WOMEN IN VAJRÄNA BUDDHISM—THE EMBODIMENT OF WISDOM AND ENLIGHTENMENT IN TRADITIONALLY MALE-ORIENTED BUDDHISM

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ABSTRACT

Society’s perceptions of women’s role, not Buddhism as a doctrine, have a more influential hand in the suppression of female practitioners and their opportunity to practice Buddhism. Buddhism, in general, has been widely criticized by Western feminists for being non-egalitarian and essentially classifying women as inherently inferior to men. A multitude of religious writings attempt to establish an intrinsic patriarchal authority in Buddhism, yet many women are dedicated, successful practitioners and teachers of Buddhist wisdom. Earlier Indian and Mahāyāna Buddhist texts refer to women as unable to attain enlightenment as a result of their inferior birth, although there are many mythical deities and actual enlightened women, such as Yeshé Tsogyal, Machig Labdrön and Sera Khandro, whose existence proves the claim of inferiority to be otherwise. In later Vajrayāna Buddhism, however, the attitude of female inferiority appears more subdued than its predecessors.

Many examples of the feminine embodiment of wisdom exist in Buddhism to make one question the inherent gender-bias attitude in Buddhism as a doctrine. Tārā, one such example of a female Buddha, is a widely worshipped and enlightened being. Additionally, dākinīs are a female embodiment of enlightened energy and part of a tantric
practice called the Three Roots — a central requirement for any Buddhist practitioner, male or female. Regardless of these feminine images and positive changes in Buddhism, the question remains: What factors deter Buddhist female practitioners and their opportunities to hold leadership positions in Buddhism?

While Vajrayāna Buddhism is male-oriented with his Holiness the Dalai Lama as the most influential figure, Buddhism, as a doctrine, provides an equal opportunity to both men and women. It is predominately societies and their influential attitudes toward women that create a bulk of the obstacles for women and their prospects to practice Buddhism. There are additional guidelines, referred to as precepts, which are particularly geared towards Buddhist nuns and place them in a position more inferior than even the most novice monk. Currently, the largest setback for females is the inability to be ordained in Vajrayāna Buddhism. However, the Dalai Lama has pledged to call upon the monks’ consul, in an effort to change the rules of subordinating nuns and possibly establish the bhikkhunī “a fully ordained nun” ordination in Vajrayāna Buddhism.

My objective is to examine the female status in Vajrayāna Buddhism in order to determine whether the sexism displayed within the discipline is inherent to Buddhism, to the Vajrayāna sect, or has been gradually absorbed from surrounding cultures as the religion developed and can finally evolve and progress through recognition that gender inequality is an absorption from culture and not a religious doctrine itself. To determine this, I will examine Buddhist history and the principles which are applied to religious and social communities, as well as the role of women in Vajrayāna, and prominent female Buddhist images and leaders. After analysis of the research material, I will conclude by
setting forth my determination as to whether Buddhism is inherently prejudiced against women and their leadership, thereby resulting in the female status inevitably remaining low. Or whether social transformation and improved egalitarian rights, both outside and within the Buddhist community, could alter the cultural and historical limitations imposed against the female Buddhist lineage and leadership.
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INTRODUCTION

The most influential analysis for this thesis is based on the Rita Gross book, *Buddhism after Patriarchy: a Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism*. The book investigates the feminist critique on Buddhism and the role of women in the history of Buddhism. Gross demonstrates that Buddhism, as a doctrine, promotes gender equity rather than male authority, despite many misogynistic practices found in Buddhist institutions. The Buddhist doctrine declares that Buddhahood is a state of perfect enlightenment and equally available for everyone, in spite of an individual’s gender. There are many social, cultural, and religious constraints that frustrate women and hinder their ability to reach the ultimate goal. However, there are two main issues that need to be addressed before women can have the opportunities equivalent to that of men: availability of Buddhist training and the opportunity to receive a full ordination.

An additional source addressing the controversy surrounding a full female ordination and gender equality, is a book compiled by Thea Mohr and Jampa Tsedoroen entitled *Dignity & Discipline: Reviving Full Ordination for Buddhist Nuns*. This book includes seventeen papers from a 2007 conference in Hamburg — The International Congress on Women’s Role in the Sangha. This conference addressed the female ordination problem in Tibetan Buddhist tradition. The deprivation of full ordination permanently constrains women to the level of novice and renders their reality to receive the Geshe degree nearly impossible. The availability of experienced tutors and encouragement within Tibetan Buddhist tradition is kept to a minimum. The book opens with the hypothesis that full ordination is inevitable. A handful of options are introduced
to accomplish this goal, but the fact remains that many doctrinal issues must be settled before the Tibetan saṅgha can welcome the change. The focus of this book is clear, the ordination of women as full-fledged monastics is not only a religious and political issue, it is a significant issue relevant to the basic human right of gender equality.

Chapter 1, *Foundations of Vajrayāna Buddhism*, introduces Vajrayāna Buddhism and its ultimate goal to attain Buddhahood, a state of perfect enlightenment. This chapter includes a short classification of Buddhism, its traditions and various schools, to show where Vajrayāna tradition fits in and the extent of the differences and similarities in its views of Buddhist female practitioners. Vajrayāna Buddhism integrates esoteric meditation techniques to speed up the path to enlightenment. The esoteric transmission occurs during an initiation directly from teacher to student and cannot be learned from a book. The conversation continues with feminine images in Buddhist art, that many Westerners are familiar with, when thinking of Buddhist art. These images are utilized as tools for religious practice, often depicting female deities such as Tārā, Vajrayoginī, dākinī, and Machig Labdrön, the latter an eleventh-century Tibetan women who founded the practice of Chöd and became known as the female lineage holder. The first chapter concludes with major key concepts in Vajrayāna Buddhism, as a doctrine, to prove if they are gender-bias.

Chapter 2, *Female Ordination in Vajrayāna Buddhism*, presents the largest issue in Tibetan Buddhism, the absence of the full ordination of female practitioners. For nuns, only one option exists, to become a novice nun through the śrāmaṇerikā “going forth” ordination and stay this way forever. This basic ordination includes taking on the Special
Eight Rules created by Buddha, which effectively subordinates nuns to monks. Delving deeper into ordination procedures and precepts uncovers the gender discrimination practices within the Buddhist institution. Close analysis unveiled that the gender inequity in Buddhist institutions is not due to Buddhist key teachings, but is inflicted upon women by androcentric record keeping and surrounding society’s intolerance of women with no family ties. Buddha’s original hesitation to include women in a meandering, homeless lifestyle is, to this day, brought up as an excuse to not allow women to receive ordination in Tibetan Buddhism. Institutional subordination and androcentric record-keeping has had a far reaching effect of eliminating skillful female teachers and making leadership positions unreachable for women. The lack of support by lay people and the Buddhist monastic community have played a pivotal role in the subordination of female practitioners within Buddhist institutions.

