Outward Beauty, Hidden Wrath: An Exploration of the Drikung Kagyü Dharma Protectress Achi Chökyi Drölma

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OUTWARD BEAUTY, HIDDEN WRATH:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE DRIKUNG KAGYÜ DHARMA PROTECTRESS
ACHI CHÕKYI DRÖLMA

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This work is dedicated to my Grandmother, Lois Sobin,
who has instilled in me a passion for books and far off places,
and to my Grandfather, Alvin Sobin,
who has always been patient enough to indulge us both.
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ABSTRACT

Despite her popularity within certain sects of Tibetan Buddhism, little focused work has been done on the dharma protectress Achi Chökyi Drölma. Venerated as the guardian of the Drikung Kagyü tradition, as the maternal great-grandmother of its founder, Jikten Sumgön (1143-1217), and as a human embodiment of the fully-enlightened female buddha Vajrayogini, this little-researched but influential deity maintains numerous diverse roles within her community of lay and monastic devotees. Drawing on primary and secondary sources, this thesis examines Achi’s uncommon characterizations beyond the typical mundane Buddhist dharma protector, which I categorize into three separate but at times overlapping personas: 1) Hagiographic Achi, as seen in her portrayal as a Tibetan Buddhist saint; 2) Ritualized Achi, as portrayed in her roles of fierce protectress and boon-granting goddess, and; 3) Historical Achi, or rather, the possible viability of the existence of such a female teacher in the history of Jikten Sumgön's genealogy. This is done first with an exploration of Achi’s iconography and ritual associations, which have roots in Indian tantric traditions, followed by the history of the domain over which she is sovereign, the Drikung valley region. I then provide a full translation of one of her more recent hagiographies and examine its meanings and implications in relation to the genre of Tibetan religious biography, and end with a look at the impact the roles of women and issues of gender in Buddhist narrative and Tibetan culture have had on the portrayal of Achi as a mother, ritual consort, and teacher. This single case study, therefore, sheds light not only on the construction of religious figures and divine entities within a given cultural sphere, but at the influence gender and normative social values play on the perception of such constructions. In conclusion, I argue two points: First, that Achi, and other semi-wrathful deities like her, are able to assume different and seemingly contrary roles because they embody a specifically Tibetan Buddhist cultural repertoire grounded in indigenous beliefs and imported religious and social constructs, and second, that while the deity's voluntary assumption of a female body specifically to give birth to a lineage may appear to exemplify the presence of an androcentric gaze in Buddhist narrative, reducing her to a mere reproductive function and an association with a male authority figure, such activities actually stem from a legacy of both religious male and female figures who have used the activities of the house-holder life as skillful means in spreading the Buddha's teachings.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Tibetan religion is filled with an abundance of deities to be propitiated with offerings and rituals—some who must be placated and kept under control, and others who are benevolent and need only to be honored. Some of these deities are linked to local cults, perhaps even pre-Buddhist in origin, while numerous others can be traced to imported buddhas and bodhisattvas from Indian traditions. With such an extensive mix of beings inhabiting Tibet's landscape, it is not surprising that over the centuries many of what could be perceived as purely "Buddhist" deities could take on hybrid personalities and narratives that not only linked them to the dominant religion, but to aspects of indigenous worship as well. One genre of literature in which this mixing can often be seen is in the hagiographic accounts of the lives of respected holy men and women. These stories not only relate the often fantastical reasons why a particular figure is seen as especially important to the religion, but in turn reveal the issues that have concerned the authors and audiences of each body of work in their respective time periods. Of these numerous deities, both major and minor, only a handful have received exclusive attention and study. That is not to say the area has been neglected, however. In fact, the study of deities in Tibet is a rather prolific topic, and instrumental research has been produced not only on individual deities, but on the worship and practices of their cults as a whole. Rather, due to the breadth of variety, there is simply much more work to be done. While the study of deities in and of themselves may not say much about real, living Tibetans in the centuries after Buddhism was introduced to Tibet, a study of how these deities are portrayed, worshipped, and ritualized can say much about what was and is important to those that hold them dear.

One such deity who has received only brief attention is the legendary Achi Chökyi Drölma (A phyi chos kyi sgrol ma). Venerated as both an emanation of the female buddha Vajrayoginī (Tib. Rdo rje rnal ’byor ma) of Indian tantric tradition and the great-grandmother of the founder of the Drikung Kagyü sect of Tibetan Buddhism, Ratnaśrī Jikten Sumgön (Jig rten gsum mgon, 1143-1217), Achi takes on a variety of significant roles for those that worship her. From a ritual standpoint, she functions not only as a semi-wrathful dharma protectress (Tib. chos skyong, Skt. dharmapāla), but as a spiritual guru (bla ma), a potential consort, and even a personal tutelary deity, or yidam (yi dam). It is this last characterization that
informs her character as portrayed in her hagiographical materials, as a fully-awakened female buddha who has voluntarily sacrificed her own enlightenment in order to assume bodily form and the strictly householder status of wife and mother. Additionally, beneath these fantastic portrayals lies the question of the viable existence of a living, breathing Tibetan ancestor to inspire these stories, who may or may not have lived sometime in the ninth or tenth centuries.

This project endeavors to examine the deity's uncommon possession of all these characterizations in the hopes of better understanding how such a diverse persona can function as one coherent entity within the tradition of her devotees. To the extent to which it is possible, this analysis also seeks to uncover the feasibility of Achi as a possible historic figure, as well as the significance of her elevation from a simple ancestor of a prominent lineage to a full buddha-deity within not only the Drikung Kagyü tradition, but among other sects of Buddhism as well. By examining these multivalent discursive constructions of Achi Chökyi Drölma, I argue two distinct points: First, semi-wrathful female deities, and Achi in particular, embody a specifically Tibetan Buddhist cultural repertoire that is grounded in active indigenous beliefs and imported religious ideas; and second, that while Achi's assumptions of the samsāric roles of mother and wife appear to simply exemplify the presence of an androcentric gaze, belittling her importance to mere reproductive function, the dharma protectress is in fact just one more example in a long line of Buddhist figures, both men and women, who have taken on householder activities as an act of skillful means (Tib. thabs; Skt. upāya) in order to spread the Buddha's teachings.

With regard to the make-up of this aforementioned Tibetan cultural repertoire, I can identify at least five sets of inherent resources working together to develop three distinct representations of Achi. The first representation is what I call "Hagiographic Achi"; this is the serene, buddha-like Achi as exemplified by her life-story and seen in her identification as a yidam. This image of Achi pulls mainly from a set of resources drawing on early Indian and Mahāyāna depictions of saints and gurus, modeling her character on the benign enlightened beings most traditionally classified as 'mainstream Buddhist.' This characterization, particularly as it relates to iconography, is also informed by a second set of resources based in esoteric Buddhist and pan-Indian tantric practices. In addition, this set, seen in the wrathful, transgressive, and sexual aspects of her character, informs a second classification, "Ritualized Achi." This persona is seen most prominently in practical texts and local legends, and in her constructions as sexual consort, as fierce protector to be called in times of need, and in her identification with the buddha Vajrayoginī, a female figure who also straddles the esoteric and mainstream Buddhist sets of resources herself. Ritualized Achi is further informed by non-Buddhist indigenous resources related to deities of land, water, and wind. Finally, "Historical Achi", in which the term 'historical' is used loosely to refer to the possibility of a figure based in historic fact rather than to the known actuality of such a figure, is informed by sets of pre-Buddhist Tibetan resources related to ancestors cults and divine legitimization,
and by sets of social resources related to family life and women in particular. Each of these individual resources and the ways that they play into the character of Achi will be explored in the body of the following chapters.

1.1 Setting the Stage

Achi's name appears in the academic works of numerous top scholars within the field of Tibetan studies past and present, attesting to her relative popularity, but she is often granted little more than a line of reference identifying her status as the protectress of the Drikung Kagyü region and lineage. From a traditional standpoint, a significant amount of written material exists on Achi and her cult, but only a handful is accessible to non-Tibetan speakers, despite the growing popularity of her worship through the spread of the Drikung Kagyü tradition to the West. The cornerstone of this project, therefore, lies in the translation and interpretation of a modern abbreviated hagiography of the figure, The Abridged Life-story of Drikung Achi Chökyi Drölma ('Bri gung a phyi chos kyi sgrol ma'i rnam thar mdor bsdus) by Drikung Könchok Gyatso ('Bri gung dkon mchog rgya mtsho), as well as consultation with a sampling of her ritual texts, including two short sādhana, one from the Great Drikung Kagyü Treasury of the Doctrine ('Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo) and one from the Collected Works of Lozang Damchö Gyatso (Blo bzang dam chos rgya mtsho gsung 'bum), and the catalogue of a much larger ritual text devoted entirely to Achi, entitled The Sādhana Handbook of the Teaching Guardian Achi (Bstan bsrung a

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1 Achi appears in the body and footnotes of a number of works, although sometimes with the spelling "Apchi" instead. Rarely is the Tibetan spelling of her name included in these latter texts, so it is possible that this is either simply due to variations in the pronunciation of her name among various groups of Tibetan-speaking people, or a mistake in phonetics or transcription. The reference undoubtedly refers to the same deity, however, as the rest of the information conforms to the general descriptions of Achi. Some of the more significant references in which she is mentioned but not elaborated on are as follows: Keith Dowman, The Power-Places of Central Tibet: The Pilgrim's Guide (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988), 108-119; Matthew T. Kapstein, The Tibetans (Maldon: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 46-7; Per K. Sørensen and Guntram Hazod, Rulers of the Celestial Plain: Ecclesiastic and Secular Hegemony in Medieval Tibet: A Study in Tshal Gung-Thang (Austria: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007), 75; Giuseppe Tucci, Tibetan Painted Scrolls, Vol. 1 (Thailand: SDI Publications, 1999), 630.

2 The second chapter of this work, which contains the hagiography, is fully translated in chapter two, and Appendix C contains the full translation of its third chapter, which lists the texts related to the deity (Drikung Könchok Gyatso, 'Bri gung a phyi chos kyi sgrol ma'i rnam thar mdor bsdus (Abridged Life-story of Drikung Achi Chökyi Drölma) (Lhasa: Tibet's People Publishing House, 2004)).

3 Amgön Rinpoche, "A phyi Chos kyi Sgron ma Chibs zhon gyi Sgrub thabs (Sādhana of the Horse-Riding Achi Chökyi Drölma)," in 'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo (Great Drikung Kagyü Treasury of the Doctrine), Vol. 43 (Lhasa: 2004).

4 See Appendix B for a translation of this short sādhana (Lozang Demchö Gyatso, "A phyi'i sgrub thabs mdor bsdus (Abridged Sādhana of Achi)," in Blo bzang dam chos rgya mtsho gsung 'bum (The Collected Works of Lozang Damchö Gyatso) (New Delhi: North Sopa, 1975)).
This endeavor is greatly assisted by the very recent translations by Tashi T. Jamyangling of a few of the texts from this particular collection, including an alternate version of her life-story.

According to her tradition, Achi Chökyi Drölma was born to human parents of the prestigious Nanam (Snā nam) clan in the Drikung region of Central Tibet, which lies north-west of Lhasa, sometime after the period of the First Propagation of Buddhism (c. 650-850). Her birth was foretold by prophetic dreams and accompanied by auspicious signs. Because she was born with a third eye and spoke immediately upon her delivery, it was obvious that she was no ordinary child, but rather a divine dākinī and emanation of the fully-enlightened Queen of the Dākinīśī, Vajrayoginī. At the age of three, she spontaneously began reciting the mantra of Tārā, teaching it to friends and neighbors, which earned her the name of Chökyi Drölma; drölma (sgrol ma), or savior, being the Tibetan translation of the name of the popular Buddhist goddess. By the time she was in her late teens, both her parents had died, and Achi, now living with extended family, chose to renounce her inherited wealth and sneak away with a merchant caravan travelling east toward Kham (Khams). As she had prophesized to those around her many times before, it was here that she met and married a practiced yogin by the name of Amé Tsültrim Gyatso (A

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5 A full translation of the handbook's catalogue is provided in Appendix A (Bstan bsrung A phyi'i sgrub thabs be'u bum: Collected texts concerned with the rites of propiation of the special protective deity of the 'Bri gung Dkar bryud pa tradition A phyi Chos kyi sgrol ma (New Delhi: Tsering Dorma Gelek, 1975)).

6 Tashi T. Jamyangling, trans., A phyi'i Gsang sgrub (Secret Achi Sādhana) (Tara Foundation of Germany, 2010); Tashi T. Jamyangling, trans., A phyi'i 'Khrung rabs (Life Story of Dharma Protector, Achi Chökyi Dolma) (Tara Foundation of Germany, 2010); Tashi T. Jamyangling, trans., A phyi'i Sgrub skor Bstd pa'i Rim pa (Praise from the Cycle of Achi Liturgy) (Tara Foundation of Germany, 2010).

7 Of the ancient dynastic clans of Tibet, the Nanam is one of the oldest, representing one of the four heir-producing families of the imperial age. A number of its members are recorded as maintaining high political positions throughout that era. These include the royal mother of Trisong Detsen (Khri srong lde btsan, r. 755-804), Mangmoje Shiteng (Mang mo rje bzhi steng), as well several ministers (zhang blon). The founder of the Tselpa Kagyū sect, Lama Zhang (Zhang sna nam brtson 'grus grags pa, 1123-1193), was also born to the Nanam clan. A main settlement of the clan was in lower Tölung (Stod lung) (Ronald Davidson, Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture (New York, Columbia University Press, 2005), 329; Drikung Könchok Gyatso, 'Bri gung a phyi chos kyi sgrol ma'i rnam thar mdo r bs dus, 11; Matthew T. Kapstein, The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 29-30; Alex McKay, ed., The History of Tibet Volume 1: The Early Period: to c. AD 850, The Yarlung Dynasty (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 56; Sørensen and Hazod, Rulers on the Celestial Plain, 75; Helga Uebach, "Ladies of the Tibetan Empire (7th-9th Centuries CE)," in Women in Tibet (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 38-39).

8 The introduction of Buddhism to Tibet is traditionally taught to have occurred in two main phases: the First Propagation (snga dar), which occurred during the imperial age of the Buddhist Kings (c. 650-850), and the Second Propagation (phyi dar), also called the Age of the New Translations (c. 1000-1400), as this was the period in which there was an influx of new texts and teachers. These periods were separated by a tumultuous period of uncertain activity referred to as the "Dark Age" (c. 850-1000), which began with the death of the last member of the imperial line and the collapse of the Tibetan empire. As the translated hagiography points out, there is some debate as to when Achi lived – some say during the First Propagation, while others suggest sometime afterwards, right before the tenth century. For more information on the periodization of Tibetan history, see: Bryan Cuevas, "Some Reflections on the Periodization of Tibetan History," Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines, 10 (April 2006): 44-45.
mes tshul khrims rgya mtsho) of another good family line, the Kyura (Skyu ra) clan, and with him she eventually gave birth to four sons. Throughout her life she demonstrated her miraculous tantric powers and otherworldly abilities. On the occasion of her wedding, when no feast could be provided for her guests, Achi unexpectedly produced a damaru drum and skull-bowl from the pockets of her robes and, upon performing a mystical dance, manifested food and drink, thereby pleasing all those present. Later in life, while teaching in a cave, she transformed a fresh corpse into a great tantric feast offering (Tib. tsog 'khor, Skt. gañacakra), simultaneously leaving a bodily imprint of herself and her children on the rock walls. Most fantastic of all, as Achi's death drew near, she informed her family and disciples that her time with them had ended, and rode her celestial blue wind-horse into the sky, ascending bodily to the dākinī pure land of Khecara. One of Achi's sons was Namkha Wangchuk (Nam mkha' dbang phyug), his son was Nenjor Dorjé (Rnal 'byor rdo rje) and his son in turn was Jikten Sumgön, who would go on to establish the Drikung Kagyü lineage and the monastery of Drikung Til Okmin Jangchupling ('Bri gung mthil 'og min byang chub gling). By these same traditional accounts, Achi is said to have appeared to Jikten Sumgön and his retinue, personally vowing to act as the protectress of his monastic lineage, its followers, and the land surrounding the monastic complex, which coincidently was located in Drikung valley, the region of her birth. This was by her own volition, proving her status as a wisdom dākinī (ye shes kyi mkha' 'gro ma) rather than a worldly spirit deity bound by oath to serve as a guardian of the teachings; a point ardently defended by the authors of her life-stories. Subsequent leaders within the tradition report visitations from Achi as well, and she remains a strong presence among the residents of the Drikung valley and the teachers of the tradition throughout the world, both as a wrathful protector and as a peaceful benefactor.

1.1.1 Methods and Sources

In order to analyze and interpret the ritual and hagiographic writings of the Drikung Kagyü tradition, the methodological approaches of several specific scholars both inside and outside the field of Tibetan studies can be used to reconcile the diverse roles Achi maintains and exemplifies. In particular, methodologies related to narrative reconstruction, biography and hagiography, gender studies, and the existence of a common set of cultural resources to draw upon are instrumental in this endeavor. With regard to the problems of using traditional histories, Hayden White's theories on history-as-constructed-narrative are an invaluable tool. As White argues, when looking at histories both inside and outside traditional accounts, a responsible historian must keep in mind that each is a creative construction, as is

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9 Amé means "forefather" or "yogin", and like Achi, which means "grandmother," was probably not a personal name, but a later epithet conferred on the paternal ancestor by members of the later tradition.

10 The Kyura clan is one of the more prominent clans of Tibet, tracing itself to the imperial age.
the account that she will construct from those materials herself. Each author or group of authors chooses what points to emphasize or de-emphasize according to her own perspective, the perspectives of her sponsors, and simply from the materials available to her. This can be seen, appropriately enough, when contrasting the histories written by western historians, which emphasize the political conflicts between the competing schools of Buddhism in Tibet, and the histories written by members of the traditions themselves, which often downplay those same conflicts in favor of the religion's philosophical achievements. While it would not be fair to say either style is necessarily false, the differences showcase the inherent truth that every author brings her own subjective eye to the historical evidence presented to her. Matthew Kapstein stresses that the historian must be aware of these tensions while constructing a narrative of Tibetan history, particularly in regard to the early medieval period of the First Propagation, the period in which Achi is believed to have lived. Kapstein describes researching this period to be like “looking down a hall of broken mirrors” due to the difficulty in differentiating between what may have actually happened and the myths told later and reflected back on the past by post-imperial authors.\(^\text{11}\)

These ideas are even more clearly expressed in White's essays. In reconstructing a narrative of Achi and the Drikung region, White's warning that all historical narratives are in fact works of literary construction is an important consideration to take into account. Merely listing events in a sequence, with no explanatory force, is simply a chronicle; not a history in itself, but the evidence used to write a history. Structuring and emphasis of these events is not a scientific feat, but an interpretative act of translation.

As a symbolic structure, the historical narrative does not reproduce the events it describes; it tells us in what direction to think about the events and charges our thought about the events with different emotional valences.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{11}\)Kapstein's poetic metaphor for researching the early history of Tibet is one that has stuck with me in my own research, and I quote the core of it here: "Thus the study of early medieval Tibet may be compared without much exaggeration to the view from one end of a great hall of mirrors: there is little basis initially for determining which of the many reflections one perceives actually originate from the opposite end of the hall, which only reveal persons and objects situated in the intervening corridor, which are just optical illusions, and, finally, which are in fact the observer's own reflection coming back upon himself....the far end of the corridor is the history of the early medieval Tibetan empire; the rubble partially visible behind the curtain is the original documentation that survives – above all, the Dunhuang Tibetan manuscripts and the Central Tibetan pillar inscriptions; the curtain is woven of the great historical myths of the early empire that were elaborated in the centuries following its collapse, and that established the patterns that would dominate all later Tibetan historiography; its translucency represents the incorporation within these myths of authentically ancient traditions; while its reflectivity represents the distinctive perspective of the post-imperial period during which they were redacted" (Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, 24).

By this White means that emphasis can be placed on different events over others by each individual author depending on her interpretation of the information, causing the narrative elements to carry different emotional weights. When the first event is the primary force, all those following after can be seen as deterministic, and when the last is given that position, it could be seen as teleological, as if the preceding moments lead to the final outcome. White goes on to argue that metaphor and figurative language is used by the historian to make sense of the "facts" available; history becomes a re-description of those events through the creation of logical relationships between them. The construction of such a work is a deliberate, persuasive act on the part of author to convince the audience of its validity. What makes these aforementioned relationships logical is not a universal constant, but rather is dependent on the society or region from which the story is constructed. No particular event or series of events is inherently tragic, comedic, redemptive, and so forth; each is in fact value-neutral until the historian presents them in a culturally-relevant way, pulling from tropes and mythic plot structures derived from the religion, geography, or literary legacy she, and in turn her audience, identifies with. White refers to this as an act of 'emplotment,' in which the historian structures the events at hand in such a way as to familiarize them to her intended audience. The audience in turn accepts the sequence and provided emotional valances of the otherwise foreign series of past events as an intelligible and logical story. The more effective the historian is at emplotting her history in accordance with these shared plot structures, the more convincing her story and ultimate conclusions seem, at least to those that belong to her same culture. These ideas will be kept in mind throughout this study, but particularly in the reconstruction of the history of the Drikung valley region in chapter five.

These issues of narrative construction are more than applicable to hagiographic writings, in which individuals' histories can be written as a means of legitimization, both for the figure herself and the tradition she belongs to. The hermeneutic models used by Janet Gytatso, Hildegard Diemberger, and Kurtis Schaeffer in their respective investigations of specific Tibetan life-stories inform the study of these texts and their ensuing implications. The Tibetan term for the literary genre of biographical and hagiographical writings is namtar (rnam thar), which literally translates as "full-liberation [story]", or the account of a Buddhist individual's spiritual achievements and subsequent enlightenment. This is appropriate, Gyatso argues, as "virtually all of these kinds of Tibetan life stories...share the presumption – or at least the suggestion – that the protagonist reached full liberation, and that the life story being told is an example for others." In particular, Buddhist life-stories are stereotypically patterned on the life of the historical Buddha Siddhartha Gautama, which is not only a structure to be used by later authors when

13White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," 82-85, 91-94.
15Gyatso, Apparitions of the Self, 103.
constructing the history of an individual, but also a blue-print for an aspiring renunciant to follow. The Buddha's life-story, in written and oral accounts and in iconographic images, serves as a model for and a model of the saintly life. This in itself can be seen as an example of White's theory of emplotment on the part of these Buddhist historians. Early Buddhist tradition teaches that any potential buddha has to follow the same pattern as all the buddhas that came before, so the more closely a liberation story follows that structure, the more legitimate its subject appears. While it is easy to see the parallels of the Buddha's life in the stories of monastic and lay male figures, difficulties arise in reconciling the renunciation of wealth and family as required by the pattern with the realities of women's experience and social dependence within Buddhist cultures. In studying the life of the fifteenth century Tibetan nun Chökyi Drönma (Chos kyi sgron ma, 1422-1455), Diemberger points out the conflicts of having to be seen as a good homemaker and a good ascetic in order for a Tibetan woman to be perceived as culturally and spiritually successful. These issues of hagiography and narrative construction are addressed in reference to the full translation of Könchok Gyatso's hagiography in chapter four.

It would be easy to say Achi's story, which depicts her as the devoted wife and mother, embodies the typical male gaze of early Buddhist literature, subjugating a female figure under the guise of her elevation. Despite the classic rhetoric of the Buddhist renunciant abandoning the householder life and all it entails, the veneration of mothers and the exaltation of motherly deities can be found throughout the Buddhist world, revealing Achi's elevation to be far from extraordinary on its own. In the study of early Buddhist traditions, both Siddhartha Gautama's birth mother, Mahāmāyā, and his step-mother, Mahāpajāpatī Gautamī, are elevated as objects of veneration, even attaining varying degrees of enlightenment status. In later traditions of Buddhist tantra, as found in Tibet, the role of the feminine becomes increasingly sexualized. The ideal heroine often takes the role of the ritual consort with iconographic roots in the dākinīs and yoginīs of Indian Śaiva religion. While the evolution of these wrathful and semi-wrathful entities will be addressed in chapter three, these female consorts prompted some feminist scholars to argue that their presence and the praise bestowed on them hinted at an increased participation of women within this period that was later hidden by male authors of the monastic institution. This controversial point of view, voiced most avidly by Miranda Shaw in her work, *Passionate Enlightenment*, reconstructs the history of tantric Buddhism as incumbent on the equal, and sometimes greater, contribution of female practitioners.

Much work within the field has attempted to combat or mitigate these egalitarian descriptions of the tradition. Idealized conceptions of divine womanhood rarely seem applicable to the available evidence.

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on human women functioning in everyday life, and scholars have sought to present this reality, some in direct opposition to Shaw's claims. Within much of Buddhist literature, conception, birth and mothering are often portrayed as the epitome of samsāric suffering, and early Buddhist tradition is often characterized by its negative descriptions of the physical form, particularly with regard to the bodies of women. In much of the hagiographic literature of early Buddhist saints, the female characters rarely maintain the same subjectivity and agency as the male protagonists, and often it seems the heroes are able to use the faults they see in these flawed and often brutalized women to propel themselves toward arhatship. Liz Wilson argues that this objectification of women is a pan-Buddhist theme, and that by constructing these female figures as "mute objects of the male gaze, [the narratives] express an androcentric Buddhist ethos that gives priority to the experience and perspective of male subjects."  

Women protagonists, in turn, often continue this objectification by adopting this male perspective as well, identifying the female body as low and using meditation on the body's decay as a means to liberation. This is seen not only in Indian Buddhist stories, but in the hagiographies of Tibetan saints as well. Despite this apparent lack of subjectivity, Alan Sponberg postulates the existence of not only one voice on women in these nascent stages of the religion, but rather a proliferation of voices that can be found in the texts. While only one that he lists, found in the early tantric tradition, could be identified as unambiguously positive, Sponberg demonstrates that not all early Buddhist conceptions of women are devastatingly negative or conflicting. 

With regard to tantric tradition, rather than seeing the role of consort as an elevating factor for Buddhist women, scholars have pointed out a lack of material from a feminine perspective and the possible exploitive nature of the role, which some texts teach is ideally filled by low-caste and underprivileged girls. Sex is not absent from the life-stories of enlightened beings in this period either. Paul Williams argues that while male bodhisattvas seem to demonstrate their compassion and skillful means through self-sacrifice and deliberate bodily-mutilation, female bodhisattvas are often portrayed as

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18Janet Gyatso echoes this sentiment with regard to the application of the male gaze on dākinī consort figures: "Such a female will either be a mere instrument for him to use of a perfect mistress who teaches him the art; rarely is she a realistically portrayed practitioner in her own right, working her way along the difficult path to enlightenment" (Gyatso, Apparitions of the Self, 257; Elizabeth Wilson, Charming Cadavers: Horrific Figurations of the Feminine in Indian Buddhist Hagiographic Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 4).

19In addition to the number of examples Wilson provides in which nuns achieve arhatship after being instructed to view their bodies as objects of decay, Yeshé Tsogyel, Mandarava, and Orgyen Chökyi each make similar disparaging remarks about their female bodies and low birth according to their life-stories (Janet Gyatso, "Down with the Demoness: Reflections on a Feminine Ground in Tibet," in Feminine Ground: Essays on Women and Tibet (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1989), 145; Kurtis Schaeffer, Himalayan Hermite: The Life of a Tibetan Buddhist Nun (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 91-103).


21Gyatso, Apparitions of the Self, 249.
personifying these traits through sexual acts - violent or otherwise. As seen in a number of hagiographies, including Achi's, this demonstration of compassion can also be shown in the related idea that one could intentionally return to samsāra in order to assume the loathed role of motherhood for the sake of sentient beings. If it is true that only women are portrayed in this manner, it would indicate a re-application of the same androcentric gaze, in which the feminine is reduced to a tool for the pursuit of masculine spiritual progress. John Powers' latest work has been indispensable in this regard, shedding light on the masculine discourse in Indian Buddhist literature. In looking at both sides of the gender coin, Powers provides further translation and interpretation of the bodhisattvas' acts of skillful means, in which the body and sex are used as tools of compassion. How this pertains to Achi and other enlightened females is more fully explored in chapter six.

Understanding Achi's capacity to maintain multiple personas, some appearing almost contradictory from a Western perspective, can only be done through an understanding of the Tibetan Buddhist worldview. The concept of an indigenous "cultural repertoire" underlying the beliefs of a given society and informing its religious practices (a concept used by the sinologist Robert Ford Campany as a structuring motif), may provide some insight into the case of Achi and how she is viewed by her followers. Drawing on the anthropological work of Ann Swidler, Campany theorizes that religious traditions, like culture on a greater scale, functions not as container-like bounded entities but as repertoires of dynamic sets of resources to be used by people as they negotiate their lives. Different, sometimes contradictory, pieces of that repertoire can be accepted by individuals of various levels of a society because each answers particular questions and concerns. In this way, religion is not a single enveloping conceptual system, but rather an overlapping set of systems that can adapt and shift under varying circumstances. This includes collections of accepted narratives or story structures that can act as models for formal practitioners of the religion to follow and as standards for the lay participants to measure those exemplars against. These are the same tropes White claims must be called on to make any story intelligible to its audience. "The repertoire was thus a kind of public space, an array of commonly available images, patterns, and expectations" accessible to different people throughout a society to different degrees. Unlike other existing metaphors for culture and religion, which may imagine them as messes of unrelated and unconnected pieces or as monolithic, coherent wholes in which its members are left to reside in, the concept of the repertoire allows for human beings to take an active part in the ways they interpret the world around them. If collectively left unused, the influence of certain resources may wane, while others may become more prominent in their consistent and prevalent use. This explains how

religions may adapt and change while at the same time still carry remnants or pieces of the past that remain relevant to those that practice it. Everyone in a given society shares the same repertoire, but different people may call on different resources at different times. It is people in this metaphor, not the religion or the culture, that is the functioning agent.  

In creating and understanding deities like Achi, both the authorities that write about her and the practitioners that worship her actively call upon such a shared religious and cultural repertoire. In the context of this project, however, it is nearly impossible to determine each of the individual agents that have taken part in both her construction and in the construction of the repertoire as a whole over the course of history, and therefore this is not what this analysis intends to do. In investigating a specifically modern hagiography of Achi and her current manifestations, I use this particular methodology not so I can explain how she has evolved over time due the influence of particular agents (although that would an interesting project for the future once further work has been done), but because of its effective image and its allowance for the possibility of agency as other metaphors do not. As to what this looks like in the case of medieval and modern Tibetan religion, Tibet's cultural repertoire contains a vast reservoir of Buddhist tropes and models, as well as resources based on pre-Buddhist and non-Buddhist notions of religious practice throughout the country's history. This theory is supported in the work of scholars within the field, and Kapstein specifically cites Achi as an example of an advanced synthesis of non-Buddhist Tibetan beliefs and institutional Buddhist concepts. According to the him, 

Though the goddess Achi is a purely Buddhist divinity, with apparently no non-Buddhist antecedents, nevertheless she seems clearly to represents a cult of ancestors, of a type that was perhaps more prominent prior to the ascendancy of Buddhism in Tibet. 

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The acceptance of Achi's multivalent persona must negotiate varied and perhaps contradictory resources, but still belongs to the same societal standards that gave birth to her. The impact of this functioning cultural repertoire will serve as a backdrop throughout this study and each of its chapters.

Beginning with the actual translation of one of Achi's modern hagiographies, the following project will break down its important themes and analyze the many factors influencing the legendary figure and her various personas and functions. While chapter four will specifically address the structure and narrative tropes present in Könchok Gyatso's hagiography as well as Achi's related repertoire of ritual practice, chapter three will start the analysis with a look at the deity's iconography, her source-deity Vajrayogini's iconography, and an overall look at the broader Tibetan pantheon from which Achi has emerged. Chapter five will move away from Achi in particular, and instead look at the history of the Drikung valley region from which she is said to have been born and where her sect has traditionally reigned. As the area's chief protectress, however, her presence is far from removed, and local legends regarding her wrathful nature will be discussed as well. Finally, chapter six will investigate issues of gender and womanhood in the Buddhist tradition and in Tibetan culture, specifically analyzing Achi in her roles as mother, wife, consort, and teacher. In using her hagiography as an interpretative lens, the full picture of who Achi is and how she is perceived by her devotees can be brought into better focus and her embodiment of so many characterizations more fully explained.
CHAPTER TWO

ACHI CHÖKYI DRÖLMÀ IN TRANSLATION

Before delving into the translation of Achi's hagiography, it is important that both the text and its author be contextualized. In looking at any written work, three specific areas must be addressed: the tradition within which the work was produced and its ensuing point of view, the historical circumstances surrounding the work, and any other texts within the author's repertoire. In the case of Könchok Gyaltsen, the author of the hagiography translated below, his surname 'Drikung' betrays his close ties to the sub-sect of the Kagyü tradition, thereby signaling the possibility of a degree of sectarian agenda on his part. This is collaborated by the numerous other works he has produced on topics relevant to the Drikung Kagyü, such as a hagiography of Jikten Sumgon and several histories of its monasteries. According to the colophon of The Abridged Life-story of Drikung Achi Chökyi Droülma, this small, three-chapter booklet was commissioned by one of the two current leaders of the Drikung Kagyü tradition, the Eighth Chungtsang Tendzin Chökyi Nangwa Rinpoche (Chung tshang bstan 'dzin chos kyi snang ba rin po che, 1942-present) himself, and written at Lhasa's Norbulingka palace in the year 2000. Besides a chapter focusing on Achi's abbreviated life-story, the booklet also contains a short prayer dedicated to the deity and an outline of ritual texts related to her, with versions in both Tibetan and Chinese languages. While subsequent chapters should shed light on the religious perspective of the tradition, the use of these two languages within the booklet presupposes the work's historical circumstances. As a modern hagiography, the author must contend with the changing climate of the Tibetan Autonomous Region, in

26 Schaeffer, Himalayan Hermitess, 7.
27 'Bri gung dkon mchog rgya mtsho. Phag gru'i gdan sa thel dgon gyi lo rgyus gnad bsdus: Bod ljongs gna' shul gnas mchog Series (Series on ancient Tibetan sacred sites: Abridged history of Densa Til monastery) (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2004); 'Bri gung dkon mchog rgya mtsho, 'Bri gung thel mgon gyi lo rgyus rags bsdus: Bod ljongs gna' shul gnas mchog Series (Series on ancient Tibetan sacred sites: Brief history of Drikung monasteries) (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2003); 'Bri gung dkon mchog rgya mtsho, 'Bri gung Chos 'byung (Drikung History) (Beijing: Nationalities Language Press, 2004); 'Bri gung Dkon mchog rgya mtsho, 'Bri gung 'Jig rten mgon po'i rnam thar (Biography of Drikung Jikten Gönpo) (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2003).
28 The Eighth Chungtsang Tendzin Chökyi Nangwa Rinpoche is the the Thirty-Sixth Drikung Throne-Holder, and he reigns alongside the Seventh Chetsang Trinlé Lhindrup Rinpoche (Che tshang 'phrin las lhun grub rin po che, 1946-present) in exile. See chapter five for more information on these two hierarchs and the past and present rulership of the Drikung Kagyü tradition.
which the Chinese language has become a communication standard. It also says something about the purpose of the text; rather than directed toward specialists within the tradition or even to purely Tibetan speakers, its colloquial language and bilingual presentation demonstrate its intended accessibility to a wider popular audience, including lay practitioners and non-Buddhists of Tibetan and Chinese descent. It is clear, therefore, that the text seeks to highlight those elements of Achi's story that are the most positive and exemplary of Drikung Kagyü principles, while at the same time explaining her in such a way as to potentially popularize her practice further. Königchok Gyatso achieves this by not only relaying the events of Achi's life, but by discussing common misconceptions and negative associations applied to the deity, correcting each with supplementary evidence. In typical Tibetan fashion, this involves the copious use of authoritative quotes from a variety of sources. By convincing the potential audience of the hagiography of Achi's divine status, the integrity of the Drikung Kagyü tradition is also maintained due to her status as the maternal ancestor of its founder, Jikten Sumgön, and her position as the current protectress of the sect and its holdings.

The Abridged Life-story contains more than just a hagiography, although Achi's life and death take up a substantial portion of the chapter. After beginning with a prayer to the deity, the author provides a detailed description of the category of dharma protectors in Tibet, including an extensive list of examples, showing how Achi stands apart from them. The main discussion explains the protectress's origins as an emanation of Vajrayoginī who chose to take on the samsāric roles of wife and mother, her subsequent life as a human woman, and her inevitable departure. Königchok Gyatso ends the discussion by addressing Achi's nature as explained by numerous leaders and authors from within the tradition. In order to provide a context for further discussion of the deity's character and how she is represented, this narrative is provided in full translation below.

