise of my doctoral advisor Dr. Matthew Kapstein at the University of Chicago. The translation of the *Lotus Vine* improved immensely during Professor Kapstein's Advanced Tibetan Class in Winter 2016. I am also thankful to the late E. Gene Smith for introducing me to the *Lotus Vine* in 2009 in New York City and for Dr. Gray Tuttle at Columbia University for encouraging me to work with it as a master's student. I am also thankful for Tibetan teachers Karma Ngodup at the University of Chicago; Gendün Rapsel at Indiana University (2012) and Lozang Jampel at Columbia University (2010) for their help with the text. I am also thankful for the help of Dékyi of Labrang and Professor Döndrup at Qinghai Nationalities University in Xining, Qinghai, as well as some of his graduate students for help identifying some names and place names in the *Lotus Vine*.

<sup>458</sup> For the purposes of organizing this translation I use the type-set copy of the *Lotus Vine* found in the re-edited English translation of Zhangtön Tenpa Gyatso's collected works in Zhang ston bstan pa rgya mtsho'ai gsung 'bum [Collected Works of Zhang ston bstan pa rgya mtsho]. The original Tibetan copy of the 18-folio *Lotus Vine namtar* can be found at BDRC [https://www.tbrc.org/#library\\_work\\_ViewByOutline-O2DB891872DB89203%7CW22145](https://www.tbrc.org/#library_work_ViewByOutline-O2DB891872DB89203%7CW22145)

ཤེས་རབ་པ་ལོ་ལྟོན། །གངས་ཅན་གྲུབ་པའི་དབང་མོ་ལབ་ཀྱི་སྐྱོན། །ལྷ་མ་རྣལ་འབྱོར་དབང་མོས་བདག་སྐྱོངས་ཤིག།  
 རི་སྒྲིབ་བརྟན་གཡོ་ཀྱན་གྱི་རང་བཞིན་གདོད་ནས་རྣམ་དག་དབྱིངས་ཀྱི་བཅུད། རང་རིག་འོད་གསལ་སེམས་ཀྱི་དྲོ་  
 རྗེས་ཉག་ཏུ་འཐུང་བའི་ལང་ཚོའི་བཞིན། །རབ་དམར་བདེ་ཆེན་སྤྱུང་གཅིག་གིས་འཁོར་འདས་མ་ལུས་སྒྲོམ་མཛད་  
 པ། །དབལ་ལྡན་རིགས་རྣམས་ཀྱི་འབྲུབ་བདག་ཉེ་ཅུ་ཀ་དབལ་རྒྱལ་གྱི་ཅིག།

I prostrate to Prajnaparamita the Mother of Wisdom, to Machik Lapdrön who is the Queen of the Snow Land (Tibet), and whose nature is perfect wisdom free from elaborations, the only mother born of the noble assembly of the three times (past, present and future). Guru Queen of Practitioners, may you protect us! She is the essence of a dimension of purity that from the very beginning is the nature of the entire animate and inanimate world. Her indestructible self-cognizing luminosity is always a fountain of youth. She binds together all samsara and nirvana with a red circle of bliss. May the Glorious Héruka, who is pervading Lord of all clans, be victorious!

དུག་ལྡན་མཚོ་སྐྱེས་གསར་བའི་སྤྱང་ཆང་གིས། །དབལ་བོའི་དབང་ལྷན་སྤྲིད་མཐར་དགེས་མཛད་ཅིང་།  
 །རྗེས་ཆགས་དམ་དུ་འབྱུང་བའི་དགའ་བ་མོ། །རྣལ་འབྱོར་མ་ཁྱེད་བཙེ་བས་ཉག་ཏུ་སྐྱོངས། །བྲག་དཀར་ཞེས་གྲགས་  
 མདོ་སྤང་གནས་ཆེན་འདིར། །མཁའ་སྐྱོད་ཞིང་གི་གཙོ་མོ་རྒྱལ་བའི་ཡུམ།

By the ale distilled from the newborn lotus, the supreme hero Machik Lapdrön confers bliss until the end of *samsara* clasping tightly (with them) as lovers with joy. Machik, out of great love you always protect this sacred site here in Amdo known as Drakkar (The White Cliff), the celestial realm of the distinguished victorious mother.<sup>459</sup>

བསམ་བཞིན་མི་ཡི་སྲིད་པ་བཟུང་བ་ཡི། །དཀོན་མཚོག་རིག་འཛིན་དབལ་མོར་སྤྲིང་ནས་གྲུས། །ཨ་མ་ལབ་ཀྱི་སྐྱོན་མ་  
 ཡུམ་སྲས་ཀྱིས། །མཐའ་འཁོབ་ཡུལ་འདི་བདག་གིར་མཛད་པ་བཞིན། །ཀྱན་མཁྱེན་ལྷ་མ་མཚོག་དང་ལྷན་ཅིག་  
 ཏུ། །ཐུགས་བསྐྱེད་སྐྱོན་ལམ་པ་མཐའ་སུ་ཡིས་དཔོག།

I wholeheartedly show reverence to the precious Könchok Rindzin Pelmo who willingly assumes human existence. Machik Lapdrön and her son made this barbarian land like their own. Who can fathom the endless limits of the prayers and aspirations that the Jamyang Zhepa (of Labrang) and Machik Lapdrön (Rindzin Pelmo) shared together?

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འོན་ཀྱང་མདུང་ལྷུང་མཛད་པའི་ལྷ་ཟེར་གྱིས། །སྤྲིང་ལ་བསེལ་བ་ཐོབ་པའི་དགེ་སྐྱོང་ཞིག། །སོར་བཅུའི་འདབ་མ་སྤྲིང་  
 གར་ལུས་བྱས་ཏེ། །དད་པའི་ཡིད་ཀྱིས་ཅུང་ཟད་སྐྱོང་བར་བྱ། དེ་ཡང་། །རྒྱུད་དྲོ་རྗེ་མཁའ་འགོ་ལས། །མཁའ་  
 འགོ་མ་ཞེས་ཡང་དག་གྲགས། །དྲོ་རྗེ་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་གཙོ་མོ་སྟེ། །ཡི་ཤེས་ལྡན་རྣམས་ཡུལ་ཡུལ་དུ། །རང་བཞིན་སྐྱེ་  
 གནས་རྣམས་སུ་སྐྱེ། །ཞེས་དང་། །མན་དག་སྟེ་མ་ལས་གསུང་བ་ལྟར། །འཛམ་སྐྱིང་གི་གནས་ཆེན་ཉེར་བཞི་  
 །སོགས་གྲུབ་པའི་གནས་ཆེན་པོ་རྣམས་སུ་མཁའ་འགོ་མ་རྣམས་བྱད་མེད་ཐ་མལ་བའི་ཚུལ་བཟུང་ནས་བཞུགས་པར་  
 གསུངས་ལ།

However, I, the virtuous aspirant whose heart has been cooled by your moon beams of marvelous activities, by holding ten fingers together at the center of my heart, (like petals of a lotus) with a mind of faith, I will tell a little. Furthermore, the book titled *Vajradakinis—Indestructible Sky-Goers* states: “The renowned *dakini*, who is the principle female deity of

<sup>459</sup> Drakkar Monastery opened in 1644 in Gengya established by the Gengya Pandita. At that time 700 monks lived at Drakkar. In 1788 the temple was renamed Tantric Academy by Tringwang Tenpé Gyeltsen.

the Vajra mandala, in various lands these wisdom *dakinis* took a natural human birth.” As spoken, according to the *Man Nag Nyem Ma*, it is similarly said that, “The *dakini* woman, who assuming the form of an ordinary body, resided in one of the great establishments of one of the twenty-four holy places of the world, and so forth.”

དེ་ལ་ཡང་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་ལ་གནས་པའི་ལྷགས་སྐྱེས་མ་དང་དབེན་གསུམ་ལ་གནས་པའི་ཞིང་སྐྱེས་མ་དང་། ཟུང་འཇུག་ཡན་ཚད་ལ་གནས་པའི་སྣན་སྐྱེས་མ་དང་གསུམ་ཡོད་པར་གསུངས་སོ། །དོན་ལ་མི་སྣོབ་པའི་ཟུང་འཇུག་པ་ཡིན་ཀྱང་། སྣང་ཚོད་ལ་བསྐྱེད་རིམ་པ་སོགས་ཀྱི་ཚུལ་བརྒྱུད་པ་ཡོད་པ་ལ་ཐེ་ཚོམ་མེད་པར་མ་ཟད་ཚེ་རིང་མཆེད་ལྗེའི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་སོགས་ཀྱིས་ཀྱང་ཤེས་སོ། །

With respect to that, the book also says that the *dakini* resided in three places: “The first place was the abode of enchanted mothers (*Utpattikrama*) in the development stage; the second place was the abode of the twenty-four regions of ordinary *dakinis* (*Sampannakrama*) in the “Three Solitudes” of body, speech and mind; and the third place was the abode of the three co-emergent mothers (*Sahaja*) above/beyond the union (*Yugananaddha*).” In actuality, although the *dakini* had attained the coalescent stage of no more learning (Buddhahood), it appears there is not only no doubting the existence of one who practices the development stage, but it is also known from (reading) the story *Five Sisters of Long Life*, and so forth.

། ཡི་ཤེས་ཀྱི་མཁའ་འགྲོ་ལ་ཡང་། རྣལ་འབྱོར་མ་སོ་བདུན་གྱི་རིགས་སོ་སོར་ཡོད་ཚུལ་དང་། དེ་དག་གི་རྟགས་མཚན་སོགས་འཁོར་ལོ་བདེ་མཚོག་གི་རྒྱུད་ལས་རྒྱ་ཆེར་གསུང་ཞིང་། འཛིག་རྟེན་པའི་མཁའ་འགྲོ་ཤ་ཟ་ཕྱ་མེན་མ་གཏུག་པ་ཅན་ཡང་མང་དུ་ཡོད་པར་གསུངས་སོ། །དེ་དག་ལས་མདོ་སྣང་གྱི་རྒྱུད་འདིར་འཁོར་ལོ་བདེ་མཚོག་གི་ཕོ་བྲང་དངོས་ཡིན་པར་ཚད་ལྡན་གྱི་སྐྱེས་བུ་དམ་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཞལ་མཐུན་པའི་བྲག་དཀར་གྱི་གནས་འདིའི་བདག་པོ་གུང་ཅུ་ཡི་ཤེས་ཀྱི་མཁའ་འགྲོ་མ་དགོན་མཚོག་རིག་འཛིན་དཔལ་མོའི་རྣམ་པར་ཐར་པ་ཅུང་ཟད་བརྗོད་པར་བྱའོ། །

The *Cakramsamvara Tantra* also explains at great length about the wisdom *dakini*, about the ways of existence of the 37 individual *dakinis* and their manifestations, and so forth. The *Cakrasamvara Tantra* mentions the existence of many worldly male sky-goers (*dakas*), and also many flesh-eaters, sorceress spirits and evil people. Among these worldly *dakinis*, and so forth, I am going to explain a little about the liberation story of the Gungru *Dakini*, Kōnchok Rindzin Pelmo, the owner of Drakkar Monastery, who on behalf of all the excellent authentic masters, lived in an actual Cakrasamvara palace in the Amdo countryside.

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དེ་ལ་སྐྱེ་ཐོག་དང་པོ་སློབ་བཟང་སློལ་མ་བྱ་ཁུང་སྐྱེ་འབྱུང་སོགས་དགོན་ལྗེ་དུ་མར་པན་ཕྱོག་མཛད།

With respect to that, the first Gungru reincarnate, Lozang Drölma, acted as an aid and benefited many monastic communities, including Jahkyung and Kumbum Monasteries (in Qinghai, Amdo), and so forth.

རྒྱ་འབྲུལ་མངོན་ཤེས་ཐོགས་པ་མེད་པའི་ཤུབ་ཐོབ་ཚད་ལྡན་དུ་རྗེ་སྐལ་ལྡན་རྒྱ་མཚོས་གསུངས། དབུས་ལམ་ནས་ལམས་གུང་ཅུར་ཕེབས་ཏེ་མགོན་ཁང་དུ་མངལ་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་བྱས་པར། མཁའ་འགྲོ་མ་གཤེགས་ནས་སློབ་འབྲེད་མ་ལྱོད་ལྗེ་མིག་གར་ཡོད་མི་ཤེས་ཟེར། ལྗེ་མིག་འདི་ན་ཡོད་ཅེས་སྟན་ཤལ་གསེབ་ནས་སྣང་སྟེ་སློབ་ཕྱི་བས་མཁའ་འགྲོ་མ་གཤེགས་དུས་སྤར་བའི་མར་མེ་ད་དུང་ཡོད་པས་གུང་ཅུ་མཁའ་འགྲོ་མའི་སྐྱེ་བར་ངོས་བཟུང་།

Kelden Gyatso of Rongbo Monastery (Rebgong, Qinghai *trülku*, 17<sup>th</sup> century) said, “(The First Gungru) was an authentic siddha who had unobstructed higher forms of

commitment.” It is said that the first (or second<sup>460</sup>) Gungru lineage holder (Lozang Drölma) “went on the path from Central Tibet to Kham, Gungru on the main road, and made known, ‘I am going to go (have an audience at) the Protector Temple’.” The *Khandroma* went there but could not open the door. She was told that the door to the temple had not been opened since the first *khandroma* had died and that we did not even know where the key was anymore. The *Khandroma* in response said, ‘Here’s the key,’ after finding it inside a *khatak* (a silk white scarf). She entered the temple after opening the door, and because the butter lamps that were lit to commemorate the First Gungru *Khandroma*’s death were still ablaze, (the next *khandroma*) was recognized as (the First) Gungru *Khandroma*’s reincarnation.<sup>461</sup>

གཞུང་ནས་བཀའ་ཤོག་གིས་གཞུང་ས་བསྟོན། དེའི་སྐུལ་སྐྱོ་སྐྱོ་བཟང་ཚོས་སྟོན་ཟེར། དེའི་སྐུལ་སྐྱོ་རྗེ་འདི་བ་ཡིན་ལ་  
 ཁོང་འཇུངས་དུས་སོགས་ཀྱི་ལོ་རྒྱུ་རྗེ་ཉིད་ནས་ཡི་གེ་ཞིག་གནང་འདུག་པ་ནི་འདི་ལྟར། ངའི་སྐུ་བ་ལྷ་མ་དཀོན་མཚོག་  
 ཚོས་ཀྱི་སྟོན་མེ་ཟེར་བ་དེས་གུང་ཐང་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་དང་། རྗེ་འཇིགས་མེད་རིགས་པའི་སང་གི་རྣམ་གཉིས་བསྟེན་ནས་  
 བཀའ་ཚོས་མང་དུ་གསལ། སྐུ་བ་པ་ཉམས་ལེན་མང་པོ་གནང་ཡང་། ལུགས་ཉ་ཅང་གཏུམ་ཞིང་མཐོ་དམན་བར་  
 གསུམ་ཆ་ཡོད་མེད་སྐུ་ལ་ཡང་ཁ་བརྒལ་དང་ངོ་འཛིན་མི་བྱེད་པར་རང་ཚུགས་ཅན་ཞིག་ཡིན་སྟབས། ཁ་ཉོན་ཉམས་  
 ལེན་འདི་འདྲ་བྱས་ཟེར་བ་སྐུ་ལ་ཡང་བཤད་རྒྱ་མེད། གཞན་དང་མི་འདྲ་བ་ཞིག་ཡིན་ཚོད་རེད།

The (local Tibetan government near Chamdo, present-day Tibet Autonomous Region) official praised her through a decree. Her (Lozang Drölma’s) reincarnation is named Lozang Chödrön (also known as Könchok Chödrön). And her reincarnation is the present Venerable Rindzin Pelmo who has herself provided a letter in which it mentioned her history, when she was born, and so forth. That letter reads like this: “My previous reincarnation named Könchok Chökyi Drönma listened to many spiritual discourses from reincarnates Gungtang Rinpoche (Gungtang Tenpé Drönmé) and (Jikmé Rikpé Senggé, Hortsang III, 1747-1791?<sup>462</sup>) Although she (Könchok Chödrön) practiced many meditation practices, she was very wrathful and was never deferential or discussed anything with any class of person (upper, middle or lower class people). Because she was very independent, nobody could say anything about the way she practiced her daily recitations. She was considered different from many others.”

ལྷུ་བཀུན་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་སྐྱོ་བཟང་ཚོས་ཀྱི་ཉི་མ་སོགས་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱུགས་བརྗོད་གནང་བའི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་རེ་ཡོད། དགུང་ལོ་དུག་ཅུ་རྩ་  
 བདུན་བཅུགས། ལུག་གི་ལོ་རྒྱུ་བ་བདུན་པའི་ནང་ལ། རྣམ་གཉིས་ལྟོགས་ལ་ཕེབས་ཞོར་ཞིག་ལ་ངའི་ཕ་མའི་བྱིས་དེར་  
 ཕེབས་དོན་གཞན་མེད་ཀྱང་། རང་ཁར་ཕེབས་ནས་ཞག་གཉིས་བཅུགས། ངའི་མ་དེ་ལ་མར་གྱི་རིལ་བུ་ཞིག་གནང་ནས་  
 འདི་ལྟར་གྱིས་ཟོ།

A few stories exist about how (the Third) Tuken Rinpoche Lozang Chökyi Nyima,

<sup>460</sup> The history of the Gungru lineage remains contested primarily in Amdo. Please see the introduction to the dissertation and the first chapter for a description of this contention. In summary, *The Amdo Religious History* claims that Lozang Chödrön and Sönam Gyen were both names for the First Gungru *trülku* who was born in Kham Gungru before moving to Amdo. In this arrangement, Lozang Drölma would be the second, Könchok Chödrön the third followed by Rindzin Pelmo. But many scholars have challenged the notion that Lozang Chödrön and Sönam Gyen were in fact the same person, as discussed earlier, and that therefore Sönam Gyen is the first followed by Lozang Chödrön, Lozang Drölma, Könchok Chödrön and Rindzin Pelmo. As raised in Chapter 1, Zhangtön avoids all of this in the *Lotus Vine* and says that Lozang Drölma is the First Gungru *trülku*

<sup>461</sup> It is possible that Zhangtön has the name wrong here of the person who went to this temple. Please see the introduction to the dissertation and Chapter 1 for a discussion on the confusion/controversy surrounding the listing and naming of the Gungru lineage.

<sup>462</sup> See this link from <https://treasuryoflives.org/zh/biographies/view/Jigme-Rigpai-Senggge/6536> about Jikmé Rikpé Senggé.

(1737-1802) and others praised Könchok Chödrön who lived until she was 67 years old. Then one time in the seventh month of the sheep year, Könchok Chödrön came and stayed at my parents' home for two days when she traveled through Gengya. She had no other purpose to come to my parent's home but she gave butter pills to my mother and said to her, 'You eat these pills.'" ...

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ཁྱོད་ལ་གོས་སྐྱད་སེར་པོ་ཡོད་ན་ངས་ཐོབ་ཐོབ་གསུངས་ནས་སྤུ་བཀའ་རིན་པོ་ཆེའི་ཕྱག་ཐོབ་ལོད་པ་དེའི་  
ཐོབ་ལུང་བརྗེས་ནས་ཕུལ། ཕྱི་ཉིན་ཕེབས་དུས་སྐྱོ་ནས་ཞལ་ཕྱིར་འཁོར་ནས་སྐྱོ་ཕྱག་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་བཟུང་ནས་ཐོ་  
གཏུག་གཡང་སྒོ་འདི་འདྲ་བྱས་ནས་ཞོག་དང་བཟང་གསུང་ནས་ཕེབས་ཟེད།

“Könchok Chödrön said to my mother, ‘If you have a yellow silk thread, I will re-thread your mala.’ She used the Tuken’s (the Third Tuken Lozang Chökyi Nyima’s) mala beads to re-thread the mala and she offered it to my mother. The next day when Könchok Chödrön left, she walked out of the tent. She turned her face back and held the tent’s entry way with both hands and closed the tent. She said, ‘This is auspicious, it is better to keep it (the door) like this,’ and then she left. ...

དེ་ནས་ཆེར་མ་འགྲུང་བར་རྒྱ་བ་བརྒྱད་པའི་ཡར་ངོའི་ཆོས་བཅུའི་ཉིན་སྐྱ་གཤེགས། དེ་དུས་རྗེ་འཇིགས་མེད་རིགས་  
པའི་སེང་གི་ཕེབས་ནས་བཞུགས་པའི་གྲུ་གདང་། སྐུ་སྐྱ་སྐྱར་འབྱོན་ཞིག་ཀྱང་མཛད་འདུག དེ་ནས་བྱའི་ལོའི་སོས་  
ཀ་ངའི་མའི་མི་ལམ་དུ་ངའི་སྐྱེ་བ་ལྷ་མ་དེ་བ་རྟ་དཀར་པོ་ཞིག་ལ་ཆེབས་ནས་བྱིམ་དུ་ཕེབས་པ་མིས།

“Then, without great delay, Könchok Chödrön passed away in the month of the full moon (8<sup>th</sup> month) on the 10<sup>th</sup> day. Jikmé Rikpé Senggé arrived and offered an elaborate dedication and also prayed that the next Gungru reincarnation would quickly return. And then during the summer of the bird year, my mother dreamed that my previous reincarnation (Könchok Chödrön) came to my house while riding a white horse. ...

དེའི་འཕྲོར་ཡང་རྒྱ་བ་གཅིག་འོང་གི་དུ་ནས་སེར་པོ་ཞིག་ཡོད་པ་མའི་མགོ་ཐོག་ན་ཡོད་པ་ཞིག་མིས། ཡང་རྒྱ་བ་གཅིག་  
གནས་ཁང་གི་ལུང་བའི་ཕུ་ན་སྤྱིན་མང་པོ་འཐེབ་ཅིང་འབྲུག་སྐྱ་དུག་པོ་དང་བཅས་ཆར་མང་པོ་བབས། དེའི་ནང་ནས་  
སྤང་མ་སེར་པོ་ཆེ་བ་ཞིག་སྐད་སྐྱོག་བཞིན་འཕུར་ཡོང་ནས་མའི་བང་དུ་བབས་པ་རས་དཀར་པོ་ཞིག་གིས་བཀའ་ནས་  
བཞག་པ་མིས་ཟེད།

“Subsequently, one night my mother dreamed that Könchok Chödrön’s yellow hat (the yellow hat that Könchok Chödrön wore on her head) was on top of her (Rindzin Pelmo’s mother’s) head. On another night, my mother dreamed that there were darkening clouds, loud thunder and a lot of rain at our house in the upper part of the valley. Amidst all the thunder and rain, a big yellow bee appeared and made a lot of noise, reverberating constantly before it descended into my mother’s lap. My mother dreamed that she covered the bee with a white cloth.

དེ་ནས་བཟུང་ཞག་མ་ཆ་རེས་མཚམས་ནས་རྩ་མོང་རྟ་དྲེའུ་ཞོན་པའི་མི་མང་པོ་སྐྱག་རྩ་འདྲ་སྐྱར་ནས་བྱིམ་དུ་འོང་སྟེ་  
ཅུང་ཟད་རེ་བསྐྱད་ནས་འགོ་བ་ཡང་ཡང་མིས་ཟེད། བ་མ་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་སྤོན་ཆད་བྱིས་པ་གསུམ་ཡོད་པ་མ་  
མཚམས་པའི་སྐྱབས་ཀྱིས་བསེ་སྐྱ་གོང་མར་གསུང་བརྟགས་ལྷན་པས། བྱིས་པ་ལྷ་མ་རྣམས་སུ་འོན་ཡིན། འདི་ལ་ཤ་ས་  
ན་འབྲུམ་དང་མགོན་པོ་ཞི་བའི་སྤྱིན་ཐོག་སྐྱོན་མེད་གསུངས།

“From then onwards, my mother dreamed again and again for several nights that many



people who rode camels, horses and mules carrying what appears to be a tiger tail (tiger drums) came to my home. They all stayed for a short time before they left. At that time, my parents asked the former *trülku* of The Fifth Alak Setsang, the (Lozang Tashi Trinlé, 1889-1937 at Tzo Monastery near Hezuo, Gansu<sup>463</sup>), to investigate why three previous infants who had been born to my parents had died. He said (my parents’) prior children were (retribution for) karmic debts and that there would be no future problems if my parents said the Sha Sa Na mantra 100,000 times and poured the fire consecration for the Peaceful Protector (Mahakala). ...

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དེ་ནས་ཁྱིའི་ལོའི་གཉིས་པའི་བཅུ་གཅིག་གི་ཉིན་ང་སྐྱེས། དེ་དུས་མའི་ཕུང་བོ་ཅུང་ཟད་མ་བདེ་བས་ཤྲན་གྱི་སྐྱ་སྐྱེ་ཟེར་བའི་སྤྲན་པ་ཞིག་ཡོད་པ་དེའི་ལག་ཏུ་སྤྲན་ཞིག་ལེན་གི་སོང་བས་བྱིས་པ་དེ་ལ་མིང་མ་འདོགས། འཕྲོ་ཁོས་འདོགས་དགོས་ཟེར།

རྗེས་སོང་སྐར་བཟང་ཞིག་ལ་སོང་བས་མིང་ལ་རིག་འཛིན་སློལ་མ་བཏགས།

“I was born on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the second month of the dog year. Because my mother’s stomach was not well at that time, she took some medicine that a doctor from Gengya named Gu Gye gave her. When she departed, the doctor told her not to give her child (Rindzin Pelmo) a name and that he would name the child. Later my mother went back (to the doctor) on an auspicious day and the child (Rindzin Pelmo) was given the name Rindzin Drölma.

སྐྱབ་གཅིག་གི་འཕྲོ་ནས་ཕུང་བོ་མ་བདེ་བས་སྤྲན་པ་ཞིག་གིས་རིམ་གྱོ་བྱས་པས་རྩལ་མོ་དེའི་མི་ལམ་དུ་བྲག་དཀར་ཕྱོགས་ནས་ཏྲ་ནག་པོ་ཞོན་པའི་མི་ཞིག་ཡོང་ནས་ཁྱེད་ཀྱིས་དེ་ལ་ཕན་མི་ཐོགས་བྲག་དཀར་ལ་ཁྱེད་ཟེར་བ་ཞིག་མིས་པས་གསུམ་པའི་ཉི་ཤུ་གསུམ་གྱི་ཉིན་བྲག་དཀར་ལ་ཁྱེད། དེ་ནས་བཟུང་ཉེ་བྲག་དཀར་ནས་བཞུད།

“A month later, a *ngakpa* performed some healing rituals because my stomach was not well. That evening my mother dreamed that a man riding a black horse from Drakkar Monastery arrived. He said (to my mother), ‘You can’t help the child like that (to get well), take her to Drakkar.’ Because she had this dream, my mother brought me to Drakkar on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the third month. I have stayed in Drakkar ever since ...

ལོ་གསུམ་གྱི་ཐོག་ཚྲོན་གྱི་སྐྱ་བདག་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་གུང་ཐང་རིན་པོ་ཆེར་གསུང་བཏགས་ལྷན་པས་མཁའ་འཕྲོ་མའི་སྐྱ་སྐྱེ་ཡིན་གསུངས་ནས་ཐག་བཅད་མན་ཇིའི་ཕྱག་མདུད་ཕུར་མདུད་གནང་། ལོ་བཞིའི་ཐོག་ལྷ་བའི་ཆོས་པ་ལྗེས་ཉིན་གུང་ཐང་རིན་པོ་ཆེའི་སྐྱ་མདུན་ལ་མངལ། ཁོང་གིས་ངའི་མགོ་ལ་ཕྱག་བཞག་ནས་ཡུན་རིང་གཟིགས་རྟོག་གནང་། ཀ་ར་ལན་གསུམ་གནང་། མིང་ལ་དཀོན་མཆོག་རིག་འཛིན་དཔལ་མོ་བཏགས།

“The retinue from the previous Gungru reincarnation (Third *trülku* Könchok Chödrön) asked the third Gungtang Rinpoche (Könchok Tenpé Drönmé) to investigate (if I was the reincarnation or not) shortly after I turned three years old. Tenpé Drönmé determined that I was the Gungru reincarnate and he pulled out a Manchu square protector knot and gave it to me. When I was four years old, I met in front of the Gungtang *trülku* on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. He put his hand on my head and observed me for a long time. He gave me three pieces of sweets one after another and said that my name was Könchok Rindzin Pelmo ...