Chapter 3, *Women’s Role in the Sangha*, offers an extensive study put forth in an effort to establish the full bhikkhunī ordination and fulfillment of Buddha’s notion to establish the four-fold saṅgha. The study includes papers from the first International Congress on Buddhist Women’s Role in the Sangha, in Germany 2007. The main purpose of this congress was to find a way to establish the full bhikkhunī ordination in Tibetan Buddhism. The primary issue at hand, during the conference, was to study Vinaya, the Buddhist monastic code, closely to find out if the bhikkhunī ordination needs to be performed by both the male and female order, or if the male order alone would be sufficient. This chapter includes the internal view of the monastic establishment to better understand the opposition of male saṅghas’ acceptance of nuns as full members of the
A couple of statements by His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, have been inserted to show the underlying pressure to establish female ordination, which resulted in additional excuses posed by the Buddhist leaders. Regardless of the congress ending with no future development for the nuns waiting to be ordained, the studies presented affirmed that full ordination in Vajrayāna Buddhism is achievable, even if the saṅgha chooses to follow the Vinaya meticulously. The chapter concludes on a higher note, by spreading the news of the emergence of the first female Geshe in spring 2011.

Chapter 4, *Celebrated Women in Tibetan Buddhism*, depicts the short biographies of three women who have achieved major breakthroughs in the Tibetan tradition. The first, Catharine Burroughs, is an American woman who established a meditation center in Poolesville Maryland, where men and women are treated as equals and receive identical teachings. She was recognized as a reincarnation of Ahkön Lhamo by Penor Rinpoche, the high-ranking Tibetan lama. That said, the situation of female lamas in Buddhism is sad, there is only one reincarnate of whom is recognized at a young age and receives the same benefits available for male incarnations, her name is Samding Dorje Phagmo. Unfortunately she renounced her position as a living Buddha and became a ranking political official in the Chinese-run government in Tibet. The second celebrated woman is Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo. She founded a nunnery in India and is working towards re-establishing the Togdenma lineage of female yoginis. She is a well-known Buddhist teacher and leader of the female cause in Tibetan Buddhism. Open-minded and progressive thinking women, like her, are the only hope that Tibetan Buddhism will one day embrace the full ordination of nuns. The third woman, Sera Khandro, was a tantric
treasure revealer whose role is still often misunderstood and disrespected. Regardless of her hardships, she is a fundamental example that the pursuit of enlightenment is possible for women who have other roles beside the ideal, detached life of a renunciate. She was not only a treasure revealer, but a wife and mother, and one of only a few female authors to record her experiences in pre-1959 Tibetan society.

To conclude, Buddhism as a doctrine is not non-egalitarian towards female practitioners. In fact, Buddhist teachings are gender neutral, moreover, Vajrayāna Buddhism involves complementary female and male principles allowing practitioners of both genders to thrive and develop equally. The misogynistic attitudes in Buddhism have regretfully been passed down from the surrounding culture and incorporated into the Buddhist institution throughout its development. Society’s gender-biased views soon made their presence known in Buddhist literature and monastic law code, placing female practitioners into inferior positions to that of males. Thus, beginning the cascading downfall of the female order, communicating to the lay people that women were less capable and supporting them would yield less merit than supporting the male order.

On the whole, the largest issue in Buddhism is yet to be solved; to reverse the damage of faulty views and establish the full ordination of females in Tibetan Buddhism. Full ordination would communicate the message that women are equally as worthy as men in producing merit to their supporters. It could be done through social transformation by communicating that women are equal to men and as capable of reaching the ultimate goal of enlightenment. However, it will also require a considerable amount of effort on the women’s part, who should work towards gaining the trust of the
lay community and proving themselves worthy of their support. With educational opportunities becoming more widely available for Buddhist nuns, they should garner and utilize skills to lead their communities independently from the male order, and put forth a concerted effort to demonstrate how they can benefit the surrounding community. If women are able to gain worth and self-sustain, allowing them to thrive independently, soon the lay community and male saṅgha will support their overall objective of receiving the full bhikkhunī ordination.
CHAPTER 1

FOUNDATIONS OF VAJRAYĀNA BUDDHISM

In order to differentiate Vajrayāna from earlier forms of Buddhist traditions, a quick overview of its position among other schools, its history, key concepts, and highly admired sacred feminine images is imperative. The importance behind elucidating the Vajrayāna practice stems from their embrace of the androgynous unity of male and female principles, as well as the intensive studies which have gone into analyzing each doctrinal concept to find the androcentric tendencies within them. Therefore, the exploration of the Vajrayāna practice is crucial in discerning societal impact on gender-bias discrimination, because if all Vajrayāna key concepts are gender-neutral, then why do women still lack the spiritual and educational support necessary to receive full ordination?

A revolutionary difference which sets Vajrayāna Buddhism apart from other Buddhist traditions is its emphasis of the relationship between a notion of ultimate spiritual perfection, known as Buddhahood, and the feminine.¹ Tantric Buddhism embraces the relationship between a male divine principle and a female divine principle. Only in Tantric Buddhism do we find androgyne, the unity of the best attributes of both sexes conceived as a state of perfection.² Vajrayāna Buddhism highlights its total devotion to the Tathāgatagarbha, or Buddha nature, which is the vehicle for universal salvation. According to Vajrayāna Buddhism, each individual has this potential Buddha within his or her mind, regardless of their gender; however they must nurture and develop
the awareness of this potentiality so that one may “give birth” and realize their Buddha Nature.\(^3\)

Practitioners of Vajrayāna Buddhism closely follow Mahāyāna Buddhism while also integrating special techniques that help to speed up their path to enlightenment. Although Mahāyāna teachings already include all the characteristics of Wisdom, it is Vajrayāna teachings which incorporate the skillful methods (upāya) to quickly realize that wisdom (prajñā). The analogous existence of skillful methods and wisdom is a major theme in Vajrayāna Buddhism. This said, Vajrayāna Buddhism mainly elaborates on the line of reasoning already accepted in Mahāyāna Buddhism but also involves extensive descriptions of esoteric meditation techniques. Tibetan Vajrayāna, also known as Tantric Buddhism, is considered a distinctive movement within Buddhism regardless of its direct expansion of Mahāyāna Buddhism.\(^4\)