2.1 The Vajra Dance of Magical Display:
A Brief Summary of the Life of Achi Chökkyi Drölma,
Extraordinary Guardian of the Drikung Kagyu Teachings

“To the Enlightened One [of] omniscient perfected wisdom; to the supreme sole guiding savior; to the teaching [which] guides [one to] the life-story [of the] liberation path, I pay homage!
To the Great Mother Dharmakāya, possessing all supreme attributes;
to the Lady Sovereignty of many kinds of maṇḍala cycles; to the Grandmother [who] manifests in the form of a genuine protectress for the sake of the Great Secret Doctrine [of] Liberation, I pay homage!

14
Everywhere and in every way, the life-story [of] the magically emanated display who defends the teachings and the holders of the teachings is examined over and over, but [it is found] faultless. To me and those like me, [it is] once more said to be for benefit's sake.

I. Introduction

[The above] statement is expressed as an offering and is the preliminary message (gtam) of the real true teaching, and so what is actually discussed here is that immaculate story of Penden Lhamo Achi Chökyi Drölma (Dpal ldan lha mo a phyi chos kyi sgrol ma). [4] Furthermore, like the Great Master Śāntideva (Zhi ba lha) said, "Previously, [it was] inexpressible for this [life-story] even to appear. It was not connected to me or [other] scholars." Nevertheless, the solitary deeds have newly spread more than the words of the past teachers. At this time, the general precious doctrines and the specific Buddhist teachings [of] the Tibetan lineages similarly grow, bit by bit, spreading in every direction of the world. Also, supramundane and mundane dharma protectors of Vajra[yāna], whichever they might be, are allies to likewise uphold, preserve and spread those precious teachings of the Buddha and [serve as] antidotes to the harm made [against those teachings]. [As to] those [protectors], within the precious Buddhist teachings of the Tibetan lineage, there are various great ordinary teaching guardians and extraordinary dharma protectors. Because there are myriad lineage protectors, clan protectors, regional deities, and local spirits respectively, [all] were not tamed through peaceful means by the knowledge-bearing buddhas of the past, and having spread, the un-liberated ones were brought down under painful subjugation with powerful and wrathful activities. Having taken a vow as a servant to one's tutelary deity (bka’ nyan) and after drinking the oath-water, [they] entered the maṇḍala [as members of its retinue]. Appointed as [mundane] dharma protectors, they were only entrusted as allies of the teachings and teaching-holders. [5] Varieties of sovereign dharma protectors which were brought from India to Tibet were also disciplined by vajrādhāras [who] relied on pride and [they] entered into maṇḍalas [as well]. [This is written] in order to elucidate the stories of each respective method of giving commands to the teaching guardians of those maṇḍalas.

Tibetan dharma protectors are themselves a worldly, arrogant breed and are simply ferocious [in nature]. All three inferior and eight great classes of deities, and the nine deities who created the universe (srid pa chags pa’i lha) such as the thirteen hunting gods (mgur lha) of the sovereign, the twelve tenma

29'<br gung a phyi chos kyi sgrol ma'i rnam thar mdor bsdus, 3.9: bdag dang bdag 'drar sman slad bskyar du brjod.
30'It is unclear whether this is referring to the eighth century Indian scholar by that name, or to another unidentified teacher.
31'<br gung a phyi chos kyi sgrol ma'i rnam thar mdor bsdus, 3.11-12: Each of the following indigenous Tibetan terms have been translated as follows: lineage protector (brgyud srung), clan protector (rigs srung), regional deity (yul lha), local spirit (gzhi bdag).
(bstan ma) [goddesses who] guard Tibet, the twenty-one gényen (dge bsnyen) [spirits],32 yangma (yang ma) protectresses, local lords of the earth (yul lha gzhi bdag), lords of the abodes (gnas bdag), lords of wealth (dkor bdag), and so forth, were bound by Padmasambhava, for example, with magical skill. Having been urged to teach, they were appointed as protectors. Those defiant to the teachings were liberated wrathfully to the Birthless Realm (skye med kyi bdyings).33 Later, arriving vidhyadhāra-siddhas also successively annihilated [those who had] gone back on their oaths. [This is written] in order to elucidate the invocations and expiations of each respective method of appointing protectresses in written materials, like the method Dramjé Chokṣé (Bram je mchog sred)34 [used to] bind under oath Penden Lhamo (Dpal ldan lha mo), Queen of the Three Worlds, as taught in the Garland of Flames Tantra of [Penden] Lhamo (Lha mo'i rgyud me lce phreng ba).35 There exists the five totem deities ('go ba'i lha lnga), the eight familial wealth deities (nor lha mched brgyad), and the seventy-five glorious protectors (dpal mgon bdun cu rtsa lnga); the guardians of the ten directions (phyogs skong bucu), the eight mahādevas (lha chen brgyad), the eight great lu lords (klu chen brgyad), the eight great planetary [deities] (bza' chen brgyad), the four great kings (rgyal chen bzhi),[6] and the twenty-eight constellation [deities] (rgyu skar nyer brgyad); the types of deities such as the ten forms of Bhairava ('Jigs byed) and the Mahādeva Brahma (Lha chen tshangs pa); types of lu, such as [the snake god] Norgyé (Nor rgyas); types of yakṣa (gnod sbyin) such as [the guardian of the north] Namtöṣé (Rnam thos sras); types of gyelpo (rgyal po) such as [the dharma protector of Samyé] Pehar (Pe har); types of tsen (btsen), such as Seven Attendant Riders (Ya ba skya bdun);36 types of planetary [deities] such as Rāhu[la] (Ra hu); types of demons (bduḥ) such as Garap (Dga' rab);37 types of gandharvas (dri za) such as [the mountain deity] Tanglha (Thang lha); types of teurang (the'u rang) such as Damjen (Dam can); types of menmo (sman mo) such Ekajaṭi (E ka tsa ti); types of döṅ (gdon) such as the döṅ [which strike] children (byis pa'i gdon);[and] types of si (sri); Furthermore, asura (lha ma yin), mahoraga (lto 'phye chen po), and types of dré ('dre) such as male dré, female dré, [and] shidré (gshid 'dre); Vampire-ghouls (grul bum), rotting corpse demons (lus srul po), ghosts ('byung po), zombies (ro langs), poverty ghosts (bse rag), and shape-
shifting demons (‘gong po) and so forth, and when the year, month, and day arises from the [tradition of] Kālacakra (dus ’khor) and from astrology, types of god-demons (lha ’dre) such as Parmé (Spar sme) – whatever [they] may be called – will fulfill requests to study the words of the Buddha, [but] one should realize [they] are merely bound under oath. But it is said classes of supramundane and mundane [deities], having listened to the words of past Buddhas, obtain the sealed [instructions of] the Great Secret maṇḍalas (Gsang chen gyi dkyil ’khor) [and] practice the dharma. Having done so, realization increases and [some] purely transcend to abide in the bhūmis [of the bodhisattvas],38 but [others] do not transcend, do not attain the bhūmis and misunderstand the maṇḍalas.

[7] However, the three protectors – the Great Mother Penden Lhamo (Dpal ldan lha mo yum chen mo), Gyelpo [Pehar] of Five Bodies [of] the Natures of the Five Families (Rgyal po sku lnga rigs lnga’i ngo bo),39 and the Dharma Protector Hayagrīva (Chos skyong rta mgrin)40 – are self-manifested without both a mother and father. If asked if the statements [regarding] the Five Long-Life Sisters (Tshe ring mched lnga) contradict [those regarding] the emanations of the dākinīs of the Five [Buddha] Families for instance, there is no conflict.41 First, phenomenal appearances are explained [as] interdependent of conventional truth from the perspective of those who possess the infallible dharma. Subsequent to this, the reality of all dharma is explained [as] the perfected true nature from the perspective of ultimate truth. For example, as it is taught from the [tantra] Intending to Cause (Rgyu la dgongs), "All sentient beings are Buddhahood itself."42 In actuality, all [beings in] existence and [in] peace [outside existence], samsāra and nirvāṇa, not only just gods and demons, due to [this] nature of sameness, must become accustomed to the principles of the two truths. In that [which was just presented], the main issue is the discourse of the method in question, [and now] the introduction has been explained.

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38 The term bhūmis refers to the scheme of ten levels (Tib. sa; Skt: bhūmi) that a bodhisattva must transcend in order to become a buddha, which start with the generation of an awakened mind (bodhicitta).


40 Hayagrīva, whose name means "horse-necked," is a tutelary deity considered to be the wrathful form of Avalokiteśvara. His origins may come from a Hindu mythology, where this name is used for a minor form of Viṣṇu. For further information, see: R.H. van Gulik, Hayagrīva: The Mantrayānic Aspect of the Horse-Cult in China and Japan (Leiden: Brill, 1935); Tucci, Tibetan Painted Scrolls, 587, 616.

41 This line seems to be commenting on possible conjecture in other texts as to whether or not the Five Long-Life Sisters are in fact emanations of dākinīs from each of the Five Buddha Families, or if the two sets – the mundane deities and the wisdom dākinīs - are somehow in competition with one another. Könhchok Gyatso clarifies any contradiction between the two by citing Buddhist philosophies which claim that all beings are in essence enlightened, therefore implying that any contradictions are null from the standpoint of ultimate truth.

42 This particular reference is unknown.
II. Main Discussion

The main discussion is the extraordinary vow-holding dharma protector of the victorious Drikung Kagyü tradition [who guards] the essential truth in the general and specific teachings of the Completely Flawless Buddha, [who is] all-pervading and absolutely exalted like the sun and moon in the assembly of constellations of the oceanic sky. [She is] the compassionate one [of] powerful magic and miracle-working and is not careless in keeping and protecting the general and specific teachings. [8] Any yogin can be granted [her] unobstructed practice. [She is] the ḍākīma who even sends enemies into ruin with only [her] name. The basis of this emanation itself is the Wisdom ḍākinī Lady Nanam (Sna nam 'bza), Sovereignty Chökyi Drölma, or dearly known as Drikung Grandmother, who transcended the realm of existence. All buddhas of the three times without exception emanate from the Sovereignty Great Mother of Creation,\footnote{This epithet usually refers to the Mahāyāna Mother of All Buddhas, Prajñāpāramitā, but it could also refer to Vajrayoginī, who is also given this title in texts devoted to her.} from the vastness of unchanging suchness which transcends thoughts, words and sounds. The Sovereignty of the vast great secret maṇḍala is the embodiment of knowledge called Vajrayoginī (Rdo rje rnal 'byor ma), the wholly complete magical emanation with a body of great bliss. Indeed, [she is] deliberately manifested as an emanated image\footnote{\textit{Bri gung a phyi chos kyi sgrol ma'i rnam thar mdor bsdus, 8.12: sprul pa'i snang brnyan geig tu} } who guards the teachings of the Buddha. North of India, in the country of Tibet, the Victor, having accomplished the excellent dharma, wandered the forbidding abodes and cemeteries to all extremes, and with unobstructed perception, prophesized:

"Because my teachings [will become] corrupted, in a town of the northern direction an incarnation of the Mother of Buddhas, having the name of Drölma will appear. [9] [She] will reveal the birthless fundamental meaning [of the teachings] and will roam to the limits [of] villages, towns, mountain valleys and cemeteries and her doctrines will spread,"[and this occurred] in accordance with the words.\footnote{While it is unclear who the "Victor" refers to, it is often a title given the Buddha. This may refer to a prophecy of Achi's birth that is said to exist somewhere in the Cakrasamvara cycle of tantras according to the Drikung Kagyü tradition, and therefore the speaker could be Sāṇvara, Vajrayoginī, or even the historical Buddha Siddhartha Gautama; see chapter three for more information on this cycle of tantras and this legendary prophecy.}

In general, in the Secret Mantras, the Five Buddha Families [and their] consorts are said to appear genuinely as the five male ḍākas,\footnote{\textit{Sprul pa'i snang brnyan geig tu}} the five female ḍākinīs, and so forth. Also, the five arise in each of the five families in each of those respectively as the essence of the five. In particular, this dharma protector
herself is classified as a dākinī of the Vajra family. The Venerable Guru Jikten Sumgön clearly states [she] possess a clan and an originating emanation being:

"The secret reincarnation of Vajra dākinī, Achi Chōkyi Drön (A phyi chos kyi sgron), came from Orgyen."46

From practicing [the sorcery] of wrathful activities of pacifying, increasing, attracting, and destroying,47 [she is] the Desire Realm Sovereignty Rematī who Dispels the Smoke with one lineage. The Lord Marpa Lotsā[wa] (Mar pa lo tsā, 1012-1097) said,

"Penden Lhamo is the Sovereignty of Desire; She herself is an emanation [of] the Sovereignty of the Doctrine."

Similarly, the Venerable Kyopa [Jikten Sumgön] said,

"Chōkyi Drön, all-good wielder [of] the enlightened mind; She [who has] become [the object of] worship of all worldly gods and men; Victorious fierce woman who wanders among all four continents; I pay homage to the Glorious Chōkyi Drölma."

Accordingly, she herself is not the type of guardian who is bound under oath, [10] because she is a Wisdom dākinī who deliberately came in order to protect the teachings. The unanimous glorification from the words of the authentic scholar-adepts of Tibet explains below how [this is so].

During [the time of] the general and specific teachings, swift activities of protection did not prevent activities, and the very powerful nature of the incarnation [Achi] herself, by a miracle of escape from the boundaries (ra ba) of ordinary beings, worked for the benefit of beings in the ten directions with various forms. Because of this, the place guardians (shing skyong) are called dāki. Before this body [of Chōkyi Drölma was born], in the place of the Zhotö Terdrom (Gzho stod gter sgrom), [Vajrayogini] taught to the gathered seven action mamos (ma mos) from a few tantras of the Glorious Cakrasaṃvara (Dpal bde mchos). [She] taught each of them, and the Protectress who confers the swift excellent path of

46Orgyen is a reference to Oḍḍiyāna or Udāiyāna, the so-called Land of the Dākinīs. See chapter three for more information on this land and its inhabitants.

47This is a reference to the las bzhi or four activities, which consist of pacification (zhī), augmentation (rgyas), subjugation (dbang) and ferocity (drag); see chapter four for more information on tantric ritual and its associated achievements.
Vajrayāna (gsang chen mchog gi myur lam) gave [teachings] to Master Padmasambhava [as well]. Later, it is well-said from the mouth of Achi herself,

"[At] Terdrom, I served as the consort (karmamūdra) of Padma[sambhava], performing activities [in this capacity]. Afterward, I went to Dentö Tsungnгу ('Dan stod tsung ngu)."\(^{48}\)

[She is] the Great Mother to the Expanse of the Doctrine, the Queen Yogini in the abode of Vajrayāna, the Ḍākīma of the Vajra family in Orgyen and so forth. In the abode of Zhotō, the tamable emanated images of the action mamos drift about inconceivably like the moon['s reflection] on water. Because of this, ordinary people, due to intention, are merely not suitable as pervading or fixated abodes. As for definitions, the Venerable Kyopa [Jikten Sumgön] calls [her], 'Mother of the Buddhas of the Three Times,' [11] 'Mother of the Bodhisattvas,' [She who is] Classified [as] Solitary Realizer by the Śrāvaka, 'Supreme Mamo [who] Originates All Joy and Happiness,' and The Lower Great Grandmother.\(^{49}\)

Even the story of this lifetime itself is unfathomable. As the teachings from the sūtras and tantras of the Billion-fold Universe [of] Śāriputra (Stong gsum 'jig rten shā ri'i bu) say,

"[Only] a buddha himself understands the story of a buddha."\(^{50}\)

But the Rulers [of] Men, when explaining to [ordinary people] like me, repeat [it] like the teachings of past stories of ordinary beings in saṃsāra. Furthermore, the Wisdom Ḍākinī performed her own activities and, with regard to teaching, thought, "Tibet is the Land of Snow [and] Ü-Tsang is the center of the dharma-realm. Töd [in] Ü is the essential center of the land (sa'i thig le),\(^{51}\) a region wealthy with the glory of the Ten Virtues,\(^{52}\) and the seat of revelry [for] manifold wisdom and worldly dākimas is in a furrow near the White Rock of Tidro (Ti sgro) [in] Zhotō. In [this] time of the earlier spread of the teachings, [the

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\(^{48}\)Bri gung a phyi chos kyi sgro ma'i rnam thar mdor bs dus, 10.4-13: bstan pa spyi dang bye brag la dus las mi g.yol bar srung skyob kyi 'phrin las myur zhing byin rlabs che ba'i bdag nyid 'di nyid kyi sprul pa so skye'i blo'i ra la las 'gongs pa'i sgyu 'phrul gyis phyags bcsur sna tshogs gzugs kyi 'gro don mdzad pas zhing skyong gi dā kir grags la / sku 'di'i sna nas dpal bde mchog gi rgyud chung ba las gzho stod gter sgrom gyis gnas su las kyi ma mo bdun 'du bar gsungs pa bzhin de dag gi ya gyal du bstan te slob dpon pad ma 'byung gnas la gsang chen mchog gi myur lam scol ba'i srung ma mdzad pas / phyis a phyi nyid kyi zhal sna nas / gter sgrom pad ma'i karma mu dra byas / las kyi byed pas 'dan stod tsang ngur phyin / zhes legs par gsungs pa las / chos kyi dbyings pa yum chen mo.

\(^{49}\)Bri gung a phyi chos kyi sgro ma'i rnam thar mdor bs dus, 11.3: a phyi chen mo sham sham mo.

\(^{50}\)This appears to be an abbreviation of a title for a set of texts, reference unknown.

\(^{51}\)This probably refers to the Drikung valley, which lies in upper Ü, the central Tibet.

\(^{52}\)The Ten Virtues, or Ten Right Actions, are to refrain from (1) killing; (2) stealing; (3) illicit sex; (4) lying; (5) speaking divisively; (6) speaking harshly; (7) chattering frivolously; (8) covetous thoughts; (9) harmful thoughts; and (10) believing false teachings.
Nanam clan] is superior in fortune because its lineage [contains members] such as the mother of the Dharma King Trisong Detsen (Khri srong lde btsan, 742-796), [who was] a Nanam lady, Zhang Nanam [Dorje Wangchuk] (Zhang sna nam rdo rje dbang phyug), 976-1060), and Bang Nanam Dorjé Dujom (‘Bangs Sna nam rdo rje bshad ’jom, c. eighth century). In both [the temporal and spiritual] traditions, [this] clan is without equals, and because of that the virtues of the union and liberation practices of the Nyingma tantras are perfected. [It possesses] the natures of scholarship and accomplishment. [12] Nanampa Jowo Pel (Sna nam pa jo wo pal), a yogin [trained in] the [vajra]kīlaya tradition of Glorious Lady Kharchen [Vajrayoginī] (Mkhar chen bza) who possesses the powerful magic which employs the actions [of] Penden Llamo Rema, married [Achi Chökyi Drölma's] mother, Driza Dardzom ('Bri za dar 'dzoms) [who] possessed the characteristic signs of the dākinīs.

At that time, as it is explained in The History of Lhawang Achi (A pyi'i lha dbang lo rgyus) by Lhojé Drung (Lho rje drung, 1801-1859), [Nanampa Jowo Pel], not possessing a son, went to Swayambhunath (Phags pa zhin kun) in Nepal to request a son.

[A man named] Bhāro Bhadra, master of the caretakers [of that place], said, "Whatever you wish for the family, you will accomplish the object."

Desiring a son, [he] said, "I [have] something small to offer but something great to request," [and] having requested an audience, offered much gold.

Bhāro went to circumambulate. The Great Lord [Nanamp Jowo Pel], having come on the day of the full moon of this month, was asked to give an audience, and having done so [he] circumambulated that [place] and remained. Because he slept in the circumambulation abode, within the dreams of the mother [this occurred]: From the eastern direction, the sun's rays spread in the ten directions and having dissolved into the bosom of the mother, the rays radiant illuminating all of Tibet and Kham to exceed the three thousand-fold world systems. [It was] a pervading and clear dream. The father dreamed a succession of white light rays proceeded (grub pa) from the eastern realm of Abhirati (shar phyogs

53For information on the mother of Trisong Detsen and Zhang Nanam, see previous footnote seven. Nanam Dorjé Dujom is one of Padmasambhava's legendary twenty-five disciples. For further information, see: Gyrme Dorje, trans., The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1991).

54'Bri gung a phyi chos kyi sgrol ma'i rnam thar mdo'r bsdus, 11.15: zla dang bral ba'i gdung. The Tibetan word zla is typically taken to mean moon or month, but can also mean spouse or companion. I take the phrase 'zla dang bral ba'i gdung' to mean "devoid of companions," or more loosely, "without equal."

55Birth and death dates of Achi's parents are unknown.

56Lhojé Drung is the thirty-second abbot of Drikung Til monastery, whose primary name is Könchok Tenzin Chökyi Lodrō (Dkon mchog bstang 'dzin chos kyi blos gros) (Sørensen and Hazod, Rulers of the Celestial Plain, 735). I was unable to find a citation for this particular text, but it may be within one of his larger works.

57Swayambhunath (Phags pa zhin kun) is a religious complex located on a hill in Kathmandu Valley, west of Kathmandu City.

58According to Davidson, Bhāro is an aristocratic political title given to members of the Nepali merchant castes from the eleventh century onward (Davidson, Tibetan Renaissance, 135).
mgon par dga’ ba’i zhiṅg kham) [and] entered the womb of the mother. Thereupon, Vajrārāhi (Rdo rje phag mo) was roused from the abode of Akaniṣṭha (’Og min) by the Great Mother. Vajrārāhi collected together as one type of emanation [which was made up] of the knowledge of omniscient mercy of the buddhas of the three times together with their sons. [13] That [emanation], marked with a Hṛī in [the form of] a five-pronged golden vajra, was sent into the womb of the mother and, by means of [all] the victors of the directions and times, the prayer request thoroughly supported the power of the activity.

In the morning, the dreams of both the mother and father respectively were explained, and they greatly rejoiced in their minds. The father said, "What kind of extraordinary son did we give birth to in sleep? [Because of what this] means, you must act wisely in your behavior!" On the day of the full moon, he offered great blessings, sent prayers, [and] having offered a tantric feast, left. Then, they left [for home].

In the majority of later writings of the life-story to arise, [the father is] called Nyanampa Jowo Pel (Snya nam pa Jo bo Dpal). [It is] said he went from Nyanam (Snya nam) to Drikhung (’Bri khung). Concurrently, a nun also went from Nepal to Drikhung. Previously, it was believed to be Nyanam and later Nanam. In the previous writings, one called Lady Nanam (Sna nam bza’) appears. In the Dharma History of Lhorong (Lho rongchos ’byung), Zhang Lady Nanam (Zhang sna nam bza’) in Ü-Tsang (Dbu-gtseang) is indisputably said to be the Wisdom Dāki called Chökyi Drölma, but in the cycles of activity sādhanas which were written by Venerable Künga Rinchen (Rje kun dga’ rin chen, 1475-1527) and Gyelwang Ratna (Rgyal dbang ratna,1509-1557), and in the Dharma History of Pawo Tsuk[lak] Trengwa (Dpa’ bo gtsug phreng, 1504-1564/66), it is said to be Sovereigness Lady Nanam (Sna nam bza’ dbang phyug).

[14] From the Annals of the Fifth Dalai Lama (Gong sa lnga pa’i deb ther), it says, "A Lady called Lady Nanam belonging to the dākinī lineage took up a tantrika (snags ’chang) of the Kyura (Skyu

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59 The mark of the Hṛī in the form of a crossed vajra is one of the marks of a dākinī emanation; see chapter four.
60 The History of Lhorong which Clarifies the Buddha’s Teachings (Lho rongchos ’byung thub bstan gsal byed) was written in the mid-fifteenth century. It is an in-depth history of the Kagyü school, containing numerous biographies of its various hierarchs (Rta tshag tse dbang rgyal, Lho rongchos ’byung (Lhasa: Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, 1994)). For further information, see: Dan Martin, Tibetan Histories: A Bibliography of Tibetan-Language Historical Works (London: Serindia Publications, 1997), 69-70.
61 Künga Rinchen is the seventeenth abbot of Drikung Til and a revered teacher and recognized reincarnation of Jikten Sumgön (Sørensen and Hazod, Rulers of the Celestial Plain, 726-728)
62 Gyelwang Ratna is also known as Rinchen Punstok Chökyi Gyelpo (Rin-chen phun-tshogs chos-kyi rgyal-po), the eighteenth abbot of Drikung Til (Sørensen and Hazod, Rulers of the Celestial Plain, 728-730).
63 Pawo Tsuklak Trengwa was a disciple of the eighth Karmapa Mikyö Dorje and the author of several histories. His most famous chos ’byung is a two-volume work on the history of Buddhism in India and Tibet called The Feast of Scholars Dharma History (Gtsug lag ’phreng ba, Chos ’byung mkhlas pa’i dga’ ston (Delhi: Delhi karmapae chodey gyalwae sungrab partun khang, 1980)). For further information, see: Martin, Tibetan Histories, 88-89.
64 This refers to the chronicles of the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lozang Gyatso (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, 1617-1682), entitled The Melody of the Queen of the Spring: The Chronicles of Tibet (Bod kyi deb ther dpivid kyi rgyal mo’i glu dbyangs (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1980). For further information, see: Kapstein, The Tibetans, 78, 82; Luciano Petech, "The Dalai-Lamas and Regents of Tibet: A Chronological Study," T’oung Pao 47:
ra) [clan]. [She] displayed various kinds of mundane emanations. These days, this [person] is exclaimed as Drikung Achi.65

I myself think she is Lady Nanam (Sna nam bza’). In some amended writings, it is Lady Nanam (Sna nam bza’), [and] in some she is called Lady Nenam (Sne nam bza’), [but] I think this is a confused syllable. As to [her] mother, some are said to call her Lady Drin Dardzom (Brin bza’ dar dzoms), some call [her] Lady Dri Darzom (’Bri bza’ dar ’dzoms), or Driza Lammo (’Bri za lam mo). As to the former [writings], the region she is said to be from is Nanam Drin (Sna nam brin), and as to the latter, she is said to be from Drikung itself. I myself think the latter [writings] to be correct.66

Along with omens like that, from the nine months and ten days [in the womb] to the virtuous date [of birth], the land of Zhotö, possessing manifold miraculous omens and auspicious signs, developed into a maṇḍala of the completely virtuous marks [of the Buddha] (dge bcu tshang bar mthshan dpe’i dkyil ‘khor). Regarding [that] former time, from the [Annals of the Fifth Dalai Lama it is said [to have occurred] during the First Propagation of the Teachings. In the [Dharma History of Pawo Tsukla Trengwa] and some of the monastic texts of Drikung, it appears to assert [that it occurred] in the time of King Lang Darma Udumtsen (Glang dar ma u dum btsan, r. 838-841), 67 but [I] think that to be illogical.

The son of Achi was Namkha Wangchuk (Nam mkha’ dbang phyug), his son was Nenjor Dorjé (Rnal ’byor rdo rje), [15] and his son was the Dharma Lord [of] Drikung [Jikten Sumgön] (Chos rje ’ bri gung


65Zahiruddin Ahmad translates this complete passage as follows: “At the time of the earlier propagation of the (Buddhist) teaching, a (tantric) knowledge- and mantra-bearer of sKyu-Ra took a wife called sNa-Nam bZa’, who belonged to the lineage of the sky-wanderers and showed various superhuman signs. Nowadays she is known as ’Bri-Guṅ A-PPhyi. The two had a son (called) Nam-mKhA’ dBar-PhHyug, from whom was descended A-Mes dBaṅ-PhHyug, whose fourth son, rDo-rJe, took a wife called rJe-bTsun-MA and had a son called ’Bri-Guṅ Rin-Po-CHé, who heard deep (nirvāṇic) and vast (sāṃśāric) doctrines at the feet of the worthy Lord-of-the-World (the ’Phag-Mo-Gru-Pa), (taking in everything) like a pitcher filling with water. He took the monastic name of Rin-Cen dPal" (Zahiruddin Ahmad, trans., A History of Tibet by Nag-dBaṅ Blo-bZaṅ rGya-mTSHo, Fifth Dalai Lama of Tibet (Bloomington: Indiana University Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1995), 110-111).

66This entire paragraph is meant to debate some disputed facts regarding Achi, such as her name, region of birth, and mother’s name. While he comes to no definite conclusion as to the spelling of Achi’s mother’s name, ultimately Könchok Gyatso concludes that any name other than Lady Nanam must simply be a misprint, and that despite some texts which say otherwise, Achi was originally born in the Drikung region and later moved to Kham.

67Lang Darma Udumtsen is the name of the controversial “last” ruler of the Yarlung Dynasty, known within the tradition for his anti-Buddhist pogroms. While the origins and motives of the figure are debated, his assassination is said to mark the end of the 7th imperial age and the beginning of the so-called Dark Age. For further information, see: Davidson, Tibetan Renaissance, 65-67; Kapstein, The Tibetans, 79-83; Samten G. Karmay, "King Glang Darma and his Rule," in The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History, Myths, Rituals and Beliefs in Tibet Vol. 2 (Kathmandu: Mandala Book Print, 1998), 15-30; Snellgrove and Richardson, A Cultural History of Tibet, 94; Stein, Tibetan Civilization, 54, 69-70; Tucci, Tibetan Painted Scrolls, 3-4; Zuihō Yamaguchi, “The Fiction of King Darna’s Persecution of Buddhism,” in Du Dunhuang au Japon: Études chinoises et bouddhiques offertes à Michel Soymié, edited by Jean-Pierre Drège (Geneva: Droz, 1996): 231–258.
Because of this, the [illogical] time is a former incorrect fault. Regarding my own system, [there were] fifteen hundred posthumous teachings of the Buddhas [in] Tibet in the first cycle of the Fire-Rabbit year, western year 1027, which undoubtedly came at a different time [than] this. Because the transmission is acceptable proof by means of practice and logic, so far, so good. From the biographies of the Dritak (Bri Stag) Lama lineage which were written by Khetsün Zangpo (Mkhas btsun bzang po), it says, "It [occurred] just inside the tenth century." [This was written] in order to be able to discern the lineage which was just been explained as well.

Furthermore, to some [people] a vision of a fair complexioned maiden emanating a glowing shine and possessing a third eye arose. As soon as she was born, she appeared to speak, saying, "Regarding my own birth, [its] praiseworthy renown will come to pervade all directions." The mother and father were frightened and thinking having a third eye and conversing as soon as she was born to be evil, they threw her into the water, but because she came to the surface, it was said she was dearly protected. The name "Famous Birth" (Skyes grags) was attached to that birthplace. Later, the name is said to have become confused, [and was] called "Tétrak Gomtel Tra (Lte khrag gom tel phra)." Lhopas say, "Tendrel Dratang (rten 'brel gra thang)." Even now, it is known as "Tétraktang (Lte khrag thang)" and in the place of the birth, one is met with a beautiful shrine to the protectress of the teachings. While the father [had] hoped for a son, she was a daughter like [in] those dreams of the mother. [He felt] one son to be more joyful than a daughter, [and] the birth [that was] sent was disastrous in comparison. From her youth, she made an oath to the heart of the Venerable Savioress [Tārā] (Rje btsun sgrol ma'i snying po). She even wore the name Chökyi Drölma, [which means Savioress of the Dharma]. From age three [or] four, [she] was encouraged to teach [about] the Great Bodhicitta and the Heart of the Savioress to all [her] neighbors and friends, and all were struck with awe. Then, when she came to be five-years-old, she said frequently to her parents, "This is not the region in which I will dwell. Because [I have] prayer-connections to the region of Kham, there is a person like me of a good family in a region and a town, [and] I will go there."

As far as this, Chökyi Drölma received the cycle of teachings of the purba (phur pa) [practice] of the tradition of Queen [Vajrayogini]. Because of that, it seems to be said that the cycle of teaching methods of [this purba] practice was brought forth by the Venerable Kyopa [Jikten Sumgön].

Then, when he acquired many [years], her father died by means of small pox disease. As soon as [Achi] reached the age of eighteen, her mother also died, [and] following her parents [death] she

\[68\] Child and grandchild's dates unknown.
\[69\] 'Bri gung a phyi chos kyi sgrol ma'i rnam thar mdor bsdus, 15.1-2: dus mi 'grigs pa'i skyon so na gnas yod do.
\[70\] This probably refers to Khetsun Zangpo Rinpoche (1920-2009) and a section of his twelve-volume work in Tibetan, The Biographical Dictionary of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1973).

\[71\] Emanation of light and the possession of a third eye, as mentioned, are additional signs of a dākinī.

\[72\] The Lhopas are an ethnic minority located mainly in south and southeastern Tibet.
renounced [their] wealth. [17] While residing with a paternal uncle, [word of her] lovely qualities spread greatly, and the concerns of married life arose in many speakers. She said,

"I will not stay in this [place]. There is a person of a good family in the direction of Kham. We have a profound connection with that [place]. From [our] great unbroken method, a fortunate person [of] a good family will arise."

Upon saying [this], everyone was struck by surprise. Thereupon, a Lapa merchant [who was] travelling to China reached that dwelling place. The merchant offered reason to call [on the house], such as [asking about her] parents. [Achi] having said, "I am going to Kham," the merchant replied, "If you go as a companion of ours, happiness will come." Chökyi Drölma accepted [the proposal]. [She] escaped [the home] secretly, and uniting with the merchant, left [the region]. When they came near to Denyül ('Dan yul), she said to the visitor, "My dwelling place is here. Great merchant - A great distant land has been bestowed [to me]." Because the gods descended on the city of Tsungngu (Tsung ngu) of [the land of] Den[yül]tö, the Dri[kung] King['s] Kyura family lineage was immaculate, it['s abilities] extending to the limits of the dharma and many worldly arts. A practitioner of the Nyingma knowledge mantras, called Kyura Tsültrim Gyatso (Skyu ra tshul khriṃs rgya mtsho), departed to [his] opulent wife because of [his] characteristics as a pawo of the Vajra Family. Having departed from [the region of] Ü, oral accounts emphasized this especially.

[18] [Achi, upon seeing him], said, "I have wished to teach with you, a person from a good family. I have come here at a long distance from Ü."

Kyura replied, "I do not have worldly attachments and also, with little resources, there is not even an aspiration for family-life. In particular, material necessities, such as [those needed for] a wedding party

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73′I s g r g y h i s k r k n . 17.4: thabs zhes dbyer med chen po las. Here, "method" (thabs) is used as a euphemism for sexual intercourse; see chapter four for an elaboration on this usage and its impact on Achi's hagiography.
74′I s g r g y h i s k r k n . 17.6: la pa'i tshong pa. The title literally translates to merchant of Lapa, in which I am taking the provided word "la pa" to refer to an unidentified place name (perhaps the region of Lapcha) or the goods he is transporting. While I could not find an exact definition of the term, it could possibly be a misspelling of 'la ba', which means the same thing as 'la sman', 'imported medicine.'
75May refer to Denma Drag, a place in eastern Tibet where Wencheng supposedly commissioned a relief of Vairocana Buddha in the seventh century (Gyurme Dorje, Tibet Handbook with Bhutan (Chicago: Footprint Handbooks, 1996), 482).
76′I s g r g y h i s k r k n . 17.17: phyug pa de'i khab.
77′Pawo (dpa' bo), translated here as hero, is often used to refer to male equivalent of a dākinī consort, but can also be a term used for male oracles.
78′I s g r g y h i s k r k n . 17.18: byon pa'i lo rgyus rnam
and marriage charms,\(^{79}\) cannot be prepared. Because of this, it would be better if you left to desire another."

Chökyi Drölma said, "I also do not have great worldly attachment. Due to the both of us, auspicious connections will be created which will bring forth many great beings who will accomplish activities for the precious teachings of the Buddha. We exist for this. Because of [this] wealth of prosperity, [we] need not fear destitution. [This is] what must be done to make attainments [for] everyone."

Having said this, the auspicious connection of [both] mother and father was made right. Thereupon, the family and neighbors of Amé (A mes)\(^{80}\) began to deride [him], saying [things like] "Is that Lord Tsül[trim] Gyel (Tshul rgyal) not crazy?" and "What's the use of that woman?"

Chökyi Drölma said to Amé, "Tsül[trim] Gyel, you need not worry. If you do not jump [in fear], people will cower [from you]. Now [begin] preparations for the marriage feast."

Amé, saying, "A marriage feast is not a great impetus to action for me," [nevertheless] called to the local people and neighbors. [19] Some attendants began to make the marriage feast, [and] that night, those who perform the marriage charms were also summoned.

[Chökyi] Drölma said, "You, the locals and neighbors, have been summoned. As to this occurrence, were the Lapa [merchants] able to be summoned [as my] guests?"\(^{81}\) And, the signs having combined in every way, everyone was nearly assembled.

The Great Amé [and his] retinue became very afraid [because there was no feast]. "As for us, if there is nothing apart from [our] self-sufficiency, how will we give to the guests?" In not knowing what to do, the minds of everyone became panicked.