<sup>463</sup> Consultation with local Amdo natives in Xining, Qinghai Amdo in 2016 suggests that Lozang Tashi Trinlé is the Alak Tse *trülku*. See also <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Fifth-Setsang-blo-bzang-bkra-shis-phrin-las---rgya-mtsho/7172> for a sketch on Lozang Tashi Trinlé.

དེ་ནས་ཕྱིར་རང་ཡུལ་དུ་ཡོང་དུས་ཨ་ཁུ་ཞིག་ཡོད་པ་དེ་བས་བོས་ནས་རྟ་དཀར་བོ་ཞིག་བྱིན། ལོ་ལྔའི་ཐོག་གུང་ཐང་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་དགོན་ལུང་ལ་ཕེབས། ཕྱིར་ལམ་བྲག་དཀར་ལ་ཕེབས་ནས་ཁོང་ལ་མངལ་ནས་མུར་གྱི་རྟེན་པ་དང་བོ་རྟ་དཀར་བོ་དེ་ཕུལ། དེ་དུས་བསམ་པ་ཅིང་མེད་ཀྱང་འདང་རྒྱབ་ན་རྟེན་པའི་དང་བོ་སྐྱ་མ་ལ་འབུལ་རྒྱ་བྱུང་བ་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་འབྲིགས་བསམ།

“Then upon returning to my home village a monk summoned me and gave me a white horse. When I was five years old, the Gungtang (Könchok Tenpé Drönmé) went to Gönlung Jampaling Monastery (in present-day Qinghai). On his way back, he stopped at Drakkar. I met with him and I offered him my first possession, the white horse. Although I did not think too much about this at the time, after pondering it, I believe that offering the very first possession I had obtained (the horse) to the Gungtang concluded an auspicious connection (between us). ...

ལོ་ལྔའི་ཐོག་ནས་ཡི་གེ་སོགས་བསྐྱབ་པས་དཀའ་ཚོགས་ཆེར་མེད་པར་ཤེས་པ་ཞིག་བྱུང་། ལོ་བདུན་གྱི་ཐོག་དགེ་རྒན་བཀའ་དྲིན་ཅན་ཞིག་ཡོད་པ་དེས་བྲིད་ནས་ཡབ་རྗེ་བཀའ་དྲིན་ཅན་བཞུན་པའི་སློན་མའི་དུང་དུ་བྲིད་ནས་འཛིགས་བྱེད་གྱི་དབང་ཞུས་པས། ཁོང་གིས་འདྲིའི་སྐྱེ་བ་ལྔ་མས་བདེ་མཚོག་འདོན་ཚོད་ཡིན། བདེ་མཚོག་ཞིག་བཏོན་ན་བཟང་གསུངས་ནས་དྲིལ་བུ་ལྟ་ལྟའི་དབང་དང་། རོམ་དཀར་ལྟ་ལྟའི་རྗེས་གནང་། མགོན་པོའི་རྗེས་གནང་སོགས་ཐོབ། ཚོས་ཉན་པའི་ཐོག་མ་དེ་ཡིན་ལགས།

“I learned the alphabet and language, and so forth, without great difficulty when I was five years old. When I turned seven, my kind teacher took me in front of the gracious Gungtang Tenpé Drönmé and I requested (or it was requested on her behalf?) the Bhairava deity empowerment from Gungtang. The Gungtang said to my request, ‘Your previous reincarnation (Könchok Chödrön) always recited the Cakrasamvara text, therefore it is good if you recite any Cakrasamvara text.’ I obtained the empowerment of the Five Deity Mandala of Cakrasamvara according to the System of Ghandapa, the permission of the five deities of Dzamkar and permission of the Mahakala, and so forth, from the Gungtang. These were my first teachings of the Dharma.”

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བྲིད་གྱིས་འདི་འདྲ་ཞིག་བྲིས་ནས་བསྐྱར་ཟེར་བས་བསྐྱར་བ་ཡིན་པས་འདི་འདྲ་ལ་དགོས་པ་ཅི་ཡང་མེད་སུ་ལ་གཏན་ནས་མ་སྟོན་ཞེས་པ་འདི་ཉིད་གྱི་ཕྱག་བྲིས་མ་ཡིན་ལྟར་གསུང་མ་བཅོས་པར་བཀོད་པའོ། །དེ་དོན་བཞིན་ཡབ་གཡུང་དུང་རྒྱལ་དང་། ཡུམ་ལྟ་མོ་རྒྱལ་གཉིས་གྱི་སྲས་སུ་གསེར་ཆེན་གཞུང་ནས་སྐྱེ་བ་ལྟམས། ཞལ་ནས་ང་རྒྱུང་དུའི་དུས་ཡུལ་ནས་བཟང་ན་ཕུང་བོ་མི་བདེ་བས་མས་བྲིར་འོང་ནས་བྲག་དཀར་དུ་བཟང་པས་འབྲོག་པ་དེ་ཅམ་མི་ཤེས་གསུངས།

Said Rindzin Pelmo: “You (Zhangtön Tenpa Gyatso) said to (me) to write a letter in this manner and I have sent it to you. There is no reason to ever show this to anybody!” To which Zhangtön replied to Rindzin Pelmo, “I have set this down in accordance with her hand-written document without any corrections.”

Rindzin Pelmo’s letter continued: “In accordance with this, my father Yungdrung Gyel and mother Lhamogyel gave birth to a girl from the valley of Serchen. When I was small and lived at home in the countryside my mother took me to Drakkar because my health was not well.” And because Rindzin Pelmo has lived in Drakkar ever since, they had no inkling that she was a reincarnation who lived among the nomadic people.

སྐྱེ་གོང་མ་བྲིས་དུ་ཕེབས་ནས་གྲ་བ་རྣམས་ལ་བྲིད་ཚོ་སོང་ནས་མི་དོ་ཆེ་བ་ཞིག་བྲིར་ཤོག་ང་ལ་དགོས་གསུངས་ནས་

མངགས། དེའི་ཤུལ་ནས་སྤེང་ཐག་བརྗེས། རྫོགས་འོང་བ་བཅག་པས་ནང་ན་འབྲུ་ཆེན་པོ་ཞིག་འདུག་པར་ཡ་མཚན་  
རྫོང་ནང་ན་འབྲུ་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན་རྒྱུ་རེད་གསུངས། དོན་ལ་སེམས་ཅན་དེའི་ཆེད་དུ་ཡིན་པར་འདུག་པས་མངོན་ཤེས་ཀྱིས་  
གཟིགས་ནས་སྤྲོ་བ་ཚོའི་ལག་དུ་རྒྱུད་པར་བྱིན་གྱིས་བརླབས་པ་ཡིན་པར་སྣང་ངོ། །

“When the (previous Gungru Könchok Chödrön) went to (Rindzin Pelmo’s house) she told the monks, ‘You all go and bring me back a big flint stone; I need it.’ During that time (Könchok Chödrön) exchanged the string of the mala. They came back and the flint was broken and inside there was a large worm. ‘They were amazed that a (lug/worm) would live inside a stone!’ In fact, for the sake of that sentient being (a lug), she (Könchok Chödrön) must have through her super normal powers seen it enter into the monk’s hands and blessed it in that way. And so it seems!

གནས་ཁང་གི་ཐང་གི་རི་འགོ་དེར་མས་ཁྱེར་བས་འདི་ན་གཏེར་ཞིག་འདོན་རྒྱུ་ཡོད་ཀྱང་བདག་དང་མི་གསུམ་མེད་པར་  
ལེན་མི་སྤྱབ་ཅེས་བཤད་འདུག བྱིས་པའི་སྐད་ཆ་ཡིན་པས་ངེས་པ་ཅི་ཡོད་ཅེས་འདི་དག་བདག་ལ་དངོས་སུ་གསུངས་  
སོ།

“Although my mother led me to the lower slope of the Gungru estate to retrieve a treasure, four of us, including myself, could not retrieve it” it was explained to me. Rindzin Pelmo said to Zhangtön (in a conversation): “Because all of this is child’s talk, what certainty is there that all of this happened?” Said Zhangtön Tenpa Gyatso: “All of these (stories) were told explicitly to me.”

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གདན་སར་བཀོད་ནས་རི་ཁྲོད་པ་འཇམ་དབྱེངས་མཚོག་གྲུབ་ཟེར་བ་དགོ་རྒྱན་ལ་གདན་འདྲེན་དུ་སོང་བས་ཁོ་རང་གི་མི་  
ལམ་དུ་མི་ནག་པོ་ཞིག་འོང་ནས་སང་ཉིན་སྲོད་འབོད་མཐར་ཞིག་འོང་བས་དེ་ལ་ཅེས་ཀྱང་སོང་ཟེར་བ་ཞིག་བྱུང་བས་  
འཕྲལ་དུ་ཕེབས་ཏེ་བཅར་བཞུགས་མཛད།

When she was seated as the Gungru reincarnate (at Drakkar), someone went to the hermit Jamyang Chokdrup to invite him as her tutor. It was said: “(Jamyang Chokdrup) dreamed that a black man will arrive (to tell him) that someone would come tomorrow to call for you (Jamyang Chokdrup). By all means, ‘You should go.’ He came immediately and stayed close to her (Rindzin Pelmo) as a tutor.

འདོན་ཆ་ཚོས་སྦྱོང་སོགས་བསྐྱབ། ལྷ་མཚོད། དཔལ་ཅིག་བརྒྱ་ཅུ། མགོན་པོ། ལྷ་མོ་སོགས་ཆག་མེད་བྱེད་རྒྱུའི་  
འགྲིགས་ཡིག་འདྲ་བ་ཞིག་བྱིན་པས་དགོ་རྒྱན་བཞུགས་མེད་སྐབས་ཀྱང་དེ་ལྟར་མ་ཆག་པར་བྱས་གསུངས།

Jamyang Chokdrup taught her recited Dharma practices and gave her what appeared to be a compiled manual of rules to continuously perform the Guru Puja; the Yidam Deity (Name of Scripture); the One Hundred Tormas (Name of Scripture); Mahakala; Protector goddesses, and so forth. Even on occasion when the teacher was absent, she was told to continue practicing like this without interruption.

རྒྱུད་དུའི་དུས་ནས་བག་མེད་ཀྱི་སྦྱོང་པ་ལ་འཇོམ་པས་རྩ་སྐོར་བྱི་མ་ན་གོང་བ་མང་བོ་འདུག་ཀྱང་། དེ་ལ་གཏན་ནས་  
མ་སོང་། རྒྱུད་དུས་མི་མང་དང་འགྲོགས་ན་ལད་འགྲོ་ཞེས་གསུང་སྟེ་ངོ་མཚར་ཆེ་བར་སྣང་ངོ། ། དེ་དུས་ཕྱག་རྒྱས་སྤེལ་  
པས་བཞེས་པ་ཡང་བཟང་བོ་མེད། གསོལ་ཇ་དུས་སུ་མ་འབྱོར་ཀྱང་རྒྱུད་ལ་ཕེབས་སྐབས་ཞིག་སྤྲི་བྱིན་པོ་  
ཆེ་ཚོགས་ཆེན་ཁྲི་བའི་དུ་དེར་ཕེབས་ནས་དགོན་པའི་ལྷག་རྒྱབ་ནས་སྐར་བཏབ་ནས་བཞུགས།

Although there were many houses outside the border of her estate, she absolutely did

not go to visit (people) as she avoided careless behavior when she was little. When you are young and if you associate with many people, you come to imitate them. Marvelous miracles appeared!

Due to their slender resources, the quality of their food was also not good at that time. And even though the tea did not arrive on time she did not go back home. One time, when Détri Rinpoche (Jamyang Tupten Nyima) was the throne holder of the grand assembly (at Labrang), she went there and pitched a tent (in the area) behind the monastery where the ceremony was held and stayed there.

ཉིན་ལ་ཤས་ལ་མདུན་དུ་མ་སོང་བར་མཉམ་འགྲོ་མ་འདིར་མི་འོང་གི་འང་གསུང་བ་ཐོས་པས་མདུན་དུ་ཕེབས་པར་གནས་ཁང་ནས་སྤྱིར་སྤྱོད་འདུག་པས་ང་གནས་ཁང་དུ་སོང་བ་ཡིན། དེ་ན་ཚེས་མང་པོ་འདུག། འདི་ཚེས་རེད་ཅེས་དྲོད་དཀར་པོ་ཞིག་བསྟན་པར་དེ་དྲོད་ཞིག་རེད་ཞུས་པས་མ་རེད་ཅེས་སྐྱེ་ཆེད་མཛད། ད་ཉིད་རང་སོང་ནས་ཆེད་མོ་ཆེས། དེ་དྲོད་ཚོས་གྲོད་ཅིག་བཤད་གི་ཡོད། ཉིན་གཅིག་ཤོག་དང་ངས་བདེ་མཚོག་གི་རྗེས་གནངས་གནང་ཞིག་བསྐྱར་གསུང་ནས་དེ་བཞིན་གནང་བ་དགོས་པ་ཁྱུང་པར་ཅན་ཡོད་འདུག་གོ། ཡང་སྐབས་ཞིག་གཉན་ཁྲོད་པ་འགའ་ཚུ་ལ་ནས་རས་གུར་ཕུབ་སྟེ་བསྟན་འདུག། ཟ෍་ཉིན་ཇ་མ་རྒྱུད་པོ་ཞིག་ཡོད་པས་དེ་བསོད་གྲག་ཚང་རེད་ཟེར་བས་མཚན་ཐོས་པ་ཅོམ་གྱིས་སྔོད་མི་ཚུགས་པ་བྱུང་སྟེ་མདུན་དུ་ཕེབས།

“I went from my home to meet the Détri after having heard that he had said, ‘The *dakini* has not come here for a few days.’ There was a lot of fat there and (Détri) said to me, ‘This is fat’ while pointing to the crystal (white rock). ‘Is it a white rock?,’ he asked. Rindzin Pelmo said, ‘No it is not (a stone).’” And then Détri said, ‘Now you go and play.’ We have some adult talk (non-childish talk) to tend to.”

The Détri said, “One day you should come to me and I will bestow on you the permission blessing of Cakrasamvara. The purpose of performing this blessing would be extraordinary.” Then one time I pitched a tent and stayed on the spring next to some (haunted grounds). The next day the old cook said, ‘That is Södrak Tsang.’ Upon hearing that, I could not restrain myself and I went to meet (Södrak Tsang).” ...

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གནས་ཁང་དུ་ཕེབས་གྲབས་བྱེད་པར་འདུག་པས་ང་ཡང་འགྲོ་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་ཞུས་པར། དེ་མི་རུང་ཁྲོད་སྐྱུང་འགྲོ་གསུངས་པར་སྤྱོད་མེད་ང་ཅེས་ཀྱང་འགྲོ་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་ཞུས་ནས་ཞབས་སྤྱིར་སོང་བ་ཡིན། གནས་ཁང་དུ་དང་པོ་སོང་དང་མཉམ་དུ་སོང་བ་དེ་ཉིན་འབྲེལ་ལེགས་འདུག། གཤམ་རྗེ་འཕྲུང་ནས་རྗེ་དེ་ཉིད་གྱིས་ཐག་པ་བསྐྱམས་ཏེ་རྒྱུད་གསུང་ཞིང་མི་རྣམས་ཡར་འཐེན་གིན་འདུག་ཅེས་ཞུས་ནས་དངོས་སུ་ཐོས་སོ། །འདི་དག་ནི་རྒྱུད་དུས་ཀྱི་མཛད་པའི་སྐོར་རོ། །ཁྱུང་ཐང་འཇམ་པའི་དབྱངས་ལས་རབ་བྱུང་མར་བསྐྱབས། མཚན་ལ་མཉམ་པོའི་མཚན་རྒྱུར་གྱིས་དགོན་མཚོག་རིག་འཛིན་སྐྱོལ་མར་བཏགས། དཀར་ཡོལ་སྤྱི་ནང་གཉིས་ཀ་སེར་པོ་ཡིན་པ་ཞིག་ཞོས་བཀའ་སྟེ་གནང་། རྗེ་དེ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ཞུལ་རས་གཉན་ནས་མི་བརྗེད་གསུངས། རྗེ་འདི་ལ་ནམ་མཇལ་ན་ཡང་ཕྱག་གཡོན་པས་མཇལ་ཁ་དང་། གཡམས་པས་ཕྱག་མདུད་གནང་གསུངས་ཏེ་བདེ་མཚོག་གི་རྒྱུད་དོན་དང་འབྲེལ་བའི་དགོས་པ་ཁྱུང་པར་ཅན་ཡོད་པས་སྐྱོབ་གཉིས་ཀའི་རྣམ་ཐར་མདུ་བྱུང་བའོ། །

I asked if I could also go with Södrak Tsang as he prepared to return to his house. Détri said, ‘That (Going with Södrak) is not all right, you will fall (on the sharp rocks).’ And I said, ‘It does not matter, I am still going.’ I walked out.

“The first time that I spent together with Södrak Tsang was in his home and it was very auspicious. Södrak Tsang used his Yamatanaka Mala chord and I explicitly heard him saying the eight verses while he pulled people (out of evil rebirth).” These were the deeds of my (her) childhood.

Rindzin Pelmo attained the vow to become a renunciant from Gungtang Jamyang (Könchok Tenpé Drönmé). And she received the name Könchok Rindzin Drölma from Khenpö Tsenzur as she in part was named after the Gungtang who was called Könchok. “The Gungtang offered me yogurt in a porcelain bowl that was yellow on both the interior and exterior. I will never forget the Gungtang’s face.”

Rindzin Pelmo said, “Whenever I met with Gungtang, he blessed (me) with his left hand and gave me a protector’s knot with his right hand.” Because (the left hand for the blessing and right hand for the protector knot) is extraordinary to be linked with the tantric meaning of Cakrasamvara, this is the marvelous liberation story (biography) of Master and Disciple!!

དེ་ནས་མང་ཐོས་ཇི་ལྟར་མཛད་པའི་ཚུལ་ནི། ཤེས་བཤམ་མགོན་ཐམས་ཅད་མཐུན་ཅིང་གཟིགས་པ་ཆེན་པོ་རྗེ་  
བཙུན་སློབ་བཟང་ལུབ་བཟུན་འཇིགས་མེད་རྒྱ་མཚོའི་ལལ་ལྷན་ནས་དང་། མགོན་དེའི་སྤྱལ་བའི་སྐྱེ་རྗེ་བཙུན་སྤྱལ་བཟང་  
ལུབ་བཟུན་དབང་ལུག་དཔལ་བཟང་བོ།

Then, as for the method of how she attained her extended learning, Rindzin Pelmo studied with many lamas, including many highly-regarded all-knowing Lords, the Jamyang Zhepas, such as the exalted presence of the third Jamyang Zhepa, Jétsün Lozang Tupten Jikmé Gyatso, and his reincarnate the Fourth Jétsün Kelzang Tupten Wangchuk Pelzangbo;

མཚན་དང་དོན་མཐུན་པའི་ངེས་པ་དོན་གྱི་འཇམ་པའི་དབྱངས་དཀོན་མཚོ་ག་བཟུན་པའི་སློན་མེ། དེའི་སྤྱལ་བའི་སྐྱེ་  
དཀོན་མཚོ་ག་བཟུན་པའི་རྒྱ་མཚོ་དང་། དེའི་ཡང་སྤྱལ་འཇམ་དབྱངས་བཟུན་པའི་ཉི་མ་སྤེ་སྐྱེ་ཐོང་གསུམ།  
; as for the Gungtang reincarnation lineage, the third Gungtang, Könchok Tenpé Drönmé, (1762-1823) who is the real Manjushiri both in name and meaning; Tenpé Drönmé reincarnate, Könchok Tenpa Gyatso (1824-1859), and his reincarnation Jamyang Tenpa Nyima (1860-1925);

རྒྱལ་བ་གཉིས་པའི་རྒྱལ་ཚབ་ཉོར་ཚང་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་འཇིགས་མེད་བཟུན་པའི་ཉི་མ། སྤྱལ་བཟང་དཔལ་ལྷན་གྲགས་པ་སྟེ་  
གཉིས།

Two Hortsang Rinpoches, who were regents for the second Je Tsongkhapa, including Jikmé Tenpa Nyima and Kelzang Penden Drakpa;

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ལྷབ་བདག་དང་པོའི་སང་རྒྱས་རྗེ་བཙུན་འཇམ་དབྱངས་ལུབ་བཟུན་ཉི་མ། སློབ་བཟང་ལུང་རིགས་ཉི་མ། འཇིགས་  
མེད་ལུབ་བཟུན་ཉི་མ་སྤེ་གསུམ།

Three lineages of the Détri Lineage, including Jétsün Jamyang Tupten Nyima (1779-1862 ; Lozang Lungrik Nyima (1862-1874) ; and Jikmé Tupten Nyima (1874-1898);

དཔལ་མང་རྫོ་རྗེ་འཆང་དཀོན་མཚོ་ག་རྒྱལ་མཚན།

Pelmang Dorjé Chang Könchok Gyeltsen;

ཡུམ་ཆེན་ལབ་གྱི་སློལ་མའི་ལུགས་སྤྱོད་ལུབ་དབང་བསོད་གྲགས་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་དཀོན་མཚོ་ག་རྒྱ་མཚོའི་ལལ་ལྷན་ནས་དང་།  
འཇིགས་མེད་བསོད་ནམས་རྒྱ་མཚོ་གཉིས།

Two lineages of the Södrak Tsang lineage, who is considered the spiritual son of

Machik Lapdrön, Könchok Gyatso (1790-1858) and Jikmé Sönam Gyatso (Dates?);

བསྟན་པའི་སློབ་ཤིང་མཁན་པོ་དག་དབང་ཐུབ་བསྟན་རྒྱ་མཚོ། ལྷང་རྟོགས་མངའ་བདག་སློ་མང་མཁན་སྤུལ་སློ་བཟང་  
ཚུལ་ཁྲིམས་རྒྱ་མཚོ།

The life teacher, Khenpo Ngakwang Tupten Gyatso; the Lungtok Ngadak Gomang;  
Lozang Tsültrim Gyatso of the Khentrül lineage, the monastic lord of the Dharma;

སྤྱིང་ཁྲི་ཚེན་དཀོན་མཚོག་དགེས་པའི་སློ་གོས་དང་། འཇིགས་མེད་སློ་གོས་རྒྱ་མཚོ་གཉིས།

Two members of the Lingtri lineage, including Könchok Chokgyépé Lodrö and Jikmé  
Lodrö Gyatso;

ཁྲི་ཚེན་སྟག་ལྷང་པ་དཀོན་མཚོག་ཉི་མ་དང་། དེའི་སྤུལ་སྤུ་སློ་བཟང་དམ་ཚོས་རྒྱ་མཚོ། མཁས་བཙུན་བཟང་གསུམ་གྱི་  
ཡོན་ཏན་འགྲན་རྒྱ་མེད་པ། ཤ་རྩེ་བཙུན་ཤེས་རབ་རྒྱ་མཚོ་དཔལ་བཟང་པོ་སོགས།

and the Trichen lineage, Taklungpa Könchok Nyima and his reincarnation Lozang Damchö  
Gyatso whose learned, virtuous and noble qualities of these lamas are unmatched and Jétsün  
Shérap Gyatso Pelzangpo, and so forth.

‘བཤེས་གཉེན་དམ་པ་དུ་མ་ལས་ཚོས་བཀའ་རྒྱ་ཚེར་གསན་འདུག་ན་ཡང་གསན་ཐོ་མ་རྟེན་པས་ཞིབ་པར་འབྲི་མ་རུས་  
སོ། །དེ་དག་ཀྱང་ཚོས་ཉན་པ་ཅོམ་ལ་མ་བཞག་པར་དག་སྤང་དད་གུས་ཀྱིས་ཚུལ་བཞིན་ཏུ་བསྟེན་ཏེ་སོ་སོའི་སྤུལ་སྤུ་  
རྣམས་ལ་ཡང་ཚོས་འབྲེལ་གསན། སླ་མ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ཞལ་ཐང་བཞེངས་ཏེ་དེའི་མདུན་ནས་རྒྱུན་དུ་ཕྱག་འཚལ།

Although (Rindzin Pelmo) listened to many extensive teachings of the Dharma,  
because I have not received the register of teachings, and so forth, I could not write about  
them in great detail. She did not leave these teachings to be merely heard, she appropriately  
relied upon them with pure vision and reverence and attained a spiritual connection (by  
listening to these teachings) with each of those respective reincarnate lamas. She had a  
*tangka* prepared of all of these individual lamas and she continuously prostrated in front of  
the *tangka*.

དེའི་གཏངས་སུ་ཁོང་གི་དགེ་རྒན་གྱི་སྤུ་ཡང་བཞེངས་དགེ་རྒན་བཀའ་དྲིན་ཅན་ཞེས་དད་གུས་ཚེན་པོ་མཛད་ཀྱང་པར་དུ་  
སྤེ་ཁྲི་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་དང་། བསོད་གྲགས་ཚང་གཉིས་ལ་དད་གུས་གཞན་དང་མི་འདྲ་ཞིང་ཐུན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་རྣམ་པར་  
ཐར་བ་ཡང་མང་དུ་ཡོད་དོ། །བསྟེན་ཚུལ་ཕྱིན་ཅི་མ་ལོག་པའི་དབང་གིས་སླ་མ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱིས་ཐུགས་རྩིས་ཤིན་ཏུ་ཆེ་  
ཞིང་ཚུར་ཡང་དད་གུས་དཔེ་མཛད།

Among those, she made a statue of her teachers and would say with great reverence,  
“My generous teachers.” She particularly showed exceptional reverence for Détri Rinpoche  
and Södrak Tsang and there are many extraordinary episodes of her life concerning these two  
figures. Because of her unerring method of study all of the lamas took great account of her  
and showed incomparable reverence toward her.

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དུས་ཕྱིས་ཞིག་སྤུ་ཞབས་མཚོག་སྤུལ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་ལ་ཞལ་ཕུ་ཞིག་ཞུས་པར་དེ་མི་རུང་གསུངས། དེ་ཅི་སྟོན། མགོན་པོ་  
ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་ཞལ་གྱི་དབྱུགས་ཅོམ་ཡང་། །མཐའ་དག་འགྲོ་ལ་སྟོན་པའི་རྒྱུར་འགྱུར་ན། །གསུངས་འདུག་མོད་ཞུས་  
པར། དེ་རྩེ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་རེད་མོད་གསུངས་པར། ང་ལ་རྩེ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་དང་ཁོང་གཉིས་ལ་ཁྱོད་པར་ཅི་ཡང་མེད་ཞུས་

པར་འོ་འོ་དེས་ན་ཚོག་གི་གསུངས་ནས་ཞུ་མཛད། གཞན་ཚོ་ལ་ཡང་སྐྱེ་ཞབས་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་ལ་དང་པ་གྱིས་ཞེས་ཡང་  
དང་ཡང་དུ་འདོམས་པར་མཛད་དོ།

Said Rindzin Pelmo: “At a later time, I asked Venerable Choktrül Rinpoche<sup>464</sup> if I could receive the ritual (*zhal phu*) from him, but he told me that it is not appropriate for me. ‘What is the problem with that (the ritual)?,’ I asked. ... ‘Lord, you said that your breath is serviceable medicine for all sentient beings.’”

He said, “It is the breath of Je Tsongkhapa not mine.

Rindzin Pelmo said, “To me there is no difference between you (Choktrül) and Je Tsongkhapa.’”

And he said, ‘Oh, oh, in that case it will be all right,’ and he performed the *zhalphu* ritual. I also instructed others to have faith toward Kuzhap Choktrül Rinpoche and they repeatedly did.”