An integration of wisdom and the esoteric meditation techniques in Vajrayāna Buddhism have positively influenced attitudes towards women. Rita Gross, in her analyses of positive and negative attitudes towards women in Vajrayāna Buddhism, states that “The doctrinal attitude toward women is very favorable—much more favorable than in any earlier form of Buddhism and among the most favorable attitudes found in any major religion in any period of its development.”\(^5\)

**Definition and Classification of Buddhism**

Overall, Buddhism is considered flexible and, to some extent, still developing. The simplest method of classifying Buddhism comes from the Dzogchen perspective of
the Nyingma tradition, which is regarded as the highest teaching.\textsuperscript{6} The Nyingma is the oldest of four schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the others being Kagyüd, Sakya, and Gélug.\textsuperscript{7}

This classification divides the Buddhist practice into:

- Sūtra
- Tantra
- Dzogchen

Sūtra is characterized as the path of renunciation, in the sense of rejecting every kind of form to which one might develop attachment. The Sutric teaches that the perfect “spiritual friend,” like a monk or nun, is reliable and open to being strictly evaluated according to the Vinaya code of monastic conduct, as well as the bodhisattva vows.\textsuperscript{8} Tantra, on the other hand, is characterized as the path of transformation, making use of every kind of form that arises, especially one’s own psycho-physical and emotional experience. The Tantric teacher is the vajra master who manifests the teachings through the symbolic wealth and richness of his or her display of personality. Whereas, Dzogchen is characterized as the path of self-liberation, the vajra master spontaneously transmitting the realized state, without the need of any intermediate symbolism or ritual, to those who are open to receiving it without the meditation.\textsuperscript{9}

According to Rig’dzin Dorje, the Sutric teachings of Siddhartha Gautama are for Buddhist practitioners who renounce ordinary life, remain celibate, and choose a monastic lifestyle. In contrast, the Tantric tradition of the \textit{mahāsiddhas} is non-monastic, non-celibate, and non-institutional.\textsuperscript{10} Dorje explains that “by Tantric I mean the style of practice typified by the \textit{mahāsiddhas}, in which ordinary psychology and emotions are liberated in the process of actively embracing them just as they are.” The energy and
The Vajrayāna teachings practice gender equality, or even prioritize the status of women, and also embrace every conceivable kind of lifestyle as spiritual practice in itself.\textsuperscript{12}

The fine line between Sutra and Tantra is actually not quite as clear-cut as the division between the strictly monastic versus non-monastic lifestyle. Tsultrim Allione, an American woman ordained in 1970 as a Tibetan nun, revealed that she chose to live outside a monastic institution, yet in close proximity to a lama from whom she could receive instruction. This advantageous living arrangement allowed her to learn Buddhist teachings without having to seek permission to travel. Even in present day, Tibetan nuns residing in monastic situations have many obligations and do not enjoy the freedom to travel and study wherever they wish.\textsuperscript{13}

Buddha Śākyamuni predicted that his community of Sutric practitioners would last for approximately five-hundred years in its present form without needing to be re-interpreted by acknowledged masters, according to the established cultural conditions. However, he predicted that the Tantric Buddhist teachings would endure for the next fifty-thousand years, and the Dzogchen teachings far beyond that time.\textsuperscript{14}

**The Spiritual and Philosophical Goal of the Buddhist Practitioner**

The ultimate goal of the Buddhist practitioner is to embrace the Four Noble Truths, which will lead them to the cessation of suffering. In other words, every Buddhist strives to achieve a spirit of compassion in order to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings. The Buddhist doctrine declares that Buddhahood is a state
of perfect enlightenment and equally available for everyone, despite an individual’s
gender. If this is true, then why are women in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition denied
proper education and the full ordination to realize their true potential?

There are many social, cultural, and religious constraints that frustrate women and
hinder their ability to reach the ultimate goal — to become enlightened. However, there
are two main issues that need to be addressed before women can have the opportunities
equivalent to that of men: availability of the Buddhist training, and the opportunity to
receive a full ordination. The major subject in Tibetan Buddhist tradition is the refusal
of a full bhikkhunī ordination and the Geshe degree, the highest philosophical degree in
Buddhism for women. The deprivation of full ordination permanently constrains women
to the level of novice and renders the Geshe degree impossible. A woman who develops
a strong desire to practice meditation often lacks the proper conditions for practice, since
experienced tutors are scarce and encouragement is minimal.

A Buddhist practitioner’s path to enlightenment begins with purifying one’s mind
of all mental afflictions. The path to spiritual development is established through
hearing, contemplating, and meditating on Buddha’s teachings. The process of purifying
one’s consciousness requires expertise and suitable conditions for practice, which are
largely unavailable to women.

The suffering inflicted upon women is not due to natural physical limitations, but
often as a result of gender-bias restriction. Women are frequently given advice to
humbly deal with the gender-based discriminations as part of their practice. A nun’s full
ordination is often declined because they are told that keeping eight to ten precepts is too
difficult to maintain. In the Tibetan traditions, nuns are not allowed to study *bhikkhunī* Vinaya if they are not fully ordained, this knowledge being required to qualify for the Geshe degree in philosophical studies.\(^{19}\)

**Feminine in Vajrayāna Buddhism**

Vajrayāna Buddhist art and practices are filled with striking feminine images depicting women of enlightenment. Tantric Buddhism was developed and practiced in India around the eighth century. This new form of Buddhism incorporated many complex meditative practices focusing on the visualizations of male and female deities. These images and practices were toured and exhibited by the enlightened *yogis* and teachers, known as the eighty-four *Mahāsiddhas*. These meditative practices continued into Tibet, where they thrived and became widely followed.\(^{20}\)

Many of the deities depicted in thangkas — Tibetan religious paintings — are predominately male, although occasionally shown in symbolic union with a female consort. There are, however, many important female deities depicted as the central figure in thangkas, such as Tārā and Vajrayoginī.\(^{21}\) The Tantric practice of Vajrayoginī uses sexual imagery, interpreted metaphorically in present day, to harness the power of energies in a skillful way and lead the practitioner to full enlightenment. The instruction for this tantric practice is contained in the *sādhana*, a sacred Tantric text that involves reciting prayers, meditating, and visualizing oneself as a deity. Vajrayoginī, queen of the *dākinīs*, is considered to be the nature of desire-less, blissful wisdom. *Dākinīs*, also known as sky-dancers, are the most complex and powerful feminine symbols in
Buddhism. A force of feminine energy that guard and own the secret teachings in tantric Buddhism, dākinīs act as assistants in times of difficulty, transitions and spiritual initiations.