Chökyi Drölma said, "With respect to that, all of you need not be frightened. All vessels belong to the river; all lineages are amassed [together]," and, having said "Phat!" a skull bowl appeared from her left breast pocket. Saying, "Phat!" again, she pulled a damaru from her right breast pocket. "Now, to this [gathering], let whatever necessities for a tantric feast be given!" Saying this, she held out the skull bowl and, staring into the sky [with her] three eyes, she performed a dance.\(^{82}\) Having been offered white rice\(^{83}\) [in her] right hand, [she was] pleased and smiled, saying, "Oh! A very good auspicious connection! Four sons will arise to me! Aside from these, by way of direct and indirect transmission, many great men who

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\(^{79}\) *Bri gung a phyi chos kyi sgrol ma'i rnam thar mdor bsdus*, 18.5: The term *sna bon* appears to refer to either the marriage charms themselves or to those that perform them. They may be *Bönpo* in nature.

\(^{80}\) Another familiar name for Achi's husband, Kyura Tsültrim Gyatso.

\(^{81}\) In the version of the hagiography translated by Jamyangling, this comment is explained as Achi inviting the merchants to the wedding ceremony as they were still in the area and the closest people she had to family this far from her birthplace (Jamyangling, *A phyi'i 'khrung rabs*, 11).

\(^{82}\) *Bri gung a phyi chos kyi sgrol ma'i rnam thar mdor bsdus*, 19.14: *gar bsgyur*.

\(^{83}\) *Bri gung a phyi chos kyi sgrol ma'i rnam thar mdor bsdus*, 19.15: *dkar mo*. 

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will do deeds [and] the teachings of the Buddha will arise!" [20] Sounding the damaru, [with each] kind of strike, food and drink descended inconceivably like rain. Bones became fish and water became beer. The guests were made highly satisfied with the exalted banquet, and even those that performed the marriage charms were given dzi beads. As before, a prophecy was made.

Because of that, the wedding party was created. The southwestern land of Khamtö Kyégu (Khams stod skye rgu) [of] the immutable Dru (‘Bru) [clan] is one of the eight abodes of liberation. The Kyura [clan] took up Dentö Draktsa (‘Dan stod brag rtsa), one of the immutable abodes of the Kyura. [Achi] permanently remained in Tsung Ngu outside the foothills of the so-called Den Drölma cliff (‘Dan sgrol ma brag). To the father [Amé, she said,] "I do not know if I will be the maternal ancestor of [an incarnation of] Akṣobhya (Mi bskyod rdo rje), but all of your lined sons will give rise to [his buddha-land,] Abhirati (Mngon par dga’ ba’i zhint khams). Our descendents will be defenders because of us." [Then], while residing in a house in accordance with ordinary worldly activities, four sons were born. As to names, [they] were consecutively called Namkha Wangchuk (Nam mkha’ dbang phyug), Péka Wangyel (Dpe ka dbang rgyal), Nanggakpa Sönam Pel (Nang dgag pa bsod nams dpal), and Katung Druzhi (Ka thung gru bzhi). Having been nurtured [in their] growth, when they grew older they simply gave rise to the clarification of their sense-powers through their own inherent nature [21] and were endowed with many virtues of both the spiritual and the temporal. Even now, footprints from when the children were small are on [Den] Drölma cliff. As for Chökyi Drölma, or the Lady of the Dharma, at indiscriminate times she came by means of magical power (rdzu ‘phrul) in the ten directions, presiding over the gatherings of däkinīs. She wandered in all of the charnel grounds (dur khrod), taking up human corpses, cutting them up with a curved knife (gri gug), making torma (gtor ma) in [her] skull bowl [and] dividing that into three parts. One [piece], she divided to all. One she consumed herself. One, having been given to a maid-servant, [caused her] to attain accomplishments (dnyos grub thob). She traveled unobstructed and magically through the rocky precipices. As taught by the Fifth Dalai Lama, a display of various forms arose to those transformations which did not transcend [and] the local people said, "How

84Dzi are a type of indigenous Tibetan beads that are oblong, round, cylindrical, or tubular in shape, black or brown in color, with white eye-like features. They are considered auspicious.

85The eight abodes of liberation are the eight heavenly realms found within the fourth dhyāna (meditative absorption) of the rūpa-dhātu, including Akaṇiṣṭha (Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Tayé, Myriad Worlds: Buddhist Cosmology in Abhidharma, Kālacakra, and Dzog-chen, (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1995), 120).


87Bri gung a phyi choi sgrol ma’i rnam thar mdor bsdu, 21.3-8: chos kyi sgrol ma’m chos kyi dbang phyug ma ni dus nges med du phyogs bcar rdzu ‘phrul gyi byon te mkha’ ‘gro’i tshogs dpon mdzad pa / dur khrod kun tu nyal ba / bam ro blangs nas gri gug giis btub nas ka pär lar gtor ma mdzad de cha gsum du bgos / gcig kun la bkye / gcig nyid nas gso’l / gcig ‘khol mo la byin pas dngos grub thob.

88It is considered a tantric siddhi and a typical magical ability of a däkinī to travel through stone.
wondrous [is it that] Kyura Tsüttrim Gyatso found a Wisdom dākinī?" The majority became humbled [toward her].

That great mother herself enrolled [her] four sons into the practice [of] the Venerable Vajrayoginī (Rje btsun rdo rje rnal 'byor ma), and having done so, they experienced [the goddess] in bodily form and discerned the true nature of reality. Then, on the Sky Cliff (Nam mkha' brag) above the rock-cave, Chökyi Drölma, with her own hands, made a four-petaled lotus from the center of the dharmadaya (chos 'byung) of the Vajravārāhi maṇḍala, writing [the syllables] "Baṅ hi ri ni sa." Even now it exists to go see. On the ground under the large rock, [one can] see an image of five – the mother and sons - [22] together with remaining traces at the front, back, right and left [sides]. [These] are established as marks of accomplishment. Now, all are directly [able] to benefit from a sight like that. Furthermore, embodiments of malicious hateful beings, [such as members of] pernicious lineages and wicked worldly dākinīs, were bound under oath and placed into service [by Achi at that time]. Having [subdued them], she did the great blessing activities of doctrine beings, such as giving directions to uphold the teachings. To the subdued worthy ones, [she] said, "I myself, having taken the way of rebirth in samsāra intentionally, increase and spread the Buddha's teachings, and I have come here by means of prayers in order to preserve [them]. If desired, supreme and common attainments will be given to you all." Having said that, she instructed [them]. Afterward, she lead [her] followers to a deep cavern on the shore of the Pamé River (Dpa' smad chu bo). Taking a genuine fresh corpse from the charnel ground, she created a tanitic feast offering. At the feast, many common and supreme siddhi attainments arose to those able to enjoy [it], but [those of] inferior fortune and few accumulations [of merit] were obstructed by wrong views. At the assembly, a share of attainments came in isolation to those unable to enjoy [it]. That cave is known as "Achi Cave" (A phyi phug), and there is also a body imprint [of] the mother and sons in the rock.

[23] Then, reflecting on the disciples and children of the Fortunate One, she herself performed her own sādhana. She said, "For the sake of [my] sons and grandsons, I myself have performed my own sādhana. If great importance is put on me, [in] the distant future, I [will spread] further than any other young woman.89 It will be impossible to break [my] family lineage and the precious teachings will be spread." And like a golden line, she prophesized the lineage of descendants would not be cut and temporal and spiritual activities would arise until the end [of the age]. When, in stages, the training of the noble [woman's] disciples was finished, she said, "All the activities of this very female body have been completed. Now, to these generations of children, an ancient supreme teaching will arise from the general teachings. I myself will act [as] the dharma protectress of that. Even now, I myself will also act [as] a protector until the fifteenth generation of practice with whoever performs these sādhanas. Having given

89'Bri gung a phyi chos kyi sgrol ma'i rnam thar mdor bs dus, 23.5: do gal che na sgron / nga bu mo gzhan pas phyi thag ring.'
[her] final words, such as "Put a great importance on me" and so forth, without renouncing [her] body she departed to the celestial realm (mkha’ spyod), manifesting the form of the Great Transference into Rainbow Body (ja’ lus ’pho ba chen po). All non-human evil-doers of the world-system without exception, [who were] evil, ferocious, and praying for evil, were [subject to her] subduing activities. [24] Achi herself, by means of the Padmasambhava mūdra, shook the entire world-system, completely felling god-demon evil-doers. Because [of this,] it is said that all disciples will achieve the secret [teachings].

III. The Departure

Regarding her time of departure, it is thought to be just before the second yearly cycle (rab byung gnyis pa), because she surely lived more than seventy years. According to the Tantra of the Blazing Flame Ąakini (Mkha’ gro ma me lec 'bar ba'i rgyud), the Victor of the Three Times is praised, saying, "After many future kalpas, the Queen of Space Penden Lhamo Chökyi Drölma herself [will be] in the Lotus-Endowed World-System. Arhats [who] depart [to that place] like that Blessed One will be taught to act as one who is perfectly and completely enlightened in the supreme glory of the completely perfected Lotus Buddha." According to the words of the Second Nāgārjuna [Jikten Sumgön], in this present world-system, in order to preserve the teachings of the thousand buddhas, this Sovereignness of the Dharma achieved the general and specific doctrines of the Buddha by means of [enlightened] activities. [She] appeared in person [as] a revelatory vision to successive [members of] the Golden Rosary [of the Kagyu Lineage], siddha-yogis, and vow-holders, and until now the lineage has been unbroken, such as the acts clearly [portrayed] in parts of the practical method life-story [above]. [Because of this,] the Sovereignness herself is a very powerful essence. [25] In order to protect the essential teachings, [she] even dwells in the one billion worldly mundane realms, and [therefore] gods and humans from combined interdependence [on her are able to] obtain buddhahood in a single lifetime. Quickly endowed with wrathful power which easily accomplishes the eight great ordinary actions and the four kinds of

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90Each cycle in the Tibetan calendar lasts sixty years – the first yearly cycle takes places between 1027-1087 C.E. and the second yearly cycle takes place between 1087-1147 C.E. on the Western cycle. The hagiographer therefore believes Achi was born sometime in the early eleventh century and died shortly before 1087 C.E.

91The Tantra of the Blazing Flame Ąakini (Mkha’ gro ma me lec 'bar ba'i rgyud; Skt. Ākīnī-agnijihvā-jvalā-tantra) is located in the Tibetan Kangyur (bka' 'gryur) (Peking no. 0466, rgyud, zha 228a4-256a4/Derge no. 0842, rnying rgyud, ga 223b6-253a5).

92Jikten Sumgön is considered a reincarnation of Nāgārjuna, therefore this reference to a "Second Nāgārjuna" is a reference to the Drikung Kagyu founder.

93'Bri gung a phyi chos kyi sgrol ma'i rnam thar mdor bsdus, 24.15-16: gser phreng rim byon dang grub thob rnal 'byor dang dam ldan rnas.

94The eight great ordinary actions are 1) medicinal pills; 2) eye-salve; 3) swift feet; 4) the penetration of matter; 5) the accomplishment of the enchanted sword; 6) sky-faring; 7) invisibility; and 8) immortality and the suppression of disease (Dorje, The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, 259).
enlightened activities, she dwells as the Great Protectress of the Teachings who is able to bestow whatever desires and wishes asked for in an instant. Lord Drikung Rinchenpel (Rje 'bri gung pa rin chen dpal) said,

"Protecting without exception the beings gathered [in] the sovereign three worlds; Guarding the teachings of the one thousand buddhas; She who achieves the intentions of beings; Salute and praise the Wish-fulfilling Achi!"

Regarding this dharma protectress called Achi, to her son, Pēka Wanggyel, four sons were born: Khenpo Darma (Mkhan po dar ma), Könchok Rinchen (Dkon mchog rin chen), Tsünpa Bar (Btsun pa 'bar), [and] the youngest, Nenjorwa Dorjé (Rnal 'byor ba rdo rje). The son of that youngest mantrin was foretold in manifold sūtras and tantras. If one counts up from the Protector of the Three Worlds, Drikung [Jikten Sumgön], Guide of both gods and sentient beings, the Lord of the Dharma Ratna Śrī, one comes to Achi. [26] Achi Chōkyi Drölma is sweetly known in the Triple World as Sovereign Lady Nanam (Sna nam bza' dbang phyug). Thus, describing a brief outline [of her] life-story was the goal [of this work].

IV. The Nature of Achi Chōkyi Drölma

Regarding the Queen of Space Goddess (Dbying phyug lha mo) herself: Even though, as explained, she is fundamentally not a type [of dharma protector] who is bound under oath because she is a genuine wisdom dākinī who intentionally undertook worldly existence [as a] teaching method, some [people], because of a measure of ignorance, wonder if she is a female demon (‘dre mo) bound under oath. She is not. The Lord Protector [Jikten Gönpo], from the Introduction to Vajrayāna (Rdor rje theg pa'i lde mig), praises [her, saying],

"I am known as the Lord of Dākinī. The Mother-Queen of Space is a Vajraḍākini. [Mundane] sky-goers were vicious [and were] subjugated. Yogins [who have] not transcended are protected [only] because of their oaths. Not only [that], love has been nurtured, [and the sky-goers] grew affectionate. Today, the minds [of] the mistress [sky-goers] have become [loving] like one's own children. As for this Vajraḍākini, a great
grandmother is a low woman, but a maternal grandmother is very low.\textsuperscript{97}

The entire assembly having entrusted [themselves] to her, including the hermits, [Achi] is known in all directions.

Lord Chökyi Lodrö (Chos kyi blo gros), in the Catalogue of the Glacial Lake (Gangs mtsho'i dkar chag),\textsuperscript{98} says: "The Drikung Kyopa Rinpoché was teaching dharma to a gathering of [his] retinue assembly. While residing [there], they perceived a resounding sound of a damaru coming forth from the sky.

Achi [and her] retinue of five [dağinis] appeared directly, and promised, "I myself will act as protectress of our family and both dharma lineages."

[27] Lord Kyopa replied, "Exemplified by the mountain [hermits] that travel to the three abodes, [this] entire assembly is entrusted [to you]. The name Drikung Achi will be known like the wind and by merely saying the name 'Achi,' the lineage holders will be able to send foes to the doors of ruin."

When some from the fifteen generations do not explain that it was with enlightened activity [but] instead say [it was by] oath, they do not surpass stupid stories which are without study and reflection. As to the meaning of those [stories], the sādhana itself was practiced among the fifteen generations of those people who were practitioners, and because the Lord [Jikten Sumgön] said [she] had done the enlightened activities, it is clearer [that he] certainly did not say [otherwise]. [Achi] is not a worldly dākini. From the Lhodrak History (Lho brag chos byung) by Pawo Tsuk[la]k Treng[wa],\textsuperscript{99} it is taught: "This unlimited body, Wisdom Dākini Queen Lady Nanam, Lady of the Dharma, became the Queen of all the Teaching Guardians. As soon as the lineage holders call [her] name, enemies are sent [to the] doors [of] ruin. Nowadays she is known as Drikung Achi."

If someone asks if she is a flesh-eating demoness (sha za srin mo) who is bound under oath, she is not. As explained, she is a wisdom dākinī and when Lord Jikten Sumgön and [28] the Druptop Khampa

\textsuperscript{97}Bri gung a phyi chos kyi sgrol ma'i rnam thar mdor bsdus, 26.9-12: ma bas byams shing sring bas dungs / mdza' mo bu bzhin yid du 'ong / tshul 'di rdo rje mkha' ma / a phyi chen mo sham sham mo / yang phyi chen mo 'jol 'jol mo.\textsuperscript{98}The name Chökyi Lodrö could either refer to Könchok Tenzin Chökyi Lodrö (Dkon mchog bstan 'dzin chos kyi blo gros, 1868-1906), the Sixth Chuntsang Rinpoché and Thirty-Fourth Abbot of Drikung Til or Khyentsé Chökyi Lodrö (Mkhyen brtse Chos kyi Blo gros, 1893-1918), who is mentioned below (Sørensen and Hazod, Rulers of the Celestial Plain, 735). Because of the confusion with the exact author, the reference of the Catalogue of the Glacial Lake (Gangs mtsho'i dkar chag) is unknown; the repertoires of both authors would need to be examined more closely than this study allows.\textsuperscript{99}Lhodrak History is another name for Pawo Tsuklak Trengwa’s Feast of Scholars Dharma History (Chos 'byung mchas pa'i dga' ston), which gets its name because it has been reproduced from Lhodrak blocks from Rumtek monastery (Martin, Tibetan Histories, 88-89).
Gyagar (Grub thob kham pa rgya gar, 1110-1193) were debating in Drikung Changchupling ('Bri gung byang chub gling), the sound of a āmaru [resounded] from the sky and the melodious voice of a dākinī arose.

Druptop asked the Lord of the Dharma (Chos rje) how this could be, [and] he replied, "The voice which arises is a Wisdom Dākinī, my Grandmother."

Druptop insisted, "What is her sādhana like? How is [her] practice done?"

Because of that, [Jikten Sumgön] bestowed many extensive sādhanas and the fifteen chapters [of] the Precious Diadem in the Sādhana Cycle (Sgrub skor rin chen cod pan le'u). Druptop said, "Having reviewed the oral transmission with earnest, the essence [of the] goddess (hri ma) rose up from the sphere of reality, [and I] perceived [her] with divine sight from the sphere of wisdom."

Is that like a vicious demoness? Moreover, that method [of practice is] not only [in] the Precious Five Ornaments (Rin chen gyi rgyan can lnga), but the empowerment of this Protectress Deity is also said to be like [those among] the Highest Mother Tantras (Bla med ma rgyud). This itself is able to indicate the truth [that she is] a mother who is born a Wisdom Dākinī Victorious One, because an empowerment [which] entrusts the life-force to a kind of mundane demon is not a true [empowerment].

When some say [she] is like the Sakya witches (Sa skyā'i 'bag mo), [she] is not. As for that, the hateful beings teach [that she] is a demoness of an arrogant lineage, but she herself is actually the mother of the Victorious Ones. Just as Lord Protector [Jikten Sumgön] said,

"[She is one who] does not possess diminished clarity in wisdom; does not possess postponement in compassion, does not possess a shortening in blessings; does not possess obstruction in magical power,"

and so forth, as taught in the Illuminated Secret Meaning Sādhana of Achi Illuminating the Secret Meaning (A phyi'i sgrub thabs gsang don rab gsal), which her to be like the highest stainless sects.

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100 This is the primary title of the first Karmapa Düsüm Khynapa ( Karma pa Dus gsum Mkhyan pa), a contemporary of Jikten Sumgön. For more information, see: Davidson, Tibetan Renaissance, 332-335; Kapstein, The Tibetans, 105-106; Hugh Richardson, "The Karma-Pa Sect: A Historical Note," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland 3/4 (October, 1958): 139-164; Snellgrove and Richardson, A Cultural History of Tibet, 136-137, 150-151.

101 This may refer to "The Instructions of the Five Ornaments," the eighth chapter of the first volume of the Bstan bsrung a phyi'i sgrub thabs be'u bum (See Appendix A).

102 The Sakya monastery in western Tibet is known for its terrifying legends of a class of "living demons" (gson 'dre) or witches. These demons are believed to be possessed, once-human women who can inflict fever and disease on those that come into contact with them. See: Bryan J. Cuevas, Travels in the Netherworld: Buddhist Popular Narratives of Death and the Afterlife in Tibet, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 101-102.

103 'Bri gung a phyi'chos kyi sgrol ma'i rnam thar mdor bs dus, 28.18: rgyud brlams pa'i srin mo.
From the *Secret Invocation (Gsang ba gsol ’debs)* it says, "Ask [Achi] to bestow all supreme and ordinary *siddhis* without exception." If she was [a demoness of] arrogant lineage, it is doubtful [she could] even bestow just the same ordinary attainments, let alone supreme attainments. [Therefore, she] herself is the Queen of the Ăakinîs, intentionally taking rebirth to guard the doctrine. Recognize she utterly is not a vicious flesh eater, demoness, fierce woman, lustful spirit, etc.

The Twenty-Eighth Chennga (*Spyan snga nyer brgyud pa*) says in the *Sādhana [which] Arouses Wish-Fulfillment (Sgrub thabs yid bzhin ’byung ba)*,

"Glorious Goddess Queen of Space Chökyi Drön (Dpal ldan lha mo dbyings phyug chos kyi sgron); Offer whatever prayers [to her, and] siddhis will arise like rain; Protectress [of] practitioners [who are] like her own children; Prostrate and praise the merciful Queen of Space!"

Moreover, it says,

"Without hesitation from the ineffable, [she has] the highest intention to act with great kindness. Having taken apparitional form with diverse emanations, [she has done this] for the purpose of teaching. You [should] prostrate and praise!"

[30] The *Stainless Faction (Dri med sde)* says,

"Glorious Ăakinī Lady Wrathful Mother; Apparitional Form [of the Sixteen Sources of Bliss [who] emanates as Achi Chökyi Drölma; I pay homage to the Venerable Lady Nanam!"

Also, in the *Essential Clarification Sādhana (Sgrub thabs snying po gsal ba)* by Lord Ratna [Śri] it says,

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104 This may refer to "Venerable Achi Chökyi Drölma’s Ritual of Permission [that] Illuminates the Secret Meanings," the seventeenth chapter of the second volume of the *Bstan bsrung a phy'i sgrub thabs be'u bum* (See Appendix A).

105 This reference is unknown.

106 This may refer to Chennga Kunga Dorjé (*Spyan snga kun dga’ rdo rje*, c. fifteenth century), a reincarnation of the fourth Drikung abbot, Chennga Drakpa Jungné (*Spyan snga grags pa ’byung gnas*, 1174-1255) (Sørensen and Hazod, *Rulers of the Celestial Plain*, 720-1).

107 While the *Bstan bsrung a phy'i sgrub thabs be'u bum* contains a chapter entitled "Achi Sādhana [which] Arouses Wish-Fulfillment", is has a different author. This is perhaps a different version or interpretation of that text.

108 More than likely an abbreviated title, but the reference is unknown.
"Vajradākinī, in order [to be] a guardian of the teachings of the victor, like the essential rain [of] the Drikung Ruler, [in] Zhotō Achi Chokyi Drön wholly accepted birth and the supramundane [being] emanated into samsāra."

Gyelwa Gédün Gyatso (Rgyal ba dge 'dun rgya mtsho, 1476-1542)\textsuperscript{110} says,

"From the Vast Valley of the Unconditioned Blissful Sky, Chokyi Drön propagated the Great Vehicle in the Ten Directions. [She is] the Teaching Guardian Grandmother of Jikten Gönpo."

Because of [these] sayings, one is able to understand the nature of the teaching protectress.

This teaching protectress herself first stabilized the Drikung monasteries and later stabilized the actions of transforming merit and transforming places themselves with great wrath.\textsuperscript{111} [This] is clear from the Amdo History (Mdo smad chos 'byung),\textsuperscript{112} and because [this] was in the three regional monastic colleges of Se[ra], Drê[pung], Ga[nden] (Se 'bras dga’) and many [others, she] was made the tutelary deity of many great saints, new and old. Gyelwang Gédün Gyatso, [called the] Trenpo Terchen, Karmapa, Khyentsé, Kongtrül Khyentrül, [31] Ösel Dorjé, Düjom Bötül, Khenjik Pünsok, and so

\textsuperscript{109}This may refer to "Essential Clarification Sādhana of the Peaceful-Wrathful Word Guardian Achi and Her Retinue," the sixteenth chapter of the first volume of the Bstan bsrung a phyi'i sgrub thabs be'u bum (See Appendix A).

\textsuperscript{110}Gyelwa, or Gyelwang, Gédün Gyatso is the Second Dalai Lama of the Géluk sect. While sectarian differences would traditionally disallow such cross-referencing between the hierarchies of different sects, Könchok Gyatso nevertheless calls upon the words of the Second Dalai Lama to legitimize Achi as an enlightened being and not a demoness as some may claim. Today, the Géluk sect and its Dalai Lama rulers are considered the supreme authority over the Tibetan people, so calling on this source would further legitimize as Achi as an important figure not only to members of the Kagyü tradition, but to Tibetan Buddhists in general. For further information on Gyelwang Gédün Gyatso, see: Anne-Marie Blondeau and Yonten Gyatso, "Lhasa, Legend and History," in Lhasa in the Seventeenth Century: The Capital of the Dalai Lamas, Françoise Pommaret, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2003): 15-38; Kapstein, The Tibetans, 129-131; Glenn H. Mullin, The Second Dalai Lama: His Life and Teachings (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2005); Luciano Petech, "The Dalai-Lamas and Regents of Tibet: A Chronological Study," in Young Pao, Second Series 47: 3/5 (1959): 368-394; Snellgrove and Richardson, A Cultural History of Tibet, 182-183; Stein, Tibetan Civilization, 81-82.

\textsuperscript{111}'Bri gung a phyi chos kyi sgrol ma'i rnam thar mdor bsdus, 30.12-14: bstan srung ma 'di nyi ches gnyan pas snyon 'bri gung pa'i chos sde phyis su dge bsgyur dang sa bsgyur byas pa rnam s su yang di nyid brten par byed de.

\textsuperscript{112}The Amdo History (Mdo smad chos 'byung) is another name for the three volume work, The Ocean Annals (Deb ther rgya mtsho) by Drakgön Könchok Tenpa Rapgyé (Brag dgon dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, 1800-1866) (Brag dgon dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, Mdo smad chos 'byung (New York: TBRC, 2007). See also: Martin, Tibetan Histories, 163.
forth, offered praises and displayed attainment-communications (sgrub 'phrin). Revelations did not arise to all of these [people] with words. For instance, from the Pure Vision Dharma Cycle of the Thirty-Eight Successive Drikung Abbots ('Bri gung gan rabs so brya'ad ra'i dag snang chos skor), it says the way this teaching protectress is to be practiced as a guardian of the outer dharma, as an inner tutelary deity, as a secret dākini, and as an innermost lama (bla ma). When [one] is able to know the inner, outer, and secret life-stories of the Queen of Space from the petition offerings residing in very many [texts] about the practice-communications, such as The Enlightened Activity Which Falls Like Rain: The Petition Offering of Drikung Achi Vajra Chödron ('Bri gung a phyi rjechos sgrong giy gsirod phrin las char 'bebs) by Khyentsé Chökyi Lodrō (Mkhyen brtse chos kyi blo gros, 1893-1918) [and] in Achi's Sādhana Cycle of the Dzongmar Tertön (Rdzong dmar gter ston), [one discovers that] all the protectresses of Tibet are not sufficient above the Superior Great Teaching Guardianess, [and] the truth will genuinely be found. In this same way, at all times conclude [that] virtue [arises] from virtue.

"The three bodies bestow the unchanging self-produced magically-emanated display;
The three roots bestow the single-embodiment Queen of Space Chö[kyi] Drö[ma];
The three secrets bestow this sounding of achievement music;
The three doors bestow purity [to] whatever is polluted [with] defilement.
The hidden meaning [of] the Great Sage's sūtras and tantras and the sayings of the Great Leader Kagyu Lama have been written in accordance with the system of the Great Scholar. Because of this, let this

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113 'Bri gung a phyi chos kyi sgrol ma'i rnam thar mdor bsdus, 30.18-31.1: rgyal dbang dge 'dun rgya mtsho / 'phreng po gter chen / karma pa / mkhyen brtse / kong sprul / mkhyen sprul / 'od gsal rdo rje / bdud 'joms / bod sprul / mkhan 'jigs phun sogs.
114 There are numerous texts on the successive abbots of Drikung Til, but without an author it is hard to determine which one this refers to.
115 This particular work is unknown.
116 This particular work is unknown.
117 The three bodies (Tib. sku gsun; Skrt. trikāya) refers to the three aspects of buddha-hood: the dharmakāya, the sambhogakāya, and the nirmāṇakāya; the ultimate truth body, the enjoyment or heavenly body which appears in the pure realms, and the emanation body.
118 The three roots (rtse gsun) refer to the lama, the source of blessings; the yidam, the source of accomplishments; and the dākinī, the source of activities (Patrul Rinpoche, Words of My Perfect Teacher: A Complete Translation of a Classic Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, Revised Edition (Lanham: Altamira Press, 1998), 436). Beyer adds the dharma protectors as a fourth to this list, whom he refers to as the "Lords" for short (Stephan Beyer, The Cult of Tārā: Magic and Ritual in Tibet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973) 38-41).
119 The three secrets (gsang gsun) refer to the body, speech, and mind of enlightened beings.
120 The three doors (sgo gsun) refer to the body, speech, and mind of mundane beings.
system of the great vehicle spread [from] the center of the constellation

The pure wisdom ḍākinī is the moon (ku mud gnyen);
The pure teaching guardian teaches realization with white light;
May the utpalā flower (sa mos) which tames many kinds [of beings]
spread!”

V. Colophon

Also, [with regards to] this abridged life-story of the Queen of Space Chökyi Drölma, the Eighth Perfect Lord of the Teachings Drikung Kyapgön Chungtsang Könchok Tendzin Ngakwang Tupten Chökyi Nangwa Pelzangpo Rinpoché (Yongs rdzogs bstan pa'i mnga' bdag 'bri gung skyabs mgon chung tshang dkon mchog bstan 'dzin ngag dwub bstan chos kyi snang ba dpal bzang po) honorably said,
"In this way let it be written!"[while] wearing above [his] head the diadem of precepts. As a vagabond121 who takes the dust of His Honorable Feet above his head, Sé Könchok Gyatso (Se dkon mchog rgya mtsho), having taken the scriptures of the Kagyu forefathers as a basis, composed [this] teaching testament devoid of the corruption of individual creation in the evening session at Lhasa Norbulingka (Norgling) on the fifteenth day of the third month of the 2000th year of the 14th year [of] the Iron-Dragon from the 2544 generation.

121 Bri gung a phyi chos kyi sgrol ma'i rnam thar mdo r bsdus, 32.9-10: rgya khams pa
CHAPTER THREE
IMAGES, ITEMS, AND ASSOCIATIONS

Before delving into the hagiography of Achi Chökyi Drölma, the main topic on which Könchok Gyatso's text revolves, it is important to understand the persona of the semi-wrathful protectress and the historical and cultural resources from which she developed. To do so, the iconographies of both Achi and her source-deity Vajrayoginī as they appear in art and textual traditions will be analyzed, along with each of their placement within the greater hierarchy of Tibetan deities and spirits. Achi can be called on for a variety of reasons, but as can be seen in the above translation, her identification as a wisdom dākinī who has chosen to protect the religion of her own volition is an important distinction that separates her not only from other local deities, but from other dākinīs as a whole, and this is a point fervently defended by the authors of her hagiographies. These classifications will be examined in the following chapter, as will two specific female deities often compared to Achi's character.

3.1 Identifying the Deity

Like many buddha-deities, Achi maintains numerous epithets, some relatively unique and others fairly common among female deities like herself. Most common of course is her given name, Chökyi Drölma, literally meaning "Saviorress of the Dharma," and the familiar title 'Achi', which simply translates as "grandmother" and demonstrates goddess Prajñā, who is said to be anthropomorphic personification of the perfection of wisdom (prajñā) and the primordial mother of all the buddhas of the three times. Another name often attributed to Achi is Nanamza (Sna nam bza') or 'Lady of Nanam', reflecting the Tibetan clan from which she was

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born and the noble birth to which she is associated. The occasionally used 'Queen of the ḍākinīś' directly correlates with her source-deity Vajrayogini, while 'Glorious Queen of Space' is the common epithet of another female tantric buddha, Nairātmyā, or possibly another reference to Vajrayogini, as a key trait of the ḍākinīś is their ability to fly through the open sky. Furthermore, Achi belongs to a class of Buddhist deities called dharma protectors (chos skyong) or teaching guardians (bstan srung), whose duties can be as broad as defending the religion as a whole or as specific as keeping a particular teaching hidden and safe. Departing from the behavior of many of Tibet's mundane, oath-bound protectors, however, the Achi takes multiple roles, making her an interesting point of departure in this category. According to at least one sādhana, besides being taken as one's dharma protector, she can be taken as one's inner-most secret lama (gsang bla ma), one's inner yidam (nang ltar yi dam), or one's secret ḍākinī consort.

In accordance with these multiple roles and identities, it is no surprise that Achi maintains a number of different iconographic images which can be called upon according to the function she is to perform. The two most popular of these images are quite beatific in appearance, with only hints of her semi-wrathful nature in her dress and tantric accoutrements. One of these is depicted standing upon a lotus throne as in Fig. 1, while the most popular image shows Achi flying through the sky mounted upon her blue-hued wind-horse, as in Fig. 2. She is typically depicted as a smiling sixteen- or eighteen-year-old dressed in elaborate robes and the jewels of royalty, having white skin tinged with red and an open vertical third-eye on her forehead. The more peaceful, standing Achi is reminiscent of Mahāyāna-style deities like Avalokiteśvara, who calmly stand upon lotus thrones, passive and inactive. Carrying a white-silver mirror (me long) and a wish-fulfilling jewel (nor bu), this form is called upon to grant boons and wishes. The images of Achi riding her wind-horse, despite her apparent age, depict the last moment of her life according to some stories, when she is said to have taken off into the sky upon her worldly death. This image is full of action, and calls to mind various other fierce dharma protectors who ride terrifying...
Fig. 1. Image of standing Achi Chökyi Drölma, repository unknown.
Fig. 2. Image of Achi Chökyi Drölma mounted on her blue wind-horse, courtesy the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation (item no. 73896).
mounts, such as the Géluk protectress Penden Lhamo (Dpal ldan lha mo; Skt. Śrī Devī), to be discussed below. While Achi’s demeanor is still smiling and attractive, and her mount is more fantastic than frightening, she still maintains some of the fierce tantric elements that cause her to be referred to as a semi-wrathful deity. She carries a two-sided hand drum called a dāmaru (Tib. rnga chung) above her head, and a skull-bowl, or kāṭāla (Tib. thod pa), containing wish-fulfilling jewels in front of her. As to footwear, standing Achi is depicted in either sandals or bare feet, whereas mounted Achi wears heavy boots. This is an important detail distinguishing these two forms, as according to the art historian Rob Linrothe, worldly dharma protectors are prone to wear boots, which is a reflection on their war-like nature and ability to take an active role in the lives of their followers. Images of fully-enlightened buddhas, both peaceful and wrathful, as well as beatific bodhisattvas, are usually shown without any such footwear in contrast.129

Before reflecting further on the meanings of individual elements in Achi’s iconography, it seems prudent to turn to the buddha-deity most closely connected to her life-story. According to the Drikung Kagyū tradition, Achi is an emanation of the female tantric buddha Vajrayoginī, her birth having been foretold in the texts of the Cakrasaṃvara cycle of tantras.130 The cult of this wrathful buddha-deity formed from these early texts, stemming from the introduction of her emanation Vajravārāhī as the consort of the texts’ central deity, Saṃvvara. Later traditions would display both Vajrayoginī and Vajravārāhī separately in their own maṇḍalas, and while each goddess maintains slight differences in her iconography, it seems that the two names were originally interchangeable.131 Today, referencing the Mahāyāna standard of every buddha possessing three bodies (trikāya), the name Vajrayoginī is most often used to refer to the dharma-kāya or primordial source-deity and the name Vajravārāhī to the sambhogakāya, the form which


130 It is a popular belief among devotees of Achi within the Drikung Kagyū tradition that the Cakrasaṃvara Cycle of texts foretell Vajravārāhī’s rebirth in western Tibet, but I have yet to verify the exact location of this prophecy within the Cakrasaṃvara tantra as translated by David Gray. It is possible that the prophecy may have appeared in the “Greater Cakrasaṃvara” Tantra, which, according to Gray, is no longer extant. If this is the case, the rumor of Achi’s prophecy may not be false, but simply not present in the available “Minor Cakrasaṃvara” texts currently used by the tradition. This requires further research outside the purview of the subject at hand (Gray, The Cakrasaṃvara Tantra: The Discourse of Śrī Heruka: A Study and Annotated Translation (New York: The American Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2007), 19).