སྐྱེ་བྲལ་ལ་ཕེབས་རེས་གྱིས་ར་སྐོར་དུ་བྱོན་ནས་སྐྱེ་འཕྲིང་རྣམས་ཀྱི་གསོལ་འདེབས་གསུངས་ཏེ་ཇ་ཕུད་ཕུལ། ཞུ་བྱིར་  
བྱོགས་ཏེ་སྐྱེ་བྲལ་ལྷན་སྐྱེས་བདེ་བའི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད། །སྐྱ་ཚོགས་སྐྱེ་འཕྲུལ་དྲ་བས་རོལ་བ་ལས། །དག་པའི་བརྟན་དང་  
གཡོ་བའི་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས། །རྟོན་དང་བརྟེན་པར་ཤར་ལ་མཚོན་པ་འབྱུལ། །ཞེས་གསུངས་ཏེ་བྲག་དཀར་བྱོགས་ལ་  
མཚོན།

Whenever Rindzin Pelmo visited Labrang, she circumambulated around the fence and recited the supplication prayer of all the reincarnate lineages; she then made a tea offering. She then looked outward and recited this (four-line) prayer and made offerings toward Drakkar Monastery:

**Prayer:** སྐྱེ་བྲལ་ལྷན་སྐྱེས་བདེ་བའི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད།

།སྐྱ་ཚོགས་སྐྱེ་འཕྲུལ་དྲ་བས་རོལ་བ་ལས།  
།དག་པའི་བརྟན་དང་གཡོ་བའི་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས།  
།རྟོན་དང་བརྟེན་པར་ཤར་ལ་མཚོན་པ་འབྱུལ།

“Various untainted co-emergent blissful embodiments  
From playing by means of magical emanations  
By the nature of the pure environment and its inhabitants,  
I make offerings to the support and the supported that arise toward the east  
(Drakkar)!”

དེ་ནས་རྐང་བརྟུན་གསུངས་བཞིན་པར་ཕེབས་པ་ཡིན་འདུག ཇི་ཕྱུ་བཀུན་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་སྐོ་བཟང་ཐུབ་བཞུན་ཚོས་གྱི་  
རྒྱལ་མཚན་པ་ཕེབས་དུས་ཆེབས་བསྐྱེད་ཀྱང་ལོ་རྒྱུད་བས་ཚོས་འབྲེལ་མ་ཞུས་འདུག བྱང་མཇལ་དུ་སོང་སྐབས་  
སྐྱེ་བྲལ་སྐྱེ་འཕྲིང་བ་ཚང་དེ་ལ་ཡང་མཇལ། སྐྱེ་འདི་བ་ལ་ཡང་མཇལ་པས་བ་བཟང་གསུངས།

Rindzin Pelmo then left while she said the eight-line prayer. She said, “I requested to meet with (the fourth) Tuken Lozang Tupten Chökyi Gyeltsen when he came, and although I welcomed him, we did not establish a Dharma connection because I was too young.” One time when she went up north (to Gönlung Jampaling Monastery) she also met the young

<sup>464</sup> I could not clearly identify this figure. One Tibetan in Xining said that Choktrül Rinpoche could be another name for a *trülku* at Labrang and/or the Jamyang Zhepa. See <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Zhenpen-Dorje/8603> for other possibilities of Choktrül during Rindzin Pelmo’s lifetime.

Tuken reincarnation (Fifth Tuken?) which was a very auspicious occasion.

རྗེ་དེ་ཉིད་ནས་གནང་བའི་ཁ་དར་རྒྱམས་ལ་ཡང་འདི་ལོང་གིས་གནང་བ་ཡིན་ཞེས་བདེ་མཚོག་གི་གསང་ཐང་ལ་འབྲུལ་  
བར་མཛད་ཅིང་ཐུགས་དད་གཞན་དང་མི་འདྲ་བ་ཞིག་འདུག་སྟེ་སྟེ་འཕྲེང་དུ་མའི་བར་དུ་འབྲེལ་ཆེ་བར་མཛད་  
ནོ། །དེ་དག་ནི་བཤེས་གཉེན་དམ་པ་རྒྱམས་བསྟེན་ནས་གདམས་ངག་གསན་པ་སྟོག་པ་ཐོས་བསམ་གྱི་སྐོར་རོ། །

As for the *khataks* that were given to her by the Tuken, she put them on a (veiled) Cakrasamvara *tangka* (at Drakkar) and felt an unparalleled reverence. It is evident that she had great connections with many reincarnate lamas. This section is about how she heard, contemplated, read and listened to instruction from great spiritual teachers.

### Bottom of page 190 into 191

གདམས་དོན་ཉམས་སུ་བཞེས་པའི་ཚུལ་ལ་རྗེ་བདག་ཉིད་ཆེན་པོས་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར་གདམས་ངག་ལྟ་རེ་ཙམ་མ་  
ཡིན་པར་སྟོམ་གསུམ་དག་པ་ཉམས་ལེན་གྱི་མཐེལ་དུ་མཛད་དེ་ཉིན་རེ་བཞིན་སྐྱོན་དུག་རྣལ་འབྱོར་དུས་དུག་ཏུ་ཆག་  
མེད་མཛད།

As for the manner of cultivating these practices and meaning, the Lord Tsongkhapa said, “Don’t take only a portion of the practice, make completing all three vows as the basis of the practice.” Every day she did the Yoga of the Six sessions six times (three in the morning, three at night) without ceasing.

ནང་རེ་བཞིན་ངག་བྱིན་རྒྱབས་འཇམ་དབྱངས་གང་སྟོ་མ་སྟོལ་དཀར་ལྗང་དགའ་ལྡན་ལྟ་མ་ས་གསུམ་མ་དམིགས་  
བརྩེ་མ་གང་འགྲུབ་བདེ་མཚོག་གི་ཚོག་དང་བརྒྱ་ཅུ་མཁའ་འགྲོའི་སྤྱི་གཏོར་དཀར་གཏོར་བཅས་དང་། དེ་རྗེས་ཕྱག་  
དང་འབྲེལ་བར་སྦྱང་བཤགས་སྐྱེན་ལྷ། ལྷ་མཚོད། དཔའ་ཅིག་བཟང་སྟོན་བྱམས་པའི་དམ་བཅའི་གཞུངས།

Every morning, (Rindzin Pelmo) recited the prayer of speech, including the prayer of Manjushiri Gang Loma; Green Tara and White Tara; the Prayer of 100 Deities of Tushita; the prayer to the Three Root Prayer (Guru, Yidam and *Dakini*) and the Prayer to Tsongkhapa as much as possible. She practiced the ritual of the *Cakrasamvara Tantra* with 100 *torma* offering; she performed the general *torma* with the white *torma*. After that she prostrated and made sacred incantation of the prayer of confession, Medicine Buddha, Guru Puja, Yamantaka, the Dharanis and the vows of Maitreya.

བདེ་གསང་འཇིགས་གསུམ་གྱི་ཅུ་རྒྱུད། དུས་འཁོར་བསྐྱེད་རྒྱུད་མཚན་བཙུན་བཙུན་ཚོས་ཐེ་ལྷ་དབྱུང་མ་འབྲུག་པ། ལྷལ་  
བཟང་རྒྱན་འཕྲེང་གསེར་འོད་བརྒྱན་སྟོང་བ་རྒྱམས་ཅི་ལུབ་རེ་ལྷགས་སྟོག

Rindzin Pelmo read as much as possible from the root tantra of Cakrasamvara, Guyasamaja and Vajrabhairava; the condensed tantra of Kalachakra, the Recitation of the Names; the Five Dharmas of Maitreya and the Introduction to the Middle Way, the *Sutra Sri Mana Devi* and the Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 lines.

དེ་རྗེས་བསྐོར་བ་གང་འགྲུབ། ཚོ་དཔག་མེད། མཁའ་སྟོན་མ་ལོ་ས་ནག དམིགས་བརྩེ་མ། ལྷུང་ལྷ། ཏྲ་  
མགིན་འཁོར་ཆེན། སང་གདོང་མ། རིག་བྱེད་མ། རྒྱམ་འཛོམས། ལོ་གྲོན་མ། རྒྱམ་རྒྱལ་མ། བདེ་མཚོག་  
དཀར་པོ། ཉེ་ཅུ་ཀའི་ཡིག་བརྒྱ་རྒྱམས་བརྒྱ་ཅུ་རེ།

After that, Rindzin Pelmo circumambulated (around Drakkar) as many times as she could and recited each of the following mantras one-hundred times each, including Amitayus; the Black Wrathful Vajra Yogini (Khecari Goddess-Khacoma); Prayer for Tsongkhapa; the





བདུན་མཚམས་གསུམ་སོགས་ཞག་གྲངས་དང་ཐུན་གྲངས་ཐམས་ཅད་བཤད་ཚོད་ལྟར་གྱིས་དང་དེས་ཚོག་གསུངས། མི་གཉིས་དང་རང་དང་མཉམ་དུ་འགྲོ་རྒྱུ་བས་ཡོད་པས་དེ་ལྟར་བཟུང་ཞི་ཚོག་ལྷན་པར་དེ་གཉིས་གཉིས་དེ་ལྟར་བྱས་མི་ཚོག་གསུངས། ཕྱིས་སུ་མཚམས་ཁང་དེ་གཙོད་ཀྱི་གཞུང་ནས་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་གྱི་གནས་རེད་གསུངས། མཚམས་ཁང་དེར་གཞན་སུ་ཡིན་ཀྱང་སྡོད་མི་ཐུབ་པ་ཞིག་ཡིན་འདུག ལྷང་ཐང་འཇམ་པའི་དབྱངས་ནས་སྐྱུན་རས་གཟིག་གྱི་ཞིང་བཀོད་ཞིག་ནང་འདུག་པ་དེའི་མདུན་ནས་སྐྱུང་གནས་བརྒྱད་བརྒྱ མ་ཉི་དུང་ལྷུང། ཡིག་བརྒྱ་འབྲུམ་ཐེར་གསུམ། འབྲེལ་བ་བཞི་སྐྱགས་ས་ལྷུང་བསྐྱེགས་ནས་ཚར་བཅུ་གསུམ་གསུང།

Södrak said (to me): “For three weeks, and so forth, as for the number of meditation sessions, you must do them as explained. That would be sufficient.

I asked, ‘I think two people should come with me. Would that be all right if they come stay with me like this?’ ‘He said that is not all right (for those two to stay like that).’

Södrak said, ‘Later that hermitage will be a place as exactly described in a chö text. ‘No one else who comes to that retreat house is able to stay.’”

The third Gungtang (Tenpé Drönmé) gave (Rindzin Pelmo) a *tangka* of the field of Chenresig and she did 800 fasting rituals in front of this *tangka*. She also said more than 100,000,000 mani mantras, 300,000 mantras of Héruka and the *Four Commentaries* (of Tsongkhapa’s Lam Rim).<sup>465</sup> She recited them completely 13 times in the Drakkar Cave (behind her *nangchen*).

ལོ་རེ་བཞིན་བདེ་གསང་འཇིགས་གསུམ་རྣམ་འབྱོར་མ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་བདག་འཇུག་ཉིན་བདུན་རེ། ལྷ་བ་དང་པོ་ཚེས་གཅིག་ནས་བདེ་མཚོག་དཀར་པོའི་ཚེ་སྐྱབ་ལྷགས་འབྲུམ་འགྲོ་དེས་གནང་ལྷོ་ལྷ་མ་རྣམས་ལ་བུམ་ཚུ་འབྲུལ་བར་མཛད།

Every year Rindzin Pelmo did the Cakrasamvara, Guyasamaja and the Vajrabhairava rituals and every week she performed the self-empowerment of the yogini. On the first day of the first month (New Year’s Day), she definitely recited 100,000 White Cakrasamvara longevity mantras and offered the water from the vase to the lamas.

ལོ་ལྷ་ཏུན་དུ་ལན་དུག་ཕེབས་ནས་བདག་འཇུག་བཞེས། དང་པོ་ཕེབས་སྐབས་བདེ་མཚོག་གི་ཞལ་རས་སྡོན་པོ་ཡིན་པར་གཟིགས་གསུངས་ཏེ། ཉེ་རུ་ཀའི་ཞལ་དངོས་སུ་གཟིགས་སམ་སྐྱམ་མོ། །དེར་བཞུགས་སྐབས་ཞིག་མཚན་ལམ་དུ་སྐྱེ་པ་པཎ་ལྷ་སྐྱེ་རེད་ཅན་སྐྱེ་གཟུགས་རེད་བཞིག་ཕེབས་ནས། ད་སྡོ་བཟང་ཚོས་ཀྱི་ཉི་མ་ཡིན་གསུང་བཞིག་མེས་གསུངས། འདི་དུས་ནང་ཇི་དཀར་ཇི་དཀར་ལ་སོང་ནས་སྐྱེ་མ་དེ་ཉིད་མངོན་སུམ་ལྷ་བྱུར་ཕེབས་བྱུང་གསུངས་པས་ཉམས་སྦྱང་ཡིན་པ་འདྲའོ།

She went six times to the spot of Lokyatün (near Labrang) and partook in the self-empowerment. The first time she went, it was said that she saw that Cakrasamvara’s face was blue and that she thought she saw the actual face of Héruka. While she stayed (at Lokyatün), she dreamed that a tall lama wearing a Penzha (long pointed hat of the Pandita) came and said, “I am (the Third Tuken) Lozang Chökyi Nyima.” Since that time, as his (Third Tuken Lozang Chökyi Nyima’s) face became whiter and whiter, she experienced what seemed to be the real perception of him coming. It must have been a meditative experience because she spoke like that.

སྐབས་ཞིག་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་གྱི་འོག་གི་ཚོག་ཚའི་སྡོང་དུ་མའི་རྐང་རྗེས་གསལ་བར་བབས་པ་ད་དུང་ཡོད་འདུག དེ་

<sup>465</sup> The name of this text is ལྷུང་རྒྱལ་ལམ་རིམ་ཚེན་མའི་མཚན་གཞི་སྐྱགས་བཞུགས་སོ། །Published in India ‘དཔལ་ལྷན་འབྲས་སྤངས་སློ་མང་དབེ་མཛོད་ཁང་ [The Great Treatise of the Stages of Enlightenment] Published in the Library of Drepung Monastery]

ནས་དྲི་ཐོད་པ་ནང་ན་སྒྲིབ་འདྲ་བ་ཡོད་པ་ཞིག་ཀྱང་རྟོན། སེབས་རེས་གཅིག་མ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ན་མར་འགྲོག་མོ་ཞིག་འགྲོ་  
གིན་འདུག་པས་ང་ལ་ཡང་ཡང་བསྟམས་བྱུང་། རྒྱ་ནང་ན་དེ་འདྲ་མེད་ཀྱང་ཅི་ཡིན་མ་གཤེས་གསུངས།

One time a person’s footprint appeared on the table underneath the mandala and it is still there. Then, she also found something that looked like a heart (heart like) in a stone skullcap. On one circuit she made, Rindzin Pelmo said, “I repeatedly watched a nomadic woman walking down river from the source of the Yellow River.” Since there is nothing like that in China she did not know who that person was.

དུས་རྒྱུན་ཡར་མར་གྱི་ཚེས་བརྒྱ་གཉིས་ལ་བདེ་མཚོག་གི་བདག་འཇུག་ཚོགས་འཁོར་དང་བཅས་བ་གནང་།འདི་དག་ནི་  
སྤོང་བ་བསམ་གཏན་གྱི་ཉམས་བཞེས་མཛད་པའི་སྐོར་རོ། །ལོ་རྒྱ་ཏུན་དུ་དང་པོ་སེབས་སྐབས་དོང་ཅོ་ཆེ་བ་ཁྲོན་འགའ་  
མི་ཞིག་གིས་སྤལ་བས་མགོན་པོའི་བྲིས་སྐྱ་བཞེངས་པ་རྟེན་བཞེངས་ཀྱི་ཐོག་མ་ཡིན།

Around the twelfth day she always did the Cakrasamvara self-initiation together with a tantric feast (Ganachakra); these are her experiences as part of her larger practice of renunciation. The first time she went to Lokyatün, a person offered her some strings of large Chinese copper coins. She commissioned a painting of Mahakala; this was the first object she commissioned.

གཟིམས་ཁང་དང་སྤྲ་ཁང་ཉ་ཅིང་རྟོང་ནས་གསར་བཞེང་བྱེད་ཅིས་གནང་བར་ཁྲོན་བརྒྱ་ལས་མེད་པས་ཐབས་མ་རྟོན་  
པར་བཞུགས་སྐབས་མཚན་ལམ་དུ་གྲ་བ་ཞིག་གིས་ཁྲིད་ཀྱིས་བཞེངས་ཐབས་ཀྱིས་དང་ངས་ཕྱོགས་བྱེད་ཟེར་བ་བྱུང་བས་  
དེ་ནས་བཟུང་གདན་འདྲན་པ་མང་དུ་བྱུང་སྟེ་ལོགས་པར་གྲུབ། འོན་ཀྱང་འཇུབ་ཆ་ཤིན་ཏུ་ཆེ་བས་བསོད་གྲགས་རིན་པོ་  
ཆེ་སྟོ་བྱར་དུ་སེབས་ནས་ཁྲོས་མའི་གཏོར་སྐོག་ཞིག་གསུངས། ཉེ་ཅུ་ཀའི་ཡིག་བརྒྱ་མང་དུ་བསྐྱབ་གསུང་བ་ལྟར་བསྐྱབ་  
པས་རང་ཞིར་སོང་།

She planned to build a new bedroom and shrine room (at Drakkar) because the dormitory (bed) room and temple shrine room were both very old. But she did not have the means to do so since she did not have more than 100 kron. She dreamed at that moment that a monk appeared and said to her, ‘You should build these (shrine room and dormitory) and I will assist you.’ From then onwards, she was invited many times (to do rituals and earn money in local villages) and they were both built well. However, because this was a big obstacle, Södrak Rinpoche suddenly arrived and performed a Krodi *torma* ritual to ward off the bad influences. He said to accomplish as many 100-syllable mantras of Héruka. She accomplished this like he said and all of the obstacles themselves subsided on their own accord.

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ཡང་རུབ་གཅིག་ཁོང་སྐམ་ཞིག་གི་ནང་དུ་བརྒྱུག་འདུག་པར་སྐྱར་གྱི་གྲ་བ་དེ་འོང་ནས་བྱ་ག་སྐོ་ཞིག་ནས་ལག་པ་  
བཟེད་པས། དེ་མ་ཐག་ཕྱིར་ཐོན་ཏེ་ནང་དུ་སེབས་པ་ན་གྲ་བ་དེ་ཉོར་ཚང་རིན་པོ་ཆེའི་ཕྱག་བྲིས་ཀྱི་བྲག་ཤིས་རྟགས་  
བརྒྱུད་ཞིག་ཡོད་པ་ལ་ཐེམ་འགྲོ་བ་རྟེས་གསུངས།

Then one night, Rindzin Pelmo dreamed that she entered inside a box (chest) and received the hand of a monk from before (who extended his hand) through a small hole. Immediately she came out of the box and when she went in (another place/the box?) she saw that the monk had dissolved into the eight auspicious marks drawn by (Labrang) *trülku* Hortsang Rinpoche.

དེ་དམ་ཅན་གྱི་འཕྲུལ་དུ་འདུག་ཟེ་མི་རིན་པོ་ཆེས་ཁྱོད་ཀྱིས་དམ་ཅན་རེ་ཐོན་དང་བཟང་གསུང་ཡོད་གསུངས་ནས་རྗེ་  
 ཆོས་གྱི་ཉི་མས་མཛད་པའི་དམ་ཅན་གྱི་ཚོ་ག་རྒྱས་པ་དེ་སྐབས་རེར་འདོན་དུ་འཇུག་པ་གནང་། ལྷ་བང་བཟླ་ཤིས་འབྱུང་  
 དུ་མང་བསྐོལ་ལན་བདུན།

That is an emanation of the sworn protector. Détri Rinpoche said (to Rindzin Pelmo),  
 “It is good if you do the recitations of each protector.” And (Détri Rinpoche) had her on each  
 occasion recite the expanded ritual of the Protector as composed by the (Third Tuken)  
 Chökyi Nyima. She offered tea seven times to the entire congregation in Labrang.

བྲག་དཀར་དགོན་དུ་འབྱོར་མང་བསྐོལ་ལན་གངས་དུ་མ་དང་གཏོར་ཆེན་ཡང་མང་དུ་བཏང་། ལྷ་ཁང་དང་འདུ་ཁང་  
 གསར་བཞོས་དང་འདུ་ཁང་ཕྱིའི་བྱམས་སྐྱུ རོ་བོ་རྗེ་རྗེ་འཆང་གསུམ་ཞིག་གསོས་མཛད་ནས་རྟེན་སྣ་མང་པོ་གཟུངས་  
 འཇུག་དུ་ལུལ། རྟོར་ཚང་དང་རྣམ་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་རབ་གནས་རྒྱས་པ་མཛད། དེ་ནས་བཟུང་ལྷ་རེ་བཞིན་བྱམས་ཁང་དུ་  
 ལྷས་གསོལ་དང་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་བསྟོད་པ་བྱམས་བསྟོད་བཅས་དུས་ཆེན་རྣམས་ལ་ཆག་མེད་མཛད་དེ་དགོས་པའི་གསུང་  
 བཀོད་སྟུལ།

Rindzin Pelmo offered tea to the entire assembly a number of times at Drakkar. On  
 several occasions she also made many offerings (of money and food) and performed many  
 large *torma* rituals. She built a new temple and assembly hall and she had the images of  
 Maitreya, Atisha and Vajradhara statues constructed at the head of the Assembly Hall. She  
 offered as the enlivening Dharanis many varieties of support (relics, consecrated substances)  
 inside. She and Hortsang Rinpoche performed the elaborate consecration. From then onwards,  
 the order was put forth for (monks and nuns) without fail to confer a cleansing ritual, the  
 praise of Dependent Origination and the praise of Maitreya at the festivals every month at the  
 Maitreya Temple.

ཉིད་གྱི་ལྷ་ཁང་ལ་གྲིབ་ཕྱོག་བའི་རྒྱུན་གྱིས་ལྷས་གསོལ་དང་། མཁའ་འགྲོའི་རྒྱུག་བསངས་གནང་བས་སྐབ་དབང་གི་  
 ལྷགས་ཀའི་གཟུངས་ཐག་དེ་སོར་དོ་ལས་མེད་པ་རིམ་གྱིས་སྐྱེ་ས་བྲག་དཀར་དུ་དབྱར་གནས་མི་འདུག་པས་ཉིད་གྱི་ནང་  
 དུ་གྲ་བ་བདུན་རེ་གདན་དྲངས་ནས་ལོ་བདུན་ལ་དབྱར་གནས་བཟུང་སྟེ་འདི་དག་ནི་བྱ་བ་ལས་གྱི་འཁོར་ལོའི་སྐོར་རོ། །

Rindzin Pelmo performed the cleansing ritual and *daka/dakini* purification ritual  
 because her own shrine room was contaminated. The mantra thread of the Buddha image is  
 not more than two finger widths apart that grew gradually (from the *tangka* or statue), and  
 since there was no summer retreat at Drakkar, she invited seven monks each time to her home  
 over a seven-year span to enter into a summer retreat. This section concerns the cycle of  
 deeds upholding the monastic community.

དེ་ལྟར་འཁོར་ལོ་གསུམ་གྱི་ཉམས་བཞེས་མཛད་པས་རྟོགས་པའི་ཡོན་ཏན་རི་ལྟར་འཇུངས་པ་བདག་ལྷ་བུས་ཤེས་པར་  
 དཀའ་མོད། ལྷར་བཤད་པ་ལྟར་བསྟན་པ་སྤྱིའི་བབས་དང་མཐུན་ཞིང་སྟེགས་དུས་བསྟན་འགྲོའི་དམིགས་རྒྱུན་ལ་ཕན་  
 དེས་པ་རང་གི་མཚོང་ཐོས་སུ་གྱུར་པ་འགའ་ཞིག་བྱིན།

In such a way, it is difficult for someone like me (the author Zhangtön Tenpa Gyatso)  
 to understand how the good qualities of her realization arose by means of experiencing  
 renunciation, study and work (the Three Spheres). However, as I have explained before, I  
 have written some of the things that I myself have seen and heard about how she benefited  
 sentient beings and teachings during a time of a general cause of degeneration.

དེ་ཡང་མཁའ་འགྲོ་མ་ཟེར་བའི་མཚན་ཡོད་པ་རྒྱ་མཚན་དུ་བྱས་ནས་གྲུབ་ཏུ་གྱུར་དང་མངོན་ཤེས་ལྡན་པའི་འདྲ་གཏན་ནས་མི་གཏན་བསལ། ཇི་སྐད་དུ། གྲུང་ཐང་འཇམ་པའི་དབྱངས་ཀྱིས་ལྷ་མཚོང་འདྲེ་མཚོང་མངོན་ཤེས་བདག་ལ་མེད། །དག་པོ་སྐྱོལ་བའི་རྣམས་པ་བདག་ལ་མེད། ཅི་དགར་སྦྱོད་པའི་སྤྲིང་སྦྱོབས་བདག་ལ་མེད། །ལས་ཅན་ཚོས་མགོ་ཚོན་པའི་རྣམས་ཐར་ཡིན། །ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར། སུད་མེད་ཀྱི་ཉེན་ཅན་པར་ཟད་དགོས་ལ་ཡང་བསྐབ་ཁྲིམས་རྣམས་དག་བསྐྱང་མཁའ་དཀའ་བའི་དུས་འདིར།

Moreover, despite the fact of her having the name/title of a “*Khandroma*,” Rindzin Pelmo never appeared in connection with her super-normal powers and marks of appearances (or she never performed these acts). As Gungtang Tenpé Drönmé said, “I do not have the clairvoyance to see gods and demons. I do not have the ability to free enemies. I do not have the spiritual force to enjoy as I please.” This is the biography of one who holds high the hands of karma practicing Dharma. In accordance with that statement, let alone discussing the obstacles of being embodied as a woman, it is even difficult here and now to find a *bhikshu* (a fully-ordained monk) who observes the vows completely during this time.

ཚངས་པར་སྦྱོད་པའི་བརྟུལ་ལྷགས་ཁོ་ན་ལ་གནས་ནས་བལྟགས་པ་ནི་ངོ་མཚར་བའི་རྣམས་པར་ཐར་བ་ཡིན་ལ། དེ་ཡང་རྩ་བ་ནང་གི་ཀྱན་སྦྱོང་ལ་རག་ལས་པས། དེང་སང་གི་དུས་སུ་སྲིད་པའི་ཁ་གདངས་བརྒྱབ་སེམས་ཀྱི་མཆོ་བ་གཅོགས་ནས་གང་ཚོ་གང་ཞེས་ལ་བྱི་རྒྱན་ལྟར་རྒྱག་པ་ལ་གཞན་དོན་དུ་མིང་བཏགས་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་འགྲན་པར་མི་རྣམས་པའི་རྣམས་པར་ཐར་བ་ཡིན་ཏེ་རིམ་གྱིས་འཆད་པར་འགྱུར་རོ།

Having resided and abided only in the vow to practice celibacy, this is the amazing tale of her biography. Moreover, since the foundation depends on all internal motivations, nowadays, those who pretend to benefit others but who actually act like thief dogs running after delicious food and opening the mouths of attachment with the fangs of envy, these (pretenders) cannot compete with the tale of her biography. I (the author Zhangtön Tenpa Gyatso) will gradually explain this.

ཁྱབ་སེམས་ཀྱི་སྦྱོར་པ་སྤྱིན་དུག་དུ་འདུ་བས་དེ་ལ་བསྐབ་ཚུལ་ནི་རྟག་དུ་པན་སེམས་ཀྱི་ལྷག་བས་ཁོ་ན་མ་གཏོགས་གཞོན་སེམས་དང་ཁོན་འཛིན་སོགས་གཏན་ནས་མི་མངའ་བས་གཞན་གྱིས་ལོག་སྐྱབ་ཇི་ལྟར་བྱས་གཞོན་ལན་གཏན་ནས་བྱེད་དུ་མི་འཇུག། གཞན་གྱི་སྤུལ་བའི་རྣམས་ཐར་དོང་ཅོ་བརྒྱ་ཡན་ཆད་ཆ་གསུམ་དུ་བྱས་ཏེ་ཆ་གཅིག་སྐྱ་མ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་འབུལ་བ། གཅིག་དགོ་འདུན་དང་དགོན་མཚོག་གི་མཚོང་ཐེབས། གཅིག་ནང་ཆེན་གྱི་ཆ་རྒྱེན་ལ་གནང་བར་མཛད། ཟླ་ཁྲི་རིན་པོ་ཆེའི་གསུང་བཀོད་ལྟར་དུས་འཁོར་ཞལ་ཐང་རིགས་ལྡན་ཉེར་ལྡས་བསྐོར་བ་དང་། ལྷུབས་མགོན་རིན་པོ་ཆེས་གཅོས་སྐྱ་མ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ཞལ་ཐང་བཅས་བཞེངས།

Because vows of the Bodhisattva are collected in the Six Paramitas (Six Perfections), with respect to that discipline, one should not possess harmful intent and resentment and always have a superior attitude to only benefit others, and so forth. No matter how people are ungrateful, one should not engage in exacting revenge with others. As for other substantial donations, she donated over 100 Chinese copper coins in three parts: she gave the first part to the lamas, the second part to the sangha with various jewels (altar), and the third part to her household (at Drakkar). In accordance with the arrangement pronounced by Détri Rinpoche, she made a *tangka* of the chief lamas (Tsongkhapa, Jamyang Zhepa or Gungtang) and the painting of the Kalachakra mandala surrounded by the Twenty-Five Rigdens lineage.