The most remarkable example of feminine imagery is the Thangka of Machig Labdrön. An eleventh-century Tibetan woman, she was identified as a founder of the Chöd tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. The practice of Chöd unifies the view of Prajñāpāramitā literature with the methodology of Tantra. The central focus in Prajñāpāramitā literature is the understanding of emptiness, meaning everything we perceive is devoid of inherent self-nature, while Tantra reveals the power of a symbolic domain and the value of letting awareness find a transitional reliance on the realm of the deities. The meeting of these two streams, Prajñāpāramitā and Tantra, occurred in Tibet during the eleventh century, when Machig Labdrön met the Indian yogi Dampa Sangye. Dampa’s teachings focused on pacifying the suffering that arises from attachment. Machig integrated these teachings with her meditative experience, which consequently unfolded into what is now known as the female lineage of Chöd (mo gcod).

In Tantric Buddhism, women’s bodies reflect the energetic qualities of limitless space and the wisdom which knows that space. Men’s bodies reflect skillful action, which enacts with the wisdom of space. When a practitioner learns to see their physical bodies in a direct and unconfused way, they see the sacred dynamics of mind literally embodied in our experiential world. This point of view articulates that every woman is a dākinī by virtue of being female. Human women have power simply because they have
female bodies, which is seen in Vajrayāna as emanations of the wisdom principle. Therefore, the tantric practitioner is bound to see all women as dākinīs.28

In all Buddhist traditions, enlightenment is attained through the human body. The body, speech and mind are three gates to the phenomenal world. In Vajrayāna Buddhism, one visualizes and eventually experiences the subtle body within the manifest body. In terms of Vajrayāna symbolism and practice, female bodies are explicitly venerated and frequently depicted in sacred art and rituals. In major sādhanās, an ego-transcending spiritual practice, these female deities are representations of enlightenment. During the sādhanā, both men and women perform the meditation of visualizing their own identification with the enlightened female.29

Tantric Buddhism’s abundance of incredibly beautiful feminine images is noteworthy, such as Tārā, the female deity who saves people from fears and afflictive emotions, as well as the aforementioned Machig Labdrön. Additionally, images of Vajrayogini are used during Buddhist visualization practices. Yet regardless of the many examples of accomplishments by female practitioners and feminine images, Buddhist female practitioners are lacking the sufficient support by the Buddhist community and Tibetan society.

When Tantra entered the male-dominated monasteries of Tibet, the implementation of a new set of monastic rules caused the great female teachers to nearly become extinct by the end of the fifteenth century. In Tibet, some monks are taught to think of women as full of desire and filth, even though Tārā and dākinīs — such as Yeshé Tsogyal, Mandarava, Vajra Yogini, and Simhamukha — are practiced and revered. The
contradictory views between the status of women socially, and the religious status that female figures hold,\textsuperscript{30} often results in a low esteem held by women practicing Buddhism.\textsuperscript{31} Where is the cultural breakdown between the elevated notion of the sacred feminine, existing in the dākinīs and Tārā, and the apparent female sexism existing in society? What is the source of this divide? The first change comes from something as simple as the word for “woman,” kye men, meaning “lower birth.” This is where the profound cultural split begins, in one hand you have the simultaneous idealization of the feminine being in the spiritual tradition, and in the other, the treatment of women as second-class citizens.\textsuperscript{32}

In Tibetan Buddhism, there have been successful and renowned female teachers. One such example, Kunga Bum, was a prostitute who later became a nun. Lama Rinchen Phuntsog, a contemporary Nyingma lama, recounts that “She was no ordinary woman, she was an emanation of Vajra Varahi.” According to Lama Rinchen’s statement on Kunga Bum, she could not be an ordinary woman because no such woman could be accomplished, only one considered to be of divine emanation.\textsuperscript{33} Under the influence of androcentric and misogynist views, many Buddhists from Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna schools reject the possibility that human women could become enlightened beings, although they willingly accept the existence of women arhats. Some parts of Mahāyāna became inspired to develop the soteriological inclusiveness toward a more equalitarian view, in support of non-dualistic androgyny, which had strong roots in newly emerging Mahāyāna philosophy of emptiness.\textsuperscript{34}
Are Key Concepts in Vajrayāna Buddhism Gender-bias?

In Buddhism, the Law of Karma is about cause and effect,\textsuperscript{35} and closely tied to the belief of rebirth. Traditionally, society was quick to point out that a woman’s inferior birth was the result of bad karma, caused by improper behavior in the past. This belief led many misogynists to refer to women as biologically, intellectually, and spiritually deficient. Within patriarchal societies, women were taught to deal with their present situation in a means to create future positive karma, which would lead to male rebirth as a result. Altering the Law of Karma in this manner was deemed a very effective way to lobby that women only get what they deserve and must not rebel against the patriarchal customs concerning the treatment of women. In fact, by doing so, they would only create negative karma for themselves.\textsuperscript{36} In a male-dominated society, this diehard mindset functions as not only an explanation, but a justification of how women are being treated.

The conventional speculation assuming the inevitability of a woman’s rebirth fails to explain why they are continually treated poorly. Virtually everyone within the Buddhist realm agrees that a female being born into patriarchal conditions is a less than ideal circumstance. The negative attitudes of women in male-dominated societies are maintained by patriarchal social systems, where female biology and reproduction are understood as liabilities. Possibilities for cultural and spiritual advancement are virtually thwarted for women, who are seen as intellectually and spiritually inferior to men. This ill-fated position has subtly transitioned into a notion of female rebirth being a result of their negative karma.\textsuperscript{37}
If a woman’s misfortune is due to bad karma accrued in her past, how would one explain the continuing mistreatment inflicted on women by patriarchal society? The truth is that patriarchal social arrangements and stereotypes are often instigated by habitual patterns and egocentrism in society. What is really causing the negative attitudes towards women in patriarchal society is the self-centered, fixated and habitual patterns of those in power, not a woman’s karma. Modern feminists, in return, have presented an example of a post-patriarchal society, one without male privilege, a feature that makes female existence a liability. Their ideal Pure Land — a place to which entry is generally perceived as the equivalent of attaining enlightenment — would embrace androgyny, and its mutuality between women and men.