131 While Gray explains that the earliest compilations of the Cakrasaṃvara Tantras are not able to be dated, the high point of the tradition occurred in the late tenth century, when it was translated into Tibetan. There are three general genres of Cakrasaṃvara commentarial literature: “explanatory tantras” (vyākyātantra); commentaries on the”root text” (mūlatantra); and ritual literature, such as sādhanas, maṇḍalavidhīs, and abhiṣekavidhīs. Unlike most sūtras, or even most tantras, the main text does not begin with the typical nīdana verse, but begins immediately with ”and now” (atha). While generally accepted that this means the text comes from a larger collection, where this verse was already provided, there is some controversy surrounding it. Some commentators attempt to suggest the contents one might find in a typical nīdana verse, such as the setting and the teacher, were alternatively that Saṃvvara’s consort, Vajravārāhī, was the teacher or that she was the solicitor of the teaching (Gray, The Cakrasaṃvara Tantra, 11-37).
Fig. 3. Image of Vajrayoginī, courtesy of the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation (item no. 530).
resides in the buddha pure lands. This leaves the infinite human and dākinī incarnations of the deity, such as Achi, as the various nirmāṇakāya forms of the deity.\textsuperscript{132}

According to the extensive work of Elizabeth English, the Vajrayoginī/Vajravarāhī cult seems to have flourished in India sometime between the tenth and twelfth centuries, and while only conjecture, this could explain her growth of importance in the sects of Buddhism forming in Tibet at the same time.\textsuperscript{133} The enlightened goddess is not only categorized by her followers as a dākinī, but is identified as the supreme dākinī, the Sarvabuddhadākinī, who reigns as queen in the heavenly realm of Khecara located in the uppermost realm of Akaniṣṭha (‘Og min), a plane of existence akin to pure lands like Sukhāvatī and Abhiratī. Here, ruling alongside her consort over scores of lesser dākinīs, she welcomes the rebirth of her devotees so that they may receive her teachings and practice them in her realm. Khecara is identified as a western paradise, sometimes given one of three geographic locations: the Hindu Kush, the Swat valley, or the South Indian region of Kañcī. In Tibetan traditions, the name is synonymous with Orgyen (O rgyan), Oḍḍiyāṇa, and Uḍḍiyāṇa, and it is recorded as Achi’s plane of origination in Köchok Gyatso’s text. Originally, the mythic country is said to have been ruled by the legendary King Indrabhūtī, but when he and all of his subjects physically transcended the world through the Buddha’s teachings, it was left desolate and empty. It was eventually taken over by the dākinīs, and became known as their kingdom. Padmasambhava, “Lord of the Dākinīs,” has strong connections to Orgyen as the land of his birth, and as further evidence of its importance, some traditions claim that treasure texts (gter ma) are kept safe there when no suitable treasure-revealers (gter ston) exist to receive them.\textsuperscript{134} While often described as a supreme paradise whose beauty is beyond compare, at least one account describes Orgyen in horrific, gruesome terms. According to the hagiography of Padmasambhava’s consort-turned-teacher Yeshé Tsogyel (Ye shes mtsho rgyal, 757-817), as she was meditating in her secret cave in the Drikung region, she visually experienced the hidden land, which more closely resembled a hell realm than a heavenly one:

\begin{quote}
The fruit trees there had leaves like razors, and the ground was a mass of corpse-flesh. The hills and cliffs were heaps of bristling skeletons, and
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[133] Elizabeth English, Vajrayogini: Her Visualizations, Rituals, and Forms (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2002), 1; Shaw, Buddhist Goddesses of India, 4.
\item[134] Cosmologically speaking, Khecara is situated in Akaniṣṭha, the highest heaven of the form realm (rūpa-dhātu). This pure land is similar to other buddha lands except that it is said to be the only one in which beings can receive the Highest Yoga Tantra teachings and put them into practice. All reborn there through generation stage and powa (pho ba) practices will be born as sixteen-year-olds of great beauty and vitality with endless life-spans, who can only be reborn in samsāra of their volition (Gray, The Cakrasamvara Tantra, 29-30; Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, Guide to Dakini Land: A Commentary to the Highest Yoga Tantra Practice of Vajrayogini. (London: Tharpa, 2008), 22-25; Shaw, Buddhist Goddesses of India, 360, 382-4; Judith Simmer-Brown, Dakini’s Warm Breath: The Feminine Principle in Tibetan Buddhism (Boston: Shambhala, 2001), 268-270).
\end{footnotes}
for earth and rock there were but scattered fragments of bone. In the middle of this place there was a castle keep, its walls fashioned of three layers of human heads, some freshly cut, some dry, some putrescent, its root and doors contrived of human skins. All around and at a distance of a thousand leagues, the place was encircled by mountains of fire, a tent of vajras, a rain of weapons, the eight charnel grounds, and a fence of fair lotus flowers.\footnote{Padmakara Translation Group, trans., The Lady of the Lotus-Born: The Life and Enlightenment of Yeshe Tsogyal (Boston: Shambhala, 2002), 67-71; Simmer-Brown, Dakini’s Warm Breath, 127-8.}

As she entered the stronghold of that place, she saw all types of terrifying females with various offerings, some slicing off their own flesh and organs with knives to make a feast offering to Vajrayogini in union with her consort. Once done, Vajrayogini snapped her fingers and they all became whole once again. While her guru Padmasambhava would later warn Yeshe Tsogyel that this was not a literal call for her to mimic these acts but a symbolic one about devoting all of oneself to the dharma, these gruesome images are important to keep in mind, because Vajrayogini is often accompanied by the same hellish imagery and offerings of bloody sacrifice in her iconography.

The earliest known image of Vajravarahi as an independent deity separate from her consort dates from ninth or tenth century India, where she appears as a vajra-wielding goddess in the form of a small bronze statue.\footnote{English, Vajrayogini, 23, 43.} Not surprisingly, the deity manifests in an almost incalculable number of forms, more so than even most male deities, and many Vajrayogini doctrines even claim that she is the penultimate female buddha, with all Buddhist goddesses ultimately originating from her essence. Despite their hagiographic connection, however, the iconography of the most prevalent forms of Vajrayogini and Vajravarahi bears only slight resemblances to the images of Achi. Both forms of the wrathful buddha are classically depicted as fierce yet beautiful goddesses about sixteen years in age, the skin of their nearly-naked bodies red, their hair wild and black. Each typically stands in an active pose trampling a prostrate body or corpse; Vajrayogini in what is referred to as the 'archer's stance' and Vajravarahi in a 'dancing pose.'\footnote{The ‘archer's stance’ consists of one leg bent and the other outstretched, and comes in two types which mirror each other: \textit{āli̱dha} and \textit{pratvāli̱dha}, in which the right and left leg is bent, respectively (see Fig. 3). Linrothe has found this stance in depictions of wrathful deities dating from the eighth through thirteenth centuries. In a proper 'dancing pose', \textit{ardhaparyankāsana}, the left leg is bent at the knee and the entire weight is supported by the toes of that foot, while the right foot is drawn up close to left thigh. This mimics Śiva's 'world destruction dance,' and is typically found in images of deities dating to the eleventh through thirteenth centuries (Rob Linrothe, "Delivering Threats, Threatening Deliverance: Forms and Functions in Indo-Tibetan Esoteric Buddhist Wrathful Deities: Part One" in \textit{Oriental Art} XLVI: 2/3 (2000): 24-35, 92-105, 34.).} Both display a smile that betrays the small tusks or fangs they possess and a third vertical eye on their foreheads. Like other tantric deities, they are surrounded by haloes of flame, and as accoutrements

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136 English, Vajrayogini, 23, 43.
137 The ‘archer's stance’ consists of one leg bent and the other outstretched, and comes in two types which mirror each other: \textit{āli̱dha} and \textit{pratvāli̱dha}, in which the right and left leg is bent, respectively (see Fig. 3). Linrothe has found this stance in depictions of wrathful deities dating from the eighth through thirteenth centuries. In a proper 'dancing pose', \textit{ardhaparyankāsana}, the left leg is bent at the knee and the entire weight is supported by the toes of that foot, while the right foot is drawn up close to left thigh. This mimics Śiva's 'world destruction dance,' and is typically found in images of deities dating to the eleventh through thirteenth centuries (Rob Linrothe, "Delivering Threats, Threatening Deliverance: Forms and Functions in Indo-Tibetan Esoteric Buddhist Wrathful Deities: Part One" in \textit{Oriental Art} XLVI: 2/3 (2000): 24-35, 92-105, 34.)
\end{flushleft}
they hold a *vajra*-chopper (Tib. *gri gug*; Skt. *kartri*) in their right hands, a *kāpāla* in their left, and a *khaṭvāṅga*, or tantric staff, resting in the crook of their left arms. Reminiscent of deities in the tantric Śaiva religions, they wear garlands of freshly severed heads draped around their necks and an assortment of pieces made from bone referred to as the five *mūdram* - earrings, necklaces, armlets and anklets, a wheel at the crown of the head, and a girdle. As leaders of their own maṇḍalas, they also wear the sixth *mūdra* usually reserved for male deities: the smearing of cremation ash upon their bodies. Both being wrathful buddhas, they wear a five-skull crown (*rigs lnga khro bo*) upon their heads, but only images of Vajravārāhī distinctively add the small head of a wild boar (*vārāhī*) emerging from behind her right ear or above the crown from amid her hair, referencing the name of that particular epiphany, 'Indestructible She-Boar.' Aside from the common iconographic details of a third open eye, a skull-bowl, and a flaming aura, there is very little in common between Achi and the deity she emanates from, but looking at the origins of Vajrayogini's distinctive appearance could shed light on how this deity influences the image and persona of the dharma protectress at hand.

3.1.1 Ḍākinīs, Yoginīs, and the Origins of Tantra

For the uninitiated, images of deities drinking blood from skulls or dancing naked covered in bone ornaments may seem striking, extraordinary, or even disturbing. These are, however, commonplace for those familiar with the history of Hindu and Buddhist tantric traditions. While defining tantra in simple terms is a task even the most skilled scholars have debated, the use of highly eroticized and violent imagery remains a key factor in recognizing its influence. Generally speaking, while there are a number of these implements have connections to early Indian Śaiva practitioners, to be discussed in the following section, but the *khaṭvāṅga* or tantric staff is a particularly complex iconographic symbol within the Buddhist tradition. Paired with a female deity, it represents the masculine trait of *upāya* and her consort; in the case of Vajrayogini, this is Heruka-Cakrasamvara. The top of the long shaft is usually a *vajra*, on which three severed heads have been impaled – one fresh, one semi-decomposed, and one a dry skull. These three represent various ideals, depending on the practice. On one hand, they can represent the three realms of desire (*kāma-dhātu*), form (*rūpa-dhātu*), and formlessness (*arūpa-dhātu*), respectively. On the other, they can represent the three bodies of the Buddha – the *dharmacāya*, *sambhogakāya*, and *nirmāṇakāya*. Other meanings exist as well, as do meanings for each of the various ribbons and accessories that are tied to its hilt (Robert Beer, *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1999), 261-263).

138 All of these implements have connections to early Indian Śaiva practitioners, to be discussed in the following section, but the *khaṭvāṅga* or tantric staff is a particularly complex iconographic symbol within the Buddhist tradition. Paired with a female deity, it represents the masculine trait of *upāya* and her consort; in the case of Vajrayogini, this is Heruka-Cakrasamvara. The top of the long shaft is usually a *vajra*, on which three severed heads have been impaled – one fresh, one semi-decomposed, and one a dry skull. These three represent various ideals, depending on the practice. On one hand, they can represent the three realms of desire (*kāma-dhātu*), form (*rūpa-dhātu*), and formlessness (*arūpa-dhātu*), respectively. On the other, they can represent the three bodies of the Buddha – the *dharmacāya*, *sambhogakāya*, and *nirmāṇakāya*. Other meanings exist as well, as do meanings for each of the various ribbons and accessories that are tied to its hilt (Robert Beer, *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1999), 261-263).

139 According to Beer, the traditional six bone ornaments represent the six perfections of the bodhisattva path: generosity, morality, patience, effort, meditation, and wisdom respectively. Because the female body itself represents the sixth perfection, female deities are not usually required to wear the smearing of ashes, and therefore usually only wear the first five bone ornaments. These all have iconographic roots in the accoutrements of the Indian Śaiva movement of the Kāpālikas, known for their transgressive and cremation-ground-based practices, to be discussed in the next section (English, *Vajrayogini*, 51; Beer, *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*, 318).

140 This headdress is worn frequently by powerful buddhas and dharma protectors of both sexes, while some lower ranking protective deities wear a diadem of three skulls, or simply a single skull at the front (Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, 12).

141 This boar-head appendage only occurs in epiphanies of Vajravārāhī, and seems to have appeared as late as the twelfth century. Earlier Indian images of the goddess did not possess it (Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, 373).
of ritual styles, beliefs, and worship practices that can be identified as having roots in tantric practice, a tradition only needs to support a handful of them to be considered a tantric religion.\textsuperscript{142} Davidson describes its basic purpose as a means of obtaining and manipulating structures of power, be they mundane or supernatural, typically formulated into the arrangement of a \textit{mandala}. These non-institutional esoteric movements and their leaders - sorcerer-practitioners known as \textit{siddhas} - attempted not only to gain control of their own bodies, but vied for power in the world around them, eventually garnering the attention and patronage of political leaders.\textsuperscript{143} Brahmanical religion demanded distinctions between issues of purity and impurity, and tantric practitioners utilized the power given to impure acts and substances, such as sex, blood, bodily excretions, and objects and places related to death, to their own advantage. Transgressive acts could be used to propel one toward divine powers, and eventually, awakening. While the precise origin of these practices is debated, what is known is that as early as the fifth century C.E., texts that propagated practices that defied the social norms of contemporary institutional religions were being written and distributed on a wide scale. The contents of these texts include violent rituals and the promotion of sexual practices that were deemed necessary for achievement. In terms of imagery and practice, Buddhist tantra and its \textit{siddha} practitioners have strong connections to Indian Śaiva movements, emerging by the early eighth century out of transgressive groups like the Kāpālikas and the Pāṇḍūpatas. There is evidence that this was not the only source for this new way of thought, however, and while intertextuality exists between the \textit{siddha} groups and the Hindu movements, Davidson argues successfully that indigenous tribal and outcaste practices influenced much of this rising culture as well.\textsuperscript{144} These movements contained practitioners from various religious and social backgrounds, and while in some cases their controversial texts were eventually adopted by mainstream Buddhist practitioners, there are questions as to how much was sanitized for monastic practice. There is certainly evidence that elements

\textsuperscript{142}David Gordon White's working definition of tantra: "Tantra is that Asian body of beliefs and practices which, working from the principle that the universe we experience is nothing other than the concrete manifestation of the divine energy of the godhead that creates and maintains that universe, seeks to ritually appropriate and channel that energy, within the human microcosm, in creative and emancipative ways" (David Gordon White, introduction to \textit{Tantra in Practice} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 9). Four indigenous Tibetan categories are used to refer to the bodies of tantric texts and rituals, ranked by what is traditionally held as the lowest to the highest. These are the Action (\textit{Kriyā}) Tantras, Observance (\textit{Cāryā}) Tantras, Yoga (\textit{Yoga}) Tantras, and Highest Yoga (\textit{Anuttarayoga}) Tantras (Jacob Dalton, "A Crisis of Doxography: How Tibetans Organized Tantra During the 8\textsuperscript{th}-12\textsuperscript{th} Centuries," in \textit{Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies}, 28 (2005): 115-179; White, \textit{Tantra in Practice}, 22).

\textsuperscript{143}This features as a major argument of Davidson's thesis (Ronald Davidson, \textit{Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 1-24).

\textsuperscript{144}Davidson, \textit{Indian Esoteric Buddhism}, 170, 231-268. For more information on the rise of tantric movements and particularly their incorporation into Buddhist practices, see: Geoffrey Samuel, \textit{The Origins of Yoga and Tantra: Indic Religions to the Thirteenth Century} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Alexis Sanderson, "The Śaiva Age: The Rise and Dominance of Śaivism During the Early Medieval Period," in \textit{Genesis and Development of Tantrism}, Shingo Einoo, ed. (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Institute of Oriental Culture, 2009), 124-243; White, \textit{Tantra in Practice}. 
of the tantric traditions were later philosophically justified and explained by Buddhist authors. This is inherently what occurred in Tibet, as these later Buddhist texts were adopted and translated starting as early as the seventh century. The type of Buddhism that eventually evolved in this region was therefore tantric in nature, and continues to be today.

It is from this religious milieu that one finds the origins of the female divinities commonly known as dākinīs in Buddhism and yoginīs in Hindu tantra. Originally, these entities were members of some indigenous non-Brahmanical pantheon of India, described as powerful female spirits who inhabited the charnel grounds, cemeteries, and wild mountainsides causing pestilence, mischief, and general disruption, and at times could even possess women who wandered into their lairs. These flying, witch-like beings can be seen in conjunction with tantric practice as early as the fifth century, from which a Vaiṣṇava inscription remains in a temple in Mandasor. According to English,

The aim of much tantric yogic practice was to access the power of these terrible spirits by delighting them with the transgressive offerings, including offerings of sexual fluids, and inducing them to serve the yogin's own interests. As the primary goal of tantric practice is to gain control over elements of power, practitioners sought to seduce and subdue these entities in hopes of accumulating supernatural abilities and a retinue of spirits under their own command through rituals involving sexual activity and transgressive offerings. This is supported by evidence supplied by White, who describes the proto-tantric cults as moving away from a "cremation-ground-based-asceticism," which used blood sacrifice and alcohol as a means of merely satisfying a host of fearsome deities, to an emphasis in the ninth or tenth century on "erotico-mystical practice" with a specifically female class of entities known as the yoginīs. These fierce women were

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145 While the term yoginī is later defined simply as a female yogin, or in many cases the consort of a yogin, in early tantras it seems to refer to a specific supernatural female entity. The meaning of the word dākinī, however, is less apparent. While many have claimed that it means "one who flies", coming from the Sanskrit verb di meaning "to fly", there is some argument that it actually derives from the verb dam, "to sound." In either case, the first definition seems to have been favored by Tibetan translators, who translated it as khandroma (mkha' ‗gro ma), which means "one who moves through the sky" (Simmer-Brown, Dakini's Warm Breath, 45; David Gordon White, Kiss of the Yoginī: Tantric Sex in its South Asian Contexts (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003), 207).

146 English, Vajrayoginī, 43.

147 Mātrkās and yakṣinīs are both types of female deities indigenous to the ancient Indian landscape. Both seem to have been dark and frightening in nature, but while the mātrkās eventually earned individual names and kinder natures, the yakṣinīs became identified with beautiful wood nymph-like women inhabiting the groves and trees (White, Kiss of the Yogini, 8; Thomas B. Coburn, Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the Devi-Māhātmya and a Study of Its Interpretation (Albany: New York Press, 1991), 21; Gail Hinich Sutherland, The Disguises of the Demon: The Development of the Yakṣa in Hinduism and Buddhism (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 137-147).
often interchangeable with one another, as well as with other female entities like the mātrakās and yaksinīs, who were possibly antecedents to the dākinī and yoginī classifications. Ideally these beings were taken as consorts, and once they had been tamed by sexual practice and the substances offered them, a practitioner could gain control of the spirit deity and her associated magic powers. In the case of early Buddhist esotericism, this could mean turning the creature from a dangerous enemy to a defender of the practitioner and his tradition.

It is not surprising that Könchok Gyatso and the tradition to which he belongs would seek to distinguish Achi and other fully-Buddhist deities, also identified as a dākinīs, from these violent and terrifying females. While the image of the blood-thirsty, sexually-driven dākinī remains within Tibetan Buddhist narratives, another more beneficent aspect to her nature began to emerge in late Indian tantric texts and even later Tibetan legends. In fact, most Buddhist sources on these beings can be found within the Cakrasaṃvara cycle of texts, which feature their sovereign queen, Vajrayoginī. These tantric texts distinguish a number of different types of dākinīs which could be called on depending on the level of achievement and needs of the practitioner. The two most important distinctions seem to be between the worldly dākinī (Tib. ’jik rten kyi mkha’ ‘gro; Skt. lokaḍākinī) and the wisdom dākinī (Tib. ye shes mkha’ ‘gro; Skt. jñānaḍākinī). The first group resembles the frightening creatures of early tantric practice; they are untrustworthy in nature, able to take attractive forms to seduce their prey, and are often bound under the control of a greater, more powerful deity or religious practitioner. The indigenous Tibetan mamo (ma mo) is considered a specific sub-class of the worldly dākinī, and these spirit deities are described as ugly, fierce demonesses armed with sacks of diseases, magical dice, and black snares. While these entities can be subdued by Buddhist practitioners, they must be bound by oaths to be made into protectresses of the religion.148 On the other hand, the wisdom dākinī is considered to be a fully enlightened being who actively works to help practitioners of the Buddhist religion. While she can appear in wrathful forms, she is actually a realized being and a protector of teachings and teachers. Throughout the life-stories of great Tibetan saints, wisdom dākinīs often appear in times of crisis to assist an individual in need, or in times of revelation to pass along new teachings and practices. Tibetan manuals go to great lengths to describe the differences between these types of dākinīs because of the effect they can have on a practitioner's life; unknowingly trusting a worldly dākinī can lead to one's death or the destruction of one's lineage, whereas missing an opportunity to receive teachings from a wisdom dākinī can result in negative consequences for one's practice.149 Making this distinction is not always easy. Aside from appearing as purely supernatural entities, Tibetans believe dākinīs can be reborn as human women, both as mothers of practitioners and

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149Simmer-Brown, Dakini's Warm Breath, 54.
practitioners themselves. Therefore, tantric vows include a responsibility to treat all women as dākinīs.150 Because of the great lengths Achi's hagiographers go to in order to prove that she belongs to this latter category of enlightened wisdom dākinīs, this topic will be returned to in the discussion of the life-stories of female saints in the following chapter.

3.1.2 The Accessories of the Goddess

The images of Achi emerge from this rich history, and examining the individual aspects of her attire and accoutrements allows not only a better understanding of the goddess, but the import of meaning each of those subtle pieces may have in the minds of her devotees. Each element of Achi's iconography is part of the cultural repertoire of Tibetan religion, with links to tantric, Buddhist, and indigenous identifications. As such, what may seem to be a simple detail of clothing or background can carry far more significant connotations in the mind of its relevant audience. These elements of the religious repertoire identify Achi not only as a semi-wrathful deity despite her beatific appearance but connect her to a tantric legacy shared with Vajrayoginī and the ranks of wisdom dākinīs.

As noted previously, there are only three exact parallels between the primary forms of Vajrayoginī and the two most common images of Achi. These are the presence of a vertical third eye, a halo of flame, and the holding of a kāpālā in the left hand. All are typical elements seen in images of numerous tantric deities and with dākinīs in general. When distinguishing a mundane from a supramundane dākinī, Judith Simmer-Brown points out the vertical third eye as a distinguishing characteristic only possessed by the latter, representing her awakened insight into reality.151 Anyone familiar with the numerous images of Central and South Asian deities who utilize this in their iconographies may question this assertion, but in the context of some later tantric texts it may make sense, because all supreme females – goddesses or buddhas – are explained to be wisdom dākinīs in essence. Similarly, the inverted horseshoe-shaped aura of flames surrounding both is common with semi-wrathful and wrathful tutelary deities, such as Hevajra, Kālacakra, and Cakrasaṃvara. This is often described as the 'blaze of awareness fire', and represents the deity's wisdom-energy.152 The last of the direct similarities, the kāpāla, like the assortment of bone ornaments and the smearing of ash worn by Vajrayoginī, has its roots in the Śaiva movements. The Kāpālikas were the most notorious of these ascetic groups, appearing in dramatic literature and poetry as either villains or comic relief due to their transgressive preoccupations with ritual sex and the ingestion of impure substances. While not an institutional order, practitioners devoted themselves to Bhairava, the wrathful form of Śiva, and in

151 Simmer-Brown, *Dakini’s Warm Breath*, 64.
emulation of him they smeared themselves with ashes, roamed the cremation grounds, and carried a skull (kāpara), from which their name derives. These renunciants fashioned themselves after the worst kind of criminal according to Hindu law – the murderer of a Brahmin – and in their penance hoped to approach their deity by purposefully extricating themselves from society and transgressing its normative behaviors. Part of this emulation required the wearing of certain ornaments, but the exact list is known to vary as well as be adopted and adapted by other ascetic movements. Aside from the assorted pieces of bone jewelry and their skull-bowls, Kāpālikas were known for their possession of a trident or a khatvānga as well, which might be topped with a skull and a dāmaru.153 While both Vajrayoginī and Achi carry their own kāpālas, one is filled with blood from which the great goddess drinks, while the other holds a wish-fulfilling jewel, signaling Achi’s ability to bestow the desires of her devotees.

At first glance, there appear to be far more differences than similarities between the two deities, but numerous connections can be made through an examination of their shared esoteric Buddhist repertoire. While Vajrayoginī appears naked in only these bone implements, Achi is fully clothed in elaborate brocade robes and ornate jewelry. Rather than connecting Achi to tantric practice, this style of dress reflects her hagiographic status as a noble woman and is reminiscent of the peaceful Mahāyāna deities who appear seated on lotus thrones in heavenly abodes. At least one sādhana specifies that it is the 'five kinds of the silken garments', which could refer to five elements of dress that each represent one of the Five Buddha Families, just as numerous pieces of Vajrayoginī's attire do as well.154 While the same kāpāla is held in each of their left hands, different accoutrements can be depicted in the right. For Vajrayoginī, this is typically the vajra-chopper, a version of a kind of flaying knife with a handle in the shape of a vajra (Tib. rdo rje), also known appropriately as the 'knife of the dākinī.' Despite its violent appearance, traditions account that the sharp curved blade is used by the enlightened beings to cut through delusion and the five poisons of ignorance, desire, hatred, pride, and jealousy. Alternate versions of the wrathful goddess, particularly earlier ones, depict her with a simple vajra in hand. The vajra is the paramount symbol of tantric Vajrayāna Buddhism, and is often translated as 'diamond', 'adamantine', or 'indestructible' as it symbolizes the immutable state of Buddhahood. It is also a reference to royal scepters and the original weapon of Indra, a thunderbolt. As a ritual implement, it symbolizes the masculine

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154 The patrons of the Five Great Buddha-Families are Vairocana, Aksobhya, Amitābha, Ratnasambhava, and Amoghasiddhi. According to Beer, the 'five kinds of the silken garments' can also refer to five specific garments traditionally worn by these peaceful deities: "an upper white silk bodice embroidered with gold, a multi-colored silk dhoti or loincloth, a yellow scarf worn as a sash, a multi-colored ribbon under the tiara, and a long blue or green scarf draped over the shoulders" (Beer, The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs, 202, 318).
principle of upāya, or skillful means, and is often used in conjunction with a feminine implement, like a kāpāla or chopper.¹⁵⁵

Achi’s implements do not have such an outright violent appearance, but still carry weighty connotations as further attributes typically belonging to Kāpālikas. The primary accoutrement associated with Achi is the hand-held damaru, and aside from appearing in her stories and iconography, the resounding sound of the small drum is said to accompany her miracles and visits to her followers, as can be seen in the descriptions of these events in the previous chapter. Larger versions of the tantric damaru, which can be seen in the possession of various wrathful and semi-wrathful deities, are ideally fashioned from the joined skulls of each a sixteen-year-old boy and sixteen-year-old girl, thereby linking it with its origins in the charnel ground and cemetery imagery. The drum is most commonly associated with Tibetan chö (gcod) practice, which is credited to a famous female yoginī Machik Lapdrön (Ma gcig lab sgron, 1055-1152) from within the Kagyü sect.¹⁵⁶ Interestingly enough, the less wrathful standing version of Achi carries none of these implements, not even a kāpāla. Her wish-fulfilling jewel, mirror, bare-feet, and heavenly scenery seem ideally passive and feminine, and in many ways this is the case. Achi’s mirror, however, has its own connections to Tibetan cultural repertoires of indigenous divination practice and tantric ritual. Individual oracles and cults of spirit possession have had profound religious and political influence throughout Tibet’s history, and the mirror is their most important instrument. After setting one or three of these ritual items in a cup of grain, the oracle consults the mirror and falls into a trance from which she can answer not only questions in moments of crisis, but ones concerning the whole range of human experience – health, kinship, weather, work, politics, and so forth. Due to their importance, many of these heirloom items have been kept as precious possessions even though many pieces of ritual paraphernalia have been lost since the Cultural Revolution. Furthermore, while both men and women can function as mediums, Diemberger’s research reveals that where men are usually the chosen diviners on the level of institutional religion, female oracles predominate the lay and local scene of village life.¹⁵⁷ Achi’s possession of a mirror taps into this rich tradition of female-oriented ritual power.

Finally, one of the most prominent points of departure between Achi and Vajrayoginī is the dharma protectress's possession of a mount. While uncommon among fully enlightened buddhas and tutelary deities, mounts are quite common among the more mundane indigenous teaching guardians. Due to the vast distances and difficult terrain separating pre-modern Tibetan communities, horses were revered for their swift and reliable transport, and were even granted their own set of thirty-two marks of perfection, akin to those given to buddhas and dākinīs.\(^\text{158}\) Achi’s mount is no mere mundane horse, however, but a blue wind-horse, which carries a number of auspicious connections in Tibetan culture. Both the horse and the wind are viewed as natural vehicles for movement, and prayer flags are known by this name as well. The mount of the epic hero Gesar of Ling is also the wind-horse, and, in Tibetan medical and astrological systems, the divine animal symbolizes the combination of all of the elements of personal health and harmony: life energy (srog); health (lus); personal power (dbang thang); and lastly success, for which the Tibetan word, lung ta (rlung rta) literally translates as "wind-horse" on its own. While Vajrayoginī specifically connects to resources rooted in Indian tantric past, Achi’s iconography connects her to multiple layers of the Tibetan cultural repertoire, from indigenous practice to social status, from Mahāyāna imagery to tantric ritual. This allows her to appeal to the Tibetan consciousness on more than one level through numerous avenues. These specific tantric rituals and the individual elements of Achi’s hagiographies will be addressed in the next chapter, but interpreting the multiple roles Achi may assume for her sect first relies on an understanding of the greater pantheon of deities in Tibet. From this, one can see where the semi-wrathful protectress fits amidst its complicated hierarchy, which has roots not only in local religion but in Indian notions of the universe as well.

### 3.2 Understanding Tibetan Deities

Practitioners throughout the history of the Buddhism have always had to deal with conceptions of benevolent, malevolent, and indifferent divine forces throughout the natural and supernatural world. This is particularly the case for Tibetan Buddhism, in which a host of deities of varying strengths, powers and temperaments must be dealt with on a regular basis by both religious specialists and laymen alike. These beings permeate the cultural and textual landscapes of the religion, and due to their often capricious natures and the difference of opinions between various texts, teachings and interpretations, it is virtually

\(^{158}\) Beer describes these marks as follows: “The ‘pearl’ of the horse's eye is the chief of these thirty-two signs. The eye should be round with a pure white colour, the pupil bean-shaped and of a deep colour, the iris should have a hue of five colours. The mane should consist of ten thousand soft hairs, and the upraised tail should flow like a comet. The ears should be shaped like a willow leaf, the tongue slender, pink, and clean like a two edged sword, the gums a light colour, and the incisor and molar teeth spaced firmly apart. The neck, forehead, breast, bones, skull, sinews, legs, knees, and fetlocks all bear similar signs of distinction. A particular mystique is also accorded to the colour marks of the forehead, hoofs, and body of a perfect thoroughbred steed, which though possibly high strung is never distributed by sudden sounds or startling sights” (Beer, *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*, 60-62).
impossible to determine a single categorical scheme for the multitude of deities within the Tibetan pantheon. One traditional scheme divides the supernatural beings into eight categories (sde brgyad), which include buddhas, bodhisattvas, gurus, yidams, dharma protectors, and dākinīs, plus various types of lower level indigenous spirits which differ from list to list. The number eight is often considered an auspicious and convenient number, and Tibetan authors often attempt to categorize items into such groupings, even if there are technically more items that could be included. Dākinīs, one of the classes to which Achi belongs, became increasingly important in Tibetan practice, and according to Adelheid Hermann-Pfandt, "form the only purely female class, and, on the whole, they are probably the most important personifications of the feminine in Tantric Buddhism."\(^{159}\) Of the categories mentioned, Achi seems to be able to fill them all, and five out of six appear to be more like titles that can be earned rather than a species one can be born into.\(^{160}\) To the unacquainted, the majority of the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon appears aggressive, fearsome, and malicious. Juxtaposed against the beautiful and serene images of enlightened beings from the rest of the Buddhist world, this caused early visitors to Tibet to identify these deities as inherently evil in comparison.\(^{161}\) Despite these appearances, a great number of these frightening deities are actually benevolent in nature, drafted into the service of Buddhism. Achi, while far from demonic in appearance, belongs to this greater pantheon, finding her place among their ranks somewhere between the most benevolent and most wrathful of them all.

### 3.2.1 What's in a Name: Dharma Protectors and Teaching Guardians

Perhaps the most diverse class of deities within this mix is that of the dharma protector – a defender of the Buddhist religion. More of a title than a species of supernatural entity, almost any type of sentient being – human or otherwise – can earn the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of these figures. Other titles are used as well, such as tensungma (bstan srung ma), "guardian of the teachings", and damjen (dam can), "one bound by oath"; the latter referring to those beings that were once harmful to the

\(^{159}\)Hermann-Pfandt, "Dākinīs in Indo-Tibetan Tantric Buddhism," 45-49.

\(^{160}\) This list differs from the eight classes of gods and demons (lha sрин sde brgyad), a list of indigenous species of spirit deities discussed in a later section of this chapter.

\(^{161}\) One of the earliest and regrettably most ineffectual interpretations of Buddhist deities has been to view them simply as a dichotomy between 'gods' and 'demons', in which the former constitutes all the entities perceived as beneficial, and the latter as dangerous and hostile to humans. If left at this, one finds that almost any deity that does not specifically go by the title of deva or devī in the original Sanskrit falls in the catch-all category of the demonic. This term, however, carries an abundance of negative Western connotations that dilute the diversity of these entities, and while some may very well embody these malicious traits, few scholars would be hard-pressed to settle on such an imprecise title. Bhattacharyya, in claiming that there are no clear cut distinctions between "gods and divine beings" on the one hand and "demons and spirits" on the other, classifies almost all supernatural beings, with the exception of the Buddha himself, as a category of demon, and even goes so far as to refer to some beneficial deities in further Christian-Judeo terms such as “archangels of the Buddha.” In trying too hard to translate Indian cosmology into familiar Western terminology, he loses much of the meaning and diversity in the rich cultural tradition (Narendra Nath Bhattacharyya, *Indian Demonology: The Inverted Pantheon* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2000), 11, 66).
propagation of Buddhism but were then subdued into its protection. These deities, maintaining various
levels of ability and insight, guard hidden texts, protect members of lineages from harm, and watch over
the land-holdings and monasteries of their charges. They can appear as peaceful or wrathful, as human or
non-human, brandishing ritual items or weapons, but each is a formidable opponent to the enemies of the
dharma. They are recruits to the ranks of the Buddhist pantheon, either forcefully conscripted by their
vows to powerful practitioners or by their own volition for the sake of the religion. Just as Kônchok
Gyatso describes in his hagiography, René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz cites a two-pronged division among
the protectors of the dharma, quite similar to the two types of dākinīs addressed above. On one side are
supramundane protectors, the fully-enlightened 'guardians who have passed beyond samsāra' ('jig rten las
'das pa'i srung ma') and on the other are the worldly guardians or 'guardians who have not yet passed
beyond samsāra' ('jig rten pa'i srung ma / 'jig rten ma 'das pa'i srung ma'). While much of the first group
are only approachable by ritual specialists and yogic practitioners, the second group commonly resides in
the world and can take an active role in the lives of Tibetans, some even taking possession of mediums or
intervening in times of trouble. Providing a number of other general terms for these entities, Nebesky-
Wojkowitz adds that this is not a rigid, unchanging system. Rather, the worldly guardians, still subject to
the laws of karma, continue to collect good merit for their efforts in protecting the Buddhist doctrine and
its followers, eventually causing them to transcend samsāra and reach the status of buddhas
themselves.¹⁶²

Due to the wide variety of beings designated as dharma protectors in Tibetan hagiography and
ritual, appearances vary greatly among them. In his analysis of the iconography of vast number of male
guardians and divine beings, Linrothe divides them into three useful categories: "dangerous protectors," "enlightened protectors," and "wrathful buddhas." The first, the dangerous protectors, encompass the
lowest rung of worldly protectors. They are fractious and unpredictable, and they are often described in
their related mythologies as converted indigenous or foreign deities. While given some duties with respect
to the protection of the religion, their primary responsibilities are mundane. Laymen call on them for the
birth of sons, to ensure health or provide wealth or medicinal cures, and to protect tracts of land from
invasion or epidemics. Of those native to Tibet, many are said to have been subdued by the great powers
of the legendary Padmasambhava, who is credited with bringing Buddhism to the country during the
eight century. Others were conquered and brought under oath by the numerous powerful masters that
followed in the centuries after.¹⁶³ As the country was slowly converted to the Buddhist religion,

¹⁶²Nebesky-Wojkowitz, Oracles and Demons of Tibet, 3-5. This is not exclusive to Tibet, but can be seen throughout
the Buddhist world. Strong parallels can be drawn to Japanese religion, in which indigenous deities are often
conscripted as protectors of the Buddhist teachings as well (Mark Teeuwen and Fabio Rambelli, Buddhas and Kami
in Japan: Honji Suijaki as a Combinatory Paradigm (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003)).
¹⁶³Linrothe and Watt, Demonic Divine, 15-17.
indigenous deities were incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon rather than supplanted, and the territories which they maintained were transformed through ritual appropriation and pilgrimage practices. Many of these converted deities are pictured riding ordinary or supernatural animal mounts, and often they wear armor and other attributes appropriate for battle.