ནས་མཛོ་མོ་མི་འཛིན་ཅིང་འབྲི་འགའ་རེ་ཡོད་པའི་མར་གྱིས་ཚོ་འབར་གནང་། ལུག་གི་བལ་རྣམས་དགོ་འདུན་ལ་  
བསྐྱོ་ཏེ་ཁོ་རང་ཚོ་ལ་ཡང་འབྲེལ་འཛོག་ཏུ་བརྟུག་པ་ཡིན་གསུངས།

Rindzin Pelmo did not have any of the sheep and livestock that were offered to her slaughtered and sold until they died naturally. Among those (animals), she freed several of the *dzo mo* (female offspring between a yak and cow) and used some of the female yak that produced butter to make butter lamps. And she dedicated and offered sheep's wool to the sangha and said, "In this way I have formed a connection with them (sangha)."

དགུང་རེ་བཞིན་རྣ་ལམ་དུ་མཚན་དང་གཟུངས་སྐྱགས་སྐྱོགས་པར་མཛད་ཅིང་བདག་འཇུག་གི་བྱམ་ཚུ་ལ་ཏེན་གསུམ་  
བསྐྱོ་ནས་ལོ་རེ་བཞིན་ཁ་ནང་དུ་བྲུགས་པ་ཡིན་གསུངས། སལ་མོ་ལྷ་མཁན་རྣམས་ལ་སྐྱབས་འགོ་དང་དམིགས་བཅོམ་  
བརྟུན་སྦྱོང་བ། གསེར་འོད་སོགས་པའབས་ནས་པན་པའི་ལམ་ལ་སྐྱུར། སྤོང་བ་རྣམས་ཀྱང་རིམ་གྱིས་ཁྲིད་དེ་ད་ལྟ་  
དམིགས་བཅུ་མ་དང་སྐྱབས་འགོ་ཡང་འདོན་གི་ཡོད་གསུངས། གསང་སྐྱགས་ཀྱི་སྦྱོར་པ་ཡང་སྐྱོ་སྦྱོར་པ་ལྟར་ཅ་བ་སྐྱོ་  
མའི་དམ་ཚིག་ཚུལ་བཞིན་དུ་བསྐྱུང་བར་མཛད་ཅིང་བདག་འཇུག་ཡིག་བརྟུ་སོགས་ཀྱིས་ཉམས་ཚག་སྦྱོང་བའི་ཐབས་ཀྱང་  
མང་དུ་མཛད།

Every night, Rindzin Pelmo recited within ear shot the Dhahrani mantras and mixed the three Jewels (three kinds of relics) with water from the vase of the self-empowerment; and then every year she poured it inward (to the mind).” She said the refuge prayer and the Prayer for Tsongkhapa and the empowerment (shortened text) of the 8,000 lines *Mother of Wisdom*, and so forth, to those who came and asked her for a divination connecting them to the beneficial path. She even guided the villagers and now they also say the Prayer of Tsongkhapa and the Prayer of Refuge. She made them properly maintain the commitments of the root lama, according to the above-mentioned tantric vows, and she also did many activities to purify (broken commitments) through means of the self-empowerment, the 100-syllable mantra, and so forth.

དེ་ལྟར་ནང་གི་ཉམས་བཞེས་ཀྱི་མཐུས་སྤྱོད་ཐམས་ཅད་ནས་མཇལ་བ་མང་དུ་འདུས་ཤིང་དགོན་པར་དགའ་ཇག་གི་  
གཞོན་པ་རྒྱན་ཚད། བྱུང་པར་སྤི་ཅན་གྱི་རིགས་ཁོང་ལ་བསྐྱབས་པ་མི་ཐར་བ་མེད་པ་ཞིག་འདུག། ལྷ་ཚེན་གྲགས་  
ཅན་གྱི་རིགས་པལ་ཚེར་ཐེབས་པས་སྤྱོད་འདིར་ཡུལ་ལ་གཡང་ཆགས། ས་ལ་བཀྲ་ཤིས་པའི་རང་སྤྱིད་གཞན་སྦྱོར་གྱི་  
གནས་སུ་གྱུར།

In that way, from the power of her internal experience, many people came from all directions and assembled in front of Rindzin Pelmo; the bandits at Drakkar Monastery were eliminated. People who were afflicted with demons, in particular, sought her protection, and there was no one that was not liberated. Because well-known lineages of trülku usually came to meet her, prosperity (blessings) came in this direction here (Drakkar). This land became an abode that brought auspiciousness to the earth through happiness of one's self and the aspiration for others.

ཅ་རི་ལ་ཚེ་སྐོར། བར་སྐོར། རོང་སྐོར་གསུམ་ཡོད་པ་ལྟར་ཕྱི་རི་སྐོར་ལམ་གསར་དུ་བཏོད་ནས་ལན་གསུམ་ཐེབས་ཏེ་  
སྐོར་ཚད་<sup>466</sup> ཀྱང་དེ་བཞིན་གནང། གནས་ཁང་དུ་བསང་གཏོང་བར་ཐེབས་ནས་བྱུག་ནས་དུང་དཀར་ཤོར་བ་སྐྱོ་དང་  
བཅས་ཏེ་གསེབ་པའི་ནང་དུ་སྐྱུང་ཡང་སྦྱོར་གང་ཡང་མ་བྱུང། ཡང་ཐེབས་རེས་གཅིག་ཡབ་ཡུམ་གྱི་མཚོ་གཉིས་འཕྱར་  
ནས་ནང་གང་འགོ་རྒྱ་རེད་སྐྱམ་པ་འདུག་གསུངས། ཡང་རེབ་གཅིག་སྤིང་ངོས་ནས་སྐོ་བུར་དུ་ཚུ་འཁྱོར་བ་གང་བབས་  
པ་ཞལ་དུ་བཞེས།

<sup>466</sup> This is a term for a measure/size distance of a kora. In this case three times = one of this measurement.



is actually the abode of the retinue Na Ga Ra. There, it must be the case that you are the most Heroic goddess (*Khandroma/ Vajravārāhi*) with the Glorious Héruka (of Héruka).” At the time she went to meet Pelmang Rinpoche, the attendant went and asked (Pelmang) how their meeting was when she came. Pelmang Rinpoche said, “She is the real Gungru *Khandroma* (*mak zor ma*—army repelling malign sorcery *torma*).” Although it is said whenever she would meet with the hermit (the person named Druppa Dungna) she recited the “Ma sam jö mé ma.” Druppa Dungna invited her and her retinue three times to his hermitage.

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སྐབས་ཞིག་དབུས་ལ་འབྱོན་བཞིན་པར། སྐབས་པ་མདུན་དུ་མཇུག་ཏུ། ས་མཐའ་སྐོར་གྱི་འདུག་པ་ལས་སེམས་མཐའ་  
བསྐོར་ན་དེའི་དགའ་མོད་ལྷན་པས། དེའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་སྣ་ལྟེན་པོ་ཆེ་ལ་ལྷན་པར། དེ་ཉན་ཉན་པོ་རེད་གསུངས་པས་  
དབུས་ལ་ཕེབས་རྒྱ་བཤོལ་གསུངས།

At one time when I decided to go to U Province (Central Tibet), Rindzin Pelmo met with a Siddha who said to her, “Wouldn’t it be better if you traveled to the ends of the mind than traveling to the ends of the earth? When I told these reasons (of my conversation with the Siddha) to Détri Rinpoche, the Détri said, ‘That (what the Siddha said) is true and therefore you should definitely delay your trip to (the province of U in Central Tibet).’”

སྐྱེ་མའི་རྣལ་འབྱོར་ལྷ་མཁན་རྣམས་ལ་ལམ་ཟབ་ཐོན་དང་དེའི་ཚོགས་ཅེས་དང་། སྐྱེ་འདྲ་བཞེངས་རྒྱ་ཡིན་ལྷན་པ་ལ་  
ལབ་སྐོར་བཞེངས་ན་བཟང་། དེ་འདྲ་བ་བཞེངས་པས་ཅི་བྱེད་གསུངས། ཡིག་བསྐྱར་ཞིག་ཏུ་ཟངས་རིའི་མཁའ་འགོ་  
མའི་ཡི་གེ་ཞེས་གནང་བ་དང་། ཉིད་ཀྱི་ལམ་ཚབ་ལྟ་བུར་ལབ་སྐོར་གྱི་སྐྱེ་གཟུགས་བཞེངས་པ་རང་བྱོན་ལྟ་བུར་ཕེབས་  
ཤིང་ཤིན་ཏུ་བྱོན་ལེགས་པས་སྐྱེ་བྱེགས་ནས་ཀྱང་འདི་གསོན་པོ་ལྟ་བུར་འདུག་གསུངས།

Rindzin Pelmo said, “It is sufficient to recite the profound path (*lam zap*) to people who request Guru Yoga.” And she said to those who say that she should build a statue of herself, “I say it’s better to build a statue of Machik Lapdrön. What’s the use of building an image of me?” She wrote that, ‘This is the letter of *Dakinis* of Copper Mountain,’ in one of the letters she wrote. There was a statue made of Rindzin Pelmo and the face of Machik Lapdrön naturally appeared. (Rindzin Pelmo) said, “This statue appears to be like a real person. Her face was substituted for Machik Lapdrön’s body that naturally appeared and it arrived very well. “This looks like a real one,” Rindzin Pelmo said.

ལོ་གཅིག་གི་རང་ཉིན་རེ་བཞིན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་རབ་གནས་འཆག་མེད་མཛད། འདིའི་དཀར་ཆག་མཁན་པོ་སྣལ་པའི་སྐྱེ་  
རིན་པོ་ཆེ་དག་དབང་མཚན་ཅན་ནས་རྒྱས་པ་ཞིག་གནང་འདུག་པ་དེའི་ཚོགས་བཅད་དུ།

Rindzin Pelmo ceaselessly did consecrations every day for one year. The table of contents of this statue’s register is written in detail by Khenpo Trülku Rinpoche Ngawang Tsenchen. The following are verses of the table of contents:

དག་པའི་སྐྱེ་ལུས་དགེས་འཇུག་བཞེངས་པའི་ཉམས། བཅོས་མ་མིན་པར་གང་དུ་རོལ་བ་ཡི། རྟེན་འདི་འཕགས་མའི་  
རིགས་པའི་སྣལ་པའི་སྐྱེ། མིན་ཞེས་སྐྱར་བ་འདེབས་པ་རུང་ངམ་ཅི། བྱི་དང་ནང་གི་རྟེན་འབྱུང་ཕན་ཚུན་དུ།  
འཆར་བ་མེ་ལོང་ནང་དུ་གཟུགས་བརྟན་བཞིན། བྱ་བ་ལས་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལ་འདི་ཡིས་ཀྱང་། བྱེད་པའི་སྐྱེ་མར་གྱུར་པའི་  
རྣམ་ཐར་མཚན། ཞེས་གསུངས་འདུག་པ་ནི་གསང་སྤྲུལ་མཁའ་ལྷན་པ་ཞིག་གིས་བལྟས་ན་ཤིན་ཏུ་ཡ་མཚན་པའི་གནས་  
ཡིན་པས་མཐོང་ཐོས་དྲན་རིག་ཅམ་ཡང་ཤིན་ཏུ་དོན་ཆེའོ། །

“This body is the uncontrived expression of smiling and laughter of the pure illusory



body. This trülku is not the manifestation of Tara. Is it right to pronounce (denigrate?) such an emanation? Through the mutual interaction between the outer and inner dependent origination, what appears is like an image in the mirror. Through this wheel of activity one may also adduce the liberating career of one who is an illusory agent. Thus, for what is said in these verses from the point of view of a Mantrayana scholar, it is a topic of great amazement that even seeing, hearing, remembering and contacting (with the *Khandroma*) is very significant.”

བྱང་ཚུབ་ཀྱི་སེམས་སྐྱར་ཡང་གོང་དུ་འཕེལ་བྱིར་མཁན་པོ་ངག་དབང་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་ལ་སེམས་བསྐྱེད་མཚན་པ་ལྟས། དེ་  
རིང་ནས་ང་བྱང་ཚུབ་སེམས་དཔའ་ངེས་པར་ཡིན་ལྟས་པར།

Said Rindzin Pelmo: “In order to further promote the Bodhisattva vow, I requested the mind generation (first three chapters of Bodhicaryavatara) from Khenpo Ngakwang Rinpoche. From today forward, I am really a bodhisattva.”

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རྗེ་དེ་ཉིད་ནས་ཁོང་བྱང་ཚུབ་སེམས་དཔའ་ལོས་ཡིན་ཏེ་ཁོང་དང་མཉམ་དུ་སེམས་བསྐྱེད་རྒྱ་ཞིག་བྱང་བ་ང་ཡང་སྐལ་བ་  
བཟང་གསུངས།

The Khenpo said, “She must indeed be a bodhisattva; I am also fortunate to cultivate bodhicitta, the spirit of enlightenment (cultivation of aspiration), together with her.”

སེབས་བཞུད་ཀྱི་ལམ་ཞིག་ནས་རྗེ་ཉིད་ཞིག་ལས་དུ་འཕང་ལ་རྩུ་ཡིག་དཀར་པོ་ཞིག་བབས་པ་ཀྱན་རིག་གི་སྐྱུ་ཞིག་གི་དཔལ་  
པར་བཞག་འདུག སྐྱང་གི་ལོ་བདག་བྲག་དཀར་དུ་སོང་ནས་ཟླ་བ་རེ་གཉིས་བཟང་སྐབས་ཚོས་བརྩུ་རྣམས་ལ་མདུན་  
ནས་གོང་ཚོགས་གནང་སྟེ་ལམ་བཟང་ཡུན་རིང་གནང་། གཙོད་གདོན་ཚོགས་དགུ་མ་སོགས་ལུང་ཁ་ཤས་ཀྱང་སྩལ།

While going to-and-from on the path, a stone struck her in the face (inscribed a white Hrum). And I placed (the white Hrum) on the forehead of the Vairocana statue. In the year of the bull, I (the author Zhangtön Tenpa Gyatso) went to Drakkar and stayed one or two months. Rindzin Pelmo spoke for a long time on the tenth day at lunch time. She also bestowed some oral instructions, and so forth, such as the nine verses of chö practice.

བྲག་དཀར་མགོན་གྱིས་ལམ་ཁྲིད་ལྟས་པར། དེ་བཀའ་རྒྱན་ཆེ་འདི་རྒྱུད་ལྷ་ཡིན་པས་དབང་རེ་ལྷ་གིན་འདུག ལམ་  
རིམ་གོ་མ་རྩོད་བས་སྐས་ཀྱི་ཉིང་བ་ནས་མི་འགོ་བར་མགོ་ནས་མར་བབས་པ་ཅི་ཡང་མ་རེད་གསུང་སྟེ་གནང་ཆ་བར་  
སྤང་དོ། །དུལ་སོགས་ཀྱི་འབུལ་བ་མི་བཞེས་ཀྱང་རྗེ་མཉམ་བཀའ་ནོ་ཐོག་ལྷ་ནས་དུལ་སྤང་ལྷ་བརྩུ་གནང་བ་མི་བཞེས་  
ཐབས་མེད་བྱང་བ་དེས་གཞི་བྱས་ཏེ་བྲག་དཀར་གྱི་དགེ་འདུན་པ་རྣམས་ནང་དུ་གདན་དྲངས་ཏེ་ཉིན་ཁ་ཤས་ལ་སྐབས་  
འགོ་དང་དམིགས་བཅེ་མ་རྩུབ་དུ་བརྩུག་ཁྲོད་རང་ཁོང་ལ་འབེལ་ཆེ་བས་ད་རེས་ཉིན་འབེལ་འགྲིགས་ལྷབས་ཚོགས་  
དབུར་སོང་ནས་བརྩོ་སྟོན་གྱིས་གསུངས།

The monastic sangha from Drakkar Monastery requested oral instructions from her and she bestowed an empowerment since Drakkar is a tantric college (Sangbak Mingyéling). Rindzin Pelmo said, “Because most people had not heard of the gradual path to Enlightenment (*the Lam Rim*), instead of starting from the bottom of the ladder they start from the top (after receiving empowerment), and this is never right.” Although she did not accept offerings of money, and so forth, the Tuken Rinpoche gave her 50 ounces of silver, in which she had no choice but to accept. Therefore she made an endowment to invite the sangha at Drakkar back home to the monastery for several days. She led them to recite the prayers of refuge and the Prayer to Tsongkhapa. Rindzin Pelmo told Zhangtön Tenpa Gyatso:

“Because you have a great connection with the Tuken, this is an auspicious time to go to the head of the assembly and recite these (dedication) prayers.”

སྐྱེ་བ་རྗེས་མ་ཚོ་ལ་རྗེ་འདི་བསྟན་པ་འདི་དང་ཞེ་མཇལ་གྱི་རེ་བས་དམིགས་བརྟེན་མ་མང་དུ་སྐྱབ་བཅུག་པ་ཡིན་གསུངས་སྟེ་གཞུང་ཚེན་ལ་སྐྱབས་པ་མ་མཇུང་གྲུང་རྟོགས་པའི་སྟོབས་ཀྱིས་བསྟན་པའི་གནད་མཁྱེན་པས་རྗེ་འདི་རིང་ལུགས་ལ་ཐུགས་ཀྱིན་གྱིན་ཏུ་ཆེ་བ་མཇུང། གཞན་གྱི་ལུང་ཕན་ཚེགས་རེ་ལྷན་པ་རྣམས་འཕྲེལ་དུ་གནང། རེ་གཉིས་ཅོམ་ལ་མཁའ་སྐྱོད་མའི་བྱིན་རླབས་ཡང་གནང་འདུག ཉེ་ཚང་སྐྱེལ་བའི་སྐྱེས་ལྷན་དོར། བསྐྱེད་གཏུག་གྱི་སྐྱབས་གནས་སླ་མ་དང། །བརྟེ་ཚེན་ཐུགས་རྗེ་གཏེར་ཚེན་མ་ར་ཉི། །ཁྱོད་མིན་རེ་སའི་སྐྱབས་གཞན་མ་མཚེས་པས། །མཁའ་སྐྱོད་ཞིང་དུ་འཁྲིད་པར་མཇུང་དུ་གསོལ། །ཞེས་པ་གནང།

Rindzin Pelmo asked: “In future lives will I meet with the teachings of Tsongkhapa?” With this hope, (I) recited the Prayer to Tsongkhapa many times.” And although she did not study the great texts, by the power of her wisdom, she understood many crucial points of the teaching; she had a great attachment to the tradition of Tsongkhapa. .... On occasion, she gave other teachings to those who requested and she also granted the Khecari Goddess’ blessing for one or two people. In the face of Nyangtsang Trülku’s request, She responded, “The lama of unflinching and unerring refuge and *Vajravārāhi*, the great treasure endowed with compassion, because there is no place of refuge other than you, may you lead us to the celestial realm!”

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སླ་བྲང་གི་རྒྱུད་པའི་གྲ་རིགས་རྗེ་ཉིད་ལ་གྱིན་ཏུ་དང་བ་ལུང་རིགས་རྒྱ་མཚོས་ནན་གྱིས་ལྷན་དོར། དཀོན་མཆོག་ཀུན་འདུས་སླ་མ་རྗེ་བཅུན་མ། །རིག་འཛིན་མཁའ་འགོ་ཀུན་འདུས་རྗེ་བཅུན་མ། །དཔལ་མོ་ཐུགས་རྗེ་འདི་གཏེར་ཚེན་རྗེ་བཅུན་མ། །དང་ནས་བཟུང་སྟེ་བྱང་རྒྱུ་སྟེང་བོའི་བར། །ཞུ་བུ་དུ་རེ་འགོ་བའི་སྐྱབས་གཅིག་མ། །ཁྱོད་མིན་རེ་སའི་སྐྱབས་གཞན་མ་མཚེས་པས། །མིང་ཞིའི་འཛིགས་པ་ཀུན་ལས་སྐྱབས་ཏུ་གསོལ། ། ཚོ་བསོད་དཔལ་འབྱོར་ལེགས་ཚོགས་མ་ལུས་པ། །ཡར་ངོའི་སླ་ལྷར་འཕེལ་བར་བྱིན་གྱིས་རློབས།

In the face of the emphatic request of the Labrang Tantric College’s Lungrik Gyatso, who had great faith to Rindzin Pelmo: She responds: “**Könchok:** The devout goddess is the embodiment of all the jewels. **Rindzin:** the revered goddess and embodiment of the *dakinis* (Sky Goers). **Pelmo:** The great treasure of most glorious compassion. From now on, until I reach the heart of enlightenment, you, Tara, who are the sole refuge of human beings, and because there is no other refuge that gives hope from you, may you provide refuge from all fear of *samsara* and nirvana. Grant your blessings so that everything, life-span, merit, splendor and prosperity without exception; may they increase like a waxing moon.”

ཞེས་པ་འདི་གཞན་ལ་མ་སྟོན་གསུང་ནས་གནང། །འདི་གསུངས་མི་ཉམས་པའི་ཚེད་དུ་འདིར་བཀོད་དོ། །པོ་རྒྱུད་པན་དེ་ཟེར་བ་ཞིག་ལ་སེམས་ལྷག་ལ་ཁ་ཉོན་རེ་གྱིས་གསུང་བར། །ངའི་སེམས་ལྷག་འདུག་ལྷན་པར། །ཁྱོད་མར་སོང་ལ་ང་སེམས་ལ་ཞེ་འཆར་བལྟས་ནས་སྐྱབས་འགོ་བ་རྒྱ་ཐོན་ལ་ཡར་ཤོག་གསུང་བ་ལྷར་བྱས་ཏེ་མདུན་དུ་སོང་ནས། །སེམས་མི་ལྷག་ །སླ་བྲང་མན་ཚད། །ཟ་ལར་ཡན་ཚད་ལ་སོང་ནས་མི་ཐུབ་པར་འདུག་ལྷན་པར། །འོ་འོ་དེ་ཡིན་ཁྱོད་གྱིས་སེམས་ལྷག་པ་མ་རེད་བསམ་གྱིས་པ་རེད། །བྱིན་ཚད་ང་འམ་བསོད་གྲག་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་སེམས་ལ་ཞེ་འཆར་བལྟས་ནས་གསོལ་བ་རེ་ཐོབ། །མང་པའི་ཁ་ན་མེད་ཅེས་གསུང་སྟེ་བཀའ་གདམས་གོང་མའི་གསུང་ལྷར་སྐྱང་དོ།

Rindzin Pelmo said to Lungrik Gyatso, “Don’t show others what I just said,” and gave it to the (author Zhangtön Tenpa Gyatso). For the purpose of maintaining the uncorrupted speech, I (the author Zhangtön Tenpa Gyatso) stated it here.

Rindzin Pelmo said to a person called Bo Chung Pen De to control the mind and do prayer recitations.

“My mind is in check,” he said.

Rindzin Pelmo said to him, “You go down and look to see where I (Rindzin Pelmo) appear in your mind, say 100 refuge mantras and come back up.

Having done this, he came in front of me and said, ‘My mind is unsettled. I am not able to go from below Labrang to above Salar.’

“Oh, oh this is it, You are not concentrating, you are not a good thinker,” Rindzin Pelmo said. “From now onwards, you have to see whether I or Södrak Rinpoche appear in your mind and then say prayers and you will obtain (a peaceful mind).”

Said Rindzin Pelmo to him (the author Zhangtön Tenpa Gyatso): “Don’t mention this! This anecdote appears as speech from an early Kadampa master.

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ལྷ་བྱང་ལྷ་མེད་མི་ཞིག་དག་སྐྱེས་ནས་ཁ་ནས་སྐྱ་ཚམ་ཡང་མི་ཐོན་པ་ལ་སྐྱབས་མགོན་མཚན་མཁན་མཁའ་འགྲོ་མ་ཚང་གི་  
མདུན་དུ་སོང་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར་དེར་ཡོང་ཡང་སྐྱ་མཚམས་ཡིན་པས་མ་ཚུད། ཕྱི་ཉིན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་དབུ་སྐྱ་དང་བསྐྱེད་གུལ་  
ལྷན་གཅིག་བདུག་རྒྱ་དང་བསྐྱེད་མདུན་བུམ་ཚུ་བཅས་གནང་། དེའི་མཚན་མོ་ཁོ་རང་གི་མི་ལམ་དུ་ཕྱུ་དུང་གི་ནང་  
ཤིག་གིས་གང་བ་མཐོང་བས་སྐྱེས་ནས་སྐྱ་ཚུ་ཚེན་པོ་བཏོན་པས་སྐྱ་བོ་ཞིག་ཡོད་པས་སང་ནས་ཁྱོད་ཀྱིས་ཁ་གྲགས་ལྷབ་པ་  
ཨི་རེད་ཟེར་བར་ལྷབ་པར་འདུག་བྱས་ནས། མ་ཅིག་ལ་བ་ཀྱི་སྐྱོན་མ་ཞེས་གསོལ་བ་བཏབ་པས་དེ་ཕྱིན་དག་གོལ།

A servant at Labrang’s estate who was mute and not able to produce a sound was told by the Supreme Lama (the Jamyang Zhepa) to go in front of the *Khandroma* (Rindzin Pelmo). He went there, but because she was in solitary retreat at the time, he could not go inside. (Note: It is not clear if Rindzin Pelmo leaves her retreat to meet with him or not). The next day Rindzin Pelmo gave mantras with part of her hair, a black medicinal substance, holy water vase, a protector’s knot and some incense. That night since he dreamed that his sleeve was full of lice, he became afraid. Because he was able to scream a helper woke him up and said, “You were able to scream, weren’t you?” “Yes, I could.” By praying “Machik Lapdrön” his speech was liberated!

ལ་ནག་གི་བྱིས་མོ་ཞིག་ཀྱང་ནག་སྐྱེས་པ་ལ་ལུས་སྐྱོན་དང་བུམ་ཚུ་གནང་དོ་རུབ་གནས་ཁང་ནས་ཉོལ་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར་  
བྱས་པས་ཕྱི་ཉིན་ལེགས་པར་གོལ་འདུག། མཚོ་མོ་ཞིག་ལ་ཡང་ཕྱག་གཉིས་ཀས་མགོའི་གཡས་གཡོན་ནས་བརྟེན་ཏེ་  
མཚན་དང་གསུངས་སྐྱེས་གསུངས་ཤིང་ཞལ་ཕུ་བཏབ། དོང་ཅོ་ཁྱོན་འགའ་རེ་ཡང་གནང་།

Rindzin Pelmo performed a chö ritual and gave holy water to a girl from Lanak (in Gengya) who also could not speak. Rindzin Pelmo said, “Tonight, sleep at home.” As for what is said, she did exactly as she was told, and the next day she was able to speak! To a female leper, Rindzin Pelmo put both her hands on the left and right side of the leper’s head and supported her. She said names (Avalokitishvara) along with Dhahrani mantras and cast a blow on the leper’s face. She also gave her a string of copper coins.

དེ་བཞིན་དུ་དགོན་པའི་གྲ་རྒྱུད་ནམས་དང་། དབུལ་ཕོངས་དང་ནད་པ་སོགས་ལ་གནང་སྐྱོན་དང་སྐྱོན་ལམ་མཚན་  
ཡང་ཞལ་ནས་ངའི་ཁང་བ་འདི་གྲང་ཐང་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་དང་། ལྷེ་བ་ཚང་། བསོད་གྲགས་ཚང་གང་རུང་ལ་ཕུལ་ནས་ང་  
རང་མཚམས་ཁང་དུ་བསྐྱེད། ཕྱིན་ཚད་སྐྱེས་སྐྱ་སོགས་མེད་པ་བྱས་ན་ཞེས་ཨ་ཁུ་རིན་པོ་ཆེར་ཞུས་པར། དེ་མི་ཚོག་  
ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་རྗེས་ནས་མཁའ་འགྲོ་མ་ཟེར་བ་ཞིག་དགོས་པ་རེད། གནས་འདིའི་བདག་པོ་ཡིན་པས་ཅིས་ཀྱང་དགོས་པ་རེད།

གསུངས།

Similarly, she gave blessings and prayers to ordinary monks, the penniless, the sick, and so forth. She said, “I offered my house to any one of Gungtang Rinpoche, Deba Tsang Rinpoche and Södrak Rinpoche, while I myself stayed in my hermitage. If I do everything will there be no future (Gungru) reincarnations, and so forth?,” I asked Akhu Rinpoche. Akhu Rinpoche responded to her, “This is not permissible. After you, there must be a being called a *Khandroma*. Because the *Khandroma* is the owner of this place, it is necessary that she is here.”