In traditional Buddhism, with the exception of Karma teachings, no other major teachings have been used to explain and try to justify the male dominance. If nearly all major Buddhist teachings are presented in a gender-neutral manner, why are both lay and monastic Buddhist institutions riddled with male dominance? All the while, many Buddhist teachings mandate gender equality, or even better, deny the relevance of gender.

Aside from the Law of Karma, the other key Buddhist doctrines connected to gender are those of the “three turnings of the wheel of Dharma.” Buddhist see these three turnings as building upon one another, a practitioner cannot start with the third turning and skip the teachings of the first two. The three turnings consist of:

- Hinayāna, the first-turning, is attributed to the teachings of historical Buddha, and include the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, the Three Marks, and Co-dependent Co-arising.
• Teachings of Madhyamaka school, the second-turning, involve emptiness (śūnyatā), as well as general Mahāyāna concepts of the two truths and the bodhisattva path.
• Yogacāra, the third-turning, teachings include Buddha-nature (tathāgatagarbha) and the closely related concept of Suchness or Things-As-They-Are (tathata).44

The second and third turnings are both included in the Mahāyāna school of philosophy. It is important to note that the Vajrayāna philosophy grows directly out of the third turning, with its emphasis on non-duality, and on the masculine and feminine principles.45

The last part of this chapter covers the hard to grasp key concepts found in Vajrayāna Buddhism, and how they relate to a gender. These key concepts are:
• Buddha-nature (tathāgatagarbha),
• Suchness (Things-As-They-Are),
• non-duality, and
• masculine and feminine principles of Vajrayāna Buddhism.

**Tathāgatagarbha and How it Relates to Gender**

The term tathāgatagarbha is regularly translated as Buddha-nature. The literal translation of “tathagata” is a title for Buddha and “garbha” connotes both “womb” and “embryo.” This term translates as an embryo of Buddhahood or a womb containing Buddhahood. Buddhahood is the innate potential of all sentient beings.46 Each person is a Buddha, although that insight has been obscured. When these obscurations are removed, what remains is intrinsic, indwelling, innate Buddhahood. Buddhahood has always been there as seed, also called “the enlightened gene” in modern terminology because of its eternal presence, not subject for causes and conditions. This Buddha-
embryo is ordinary and common, not personal. It has no gender and bares no difference in women than in men.\textsuperscript{47}

Buddha-nature is referring to the moment when one recognizes the true, ultimate reality. It is an enlightened moment when there are no distinguishing marks such as rich and poor, male and female, right and wrong. All these distinguished qualities one believes or discards are the causes why a person is not able to reach the goal of emptiness and to experience the ultimate reality. Overall, this Buddhist-nature doctrinal concept thus proves that when it comes to enlightenment, being male or female is completely irrelevant.\textsuperscript{48}

The \textit{tathāgatagarbha} implies that since all beings are characterized by Buddha-nature, the only conclusion is that Buddha-nature is gender-neutral. All sentient beings, including men and women, have equally inherent potential for enlightenment. If women and men have the same potential for enlightenment, their vastly different achievements recorded throughout Buddhist history can only be due to inadequate institutions. These institutions have for centuries promoted, encouraged, and anticipated men to achieve higher levels of insight and realization.\textsuperscript{49} It is not the Buddhist concept of \textit{tathāgatagarbha} that advocates the formal subordination and lower expectation of women.\textsuperscript{50} It is the ingrained disposition of Buddhist lay and monastic institutions to hinder female practitioners on their spiritual path.
Suchness, Seeing Things As They Are and Society

In Buddhism, the way things are perceived is called the ālaya, the store-house consciousness. This is storage for individual karma, which contains the traces of past actions, universal karma, and tathāgatagarbha. According to the Cittamatra or Yogacāra schools, what we have to work with is mind and its perceptions, which are generally defiled by kleśas, negative emotions. Depending on the level of spiritual progress, a person could possess any, or a mixture of, levels to perceive things. These three levels of spiritual progress are imagined, relative, and perfected.

The imagined level of consciousness is experienced by an unenlightened mind. The relative level, on the other hand, perceives things according to interdependent co-arising, meaning that all things arise in dependence of numerous causes and conditions. Lastly, the perfected level is the enlightened mind that perceives things as they truly are. Overall, the enlightened being would not see people as men or women, but Buddha-nature. However, the conventional Buddhist institution has established values that promote gender-bias, deferring practitioners to stay in the imagined, unenlightened level.

The primary meaning of suchness, or seeing things as they are, is to see them in a non-dualistic manner, to see ever occurring events without objectification. The Buddhist social institutions that advocate the notion of tathāgatagarbha would help practitioners to realize suchness, if they simply stopped hanging on to the imaginary gender constrictions. To see things at a perfected level involves suffering, impermanence, selflessness, emptiness, and suchness. The perfected level does not involve war, poverty, oppression,
sexism, and patriarchy. These situations are created by ego, fixed mind, and imagined level of perceptions.53

Suchness, hard to comprehend and achieve, is one of the key concepts in Buddhism. It is an ideal goal for all Buddhist practitioners and requires the recognition of all beings by their Buddha-nature — a Buddha deficient of any unique traits. Buddhist institutions clinging to gender-bias attitudes re-enforce sexism and prevent practitioners from reaching the perfected level of consciousness. Thus, Buddhist practitioners who embrace the ingrained notion of gender differences are, ironically, unable to reach the enlightened state of mind.