The second grouping is that of the enlightened protectors, and it mostly contains the primary guardians of specific lineages, teachings, rituals, meditation texts, and treasure texts. While these beings can provide this-worldly benefits like the dangerous protectors, such as wealth and well-being, they can also provide spiritual assistance with regard to religious practice and the pursuit of enlightenment, and are themselves considered awakened beings. As mentioned above with regard to Achi's attire, the major iconographic difference between dangerous and enlightened protectors is the propensity for the former to wear boots instead of walking barefoot, and this distinction is the same for the next group of deities, the wrathful buddhas.164 This third group is the most important with regard to religious practice, and form a subset of the larger category of tantric tutelary deities, who, as Linrothe points out, are mostly beneficent in appearance.165 All of these deities emerged after the eighth century, and while they owe facets of their imagery to the deities of Indian Śiva religion, none are directly derived from them. Examples of such prominent Tibetan Buddhist figures are Vajrabhairava, Cakrasamvara, and Hevajra. They appear as the fearsome Heruka-type, often with "multitudinous arms bearing attributes of power and ferocity, [and] three-eyed faces distorted in scowls of rage."166 Despite their terrifying appearance, these wrathful buddhas take on these forms to combat the most powerful inner demons of their practitioners and devotees, each meant to specifically counter a particularly pervasive afflictive emotion.

3.2.2 Hierarchy in the Tibetan Pantheon

The ranks of dharma protectors, bodhisattvas, and buddhas, in all of their forms, are pulled from the repertoires of local religion, either from the plethora of indigenous Tibetan spirits or imported from India's own pantheons. As with dākinīs, many Indian and Tibetan entities have been conflated in Tibet so that it is often hard to tell the point in which one ends and the other begins. Nevertheless, all of these minor deities inhabit the legends and the features of the natural landscape, such as the mountains, lakes, and forests within the human realm. One could even claim that a major function of Tibetan ritual is to propitiate these spirit deities in order to induce them to be helpful and prevent misfortune. Tradition separates the world into a three-fold cosmos – above, below, and in between– with the entities known as lha (lha), lu (klu), and sadak (sa bdag) dwelling in each respectively. The lha inhabit the sky above the

164 Linrothe and Watt, Demonic Divine, 18-19.
165 Linrothe and Watt, Demonic Divine, 26.
166 Beer, The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs, 42.
earth, the *lu* control the rivers and springs below, and the *sadak* occupy the open grounds and fields between. Traditional texts often expand this list with further species of beings, citing another list of deities known as the eight classes of gods and demons (*lha srin sde brgyad*), but again the number eight seems to be one of convenience as the actual contents can vary by text and sect. One of these additions is the *mamo*, mentioned previously as an indigenous female entity often equated with ferocious mundane *ḍākinīs*. The temperaments and general appearances of these spirit deities can differ greatly by class and by individual, but in all cases each can become dangerous if not treated with the proper respect. Various types of disease, injury, insanity and ill-fortune are blamed on transgressing these entities, and the negative effects can only be cured through the proper identification of the hostile spirit and the performance of the necessary ritual procedures to either exorcise or placate it. Many of the most powerful 'worldly gods,' despite some superficial connections to the religion and its rituals, seem to have very little to do with Buddhism from a doctrinal standpoint; they are often identified as the pre-Buddhist and indigenous deities of Tibet, or in the case of malevolent spirits, with supernatural horrors such as hostile ghosts that had formerly been human beings. For the most part, these deities are capricious at best, and are viewed with an attitude of suspicion, fear, or avoidance. Many are potential dangers, and must be controlled by Buddhist lay and monastic specialists, a point that will be returned to in a subsequent chapter.

Ultimately, in any hierarchy of Tibetan deities the fully-enlightened buddhas and bodhisattvas rise to the top. The Tibetan word *yidam* is most commonly translated to mean one's main meditation or chosen tutelary deity, but this comes from its root meaning of "vow" or "promise." The *yidam* is that supreme deity to which the tantric practitioner devotes herself and her practice to, and from whom she can

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167 Beyer claims the *sadak* are considered lords of the grounds and roads, and, while easily offended, are commonly neutral in temperament. The *lu* each have individual dispositions, good or bad, and are considered lords of the underworld. They also preside over springs, wells, and rivers, which can act as gateways to their realms. The *lha* are neutral or benevolent divinities who inhabit the skies and heavens. At times this group is replaced by the *nyen* (*gnyan*), who are almost always malignant in nature, and can exist anywhere but particularly prefer trees, pillars, and stones above the surface of the earth. This corresponds with Davidson's assessment of this tripartite division of spirits, which exist throughout all the elements of nature, including the clouds, winds, lightning, and other aspects of the physical landscape (Beyer, *The Cult of Tārā*, 294; Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 217).

168 The ten most commonly cited deities among these variations are *lu*, *nyen*, *sadak*, *tsen* (*btsan*), *gyelpo* (*rgyal po*), *dūd* (*bdud*), *mamo*, *za* (*gza*), *nöjin* (*gnod sbyin*), and *lha*, and Kônychok Gyatso provides an example of a dharma protector for each of these and more in the previous translation of Achi's hagiography (Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 162). Some of these entities are considered synonymous to Indian spirits, as the Tibetan *lu* are to the Indian *nāgā*, and the *nöjin* to the *yakṣa*. The similarities between these pairs are debated, however, and may be in part anachronistic. For further information see: Anne-Marie Blondeau, "Le Réseau des mille dieux-démons: mythes et classifications," in *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 15 (November 2008): 199-250; Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*; Robert DeCaroli, *Haunting the Buddha: Indian Popular Religions and the Formation of Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Tayé, *Myriad Worlds: Buddhist Cosmology in Abhidharma, Kalacakrā, and Dzog-chen* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1995); Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*; Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*; Gail Hinich Sutherland, *The Disguises of the Demon: The Development of the Yakṣa in Hinduism and Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).
gain the various mundane and supramundane achievements of tantric deity yoga as discussed in the next chapter. The yidam is ranked second only to one's lama, superseding even one's refuge in the traditional Three Jewels of the Buddha, Dharma the Saṅgha. Each of these deities presides over its own cycle of texts, liturgies, and commentaries within the Highest Yoga Tantras, and features as the essential component of generation and completion stage yoga. Despite their distance from their devotees and their ineffable natures, these tutelary deities become the recipients of the closest personal and emotional bonds in their devotees. They can appear as a variety of emanations, ranging anywhere from peaceful and solitary to supremely wrathful and in sexual embrace with a consort or in the company of a retinue. While all of the high ranking buddhas are given primacy by each of the sects of Tibetan Buddhism, some lineages are more greatly indebted to certain ones over others. The Kagyū sect, for instance, is particularly devoted to Cakrasaṃvara and his consort Vajra vāraṇāśī or Vajrayoginī, which explains why the protectress of the Drikung Kagyū lineage would have such a strong connection to both deities.

3.3 Local Comparisons

Despite her status as a fully-enlightened dākinī and her legendary identification as an emanation of Vajrayoginī, the most prominent images of Achi share more in common with the iconographies of oath-bound female dharma protectors than with images of traditional tutelary deities. While the appearances of these protectors can vary drastically, many have mounts of various species, are conscripted to protect specific areas of land, and share their hagiographies with particular masters and lineages to which they teach and are taught. In his own explanation of the multitude of deities within the Tibetan pantheon and of dharma protectors in particular, Köchok Gyang lists a number of specific gods and goddesses and the roles that they play. In particular, he mentions two strikingly different deities within local and institutional traditions that serve as interesting points of comparison with the subject of this study. One is a set of five goddesses, Tashi Ts'eRINGma (Bkra shis Tshe ring ma) and her sisters, all personally oath-bound by the hero Milarépa (Mi la ras pa, 1052-1135) himself, while the other is Penden Lhamo, the popular and prominent guardian of the Dalai Lamas and the ruling Geluk sect of Tibetan Buddhism. The first group, the Five Long-Life Sisters (Tshe ring mchad lnga), are conscripted protectors of Tibet in general and the Kagyū lineage specifically, with related rituals even appearing in The Sādhana Handbook of the Teaching Guardian Achi, perhaps hinting at some form of deeper relationship between the female entities. Each is a beautifully sublime deity, dressed in fine robes and jewelry, riding her own animal mount. While each of these protectresses bears close physical

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170 Both images of Tashi Ts'erimgma (Fig. 5) and Penden Lhamo (Fig. 6) are provided courtesy of the Rubin Museum of Art's online collection.
resemblance to Achi, the distinguishing difference lies in their natures, a fact that is stressed in each of Achi’s hagiographies. Despite her shared appearance with these worldly dākinī guardians, Achi is instead a wisdom dākinī who chose to emanate in saṃsāra, protecting the religion not by oath, but by her own volition.

Iconographically-speaking, the ferocious and blood-soaked Penden Lhamo seems to have more in common with Vajrayogini than with Achi, but both function as personal protectors to a tantric lineage, performing key roles in the hagiographies of their respective sects’ most influential teachers. All three goddesses are considered enlightened in what is chiefly a male-dominated Buddhist pantheon, and as is the case with most wrathful Buddhist deities, the image that ties the three together is the possession of a kāpāla in the left hand. While both Vajrayogini’s and Penden Lhamo’s skull-cups are full of blood, which they drink as is typical of wrathful deities, Achi’s is full of an offering more akin to peaceful deities, the wish-fulfilling gem. This is similar to images of Padmasambhava, who is depicted holding a skull-cup full of nectar. Nevertheless, Achi is shown holding two of the three Kāpālikā attributes, the damaru and kāpāla, items commonly held by siddhas, yogins, and dākinīs of both genders. According to Beyer, these two and the khaṭvāṅga represent the speech, mind, and the body of the deity respectively, a common set of principles used to describe various symbols, practices and doctrines of Buddhism. If this is the case, perhaps one interpretation of Achi’s standard iconography is that while she can transmit the speech and mind of the deity, as evidenced by the drum and bowl, having been born human in this realm she does not possess Vajrayogini’s divine body and attributes, and therefore lacks the khaṭvāṅga. The possession of these items in the hands of other female emanations would have to be explored further to verify any possible truth to this theory.

Despite her accepted status as a possible tutelary deity, Achi’s primary title is that of protectress. While other yidams have the ability to take such lower forms, these are usually minor or little known epiphanies for specific ritual practices. One example of this is a form of Tārā called Bhīmadevī, a blue she-wolf whose special function is the protection of those who practice certain rituals and the books in

172 Of the three, only Penden Lhamo’s iconography specifies what type of skull the bowl is fashioned from – in this case the skull of a misbegotten child, particularly one born from incest. This type of skull is said to possess the greatest tantric power, and makes sense with the rest of the goddess’s frightful arsenal. More so than the other deities described here, she is heavily armed and ready to do battle, not only with her vajra-tipped club, but with an arsenal of magical devices to protect her charges from supernatural attack: a tally stick (khram shing) used for exorcism and the counteraction of curses, dice (sho rde’u) for divination rituals and the determination of fate, and a pouch of diseases (nad rkyal), a potent symbol the shows she has both the ability to inflict as well as ward off illness. All of these are standard accoutrements of a mamo demoness, but like the wisdom dākinī she bears a vertical third-eye on her forehead, denoting her awakened status (Amy Heller, “The Great Protector Deities of the Dalai Lamas,” in Lhasa in the Seventeenth Century: The Capital of the Dalai Lamas, Françoise Pommaret, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 81-98; Nebesky-Wojkowitz, Oracles and Demons of Tibet, 24-25; Miranda Shaw, “Palden Lhamo: Supreme Guardian Goddess of the Dalai Lamas,” in As Long as Space Endures: Essays on the Kālacakra Tantra in Honor of H.H. the Dalai Lama (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2009), 154-156).

which they are recorded. While she is respected in this form, devotees turn to Tārā’s more prominent forms, such as Green and White Tārā, for meditation practice and assistance in more general matters.\textsuperscript{174} On the other hand, like Penden Lhamo and many of the other dangerous protectors, Achi is often shown upon a mount – a glorious divine mount, but one nonetheless. In looking at her identity and her related rituals in the following chapter, it seems that the most practical category for Achi is among the bare-footed enlightened protectors, who are occasionally allowed the privileges and responsibilities of higher level deities in their own specific sects or communities. What is clear is that, despite her peaceful appearance, Achi embodies more than just the compassionate traits of a mother. As her hagiography and tantric imagery attest, her calm demeanor hides the wrath and power of the sexualized and violent Vajrayogini, which she will use to protect her charges at all costs. While further examples of this hidden power will be explored in the following analysis of her life-story, its terrifying aspects will be demonstrated more directly afterwards, in relation to her sphere of influence, the Drikung valley.

\textsuperscript{174} Beyer, \textit{The Cult of Tārā}, 292; Shaw, \textit{The Buddhist Goddesses of India}, 341.
Fig. 4. Image of the worldly protector Tashi Tséringma, courtesy of the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation (item no. 433).
Fig. 5. Image of Penden Lhamo Magzor Gyelmo, courtesy of the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation (item no. 604).
CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROTECTRESS IN NARRATIVE AND RITUAL

Having addressed the historical and cultural implications of Achi’s character as presented in image, it is possible to return to how she is portrayed in literature. This can be accomplished through an analyzation of the deity’s hagiography and her related ritual texts, which both belong to greater literary traditions that have roots in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist religions. By looking at how Achi’s story compares to the hagiographies of other figures, one is able to see how she is made to exemplify an institutionally accepted Buddhist deity in narrative, and by looking at her rituals, one understands the practical roles she plays for both monastic and lay practitioners alike.

4.1 Constructing Life Through Narrative

Aside from merely recording the events of a person’s life, Tibetan hagiographies serve two distinct yet mutually important purposes: (1) to supply an exemplar for devotees to strive toward if not to follow; and (2) to provide a legitimizing force, not only to the figure herself, but to the lineage, sect, and tradition to which she belongs on a greater religious scale. While both the modern historian and the traditional hagiographer aim to construct narratives that make sense to the cultural repertoires of their respective audiences, both do so for slightly different reasons. Whereas the historian seeks to persuade her audience that the history she constructs is logical and therefore as close to factual as she can achieve, the goal of the hagiographer is to enthral and inspire with the hope of propagating the religious message of her subject and her sect to Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. More than just an account of a life, Kurtis Schaeffer aptly explains the genre of namtar as “a richly layered literature containing esoteric philosophy, folk practices, local history, social theory, political rhetoric, and pyrotechnic miracle displays.”

Individual hagiographies reflect contemporary concerns and act as guidebooks to practice, promoting ritual, pilgrimage, and merit-making activities. While Achi maintains followers of both genders, numerous scholars have cited the particular importance the contemporary biographies of female saints

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and emanations of Vajrayoginī have as authorizing referents for women both inside Tibet and in exile. In order to act as such an exemplar, both men and women must be seen as fulfilling certain duties and expectations in the eyes of their audience; in the case of Buddhist saints and incarnate dākinīs, this includes the maintenance of a particular pattern to their life-stories and behaviors. As a deity with no verifiable historical basis, Achi's story is less of a real-life inspiration than some later, more locatable figures, but the respect and devotion shown to supernatural females like her nevertheless reveals an allowance for such powerful women in the culture of Tibet.

4.1.1 Parallel Lives

Tibetan tradition dictates that in the course of his own life, the historic Buddha Siddhartha Gautama followed a twelve-part pattern established by countless buddhas before him. It is therefore no surprise that successive buddhas and enlightened beings would be expected to live lives that correspond to the major events and milestones of their predecessors. Both practitioners and their disciples attempt to reenact and reinterpret the events of their lives according to these exemplary narratives, and the pattern of the Buddha's life became both a standard a devotee would expect an enlightened being to follow and a road map for a devoted practitioner to model her life upon. After the death of a significant Buddhist figure, it is not uncommon for hagiographers to make attempts to structure events in their subjects' lives to fit these accepted paradigms to different extents and extremes.

The classic twelve acts consist of (1) a voluntary descent from a heavenly realm; (2) an entrance into the womb of the chosen mother; (3) an auspicious birth; (4) a display of early miracles and special abilities; (5) an accomplishment in the worldly arts; (6) a life of ease and pleasure; (7) a departure from home; (8) the practice of austerities; (9) the subjugating and taming of demons; (10) the reaching of enlightenment; (11) the "turning the wheel of dharma" or a time of teaching; and (12) death, or the reaching of parinirvāṇa. This scheme, or a simplified version thereof, is often used to legitimize the enlightened status of an individual. Proof of one's accomplishment of all these milestones validates an ideal Buddhist life. Based on this premise, Nathan Katz has noted the use of a particular structure in Tibetan namtar writing specifically, which seems to be a simplification of this longer list. According to this scheme, the hagiography of a tantric Buddhist figure should (1) begin with a birth in a particular caste or class; (2) mention unusual accomplishments during her early life; (3) involve some kind of turning point that results in the renunciation of a previous vocation; (4) discuss the initiation into tantric practice,

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176 Diemberger, *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty*, 9, 321.
usually by a supernatural being like a dākinī; (5) introduce a meeting with the figure's primary guru; and finally (6) relate the attainment of the highest spiritual powers and the working of various miracles.  

In contrast, Hildegard Diemberger notes in her study of the fifteenth-century Tibetan nun Chökyi Drönma that while this structure can often be smoothly applied to the lives of men, it is often difficult to portray a woman who has become a mother in a positive light once she abandons her children to become a celibate monastic in the pursuit of the dharma. The fates of these children either must be addressed by the hagiographer, or somehow glossed over in an effort to obscure any negative consequences that could otherwise result from the subject's pursuit of a spiritual path. In the case of Chökyi Drönma, it was the traumatic death of her daughter that acted as the catalyst for her assumption of monastic vows, but since the young child's death occurred while she was away on pilgrimage, her hagiographer had to explain why the nun would have left her child behind for such an extended period of time in the first place. While in general, Buddhist attitudes toward women allowed them to follow Siddhartha Gautama's example and renounce their home lives, Tibetan women with families seemed to have had more practicalities than men to work out to do so, at least if they also wanted to be perceived as ideal women as well as ideal Buddhists. In response to her daughter's death, Chökyi Drönma seemed to show some regret at the news, but also calmly assured her family that her daughter had already been reborn in the human realm by the time she had returned home. The hagiographer had to walk a fine line between showing the nun as a good mother who cared for her daughter, and showing her as an ideal monastic that could see the world from a state of enlightened equanimity.

The motherhood of Machik Lapdrön, a yogini and female lineage holder who lived sometime in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, is discussed much differently. The Tibetan title 'Machik' (Ma gcig) means 'One Mother' and is an honorary epithet given to some female religious teachers. By far, Machik Lapdrön is the most famous of these women, although her lesser-discussed contemporary, Machik Zhama (Ma gcig zha ma, 1062-1149), shares this title as well. The former is known best for her involvement in the lineage of Tibetan chö practice, which spread from her into the Kagyü, Nyingma, and eventually Géluk sects, while the former became famous for her Lamdré (Lam 'bras) lineage teachings popularized within the Sakya sect. According to her hagiographies, Machik Lapdrön married and raised her

179Diemberger, When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty, 123-125.
children after she had begun pursuing a religious life. Some popular traditions claim that the tantric practitioner broke her vows in order to become the consort of the Indian yogin Töpa Bhadra (Thod pa bha tra ya / 'Ba' re), who would then become the father of her three to five children, while others claim she had never been officially ordained. The circumstances were nonetheless scandalous for the Tibetan woman during her lifetime, and in each of her hagiographies she is portrayed as a controversial figure who had to prove the validity of herself and her teachings to dubious opponents. By the end of each story, however, the yoginī is said to have raised her children within her own lineage and even came to be recognized as a beloved emanation of Tārā and an incarnation of Yeshé Tsogyel in the eyes of her Tibetan devotees. Machik Lapdrön's example of a tantric lay practitioner balancing religion and family seems most comparable when looking at the hagiographic life of Achi.

4.1.2 Hagiographic Patterns - Seen and Unseen

Könchok Gyatso's hagiography broaches a number of important themes necessary for understanding Achi as a syncretic Tibetan deity worthy of the devotion bestowed on her by the Drikung Kagyū tradition. Like many Tibetan saints, from a young age Achi is portrayed as possessing distaste for the worldly life, desiring to leave it behind her. In opposition to other figures, however, the dharma protectress's goal is not the pursuit of religion, but rather the drive to produce offspring that would further spread of the dharma. Despite this fundamental divide, the hagiography actually parallels the traditional twelve-act framework of the genre quite well, passing through a number of the featured milestones and addressing many of the same concerns that would validate Achi as an enlightened being. It begins with a traditional prayer to Achi, followed by a long exposition describing the deities of Tibet and their subjugation by important tantric teachers, as well as the differences between mundane and supramundane dharma protectors. This is done presumably to set the stage and ultimately show how Achi belongs to the latter category rather than the former, as elaborated on in the last chapter. About a fourth of the way through, the author finally begins telling the specific life-story of Achi herself, and it is from here that comparisons to the traditional scheme of a buddha-life can be made. The story officially begins with Vajrayoginī or one of her emanations deciding she will be reborn into the prestigious Nanam clan near Tidro Zhotō, located in the Drikung valley. This introduces Achi's parents, who are blessed with metaphorical dreams of the deity entering the mother's womb. This technically covers the first three acts of the pattern of the Buddha's life, culminating in the auspicious birth of a child that possesses the signs of the dākinī, such as the mark of crossed vajra somewhere on her body, the possession of a third-eye, and

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the ability to speak immediately about her own renown in this life. While none of these things are particularly remarkable for the birth of a divine being, and similar things occur in life-stories of the Buddha, of Padmasambhava, of his consorts Mandarava and Yeshé Tsogyel, and so forth, the hagiographer nevertheless takes a moment to describe the reaction of Achi’s parents to such a strange birth. Rather than assume they have an enlightened child, they are so frightened that she must be evil that they attempt infanticide, throwing baby Achi into a river. This could have ended the story and the lineage right there, accept somehow the baby floated to the surface, and the parents decided she must not have been evil after all. Such an event is not uncommon in the life-stories of protector deities, and the incident takes up no more than a sentence of text, but as one of the few direct interactions between Achi and her parents, who seem to play a very small role even in her early life, it seems important to note here. Paralleling acts four and six of the Buddha's life, but notably skipping the fifth act (the accomplishment of the worldly arts) at least for the moment, Achi is portrayed as an advanced child with an opulent upbringing, performing such miracles as dedicating herself to Tārā and giving dharma instruction to neighbors and friends as early as age three or four. She even receives the purba practices of Vajrayoginī from her father. At age five, she prophesizes that she will not remain in the Drikung region, but would instead seek out a person of good family to the east.

The actual time for the renunciation of her home and her pursuit of this prophecy would not come until she was eighteen, after both her father and mother had died. While not described in detail, Achi's relationship with her father appears rather poor, due to his want for a son, and he dies from small pox at an undetermined time in her life. Instead, it seems as if the death of Achi's mother may have been the catalyst for her final decision to leave. This would correspond with the stories of other religious figures, who renounce their lives after traumatic experiences like illnesses and deaths. Again mirroring the life of the Buddha, Achi sneaks away from her home and extended family, in her case with the help of a merchant caravan, only stopping when they come near Denyül, a region in Kham. It is here that the pattern of events shift from what is typical of most monastic Buddhist saints and instead follows a course more closely akin to Machik Lapdrön. Despite renouncing her wealth and home, Achi seeks out her destined husband and consort, a Nyingma practitioner of the Kyura clan named Amé Tsültrim Gyalso, whom she convinces to marry her and start a large family of four sons, fulfilling the fifth act of the Buddha's life, the accomplishment of worldly acts. Rather than seeking to abandon all the trappings of saṃsāra, Achi’s mission is focused on the task of remaining inside of it, fulfilling its penultimate task of producing more offspring within its web. The hagiography makes clear that this is not out of personal worldly desire on either of their parts, but out of altruism for the future generations their offspring will come in contact with. The influence their family would have is further bolstered by the prestigiousness of both of their families, which have strong roots in early Tibetan history.
Before and after the marriage ceremony, Achi fulfills acts eight through eleven, performing miracles, subduing dangerous deities, passing on teachings, practicing cremation-ground austerities, and, at some point, reaching enlightenment. While the hagiography does not explicitly note the time or place of Achi’s awakening, she is portrayed as a fully enlightened entity from the start due to her existence as an emanation of one. The hagiography lists numerous miracles and prophetic acts, both during and after Achi’s mundane lifetime, and the three most notable occur at her marriage ceremony, while her children are small, and near her death. For the most part, the hagiography paints Achi as a peaceful Buddhist figure, her only connections to the more transgressive tantric practices being in her connections to the Cakrasaṃvara tantras and its deities. There are no stories of her wrathful nature or her destruction of human enemies, as seen in her rituals later in this chapter and in her legends in the next. There are only stories of her subjugation of demons and spirits, which in itself is not a transgressive act but a beneficial one. In these three instances, however, Achi’s tantric nature bleeds through; she manifests the ritual items of the damaru and the kāpāla and performs a magical dākinī dance in the sky to bring down a marriage feast and payment to its facilitators; she creates a Vajrārāhī maṇḍala with her own hands in order to subdue and teach leagues of local deities, leaving imprints of herself and her sons in the rock; then, she helps her disciples reach various levels of accomplishment by transforming a fresh corpse from the cremation ground into a tantric feast. Brief instances like these are the only evidence of Achi’s fierce demeanor, which otherwise remains hidden beneath a peaceful attitude of equanimity throughout her story.

The final act of Achi’s life, at least in human form, occurs shortly before 1087 C.E. according to the notations of the hagiographer, who believes she was born in the early eleventh century and must have lived at least seventy years. In this version of the story, Achi achieves the state of rainbow-body when she decides it is time to die, and ascends to the celestial realm from which she had originally emanated. This differs from other versions of the story and from her iconography, which cite that she took off into the sky on her blue wind-horse at the time of her departure. While the reason for this omission is unclear without looking at other hagiographic texts, it may have been due to the audience of this particular booklet: the achievement of bodily transcendence is a miracle, but it is a miracle common among religious teachers throughout the Buddhist tradition. Kööchok Gyatso, and the authors on whom he based his narrative, may have felt that the summoning of a legendary creature was too fantastic for a modern, uninitiated audience, and would have made Achi’s story less believable. In any case, the achievement of this state, in which one’s body dissolves at the time of death leaving behind only hair and fingernails, is one signifier that a practitioner lived an exalted life and is a true Buddhist saint. Ascending bodily to the blissful land of the
\textit{\textbackslash{d}akin\textbackslash{n}is} is the frequent afterlife destination in the biographies of seventy-five of the eighty-four Mah\textashyl{\textashy}siddhas,\footnote{The Mah\textashy}siddhas are renowned wandering tantric yogis and yogin\textbackslash{n}s whose presence flourished in India between the eighth and twelfth centuries. For further information on these traditional figures, see: Keith Dowman, \textit{Master of Mah\textashy}mudr\textbackslash{\textbackslash}a: Songs and Histories of the Eighty-Four Buddhist Siddhas} (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985); Rob Linrothe, \textit{Holy Madness: Portraits of Tantric Siddhas} (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2006); James B. Robinson, trans., \textit{Buddha's Lions: The Lives of the Eighty-Four Siddhas (A Translation of the Catura\textashy{s}iti-siddha-prav\textbackslash{\textbackslash}rti by Abhayadatta)} (Berkeley: Dharma, 1979).\footnote{Gyatso, \textit{Guide to Dakini Land}; Shaw, \textit{The Buddhist Goddesses of India}, 384. On the rainbow body, see also: Matthew T. Kapstein, "The Strange Death of Pema the Demon Tamer," in \textit{The Presence of Light: Divine Radiance and Religious Experience} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).} and remains a spiritual goal for devotees of Vajrayogin\textbackslash{n}i in all of her emanations.\footnote{Gyatso, \textit{Guide to Dakini Land}; Shaw, \textit{The Buddhist Goddesses of India}, 384. On the rainbow body, see also: Matthew T. Kapstein, "The Strange Death of Pema the Demon Tamer," in \textit{The Presence of Light: Divine Radiance and Religious Experience} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).}

Two major themes in Achi's life – her roles as mother and teacher – will be addressed below, but having looked at how her story matches up with the traditional Buddhist pattern, it is important to note that the hagiography ultimately acts as a pilgrimage guide. In the course of explaining Achi's nature and the events of her life, the hagiographer points out each of the important locations in which those events occurred, including alternate names and spellings. He also mentions primary texts related to the dharma protectress by name and author. A common function of hagiography is to act as guide to the cult of a deity or saint, indicating sacred spots for pilgrimage practices and specific rituals to perform in her honor. These are all imbedded in the course of the story, which can be remembered and retold repeatedly. Sites related to Achi in both the Drikung valley region and in Kham are mentioned for this purpose, including her birthplace, Tidro cave, Denyül, and the cave in which she created the mandala still claimed to be in existence. Each becomes a potential destination for devotees reading the booklet, thereby propagating the cult further and justifying its activities.

Despite addressing so many of the common markers seen in the genre of Buddhist hagiography, there are a several themes that do not feature in this short text. First, formal Buddhist institutions do not play any role in Achi's story. Whereas other life-stories at least address the possibility of its subject taking up monastic vows or participating with organized religion, no comments about monks, nuns, or their practices are even made, and individuals are connected only to specific teaching lineages rather than teachers belonging to larger monastic complexes. This makes sense due to the time period Achi is said to have lived, which occurred right at the beginning of the second propagation of Buddhism according to Königch Gyatso's assessment. Whether she lived as late as the eleventh century or even as early as the ninth as some sources claim, it would be well before the major sects of Buddhism would have grown to any semblance of power. While it is unknown if Tsültrim Gyatso technically would have identified himself with a specific school, his identification as a Nyingma practitioner nevertheless links him to whatever strands of Buddhism were existing at the time from the reign of the imperial line, as the sect traces its origins back to those early teachings. Specific sexual practices are not mentioned in the hagiography either, although such a relationship is hinted at when Tsültrim Gyatso is formally referred to
as Achi's *pawo* (*dpa' bo*), the term used for a female practitioner's masculine consort, and when she prophesizes that a great man would arise from their "method" (*thabs*), which is a euphemism for sexual relations. Otherwise, Achi does not convert any disbelievers through acts of sex, as seen in the next chapter, nor does she take multiple consorts to pass on her tantric teachings to her disciples. There is no doubt, however, that intercourse, or at least its consequences, plays a major role in the story, as Achi's entire mission revolves around the production of children. The subtle use of tantric sex and violence in the narrative may be a result of the popular nature of this hagiography, which may have been sanitized for popular consumption, or it may have been seen as inappropriate for the maternal ancestor of a lineage holder. Nevertheless, it is the case in these more accessible versions of Achi's story.

One of the last missing components is one that plays a significant role in the life-stories of holy people throughout Tibet, and can even be seen in the life of the Buddha. Typically, at a point in the subject's career, some kind of catalyst, from mundane or supernatural sources, affecting the body or the mind, plagues the hero or heroine causing a time of crisis. Overcoming such a difficulty, or even multiple struggles with one, leads the saint to make profound changes in her life, and can even result in visits from divine entities who offer new teachings or knowledge. Machik Lapdrön suffered from some sort of venereal disease while her contemporary, Machik Zhamo fought with leprosy. Even the Buddha suffered a period of extreme weakness while he practiced severe austerities before deciding to follow the middle way under the tree in Bodhgaya. Diemberger has noted the prevalence of this phenomenon in his research, comparing Chökyi Drönma's struggles against crises in her life, such as the death of her daughter, the death of her teacher, and various periods of insanity, with those that plague individuals who then find their calling as oracles. Having dealt with such hardships, these men and women are more able to deal with the hardships of others, providing advice and healing to those in need. The subjects of Tibetan *délôk* (*das log*) narratives are quite literally plagued in just the same way; after dying, often due to an illness, these men and women return to life with stories of their travels into other realms. Their experiences grant them special status within their communities, and often promote religious conversion due to the karmic consequences illustrated in their journeys. Achi's story provides no instance of divine sickness, but her decision to renounce her family's wealth and finally leave for Kham came on the heels of her mother's death. Not much is said about Achi's relationship with her parents; all that is mentioned is that they nearly killed her at birth due to her supernatural characteristics, and her father was disappointed in having a daughter rather than his desired son. Otherwise, there is no commentary on her reaction to

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185 Diemberger, *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty*, 139-141; Diemberger, "Female Oracles in Modern Tibet," 128-129.

either parent's death, good or bad. Could the sequence of events that lead to her leaving have been a hint at a catalyst for that decision, or is it simply a convenient coincidence? The answer cannot be found in this abridged version of the hagiography, but may be found in others.

4.1.3 Legitimization in the Celestial and Social Arenas

Verifying her status as an enlightened being through the use of an established pattern is not the only role Achi's hagiography plays for the Drikung Kagyū tradition. To prove Achi possesses a divine identity and is no mere woman or mundane dharma protectress, she must be identified as an emanation of the fully enlightened buddha. In this case, that source-deity is Vajrayoginī. As I have shown in chapter three, the rituals, iconographies, and stories of such Indian tantric deities had taken root in Tibet's landscape, art forms, and textual traditions even as early as the tenth century, and validating a connection to such a prominent figure acts as an instrument of divine authenticity in and of itself. Unlike buddhas, who can be recognized through the possession of certain specific features, there is no standardized list to prove a woman is specifically a wisdom dākinī and not one of many violent spirit deities. Nevertheless, there are a few generalized ways with which hagiographers may attempt to connect a particular Tibetan woman to this tantric tradition. One means of identification is through stories of an auspicious birth and resulting miraculous abilities and physical attributes. Some traditions even developed a thirty-two mark system for divine women paralleling the Buddha's thirty-two bodily marks, such as the mark of a hrī on the body of the female child as seen on Achi in Könchok Gyetso's hagiography. Less miraculously, mothers, sisters, and consorts of incarnate lamas, as well as participants in Vajrayoginī and Vajravārāhī rituals, are considered wisdom dākinīs by virtue of their positions and sometimes even by their mere possession of female bodies.¹⁸⁷ Achi's position as the great-grandmother of an accepted incarnate lama is proof alone that she must have been of divine nature, and likewise her verification as a dākinī helped to legitimize Jikten Sumgön as an important political presence and rightful teacher of dharma.

In this way, the Drikung Kagyū tradition uses the hagiography not only as a legitimizing force for Achi's devotional practices, but as a ground for claims that their founder, Jikten Sumgön, was a descendent of divine and royal lineages as well. On the most mundane level, the hagiography connects him to ancient and wealthy clans in Tibet's distant history, proving his pedigree in the influential Kyura and Nanam clans. On another level, the hagiography credits the leader with a supramundane bloodline. Achi's case is far from unique when it comes to tracing a leader or clan back to a supernatural maternal ancestor, and throughout the origin stories of many prominent families there are legends of founding members taking yakṣinī, nāgini, or various other supramundane brides, lending divine blood to the lineage. Nor is it unusual for a leader like Jikten Sumgön to be dubbed an incarnation of a past teacher or

¹⁸⁷Simmer-Brown, Dakini’s Warm Breath, 187-188.
a deity himself. Often, the cited reason a buddha-deity chooses to incarnate in a particular line or clan is due to this legendary ancestry, which allows the family lineage to be an appropriate vessel for an emanation of a buddha. What is unusual about Achi is that she is specifically not an indigenous god or spirit, but instead an emanation of a specific fully enlightened buddha-deity. Not only did Jikten Sumgön need validation in the form of his own identification as an embodiment of the famous Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna (c. 150-250 C.E.), he needed proof that his genetic makeup stemmed from a divine source – in this case, Vajrayogini – in order to be socially accepted as the political and spiritual leader he became. Sørensen and Hazod address this issue of descent in Tibetan narratives, explaining that the royal and divine are often equated to one another in the remote past:

No doubt, such steps were deemed indispensable in bolstering ancestral and historical credentials, in other words, the bare necessity or priorities of ensuring hegemonic legitimacy and the continuous quest for asserting political (later spiritual) authority prompted the durable fabrication of much genealogical and ancestral fiction, the core of which, however may have contained some modicum of truth.188

To a Tibetan audience whose cultural repertoire maintains that its leaders must have such legendary origins, Jikten Sumgön is thereby proven to be of purely good stock, not only the son of a practitioner and a dākinī, as explained in his own hagiography in the following chapter, but the great-grandson of Vajrayogini herself. While there is no question that it would have been acceptable for Jikten Sumgön to have had a mundane dākinī as an ancestor (as this would be no different than the possession of such beings in the lineages of other clans) verification of Achi's status functions as more than just a legitimizing force for the founder of the tradition. Doing so justifies the devotional practices and religious worship performed by the cults surrounding Achi herself. These things would not be appropriate for mundane deity, but are perfectly allowable to an emanation of Vajrayogini. This combination of pre-Buddhist indigenous ideals of divine ancestry with Indian Buddhist concepts of reincarnation is further evidence of Achi's ability to act as some kind of advanced synthesis of Tibetan cultural ideals, bridging the gap between various sets of religious resources. Defense of Achi as a wisdom dākinī and a fully enlightened being despite her householder status is therefore understandably a major concern for her

188 Genealogies of numerous prominent Tibetan clans provide similar mythic origins, and such stories can be found in the histories of the Khön ('Khon), Lang (Rlangs), and Kyura clans, to name a few (Davidson, Tibetan Renaissance, 267-274; Sørensen and Hazod, Rulers of the Celestial Plain, 414). In another case, Chökyi Drönma's letter of reference from her guru not only compares her to Machik Lapdrön, but references her genetic royal lineage to the Gods of Clear Light ('od gsal lha), making her not only an emanation of the buddha Vajrarāhā, but a daughter of the gods as well (Diemberger, When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty, 144).
hagiographers, who have to contend with the numerous perceptions of the deity and the roles she maintains.