དེ་ལྟར་ན་དཔའ་བོ་ཞིག་ཡོང་ན་བཟང་རྒྱ་རེད་ལྟེན་པ་ལ་བཟང་ན་ཚོགས། ཉེན་བཟང་བས་གང་བྱས་ཀྱང་ལེགས་པོ་  
ཡོངས་རྒྱ་རེད་དཔའ་མོ་མི་བཟང་། བྱིས་མོ་ཞིག་ཡོང་ན་རྒྱལ་ལྗོངས་ལོང་། དེ་འདྲའི་ཚེད་དུ་ཨ་ལགས་སྤོང་ཚང་  
ལ་འདུལ་བའི་སྤོང་འབྲམ་མཉན་པ་ཡིན་གསུངས།

Replied Rindzin Pelmo: “In that case, it would be good if a male hero comes because they can stay in each monastery. Because a male has good support, whatever that reincarnation would do, it would be fine. But a heroine (female) is not good. If a little girl arrives, it is disgusting/nauseating.” Because of this, she studied the 100,000 Anecdotes of the *Origin of the Vinaya* with Alak Ling Tsang.

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ངའི་བསམ་པ་ལ་གོ་ས་འདྲིར་མ་ཅིག་གི་སྐྱབས་ལཱ་ལ་བཞུགས་པ་ལྟར་ལ་དེ་ལ་མཇུག་ན་སྐྱམ་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ་ཁོང་རྣམས་ཚོས་  
གནང་བ་མི་སྟེར་གསུང་སྟེ་རྒྱ་མཚན་འོག་ཏུ་འཆད་དོ།

Although I thought if we put Machik Lapdrön’s image in this place here so visitors could come to meet with the image, the seekers did not give me permission (they wanted to meet with her) and the reasons are explained below.

ཡང་སྐྱེ་ན་སྤྱི་མཐོང་དུས་ལྗེ་ཁྱིམ་པོ་ཆེར་མཇུག་སྐབས་དགུས་པའི་ཉམས་ཀྱིས་རང་རེ་ཚོ་སྤར་ཡང་འགྲོགས་ནས་འོང་བ་  
ཞིག་ཡིན། ད་དུང་ཡང་འགྲོགས་ནས་སོང་ན་ཚོགས་གསུངས། ཁོང་ནས་ཅི་ཅུ་གི་བར་འགྲོགས་ཞུས་པར། ཟུང་  
འཇུག་ཐོབ་ཀྱི་བར་ཡིན་མོད་གསུངས། ཟུང་འཇུག་ནས་ཐོབ་རྒྱ་རེད་ཞུས་པར། འདི་འདྲ་བྱས་འགྲོ་གི་བཟང་ན་སྐབས་  
ཤིག་ཐོབ་ལོས་ཡོང་གསུང།

Also, when she was young, she experienced joy at the time of meeting with Détri Rinpoche. Said Rindzin Pelmo: “We previously had a close relationship (the third Détri, Jamyang Tupten Nyima) and I have returned. It is permissible if we associate with each other again and again.”

“How long will we continue to consort with each other?,” the Détri asked.

Said Rindzin Pelmo: “Until we obtain the integration of skillful means and wisdom (coalescent union), she said.

“When will we obtain the union?,” he asked.

She said, “Similarly, if we stay like that, at some point or another, we will achieve the union.”

ཡང་སྤྱི་མཐོང་པོ་ཆེ་སྐྱབས་སྐབས་ཤིག་རྗེ་འདི་བ་མདུན་དུ་ཕེབས་ནས། ཟུགས་ཀའི་ན་བཟང་བསལ་ཏེ་ཞུ་བུ་ཞིག་  
བཏབ་པས་ཞུ་འཇུག་མཇུག། དེའི་རྗེས་མཇུག་ལ་ཞུས། ཡང་ཞུས་ནས་ང་ལ་ཡོན་ཏན་མེད་ཀྱང་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱིས་རེ་  
སྟོན་བྱེད་གི་འདུག་ལྟ་མ་རྣམས་ཚོ་ལ་སྐྱབས་འཇུག་རེ་ཞུས་ཡོད། ད་དམུལ་བར་སྤོང་ཡང་གཅེས་འཛིན་གྱི་དབང་དུ་མ་

སོང་ན་བཟང་གི་ཞེས་འདི་དག་ཕྱིས་སུ་རྒྱ་སྤྲུལ་བའི་སྐྱེ་ལས་ཚོས་པ་འདིར་བྲིས་སོ། །

Similarly, one time when the Détri was sick, Rindzin Pelmo went in front of him. Having removed his robe, she cast a blow on him and he responded with a smile. After that, he requested to have an audience with her. Again, Rindzin Pelmo said, “Although I do not have any knowledge/qualities, everybody has expectations of me. Therefore, I requested assistance from each of my respective teachers. Now, even if I descend into Hell, it is good if I don’t become subjected to worldly partialities.” I (the author Zhangtön Tenpa Gyatso) heard these things later on from Rwa Gya Trülku, and wrote them here.

སྟོག་ལོའི་དགུན་མཚམས་ནང་ནས་སྐྱེ་བསྐྱེད་ཚུལ་བཟུང་། དགུང་ལོ་དོན་བརྒྱད་པ་ཡོས་བུའི་ལོ་རྒྱུ་ལོའི་ཉེར་ལྔ་ལ་གྲ་  
མང་དང་མཇལ་མཁན་རྣམས་ལ་མཇལ་ཁ་གནང་། གཉིས་པའི་ནང་རང་དགོན་ལུང་དུ་འགོ་ལམ་ནས་བཙོ་ལུང་ཉེན་  
མདུན་དུ་མཇལ་བར་དུས་རྒྱུན་ལོ་བོ་ཅག་སོང་ན་ཕྱི་རོལ་དུ་ཕེབས་པ་གནང་གིན་ཡོད་པས་མི་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་བཞེན་ནས་རྒྱ་  
སྐོར་དུ་ཕེབས་འདུག་ཀྱང་སྐྱེ་ཉམས་ཞན་པར་འདུག ནང་དུ་སོང་ནས་བརྟན་བཞུགས་སྤུལ་ཀྱང་ཞལ་བཞེས་མ་གནང་།  
ཐུབ་བཀུན་རིན་པོ་ཆེར་འབྲུལ་བ་འགའ་བསྐྱར་ནས་ཁྱོད་ཀྱིས་ངས་གོ་ཚོད་པའི་སྐྱབས་འབྲུག་ནན་ཏན་ལྷུས་གསུངས།  
ལོ་བོ་ཅག་ལ་གསང་བའི་གསུང་འགའ་ཤེས་གནང་ཀྱང་འབྲི་བར་མ་ལྷོས་སོ། །སྐྱེ་འཁོར་རྣམས་ལ་ཡང་དེ་འདྲ་བ་ཞིག་མི་  
ཡོང་པའི་ཐབས་མི་འདུག སྟོན་ལམ་ཞིག་གི་སྐྱབས་རེད།

During the winter of the Tiger year while she was in retreat, Rindzin Pelmo became sick. During her 78<sup>th</sup> year, on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the Chinese year of the Rabbit, she gave an audience to the entire community of monks and visitors. On the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the second month I (Zhangtön Tenpa Gyatso) met with her (at Drakkar) while on my way to Gönlung Jampaling. Usually she comes outside to greet us when we meet her, but on this occasion, two people supported her walking to the courtyard because her body was very weak. I went inside and offered her a long-life prayer (a prayer for longevity) but she refused.

Said Rindzin Pelmo to Zhangtön Tenpa Gyatso: “You carry some offerings for (the sixth) Tuken Rinpoche and tell him that I have made meaningful repeated requests (to Tuken),” she said. Although she said some confidential things to us, I am not able to write it. Even for the entourage, there is no way that I will not come and be among those in attendance. It was an occasion for prayer.

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ཚུང་དུས་གོང་ཚོགས་ལ་གཏན་ནས་མ་འབྱེད་<sup>468</sup>། ངས་ཚོས་སྐྱོད་ལ་གཏན་གཉེར་ཡང་བྱས་ཡོད་ཅེས་ནན་ཏན་ཆེན་པོས་  
གསུང་བ་འདི་སེམས་ལ་འཛིན་དགོས་སོ། །གསུམ་པའི་ནང་མཚན་སྟོགས་མཁན་པོ་མཇལ་ཏེ་རྗེ་ཡབ་སྲས་གསུམ་བཅོས་  
བྱུང་ཅིག་སྤུལ་བར་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་ལེགས་ཞེས་ཤིན་ཏུ་མཉེས་གནང་བ་ནི་འབྲུལ་བ་ཀུན་གྱི་ཐ་མཛད།

Said Rindzin Pelmo: “When the next (Gungru) reincarnate is small, absolutely do not take her to the villages to perform rituals. I have also requested the oracle to be the guardian of the teachings. With great emphasis you need to hold onto these teachings with your heart.” In the third month she met with Tsendrok Khenpo who offered her the set of images of Je Tsongkhapa and his two disciples (Jéyapsésum). She said, “This is very auspicious.” She was greatly pleased. This was the last time she received an offering.

ཉིད་ཀྱི་སྐྱེ་གདུང་གནས་རིའི་ངོས་དེར་ཁོང་གི་མ་ཡུལ་བཞག་ཤུལ་དུ་བཞག་ནས་བྱ་ལ་བྱིན་ན་བཟང་། རུས་པ་རྣམས་

<sup>468</sup> This could possibly be the correct word in this sentence. According to consultation with local Tibetans འབྲེད་ which means lead/guide is better.

བརྒྱུད་ནས་བྲག་དོན་མི་མི་ཐར་བ་ཞིག་ཏུ་སྐྱོལ། ལུས་དུམ་ཅུང་ཟད་ཅམ་ཡང་སྤང་མི་ཚོག་ག་དུང་མཇལ་སོགས་ཀྱང་མི་དགོས། འཁྱེར་དུས་གནས་ཁང་ཕྱོགས་ཀྱི་སྐོ་འདི་ནས་ཁྱེར། མཚོ་ལ་བཀལ་ན་ཚོག་འར་ལུར་མང་བོ་བྱེད་གི་མ་འདུག་གསུངས་ཀྱང་བསོད་བྲག་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་ནས་ནན་ཞུས་བྱས་པས་དབུ་ཚོད་སྤང་ཚོག་པ་དང་ག་དུང་མཇལ་ཀྱང་བྱེད་ཚུ་གནང་།

Rindzin Pelmo said that it is better to do a sky burial on the side of the sacred hill where her mother was buried. She said to cut her corpse and take it to the face of the cliff where people cannot go.

Said Rindzin Pelmo: “Nobody should be allowed to take a single piece of bone to make a relic and no public audience should occur. When carrying my remains you should take them through this door of my home (at Drakkar). Although it will be good if you load my dead body on the back of a *dzo* (a cross between yak and cow), do not lament.” But because Södrak Rinpoche repeatedly requested permission from her, he was allowed to bring her skull and would be able to pay homage to her remains.

གསུམ་པའི་ཉི་ཤུའི་ནང་ལྷ་བར་ཇ་དཀར་པོ་ཞིག་ཁྱེར་ཤོག་ཐ་མ་རེད་མོད་གསུངས། རྗེ་བ་ཚང་གི་ཡི་གེ་ཞིག་ཁྱེར་ཡོང་བ་དེ་སྲུས་ཁྱེར་ཡོང་བ་རེད་གསུངས་པར། དེ་འདྲ་མ་ཡོང་ཞུས་པས། ལོས་ཡོང་ངས་སྐོ་ལ་བུད་ནས་བཏོན་བ་ཡིན་གསུངས་པར། ཁོང་གི་མཚན་ལམ་ཕྱིས་པ་ཡིན་འགོ། སུ་མ་ཡོང་ཞུས་པས་ཅིང་མ་གསུངས། དེ་ནས་དཔ་བོ་མཁའ་འགོའི་པོ་བྲང་གནས་ཁང་གི་ཕྱོགས་ལ་ཞལ་བཞུན་ནས་བཞུགས་ཏེ་ཕྱག་དཔལ་བར་སྐྱོ་མོ་སྐྱུར་ནས་བཞུགས་པ་རིམ་གྱིས་དུན་དུ་བསྐྱར་ཏེ་ཉིག་མཚན་པོ་ཞིག་ནང་ནས་འོད་གསལ་ནང་གི་མཁའ་སྐྱོད་མངོན་དུ་མཛད་དོ། །གསུང་བཀོད་ལྟར་བསོད་བྲགས་ཚོག་གི་སྐུ་གཟན་བཀའ་བློ་ཞག་གསུམ་གྱི་བར་དུ་གཞན་ལ་གསང་།

Her last cup of white milk tea was brought to her early on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the third month. She asked who brought the letter (to her) from Deba Tsang. The attendant said, “Nobody did that.” Said Rindzin Pelmo: “This certainly happened: I saw him (the mail man) off through the door.”

“Perhaps this is a dream,” the attendant said to Rindzin Pelmo. “Nobody came!” She didn’t respond.

Then, she looked toward the home of the *dakas* and the *dakinis*, with her hands clasped together at her forehead, she bent over. She let out a high-pitched, “Heek!” With clear light she manifested the inner sky fair of the celestial realm. As per her instructions prior to her death, she was covered with Södrak Tsang’s robe. Her death was kept a secret from others for three days.

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དེ་ནས་སྐུ་ག་དུང་ལྷ་ཁང་དུ་སྐྱུན་དངས་སྐབས་ཕྱག་གཉིས་འཁྱུད་ཚུ་མཛད་ཅིང་ཤངས་བུག་ནས་བྱང་སེམས་དམར་པོ་བབས་པ་སོགས་བུགས་དམ་གྱི་ཉུགས་ཁྱེད་པར་ཅན་བྱུང་འདུག། མིད་ཞིའི་གཙུག་རྒྱན་གོང་ས་སྐུ་ཞབས་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་དང་། བཞུན་འགོའི་མགོན་སྐབས་རོང་བོའི་ཤར་སྐུ་ལ་བའི་སྐུ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་རྣམ་གཉིས་གདན་འདྲེན་ཞུས་པ་སོགས་ག་དུང་མཚོད་ཀྱི་རིམ་པ་གང་འབྱོར་བྱས་ཀྱང་རྗེ་ཉིད་ནས་ལྷ་མོ་ཞིག་ནས་ཕབས་བཞུད་བཅོན་ཚོད་གནང་སྟེ་བྱ་བཅང་རི་ཁྲོད་པ་གནང་ཡོད་པས་ཤིན་ཏུ་དོས་གཙང་བ་བྱུང་།

At the time her body was brought to the temple, the extraordinary sign of Samaya commitment occurred as her hands were still clasped together in an embrace and red bodhicitta dripped from her nostrils, and so forth. Two lamas, the Crown Ornament of Samsara Kuzhap Rinpoche and the Protector of Beings the Shar reincarnate of Rongbö, were invited to perform a dedication ceremony for her remains, and so forth. She in some past time provided some consecrated substances and the atmosphere was very pure because she was a

renunciate hermit.

དེ་ཡང་རྗེ་བཙུན་མི་ལའི་མགུར་འབྲུམ་ལས། གངས་དཀར་ཉི་མེ་རྒྱུད་པ་དེ། །མ་མཐོང་རྒྱུད་ན་སྤྲོ་ཆེ་ཡང་། མཐོང་ནས་དྲུང་དྲུ་སྒྲིབ་ཅ་ན། །རི་འགོ་ཁ་བས་བརྟུམ་པ་གཅིག ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར་རྣམ་ཐར་ལ་ཡང་དེ་ལྟར་སོང་བ་མང་མོད་ཀྱང་། འདིར་ནི་བཀའ་གདམས་གོང་མའི་གསུངས་ལས། དགོ་བའི་བཤེས་གཉེན་བྱ་བ། བཞུད་ན་གསལ་བ་ཉམས་པོའི་གངས་རྩ་བ། བརྟུད་ན་གསལ་བ་མ་བྱའི་མདོངས་ལྟ་བུ་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར་ལྟན་པ་རྒྱུད་ན་ཆེ་བ་ལྟར་སྤྲོ་དྲུང་དྲུ་ཡུན་རིང་དྲུ་བཟང་ན་མཛད་སྦྱོང་ལ་ལྟག་པར་དད་བ་སྐྱེ་བ་ཞིག་ཡོད་ལ།

Furthermore, as stated in the (biography) *Life and Songs of Milarepa*, “Even though we cannot see the Snow Peak Kailash, we have still heard of its great fame from a distance. In accordance with that statement, although we have said a lot in regards to the biography, “According to the early Kadampa masters, when one looks up to a spiritual friend it is as clear as the snow mountain of Hepo. When you bow inwards, it is as clear as the eye of a peacock feather.” Just as it was said, if one is renowned from a distance, if you remain close to the teacher, with respect to this behavior, a special faith is born.

པོ་ཏོ་བ་ཆེན་པོས། དེད་ཀྱི་སྒོ་བ་དཔོན་ཞང་བཙུན་སྤྲོ་མཐས་པ་ཡེ་མེད། ཡོན་བཤད་ཅིག་ནང་ན་ཡང་ཀུན་གྱིས་མི་གོ་སྟེ་མ་ལས་མི་མཐུན་ཀྱང་སྤྲོ་མ་གཉིས་པོ་ཡོད་པས། དྲུང་ན་སྤྲོ་ཉེ་བ་ལ་ཕན་ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ལས་རིམ་ཆེན་མོར་དངས་འདུག་པ་ལྟར། གཞུང་ཆེན་མོ་ལ་སྤྲུངས་པ་མ་མཛད་ཀྱང་། ལུགས་རྒྱུད་བྱང་ཚུབ་ལས་ཀྱི་རིམ་པས་གང་བའི་དབང་གིས་སྤྲོ་གསུང་ལུགས་ཀྱི་མཛད་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་བསྟན་འགྲོའི་དམིགས་རྒྱུན་ལ་ཕན་ངེས་པ་ཤ་ལྟག་ཏུ་སྤྲང་ངོ།

The great Potopa said, “My teacher Zhangtsün was not eloquent and when he offered an explanation of the benefits (of the teachings) everyone could not understand. Although he was unlearned, whoever was up close to him understood and benefited. Similarly, although (Rindzin Pelmo) is not learned in the great texts, (such as the Lamrim Chenmo), by the force of having one’s spirit filled with the path of Bodhi, all of one’s activities of body, speech and mind, had as their objective the benefit of the teachings and beings.

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ལྷན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཐར་བ་ཤེས་དཀའ་ཡང་། ལྷོགས་ཅམ་ནི། དེ་ཡང་ཡུམ་ཆེན་ལབ་ཀྱི་སྦྱོལ་མའི་སྲས་སྤོང་སྤེ་ངག་གི་དབང་ལྷུག་ནི་ཀུན་མཐུན་སྤྲོ་མ་ཡིན་ཅིང་། རྗེ་ལ་སྤེ་རྒྱལ་བའི་འབྲུང་གནས་སྤེ་སྤེ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་དང་། མོད་སྤོན་བསམ་འབྲུབ་ནི་རྗེ་ལྷུང་བཀུན་པ་ཡིན་པར་ཚད་མའི་ལྷང་ལས་གསུངས་ལ་ཡུམ་སྲས་རྣམས་ལྟན་ཅིག་ལྷོགས་འདིར་ཕེབས་ནས་བྱིན་གྱིས་བསྐྱབས་ཉི་གཉིས་སྤོང་བ་སོགས་གནང་བ་བཞིན་ཀུན་མཐུན་ཆེན་པོས་བཀའ་ཤེས་འབྱུང་ལྷུག་འདེབས་མཛད།

It is difficult to understand such an exceptional liberation tale. As for giving just a portion of it, a reliable source states that Machik Lapdrön’s first son, Tongdé Ngakgi Wangchuk, is the Jamyang Zhepa. Dröldé Gyelwé Jungné is the Détri and Tönyön Samdrup is the Tuken. Mother and sons came together here in this region, blessed it and hid many treasures [gter] here, and so forth. And similarly, the Jamyang Zhepa founded [Labrang] Tashikyil.

དའི་བྱང་ལྷོགས་མཐའ་འགྲོའི་གནས་ཆེན་འདིར་ཨ་མ་ཡུམ་ཆེན་ཉིད་དངོས་སུ་བྱོན་ནས་བཞུགས་པ་ཡིན་པ་ནི་གོང་དྲུ་བྲིས་པའི་རྣམ་ཐར་གྱི་བབས་ཀྱིས་ཤེས་རྒྱས་སོ།

In the northern direction (from Labrang) at the sacred place of the *Dakinis*, the Supreme Mother herself came and stayed as has been revealed in the biography written above.

དེ་དོན་བཞིན་སྐྱབས་མགོན་ཐམས་ཅད་མཐུན་པ་ལ་སྤྱུལ་སྐྱེ་ཨི་འབྱོར་ལྷན་པར། དགོན་པའི་བྱང་ཕྱོགས་འདི་ནས་མ་  
 ཅིག་ལ་བ་གྱི་སྒྲོལ་མ་བཞུགས་འདུག་དགོས་པ་རེད། གནས་འདིའི་བདག་པོ་ཡིན་པས་སྤྱུལ་སྐྱེ་ལོས་ཐེབས། ཁ་མཐོ་མ་  
 ལྷག་ན་བཟང་གསུང་པ་ནི་དུས་གསུམ་རྗེན་པར་གཟིགས་པའི་གསུངས་ཡིན་ནོ། །མཁན་པོ་སྤྱུལ་བའི་སྐྱེ་ནས་འདིའི་  
 དཀར་ཆག་ཏུ་གསུངས་པའི་ལྷང་སྐར་བཀོད་པ་དེའི་དོན་བཞིན་འོད་གསལ་མངོན་དུ་མངོན་ནས། སྐྱེ་མའི་སྐྱེ་ནི་  
 རགས་པའི་རྟེན་སྐྱེ་བརྟན་འདི་ལ་ཡང་བཞུགས་ཤིང་། དེས་སྐར་ཡང་སྤྱུལ་བའི་སྐྱེ་འཛིན་པ་ནི་གསང་སྤྲུལ་རྒྱུད་སྣེའི་  
 དགོངས་པ་མ་ཚོར་བ་ཡིན་ནོ།

As has been explained before, someone asked (Omniscient Protector, the Jamyang Zhepa? Refuge Lama) will the *trülku* arrive? He replied: “Machik Lapdrön needs to stay at this monastery (Drakkar Monastery north of Labrang). Since she is the master of this land, a *trülku* will definitely come back again. It will be good if she is there.” This is the speech of someone seeing clearly the three times (past, present, future) nakedly, i.e., the Jamyang Zhepa.

In accordance to what Khenpo Trülku mentioned above in the table of contents of Machik Lapdrön’s statue, the statue manifests clear light and that the illusory body was also present in the image of the body, which was the gross support. Furthermore, Rindzin Pelmo’s Nirmanakaya is an unerring intention of the secret tantra and mantras.

དེ་ལས་བོ་རྣམས་གྱི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་གསལ་ན་ལྷགས་དགེས་པ་ཞིག་ཡོད་འདུག་པ་ནི། བདེ་མཚོག་རྩ་རྒྱུད་ལས། གཡུལ་དུ་  
 འཆི་བ་རྣམས་གྱི་ནི། །གཏམ་དག་ལ་ནི་རྟག་ཏུ་དགའ། །ཞེས་ལྷ་མའི་རིགས་ཅན་གྱི་མཁའ་འགྲོ་མའི་རྟགས་སུ་གསུང་  
 ལ། དུས་འཁོར་གྱི་རྒྱུད་ལས་ཀྱང་། རྣལ་འབྱོར་མ་སོ་དུག་པོ་སོ་སོའི་མཚན་ཉིད་གསུངས་པ་རྣམས་དང་བསྟན་ན་ངོ་  
 མཚན་བ་ཡོད་པར་སྐར་ན་ཡང་བདག་ལྟ་བུས་ཤེས་པར་དཀའ་འོ།

As for the pleasure of listening to the stories of the heroes, according to the Cakrasamvara root tantra, “Those who died in the battlefield, these stories are always delightful.” This (from the Cakrasamvara root tantra) was mentioned in reference to one of the qualities of the Mother *Dakinis of the La Family*. In the *Kalachakra Tantra*, the individual characteristics of the thirty-six *dakinis* are stated in accordance with the *Kalachakra Tantra*. Although it appears to be amazing, it is hard to understand for someone like myself (Zhangtön Tenpa Gyatso).

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སྤྱི་བ་དོ་རྗེ་འཆང་ནས་བདེ་མཚོག་རང་བྱོན་གྱི་མདུན་དུ་འདོན་རྒྱུའི་སྒྲོན་ཚོག་ཞིག་རྗེ་འདི་ལ་གནང་བ་ལ་ཤིན་ཏུ་  
 གསང་བའི་གནས་མང་དུ་ཡོད་ལ། མཁན་པོ་སྤྱུལ་བའི་སྐྱེ་ནས་དཀར་ཆག་ཏུ་གསུངས་པ་ལ་ད་དུང་ལྷན་མོང་མ་ཡིན་  
 པ་བཤད་དུ་ཡོད་ལ།

Deba Dorjé Chang who appeared in front of the self-arising statue of Cakrasamvara offered a supplication prayer for the *Khandroma* (Rindzin Pelmo) and there are many secret matters and topics. Khenpo Trülku repeated them in the table of contents and now they are to be explained as extraordinary.

འོང་ནས་ཕྱག་ཐལ་མོ་སྐྱར་ཏེ་གུང་རུ་ཡེ་ཤེས་གྱི་མཁའ་འགྲོ་མ་ཞེས་ལྷགས་དང་ཆེན་པོ་གནང་བ་དང་། མཚན་ལམ་ལ་  
 མཚན་ཅན་ཞིག་ཀྱང་འདུག་སྟེ་ཡི་གེ་འགོད་པར་མི་རུང་བས་ཡབ་སྐུ་རྣམས་གྱི་རྣམ་པར་ཐར་པ་ལ་དང་ཅིང་གུས་པར་  
 བྱ་བ་ནི་རྣམ་ཐར་བྲིས་པའི་དགོས་པའི་གཙོ་བོ་ཡིན་པར་ཤེས་པར་བཤོ།



The Khenpo folded his hands in great devotion and said, “Gungru Yéshé *Khandroma*.” And although he had an amazing dream, it is not suitable to be written down. As for having reverence and faith to the liberation stories of all spiritual fathers and sons, one should know the main purpose of writing this biography.

ལྷོས་བ བྱི་རུའི་དམར་འོད་ཆགས་པ་ཡི། ལྷོ་བ་གསར་པའི་བཞིན་རས་ཅན། མཛེས་མའི་མིག་རྒྱར་ཡིད་སྐྱབས་  
མདའ། ལྷོང་ལ་འཕྲོས་པའི་ཆགས་ལྡན་བཞིན། རྣམ་ཐར་པར་དཀར་པོ་ཡི། ཨྲི་ཡི་བསྐྱེད་གིས་བསྐྱོད་པ་ན། རྣམ་  
གཞུག་བྱུང་བ་ཤར་པོ་ཞིག གཤོག་རྒྱུང་དབྱེས་སྟོན་སྐྱར་ཡང་ལེན།

Thus, it is said, “The appearance of the new moon attracts the reddish brilliance of coral. One whose face is like that, and whose beautiful elongated eyes are the arrows of Kamadeva (Manmata), those arrows penetrate the heart. In the same way a beauty that arises desire in the heart, an old bee is attracted to the sweet fragrance of the white lotus vine (Rindzin Pelmo’s biography) as it excitedly flaps its wings making a pleasant song.