**Masculine and Feminine Principles in Non-dual Perspective**

In the Vajrayāna practice, the human body, emotions, and sexuality are integrated and serve as vehicles for spiritual transformation.54 This phenomenon arises out of emptiness and involves deities. Deities are beings whose existence consists of symbols and mythology, and their presence is evoked through liturgy, visualization, and ritual. These practices promote the practitioner’s realization by identifying with these empty luminous beings. In Vajrayāna Buddhism the body, emotions, and sexuality are not obstacles which must be denied and renounced, recognizing them as concepts of emptiness and suchness, they emerge primordially pure and neutral.55 Emotions arise from powerful and neutral energy and contain tremendous wisdom, which are dealt through the process of transmutation.56 As a symbol, sexuality is the most powerful representation of non-duality, of the subtle state beyond either duality or unity.
Non-duality means overcoming the subject-object duality in which one’s vision is clouded by traditional values.\textsuperscript{57} Non-duality is also the path between the extremes of dualism and monism. To apply this understanding of non-duality to gender is quite radical. The feminine and masculine principles of Vajrayāna Buddhism are an elaboration of a basic pairing from Mahāyāna Buddhism: wisdom and compassion. Wisdom became associated with the feminine in Mahāyāna Buddhism and an essential partner to compassion, the latter being associated with the masculine principle.\textsuperscript{58}

All practitioners strive equally to develop both wisdom and compassion, and enlightenment is identical for both men and women. It is not true that in Vajrayāna Buddhism one expects men to be more compassionate, while women could be more accommodating and wise. These feminine and masculine principles are meant to be embodied fully and complementary to one another, not hierarchical. This non-dual perspective of masculine and feminine principle is often misunderstood by the Western feminist who often concludes that the feminine principle is passive, accommodating and supporting the more influential masculine principle.\textsuperscript{59}

As we have seen, the key concepts in Vajrayāna Buddhism are gender-neutral. In fact, Vajrayāna Buddhist teachings mandate gender equality while simultaneously integrating both feminine and masculine principles, in order to help the practitioner develop wisdom and compassion. There is nothing in Vajrayāna teachings that suggests women are less capable and deserve to be treated as second-class citizens. The rampant belief of female inferiority within patriarchal societies has created major obstacles towards the path of educational aspiration and worldly opportunities for women. These
deeply ingrained beliefs have inadvertently entered the Buddhist world with each new individual entering to seek enlightenment. As a result, over time this all but inherent gender-bias has transcended into the creation of additional rules imposed on female practitioners and the absence of full ordination for women.
Novice ordination procedures are a basic requirement in order for nuns to join the monastic community. However, procedural differences exist, thus creating the foundation for gender discrimination within the Buddhist monastic community. To unearth the first gender-biased stone laid in the foundation, it is essential to delve into the history of the founding of the first Buddhist community, in which Buddha himself hesitated to allow women to join the homeless, monastic life. During this time, social pressure in India was the biggest obstacle for women, where societal customs were intolerant to women without domestic ties. These societal views of women subconsciously spilled over into the Buddhist community, negatively impacting monastic regulatory rules and exacerbating the androcentric exclusion of women.

Ordination Procedures

The ordination procedure to join the saṅgha is virtually the same for men and women — initially. A suitable individual must answer a series of questions to determine if they meet the twenty-four qualifications. Some of the qualifications required are being free of disease and deformity; free of debt and the bonds of servitude; as well as be in possession of robes and an alms bowl. After the successful passing of these qualifications, the candidate receives the ten precepts and becomes a novice nun, śrāmaṇerikā, or novice monk, śrāmaṇera. Once this initial procedure is completed, the rules for monks and nuns vastly diverge: nuns receive additional precepts of a...
probationary nun, or śikṣamāṇā, which consists of a two-year probationary period before 
being able to receive a full ordination, upasampadā.¹ Each level of ordination has a 
corresponding number of precepts, and a candidate receives each ordination during a 
ceremony conducted by the saṅgha.² The simple explanation given for the two-year 
probationary period was to ensure that the bhikkunī candidate was not pregnant.³

Despite the fact that nuns are forced to endure a two-year probation while 
anticipating the rite of full ordination as a bhikkunī, they soon face another issue — the 
dual saṅgha ordination requirement. The male bhikkhus have enjoyed the benefit of 
being ordained by a solitary Bhikkhu Saṅgha since the times of Buddha. The female 
requirement of a dual saṅgha ordination, on the other hand, requires the assembly of a 
group of ten bhikkunīs and ten bhikkhus, although these numbers vary depending on 
location and the Buddhist sect. Gathering twice the number of qualifying monastics 
makes the admission to the saṅgha twice as difficult for women as for men. The Vinaya 
stipulates that a bhikkunī must be ordained by both saṅhas since nuns were 
stereotypically deemed too timid to answer embarrassing questions, especially those 
pertaining to sexuality. Supposedly Buddha, himself, suggested using a bhikkunī 
preceptor to pose the twenty-four questions regarding female candidates’ qualifications.⁴

This provision clarifies the need of a Bhikkhunī Saṅgha for female ordination, but fails to 
explain the required attendance of a Bhikkhu Saṅgha. In spite of a satisfactory pass on 
the twenty-four qualifications and ordination before the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha, a female 
candidate must, nonetheless, answer the same series of questions in front of the Bhikkhu 
Saṅgha and receive the precepts once again. This double-standard, double-questioning
during female ordination suggests that some bhikkhunīs are not considered competent enough to evaluate the qualifications of new members of the saṅgha as accurately as monks.⁵

A comparable discriminatory provision of the monastic rule questions and undercuts a female teachers’ authority, although the final outcome of this provision was unintentional. During the time of Buddha, monks and nuns lived separate lives, and for the most part, the nuns served as the teachers for other women. Some of them gained an excellent reputation as teachers, highly praised and held in high regard by Buddha.⁶ However, the transmission of teachings often fell into the hands of those men travelling with Buddha. The monastic rule made the provision, theoretically to benefit women, by allowing them to receive Buddhist teachings from all teachers, regardless of gender. Although the opposite rule was never given, one allowing nuns to provide teachings to monks. Some earlier records indicate that this rule was occasionally ignored and several men acquired their teachings from a female teacher. However, from the fifteenth century onward, records no longer depict men citing women as their principal spiritual mentor.⁷

Many monastic rules have been added and modified over time in response to detrimental conduct among wandering members. These set of rules were collected into the Vinaya, the rules of discipline governing monks and nuns, and was nearly completed within the first two-hundred years since creation of the saṅgha. In the early saṅgha, both nuns and monks held bi-monthly meetings were the provisions to the rules were recited. Some of these precepts by present day standards are out-of-date, such as precepts prohibiting any kind of luxury, which have become an integral part of Buddhist practice.⁸
As of today, there are 253 bhikkhu precepts in the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya and 364 rules for bhikkhunīs. The larger number of precepts is not necessarily evidence of gender discrimination, since many of these precepts were already in place when the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha was established. Thus, the newcomers were required to follow rules already endorsed, plus separate rules added later for the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha.\(^9\)

The amendable aspect of these precepts has helped to maintain the purity of the saṅgha and the growth of Buddhism as a spiritual discipline for more than 2,500 years. The future revisions and corrections could rectify the unintentional outcome of the lower status of female teachers. Some rules in the Vinaya, at the present day, are ignored because they are irrelevant. However, with the flexibility of revising out-of-date precepts, it is feasible to reexamine each rule and modify them according to modern times. By modern day standards, the inclusion of an additional rule to the bhikkhu precepts allowing male disciples to receive their teachings from a female teacher would be considered ridiculous. However, this unintentional outcome from the past could be discontinued if the contemporary Buddhist teachers accurately depicted the sequence of historical events that led to the establishment of the monastic precepts. It is important to understand that the rules of Vinaya were originally created to preserve the purity of the saṅgha, not to undermine the Buddhist female teachers.