4.2 Ritual Roles and Tantric Practice

Aside from serving as an inspirational and legitimizing legendary figure for the Drikung Kagyü tradition, Achi is able to play an active part in the lives of her devotees through the use of ritual. Like her iconography, many of these practices have been adapted and adopted into the Tibetan Buddhist repertoire from elements of early Indian tantric practice, and because Achi fulfills so many different roles, there are a variety of functions she can be called on to perform and an even greater variety of means to do so. Achi's most prominent power is the ability to grant wishes to her devotees, particularly in the field of spiritual achievements. While such boons can be granted with rituals as simple as offerings and prayer, practitioners can access Achi through more complicated, yet relatively standard, ways as well. As a tutelary deity, practitioners can utilize sādhanas to visualize themselves as the deity; as a guru, she can be called on for teachings; as a dharma protectress, followers can invoke her for various protections against enemies, poisons, and so forth; and as a dākinī, yogins can summon her as a consort for sexual practices. To understand what this means, the general topics of offering rituals, tantric meditation, and yāpyum (yab yum) rituals will be discussed below, along with the associated rewards Achi can bestow.

4.2.1 Invoking the Goddess

Meditation is often cited as one of the premier practices of the Buddhist institution, but offertory rituals can be found throughout the Buddhist world, among both monastic and lay practitioners. In keeping with the doctrine of merit (puṇya), acts of generosity accrue positive karmic results, and the tradition has long entreated devotees to donate wealth and material goods to the religious community and its places of worship. Formal rituals of offering provide the best opportunity to obtain the most powerful merit, and the higher or more pure the recipient, the greater the results. Ritual offerings encompass a number of practices not limited to monetary gifts, including the performance of prostrations, recitations, and prayers. Offerings of all these types are a primary aspect of daily worship in Tibetan Buddhism, and are standard in devotion to Achi as well. While historically the actual prevalence of meditation among Buddhist followers is debated, dedicated practitioners in the majority of Buddhist lineages are known to practice some form relevant to their traditions. Tibetan Buddhism supports a variety of meditation practices, but advanced tantric practitioners typically engage in specific yogic visualizations centered on personal tutelary deities and their mandalic palaces as the object of their worship and meditation; a practice called appropriately tantric "deity yoga." As a high level practice, entering into deity yoga requires a practitioner to be trained by a guru and formally initiated through abhiṣeka rites both into the
practice itself and to the specific deity to be invoked. Many of these practices are considered secret, and the texts warn that if performed without these measures, they could bring great harm and even death to the uninitiated. There are two stages to tantric deity yoga; in the first, the generation stage, the practitioner visualizes herself as her personal tutelary deity surrounded by the appropriate retinue and surroundings. Tutelary deities are chosen either by the practitioner or her guru to specifically combat whatever afflictions affect her most. At this level, vivid visualization is required, as well as a lucid understanding of the deity's symbolism. In the second stage, the completion stage, the practitioner actually transforms herself into the deity, manipulating the elements of her subtle body in accordance with the specific practice she is engaging in.

Many rituals involving yapyum, or images displaying a deity in sexual union with its consort, are an advanced extension on these completion stage practices, involving intense visualization of oneself as one of the deities within the pair. Yapyum images represent the union of the masculine and feminine, the passive feminine trait of wisdom (Skt. prajña; Tib. shes rab / ye shes) combined with the active masculine trait of skillful means resulting in an experience of emptiness that causes a sensation of supreme bliss. Aside from a few rare examples, the female partner is subordinate to the male central figure of the image, as can be seen in the image of Cakrasaṃvara with his consort Vajravarāhī in Fig. 4. Despite rhetoric that each is an equal half of a necessary whole, in the highest ranking couples the male is an elaborate, multi-armed and multi-headed deity, while the female is relatively diminutive with only two arms and one head. Hermann-Pfandt, in her article on the subject, suggests that this is not necessarily a repression of the feminine in tantric Buddhism, but rather a result due to neglect. While at least two female-centric yapyum images are said to exist, she suggests that they may fell out of practice at some point, perhaps due to decreasing number of women practitioners to identify with a primary female deity. There is, however, no evidence to prove the validity of this possibility. Nevertheless, there are two ways in which yapyum practice can be performed; either through literal sexual yoga with a partner, or, for those with monastic vows of celibacy, through elaborate visualization. Whether visualized consorts (Skt. jñānamādṛś; Tib. ye shes kyi phyag rgya) or actual women (Skt. karmamādṛś; Tib. phya rgya / gzungs ma / las kyi phyag rgya), both are considered dākinīs in nature, but a real consort is said to be more beneficial, allowing for the achievement of enlightenment in this very lifetime. In those rare cases

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189 Davidson, Indian Esoteric Buddhism, 197-198.
190 Provided is a yapyum image of Cakrasaṃvara and Vajravarāhī, courtesy of the Rubin Museum of Art, New York City.
that the female is the primary partner, such as in the hagiography of Yeshé Tsogyel, the male consort is referred to as a pawo (dpa' bo), or hero.\textsuperscript{192}

In contemporary Buddhist practice, the primary goal of these advanced tantric yogas is the attainment of enlightenment, but the more immediate goal, stemming from the earliest tantric texts, is the accumulation of eight achievements (siddhi), or psychic and magic powers. While some standardized lists exist, different texts often present slight variations, indicating that the structure of 'eight' may again just be an artificial limitation, as seen in the varying lists of the eight classes of deities in the previous chapter.\textsuperscript{193} Practitioners can receive special teachings or the ability to perform secret rituals from these rites as well, such as the ability to perform the 'four activities' (las bzhi) of tantric practice. While the rituals themselves can be diverse in nature, they fall into four traditional categories divided by their intended goals: pacification (zhi), augmentation (rgyas), subjugation (dbang) and ferocity (drag).\textsuperscript{194} More mundane benefits, such as medicinal cures or the attainment of wealth, can also be gained through tantric rites and devotion.

4.2.2 Achi's Ritual Repertoire

Rituals related to Achi run the range from mundane offertory practices to advanced tantric sādhanas. One of the larger extent works, The Sādhana Handbook of the Teaching Guardian Achi, consists of two volumes containing a total of thirty-nine chapters.\textsuperscript{195} Looking at its catalogue, in addition to several sections of exaltations, a story of her past lives (khrung rabs), and a "Conveniently Arranged Abridged Recitation Manual" (bsnyen yig bs dus pa khyer bder bkod po), the work holds twenty-eight rituals dedicated to the Drikung protectress, with only ten of these bearing the formal title of sādhana.
The rituals themselves are richly diverse; to name a few, there are three empowerment rites (dbang chog), allowing the practitioner access to the deity, four expiation and confession rites (bskang bshags), three smoke offerings (bsang mchod), and two rituals involving the construction of a ritual thread-cross (bskang mdom) and a torma (gtor ma) respectively. There is even one chapter containing what looks to be three separate violent rituals to be used against the enemies of Achi and her retinue. The goals of some of these rituals seem strictly spiritual in nature, but others seek mundane rewards, like the "Wealth Sādhana" (nor grub). But despite the title's dedication of the handbook to Achi specifically, there are also several rites related to other female entities. The second volume holds two empowerment rituals to the Tséringma (Tshe ring ma) deities discussed earlier in comparison to Achi's character, and their inclusion in this work may signal some greater connection between these female dākinīs, or may merely demonstrate their mutual importance to the Drikung Kagyū tradition.

The wide variety of ritual methods and motives in just this one work vividly demonstrates the multiplicity of ways in which practitioners can relate to Achi, who can be called on to assist in both supramundane and everyday affairs. As to the greater topic of literary traditions, both the hagiographies and the rituals texts legitimize not only her formal worship within the tradition, but her local worship as the wrathful protectress of the Drikung valley. It is to this region of Tibet and its history as the birthplace of the Drikung Kagyū tradition that will now be explored.
Fig. 6. Yapyum Image of Cakrasaṃvara with consort Vajravārāhī, courtesy of the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation (item no. 99).
CHAPTER FIVE
THE DRIKUNG VALLEY AND ALL IT CONTAINS

In order to understand the dharma protectress Achi Chökyi Drölma, it is necessary to understand the world, both textually and geographically, in which she inhabits. This includes an exploration of the history of the Drikung Kagyü sect and its founder, Jikten Sumgön, which is invariably bound to the Drikung valley region of Central Tibet. Achi may not be the focus of this history, but her presence is nearly all-pervading; her image is displayed in each of the most important temples and her rituals are necessary for the performance of the area's most significant rites. In addition, the Drikung valley is said to be her birthplace before she ran away to seek out a husband in Kham during the imperial period of Tibet's history. In essence, this region, which is her sphere of protective influence, mirrors her encapsulation of the seemingly opposing sides of Buddhist and non-Buddhist, peaceful and wrathful elements. The legends, rituals, and sacred spaces contained within the landscape inform the construction of her multi-valiant character in the eyes of her audiences, vividly demonstrating the varied resources of the Tibetan cultural repertoire from which she emerges. By examining the layout and environs of this area, one can see how Tibetan Buddhists of the region construct and perceive of this space and all that inhabits it, and by doing so one can better understand how they have constructed and perceived the figure of Achi over the course of time as well.

5.1 Historical and Cultural Backdrops

Located in Central Tibet, only a few days walk northeast of Lhasa along the Kyichu River (Skyid chu), is the valley region known both historically and contemporarily as Drikung ('Bri gung). While housing numerous sites ranging the breadth of recorded Tibetan history, the most notable man-made structure is the great monastery complex of Drikung Til Okmin Jangchupling, the monastic seat of the Drikung Kagyü sect of Tibetan Buddhism. Despite the modern poverty of the region, this monastery, and the system of sites surrounding it, was once one of Tibet's most prosperous and politically significant fiefdoms up until the seventeenth century. No longer the political entity it once was, this system of sacred temples and monasteries, many now in ruins, is a significant pilgrimage destination for both native
Fig. 7. Photograph of Drikung Valley, looking north, courtesy of Bryan J. Cuevas, 2006.
Tibetans and tourists from around the world, known best for its possession of one of the largest sky burial sites still in operation and for the performance of a newly reinstated pilgrimage festival known as the Drikung Phowa Chenpo (’Bri gung ’pho ba chen po).

Before delving into the specifics of what could be called the Drikung mandala-zone, taking a cue from Per K. Sørensen and Guntram Hazod's terminology, there are some more general ideas regarding historic and contemporary space in Tibet that should be addressed. These themes inform not only a study of the region under discussion, but the study of sacred space throughout the Tibetan cultural zone, particularly in what is now considered the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China (TAR). While the study of how Tibetans relate to the landscape is too vast to address in detail for the purposes of this project, four important points specifically pertaining to an understanding of the Drikung valley region and how Achi is worshipped and perceived will be examined: first, a brief summary of the imperial past of Tibet is necessary in understanding the legendary origins of many of the sites in the region; second, a look at the spirit deities inhabiting the natural elements of the environment and the constructed monuments that keep them in check; third, an overview of the ritual act of pilgrimage and its benefits; and fourth, the current state of affairs in the TAR since the mid-twentieth century must be addressed in order to contextualize the circumstances of the area.

5.1.1 Recovering the Golden Age

In traditional accounts of Tibetan Buddhist history, authors look back on the period of the Empire and the reign of the Yarlung dynasty as a golden age of prosperity. These authors, invariably Buddhist monks and laymen with their own sectarian interests in mind, look to the seventh through ninth centuries as the introduction of Buddhism to the lawless, uncivilized land, and venerate two kings specifically as the patrons of this new religion. While knowledge of Buddhism had more than likely come to Tibet prior to this due to relations with China and India, King Songtsen Gampo (Srong btsan sgam po, 605-649) and his two Buddhist wives are credited with building the first temples within the country's borders, officially introducing the religion to the imperial courts. But Buddhism did not fully arrive on the Tibetan scene until the reign of his descendant, King Trisong Detsen (Khri srong lde btsan, 755-797/804), who expanded the territory of the empire to the largest it would ever be. In the traditional histories, Trisong Detsen is described as an avid supporter of the Buddhist faith, inviting teachers and translators from India and China in order to bring the religion to all levels of Tibetan society. This period introduced a flurry of new translations and saw the construction of the first Tibetan monastery, Samyé (Bsam yas), which pulled

monks from the highest levels of the aristocracy. It also brought the great tantric mystic and exorcist, Padmasambhava, who would eventually become revered as a 'second buddha' to the people of Tibet, and his famous consort Yeshé Tsogyel, who would become the premier example of the tantric Tibetan female. This period of expansion and intellectual activity could not sustain itself however, and by the middle of the ninth century, the Tibetan golden age had come to its end.\textsuperscript{197}

With the fall of the Yarlung dynasty through the death of the last confirmed member of the royal line, and the subsequent period of fragmentation referred to as the "Dark Age" of Tibetan history, the country needed to find a new governmental system to fill the vacuum left by the broken monarchy. As disparate warlords and disputed royal family members fought over control of the now-divided territories of the Tibetan empire, in the eleven and twelfth centuries Buddhist translators sought to revitalize the religion by travelling to the great monasteries outside Tibet in search of new teachings. In so doing, they were also introduced to the feudal government structures that had taken root in medieval India. In the governance of their temples, these monks and laymen combined Tibetan clan-oriented systems of inheritance and land administration with the ritual concepts of tantric learning and religious lineage used by the feudal lords they encountered. Eventually, these temples grew to the great monastery-fortresses unique to Tibet, combining secular rule and religious authority under a single united aegis. The collapse of Indian centers of Buddhism in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries elevated the monasteries of Tibet as the premiere upholders of the religion, "forcing Indian monks to pay homage to Tibetan laymen, who were both more fortunate and more skillful at maintaining the \textit{Buddha-dharma} than their Indian patrons had been."\textsuperscript{198}

According to Davidson, the rising tantric traditions evolved in accordance with the \textit{maṇḍala} systems of feudalism in medieval India. In creating this imperial metaphor, "Buddhists derived the \textit{maṇḍala} forms and functions, not so much from the theoretical treatises of Indian polity as from their immediate observation at the disposition and execution of realpolitik in their environment…Indeed, the Buddhist maṇḍala is a classic analysis of the system of sāmanta feudalism in early medieval India, all sufficiently sanctified for the monastic community."\textsuperscript{199} Like the feudal states themselves, each \textit{maṇḍala} revolves around a central system, while each subsidiary system contains its own internal order and logic. Should it become necessary, any one of these sets can trade places with the center, thereby becoming the ruling polity. In accordance with tantric theories of empowerment, religious specialists are a necessary component of this system, as they must sanctify the ruler of each feudal state for his reign to be effective.


\textsuperscript{198}Davidson, \textit{Tibetan Renaissance}, 374.

\textsuperscript{199}Davidson, \textit{Indian Esoteric Buddhism}, 139.
This system worked well with the feudal system that had already developed in Tibet, acting as an organizational model. In addition to being based on this political structure, the actual construction and terminology of the tantric mandala mirrors the architecture of imperial palaces, and medieval treatises that predate the writings on the idealized realms share the same vocabulary and spatial understanding.

In Tibet, the three-dimensional form of the mandala became more than just a metaphor, its form and function reproduced throughout the Tibetan world, in politics, religion, landscape, and architecture. In many cases, temples and monasteries were meticulously constructed in accordance with the correct ritual dimensions of the geometric images, as with Samyé, but in others, the form was superimposed on tracts of land – most often venerated mountains - which had already maintained connotations of the sacred prior to the introduction of Buddhism. While this superimposition was originally formulated for the esoteric meditation practices of elite yogins who were said to be the only ones able to completely perceive this inherent divine nature, the Buddhist worldview allowed for people of every level of experience to benefit from the sacred landscapes, whether they could see them fully or not.

5.1.2 Deities in Water, Deities in Land

The landscape of Tibet is perceived to have more than just palatial mandalic constructs imaged upon it, however. Janet Gyatso describes the Tibetan tendency to locate animated images onto the features of the land, ranging from a single entity inhabiting a certain location, to a location essentially being a deity, to "the perception of the actual contours of the land as being anthropomorphic or animal like." Tibet is thereby inhabited by countless spirit deities of varying temperaments, each taking residence in a particular abode (gnas), with many playing major roles in the ritual practices and mythologies of the country as a whole. Wandering tantric teachers of all generations are credited with taming these deities in order to acquire their powers, or in opening the "doors" to pilgrimage routes or special locations, without which the spirits' power would continue to bar average Tibetans from entry. Some of the most popular and pervading of these legends are linked to Padmasambhava, who, according to legend, had to travel the country subjugating these violent deities of the indigenous religion, transforming many of them into guardians of Buddhism. In these same locations it is said the great mystic often hid teachings and personal ritual items, which he left to be found by the appropriate treasure-revealers in the future. Many natural landmarks, which seem to have had pre-Buddhist connections to local deities, were transformed into conglomerate sites combining both practices related to these land-based deities (yul lha) and those of Buddhism. Legends of Padmasambhava and other figures from Tibet's

200 Davidon, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 140.
202 Gyatso, "Down with the Demoness: Reflections on a Feminine Ground in Tibet," 49.
While the abodes of these deities could come in many forms, lakes and rivers, and the *lu* spirits connected to them, are particularly important when looking at the environmentally-based sites of the Drikung valley region. Mountains and lakes are considered gendered pairs in the ancient Tibetan worldview, the latter acting as the feminine element with connections to early conceptions of the soul or life-force (*bla*) of not only human beings, but entire clans, sectarian groups, or even the whole of a society. Lakes are one place in which the vitality of an individual or a group could reside, creating a mutually dependant relationship between the people that dwell in a place and the place in which they dwell. Bodies of water can also act as points of visionary access between this world and other dimensions for tantric adepts and oracles, and in myth they often act as very physical gateways to the underworld kingdoms of the *lu*. These serpent-like spirits could take various forms, often shape-shifting between human and amphibian in early Tibetan myth. With the introduction of the Indian *nāgā*, the two entities became conflated so that the *lu* also took on more snake-like features and attributes. The roles played by these legendary beings are diverse, and they often act as key parts in mythologies, becoming anything from nameless antagonist, to begrudging assistant, to even beautiful love interest. The *lu* find power in both water and certain diseases like leprosy, using these forces against those that would trespass them or their abodes. It is even believed they can control the bodies of water they inhabit, and angering one could cause lakes to expand to enormous sizes, flooding a region and killing its inhabitants.²⁰³

It is not surprising, then, that in their exploration of the *mandala*-zone surrounding Lhasa and its politics, Sørensen and Hazod focus on the management of water in the region as a major interest of Tibetan governmental leaders. Fear of flood and drought were high priorities throughout Tibet, and the effectiveness of individual ritualists or sectarian ritual cycles in combating these problems and the *lu* believed to cause them played a huge role with regard to which groups gained or lost favor in the eyes of the court.²⁰⁴ Padmasambhava was no stranger to the *lu* himself, and nearly every sacred body of water in Tibet maintains a legend as to how the local water spirits were subdued by him or a similar figure. This connection becomes even more interesting in light of evidence presented in the *Testament of Wa* (*Dba ‘bzhed*), the earliest extent narrative of Tibetan history. In this work, Padmasambhava is not portrayed as the all-powerful hero of later legend, but rather something of an irrigation expert; after taming a few

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²⁰⁴ Sørensen and Hazod, "Appendix II: Control Over the Lhasa Mandala Zone: Geo-political Schemes, National Monuments, Flood Control Politics and Ideological Background," 401-552.
deities, performing some water magic, and suggesting some new technology to better cross rivers, he is
sent back to his homeland, having done little on behalf of the Buddhist religion. Due to its importance
as a controlled resource in the history of Tibetan politics, water management was a responsibility to be
left in the hands of the leaders, and his presence apparently threatened the political standings of the time.
Padmasambhava is left as a minor ambiguous figure who may or may not have been the hero expounded
upon in later accounts of Tibet's golden age.

Heroic acts on the part of individual mystics are not the only means of subduing deities in the
landscape of Tibet. At times, the construction of man-made temples and stūpas is a necessary means to
control the negative forces of a given region, even after many of the ferocious deities have already been
converted into dharma protectors. Certain temples, such as lhakhang (lha khang) and gönkhang (mgon
khang), are built on the land for just such a purpose. Both are terms for shrines or temples, depending on
their size, but while lhakhang are dedicated to any sort of deity, minor or major, gönkhang specifically
house images of fierce protector deities who require propitiation. These temples, often full of weapons
and sacrifices of blood, meat, or beer, are built to keep these deities appeased and under control. As
mentioned in chapter three, many dharma protectors are often former vicious deities, like lu or sinmo (srin
mo; Skt. rākṣasī), and therefore, while considered acting on the side of good, still have inherent tempers
that could lash out if not treated with the proper respect. Perhaps the most interesting and prominent
example of architecture as a means of subjugation can be seen in the legend of the supine demoness of
Tibet. According to the popularly presented history of the Maṇi Kabum (Maṇi Bka' bum), when the
Chinese wife of Songsten Gampo arrived in Tibet, she geomantically divined that the reason Buddhism
was having difficulties taking root in the country was because the very land itself was actually a great
sinmo demoness actively fighting against the presence of the civilizing religion. In order to rectify this
problem, the King proposed the construction of thirteen temples strategically placed to pin down the
demoness and keep her powerless, starting with the draining of the lake at her heart and establishing
Lhasa's Jokhang temple (Jo khang) in its place. Twelve temples were then built outwards in four
concentric squares, pinning her shoulders and hips, elbows and knees, and hands and feet, respectively.
As at least fifteen known temples claim to be part of this scheme today, it is hard to determine which

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205 Pasang Wangdu and Hildegard Diemberger, Dba' bzhed: The Royal Narrative Concerning the Bringing of the
Buddha's Doctrine to Tibet (Austria: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000), 13-14.
206 This configuration could be based on a number of related concepts. While Micheal Aris argues that the placement
of each temple on the body of the demoness corresponds with points on the body in the Tibetan medical practice of
mētsa (me btsa'), or moxabustion, he also claims it more accurately follows the way in which the Chinese empire
systematically expanded the realm in concentric squares. Sørensen and Hazod, however, disagree that a source for
the scheme must be sought in China, pointing to similar systems functioning in a number of traditional civilizations
such as Tibet's "four border design" (mtha' bzhi) (Per K. Sørensen and Guntram Hazod, Thundering Falcon: An
Inquiry into the History and Cult of Khra-'brug, Tibet's First Buddhist Temple (Wien: Österreichischen Akademie
der Wissenschaften, 2005), 178-181).
exact locations make up the elaborate web. Sørensen and Hazod have determined that there are three
general versions of the list, with significant parallels between them. One of these lists, quite possibly the
earliest, even contains upwards of forty temples pinning down the demoness, suggesting that the twelve-
temple scheme may have been a deliberate reduction, used in later accounts of the traditional histories as
a more convenient number. In several of these schemes, it appears that the Drikung valley lies along the
right shoulder and arm of the supine demoness, and as discussed below, the legends of the area maintain
the continued existence of one such geomantic temple near the entrance of the region. Whether originally
built for this specific purpose or not, it is clear from the little archeological work that has been done that
some of these geomantic temples could very well have been constructed as early as the seventh century,
and that the myth of the supine demoness requiring control was, at least by the twelfth century, pervasive
throughout Central Tibet. The establishment of these new structures on Tibetan soil simultaneously
suppressed the ancient holy places and transformed them into Buddhist sites, instantly gaining the long
history and sacred power that had already been present there.

5.1.3 Pilgrimage and Sacred Space

Having examined both natural and man-made constructions of Tibetan sacred space, one becomes
aware of the great power attributed to these locations. Therefore, it is not surprising that ordinary people
would somehow wish to harness that power in some small way. Pilgrimage is an important practice in the
Buddhist tradition and in Asian religion in general, and by visiting these places of power pilgrims hope to
make contact with deities and the divine energy they bestow upon the places they inhabit. Tibet is no
exception, and at least until the Cultural Revolution there seemed to have been a national pilgrimage
network which joined large and small shrines, caves, mountains, valleys and lakes of sacred significance.
Probably the greatest of these sites lies in Western Tibet, where Mt. Kailash, known as the "world
mountain," functions as an important pilgrimage destination to both Buddhists and Hindus. For Buddhist
practitioners, taking part in these activities can provide all sorts of mundane and supramundane benefits.

In summary, Sørensen and Hazod label their three versions the "long version", the "abridged version", and the
"reverted version." The first, as mentioned, has upwards of forty temples, while the second lists only the core
classification of twelve. The last is the same as the second, only with the order of the temples in reverse. They
surmise that the overall border scheme of twelve or more temples cannot actually predate the eighth century and the
development of the Tibetan scheme of the "four horns of Tibet", but believe it probably came about sometime in the
post-Samye monastery period, and most realistically in the earliest post-imperial period of the eleventh century
(Sørensen and Hazod, Thundering Falcon, 182-183).

While some authors have focused on the misogynist implications of a masculine/feminine dichotomy which arises
in this myth of phallic temples pinning down the female demon, Gyatso points out that the sinmo does not primarily
represent women, but pre-Buddhist religion, "or more accurately, a religious culture and world view that is being
dominated." There is, however, the implication that this earlier religion may have in some way elevated women in a
way that had threatened the early Buddhists coming into the region, and may therefore hint to some unknown
cultural maker which could explain the relative freedom Tibetan women experienced in comparison to neighboring
Asian cultures (Gyatso, "Down with the Demoness: Reflections on a Feminine Ground in Tibet," 43-48).
from healing the physical body of oneself and one's loved ones, to bringing prosperity and wealth to one's household, to forgiving past bad karma and ensuring a positive rebirth. The greatest benefits can be achieved at a site during its specific auspicious days, and many places have a great pilgrimage festival attached to them. These events take place according to the Tibetan calendar, occurring once every twelve years in accordance with an astrological animal year. Sites can also hold annual community celebrations associated with seasonal rituals and so forth. One example is seen at the sacred site of Tsari (Tsa ri) and the Pure Crystal Mountain (Dag pa shel ri), a popular site in southeast Tibet, where the great pilgrimage festival can cleanse even the negative karmic consequences of murder. Similarly, visiting Chöten Nyima (Mchod rten nyi ma), located north of Sikkim, can cleanse the pollution caused by incest. Each site typically maintains prescribed rites and rituals to be performed in honor of the inhabiting deities in order achieve their specific benefits, but all Tibetan Buddhist sites utilize acts of circumambulation, prostration, and offering to gain merit and purify karma in some fashion.

Outside purely Buddhist motivations of karma and rebirth, there seems to be a universally accepted system of pollution and blessing underlying Tibetan culture, thereby justifying certain ritual behaviors and explaining their effects. Toni Huber describes this phenomenon through the use of the equivalent Tibetan terms drip (sgrib) and chin (byin), which seem to inform the practices of all Tibetan pilgrimage sites. These holy places are seen as sources of chin, a potent sacred energy or empowerment which saturates the surrounding area, flowing from the deities or holy people inhabiting the site. In contrast, ordinary human bodies are sources of drip, contamination, and by coming in contact with the transformative power of chin, pilgrims can purify themselves of its polluting effects. Contact itself is often not enough, however, and there is obviously a connection between physical exertion, such as arduous circumambulations around mountainous regions and the performance of full-body prostrations, and the ability to fully utilize the blessing powers of a sacred site. According to Kapstein, pilgrimage practice was undoubtedly "the religious practice par excellence" for Tibetans prior to the Cultural Revolution, and this was just as true for the pilgrimage circuits and festivals in the Drikung region as for anywhere else. The Drikung Phowa Chenpo, or "The Great Transference of Consciousness [Festival at] Drikung," is said to bestow on the visiting pilgrims the ability to transfer one's consciousness to Amitābha's pure land, Sukhāvatī, upon one's death. Its long history in the region began in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, and it has traditionally been held once every twelve-year cycle of

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209 Interestingly, the great pilgrimage festival of Tsari corresponds with the Drikung Phowa Chenpo, both occurring during the Tibetan Monkey year. This may be linked to the administration of the Tsari district, which, while under the Central Tibetan government, fell mostly under the jurisdiction of the Drikung or Drukpa Kagyü sects (Huber, *The Cult of the Pure Crystal Mountain*, 201-202).


the Tibetan calendar, during the summer of the Monkey year. While this pattern had been interrupted due to the restrictions placed on Tibetan religious practice during and after the Cultural Revolution, the circuit has been reopened in recent years and the festival reinstated, although in an abbreviated fashion.212

5.1.4 Local Aftermath

It is difficult to talk about the landscape of Tibet today without at least mentioning the effects of the more recent events of the twentieth century. In the wake of the Tibetan revolt in 1959 and the Cultural Revolution in 1966, many religious practices, including the pilgrimage of Drikung, were banned, and a number of sites in the region suffered almost complete demolition in the wake of the Chinese Red Guard. While most of these sites have been reopened in recent years, often with funding from the current government, much of the damage and loss of property cannot be undone. Furthermore, many of the religious leaders of Buddhism have fled Tibet and are presently residing in India. This includes the current Drikung Kagyü hierarchs, the Seventh Chetsang Trinlé Lhündrup Rinpoché (Che tshang ’phrin las lhun grub rin po che, 1946-present) and the sponsor of Könchok Gyatso's hagiography, the Eighth Chungtsang Tendzin Chökyi Nangwa Rinpoché, who both previously would have held residence at Drikung Til monastery where their predecessors had administered the region for centuries prior. After 1978, restoration began on this monastery, initiated by a Drikung Kagyü monk named Pachung Rinpoché (Pa chung rin po che, 1901-1988). Around the same time, a yoginī named Tenzin Chödrön (Bstan ’dzin chos sgros) came to the nearby region of Terdrom (Gter sgrom) to begin revitalization there. She came to be regarded as the Drikung Khandro (’Bri gung mkha’ gro), a title given to one in each generation of female adapts residing in the area who is held to be emanation of Yeshé Tsogyel. She also played a pivotal role in recreating the nun's community at Terdrom, which is now flourishing.213

5.2 Legendary Origins

According to traditional accounts, the region of Drikung has played a role in the history of Buddhism in Tibet since the religion first made a major presence in the country. Not only was this where Padmasambhava and his consort Yeshé Tsogyel were said to have fled to after their banishment from the Imperial court, but as the most northeastern segment of the Central Tibetan Empire of the Yarlung Dynasty, the region is also said to lie along the right shoulder and arm of the great supine demoness

212 For more information on the history and first-hand accounts of the revitalized pilgrimage, which took place in 1992, refer to Kapstein's article on the subject (Matthew T. Kapstein, "A Pilgrimage of Rebirth Reborn: The 1992 Celebration of the Drigung Powa Chenmo," in Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). Although Kapstein argues the festival in 1992 seemed to closely follow tradition, the one held in 2004 had more variation, and even a shortened schedule (Kapstein, The Tibetans, 240-1).
213 Kapstein, "A Pilgrimage of Rebirth Reborn," 102. This information is as current as twelve years ago, when this article was published. More current data on this area is presently unknown.
whose body makes up the land of Tibet. Situated at what is considered the entrance of the valley proper, where the river Meldro Phuchu (Mal gro phu chu) meets the Kyichu, is a small restored temple complex called Uru Katsel (Dbu ru ska tshal). The foundations of the original lhakhang at the site could reasonably date to the imperial period, according to the firsthand accounts of Hugh Richardson who observed it in the 1940's. In agreement with this analysis, it is believed to be one of the four temples built by Songtsen Gampo and his wives as part of the innermost concentric circle used to subdue that great sinmo.²¹⁴ Originally in the possession of the Nyingma sect, numerous sites were built around it, some of which are attributed to Padmasambhava after he is said to have subdued the dangerous lu of the region. One of these is a small monastery of solid stone called Katsel Gönpa (Ka tshal dgon pa), currently in ruins since its destruction during the Cultural Revolution. The site passed to Drikung Gagyü hands during the height of their political reign in the thirteenth century, to the administration of the Géluk sect in the seventeenth century, and then back to the Drikung Kagyü in recent history, as attested to by the contents of the reconstructed main building. This structure has three stories, containing a library of religious texts and numerous chapels with images of deities particularly important to the sect, including murals of the Drikung Kagyü lineage and depictions of Achi in both her peaceful and wrathful aspects.²¹⁵

While this and other sites put the Drikung valley quite literally 'on the map' of Central Tibet, it was not until the establishment of a great monastery and the founding of a sect that the region would become a formidable foothold in the political arena. The original complex of Drikung Til was established in the year 1179 by the great-grandson of Achi, Ratnaśrī Jikten Sumgön, also known as Kyowa Jikten Gönpo (Skyo ba 'jig rten mgon po). This would become the seat of the Drikung Kagyü lineage founded by the same man. While this original monastery would later be destroyed during conflicts with the Sakya sect and their Mongolian allies in the late thirteenth century, the Drikung Kagyü would hold significant sway up until this point, and even later after the monastery's rebuilding. The history of the region, therefore, is intimately tied to the origins and history of the lineage it gave birth to.

5.2.1 The Rise and Fall of Drikung Til

Jikten Sumgön belongs to a long line of teachers within the Kagyü tradition. Purportedly, the lineage began with the Indian Mahāsiddha Tilopa (988-1069), who received the instructions for Mahāmāyā practice (phyag rgya chen po) directly from the tantric emanation of Śākyamuni Buddha himself, Vajrasattva, and passed these lineage instructions on to his direct disciple, Nāropa (956-1041). What is formally called the Kagyü lineage was founded by one of his Tibetan students, the "scholar-

²¹⁴ Sørensen and Hazod, Thundering Falcon, 182-201.
traveler” Marpa (Mar pa, 1012-96), who passed the lineage on to the famous hero and sorcerer, Milarépa. Milarépa passed the lineage on to his direct disciple Gampopa (Sgam po pa, 1079-1153), who had three of his own major successors, Pakmodru (Phag mo gru, 1110-70), Dùsum Khyenpa (Dus gsum mkhyen pa, 1110-93), and Lama Zhang (Zhang g.yo brag pa brtson 'gru brags pa, 1122-93), who each founded his own suborder within the tradition. Of these, Pakmodru established the first major Kagyü monastery, Densa Til (Gdan sa mthil), with financial assistance and patronage from the ancient noble Lang (Rlangs) clan. In turn, Pakmodru had three direct disciples of his own who each founded the additional three suborders of the Kagyü tradition. One of these disciples was Jikten Sumgön, whose suborder is one of the few that remain active today.

Jikten Sumgön was born in the Water-Sow year of 1143 in the area of Denma (Ldan ma), east of Central Tibet in Kham. Accordingly, this was the place in which Achi, his paternal great-grandmother, had settled to raise her family centuries prior. The Blue Annals (Deb ther sngon po) records his father as a member of the Kyura clan by the name of Dorjé (Rdo rje) “having among his ancestors an unbroken line of siddhas of the Nyingma sect,” and his mother as a "secret yogini" (sbras pa'i rnal 'byor ma) named Tsünma (Btsun ma). Traditional accounts claim his parents had passed away by the time he reached nineteen, leaving him free to travel south into Central Tibet without the worldly bonds of family. After studying with a number of Buddhist teachers, he became a disciple of Pakmodru in his early twenties, who gave him ordination and the name Rinchenpel (Rin chen dpal). Sometime after this, the monk fell gravely ill with leprosy while on intense meditative retreat, and in response focused his mind on compassion and his tutelary deity, Avalokiteśvara, in hopes of curing the disease. His practice appears to

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216This is similar to the familial associations between the Sakya sect and the 'Khon family, allowing for a religious head and a chief lay administrator of the monastery. This particularly branch of the religion, however, did not create its own definitive line of teaching (Snellgrove and Richardson, A Cultural History of Tibet, 135-136).