འདོད་པ་རྣམ་ལྡན་དུག་གི་མེ་ཏོག་གིས། ལྷོས་སྟོབས་སྟོག་པར་རྒྱས་པའི་མ་ཡུ་ར། ཆགས་བྲལ་ཚངས་པར་སྦྱོད་པའི་  
བརྒྱལ་ལྷགས་ཀྱིས། བསྟན་པའི་མང་གཞི་ཟེན་པའི་རྣམ་ཐར་ཡིན། མཛད་བྱུང་བྱམས་དང་སྦྱང་རྗེ་བདུད་རྩི་  
ཡིས། ལྷོགས་ཀྱི་བྱམ་བཟང་རིང་ནས་གང་བའི་མཐུས། ཅི་མཛད་གཞན་དོན་ལོ་ནར་གཞིལ་བ་ནི། རྒྱལ་སྐྱས་གཞུང་  
ལམ་ཟེན་པའི་རྣམ་ཐར་ཡིན།

Like the Mayura, whose body is nourished and strengthened by the poisonous flowers of the five types of desire, remaining desire-less and practicing chastity reveals the basis of grasping (Rindzin Pelmo’s) liberation story. The amazing ambrosia of love and compassion that fills a vase from afar, one comes to fulfill only the purposes of others in whatever one does, that is why this liberation story belongs to (the liberation stories) which are highways of the bodhisattvas.

རྣམ་དག་དབང་བཞི་ལྷ་ཡི་རྒྱ་བོའི་རྒྱན། བཞེས་གཉེན་ལྷགས་གསང་རྒྱ་མཚོ་ལས་འོང་བ། འདྲ་ཅིང་གྲུས་པའི་  
གཤོང་བྱར་འབྱུལ་བ་ནི། གསང་ཚེན་འཇུག་སྒོ་མ་ལོར་རྣམ་ཐར་ཡིན། རྒྱུང་བྱུང་དུས་སྤྱད་ལྷར་དཀར་ན་  
ཡང་། རྣ་ཚོད་རྗོད་ཀྱི་སོལ་བ་ལྷར་ནག་པས། ལྷ་ཏའི་སྐྱུག་གུའི་རྗེས་སྤྱོད་མ་ལྷགས་པ། མཛད་བྱུང་སྦྱེས་བྱ་དམ་པའི་  
རྣམ་ཐར་ཡིན།

The pure stream of the divine river of the four empowerments that flows from hearts of the benefactors, when (this stream) flows in the vessel of faith and devotion, this liberation story is the unfailing entryway to the great secret. Although one is white as a conch shell in infancy, in adolescence one becomes black in coal. Not following that like a young crow, this is the biography of a magnificent holy being.

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གཞན་ལ་བཟང་བཤད་དན་བཤད་སྣ་ཚོགས་ཀྱིས། ལྷོ་བ་མཐའི་དེ་ཉིད་འབྱེད་པ་མི་མཛད་ཀྱང་། འདོད་ལྡན་རིང་  
ལྷགས་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་གཅེས་ལོར་བྱ། མཛད་འདི་རྒྱལ་བས་བསྐྱེད་པའི་རྣམ་ཐར་ཡིན།

With respect to others through various praises and blames, not disclosing the philosophical system in that way, holding the Geluk tradition as the special wealth of one’s heart, this is the *namtar* praised by Bodhisattvas.

རྟོགས་པའི་ཡོན་ཏན་བྱམ་ནང་མར་མེ་བཞིན། ལྷོས་ཀྱང་རང་འོད་ལོང་ནས་རྣོལ་བ་ཡིས། མཚོག་དམན་ཀུན་གྱི་གྲུས་

བས་འདུད་པ་ནི། རྒྱ་འབྲས་བསྐྱ་བ་མེད་པའི་རྣམ་ཐར་ཡིན།

The qualities of her realization is like a butter lamp hidden in a vase, and when the light within flows out, all people of high or low social rank bow in respect. This is the biography of infallible cause and effect honored and respected by everybody.

ཡིད་ཆེས་ཚད་མའི་ལུང་གིས་གྲུབ་པ་བཞིན། ཡུམ་ཆེན་ལབ་གྱི་སྐྱོལ་མའི་མཚན་སྟོན་པོ། བསྐྱགས་པ་མེན་པར་ཚུགས་གྲུབ་ལྷན་པ་ནི། བྲགས་སྟོན་ལྷ་ཡིས་བསྐྱགས་པའི་རྣམ་ཐར་ཡིན།

Just as something is proven reliable in which one has confidence, so the sweet name of the Great Mother Lapkyi Drölma (Machik Lapdrön), without publicly announcing it, it prevails in all directions. Such is the biography whose good reputation is announced by the gods.

གྲུབ་རིགས་དཔའ་པོ་བྱེ་བའི་བསྐྱེ་གནས་བདེ་མཚོག་སྤྲས་ཆུའི་རྒྱ་མཚོའི་བརྩུད། ཉེ་ཅུ་ཀ་དཔལ་ཞལ་ལུང་མངར་པོ་སྤྲིང་གི་བརྩུད་དུ་སེམ་ལས། རིམ་གཉིས་གྲུབ་པའི་བརྩུད་ལེན་མཚོག་གིས་འཆི་མེད་ལུང་འཇུག་གནས་ཐོབ་པའི། བསྐྱེད་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཐར་བ་བདག་འདྲའི་སྤྱོད་ལུལ་ག་ལ་ཞིག། རྣལ་འབྱོར་མ་དཔལ་རྗེས་ཆགས་སྐྱོག་ཤིང་གིས། འཇུག་པའི་སྤྱིན་སྤྱོན་རོལ་བའི་གདེངས་ཀ་ལས། རྣལ་ལྷན་འཇོ་བ་ལྷགས་རྗེས་གྲུ་ཆར་ལས། རང་གི་བསོད་ནམས་སྐལ་བར་ཤས་ཅོམ་ཐོབ། རྒྱ་མ་མཚོག་དང་དབྱེར་མེད་ཉེ་ཅུ་ཀ། དབྱེས་བསྐྱེད་མཁའ་སྤྱོད་ཞིང་གི་གཙོ་མོ་མཚོག། དོན་ལྡན་ཚོག་གི་པད་དཀར་འབྲི་ཤིང་འདིས། མཚོད་པས་དོན་གཉིས་ལྷན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་གྲུབ་ཅིག།

The essence of the oceans of the hidden waters of Cakrasamvara is the center location of the ten million Dakas of the Siddha family. It is the oral transmission of the glorious Héruka—a nectar which satisfies. With the supreme alchemy of the coming of the two stages of practice, one attains the state of union. That sort of supremely secret biography, how can it be in the scope of someone like myself?

The building canopy of blue clouds, which is embraced by the passion of the *Dakinis*, by means of strings of lightning there is a timely milked compassion drawn out of the clouds making a fertile shower. From this fertile shower I managed to obtain a little merit. The best and foremost of the realms of *Dakinis* who give pleasure to the Lama is no different than Héruka. From the meaning of the words of *The White Lotus Vine*, by means of this worship, may the two purposes be spontaneously achieved!

### Bottom of 207 into 208

རྒྱལ་གསུང་འོ་མའི་རྒྱ་མཚོ་བསྐྱབས་པའི་བརྩུད། དགེ་ལྡན་རིང་ལུགས་ཉེ་མ་འོད་པོ་ཆེ། མཁའ་ཁྲབ་ཞིང་དུ་རྟོག་ཏུ་གསལ་བ་དང་། བསྐྱེད་འཇོན་ཚོགས་རྣམས་ཞབས་པད་བརྟན་གྱུར་ཅིག། ལྷན་པར་རྣལ་འབྱོར་དབང་མོ་དེ་ཉིད་གྱི། རྒྱལ་བའི་སྐྱེ་མཚོག་ལྷ་བ་གཞོན་ཅུ་གང། ལུས་ཅན་བསོད་ནམས་ཤར་རིའི་ལུང་ལུང་ལ། མཚན་བཟང་འོད་དཀར་དོམས་བཞིན་ཅེན་གྱུར་ཅིག།

The essence churned out of the milk of the Buddha’s words is the great light of the Geluk tradition. May the realm pervading all space become permanently luminous and may all who hold the teachings remain forever, particularly the supreme reincarnation of this Queen of Yoginis (Rindzin Pelmo). The full moon arising on the crest of the eastern mountain fulfilling the merit of the person, may the white light of her good deeds fulfill us.

གསང་སྐྱགས་སྤེན་རྒྱས་སྤིང་གི་རྒྱུད་གྲུ་འདིར། ཉེ་ཅུ་ཀ་དཔལ་ཡབ་ཡུམ་ལྷགས་བསྐྱེད་བཞིན། བྲིམས་ལྡན་འདུས་པའི་ཚོགས་གྱིས་ཡོངས་གང་ཞིང་། བསྐྱེད་པའི་བྱ་བ་མི་ཉམས་གོང་འཕེལ་ཤོག། དང་པོར་བྲག་ཤིས་ལྷ་མ་ཚུལ་

བཞིན་བསྟེན། །བར་དུ་བཀྲ་ཤིས་ཐོས་དོན་ཉམས་སུ་བཞེས། །ཐ་མར་བཀྲ་ཤིས་བསྟན་འགྲོའི་མགོན་དུ་གྱུར། མང་  
གྱུང་རྣམ་ཐར་མཚོག་གི་བཀྲ་ཤིས་ཤོག། ། །

Here at the Sangbak Mingyélíng tantric college, in accordance with the enlightened spirit generated by Héruka’s parents’ concern in the vast expanse of congregation of various disciplines, may the activities of Buddha’s teaching flourish! First, one should rely on the proper teaching of the lama. In the middle, one should practice the meaning of the good teaching. At the end, one becomes the protector of all the good teachings. May there be glory to this supreme, magnificent biography!

### Colophon

ཁེས་ཇེ་བཅུན་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་མཁའ་འགྲོ་མ་ཉ་པ་དཀོན་མཚོག་རིག་འཛིན་དཔལ་མའི་རྣམ་ཐར་པད་དཀར་འཁྲི་ཤིང་ཞེས་བྱ་  
བ་འདི་ནི་བྲག་དཀར་དགོན་གྱི་གྲུ་ཐོན་དང་གུས་དང་ཐུན་པའི་དགེ་སློང་སློབ་གསལ་རྒྱ་མཚོ་དང་། དུས་འཁོར་གྱི་ཚང་  
གི་གྲུ་རིགས་ཇེ་བཅུན་མ་ཉེད་ཀྱི་སྐུ་ཚོ་གསུང་རབ་རྒྱ་མཚོ་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་གང་རྟེན་དང་བཅས་བསྐྱུལ་ཞིང་། ཇེ་འདི་ལ་  
མཚོག་དུ་དད་པ་གེ་སློང་འཇམ་དཔལ་རྒྱ་མཚོས་སྟུང་ཐོས་བསམ་བསྐྱུལ་བ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་ཇེ་ཉེད་ཀྱི་གཟིམ་ཚུང་དུ་དོ་རྩེ་  
རྣལ་འབྱོར་མའི་སེམས་འདི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་སྐྱབ་པའི་མདུན་དུ་བདུན་པའི་ཚེས་བཅུ་ལ་དབུ་བཅུགས་ཏེ་དགུ་བའི་ཡར་ཚོས་  
རྒྱལ་བ་དང་པོ་སྟག་བ་སྟུང་མཚོམས་ཀྱི་འགྲུབ་སྦྱོར་ཉེན་མང་ཐོས་དགེ་སློང་བསྟན་པ་རྒྱ་མཚོས་སྐྱར་བའི་ཡེ་གོ་བ་ནི་བྲག་  
དཀར་གྱི་སྐྱ་མ་དབུ་མཛད་ལྷགས་རམས་པ་སྟོབས་ལྡན་རྒྱ་མཚོས་བཀྲིས་པ་འདིས་ཀྱང་ལྷན་བཅས་རྒྱལ་བའི་ལྷགས་  
བཞེད་སྟུན་གྱིས་སྐྱབ་པར་གྱུར་ཅིག། །། ཚུལ་འདིར་འབྲེལ་བ་ཐོགས་པའི་སྐྱེ་བོ་ཀུན། །ཡུམ་ཚེན་ལ་བ་ཀྱི་སློབ་མས་  
རྗེས་བཟུང་སྟེ། །གནས་སྐབས་མཐར་ཐུག་འདོད་དོན་མ་ལུས་པ། །སྐྱ་མའི་ལྷགས་དགོངས་བཞིན་དུ་འགྲུབ་པར་ཤོག།

Thus, as for the Venerable *Dakini* Könchok Rindzin Pelmo’s biography called *The White Lotus Vine*, the two main persons who supported it included both the senior monk from Drakkar Monastery, Losel Gyatso, who is endowed with great faith and respect of a bhikshu; and Sungrap Gyatso, the Kalachakra Monastic College lineage holder and nephew of the *Khandroma*’s (Rindzin Pelmo’s nephew). With whatever seeds they obtained, they encouraged this composition with whatever material they could find (about Rindzin Pelmo). And the one with supreme faith, Gélong Jampel Gyatso offered *khataks* within the abode of the Venerable Lady herself (Rindzin Pelmo). Zhangtön Tenpa Gyatso began writing the biography on the tenth day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month in front of the Vajrayogini Sindhura (Vermillion) mandala. The learned (Zhangtön) Tenpa Gyatso finished it in the early days of the ninth month on the auspicious day of the constellation in front of the completed Vajrayogini Sindhura (Vermillion) mandala.

Geshe Topden Gyatso, the lead chanting lama at Drakkar Monastery, made this supplication: “May all persons who have a connection with this way be taken by the mother Lapkyi Drölma and may all purposes provisional and ultimate be taken up by the Guru’s intention.”

### Part II: English translation of Kelzang Drölma’s Chinese Obituary (2013)

The Chinese obituary written in 2013 about the Sixth Gungru *trülku* Kelzang Drölma appears as follows.<sup>469</sup> As stated in the short introduction above, and also analyzed in

<sup>469</sup> I am indebted to Teacher Fengpai Cai at the University of Chicago for our one-on-one class to translate this obituary in 2013. I am also thankful for my friend Dékyi’s assistance with aspects of the obituary in Labrang.

Chapters 1 and 5, the exact identity of the obituary's author is not clear at this point. Here is the Chinese to English translation of this text divided into four main sections.

## 活佛

### 一、沉痛悼念、民众悲泣：【分钟】

农历 2013 年 1 月 17 日凌晨四时，我们敬爱的光日堪召玛尕藏丹曲卓玛法体离开了她生活近五十多年的家，所有的人如泪似珠，天地为愁，草木含悲。在声声玛尼颂唱音下承载佛母法体的灵车和护送车队缓缓离开，驶入大街，灵车朝向（拉卜楞，停顿几秒，便调头驶向甘加……

### Title: Reincarnate

#### Section 1: Deep Grief—the people weep with grief

On January 17, 2013 of the lunar calendar at four o'clock in the morning our beloved *Khandroma*, Kelzang Damchö Drölma left her body and the home where she had lived for over 50 years. The tears dropped from people's faces like a string of pearls, and the sky, the earth and even the trees and the grass were all anxious and sad. People who were singing "Mani" mantras approached the hearse carrying the body of the Mother *Khandroma*, and a motorcade of private cars in a funeral procession slowly left and drove on the main street (of Xiahe, Gansu, China). The funeral hearse gradually moved toward Labrang Monastery before it paused for a few seconds and turned toward Gengya.

长达几公里的车队缓缓驶向她梦魂牵绕的白石崖，那里有她的一生活佛生涯的见证，那里有她数不清的一生牵挂的广大信众在等着她，沿途有僧尼在路旁烧香恭送活佛法体，每一座经过的村庄人们在公路两旁建煨桑台点燃桑叶，齐声颂唱着玛尼，送别佛母法体，护送车队经过“纳让”山梁，经过崎岖弯转的山路抵达山下，此时，明月幽静幽静的悬挂在寂静的天空，晴空万里，奇怪的是夜空中不见星光闪烁，看见的是长达数公里车队的车灯放佛像是一千尊“堪召玛”在半空体态俏丽，上下漂浮，翩翩起舞，翱翔与清空，飘逸跟随在佛母灵车后面……路边一盏盏酥油灯像无数盛开的赛庆花，指引着车队的前行，路旁等候的信众自行排成一行，手拿着哈达和点燃的香烛，泣不成声的颂唱着玛尼，悲声泣泪，哀至深处，凄雨心洒，生生世世被女活佛佑护着的这片土地上的他们…今后洁白的哈达向谁敬献，奇异的梦境由谁来解析……感恩的情怀，深深地埋藏在每一个人心中，感恩佛母菩提心悲悯众生，他们自行编队绕活佛灵车三圈，向灵车敬献哈达，叩谢佛母保佑他们这一生的福祸和来世的善果，这是永生永世不灭的信念，这是大慈大悲深深地呼唤……信众追逐着慢慢驶去的灵车，泣声告别佛母，告别与佛母共同走过这风风雨雨的一世……此景，让人哀从心生，泪从眶溢……

The funeral procession of cars was several kilometers long and it slowly moved toward Gengya Drakkar Monastery where Kelzang had lived her life as a reincarnate figure. There were countless believers for whom she had cared about for her entire life. On the procession route, many monks and nuns waited on the side of the road and burnt incense to pay their last respects to her. Passing through every village along the way, people who lined up on both sides of the road, built a platform and burned mulberry tree leaves. In unison, they chanted

the “Mani” mantra to bid farewell to the *Khandroma*. The line of cars in the funeral procession passed “Narang” mountain and passed through a rugged, windy mountain road before arriving at the bottom of the hill (the foot of the mountain). The bright moon was secluded and tranquil in the quiet sky; the sky was clear and boundless. The strange thing was that while you could not see the stars shine in the night sky, you could see the front head lights of the cars of the long funeral procession on the road. This resembled a thousand *khandromas* floating through the air, slim and beautiful (bouncing) high and low, dancing lightly and elegantly hovering while gracefully following the hearse.

There were many butter lamps lit that looked like countless yellow flowers in full bloom on the side of the road; the butter lamps marked one side of the road and led the funeral procession. Those worshippers who gathered on the road naturally formed a line and held a *khatak* in their hands while they burned candles and incense. People sobbed loudly and chanted the “Mani mantra.” Their sadness and their tears were the rain that poured out from their hearts. Generations of people who lived on this land (around Gengya) were protected by the (Gungru) female reincarnate lineage. For now, these people held a white *khatak*, but to whom could they present it? If they have a fantastic or strange dream, to whom can they share their dreams for analysis?

Every person’s heart was filled with a feeling of deep gratitude. They were grateful that the Mother Bodhisattva (Kelzang Damchö Drölma) cared about and showed compassion for all living things. Spontaneously, they one-by-one expressed their sorrow and circled the hearse of the *khandroma* three times, bowed to her and offered a *khatak*. They were very thankful for what the Mother Buddha (Kelzang Drölma) did for them by blessing their good fortune while she protected them from calamity in this life and also for attaining prosperous results in their future lives. This belief never wavered—she was a great benevolent leader of people. The people moved toward the slow-moving hearse and cried as they bid their farewell to her. They also bid farewell to the many hardships and difficulties that they experienced together in this life. This made people cry from the bottom of their hearts.

一路的拜别信众，一路的桑烟滚滚，一路的玛尼颂音，一条条敬向灵车的哈达，几乎掩盖了灵车的挡风玻璃……放佛灵车车队置身行驶在云雾缭绕的仙境之途……车队抵达白石崖“昂乾”门前时，信众和白石崖寺全体僧众早已久候，不失排序的敬候着佛母法体的莅临，大门前地面撒画着云翔图案，八名法体守护僧沿着云翔图在众广的人群中将佛母法体慢慢抬进“昂乾”大门，抬向活佛寝室……

The road was lined with Kelzang’s supporters who said their last farewell. Along the way you could see burning mulberry leaves and hear people loudly chanting “Mani” on the side of the road. One person after another offered a *khatak* toward the hearse and they (the *khataks*) almost concealed the windshield of the hearse. The motorcade procession behind the hearse that carried Kelzang Drölma traveled along a windy road amidst the fog and clouds like a road leading to a fairy tale world and arrived at Drakkar Monastery. They (the procession) reached the front door of the Gungru *nangchen*’s gate at Drakkar where believers and all of the monks at Drakkar Monastery had waited for a long time. They lined up in an orderly manner, respectfully waiting for the arrival of *Khandroma* at the gate. There was a drawing of a cloud on the ground in front of the main gate. Eight monks were in charge to guard her body. The monks walked along the picture of the cloud on the ground through the large crowd of believers. They slowly went through the *Nangchen* Gate and carried her body toward her bedroom.

## 二、玛久拉珍 桑热寺 历代光日仓活佛传系 加吾碌曲部落 佛母出生地【20分钟】：

### Section 2: Machik Lapdrön, Zangrikharmar Monastery, Generations of Gungru Reincarnate Lineage, Jiawu Luqu Tribe, the *Khandroma*'s birthplace (20 minutes<sup>470</sup>):

历代光日益西堪召玛为藏传佛教尊母玛久拉仲的转世世系，玛久拉仲一为藏传佛教息解派的创建者，息解派源于南印度著名僧人帕丹巴桑杰，由藏族著名的女密宗大师玛久拉仲所创立，是藏传佛教史上唯一由女性创立的一个宗派，这在人类宗教史上尚属罕见。该宗派，以自己独特的教法义理和别具风格的修持方法，成为藏传佛教中独树一帜的宗派。她不仅对藏传佛教诸宗派产生过深刻影响，而且曾几度风靡整个藏区在藏族社会生活中产生过巨大影响，天葬是本民族最普及的丧葬方式，天葬习俗在藏区的产生和传播直接归功于玛久拉仲及其息解觉域法，在全世界唯有藏族有此习俗。息解派以觉域法为参修主课，玛久拉仲将觉域法创立并发扬光大到顶峰，甚至将此教法传播到佛教圣地印度和尼泊尔，有“佛教皆有印度传，唯有息解藏传印”之说，后有佛母次子托宁桑珠继承法座，遵循尊母遗志更广的弘扬了息解教派，使得息解觉广泛传播到整个藏区，时至今日，觉域法和“觉巴瓦”僧众在佛教中桃李满天下……其传记中写道：“她的徒众与天共齐，无边无垠”，众弟子中有尊母次子托宁桑珠，有“东代额个昂秀”【加木央大师前世】，“召代江乃”【德哇仓前世】，“柔赛央真”【赛仓活佛】等十八位得意门生，众门徒学成各自为业，弘扬息解觉域法，遍及整个雪域高原，尊母玛久拉仲依帕丹巴桑杰授记，游历一百零八座雪山、“年”（藏族原始神祇之一）地，苦行修持，获得大成就，成为藏地著名的女密宗大师。公元1144年尊母与世长辞，享年99岁。她所独创的宗教理论与实践在整个藏传佛教界产生了极其深远的影响，尤其是玛久拉珍被后来从事密宗修炼的僧众奉为智慧空行母的化身而加以崇拜，从而使玛久拉珍在藏传佛教史上占有不可替代的特殊地位，玛久拉仲的转世世系佛母光日堪召玛的问世以来，觉法的习经流程、觉法的覆盖面、觉法的完整度、等有了系统性的改观，更有历代“索智合仁波切”和“吐观仁波切”的大力弘扬，玛久觉域法方兴未艾，如日冲天般光撒着苍茫大地……

The successive generations of the (four-century old) Gungru Yéshé *Khandroma* reincarnate lineage dates to Machik Lapdrön the Supreme Mother of Tibetan Buddhism and the founder of the chö Buddhist practice. The chö Buddhist practice originated from the famous monk Padampa Sanggyé, who was from south India. Machik Lapdrön is one of the most famous female tantric Tibetan Buddhist practitioners in Tibetan history and is the only woman in Tibetan history to establish a Buddhist sect; this is rarity in human religious history. By using the unique teaching method and having a distinct practice, the chö sect became distinguished from other sects in Tibetan Buddhism. Machik Lapdrön not only deeply influenced the various schools of Tibetan Buddhist thought, her teachings were popular in Tibetan areas and had a major influence among Tibetan society and livelihood, such as the sky burial method of burying the dead. The custom of sky burial arose in Tibetan areas and the fact that it spread across Tibet can be directly attributed to Machik Lapdrön and the chö sect. The Tibetans are the only ethnic group in the world to use this sky burial custom.

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<sup>470</sup> While I was unable to identify the exact source of this obituary, in particular since the person who gave me the obituary, Kelzang's son Dépön has not returned my calls or texts since 2014, I have deduced one key clue that indicates who wrote or used the text. Consultation with those in Labrang and with a professor at the University of Chicago has indicated that this obituary could also be part of an official presentation about Kelzang's life and that "20 minutes" were allotted to this portion of the text.

Machik Lapdrön developed and enhanced the Xi Jie Pai sect, which is based on chö. Machik's teaching of chö even spread to the holy land of India and Nepal. All of the different sects of Buddhism came from India to China (Tibet), but only the Xie Jie Pai sect was transferred from Tibet to India. Machik Lapdrön's second son, To Ning Sang Gu (Tönyön Samdru) inherited the seat of his mother and followed her unfulfilled wish to extensively promote and spread chö in Tibetan areas. Many students follow chö today and "Jue Ba Wa."

In (Machik's) biography, the author said, "Her disciples together are boundless." She is really proud of her 18 favorite disciples, and so forth, including her second son, "To Ning Sang Gu," (Tönyön Samdru) and "Dong Da E Ge Ang Xiu," (Dongdé Ngak Wangchuk) who is the Jamyang Zhepa's previous incarnation; "Shao Dai Jiangnai" (Dröldé Gyelwé Jungné) who is the Dewa's previous reincarnation, and "Ro sai Yang Zhen" (Jo sras) who is the Setsang reincarnate at Terlung. Once they finished their schooling, they each established their individual schools and propagated the Xi Jue Pa sect. The chö sect spread throughout the whole Tibetan plateau. Machik followed South India's Padampa Sanggyé and in her whole life she visited 108 snow-covered mountains, one of the original Tibetan gods, "Year." (Note: Year is one of the Tibetan Gods). She practiced asceticism and obtained the highest achievement. She became a very famous Tibetan tantric master and passed away in the year 1144 after enjoying 99 years living in this world. The original religious theory, which Machik created and also practiced, had a deep and wide influence over all of Tibetan Buddhism. Machik Lapdrön was later viewed as a reincarnation of the mother who traveled through the air (a *khandroma*) by those monks who followed the secret sect's practice and worshipped her. She has a special place in Tibetan Buddhist history, unrivaled by anyone. It is here (Drakkar) that after Machik Lapdrön's reincarnation that the Gungru reincarnation lineage came into existence and over time the course of practice of chö, the coverage of the laws of chö, and a more complete system of chö, and so forth, changed the overall appearance of the chö sect. Furthermore, each successive generation of Suozhi He Rinpoche and Tuguan Rinpoche energetically promoted the sect. The sect of Machik Lapdrön (chö) is just like the rising sun in the sky—its light covers the whole vast land.