There are additional gender-bias rules attached to female ordination among the additional precepts, supplementary two-year probationary period, and the obligatory presence of dual saṅghas. In order for a bhikkhunī to be awarded a full ordination, she must have been an ordained nun for at least twelve years, whereas a monk needs only ten
years. In addition, each female bhikkhunī is allowed to ordain only one disciple per year under the false pretense that she lacks the time and stamina to train more than one. Yet there is no limit to the number of disciples a male bhikkhu may ordain. One would reasonably expect the training of each individual monk to take the same amount of time and stamina than that of a nun.\textsuperscript{10} According to the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya found in China, there are no limits as to how many women each preceptor could ordain. Some found an excuse to question the validity of the Chinese ordination because many nuns are ordained together. Upon closer examination of this precept, it was revealed that the initial number of ordinations were limited because of two reasons: 1) to assure women’s safety, since they were allowed to stay in relatively few dwellings instead of the forest, and 2) the number of Indian women requesting ordination was too great to have enough teachers to train them.\textsuperscript{11}

Karma Lekshe Tsomo speculates in her book, \textit{Buddhist Women and Social Justice}, that the extra regulations limiting female ordination were an attempt to control the amount of women joining the saṅgha. The primary concern for the existing members of the saṅgha being that a large number of women would out-compete for the limited, available resources. In contemporary Taiwan, where women have equal access to full ordination, sufficient support and respect of the lay people, females have out-numbered the monks.\textsuperscript{12} While this fear may have some finding, it is no different than the competition of available resources that already exists among the bhikkhus.

Besides the fear of too many women entering the saṅgha, another valid reason has been proposed by Nancy Falk in her book, \textit{Unspoken Worlds: Women’s Religious Lives}. 28
She explains that the root problem of the issues associated with the bhikkhuni order results from society’s reluctance in accepting a woman’s pursuit of an alternate, renounced life. The traditional Buddhist stories praising women’s achievements in the field often lead to the belief that there are prominent opportunities for women within the institutional structure. They hope for great spiritual and intellectual advancement only to discover the institutional and scholarly leadership opportunities for them are virtually non-existent or difficult to obtain.13

Regardless of the additional difficulties imposed on female devotees, the greater issue is the complete absence of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Vajrayāna Buddhism. It is uncertain if the nun’s ordination ever took place in Tibet. It is certain that it did not transmit there during the tenth and eleventh century when there was a second transmission of Buddhism from India to Tibet. If the nun’s ordination existed in Tibet before that time, it became extinct by the eleventh century.14

There are innumerable ways in which the Buddhist community could benefit from the re-establishment of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. Embracing the four-fold saṅgha — Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunīs, upāsakas, and upāsikās — is the most obvious benefit and would help to establish a country that finally qualifies as a Buddhist Middle Country. Buddha said that for a country to be a central land where the Dharma flourishes, the four-fold saṅgha, representing the four kinds of disciples, must be present.15 This rule dictated by Buddha himself disqualifies Tibet as a Buddhist Middle Country because of its missing link — the fully ordained Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. It is interesting to note that nations such as China, Taiwan, Korea and Vietnam are fulfilling the Dharma prerequisite by possessing
the four-fold saṅgha. These four countries each could be considered as the Buddhist Middle Country. Presumably Tibet could qualify after the country was incorporated into the People’s Republic of China, in 1959.

In countries where there are four-fold saṅgha, the dual saṅgha ordination could be advantageous to all. The careful evaluation of the new candidates could be done by both saṅhas, the stronger candidates thus constitute a stronger saṅgha. This could, however, trigger a counter argument that nuns are incompetent in their ability to pick suitable candidates for the Bhikkhu Saṅgha. If this were deemed true, then what qualifies monks to evaluate female candidates? The presence of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha would, at bare minimum, benefit the saṅgha with an updated lesson on the gestational period of women. The justification given for the two-year probationary nun is clearly ludicrous since the actual gestational period of a human being is only nine months.16

When Buddha ordained Mahāprajābatī, believed to be the first woman to seek ordination, the requirement for the probationary nun did not exist. She was ordained directly as a bhikkhunī. It is firmly believed that the garudhamma, the eight special rules to ordain nuns occurred much later, and were altered by the monks who were historical record-keepers. These eight heavy rules obviously subordinate nuns beneath the monks’ order, all the while cunningly ascribing these rules to Buddha.17

**Buddha’s Opposition to Establish the Nun’s Order**

The establishment of the nuns’ order was initially met with Buddha’s own opposition to permit women to renounce themselves from their societal roles and world.
The foundation story of the nuns’ order recounts the tale of Mahāprajābatī, Buddha’s maternal aunt, and her entourage of five-hundred Sakya women, who approached Buddha and asked for ordination. Despite Buddha’s hasty refusal, they were determined to reach the ultimate goal of enlightenment. Shaving their heads and dressing in renunciate robes, they followed Buddha barefooted to a distant town to show their determination. However, their show of willpower was in vain, as Buddha refused them a second time for ordination. Intervening on behalf of the women, Buddha’s disciple, Ananda, effectively persuaded him. Finally relenting, Buddha stipulated that the women’s admission was contingent upon the observation of the eight special rules, to which they immediately resigned themselves. Supposedly following the admittance of the women as renunciates, Buddha announced that his teachings would last only five-hundred years instead of the one-thousand he had originally anticipated.18

In the article “Women in Buddhism,” Kajiyama Yuichi presented convincing evidence that Buddha’s prediction of a shortened lifespan for his teachings was added five-hundred years after the founding of Buddhism, at the time when early Indian Buddhism was challenged and threatened by the rise of the Mahāyāna.19 A similar notion was made by Rig’dgin Dorje about Buddha Śākyamuni’s prediction that his community of Sutric practitioners would last only five-hundred years, but the Tantric Buddhist teachings would endure for fifty-thousand years.20

Buddha’s original hesitation to ordain women to a homeless life and admit them into the Buddhist order has raised many questions and speculations. One such speculation comes from this being the only known instance in which Buddha changed his
decision due to the persuasion of a disciple. However, one thing is certain, he never had a moment of hesitation regarding a woman’s ability to achieve enlightenment, nor did he believe that they were unworthy or inferior to men. In the Pāli canon he specifically declared that women could and did achieve the ultimate goal. As stated by Buddha, there was no distinction between men and women on the perfection of supreme Wisdom.