217These six primary sub-orders are Pakmodrupa (Phag mo gru pa) founded by the teacher of the same name, Karmapa (Kar ma pa) founded by Dùsum Khyenpa, Tselpa (Tshal pa, 1123-93) founded by Lama Zhang, Taklung (Stag lung pa) founded by Taklung Tangpa Trashipel (Stag lung Thang pa Bkra shis dpal , 1142-1210), Drukpa (Brug pa) founded by Lingrépa Péra Dorje (Gling ras pa Padma Rdo rje, 1128-88) (David Snellgrove, Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhist and Their Tibetan Successors, Second Edition (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2002), 488-9).


220This theoretically places two divine female matriarchs in Jikten Gönpo's family lineage; Achi on his paternal side, Tsünma on his maternal side (Roerich, The Blue Annals, 596).
have worked, as soon after Jikten Sumgön had a vision that a great lu serpent left his body, leaving him healed. This incident prompted him to teach lepers this new technique, purportedly curing them of the disease as well. The miraculous occurrence left many to believe he had attained a state of buddhahood, and some even claimed he was actually an incarnation of the instrumental Indian Buddhist philosopher, Nāgārjuna.

When he was in his mid-thirties, his teacher, Pakmodru, passed away. Sources are unclear as to whether he was asked to take the lineage holder's place as head of the monastery of Densa Til (Gdan sa mthil), or if this was asked of another disciple instead, but either way Jikten Sumgön left both the area and any responsibility he may have had and headed to the Drikung valley with a gathering of personal disciples. It was here that another student of Pakmodru, Minyak Gomring (Mi nyag sgom rings, 1110-1170), had already set up a small monastery or meditation hut years prior, gathering a small group of monks around him. In 1179, tradition holds that Jikten Sumgön formally established the monastery of Drikung Til at the spot, and it is from this point that one can speak of a distinctive teaching lineage coming from the valley region based on the prolific writings of their founder. By all accounts, Jikten Sumgön appears to have had a large following, even allowing for some exaggeration by his hagiographers, and he wrote numerous treatises on Buddhist philosophy and meditation practice, some seen as controversial. According to the nineteenth-century Géluk religious history, The Crystal Mirror of Philosophical Systems (Grub mtha' shel gyi me long) by Tukten Losang Chökyi Nyima (Thu'u kyan blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, 1737-1802), it was Jikten Sumgön's nephew, Shérap Jungné (Shes rabs byung nas, 1187-1241), who composed the one-hundred-ninety special teachings posited by his uncle, making up his supreme teaching called the "Single Intention" practice (dgongs gcig).²²¹ Like most sects within the Kagyü tradition, the Six Yogas of Nāropa (Nā ro chos drug)²²² are also important within the Drikung tradition, as is the deity pair of Cakrasaṃvara and Vajravārāhī as mentioned previously. Jikten Sumgön passed away at the age of seventy-five, in the Fire-Female-Ox year of 1217, but during his life he had gained a significant reputation for both himself and his lineage among the individual polities of Tibet. The Drikung Kagyü became entrenched in Kailash, Tsari, Labchi, and Kham, and other appendage monasteries were built throughout the Drikung valley region.²²³ Eventually, the sub-sect would become one of the Kagyü tradition's most successful, establishing affiliate monasteries throughout the Himalayan region and beyond.

²²² Six Yogas of Naropa are practiced by many orders within the Kagyü tradition. It includes the practices of Inner Heat (gtum mo), Four Blisses (dga' ba bzhi), Pure Illusory Body (dag pa'i sgyu lus), Actual Clear Light, (don gyi 'od gsal), Union of Clear Light and Illusory Body (zung 'jug), and Transference of Consciousness and Forceful Projection (pho ba grong 'jug). For further information, see: Glenn H. Mullin, The Practice of the Six Yogas of Naropa (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2006).
But Drikung Til's political involvement had only just begun. During this period, the land of Tibet became dotted with great monastic establishments which, alongside spiritual authority, carried great economic and military power. Each complex had its own landholdings, its own serfs, and even its own militia, and leaders were appointed officials from among the highest orders of ordained monks, members of influential families, or, starting in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, selected by means of the tülku (sprul sku) system of incarnate lamas. This latter method began within the Karma Kagyü sub-sect of Tibetan Buddhism, but was adopted by the Drikung Kagyü order in the seventeenth century. In the Drikung version, succession is now held by the alternating Chetsang and Chungtsang reincarnating lineages, one spiritual head training the other until he passes, in which case the second would take command and train the reincarnation of the first. With regard to Drikung Til itself, until the mid-twentieth century it was governed by one of these acting as an abbot alongside a secular administrator called a gompa (sgom pa) who governed the civil and military powers of the establishment. This gompa was commonly a member of one of the patron families who dominated the Drikung region. As a consequence of this expansion, military conflict between competing religious institutions was unavoidable. Giuseppe Tucci credits the start of this trend to the struggles that would arise between the Drikung Kagyü sect and the rapidly growing Sakya tradition in the twelfth through thirteenth centuries, ending only after the ascendency of the Dalai Lama lineage as late as the seventeenth century.

As the effective political leaders of the conglomerate districts of the country, it was these monastic heads that both the indigenous people and the foreign armies turned to when Mongolian interests fell to Tibet. It was not until the reign of Ögedai Khan (r. 1229-1241), Chinggis Khan's (1162-1227) successor, that Mongolian armies began serious invasions into the northern regions of Tibet. In 1239, Kōdan (d. 1253/1260), the second son of the Khan, sent Dorda Darkhan and his army to raid and pillage the Dromtön ('Brom ston) monastery of Reting (Rwa sgreng) and the wealthy chapel of Gyal Lukhê (Rgyal lug lhas) in Central Tibet. Around this same time, another raiding party, led by the commander Miliji (Mi li byi) reached Drikung Til, but upon seeing the face of the Fourth Drikung Hierarch (Spyan nga grags pa 'byung gnas, 1175-1255), "faith was born in him," and the party left without harming the monastery or its inhabitants. Around a month later, Dorda Darkhan arrived in Drikung to do the job himself, but again the miraculous powers of the abbot is said to have

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224. The Drikung Kagyü order not only had conflicts with the Sakya monasteries; there is also evidence that the Drikung and Taklung Kagyü orders had a long standing feud, beginning in the 1220's when the Taklung attempted to monopolize the felling of trees in the contested Naksho (Nags shod) area for trading and refurbishing monasteries against the wishes of the Drikung. There is evidence of clashes in the 1270's as well due to conciliatory remarks in the letter written from the Drikung to Taklung hierarchs in the fourteenth century. This apparently did not end the conflict, however, as in the 1450's, the Drikung army unsuccessfully invaded Taklung territories at Pōdo (Phod mdo) (Sørensen and Hazod, Rulers on the Celestial Plain, 509).

thwarted his attacks.\textsuperscript{226} While the \textit{Blue Annals} reports that this miracle came in the sudden magical showering of stones from the sky,\textsuperscript{227} local legends claim that Achi, now regarded as the deified protectress of the monastery, was responsible for the defeat, having imprisoned many of the invaders in her \textit{lhakhang} located below the monastery and incinerating them inside.\textsuperscript{228} In either case, the monastery became quite famous due to these events and gained a generous number of new disciples as a direct consequence.

Frightened by these invasions, the leaders of Central Tibet and Tsang (\textit{Gtsang}) convened a meeting. This occurrence demonstrated that while there was no central unified leadership at the time, a system was in place that could bring all the various chiefs together when the interests of the whole were threatened.\textsuperscript{229} For fear of immense bloodshed, the council agreed to send ambassadors to cede all of Tibet – Ngari (\textit{Mnga ri}), the four districts of Central Tibet and Tsang, the southern provinces, and eastern Kham - to the Khan and his armies. Eager to establish friendly relations with the various royal families of the new Mongolian overlords, the hierarchs from many of the most prominent sects sent representatives northward to seek patronage. Traditional histories focus on the relationship established between Sakya Paṇḍita Kūṅga Gyeltsen (\textit{Sa skya paṇḍita kun dga’ rgyal mtshan}) and Kōdan due to the apparent granting of leadership to the Tibetan monk over the ceded provinces, but many of the other sects received grants and favors which rivaled his own. The Karma Kagyū, Tsel Kagyü, and Drikung Kagyü all courted and found patrons among the Mongolian leaders, the Drikung finding an alliance with Möngke Khan (1209-1259) and then with Hūlagū Khan (1217-1265), the Mongolian ruler of Persia. These alliances did not stop Mongolian military invasions, however, and after Sakya Paṇḍita's nephew, Pakpa Lodrö Gyeltsen (\textit{’Phags pa blo gros rgyal mtshan}, 1235-1280), was elevated as the viceroy of all thirteen myriarchies of Tibet by his advisee Khubilai Khan (1215-1284), an intermittent war began between the Sakya and Drikung monasteries with the help of their Mongolian allies. Hoping to overthrow the Sakya leaders, the Drikung received help from Hūlagū Khan and descended on the Sakya-run Jayūl (\textit{Bya yul}) monastery in southern Tibet with an army of Iranian Mongols in 1285, apparently causing some damage to the complex. The Sakya succeeded in driving back the assault, and this attack proved to be a fatal move on behalf of the Drikung institution. In 1290, seeking retaliation, the Sakya requested and received help from Khubilai Khan, who sent an army led by his son Temür (r. 1333-1368) and a Tibetan army from Tsang to attack Drikung Til. After successfully taking the monastery, the Mongolian army and their Sakya leaders burned it to the ground, purportedly killing some ten thousand monks and taking the Drikung abbot and

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{226}Kapstein, \textit{The Tibetans}, 111; Roerich, \textit{The Blue Annals}, 577-8; Snellgrove and Richardson, \textit{A Cultural History of Tibet}, 148.
\textsuperscript{227}Roerich, \textit{The Blue Annals}, 578.
\textsuperscript{228}Dowman, \textit{The Power Places of Central Tibet}, 116.
\textsuperscript{229}Tucci, \textit{Tibetan Painted Scrolls}, 9.
\end{footnotesize}
The complex was repaired sometime later, at the behest of the Sakya sect, this final attack effectively put an end to the struggles between the Drikung and Sakya, leaving the latter's rule over Tibet largely unopposed for the time being.230

Eventually the Mongolian Empire began to crumble and the Sakya rule over Tibet fell to the Pakmodru Kagyü hierarch Tai Situ Changchup Gyeltsen (Ta'i sit u byang chub rgyal mitshan, 1302-1364/1371). The Karma Kagyü tradition also formed good relations with the Chinese court, establishing itself in Kham and southeast Tibet, thereby assuming another leading position alongside the still powerful Sakya institution. According to Matthew Kapstein, this period until the rise of the Géluk Dalai Lamas is a relatively neglected time in Tibetan history.231 Many of the historic and traditional accounts claim that the destruction of Drikung Til essentially put an end to the great political reign of the Drikung hierarchs, but some more recent scholarship shows that this may not have been the case. While the sect would never reach the same competitive position for full leadership of Central Tibet, despite growing sectarian tensions and disputes with the Géluk starting in 1516, the Drikung, revitalized with help from other Kagyü orders, remained a major force politically, militarily, and ecclesiastically until the beginning of the seventeenth century.232

5.3 The Contents of the Drikung Valley Region

Returning again to the actual site of the monastery, the present foundations of Drikung Til were constructed in the fifteenth century as part of the restoration effort after its destruction by the Sakya and Mongolian armies. It is situated one-hundred miles northeast of Lhasa in the upper part of the Zho (Gzho) valley along the Zhorong river (Gzho rong chu), the principal tributary of the Kyichu, on a ridge said to resemble the back of a dri ('bri), or she-yak. This is believed to have given the valley its name.


232 While the Drikung Kagyü and the Taklung Kagyü traditions had a long history of antagonism, when the former began to wane in the fifteenth century the latter helped to revitalize the sect. According to the histories of the Drikung, Kunga Rinchen (Kun dga’ rin chen, 1475-1527) is also said to have had close ties with Dönyö Dorje (Don yod rdo rje, 1463-1512), the contemporary ruler of Central Tibet at the time, and was called in to help with the performance of rain rites in the Lhasa region. Kunga Rinchen's successor, the Fifteenth Drikung Throne-Holder Rinchen Püntsok (Rin chen phun tshogs, 1509-1557) was granted land special privileges by the same ruler, specifically land rights to the Móndrong (Smon grong) feudal estate located en route from Lhasa to Drikung Til, where the Drikung Kagyü held power until the mid-sixteenth century due to the effectiveness of the sect's rituals in preventing drought in the region. This left the sect in control of the entire territory east of Lhasa and into the Drikung valley, making this the point in history where the sect actually reached the peaks of its political power as opposed to the period during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Sørensen and Hazod, *Rulers on the Celestial Plain*, 503-4, 509).
According to Richardson, prior to the Cultural Revolution it appeared as "a scatter of temples, chapels and monastic residences spread widely over a steep hillside overlooking a small patch of cultivated ground by the [Zhorong river]...connected by walkways and ladders along the hill." More than fifty buildings lie along the ridge in varying states of repair, but three temples act as the focal pieces of the entire complex. One is an assembly hall (du khang) that contains numerous images, including those of Jikten Sumgön and his two immediate successors at its center. Two other temples are connected to the hall by an open air gallery, one said to hold the damaged reliquary stūpa, preserved stone footprint, ritual conch shell and trumpet of Jikten Sumgön. Additionally, on the lowest level is a gönkhang containing wrathful images of Achi-as-dharma protectress, known in legend as the place in which she miraculously incinerated the sect’s enemies in the thirteenth century. The ruined residences of the Drikung Chetsang and Chungstang lineages lie in the complex, as well as numerous active hermitages along the hillside. In the late 1980's, there were as many as ninety monks, nuns, yogins, and lay people practicing in the area.

Drikung Til is most well-known for its possession of the large sky burial site of Drikung Durtrō (‘Bri gung dur khrod), which lies to the northwest of the complex above the ridge. Even today, bodies are brought for funerary rites from great distances, and the site is considered identical to the most famous of the Eight Great Indian Charnel Grounds, Silbutsel (Bsil bu tshal; Skt. Śītavana) near Bodhgaya. According to legend, a rainbow connects the two sacred spots, which share the same guardian deity. As for the site itself, a circle of large rocks, twelve meters in diameter, represents the mandala of the tantric deity Cakrasaṃvara. It is surrounded by a perimeter of stūpas, lhakhangs, and hanging prayer flags, and a large standing stone at the top of the area and a flat stone near the center are used by the ritual specialists who dismember the bodies of the deceased before offering them to the flocks of large griffon vultures who arrive to feed. Nearby there is also a stūpa containing an additional footprint of Jikten Sumgön and a small temple containing the shaven hair of the deceased.

North of the Drikung Til monastic complex is the hermitage known as Zhotö Terdrom, the so-called birthplace of Achi which literally means "Box of Treasures." As mentioned in Könhok Gyatso's hagiography, it is alternatively known as Tidro in early sources, and it contains some of the oldest and most sacred sites of the region with legends dating back as early as the eighth century. This includes the Ani Gompa, an active nunnery which in modern times serves both men and women, and a meditation

233Richardson, High Peaks, Pure Earth, 308.
234Dorje, Tibet Handbook with Bhutan, 213-215; Dowman, The Power Places of Central Tibet, 115; Richardson, High Peaks, Pure Earth, 308; Roerich, The Blue Annals, 570.
235Silbutsel/Śītavana means "Cool Forest" or "Cool Grove." The Eight Great Charnel Grounds (Tib. Dur khrod chen po; Skrt. Astamahashmaśana) traditionally appear on the periphery of the tantric mandala. Mythologically, their origins come from the legend in the death and dismemberment of the demon Rudra, whose various parts each constituted one of the grounds (Beer, The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs, 250).
Fig. 8. Photograph of the hermitages of Terdrom, courtesy of Bryan J. Cuevas, 2006.
cave believed to have been occupied by Yeshé Tsogyel and Padmasambhava during their exile from the Central Tibetan Imperial court. The Ani Gompa, restored during the reconstruction efforts of recent decades, maintains a lhakhang containing peaceful and wrathful images of Achi alongside images of Padmasambhava and Jikten Sumgön. Outside the nunnery are two fifty-centimeter deep pools of hot mineral water, each also attended by a lhakhang shrine dedicated to Achi. Connecting to the early discussion of water and its inhabiting deities, legend claims that when Padmasambhava arrived in the region, a poisonous subterranean lake was wreaking havoc on the local residents. In order to subdue the lu causing this disturbance, he threw his vajra at the ridge above, creating a tunnel which flows beneath the pools in order to drain the subterranean lake. He then created the medicinal hot springs as a boon for future practitioners, promising they could cure any ailment of the human body. Because of this, they were used as Jikten Sumgön's private baths during his life time. According to Gyurme Dorje, the mark of the vajra can still be seen above the rocks marking the tunnel's entrance. Of even greater significance to the tradition, the legendary meditation cave, called the Great Assembly Hall of the Đākinīs (Mkha' 'gro tshogs khang chen mo), lies in the mountains above the nunnery and is accessible only by a demanding pilgrimage route up the ridge. Yeshé Tsogyel is said to have practiced in an attached private retreat cell at various points throughout her life, once for seven years. Tradition holds that after her royal husband, Trisong Detsen, had given her to Padmasambhava as a ritual consort, the anti-Buddhist sentiment in the capital was so great the two were forced to flee to the Drikung valley, settling in the area of Terdrom. After subduing the local spirits, the two took meditative retreat in this very cave. While Padmasambhava eventually returned to the capital, Yeshé Tsogyel acquired her own male consort and returned with him to the cave in Terdrom where they spent several months in retreat, finally leaving for the capital themselves. After the initiation of Padmasambhava's twenty-four disciples at Samyé Monastery, the yoginī is said to have returned to Terdrom, this time for solitary retreat for the rest of her life. Consequently, this was also the location in which she is known to have hidden a part of her cycle of treasure texts, which was later found in the sixteenth century by the Seventeenth Drikung Throne-Holder Rinchen Püntsök (Rin chen phun tshogs, 1509-1557).

An additional point of interest with regards to this study lies toward Lhasa, at the entrance of the Zho valley. On the south side of the Zhorong river once existed an appendage monastery to Drikung Til named Yangri Dön (Yang ri gdon), a once-wealthy site originally dating to the fifteenth century.

Richardson reports that before being looted to form a military base in 1966, it contained a great *lhakhang*, a line of *stūpas*, and a large ornate *gönkhang* enshrining a famous image of Achi. Five hundred monks were in residence when the site was razed to the ground, leaving nothing but one single stretch of wall that remained until 1985. According to local accounts, this wall was a special residence for the dharma protectress, and as the site's protector, it is said that anyone found disturbing it would die as a consequence. This prophecy seemed to come true, as a series of deaths among those who had taken part in its destruction prompted locals to leave the final wall standing for years, until local Tibetans finally dismantled that as well. According to Dowman, the ruins of the site and the military base are still present, but a few monks in residence at an old hermitage that was once attached to the monastery maintain the traditions of Yangri Đôn, having built a new *lhakhang* dedicated to Achi and the other local spirits to take the place of what had been destroyed.\(^{241}\)

### 5.3.1 Wrathful Lands and Legends

The Drikung valley region encompasses examples of most, if not all, of the ideas and practices seen throughout representations of sacred space in the Tibetan cultural zone. Imperial myths, pre-Buddhist spirits, and rituals seeking magical powers and blessings work to legitimize the area as an essential part of the landscape even now that the political power the area once held is gone. What perhaps is not clear at the time of this writing has less to do with the land itself, and more to do with the structures that have been built upon it. What rules and rituals once allowed the geomantic temples and great monastic complexes to be built on such hallowed grounds? What prevented these places from falling to the machinations of violent forces thought to inhabit the landscape when others did? Now, many of these deliberately constructed monuments have been partially or fully destroyed. Like those told of Achi's vengeance on the Red Guard that brought down Yangri Đôn, what stories have been constructed to reconcile these immense causalities, both in life and property, in post-Mao Tibet? Without more recent ethnographic studies on the region and its inhabitants, these questions will have to be left unanswered for now.

Like the legends that make Drikung famous, Achi's character is wholly Buddhist according to her hagiography and devoted practitioners. Whereas many pilgrimage sites and deities are obviously adapted from indigenous ones, a Buddhist veneer painted over pre-Buddhist conceptions of the world, both Drikung and its guardian are more complicated. Rather than governed by some great converted mountain deity to be placated, the *lhakhangs* and *gönkhangs* of Drikung placate Achi, a fully enlightened female buddha and dharma protectress, first and foremost. And yet, despite her peaceful appearance and mythology, Achi still fulfills many of the stereotypes of other fierce protectors. She incinerates enemies to

protect the monastery. She repays those that trespass her with curses of death. It is Achi, not the local spirits, who is asked permission before beginning the great pilgrimage festival of the Drikung Phowa Chenpo. To the western outsider, these ideas seem discordant with the ideal conceptions of the Buddhist religion, as does the idea that non-violent Buddhist lamas could make war on one another with their monastically sponsored armies. The peaceful and wrathful elements of Tibetan religion are allowed to coexist in its practices and landscapes, following an internal logic underlying the society as a whole. The Drikung region and the persona of Achi Chökyi Drölma represent an advanced synthesis of these apparently-not-so discordant features, intrinsically connected not only to each other, but to the religious resources and narrative constructions of Tibetan society and its cultural repertoire.
CHAPTER SIX

THE ROLES OF WOMEN IN SĀMSĀRA AND NIRVĀṆA

6.1 Changing Attitudes

In order to understand how a simple maternal ancestor could become an honored deity and the import such a figure is able to carry in the modern Tibetan worldview, there is a long history of the role women in the Buddhist religion that must be addressed. Even before the advent of tantra and its spread to Tibet, women played significant roles in religious narratives, their parts fluctuating between the praiseworthy positive, the condemningly negative, and the unambiguously neutral. Achi is just one figure in a wide cast of actresses. It has been noted that thus far the study of women in Buddhism has taken two polar opposite approaches: either the authors focus on the repression of women by a patriarchal institution or they attempt to valorize a particular woman or some heretofore unknown activity of women within the religious sphere. Both perspectives view Buddhism as some monolithic entity, and often the history of women is chronicled as an evolution from repression, as seen in early Indian Buddhism, to pure egalitarianism, as with the introduction of Mahāyāna scriptures, to a final culmination in the elevation of women in the practice of the tantras. While the last of these has already been complicated, it must be pointed out that while it may be true that attitudes toward women in early Indian soteriology appear to be more negative, and attitudes in Mahāyāna more positive in comparison, there has never been one all-encompassing doctrine with regard to Buddhist women in the Asian world.\(^{242}\) This three-part arrangement is a convenient and normative way of structuring the shifts in doctrinal paradigms of each period, but that is not to say that prejudices against or in favor of women did not bleed from one into the other at any given point, in any given place. Each of these benchmarks involved the introduction of new doctrines and ideas that did not disappear from the minds of Buddhist authors and practitioners, but rather carried forward into future permutations of the religion, to be used or discarded according to their own perspectives. While the sexualized nature of tantric practice and the introduction of the consort have been addressed, the forms of Buddhism that precluded these ideas have not been. As Serinity Young has

argued, the common held idea that these were wholly new and inventive perspectives on the female form seems far from accurate, as sexualized images of the feminine have existed in narratives and iconographies since the earliest incarnations of the religion, as seen in the hosts of courtesans, prostitutes and sexually-desirable goddesses that appear.243

6.1.1 Gender as a Cultural Repertoire

Just as religious concepts are pulled from the sets of various cultural resources that function in alternatively discordant and harmonic relation to one another, so too are concepts of gender and sexuality in a given society. These resources are accepted and reified by the culture as a whole, setting general standards for what men and women should and should not do. As John Powers points out,

Each culture constructs concepts of ideal body types and a performative repertoire for both men and women, and individuals are expected to conform to those norms. Moreover, they are judged by their peers on the basis of how well they manage to enact their society's expectations...Gender is not nature but, rather, something that people do, a repertoire of bodily actions repeated within a set of often unconsciously appropriated norms that appear natural but are actually learned and manifested for the benefit of both the individual and others.244

Gender and body are of course inexplicably related, but as the plethora of Buddhist stories on transformation from one sex to another can attest to, they are not always dependant on one another. One's understanding of one's own sexuality is not limited to anatomy alone, and arises from these sets of socially-accepted standards. Even if one rejects those norms, one is still doing so with knowledge found within that broader cultural repertoire. The perceived differences between men and women are more than just differences of physical traits, but of communally constructed phenomena. Gender cannot be seen as the only dividing line either; all men and all women have never been treated exactly the same as some unified whole, nor have all women treated all other women the same way or men all other men. There is no question that gender differences exist; the question is how much weight can be given to merely gender in a certain situation, in a certain time. Evaluating the status of women cannot be done in broad strokes,

243 Young specifically argues "that the tantric emphasis on sexuality was not entirely new, but rather a continuation of the highly sexualized female imagery found at the earliest Buddhist archaeological sites." While not a crux of her work, this argument stood out as an important and necessary shift from the general trend in the study of gender in Buddhism (Young, Courtesans and Tantric Consorts, xxiii).

244 Powers, A Bull of a Man, 8-9.
but must take into account additional differences of class, individual age, locality, and the specific time period being studied. This being said, despite the passivity often attributed to women in other historic contexts, women in Buddhism have often played very active and important roles, even if they have not always been positive ones. Buddhist traditions, and particularly those forms found in Tibet, are neither as misogynistic nor as egalitarian as is often claimed, but rather involve a complex interaction of cultural values with centuries of dissonant doctrines which has resulted in a wide cast of accepted female referents.

6.1.2 Early Indian Archetypes: The Familial and the Grotesque

While some scholars valorize the fantasy of egalitarianism within the Buddhist tradition, others narrow in on the presence of hostile and negative representations of women as a means of undermining this ideal. Often these two divergent perspectives are present in the same primary texts, leading some to characterize the Buddhist view of women as conflicted, confused, and uncertain. In early narratives, there seems to be numerous voices from a multiplicity of perspectives, each with its own attitude toward women and the roles they are able to fill. Alan Sponberg specifically cites four contending concerns that arose during the formation of the religious community. To summarize, the first three attitudes developed together in the initial centuries after the Buddha's death, as the oral and textual traditions began to form. The earliest is an attitude of "soteriological inclusiveness," in which neither gender nor class prevents one from pursuing the goal of liberation. Sponberg explains that while women are able to pursue the monastic path and are known to achieve arhatship under these doctrines, they are not considered equal to men in their spiritual ability. The second attitude, "institutional androcentrism," is seen most prevalently in the Vinaya texts, and according to this view women could only pursue a full-time religious career under the supervision of the male monastic institution. This is not so much an issue of soteriology regarding the nature of women themselves, but rather a concern for the saṅgha's ability to maintain a proper public image within patriarchal Indian society so as to retain followers and financial support. The third

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245 Sponberg, "Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism, 8-11.
246 Sponberg, "Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism,"13. This attitude is most clearly reinforced in the ordination story of Mahāprājāpatī and her retinue as the first Buddhist nuns, under the condition that they observe eight additional rules besides the standard monastic precepts. These eight special rules, called the gurudharma, or the 'eight heavies', to which the bhikṣuṇī must obey are "(1) a nun ordained even one hundred years must rise and pay respect to a monk even if he was ordained that very day; (2) nuns must not hold their rains-retreat in a place where there is no monk; (3) nuns must request instruction from the monks twice each month; (4) at the conclusion of the rains-retreat, nuns must declare the faults they have seen, heard, and suspected before the order of monks; (5) suspended nuns must be reinstated before a quorum of twenty monks and twenty nuns; (6) the ordination of nuns must be conducted by both orders (first by ten nuns and then by ten monks); (7) nuns must not revile monks; and (8) nuns must not admonish monks, although monks may admonish nuns" (Encyclopedia of Buddhism, (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 607). See also: Hanna Havnevik, Tibetan Buddhist Nuns (Oslo: Norwegian Press, 1990).
attitude described by Sponberg is that of "ascetic misogyny," which maintains a distinctly aggressive, denigrating tone toward women as temptresses and objects of desire. \(^{247}\) This stems from general beliefs regarding women in South Asia, who are seen as more sexually driven than men, \(^{248}\) as well as in the emphasis placed on male celibacy in the earliest stages of the religion. Sponberg uses the term "soteriological androgyny" to refer to the attitude he identifies in later Indo-Tibetan tantric texts emerging in the sixth and seventh centuries, which honors feminine characteristics as a necessary half of the male-female whole required for enlightenment. \(^{249}\)

Women in these early texts fill roles as mothers and wives, nuns and courtesans, and the converted and the condemned. The most positive images are those of mothers, as exemplified in the figures of the Siddhartha Gautama's birth mother, Mahāmāyā, and his foster-mother, Mahāpajāpatī Gautamī. Both became deified and venerated by specific cults devoted to them, and eventually this would lead the first to be said to have been reborn as a goddess in the heavenly realms, and the second to be viewed as an early configuration of a female buddha parallel to Siddhartha Gautama himself. In the early versions of the Buddha's life story, Mahāmāyā takes on a very small, but obviously essential, role. Having been chosen for her excellent qualities and good pedigree, and then miraculously impregnated during a prophetic dream, she carried the baby Siddhartha until she gave birth to him painlessly from her right side in the garden of Lumbini. Seven days later she died, only to be reborn in the heavenly realms where she would eventually be taught the dharma during a visit by her son. In some later Mahāyāna texts, Mahāmāyā is portrayed not only as a maternal goddess due to her role in the story of the Buddha, but as some kind of cosmic, universal mother to the whole of the dharma. \(^{250}\) Along these same lines, another important woman in the Buddha's life story is Mahāpajāpatī Gautamī, the sister of Mahāmāyā and Siddhartha's maternal aunt. While it is understood that she married King Śuddodhana and acted as caregiver to the young bodhisattva after his mother's death, there is little mention of her in the popular narratives until after the Buddha's enlightenment. She is most famously known for being the first woman to seek monastic vows, the founder of the female renunciant order, and the first preceptor of the original


\(^{248}\)Numerous scholars have commented on this prevalent stereotype in Indian Buddhist narrative. For further information, see: Gyatso, Apparitions of the Self, 248-252; Powers, A Bull of a Man, 66-69, 74-79; Wilson, Charming Cadavers, 4-5, 70-71, 93-95; Young, Courtesans and Tantric Consorts, 87-88, 105-108; 179-185; et al. \(^{249}\)Sponberg, "Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism," 25-26.

\(^{250}\)Early texts seem reticent to speak about the death of Mahāmāyā itself. What all seem to agree upon, however, is that it was not caused by complications during Siddhartha's birth, which, historically speaking, seems the most logical conclusion. Such a connection between a miraculous event and subsequent suffering, however, would not be appropriate for the story, and other texts explain that the mothers of buddhas all die seven days after their births, as it would be inappropriate for these women to ever engage in sexual intercourse again (Gethin, The Foundations of Buddhism, 19; Shaw, Buddhist Goddesses of India, 43-46; Young, Courtesans and Tantric Consorts, 23).
nuns. While there is little argument that Gautamī reached arhatship like the other male disciples of her foster-son, some argue that she can be viewed as a female buddha herself. Her detailed biography appears in the Therī-apadāna, a collection of forty biographies of enlightened female arhats composed sometime around the second century B.C.E. By the time this version of the story was written, Gautamī's life had come to parallel that of the historical Buddha's, even culminating in her own attainment of parinirvāṇa chronologically before Siddhartha Gautama reached it himself. According to Jonathan Walters, the figure of Gautamī provided Buddhist nuns with an unprecedented path that ran parallel, rather than subordinate, to the Buddha's. By all accounts, Gautamī in this context is a female buddha, although she would never be referred to as such due to the doctrinal restrictions at the time. While Wilson debates the degree to which this elevation would have created a fully equal path for women to follow, both mothers still managed to achieve their own sense of cult status within the Buddhist community due to their proximity and importance to Siddhartha Gautama's story. As exemplified in these women, maternal piety played an important role in Buddhist narrative long before Achi came to be.

Despite the importance of these figures in later cults, in the majority of early Buddhist narratives women are portrayed as objects for male liberation and not as subjects in their own right. Wilson argues that even when given names and personalities, these female characters appear as "mute objects of the male gaze" rather than as fully-developed protagonists. These women are said to disguise their monstrous and impure nature in order to lure men with sexual desire, particularly celibate monks, and they represent the continuance of the householder's life and the grip of saṃsāra. In numerous stories, monks find escape from these bonds by either mentally transforming once beautiful women into disfigured and decomposing creatures, or by literally viewing their mutilated or cremated cadavers. Both acts awaken them to the transient nature of the body and cures them of their lust. Courtesans and prostitutes play this important role as early as the Buddha's life story, as he is spurred finally to renounce his wealth and family upon seeing their sleeping bodies as a sea of oozing and horrific corpses. Rare

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Wilson, Charming Cadavers, 4.

The stories of the beautiful nun Sirimā, whose decomposing corpse was used by the Buddha to teach his disciples about the impermanence of all things, and the once-desired courtesan Vāsavadattā, whose mutilated but still living body helped the monk Upagupta to reach realization, both classically demonstrate this narrative trope (Elizabeth Wilson, "The Female Body as a Source of Horror and Insight in Post-Ashokan Indian Buddhism," in Religious Reflections on the Human Body (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 78-83; Wilson, Charming Cadavers, 77-105; Young, Courtesans and Tantric Consorts, 127-130).
women, often nuns, who do not act as vilified or misguided temptresses reach states of spiritual progress just as the male protagonists do – through the objectification of their own female bodies and its decay.\textsuperscript{256} Even Mahāmāyā and Gautamī are important due to their relationship to the Buddha, not through their own independent actions. While these images of women would never completely disappear, new texts introduced a less grotesque and more divinely sublime female exemplar with the introduction of the Mahāyāna scriptures.

### 6.1.3 Mahāyāna Buddhist Ideals: The Beautiful Divine and the Awakened Goddess

Starting as early as the first century C.E., texts claiming to preach the doctrines of the "greater vehicle", or Mahāyāna, began to appear, and with them came a host of female deities, bodhisattvas, and even buddhas. These Mahāyāna deities appear as beautifully perfect beings, in elaborate dress, decked in jewels and the ornaments of royalty, surrounded by sublime retinues, and basking in heavenly abodes on gorgeous lotus thrones. This influx of divine beings, featuring not only women but non-monastics of all classes who have attained various states of accomplishment, has prompted numerous scholars to claim that Buddhism is inherently egalitarian in nature. While the validity of this assessment is in question, many of these texts did provide new non-male and non-monastic figures for Buddhist practitioners to use as authoritative referents and objects of devotion. One of these arose out of the contents of the Prajñāpāramitā, or "Perfection of Wisdom," sūtras, which are regarded as the highest expression of Mahāyāna philosophical thought. Out of grammatical position of prajñā as a feminine noun, the metaphysical principle of wisdom became personified as a female deity, portrayed as the great mother of all buddhas and the primordial source of their own wisdom. The goddess Prajñāpāramitā become an object of devotion in her own right, and prescriptions even assured that worshipping her was equitable to worshipping all buddhas of all times and world-systems.\textsuperscript{257}

In later Mahāyāna teachings, Prajñāpāramitā continued to be identified as the ultimate source of female deities, who often adopted her standard epithet of "Mother of All Buddhas" as their own. With parallel origins as an Indian goddess outside Buddhism, Tārā and her many forms rose to tremendous popularity as one such divine mother, particularly among the Tibetan people. While she originally appeared alongside the goddess Bhṛkuṭī as one of Avalokiteśvara's attendant deities, by the eighth century Tārā had begun to appear as a central deity with her own attendants and accompanying ritual texts. Unlike many of the other goddesses introduced in Mahāyāna literature, Tārā is not only identified as a maternal deity, but also as one of, if not the, earliest goddesses identified as a fully enlightened buddha, displaying

\textsuperscript{256}These nuns are either awakened to their own impermanence by the viewing of phantasms demonstrating their bodies' aging and decay, or they actively meditate on such a future to reach that state of awakening on their own (Wilson, \textit{Charming Cadavers}, 157-169).

\textsuperscript{257}Shaw, \textit{Buddhist Goddesses of India}, 61,179.
the thirty-two marks and the three bodies (*trikāya*). The cult of Tārā did not make a major presence in Tibet until Atiśa brought her practices with him to Ngari in the eleventh century, but from that time onwards she has had a profound impact on various schools and individuals as the "Mother Saviouress of Tibet." In his in-depth analysis of the deity and her rituals, Beyer refers to her as a "patron deity," his term for a tutelary deity, and cites her as a figure central to lay devotion. Tārā, like Achi, straddles multiple roles: As a maternal goddess, she can be turned to for help with mundane problems, and as a recognized buddha, she can be venerated by the monastic community. Tārā's embodiment of the female form is not a mere incidental detail of iconography, but a key aspect of her identity. In her own hagiographic accounts, her fervent belief in the ultimate emptiness of gender prompted her to vow to reach enlightenment solely in the body of a woman.258 Female embodiment therefore plays an important role in the way devotees relate to goddesses like Prajñāpāramitā and Tārā, and the elevation of motherhood to divine heights betrays the importance of maternal ancestry in Buddhist traditions, even before its entrance into the region of Tibet.