尊母玛久拉仲圣地桑日卡尔玛寺坐落在雅鲁藏布江江畔，主要供奉着以玛久拉仲为主尊的息解派高僧大德的雕像。另外，大殿附近还有玛久拉仲当年的修行洞，里面供奉着她的雕像以及神鞋等供品，据说修行洞内有一个洞中之洞，称之为“十万欢乐大殿”，是玛久拉仲的秘密修行洞，也是一个有108个柱子的大殿，寺院山下为一大平滩，命名“本唐”，“本”为数字十万之意，相传玛久拉仲曾在此举行大法，集聚过十万人众聆听佛音而命名，桑日卡尔玛寺是玛久拉仲于1086年亲自创建的息解觉域法的根本道场，经历几百年的风风雨雨之后，已看不出昔日尊母世代的辉煌灿烂和息解派觉域法的兴盛，寺院也为后来兴建，但世世代代下来，历史的变迁和时光的推移也没能使息解派觉域法磨灭在历史的长河中，依旧有许多僧人僧尼一代接着一代追逐着尊母的足迹，弘扬着觉域法的精髓，2003年佛母光日堪召玛第六世尕藏·丹却卓玛前往桑日卡尔玛寺朝拜尊母圣地，寺院众僧泪迎佛母入殿，佛母修缮寺院白塔，供养众僧，并给众僧授教息解派觉域法要领和教法戒律，佛母嘱托：“无论时代有何变数，寺院必须以玛久拉仲息解派觉域法为主修课，历代光日堪召玛世系会关照桑日卡尔玛寺

The sacred place of the venerable Mother Machik Lapdrön is called Zangrikharmar and is located on the bank of the Yalungzangpo River in Tibet (present day Tibetan Autonomous Region). People came to Zangrikharmar to mainly worship the statues of Machik Lapdrön and chö practitioners. In addition, the cave that Machik Lapdrön used for her religious

practice is located in the vicinity of Zangrikharmar. Worshippers who went to the cave prayed in front of Machik's statues, her shoes and other offerings. It is said that another cave which contains a big hall with 108 pillars exists inside Machik's cave. There is a big pool named "Bum Tang" at the base of the mountain where the monastery resides (**Note:** "bum" means 100,000). As the legend goes, Machik Lapdrön gave a big teaching to 100,000 people at this place. Machik Lapdrön established Zangrikharmar in 1086 to practice chö and basic Buddhist rites. Because of many disturbances that have occurred here over the years, it has become harder to see evidence of this time when the ancient mother Machik and chö thrived. The building of today's monastery was constructed much later from each successive generation on down. But even the changes of history and the passing of time did not destroy the system of chö. Still, with each generation, many monks and nuns pursued the Great Mother's path (Machik's path) becoming propagators of the essence (core teaching) of chö. In 2003, the Sixth Gungru *Khandroma*, Kelzang Damchö Drölma, visited Zangrikharmar to worship at the sacred place of Machik Lapdrön. Monks had tears in their eyes when Kelzang Drölma entered the Mother Machik's temple. Kelzang helped repair a temple and a white stupa and provided food and supplies for the monks. Moreover, Kelzang also taught crowds of monks the main aspects of chö and monastic discipline. Kelzang Drölma proclaimed (to the monks): "No matter what happened in the past or what will happen in the future the monastery must base their teachings on Machik Lapdrön's chö. Future generations of the Gungru *Khandroma* reincarnate lineage will come back and take care of Zangrikharmar."

历代光日堪召玛都有过非凡的佛教贡献和传奇历史，第二世光日堪召玛曾受过由西藏地方政府发给颂扬与活佛认定并世代转世的权威公函。第四世光日堪召玛贡却仁增华茂曾六次前往罗家洞胜乐金刚圣地朝礼，举行“胜乐金刚修持仪轨”法会，并塑造怙主等佛像。据《相顿全集》记载，贡却仁增华茂活佛晚年时，曾塑造空行母玛久拉珍佛母像，以替代自己，常做觉域法事仪轨，备受信众敬仰，传言：曾说和过霍藏大部落和多哇大部落的世代仇怨纠纷。第四世光日堪召玛·贡却仁增卓玛，于藏历铁兔年三月二十日圆寂，享年78岁。第五世光日堪召玛·贡确丹贝旺茂常年资助白石崖寺院，补给和供养白石崖寺院僧众等声誉远播的鲜明事迹……

Successive generations of Gungru *Khandromas* all made extraordinary contributions to Buddhism and they all have a legendary history. The second Gungru lineage holder (Lozang Drölma) received an official letter from the local Tibetan government that praised her and recognized that she is the reincarnation of (the First Gungru reincarnate). The Fourth Gungru *Khandroma*, Könchok Rindzin Pelmo, went six times to the cave Lokyatün, the sacred place of the Excellent Vajra, and carried out the Cakrasamvara Ceremony Lit: "Happiness Vajra Ritual Ceremony." Moreover, she held many teachings and also built many Buddhist statues of Cakrasamvara. According to Rndzin Pelmo's biography that appears in Zhangtön Tenpa Gyatso's complete works, that Könchok Rindzin Pelmo during her later years built a sculpture image of Machik Lapdrön to replace (an image of) herself. Rindzin Pelmo did the chö religious practice and received great respect from her followers. Rumor has it that Rindzin Pelmo brought about peace in the dispute between the large Hortsang tribe and large Deba tribe that had for generations waged in a vengeful dispute (on the grasslands). The Fourth Gungru *Khandroma*, Könchok Rindzin Pelmo, passed away at age 78 in the Tibetan year of the Iron Rabbit March 20. For many years, the Fifth Gungru *Khandroma*, Könchok Tenpé Wangmo, provided subsidies for Drakkar Monastery, including providing supplies and food for the monks at Drakkar. Her bright reputation spread because of her many accomplishments.



### 三、第六世光日堪召玛·尕藏丹却卓玛 Section III: The sixth Gungru reincarnate, Kelzang Damchö Drölma

这片风淡云清，水草丰足、青草盈盈，如诗如画的草原就是第六世光日堪召玛·格桑丹曲卓玛出生的草原—青海省黄南藏族自治州同仁县加吾鲁其部落，这座“十万佛堆”下就是活佛出生的实地，于藏历第十六绕迥火鼠年（1936年）冬季出生于一牧民家里，出生后取乳名多杰措，父亲名卡尔则，母亲名录茂塔，7岁时，由第五世嘉木样·丹贝坚赞认定多杰措为第五世贡日堪召玛·贡确丹贝旺茂女活佛的转世灵童，并剃度受戒，赐法名为格桑丹曲卓玛，迎至白石崖昂乾坐床。

当时的加吾部落和甘加部落之间因草山纠纷而硝烟弥漫，烽烟四起的战时之秋，一幕幕悲剧演绎在双方部落中，家破人亡，妻离子散不知多少人到今天还心有余悸，双方在争执中死亡90多人，重伤70多人，轻伤100多人，牲畜几乎损失殆尽，经济陷入崩溃边缘，一个个幸福的家庭在一瞬间破裂，一条条鲜活的生命在这场战事中失去，孩子凄惨的哭声回荡在废墟上，母亲怀抱孩子，边跑边呼唤孩子的父亲的情景屡屡再现……多年战事使得双方两地民不聊生，牧民生命安全得不到保障、人心惶惶近二代人，战事的残酷和危害足以让双方的人们胆战心惊。六世光日堪召玛·尕藏丹却卓玛的诞生，坐床白石崖昂乾，两地战事随之而消，泯灭了两地的旧日仇恨，告别了硝烟弥漫、哭声与怒吼交相映衬的那个悲惨世代，安详和平、和睦共处在这片草原近两代人并永远……相传六世光日堪召玛·尕藏丹却卓玛迎接甘加时两方摆设了宏大场面，加吾宏包（加吾地方土司）召集其麾下五百名壮士身着盛装，枪械齐备，毛色一致之彪悍坐骑的盛大恭送阵容，送至“岗恩”山梁，甘加部落在此摆场迎候，甘加邀请了“卡加六部落”撑其阵容，除了前来恭迎的僧俗长队以外，还将在从“岗恩”山头往眼甘加的各个大山山尖燃起熊熊桑烟，呐喊鸣枪致意，场景尤为壮观……加木央委派拉卜楞寺下续部密宗学院的华桑措与俄热巴·青热嘉措二上师相继承当佛母的经师，授受以息解觉域法法为主的各显密教法及灌顶和经教传授，生起大慈悲心等。

能背诵始祖空行母玛久拉仲撰著的《息解觉域教法义理大品》等教法经典，此为觉域法的根本教法。又从拉卜楞寺著名高僧多杰强久美嘉措（拉阔）仁波齐座前，修学“甚深耳传”诸教法及其修持次第，还同第十世班禅大师一起习闻过许多经教，一九四六年多杰强久美嘉措（拉阔）仁波切在塔尔寺举行时轮金刚灌顶大法会，届时聚集十世班禅等金座大活佛在前厅，仁波切当众点十岁的光日堪召玛祈颂息解觉域法开场编……，祈颂完觉域法后多杰强久美嘉措（拉阔）仁波切让堪召玛就做与自己身边，给众活佛授权觉域大法，授受完毕，多杰强久美嘉措（拉阔）仁波切拉着佛母之手扬言说道：“我今将息解觉域大法归还给了大法的主人了……”

The wind blew softly and the clouds were clear. The water plants were abundant, the grass lush and the grassland poetic and picturesque. This was the scene at the birthplace of the Sixth Gungru Khandroma Kelzang Damchö Drölma in Qinghai's Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous region, Tongren, Jiawu of the Luqi tribe. This hill named "The pile of 100,000 Buddhas" was the site of the actual birthplace of the sixth *Khandroma* in the 16<sup>th</sup> Fire Rat year (Tibetan Calendar), 1936, in the winter. She was born at home to a nomadic herding family and later received the name Dorjétso. Her father's name is Kearzi while her mother's name is Lumaota. When she was seven, the Fifth Jamyang Zhepa Tenpa Tendzin with firm resolution recognized Dorjétso as the female reincarnation of the fifth Gungru *Khandroma* Könchok Tenpé Wangmo. Dorjétso had a head shaving ceremony, took the vows of a nun and received the Buddhist name Kelzang Damchö Drölma. Drakkar Monastery welcomed her and she was enthroned at this time.

A lot of fire and smoke emitted from people's guns due to the dispute on the grasslands between the Jiawu and Gengya tribes at this time. Many people from both sides tragically died amidst the confusion of war between these two tribes and families were wrenched apart. It is not known how many people still have lingering fears today. The two tribes lost 90 men to death in the dispute while over 70 people were seriously injured and over 100 people were slightly wounded. All of the livestock were killed and the economy sank toward the edge of collapse. In a split second, many happy household families were ruined and their lives, which were full of livelihood, were lost. Because so many people had died, you could hear the crying of the orphan children amidst the ruins—their crying echoed over the burning of the ruins. Mothers held their children as they ran and shouted out their father's name looking for him ... but he was dead. The years of war caused many people from both sides to not earn a living and the livelihood and the safety of the herders was very unstable and unsafe. For two generations people felt a lot of anxiety because the injuries of war and the damage done were sufficient to cause the people of both sides to tremble with fear.

The birth of the Sixth Gungru *Khandroma*, Kelzang Damchö Drölma and her enthronement at Drakkar eliminated the former hatred between the two sides who bid farewell to the firearms; the wailing sounds of tears and extreme anger was replaced by complete peace and calm. Since this time there has been a long and perpetuating peace on the grasslands and the peace has been eternal. Both sides made a large spectacle when Gengya welcomed the Sixth *Khandroma*, Kelzang Damchö Drölma. The Jiawu leader summoned 500 warriors who were dressed in splendid holiday attire with their weapons drawn and mounted on horseback to give her a big send off. They escorted her up “Gang En” hill where the Gengya tribe met and welcomed her. Gengya invited the six tribes of Khagya who lined up to make the spectacle even larger. In addition to the support of monks who lined up to greet her, the procession turned away from Gang En (the Qinghai-Gansu border) toward the rugged “Da Shan.” Here, locals fired shots into the air and yelled to welcome her. People burned many mulberry leaves on the mountain sides from Gang En to Gengya to make a large plume of smoke to welcome her. The scene was spectacular.

The Fifth Jamyang Zhepa of Labrang appointed Huasang Tzo and Ere Ba Qingre Gyatso of the Tantric College at Labrang to be Kelzang Drölma's sutra teachers. They imparted to her the secret teachings based on chö, prominent tantric teachings, the water ceremony and explanations of sutras. She exhibited signs of the great mercy of the bodhisattva. Kelzang was able to recite from memory Machik Lapdrön's composed text [*The Conduct and Logic of chö*, 息解觉域教法义理大品] and religious classics... In 1946 Lagu Rinpoché Dorjé Jikmé Gyatso performed a Kalachakra Ceremony at Kumbum Monastery. At that time, the Tenth Panchen Lama and other reincarnate figures, including Kelzang, sat in the front of the hall. (At the *kālacakra*), he (Lagu) told the *khandroma*, who was only ten years old, to recite chö. After she finished, Lagu let her sit next to him, and from that time, he started to teach chö to the reincarnates who were assembled there (including the Tenth Panchen). After the teachings ended, Lagu held Kelzang's hand and said, “Today I have returned this chö practice back to the owner of this great teaching.”

从15岁始，曾先后5次修持“百泉”、“百煞地”等觉域派密法。这是一种必须连续在108眼泉边或108处天葬场、墓地等修持的觉域派密法。她每7日在玛久拉珍像前举行一次“忿怒佛母自入法会议轨”。19岁时，曾多次诵经化缘，建造二层楼佛殿，修缮寺院的经堂及各佛殿，例行资助白石崖寺院的建设和众僧的生活补给。多杰强久美嘉措（拉阔）仁波切曾多次亲临光日仓昂乾，给成长中的佛母孜孜不倦教授息解觉域法每一个章节，使佛母觉域法造诣达到至上境界，曾为卡加六部落信众举行盛

大觉域派灌顶、经教传授大法会，佛母的觉域法修为深得拉阔仁波切的赞扬和同习觉域法高僧们的一致崇敬，佛母觉域法造诣声名远扬，常有藏区各地慕名而来参习觉域大法僧俗信众前来参拜，多次在白石崖溶洞举行觉域法会，很多人清楚记得佛母阵阵悦耳动听的法音催人泪下的屡屡场面，在藏区佛教界产生了很高的威望。

From the age of 15, Kelzang went to the “100 Springs and the 100 Wrathful Places” five times to study the secret teachings of chö. She did this continuously at either the 108 springs or the 108 cemeteries and sky burial place. Every seven days she carried out a ceremony called the “Wrathful Mother Buddha” in front of an image of Machik Lapdrön. When she was 19, she had already recited sutras many times for which she received donations. She used the money (from the donations) to build two stories of the prayer hall and she repaired the scripture hall sutra hall. She also routinely used donation money to provide Drakkar Monastery’s building and supply the livelihood of the monks there. On many occasions, Dorjé Jikmé Gyatso Zhao (Lagu Rinpoche) went in person to the Gungru *Khandroma’s nangchen* and tirelessly taught the young *Khandroma* every chapter of the chö text helping her to reach the highest realm. She carried out the chö ceremony for the six tribes of Khagya and performed many great teachings of Tibetan Buddhist sutras. Her learning and behavior earned the praise from Lagu Rinpoche and many high monks who practiced chö praised Kelzang’s learning and her demeanor. Her name became well known near and far in different Tibetan areas and many monks as well as commoners (lay men and women) came to Drakkar to worship her. She gave the chö ceremony many times in the Drakkar Cave. Many people were brought to tears clearly remembering her pleasant way of reciting the chö and she received very high prestige in Tibetan Buddhist circles.

1956年，尕藏丹却卓玛20岁时曾到北京、内蒙和东北等地方参观学习。1958年，第六世贡日卡卓玛·格桑丹曲卓玛，成为一名国家干部。1958年至1960年，她先后在甘肃兰州政治学院干训班、西北民族学院干训班学习；1961年开始，在夏河县政协工作。文革间白石崖昂乾被毁，经师、管家相继入狱谢世，兄妹离散，昂乾之牲畜、部分财产和庄田分散到当地群众中，佛母也由此成为一名农牧民，在卡加地方参加生产劳动达十余年之久。20世纪80年代以后，在党的民族宗教政策的光辉照耀下，她又重返工作岗位，在夏河县政协工作，“文化大革命”期间，白石崖寺被毁，白石崖寺院僧众并无像样的诵经祈福场所，1986年佛母携甘加僧俗代表前往兰州嘉木央坐前申请重修寺院大殿并获准，佛母又向国家申请了建寺用的100方木材，历时两年88年建成了寺院大殿。改革开放以来党和国家对民族宗教政策逐渐完善，广大僧众也开始复归原寺，集聚经堂，祈福诵经，但拉卜楞的尼姑僧众却因历史原因居无定所，分散无定，派系纷争，不能如法的上早、晚课诵，不能如期的做佛事、法会，不能定时的率领信众礼佛、诵经、修行。

为此，1994年嘉木样大师委托光日仓活佛筹建九甲尼姑寺，拉卜楞尼姑僧众有宁玛派和格鲁派共有两百多人众，两派都无正规诵经场所，也无完整的规章制度，面对如此松散、贫穷的尼姑僧众，活佛担此重担，发大愿心，着手建设，历经千辛万苦，历时十三年，建成了两座派系尼姑寺寺院，即格鲁派尼姑寺丹杰林与宁玛派尼姑寺拉森达杰林，拉卜楞庞大的僧尼群体纳入规范的国家民族宗教寺院体系，并制定寺院内部各项管理制度，建立了规范的寺院管理。两寺常住僧众各达到一百二十多人，两派僧尼有了各自的经堂，现如今香客施主络绎不绝，供养不断，众僧尼生活有了保障，寺院道风淳正，香火旺盛，寺院管理井然有序，管理规范，盛况空前。

When Kelzang Damchö Drölma was 20 years old in 1956, she went to Beijing, Inner Mongolia and the Northeast areas (of China) to visit and study. The sixth Gungru Khandroma,

Kelzang Damchö Drölma in 1958 became an official national cadre (of the Chinese Communist Party). From 1958 to 1960, she first went to Lanzhou in Gansu Province to take cadre classes at the Political Institute and then later she attended Northwest University of the Minorities in Lanzhou, Gansu, to study. She worked for the CPPCC (Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference) at Xiahe County starting in 1961. Drakkar Monastery was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and the Drakkar sutra teachers became lay householders, entered prison or passed away. Brothers and sisters were dispersed and many animals owned by the monastery (*nangchen*) and by farms were distributed among the local people. Due to this circumstance, *Khandroma*, too, became a rural shepherd in Khagya (outside of Hezuo) and she participated in production of labor for more than ten years' time.

Twenty years later in the 1980s, she returned to work as a cadre under the magnificent and brilliant minority and religious policy. Drakkar Monastery was destroyed in the Cultural Revolution and the monks were not able to chant sutras anywhere. Therefore, in 1986, the *Khandroma* brought Gengya lay representatives with her to go to Lanzhou where she sat before the Jamyang Zhepa to apply for permission to repair the main hall of Drakkar monastery. The *Khandroma* also applied to the government for 100 cubic meters of wood to build the monastery main hall, and in two years (1988) the monastery's main hall was built. Since the period of opening up and reform, the (Chinese Communist) Party and country's policy toward minority religion gradually improved. A great number of monks began to return to the monastery and assembled at the sutra hall and recited sutras.

However, sectarian conflict existed among the nuns because the nun population outside of Labrang never had a permanent location. The nuns could not follow a teaching regimen to do the early morning and evening practice as scheduled. They could not set a time to lead Buddhist customs, to chant the sutras and do religious practice. For this reason, the Jamyang Zhepa in 1994 entrusted Kelzang to raise money to build Chougya (Jiujia) Nunnery. But the nuns were not very rigorous and were also impoverished. Kelzang carried a heavy burden and made a sincere wish to build a nunnery, but she experienced many hardships. It took 13 years before two nunneries from two sects—the Geluk nunnery Géden Tengyéling (Danjielin) and the Nyingma nunnery Lapsun Dargyé Ling nunnery (Lasen Dajielin)—were built. These two nunneries had over 120 people living there year-round, and each nunnery built a sutra hall. Nowadays, many Buddhist worshippers continually come to make offerings to the nuns helping to ensure their livelihood. The atmosphere of (each) nunnery is genuine and sincere with incense burning vigorously. Each nunnery's management is in good order and the current (management) standard in these nunneries is magnificent and unprecedented (in their history).

包产到户以来因牲畜的增多，甘加地区邻村、邻乡、邻省之间草场纠纷、民间争端频频出现，很多鲜活的生命在争端中失去，草场纠纷成为笼罩在甘加地区一片阴云。为了这片地区的安宁祥和，为了更多的牧民家庭不再失去孩子、丈夫、父亲，光日仓活佛发挥她在群众的的精神号召力，用一颗仁慈之心，积极、主动地参与甘加地区每件草场纠纷和矛盾的调解，向参与争端的双方晓之以理、动之以情，在她的循循善导和人格魅力的感召下，争端双方都心平气和、理性的接受调解，化解了事态。上世纪八十年代，甘加乡和青海岗察乡发生草山纠纷造成冲突，酿成血案（二条命案），在当地政府和牧民群众邀请下，光日仓活佛与十世班禅共同参与调解的青海岗察乡与甘肃甘加乡历经三年之久，不辞辛苦，公正严明，双方永结友好，一笑泯恩仇，从此换来了双方地界长达三十多年的祥和。光日仓活佛不仅裁定了诸多的藏区草山纠纷，还参与调解了更多的民间命案事端，为牧民群众的生活安定和社会稳步发展尽心尽力。

自八十年代以来，光日仓活佛亲自参与调处成功的草场纠纷还有：甘肃桑科乡和青海多哇乡的草山纠纷（两条命案）、甘加仁爱和青海瓜尔则的草山纠纷（一条命案）、甘加西科和伏地的草山纠纷（无命案）、甘加乡和麻当乡的草山纠纷（一条命案）、还有诸多甘加乡内部纠纷、桑科乡内部纠纷、卡加道乡内部纠纷的调节并一一调和化解成功……为地区的稳定团结做出了应有的贡献，也受到了国家的高度赞扬，先后曾任：全国佛协第一、第五届理事，省佛协一至五届理事，甘南州第二至十二届政协常委，夏河县第二至第十二届政协常委，甘肃省妇联委员，甘南州妇联委员，夏河县妇联委员等……光日仓活佛一生致力于本地区的社会稳定、民族团结、教育发展，先后被州、县授予全州优秀“名誉校长”、“双文明先进个人”等荣誉称号，在宗教界和信教群众中享有很高的威望。

The number of domestic animals increased because the government fixed the farm output quotas for each household. In light of this increase in animal output, grassland disputes between Gengya and neighboring villages and between villages in different provinces (Gansu and Qinghai) occurred again and many people died. The disputes came to envelop Gengya in a dark cloud of uncertainty and violence. In order to (preserve) this area's peace and harmony and also in order for herders to avoid losing their husbands and their children's father in the dispute, the Gungru Khandroma had the power to rally support among the people. She used her benevolent kindness and energy to take the initiative to mediate the conflict and end the dispute. Because they were touched by her leadership ability and by the power of her personality the dispute ended for both sides peacefully and the matter was resolved with her even-tempered reason.

In the 1980s, a grassland dispute developed between Gengya township and Qinghai's Gangtsa township gradually leading to bloodshed where two people died. At the invitation of the local area government and a group of herders, the Gungru *Khandroma* and the Tenth Panchen Lama helped mediate between Gengya County in Gansu and Gangtsa Township (in Qinghai) for three years. They confronted the hardships and were fair and impartial to both sides. After their mediation, both sides agreed that there would be long lasting friendships between the two groups and that one smile would diminish the feud/enmity. The boundary was established and peace has lasted in this area for the last thirty years. The Gungru *Khandroma* not only solved many Tibetan grassland disputes, but she also helped mediate people's disputes over the deaths from people fighting. She did the utmost with all her heart to develop a peaceful lifestyle and stable society for many herders. Since the 1980s, the Gungru *Khandroma* successfully mediated several grassland disputes, including a dispute in Sangkhok (Sangke) south of Labrang and Doba (Duowa) Township in Qinghai where two people were killed. One person died in fighting between Gengya Ringön (Renai) and Qinghai Gartsé (Guaerze). There was a dispute between Gengya Zhölkor (Xike) and Pudi (Fudi) outside of Labrang, but no one died. She mediated a dispute between Gengya Township and Hortsang Mardang (Madang) where one person died, and also many other disputes within Gengya and Khagya. Kelzang received the country's highest praise for her contributions toward the stabilization and unification of Tibetan areas. She has served as a board member for the first through the fifth boards of the National Buddhist Association. She has also served from the second to the 12<sup>th</sup> boards of the Gannan CPPCC Standing Committee, Xiahe County. Kelzang was a member of Gansu Provincial Women's Federation; a member of the Gannan Women's Federation and a member of Xiahe County Women's Federation, and so forth. Her whole life was devoted to producing stability in the region, to producing national unity and developing education. She was praised as a statewide excellent "honorary principal" of Gannan Autonomous Prefecture Gansu Province and she received the title of "The banner carrier of civilization" as a pioneer who promoted advanced civilization. She received high prestige among religious circles and the masses.

1994 年经嘉木央指示，甘加民众筹建白石崖昂乾，97 年 10 月建成了昂乾部分居舍和经堂，僧俗恭请活佛重新入住昂乾内，已俗家之身的活佛虽不能像以往和众僧一起在大殿参法修经，多年来每日的祈颂从未间断，息解觉域大法的温习从未间断，从 2008 年开始参照过去久昂乾时期的惯例，每年夏季在昂乾举办盛大觉域大法，活佛亲临大法火供，并给民众一一摸顶赐福，每年的七月觉域法时节，昂乾里外人山人海各地参修觉域法的僧众包括拉卜楞的高僧聚集昂乾向佛母请教觉域大法要领。

In 1994, the Jamyang Zhepa instructed that the people of Gengya should prepare to rebuild Gengya Drakkar's *nangchen* and in October 1997 they finished part of the main sutra hall and the residential area. The Drakkar monks and laymen of Gengya once again invited Alak Gungru to live in the *nangchen*. However, she was not able to go to the sutra hall to practice with the monks like she used to because she was a reincarnate who was already married and had the identity as a layperson. Despite this, she never stopped praying daily and she did not stop reviewing lessons of chö practice. From 2008, she started to participate in the chö practice every summer like they did in the past with previous Gungru lineages. Every year in the summer she hosted a grand chö ceremony at her *nangchen* and the Gungru reincarnate sponsored it herself. She provided blessings for lay people every July (of the lunar year) during this chö festival. People from many regions, as well as the monks who perform the chö festival, including those senior monks from Labrang Monastery, gathered in the main prayer hall.

2002 夏季, 2007 年夏季, 2009 年夏季前后三次佛母应邀回归了阔别五十多年的故乡青海加吾，加吾部落盛大阵容迎接佛母，佛母亲临加吾部落每一个家庭，佛母兄长加央嘉措（1927—2005）确定了佛母出生具体地方，期间佛母进行过施药，视察了加吾学校，捐资学校建设，提议并选址修建佛殿，亲临亲为殿内佛像，后由部落群众在佛殿院内建置了佛母寝室，“噶嘉”寺是佛母年幼时被认定第六世光日仓时第一次身着袈裟之寺，该寺僧众也携大礼拜见活佛，加吾僧俗民众感恩佛母大德，祈求佛母寿昌，佑护这片草原，成为加吾部落的直系上师，并恭敬了佛像、经法、白塔等至高贡礼……佛母深情回望这片出生她并一直梦魂牵绕的地方，感慨由衷，祈福这片草原草肥牛壮，安居乐业，永世兴兴向荣。

The *Khandroma* was invited three times during the summers in 2002, 2007 and 2009 to return to her homeland in Jiawu, Qinghai, a place where she had left over 50 years before. The Jiawu Tribe's troops greeted her with a grand welcome and she went in person to greet every family. The *Khandroma*'s older brother, Jamyang Gyatso (1927-2005), confirmed the birthplace of the Gungru *Khandroma*. During this time, the *Khandroma* brought medicine to the locals and contributed funds to do construction at the Jiawu School. She also suggested a suitable site to build a Buddhist hall. The local tribespeople later built a dormitory for her in the prayer hall. She went to Trajia Monastery in Jiawu, the monastery where she had ordained when she was recognized as the Sixth Gungru *Khandroma*. Many monks from that monastery gave her a large gift and paid her respects. Many Jiawu monks and locals were grateful for her kindness and they prayed for *Khandroma*'s long life and for her to become the protector of these grasslands and the Jiawu tribe's main lama. The Jiawu monks and locals prayed at the Buddha's statues and white stupas showing high respect for her. With deep emotion, the *Khandroma* looked back at her birthplace that she had always dreamed about. She blessed these grasslands for fertility and strong animals and for eternal peace, happiness and honor.