### 6.2 Buddhist Bodies, Tibetan Mothers, and Tantric Teachers

With the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet, these earlier Indian constructions of gender combined, confused, and supplanted whatever indigenous normative values existed previously, forcing real-world women to negotiate an ever-shifting maze of cosmological and soteriological standards with each new generation. These foreign ideas became just another set of resources within the cultural repertoire, informing how women were perceived and how they perceived themselves. Despite any influence tantric ideologies on female sacredness or the honoring of divine mothers may have had, embodiment as a human, let alone as a woman, was viewed as an existence mired in gross physicality and deplorable desire. Paul Williams argues that the whole of the tradition, in all its permutations, describes the body as fragile, foul, and impermanent, and because attachment to the body is the worst kind of attachment one can have, it is ultimately the enemy of a Buddhist practitioner.259 As objects of this attachment and symbols for the grip of *samsāra* in early Buddhist narrative, women in Tibet have faced the same attitudes of ascetic misogyny pointed out by Sponberg and expounded upon by Wilson. Since the eleventh century, the demeaning word *kyemen* (*skyê dman*), which literally translates to 'inferior birth', has been the standard used for 'woman' in both speech and writing, although its use has declined in colloquial Tibetan speech. Gyatso cites the ubiquitousness of this term to mean that to be a woman on any level of Tibetan society presumed bad karma, low status, and poor abilities.260 Being born a woman could

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259 Williams, "Some Mahāyāna Buddhist Perspectives on the Body." 208, 211.
260Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self*, 249; Gyatso and Havnevik, introduction to *Women in Tibet*, 9. That this practice began in the eleventh century is significant, because it means that the usage coincides with what is traditionally
be seen as an evil destiny, not as bad as some, but certainly worse than being born a man. Aside from the doctrinal fear of women as seductresses, this characterization stems from the particular forms of pollution believed to surround the coarse female body, exemplified in the impurity of menstruation, the womb, and ultimately childbirth in general. If left unchecked, these elements have the potential to negatively affect all that come in contact with them, including the mother, her children, and even the entire household, subsequently causing bad luck and even illness. In order to avoid this brush with impurity and its resulting misfortune, many divine figures, including Siddhartha Gautama and Padmasambhava, are taught to have been born through miraculous, non-vaginal births. Whereas Siddhartha Gautama emerged painlessly from his mother's side, having been protected in some fashion while in the womb, Padmasambhava avoided the female form entirely, having been born from a lotus. While a mother was still important in the first case, despite her distanced portrayal from natural human procreation, a woman and her accompanying impurities were rendered completely unnecessary in the second.

For these reasons and more, mothers play a conflicted and often precarious role in the Buddhist tradition. Notions of filial piety have permeated the religion from its earliest Indian foundations, and epigraphic evidence indicates that even monks and nuns, having renounced their mundane secular lives, honored their parents through donations to the religious community. In narratives, this veneration seems to be particularly aimed at mothers, despite the condemnation of procreation and the physical sexuality associated with the role, and devoted Buddhist sons are often depicted saving their mothers from damnation and leading them to enlightenment, as in the story of the Buddha's disciple Maudgalyāyana and his descent into hell. Symbolically, a mother's love for her children is used as a metaphor for the

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262 Due to the belief in the uncleanness of the womb, different authorities attempt to reconcile both how the Buddha could have resided in Mahāmāyā's womb without being infected with its impurity and why he would choose to do so to begin with. To the first question, one explanation has been that the Buddha was protected by a crystal box while in the womb. As for the second question, Vasubandhu gives three main reasons as to why the Buddha decided to be born from a mortal womb: 1) the mighty Śākyan clan would embrace the dharma because of his familial relationship to them; 2) by being born from a womb like normal humans, they would better relate to him and emulate his perfection more closely; 3) it would create him as a physical being, so his remains could be cremated and his relics could be worshipped for merit. This gives his interaction with impurity a specific purpose, thereby explaining why it would have occurred (Powers, *A Bull of a Man*, 29-30).

love bodhisattvas are expected to feel toward all sentient beings, elevating this trait of womanhood. But rather than elevate motherhood itself, this co-opting of a feminine attribute actually belittles women, indicating that while a mother's love is selfish, the bodhisattva's love is universal. Reiko Ohnuma argues that in this way the male bodhisattva combines the best traits of two of the most common female characters of Buddhist narrative: he embodies "a genuine and freely given love that is showered equally upon all beings – like a loving mother who prostitutes herself to the entire world."264 Numerous Tibetan hagiographies, including those of Jikten Sumgön and Achi, do not focus much on the parents at all, who seem to die or simply vanish in the stories early on. Once the religious family is begun, the immediate biological family is no longer an essential aspect of the story, although the clan one belongs to seems to continue to hold weight. One exception is the case of Machik Lapdrön, whose mother accompanied her during the early stages of her spiritual progress. Doctrinally-speaking, the guru-discipline relationship is meant to create a spiritual lineage which surpasses the importance of biologically created lines.265 In reality however, these lineages often became muddled as biological children become the disciples of their parents, a trend not uncommon among lay practitioners and tantric specialists who engage in sexual yogas. This is again seen in the stories of Achi and Machik Lapdrön, who are said to have passed their teachings down to their children.266

As has already been addressed in the last chapter with regard to the common presence of supernatural ancestors in clan origin myths, maternal ancestors play key roles in the legitimization of Tibetan political and spiritual authority. Nevertheless, an exaltation of motherhood, when it exists, does not necessarily translate to a heightening of a woman's position in her immediate or extended social sphere. Faure even argues that it can contribute to their subordination, reducing women to their procreative function and removing their personal agency. Like the Buddha's mothers, these women are not recognized for their individual achievements, but for their real or potential relationship with their progeny.267 This argument can certainly be made for Achi, her familiar name of "grandmother" establishing her identity in terms of her relationship to her politically-significant great-grandson. Being a wife and mother, roles culturally perceived as exemplifying the flaws of saṃsāric existence, only carries important weight when put in correlation to spiritually progressive husbands and children. When these traits are elevated above others as a woman's ideal position, it is merely another objectification of their characters; a reapplication of the male-gaze on the female form and its functions. If this were true,

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265Young, *Courtesans and Tantric Consorts*, 73-77.
Vajrayogini’s decision to intentionally embody these characteristics as the dharma protectress Achi could be seen as a continuance of this agenda to subordinate women into procreative and sexualized roles, regardless of her fully enlightened status. Is Achi, who is taught to have come to Tibet of her own volition specifically to assume the role of a mother, the result of the application of this androcentric male gaze, elevating motherhood as a divine purpose on one hand while reducing her to a strictly procreative function on the other? Or is Achi’s identity as a genetrix of a lineage merely the result of another application of skillful means, neither inherently meant to empower nor subjugate? To answer this question, the use of the body, sex, and the lure of the house-holder life in Buddhist narrative as a teaching method to reach enlightenment must be addressed.

6.2.1 The Use of Skillful Means

Despite any negative associations related to the physical body, both male and female, rebirth in a human form at all is taught to be a precious occurrence for the bodhisattva-in-training, as the human realm is the best of the six realms of existence for the pursuit of enlightenment. This was an idea that survived from very early in the tradition, as it was only in the human realm that one encountered an equal measure of pleasure and suffering.²⁶⁸ It is therefore only the body used for ignoble goals that should be viewed as a deplorable fixation in the Mahāyāna tradition. Furthermore, as seen in tantric practices, the structure of the body itself becomes important, because the manipulation of its subtle channels and energies is necessary for the achievement of the highest attainments and powers in later traditions. The body can be used on the path toward buddhahood to actively help others, as well as an object of self-sacrifice, as seen in various examples of the Buddha Śakyamuni’s sacrifices of his own life and limb during his previous births. Ohnuma calls these dehadāna, or ‘gift of the body’ stories, and argues that the bodhisattva’s gift of the body runs parallel to Buddha Śakyamuni’s greater gift of the dharma. Whereas the Buddha can give away a piece of his ‘spiritual body’ through teaching, bodhisattvas are more able to teach through the giving away of pieces of their physical forms.²⁶⁹ Attachment to the body is still something to be avoided, but that same body can nevertheless be used for positive goals with the right motivation. The assumption of bodily forms is a necessary step for enlightened beings to take if they wish to have a profound impact in the lives of current and potential human devotees. In tantric narratives, this is often played out through the use of sexuality, as seen by the consort roles played by wisdom dākinīs.

²⁶⁹Such examples occur in depictions of the historical Buddha’s past lives in the Jataka tales, when he took the forms of animals and humans, sacrificing his tusks as an elephant, eyes as a king, and his life as a prince in order to feed a tigress, to name a few (Reiko Ohnuma, “The Gift of the Body and the Gift of Dharma,” History of Religions, 37:4 (May 1998): 323-359).
6.2.2 Sex and the Bodhisattva

Williams and Young have pointed out that whereas male bodhisattvas typically demonstrate their generosity and self-sacrifice through bodily-mutilation or the giving of their lives, female bodhisattvas, while doing these things as well, have another means at their disposal – self-sacrifice through the satisfaction of the sexual desires of others. This has led many Buddhist women to be portrayed as either willing lovers or victims of sexual violence in their hagiographies, using their sexuality to impel the ignorant toward enlightenment. Often actual intercourse is implied, although sometimes the lure of sex is all that is needed to turn one toward the dharma. One of the most prominent examples appears in the Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra, where the advanced bodhisattva Vasmūti takes on the role of a prostitute and uses lust to teach her clients how to detach themselves from desire. As Williams glibly explains, some people seem to "require kissing and embracing in order to enter the enlightening absorptions which free them from this passion." Guanyin, the female manifestation of Avalokiteśvara, plays a similar role in Japanese Buddhist stores, offering herself to men in order to urge them toward practice. Even when her promises of sexual fulfillment are not consummated by the monks enticed by her form, she still manages to subdue their desires and force them onto the path, false pretense or not. Mandarava and Yeshé Tsogyel engage in such practices as well, and each are said to possess the ability to assume alternate and multiple forms in order to sexually satisfy and bring the dharma to those in need of it. In one instance, for several years of her life, Yeshé Tsogyel even compassionately takes the place of a leper's wife who had left her husband for another man. Episodes like these seem almost light-hearted; they resemble many classic stories detailing the use of skillful means, in which ignorant male monks are tricked into proper practice by a bodhisattva taking advantage of their greatest weaknesses. The stories found in some Tibetan hagiographies seem far more exploitative and violent, however. Unlike these bodhisattvas or the countless nameless wisdom dākinīs who seek out practitioners in need of their services, both of the consorts of Padmasambhava are attacked by groups wishing to rape them. While Mandarava is able to scare her demon-attackers away by manifesting a fierce form, Yeshé Tsogyel's life-story relates that she simply gives herself over sexually to seven bandits who came upon her while she was practicing in solitude,

270Williams, Courtesans and Tantric Consorts, 154; Williams, "Some Mahāyāna Buddhist Perspectives on the Body," 215.
turning the situation into one of teaching. Whether light-hearted or violent, these stories portray women as objects of lust and desire, even in the neutral equanimity of the enlightened state.

While Achi’s hagiography does not contain the same stories of rape and wanton sexuality seen in these and other stories, in order to understand her role as a sexualized being - a ākīnī who can ritually be taken as a tantric consort - this characterization of divine women in Tibet is important to understanding her evolution as a deity. Despite the argument that female bodhisattvas are unique in their use of sex and lust as skillful means, however, Powers’ evidence shows that male bodhisattvas, at least in some texts, also engaged in these behaviors under the proper circumstances. According to these Mahāyāna stories, advanced bodhisattvas could and would engage in sexual activities, but since they did so altruistically and not out of personal desire or attachment, they could avoid any sort of polluting bad karma. Lay figures like Vimalakīrti manifest as female courtesans to incite their clients with sexual desire, then take the opportunity to teach them the dharma in the Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra. Another text tells bodhisattvas that they may use sexual intercourse to comfort laywomen lusting after their superior virile bodies, as long as it done through pure compassion, and that doing so even accumulates merit. The Upāyakauśalya-sūtra even features a story in which the Buddha warns his cousin and companion Ānanda that a bodhisattva is capable of enjoying women without being sullied by them, but only if he does so to introduce them to the dharma and get them to develop the thought of awakening (bodhicitta). While numerous texts still advocate celibacy and the avoidance of women in general, as long as the advanced bodhisattva engages in sexual activity to benefit others, he makes merit and accrues no negative karma onto himself.

The potential argument that Achi’s representation as parent and consort is merely a reapplication of the male gaze, objectifying her as an object of sexual activity and procreation, is undermined by the fact that male bodhisattvas often undertake the same activities. Achi and other women bodhisattvas who engage in these and other householder activities are not a unique Tibetan invention nor of a purely female impetus, but part of a long tradition of enlightened beings extending back to the Buddha himself. Each chose, of their own volition, to partake in samsāric actions for the benefit of others according to their hagiographies. What may be unique in the case of Achi, however, is that she descended not just to convert

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275Williams, "Some Mahāyāna Buddhist Perspectives on the Body," 181-183; Chos nyid tsul khrims, Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra (D. No. 0176, mdo sde, ma; P. No. 0843, mdo sna tshogs, phu), 435.6-7.
277Williams, "Some Mahāyāna Buddhist Perspectives on the Body," 183; Upāyakauśalya-sūtra (D. No.; 0261, mdo sde za; P. No. 0927, mdo sna tshogs, zhu), 574.7-576.2.
her immediate family, friends, and neighbors with these activities, but to actually produce offspring which would eventually lead to another embodiment of an enlightened being, who would in turn spread the dharma even further. In this case it is specifically reproduction, mired in its tropes of impurity and pollution, that is performed as an act of skillful means, elevating this particular woman to a status far above her normal station.

6.2.3 Investigating the Tibetan Female Precedent

While this addresses Achi's characterizations as a mother and a consort in story, there is still the question of Achi as a teacher in history. Compared, perhaps, to other Buddhist countries, the legendary history of Tibet contains numerous female figures held to be important teachers and lineage-holders in its ranks. From the famous consorts of Padmasambhava, Yeshé Tsogyel and Mandarava, who, while mythic in origin, still stand as paragons of the enlightened feminine in Tibetan narrative and ritual; to the various famous tantric women disciples, like Machik Lapdrön and Machik Zhama, who started their own teaching lineages still followed today; to nuns like Chökyi Drölma and Orgyen Chökyi, who have left eye-opening biographies in their wake regarding the nature of Tibetan womanhood and religious aspiration, Buddhist women throughout history have carved out some place for themselves within the predominantly male hierarchy of the Tibetan institution. All of these women are called wisdom dākinīḥ, and many are further identified as emanations of particular female buddhas and bodhisattvas. Some are even claimed as reincarnations of one another, as is often the case with Tibetan women who are identified as Yeshé Tsogyel. These women further link to the four women Mahāsiddhas among the legendary eighty-four of India, whose stories may have acted as inspiration or validation for later achievements in Tibet.278 While it is not always clear how much impact any of these women may have had during their own lives and it seems their traditions and stories were often downplayed by later generations, their existence and continued admiration demonstrates that Tibetan women have had at least some opportunity to assume a semblance of political and spiritual power. If this were not the case, these extraordinary women never would have been able to accomplish anything in their own lives, and even more telling, later audiences to their stories would not have accepted them and continued their traditions. This seems particularly true for the period of time in which Könchok Gyatso argues Achi must have lived. While Indian esoteric

278Four women are listed in Abhayadattāśrī's list of eighty-four siddhas, but none are listed in Vajrāsana's list of eighty-five. While numerous siddhas had consorts that are considered teachers in their own right by some within the tradition, the four females specifically listed as Mahāsiddhas (Grub chen thop pas) are Lakṣmīnkārā, Maṇibhadra, and the sisters Mekhālā and Kanakhalā. Lakṣmīnkārā in particular is recorded as the sister to the King of Uḍḍiyāna, Indrabhuṭi, before it became the land of the dākinīḥ, and Diemberger adds that Chökyi Drolma's life-story structure may be modeled on this yoginī's hagiography (Elisabeth Benard, Chinnamastā: The Aweful Buddhist and Hindu Tantric Goddess (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994), xii, 10-12; Davidson, Indian Esoteric Buddhism, 227-229; Dowman, Master of Mahāmudrā, 313-321, 372-375; Linrothe, Holy Madness, 278; Robinson, Buddha's Lions, 208-213, 250-253; Young, Courtesans and Tantric Consorts, 140).
Buddhism does not appear to have been particularly supportive of women's religious authority or participation, Davidson argues that in central Tibet, the eleventh through twelfth centuries seems to have been a period in which "women gained greater expressive power," as exemplified in a number of women teachers and disciples of that time, including Achi’s near-contemporaries, Machik Lapdrön and Machik Zhama.\textsuperscript{279} Dan Martin further explores the presence of women in this period, and while pointing out that the extant records of female participants and leaders are far less than those available for men, there are still a number to which he can refer, particularly in connection with the Kagyū order and its various subdivisions. Women obviously were not equals to men at this time, but they certainly made themselves known.\textsuperscript{280} By the end of this phase, however, the Buddhist institutions became more and more conservative in their behavior, adopting a more restrictive attitude in emulation of their Indian forefathers. If Davidson's and Martin's assessments are correct, Achi would have lived in a time of diverse religious ferment, where, even if it was uncommon, there was a precedent for a lay woman to take disciples and start her own teaching lineage. While this is far from affirmation of a historical basis for the legendary protectress, it does leave the door open for the discovery of perhaps a more human and less divine image of Achi Chökyi Drölma.

### 6.2.4 Finding a Tibetan Attitude

Tibetan Buddhist attitudes towards women, and the roles of mother, sister, wife, and daughter, are not few but many, mitigated by individual traditions, specific time periods and locations, and social status and personal achievements. Nevertheless, the existence of female religious specialists - doctors, oracles, and even queens and teachers - as well as the respect these women have been able to build for themselves demonstrates an allowance for female agency in the male-dominated political and religious spheres of Tibetan society. Ultimately, each of Sponberg's attitudes can be found in the Buddhist cultural repertoire of Tibet, but they are joined by other indigenous notions of women and gender extending from the dark recesses of its history. The pollution associated with women bestows a sense of power; an ability that can be harnessed to effect the world in positive and negative ways. Ritual specialists utilized this pollution, harnessing the power of menstrual blood for use in black magic and love spells, and tantric legends warn men to be wary of everyday women, as any one of them may be a supernatural creature in disguise.\textsuperscript{281} These multiple contributions have led to a unique portrayal of gender in Tibet, intimately connected to Buddhist soteriology but unique to other places the religion has taken hold. The repertoire is influenced not only by orthodox religious ideas, but also by the assumptions of the cultural and social milieu in

\textsuperscript{279}Davidson, \textit{Tibetan Renaissance}, 290-293.
\textsuperscript{280}Martin, "The Woman Illusion? Research into the Lives of Spiritually Accomplished Women Leaders of the 11\textsuperscript{th} and 12\textsuperscript{th} Centuries," 74-82.
\textsuperscript{281}Young, \textit{Courtesans and Tantric Consorts}, 180.
which it functions. The resulting picture is a complex and multivalent one, neither completely egalitarian nor completely repressive, neither completely religious nor completely secular. Whether or not Buddhist women saw themselves as people of 'low birth,' and whatever impact this may have had on the formulation of their self-image, the evidence proves that gender did not fully determine the respect, power, and achievements one could historically attain within both Buddhist institutions and Tibetan society.
CHAPTER SIX

DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

In the study of religions, each tradition is often referred to as a single bounded entity with its own agency and linear continuity. This is even done within the narratives of the Tibetan traditions themselves, which delineates what is "Buddhist" from what is "Bön" - the problematic term used for what is believed to be the indigenous, pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet - elevating one as superior over the other in accordance with the perspective of the author. Buddhism, however, is not some monolithic entity, extending its doctrinal reach from the historic Buddha Siddhartha Gautama to the devotees of the religion today. The forms of Buddhism practiced in Tibet, while sharing many of the same formative origins, can be vastly different from the forms practiced in other parts of Asia. With each new country to which it spread, with each new teaching lineage to interpret its scriptures, Buddhism has been adapted and shifted to fit the cultures it has come in contact with, its new recipients holding on to some traditions, letting go of others, and introducing new texts and ideas with each new generation. If looked at from the point of view that there is a distinct and bounded "true" Buddhist position to stand in opposition against a strictly non-Buddhist "heretical" practice, many of the deities of Tibet appear as conflicted, nonsensical beings with histories and personalities that contradict the accepted standards of one side or the other. From the point of view of the outsider, they appear almost unintelligible, and such a presumption results in poor scholarship which identifies some elements of religion are "pure" and others as "adulterated," assuming the religion has some purity inherent in it to begin with. It therefore makes more sense to follow Campany's example and identify religions not as monolithic, enclosed systems, but as sets of various, shifting repertoires from which the inhabitants, the actual agents of a society, pull from and use in accordance to the situation they are facing at a given time. The traditions of Buddhism seen in Tibet share a complex legacy with early Indian tradition, but even upon its entrance to the region in the seventh century, the religion had already gone through centuries of changes, influenced by a multitude of factors, including the introduction of the controversial tantric doctrines and esoteric practices. Practitioners drawing on this religious repertoire of seventh century Indian Buddhism were then confronted with individuals that were already drawing on their own religious and cultural repertoires existing throughout the various regions of Central Tibet. This social interaction resulted in an amalgamation of resources from
which the later generations of Tibetan people could access. While some standards became elevated and featured as prominent examples of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, many elements, which may seem contradictory or conflicted to the outsider, remain as key aspects of how people relate to their deities, to their ritual practices, and to their faith as a whole. By looking at the Tibetan Buddhist religion as a repertoire of various sets of resources, as a "toolkit" from which particular items can be chosen when the need arises, the roles and practices associated with semi-wrathful female deities, who so often walk a line between institutional and popular expectations, can be better understood.

But what does a Tibetan Buddhist religious repertoire, or even the cultural repertoire of the Tibetan regional zone, look like? Achi Chökyi Drölma, with roots in indigenous Tibetan tradition and a heritage of early Indian narrative, embodies the various elements of the Tibetan Buddhist repertoire in her own interesting and quite possibly unique way. She is an ancestral protector and fierce local guardian, and yet she is recognizably Buddhist in origin and motivation. She fulfills the mundane need for a violent personal defender and a granter of wishes, while at the same time satisfies the desire for a compassionate deity who exemplifies the key religious traits of serenity, wisdom, and equanimity that are held so highly by the tradition. She is a mother, a teacher, and a lover all at once. By breaking down some of these elements of Achi's character, parts of the Tibetan repertoire can be broken down as well. Taking into consideration the difficulties of pinpointing the exact origins of any single element of such a repertoire to an exact time in history, the modern configuration of Achi can be looked at from a contemporary standpoint, leaving attempts to determine her evolution over the generations to future comparative research of her alternate hagiographies and ritual texts, as well through comparison to texts from outside her own tradition.

As previously addressed, at least five sets of resources within this repertoire can be found in the characterizations of Achi as Hagiographic, Ritualized, and Historical. Hagiographic Achi, even-tempered and enlightened in nature, is informed by early Indian and Mahāyāna elements of mainstream Buddhism. Resources stemming from tantric ritual practices and textual traditions play a small part in this representation, but can primarily be seen in the Ritualized Achi called on for protection and wishes in the numerous practical texts devoted to her. This often wrathful and sexual representation is further informed by indigenous Tibetan beliefs regarding capricious and potentially dangerous local deities, and is most clearly reflected in legends of Achi which warn of her vengeful nature against those that trespass her land, as well in her position as a primary protector within the gönkangs of the Drikung region. Historical Achi, or the possibility thereof, is informed by pre-Buddhist sets of religious resources related to ancestral legitimization and by cultural resources related to gender and family. In the first case, Achi is respected and venerated as a maternal ancestor and founder of Jikten Sumgön's lineage, thereby validating him as worthy of his political and spiritual achievements in the eyes of the Tibetan people. In the second case,
Historical Achi, if she did exist, would have had to function under the precedents already set for Tibetan wives and mothers of her time. This includes an already apparent allowance for women to become religious teachers within that set of resources, as seen in the previous chapter. As is the case with most artificial taxonomies, it is no doubt true that these sets could be further broken up or that additional sets of resources could be identified, but these are the primary concepts at work in the formation of Achi that have been discussed here.

Understandably, this complicated religious repertoire plays a key role in understanding gender constructions in Tibetan cultural zones. While at first glance Achi's voluntary assumption of the householder life may appear to be a simple re-application of the androcentric gaze onto Buddhist narratives of women, I argue that this is not the case. The dharma protectress is in fact continuing a long legacy of male and female bodhisattvas who have used householder roles and sexual activities as just another example of skillful means. Admittedly, even Achi's familiar name, "Grandmother," reduces her identity to her reproductive function and her role as a maternal ancestor, and she is not necessarily remembered by the Drikung Kagyü tradition for her own achievements, but instead due to her relation to its well-respected founder. In this way she could be compared to the mothers of the Buddha, who are singled out due to their importance in the founding stories of the religion. Giving primacy to reproduction ultimately means giving primacy to Achi's sexual activity with her husband and tantric consort, thereby condemning her to the most loathed activities of samsāra. Nevertheless, Achi is portrayed as an individual entity with a strong cult devotion all of her own within the modern community. If, as some scholars had argued, this reduction to sexual activity-as-skillful means was strictly the domain of female bodhisattvas, perhaps Achi's representation could be viewed as an example of Buddhist misogyny. However, male bodhisattvas and enlightened beings throughout the Mahāyāna tradition have voluntarily assumed the auspices of husband and sexual partner to women as a means of converting them to the dharma as well. It could possibly even be argued that Achi's decision to assume the role of mother was even more magnanimous and universally compassionate than these figures, as she emanated as a human not only to teach her immediate family, but to create a biological lineage which would ultimately spread the religion to future generations of Tibetans. Gender in Tibet, as in most regions of the world, is more complex than a dichotomy of male superiority and female subjugation; there does not necessarily have to be one single rule that women have been exploited or venerated within its traditions. At different times and in different places, specific women have risen to positions of power within Tibetan societies, and this demonstrates that, whatever the Buddhist institutional stance may be at any given time, there has consistently been an allowance for female agency in the Tibetan cultural repertoire since the earliest periods of its recorded history. While this cannot be applied universally, and the prevalence of finding this
agency in the hands women of the higher classes and ancient royal families is not to be diminished, it is clear that gender did not unequivocally define the power one could assert in Tibetan society.

Uncovering the "truth" of a religious figure is always a near impossible goal for the historian, who is only ever left with highly malleable oral traditions handed down over the centuries and whatever discovered texts to have survived the test of time. Without further research, it is hard to say whether the figure of Achi was based on a living female teacher somewhere in Jikten Sumgön's genealogy, on some pre-Buddhist indigenous deity, or some combination of multiple elements from various sources. Her importance to the contemporary Drikung Kagyü tradition, however, is clear. In her maintenance of so many different roles, Achi fulfills a number of spiritual needs within the religious community. On one hand, she functions on the ground as a legitimizing force for the Drikung Kagyü tradition and lineage, as a wish-fulfilling goddess, and as a vengeful territorial guardian against encroaching enemy forces. On the other, she can perform all the duties expected of a fully-enlightened buddha-deity, acting as an object of meditation and a personal tutelary deity, as a consort for sexualized tantric ritual, and a dharma protector of the lineage, its holdings, and its teachings. In her own way, Achi Chökyi Drölma personifies a religious and cultural repertoire particular to the history and societies of the Tibetan region, providing unique insight into the construction of female deities and the roles that they play within the Buddhist religion.
APPENDIX A

THE SĀDHANA HANDBOOK OF THE TEACHING GUARDIAN ACHI

Note: Provided below is a translation of the complete catalogue of the contents of volumes one and two of The Sādhana Handbook of the Teaching Guardian Achi: Collected Texts Concerned with the Rites of Propitiation of the Special Protective Deity of the Drikung.282

Volume One: Contents

0. Mirror of Wisdom: Catalogue of the First Volume of the Sādhana Handbook of the Teaching Guardian Achi (Bstan bsrung a phyi'i sgrub thabs be'um las ya pod kyi dkar chag ye shes me long) (1-3)

1. KA. Life-stories of the Succession of Past Lives of the Teaching Guardian Achi Chökyi Drölma (Succession of Past Lives) (Bka' bsrungs a phyi chos kyi sgrol ma'i 'khrungs rabs rnam thar ('Khrung rabs)) (4-13)

2. KHA. Achi's Own Sādhana (Self-Sādhana) (A phyi kho mo'i rang gi sgrub thabs (Rang sgrubs)) (14-23)

3. GA. Sādhana Cycle of Achi Chökyi Drölma called the Precious Diadem of Collected Activities [in] Fifteen Sections (Collected Activities) (A phyi chos kyi sgrol ma'i sgrub skor rin chen cod pan las tshogs le'u bco lnga pa (Las tshogs)) (24-82)

4. NGA. Achi Sādhana written by Jikten Gönpo (A phyi'i sgrubg thabs 'jig rten mgon pos mdzad pa) (83-101)

5. CA. Jeweled Rosary: Achi's Rites of Expiation (Full Expiation Rites) (A phyi'i bskang ba nor bu'i 'phreng ba (Bskang rgyas)) (102-132)

282 Bstan bsrung A phyi'i sgrub thabs be'u bum: Collected Texts Concerned with the Rites of Propitiation of the Special Protective Deity of the 'Bri gung (New Delhi: Tersing Dorma Gelek, 1975).
6. CHA. Sādhana of the Horse-Riding Woman Known as Achi Chökyi Drölma written by Rinpoche Né the Younger (Horse-Rider) (A phyi chos kyi sgrol ma (grag mo) chibs zhon gyi sgrub thabs gcung rin po che nas mdzad pa (chibs zhon)) (133-141)

7. JA. Achi Sādhana [which] Arousing Wish-Fulfillment written by Gélong Dorjé Gyelpo (Arousing Wish-Fulfillment) (Dge slong rdo rje rgyal pos mdzad pa'i a phyi'i sgrub thabs yid bzhi 'byung ba (Yid bzhing 'byung ba)) (142-154)

8. NYA. Instructions of the Five Ornaments (Ornaments) (Rgyan can lnga ma'ī zhal gdam (Rgyan can)) (155-184)

9. TA. Additional Applications of the Precious Garland of Achi Chökyi Drölma's Empowerments written by KünGa Ratna (Additional Applications) (A phyi chos kyi sgrol ma'i dbang chog gi rin chen phreng ba'i lhan thabs kun dga' ratnas mdzad pa (Lhan thabs)) (185-202)

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10. RA. Examination of the Good and Bad: Elephant Ritual of the Teaching Guardian Achi Chökyi Drölma (Elephant) (Bstan bsrungs chos kyi sgrol ma'i glang po'i cho ga bzang ngan brtags pa (Glang po)) (123-148)

11. LA GONG. Individual Smoke Offering of the Word Guardian Queen of Space [that] Completely Yeilds All Wishes (Individual Smoke Offering) (Bka' bsrung dbyings phyug ma'i sger bsangs phun tshogs 'dod jo (Sger bsangs)) (149-160)

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14. SA. Abbreviated Smoke Offering Ritual of the Great Teaching Protectress Achi (Abbreviated Smoke Offering) (*Bstan bsrung chen mo a phy'i' bsaṅ mchod mdor bbsdus (bsaṅ bbsdus*)) (186-189)

15. HA. Wish-Fulfilling Ruler: Wealth Sadhana of the Teaching Guardian Chökyi Drölma (Wealth Sadhana) (*Bstan bsrung chos kyi sgrol ma'i nor sgrub yid bzhin dbang rgyal (nor sgrub*)) (190-213)

16. A. The Extensive Empowerment of the Teaching Guardian Chökyi Drölma [for] Bestowing the Two Best Benefits (Empowerment Ritual) (*Bstan bsrungs chos kyi sgrol ma'i dbang chog rgyas pa don gnyis mchog stsol (dbang chog*) (214-244)

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18. ĀH. Sadhana and Empowerment of Trashi Ts'erimgma (Ts'erimgma) (*Bkra shis tshe ring ma'i sgrub thabs dang dbang bcas (tshe ring ma*) (258-275)

19. HŪM. The Supreme Empowerment of the Five Trashi Ts'erimgma Ladies (Longevity Empowerment) (*Jo mo bkras shis tshe ring mched lnga'i dbang chog (tshe dbang*) (276-303)

20. HRĪH. Inciting Praise [for] the Original Purity of the Dharmadhātu (Inciting Praise) (*Ka dag chos dbyings bstod skul (bstod skul*) (304)


22. Sadhana of the Peaceful-Wrathful Teaching Guardian Achi and Retinue [that] Clarifies the Essence (*Bka' bsrung a phyi zhi drag gtso 'khor gyi sgrub thabs snying po gsal ba*) (308-359)

APPENDIX B

THE ABRIDGED SĀDHANA OF ACHI

Note: Below is the translation of a short sādhana from the collected works of the Khampa Géluk master, Rongta Lozang Damchoe Gytso (1865-1917). While not from within the Drikung Kagyū order, the text is obviously influenced by its traditions, and demonstrates the adoption of the dharma protectress Achi to other sects of Tibetan Buddhist practice.

[395] This is the abridged sādhana of the Teaching Guardian Achima, in order [that one] applies oneself to whatever attainments, such as offering tormas. The collected buddha-dharma [is of] the three times.

[Picture] oneself clearly as Vajrayoginī. In front, is the center of a dense white cloud moving gently. Teaching Guardian Queen of Space Chökyi Drölma, [is] on top of a blue horse, beaming glittering-white. [In her] right hand is a mirror, in her left hand is a skull-bowl holding jewels, [and she is] adorned in silk and precious jewels. Her retinue is made of the long life dākī of the four activities [who] keep the doctrine. Light emanates from the abiding heart-mind. Invoking the wisdom deity, [you] become unified with the visualized deity. Amass medicinal blood tormas, sacred potions, food offerings and suitable real and imaginary atonement offerings. Confess abandonments, faults of the heart-mind, and transgressions without exception.

[She] bestows the accomplishments [of] the four activities and the eight achievements, [and] removes poison. Regarding the recitations to perform:

284 Tib. dam tshig pa / Srt. samayasattva
Oṃ shwa ri dharma tā re hūṃ phat!
Oṃ jñāna ḍā kī naṃ hūṃ phat!
Oṃ wa šaṃ ḍā kī ni hūṃ phat!
Oṃ karma ḍā kī ni hūṃ phat!

Praise the Queen of Space Lhamo and her retinue! We, desiring goals in harmony with the dharma of practitioners, will quickly be conferred the activity of attraction unobstructed. If [she is] relied on, she will be [your] support, and if not, she will not support [you].

Vajra mu! Go into the self-existing wisdom being. Dissolve the visualized deity into oneself. [In the] daytime, [one] should have fortunes such as bliss [and] happiness.

Fortune is also aroused like this; written by the inactive mendicant Lobzang Damchö Gyatso.
APPENDIX C

A ROUGH SUMMARY OF THE DHARMA CYCLE CATALOGUE CONNECTED TO PENDEN LHAMO QUEEN OF SPACE

ACHI CHÖKYI DRÖLMA

Note: Provided below is a translation of the third chapter of The Abridged Life-story of Drikung Achi Chökyi Drölma, which contains Könchok Gyaltsö’s summary of the texts and rituals related to the dharma protectress. Further work can still be performed through the exploration of each of these texts and their related authors.


286I believe the phrase rtsa mri is a misprint, and should be rtsa myi instead, meaning human [energy] channels.
Gyépé Bang. Many [works] such as [these] appear. All adherents of the Kaygū, Nyingma, Sakya, and Géluk have arranged methods of paying homage to the Lady Teaching Guardian (*Bstan srung gtso mo*) and in clarifying they are able to examine the features of the inner, outer, and secret [teachings]. [So it is] said by the Drikung Buddhist yogi in addition to Achi's Life-story.
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**Images**


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kristen Kail Muldowney received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Religion from Temple University in 2007. In 2008, she enrolled in the Master of Arts program of the History and Ethnography of Religion track at the Florida State University, specializing in Buddhism and Tibetan Religions. She is a member of the Phi Beta Kappa Honors Society. Her research interests include lay ritual and devotional practices, deity worship and placation, Tibetan medical traditions, and the study of early Tibetan history.