2009年六月，六世嘉木央大师莅临甘加草原，在白石崖村前面“当塞拉卡”地给甘加僧俗讲经道法，大师言道：光日仓活佛是藏传佛教非同凡响的活佛之一，为尊母玛久拉仲转世再现之堪召玛，佛母传承了多杰强久美嘉措（拉阔）仁波切正统息解觉域法教仪礼法，活佛在任何年代都以慈悲为怀，未曾脱离过信教群众和佛教本意，与广大群众一起经过了新旧时代、一起经历了社会动荡，和广大民众风雨同舟，活佛恪尽职守，殚精竭虑，为宗教与社会相适应的理论与实践做出了杰出的贡献，是甘加本地方历代僧俗的直系上师，也是甘加地方唯一的直系上师，若不敬奉光日仓活佛，就等于抛弃经教，没有了修行善果……大师随即向佛母言道：白石崖溶洞为胜乐金刚佛宫，堪召玛圣地，堪召玛您作为溶洞的主人善理好溶洞……还向佛母讲述了溶洞内具体的办法！佛母奉行大师教会，随即清善了溶洞内的杂乱物件，放置了拉萨运至的佛龕，建造了煨桑台，并叮嘱管理僧注意游客和信徒的安全及洞内卫生。

The Sixth Jamyang Zhepa arrived on the Gengya grasslands in June 2009 and gave sutra teachings to the Gengya laity/monks in front of Drakkar Monastery. The Jamyang Zhepa said, “The Gungru *Khandroma* is one of the extraordinary lamas in Tibetan Buddhism and that as a reincarnation of Machik Lapdrön, she studied the great teachings and etiquette of chö with Lagu Rinpoche and never abandoned her faith to her followers (the laity) and to Buddhism. He said that, “she went through both old and new eras together with her followers, including experiencing societal unrest, and that she experienced the same difficulties that the locals experienced. She was extremely devoted as a reincarnate for the welfare of the masses and made an outstanding contribution to the theory and practice of Buddhism in society. She is a part of a reincarnation line of teachers for monks and laity in Gengya. She is the only main teacher in Gengya. If you don’t respect her, then you are not respecting the teaching and there will be no good result, such as enlightenment.” The Jamyang Zhepa immediately said to *Khandroma* (the mother): “The Drakkar Cave is the sacred Buddhist home of Victorious *Khandroma* and the *khandroma*’s sacred place. *Khandroma*, as the owner (of the Cave), you protect this place.” There is a detailed solution to managing the cave. She accepted his advisement and immediately removed (unwelcomed objects, i.e., trash) from the interior of the cave and put a shrine and built a platform to burn mulberry tree leaves. She told the monk manager to take care of the safety of the locals and tourists who visit the cave and the cleanliness of the cave.

2010年佛母在甘加和加吾部落筹集资金，十月委派两地民众数名和佛母次子德红扎西、门生金巴护送佛母高徒旦巴嘉措前往西藏桑日卡玛寺经行供养和圣地觉域法的普及，临行佛母宴请行藏人员，一行人按佛母谕示，一起朝拜了拉萨大昭寺释迦牟尼佛和西藏的名寺古刹，一起供养了尊母圣地桑日卡玛寺，后由佛母亲临指导塑建了大殿主尊尊母“玛久拉仲”鎏金铜像和护法铜像，此举增加了两地民间的联谊，巩固了两地来之不易的和平景象，其意之深远，用心之良苦，显现了佛母情系两地群众长久的幸福安康。

The *Khandroma* raised money in Gengya and in Jiawu and in the tenth month of the lunar calendar in 2010, representatives from these two places, *Khandroma* herself, *Khandroma*’s second son Dépön Tashi and her disciple Jinba all accompanied *Khandroma*’s brilliant student Tenpa Gyatso to Tibet’s Zangrikharmar Monastery to make offerings and to teach and to spread chö teachings. They had dinner together before they left and Kelzang told them to go to Lhasa, Jokang Shakyamuni, Tibet’s Mingsi Temple. Together they all made offerings at Zangrikharmar Monastery. Later Gungru *Khandroma* herself directed the building of a bronze statue of Machik Lapdrön and a bronze protector of the teachings in the

main Hall. This action increased the friendship between the two areas (Gengya and Lhasa and Zangrikharmar in the TAR) and enriched the hard-to-come by peace among the two areas. This went a long way toward preserving the happiness and peace between these two areas.

2009年夏季佛母不幸患上了股骨头坏死，拖着病重的身体，如期参加每一次昂乾内的夏季法会，给僧众解析觉域法要领，辗转又拄着腋下杖慈祥地为每人摸顶，一天下来佛母身体疲惫不堪，信众走完便一头躺下，次日又一如既往……。卧榻期间，不辞幸劳的调节民间纠纷，集结信众和僧尼劝阻不要参与时世政治当中，不要被煽动和诱导所迷惑，实施不良举动，佛母告诫僧众和僧尼：佛教的利益必须与人民的利益结合起来，佛教的宗旨是要造福人类，佛教人士当以人间和平和幸福为己任，以广大人民群众的稳定和繁荣为祈福主导。对佛母家人而言，佛母贵体是重中之重，力劝佛母到北京大医院经行手术，佛母笑言：“再怎么治疗我也不会有尊母的寿长，再说，冬季答应了信众去他们家里做客，这也许是我今生最后一次，去一个个面见我的信众，我不能食言，更不能让他们失望啊……”。冬季佛母按甘加民众的强烈要求，拄着拐杖莅临每一户村民家里，临近春节时串行完了全部甘加家庭，满足了和民众零距离接触的祈愿，如愿了信众的期望，但佛母身体不堪负重如此大的劳累，病情也有所加剧，这种慈悲既来自佛母悠远深厚之慧性善根，更来自佛母芳越蘅杜、净逾冰雪的宗教情操，心冥一乘，行崇六度，方能如此大慈大悲、无私无畏！

In the summer of 2009 Khandroma unfortunately suffered from bone necrosis and she became very ill. Nonetheless, the summer chö festival took place as scheduled at her main prayer hall in the *nangchen*. Propped up with a crutch under her arm, Kelzang benevolently greeted every visitor who came to see her at the *chö* festival. As she became extremely fatigued, she only laid down after the last visitor left and she showed up again (to the festival) the next day. While Kelzang lay on her couch, (Kelzang) did not resign from trying to solve the local grassland disputes. She advised the monks, nuns and the laity who gathered there not to participate in politics. She told them to not instigate and induce any harmful activities and the *Khandroma* admonished the monks and nuns that the benefits of Buddhism must in turn be of benefit to humanity. Buddhist figures must take it upon themselves to promote human happiness and to lead prayers for the prosperity and stability of the great masses. According to (Kelzang's) family members, Alak Gungru's health was most important. They encouraged her to go to the main hospital in Beijing to undergo a surgery, but she smiled and said: "No matter the treatment for my illness, I cannot have a long life." But I promised that in the winter, I will go to the believers' homes and visit them and perhaps this would be the last time in this lifetime I would be able to do it. I can't break a promise and make them disappointed." In response to the Gengya people's ardent request, *Khandroma*, who used a cane, arrived at every villager's home in the winter. By Spring Festival (2010) Kelzang Drölma finished this project and arrived at every villager's home. Happily, they supplicated to her. She wanted to fulfill everyone's wishes but her health could not bear the burden of doing this type of exhausting work as her illness became worse. This kind of benevolent mercy from Mother *Khandroma* was profound and sweet. The sentiments of religion stemmed from the depths of her heart and she surpassed the six realms of existence. She showed great mercy, selflessness and intrepidity.

#### 四、佛母谢世、大丧尊焚

#### Section IV: The Khandroma Passes Away and her Funeral to Honor



2013年1月二十四日凌晨4时熟睡中的佛母突然抽出，倍感不适，家人送往医院当即采取输氧输液，胸外伏击等抢救措施，持续抢救，仍未见效，清晨八时正，一颗伟大而慈悲的心脏永远停止了跳动，我们敬爱的佛母光日堪召玛·尕藏丹曲卓玛溘然长逝，安然圆寂……噩耗传来，天人同悲，整个拉卜楞乌云密布，天崩地暗，江河在哭泣，山川在呜咽，人们在呼唤，信奉佛母的每一座寺院、每一个家庭、每一个信众都望着佛母笑容可掬的面孔和智慧深邃的目光，点起了酥油灯，念起了超度经昼夜不停，人们祈祷，祈祷佛母的灵童早日传世，祈愿亲爱的佛母乘愿再来……。中共夏河县委、县政府、县政协、县人大、县统战部、县宗教局等、及省上、州上相关单位领导也纷纷前来吊唁，经献哈达，一一拜别伟大的佛母。

殡葬整个仪式经行了七天，每日祈福诵经之僧人僧尼接踵而至，济济满堂，人们从各地赶来拜别佛母，人头攒动，络绎不绝，川流不息，泣泪敬别佛母。嘉木央大师亲自致电安排大葬各项事宜，拉卜楞寺官会主任亲临主事，白石崖僧众、甘加信众担起大丧期间的各项佛事事务和接待宾客的繁重工作，他们不遗余力，亲力亲为，拉卜楞寺甘加家乡僧众倾囊相助。这七日腊月严冬变得风柔日暖，惠风和畅，七彩长虹当空映照，飞舞不断，仿佛那是佛母的英姿，飘逸在这片草原当空久久不愿散去……，腊月十九凌晨，大葬出殡，皓月婵娟，风清月朗，人们摩肩接踵，人声鼎沸，在声声玛尼音和阵阵觉域法音声中，佛母法体化作缕缕青烟，片片段段，美轮美奂，宛如一条绸带随风起伏，青烟袅袅，像飘忽散淡的烟霞，映红了千里草原……

At 4 a.m. on January 24 (Lunar Calendar) the *Khandroma*, who was sleeping soundly, suddenly became sick and her family brought her to the hospital. She underwent oxygen therapy and intravenous infusion in the outside of her chest in a frantic attempt to save her. They continued to try and revive her but it did not have the desired effect. At eight o'clock in the morning, she exhibited a big breath and her merciful heart forever stopped beating. We who respect the Gungru *Khandroma* Kelzang Damchö Drölma watched her suddenly and peacefully pass away. News announcing her death spread and overtook Labrang like a black cloud that descended from the sky with tears crying like a river. The mountains and rivers wept and people shouted. *Khandroma's* believers at every monastery, in every family, and among every individual recalled her smiling face beaming from ear to ear and deep look of wisdom. They lit butter lamps and chanted sutras day and night without stop. Everyone prayed for *Khandroma's* reincarnation's quick return and they supplicated (prostrated) wishing she would come back. The relevant leaders of Chinese Communist Party Xiahe County CPPCC Member, County Regional Government, County CPPCC (Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference), County Chinese People's Congress and County United Work Front for CPCC, County Religion Office, offered their condolences. One by one, they offered a *khatak* in honor of *Khandroma's* death.

The entire funeral ceremony lasted seven days and every day monks and nuns chanted blessings and sutras. Crowds were packed as people from all over rushed to say good bye to *Khandroma*. The scene bustled with life continuously without stopping and people sobbed in veneration to the *Khandroma*. The Jamyang Zhepa himself personally phoned and arranged the order for the funeral and the director from Labrang Monastery arrived to carry out these orders. Monks from Drakkar and believers (lay persons) from Gengya undertook every single task of the funeral and undertook the burden of receiving guests. They did their utmost and monks from Gengya and Labrang gave everything they could to help one another. This seven-day funeral in the winter was actually very warm with a soft wind and hot sun. A seven-colored rainbow shined brightly incessantly appearing like *Khandroma's* body dancing the sky remaining over these grasslands, unwilling to leave. Her funeral procession started early on the morning of 19<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> lunar month. A beautiful white moon and a quiet

wind graced the crowds of people who waited shoulder by shoulder like a boiling cauldron. There were sounds of people chanting the “mani mantra” and the chö practice. The *Khandroma*’s body was cremated and then the blue smoke came out splendidly just like a silk belt moving up and down carefree. The blue smoke rose in spirals resembling the form of typical red-hazed clouds that spread over the grasslands for a long distance.

### 五、佛母您 没走！           Section 5: Mother, Don’t Go!

佛母你别走，这里的白天依旧会到来，我们眼光背开了你时，四面都是黑暗，大地依旧需要太阳的滋润，光照每一片角落。佛母你别走，这里的人们任然需要你眷顾，指引人性的方向，让人们诸恶莫作，诸善奉行……佛母你别走，草原的子孙，更需要你的赐福摸顶，使他们利乐有情，功德圆满……佛母你没走，您的音容笑貌已镌刻在每一个人的明眸中，每当太阳升起的时候我们就会想您，想起佛母的爱，在我们生命的长河里始终有一缕灿烂的暖阳照耀，那暖阳象金子一样浇铸在我们的心头萦绕在我们心头生生世世。佛母你没走，每当夜幕降临，就会有一轮明月萦绕在我们的床头，那月光里会浮现出你一个世纪对我们的牵念，影视般的硝烟中你的身影像尊母身带光环伫立于云翔顶缓缓飘落的情景，你是我们永远歌颂不止的恩人。佛母你没走，听！那觉域法音声中我们任依稀听见你咏唱悦耳动听的声声佛音，天籁之音，荡涤心灵，启迪智慧，澄澈开悟。

Mother, do not go! The daytime here will return as before. When our eyes are turned away from you, darkness pervades on all sides. The earth still needs the nourishment of the sun to illuminate each and every place.

Mother, do not go! The people here still need you to take care of them and show [them] the direction of the path and to tell them to abstain from evil and to do all virtuous things. Mother, do not go! The posterity of the grassland especially needs your blessing and empowerment so they [locals] can benefit all sentient beings and accomplish their merit.

Mother, you have not left! Your appearance and smiling face have already been engraved in the pupil of everyone’s eye. Whenever the sun rises, we will think of You and recall your love. Our long life is like an endless river and there is always a ray of warm sunlight shining on us. That warm light is like gold cast in our heart that lingers from age to age.

Mother, you have not left! Every time the darkness falls, a bright moon lingers over the heads of our bed, and the love that you showed us for a century reappears in the light. In the same way that smoke (from guns) lingers (as) in the movies and television, your body image is like that of a Venerable Mother surrounded by bright light who lingers for a long time and descends slowly from the top of the cloud. You are the benefactor to whom we will sing our praises forever.

Mother, you have not left, listen! We can still hear your sweet-sounding chanting of chö, the sound of nature that cleanses our spirit, the wisdom of enlightenment that edifies us all!

佛母你没走，因为我们在这世上犹存，你就在我们身上。

佛母你没走，没有人能阻挡你的脚步，你只是出了一趟远门，让人们感受下你的存在与离去的差异，当红嘴鸦翱翔于天空，白石崖半壁俯冲而至的时候，当雪已化雨，阳光灿烂晃眼，蓝天愈加湛蓝，那些萌生于冬日的嫩芽、花苞伸展着，倾听着，春天到来的声音之时，莲花中央的你闪耀万丈光芒，着阳光的金色羽衣，舞着清风般的灵秀凌波乘风，带着水的柔情，雪的洁莹，一定会到来，听，远远地，你的脚步声已踏响……

佛母啊！在这白昼交替之际，一夜思亲泪，天明又复收，恐伤慈母意，暗向枕边流，唯有祈祷静人心，声声玛尼，天上人间共倾魂……. 此情绵绵无绝期！

Mother, You have not left! Because we live this world, you live in our body!

Mother, you have not left! Nobody is able to obstruct your footsteps; you merely went on a long trip, letting us feel the difference between your existence and your departure. When a crow soars in the sky and down the wall of a rampart and arrives at Drakkar, the snow turns into rain, the sunshine glitters about, and the blue sky is all the more azure blue. The buds born in a soft shoot of a winter day slowly bloom, listening attentively as the voices of spring arrive. You *Khandroma* sit in the center of the lotus flower radiating in all directions. You are wearing bright golden clothes and dancing like a breeze moving softly like water and pure like snow. You must come back! Listen, from a distance, the sound of your footsteps has already been heard.

Mother! We cry at night as we miss you but we hold back our tears during the day because we are afraid our tears will hurt you. We let our tears fall down on our pillow, but only prayers calm our hearts and the chant of mani calms both our soul and the celestial soul. This chanting of mani will never stop!

## Appendix II: Glossary of Tibetan Names

This list includes both the Tibetan phonetic and strict Tibetan transcription of all Tibetan words, including names and places. It is separated by the order in which they appear in the dissertation starting with the main introduction on throughout the five chapters and their respective sections. These terms will also appear in alphabetical order in each section.

### Preface/Acknowledgements/Introduction

Amdo *a mdo*  
Chödzin *chos 'dzin*  
Damtsik Drölma *dam tsig sgröl ma*  
Dépön *bde dpon*  
Dobi Changshar *rdo bis lcang shar*  
Drakkar *brag dkar dgon*  
Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lozang Gyatso *rgyal ba lnga pa blo bzang rgya mtsho*  
Gendün Darjé *Dge 'dun dar je*  
Gengya *rgan gya*  
Gengya Barta *rgan gya bar mtha*  
Gengya Ringön *rgan gya ri sngon*  
Gengya Taba *rgan gya mtha ba*  
Gönpotso *gon po tsho*  
Gungru Yeshe Khandroma *Gung ru Ye shes mkha' 'gro ma*  
Kelzang Drölma, Gungru VI *skal bzang sgröl ma*  
Khöntön *'khon ston*  
Könchok Chödrön, Gungru III *dkon mchog chos sgron*  
Könchok Tenpé Wangmo Gungru V *dkon mchog bstan pa dbang mo*  
Könchok Tendzin *dkon mchog bstan dzin*  
Lozang Jikmé, Jamyang Zhepa VI *lo bzang 'jigs med*  
Labrang Tashikhyil *bla brang bkra shis 'khyil*  
Lozang Chödrön, Gungru II (I?) *blo bzang chos sgron*  
Lozang Drölma Gungru II (III?)  
Lozang Tandrön *blo bzang bsdan sgron*  
Machik Lapdrön *ma gcig labs sgron*  
Ngawang Tsöndrü Ngawang Tsöndrü, Jamyang Zhepa I *ngag dbang brtson 'grus*  
*namtar rnam thar*  
Rindzin Pelmo, Gungru I *rig 'dzin dpal mo*  
Rongbo *rong wo*  
Sönam Gyen, Gungru I *bsod nams rgyan*  
Tashi Tsering *bkhra shis tshe ring*  
Terlung *gter lung*  
*trülku sprul sku*  
Zhangtön Tenpa Gyatso *zhang ston bstan pa rgya mtsho*

### Chapter 1

Akhu *a khu*

Bochung Pendé *bo chung pan de*  
 Changkya *lcang skya*  
 Changkya Rölpaï Dorjé *lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje*  
 Chougya *co'u rgya*  
 Détri *sde khri*  
 Dewa *sde ba*  
 Doba *mdo ba*  
 Dorjé Jikmé Gyatso Lagu, *la gu rdo rje 'jigs med rgya mtsho*  
 Dröldé Gyelwa Jungné *grol sde rgyal pa'i 'byung gnas*  
 khandroma *mkha' 'gro ma*  
 Kham *kham*  
 chö *gcod*  
 Gartsé *mgar rtse*  
 Géden Tengyéling *dge ldan bstan rgyas gling*  
 Géluk *dge lugs*  
 Géluk (pa) *dge lugs (pa)*  
 Gesar *ge sar*  
 Golok *mgo log*  
 Gönlung Jampaling *dgon lung byams pa gling*  
 Gungtang Tenpé Drönmé III *gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me*  
 Gungtang Tenpé Gyatso IV *bstan pa'i rgya mtsho*  
 Gyelwo *rgyal wo*  
 Gayyé *rgya ye*  
 Héruka *he ru ka*  
 Hortsang Mardang *hor tshang mardang*  
 Jamyang Tupten Nyima Détri III *'jam dbyangs thub bstan nyi ma*  
 Jamyang Zhepa *'jam dbyangs bzhad pa*  
 Jikmé Tupten Nyima Détri V *'jigs med thub bstan nyi ma*  
 Jinpa *sbyin pa*  
 Könchok Gyatso, scholar *dkon mchog rgya mtsho*  
 Kumbum *sku 'bum*  
 kün khyen *kun mkhyen*  
 lam rim *lam Rim*  
 Lanak *la nag*  
 Lapsun Dargyé Ling *bslab gsum dar rgyas gling*  
 Lhazang Khan *lha bzang han*  
 Lokyatün *lo gya tun*  
 Lozang Chökyi Gyeltsen, Panchen Lama X *blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan*  
 Lozang Chökyi Nyima, Tuken III *blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma*  
 Lozang Lungrik Nyima, Détri IV *blo bzang lung rigs nyi ma*  
 Lozang Tsültrim *blo bzang tshul khriims*  
 Lozang Tupten Jikmé Gyatso, Jamyang Zhepa III *'jam dbyangs bzhad pa blo bzang thub bstan 'jigs med rgya mtsho*  
 Kelzang Tupten Wangchuk Jamyang Zhepa IV *'jam dbyangs bzhad pa skal bzang thub bstan dbang phyug*  
 ngakpas *sngags pa*  
 Norlha/Gara Lama Sönam Rapden *nor lha mgar ra bla ma bsod nams rab brtan*  
 Nyang Tsang Trülku *nyang tshang sprul sku*  
 Nyingma (pa) *rnying ma (pa)*  
 Orgyen Chökyi *o rgyan chos kyi*

Padampa Sanggyé *pha dam pa sangs rgyas*  
 Prajñāpāramitā *sher phyin*  
 Pudi *phu di*  
 Repgong *rep gong*  
 Riboché *ri bo che*  
 Samding Dorjé Phakmo *bsam sding rdo rje phag mo*  
 Sangkhok *bsang khog*  
 Sera Khandro *se ra mkha' 'gro bde ba'i rdo rje*  
 Sétsang *bse tshang*  
 Shédруп Gyatso *bshad sgrub rgya mtsho*  
 Södrak Könchok Gyatso *bsod grags dkon mchog rgya mtsho*  
 Taré Lhamo *tA re hla mo*  
 Tenba Gyatso *bstan ba rgya mtsho*  
 Tongdé Ngakgi Wangchuk *stong sde ngag gi dbang phyug*  
 Tönyön Samdrup *thod snyon bsam 'grub*  
 Labrang Trinlé Gyatso *phrin las rgya mtsho*  
 Tsongkhapa *tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa*  
 Tuken *thu'u bkwan*  
 Tuken Chökyi Nyima *thu'u bkwan chos kyi nyi ma*  
 Tsö *gtsos Chin.*  
 Yeshé Tsogyel *ye she mtsho rgyal*  
 Vajravārāhī *rdo rje phag mo*  
 Vajrayoginī *rdo rje rnam 'byor ma*  
 Zangrikharmar *zangs ri mkhar dmar*  
 Zhapkar *zhabs dkar*  
 zhelpu *gzhal phu*  
 Zhölkor *zhol skor*

## Chapter 2

Aröl rinpoché Jétsün Lozang Lungtok Tenpé Gyeltsen Pelzangbo *a rol rin po che rje btsun*  
*blo bzang lung rtogs bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan dpal bzang bo*  
 Chentsa *gcan mtsha*  
 Chapcha *chab cha*  
 Dörjétsö *rdo rje tsho*  
 Gyayé Püntso *phun tshogs*  
 Gyayé gön ngotsar drenling *rgya ye dgon ngo mtsar 'dren gling*  
 Jakhyung *bya khyung*  
 Jamyang Gyatso *'jams dbyangs rgya mtsho*  
 Jiawu Dawa *zla wa*  
 Jiawu Tashi Gyatso *bkra shis rgya mtsho*  
 Jiawu Karmagya *kar ma rgya*  
 Jiawu Nyima *nyima*  
 Jiawu Döndrup *don grub*  
 Jiawu Samten *Bsam gtan*  
 Jiawu Tenpa *bstan pa*  
 Jiawu Tsewang Tshe *dbang*  
 Jiawu Tuften *thub bstan*  
 kashak *bka shag*

khatak *kha btags*  
 Lozang Chöpel *blo bzang chos phel*  
 Lozang Jamyang Yéshé Tenpé Gyeltsen *blo bzang 'jam dbyangs ye shes bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan*  
 Trangyar *'Phrang yar*  
 Tsering Dörjé *tshe rang rdo rje*

### Chapter 3

Akhu Dortsamet *a khu dor tsam med*  
 Alak Kampu *a lag kam phu*  
 Alak Sétsang *A lag bse tshang*  
 Ani Lhadrön *a ni lha sgron*  
 Chökyi Drönma *chos skyi sgron ma*  
 Dékyi *bde skyid*  
 Gendün *Dge 'dun* (Kelzang's first husband)  
 Hortsang *Lhogyel hor gtsang lho rgyal*  
 Jamyang Gyatso *'jam dbyangs rgya mtsho* (Kelzang's brother)  
 Karmagya *karma rgya*  
 Khagya *Yeshékhyil Kha gya ye shes 'khyil*  
 Lhamotso *hla mo tsho*  
 Milarepa *mi la ras pa*  
 Samding Dorjé *Pakmo bsam sding rdo rje phag mo*  
 Drölkho *sgrol kho*  
 Ösel *'od gsal*  
 Sönam *bsod nams* (Jiawu)  
 Sönamgyid *bsod nams gyit*  
 Tashitso *bkra shis tsho*  
 Tashi Gyatso *bkra shis rgya mtsho* (Kelzang's second husband)  
 Tupten Döndrup *thub bstan don grub*  
 Tupten *thub bstan* (Ringön)  
 Weima Gya *pad ma rgya*  
 Weima Tashi *pad ma bkra shis*

### Chapter 4

Akhu Jamyang *a khu 'jam dbyangs*  
 Chörten *mchod rten*  
 Dorjé Sönam *rdo rje bsod nams*  
 Gangri *gangs ri* (Damtsik)  
 Gara Sönam *Rapten mgar ra bsod nams rab brtan*  
 Gengya *Suruk su ruk*  
 Gungri *Gung ri* (Damtsik, alternate spelling)  
 Jamyang Zhepa II *'jam dbyangs bzhad pa dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po*  
 Kelzang Tashi *skal bzang bkra shis*  
 Könchok Gyatso *dkon mchog rgya mtsho* (Drakkar monk)  
 Makba *mag pa*  
 Norlha *nor lha* (Gara Lama)  
 Réku *re ku*  
 Shéráp Drölma *She rab sgrol ma*

Tashilhünpo  
Tsolho *Khandroma Mtsho hlo mkha' 'gro ma*  
Tupten Gyatso, Dalai Lama XIII *rgyal ba thub bstan rgya mtsho*

## Chapter 5

baryik *bar yig*  
Barta bar mtha  
benluk *ban lugs*  
*Bum 'bum*  
chöten *mchod rten*  
Dolo *rdo lo*  
Drépung *bras spungs*  
Drölkartso *sgrol dkar tsho*  
Garva pa *grva pa*  
Gengya Zhölkor *zhol skor*  
géshé *dge bshes*  
Jamyang Gyatso *'jams dbyangs rgya mtsho*  
Jikdrel Chökyi Sengé *jigs bral chos kyi sen ge*  
Jikmé Sam *'Jigs med sam*  
Jomo *jo mo*  
Kagyü *bka' brgyud*  
Katok Situ *kah thog situ*  
khatak *kha btags*  
Kyotön Sönam *skyo ston bsod nams*  
Lazang Khan *lha zang khan*  
Lhamo Drönma *lha mo sgron ma*  
Lozang Pelden Tendzin Sangdrak *blo bzang dpal dan stan 'din sang grags*  
nangchen *nang chen*  
*Nitri nikhri*  
Jikmé Tenpa *'jigs med bsdan pa*  
Sixth Dalai Lama Tsangyang Gyatso *rgyal ba tsang yang rgya mtsho*  
Fourteenth Dalai Lama Tendzin Gyatso *rgyal ba bcu bzhi pa bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho*  
Sanggyé Drölma *sangs rgyas sgrol ma*  
Sanggyé Gyatso *sangs rgyas rgya mtsho*  
tapshé *thabs she*  
Tokden Shakya Shri *rtogs ldan sakya shri*  
Topa bhadra *thod pa bha dra*  
Tralo *Bkra lo*  
Tsang *gtsang*  
ü *dbus*  
Yeshé Tsogyel *ye shes mtsho rgyal*  
Yoru *yo ru*



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**Photo Illustrations**

**Figure 2: Kelzang attending her family picnic at Drakkar**



Kelzang Drölma in August 2012 sitting at her estate at Drakkar. Photo taken by Peter Faggen

**Figure 3: Kelzang in robes in painting at Drakkar**



Photo of Kelzang in monastic robes at her Drakkar estate. Photo taken by Peter Faggen in 2013.

**Figure 4: Crowd at festival at Gungru estate in 2012**



Figure 4 is of people attending the final day of the *chö* festival at her Drakkar estate. Figure 5 is of Drakkar and the village of Taba. Photos taken by Peter Faggen in 2013.

**Figure 5: View of Drakkar and Drakkar Taba**