And be it woman, be it man for whom
Such chariot doth wait, by that same car
Into Nibbāna’s presence shall they come.

The principle reason for his hesitance to accept women to the Buddhist order centered around his awareness of Indian society’s androcentrism and strong gender roles. Buddha’s impartiality in viewing female suffering as a result of a patriarchal society was clearly not his objective. It took the dedication of women themselves to challenge social gender arrangements and enlist Buddha to contradict traditional conventions. Many saw societal renunciation by young men as a highly irresponsible and destructive act, and an absolute abomination for females. However, success of the Buddhist community depended, and still depends, on lay-donors and they chose not to draw further antagonism from the lay community by involving women.

Buddha’s hesitation to incorporate women into the Buddhist order was more immediate and short-sighted than the thought of lay community support: the complication of a monastic order in which male and female renunciates lived side-by-side. The gossip and accusations that monks and nuns would potentially engage in sexual relations needed to be avoided. Additionally, the fear that female renunciates would be vulnerable to male violence was highly probable. As a result, regulations to prevent
violence against nuns and rules to regulate the interactions between male and female renunciates were formed. In the end, Buddha’s hesitation to lead women to homeless life might have been influenced by the knowledge that then-current society would oppose this radical change. Buddhism was not created to restructure society’s injustices and inequities, it was meant to be a path of individual self-removal from conventional society.  

It is helpful to remember that at the time of the Buddha, there were no monasteries in India. Therefore, Buddha’s concern was multi-faceted: who would give food and dwelling for a group of wandering women. Regardless of them wearing robes and shaved heads, without proper education and training they would be just like any other wanderer in India. Buddha also received strong criticism from the lay people that he was destroying families by allowing people to renounce the lay life. A primary concern in his original denial of ordination to the saṅgha of the five-hundred women may easily have been the public backlash and grief of breaking up five-hundred families. At that time in ancient India, it was also unheard of for women to leave household life. Buddha learned later that women following Mahāprajābati were actually widowers, or their husbands had already joined the saṅgha.

**Buddhist Vinaya**

The different Vinayas, the regulatory structure for the Buddhist monastic community, include an altered number of precepts, anything from five, eight, or ten precepts are common. These precepts are followed and looked upon with unconditional
respect by all nuns and monks, regardless of merit or seniority. The monks are in charge of supervising the nuns’ living arrangements and ritual procedures. These precepts prohibit nuns from reviling or admonishing monks, while explicitly permitting monks to admonish nuns. These rules are included in every version of Vinaya, and Buddha himself is said to have insisted on them before granting women permission to take ordination.

As of today, three Vinayas are preserved in Indian languages. Each of the three Vinayas contains a different number and particular order of rules, simply explained as “historical development,” since they are continually modified by the monks. Under this pretense, it should be feasible to adjust these texts to meet modern day needs. Buddha, himself, was believed to be a pragmatist. There are many examples in which he considered the specific situation of his listeners and modified his teachings accordingly. This also explains why some rules of Vinaya were kept, yet not enforced. One such rule of Vinaya is that a monk is not allowed to accept gold or silver with his own hands, which in present day is still a well-accepted practice.

Only three Vinaya lineages are currently practiced: the Theravāda in South and Southeast Asia, the Mūlasarvāstivāda in Tibet, and the Dharmaguptaka in China and Korea. Many women are ordained as Dharmaguptaka bhikkhunīs, however wear the red robes of the Mūlasarvāstivāda. They are open to any options the Buddhist community would agree upon to become Mūlasarvāstivādins, of being adopted through an act of the saṅgha or be recognized as Dharmaguptaka bhikkhunīs through dual ordination.
The eight special rules, *garudhamma*, were created as a condition of female ordination to the *saṅgha* alongside the process of their ordination ceremony. These eight special rules are:

1. Any nun, even of great seniority, must always honor, rise for, and bow to each and every monk, even if newly ordained.
2. The nuns must spend the rainy season retreat in a location chosen and supervised by monks.
3. Monks will determine the dates for the twice-monthly confessional meetings of the order.
4. Monks will participate in the interrogation of nuns who were accused of breaking rules, however the reverse did not apply.
5. Monks would determine a nun’s penalty for infractions, but once again, the reverse did not apply.
6. Monks must participate in the nun’s ordination, but the reverse did not apply.
7. Nuns must never revile or criticize a monk.
8. Nuns were not allowed to officially admonish monks, though monks could admonish women.34

In ancient India, it was unconventional for women to live without social ties. However, it was an even graver offense to ignore the patriarchal gender hierarchy.35 To change the gender social structure was not even available for contemplation by societal renunciates.36 In ancient India, women always found themselves subordinate to men. Yet in spite of the eight special rules, women never considered themselves oppressed, apart from one particular protest on record against the first rule of seniority.37 Some time later, Mahāprajābatī made a request to Buddha through Ananda: “It were well, Lord, if the Lord would allow greeting, standing up for, salutation and the proper duties between monks and nuns according to seniority.” Buddha’s response was grim, even in other sects men did not rise for or salute women under any circumstances. As a result, he declared it an offense if any monk should behave so towards women. This ruling further
reinforced the gender hierarchy among Buddhist renunciates, regardless of their spiritual capabilities.  

These eight rules imposed institutional subordination, not spiritual, as no women considered themselves to be spiritually inferior. At the core of the Buddhist monastic code, all the practitioners were treated the same — they did the same practices, lived the same simple lifestyle, shaved their heads, and wore identical robes. They consider the precepts as tools to help them train the mind, speech, and behavior. The eight special rules did not hinder female practice or the pursuit that led to liberation; they either viewed themselves as equals or simply chose not to compare themselves to male practitioners. However, the damage these additional rules inflicted was more subtle. These rules assured that women would never become leaders or have any decisive voice in shaping the Buddhist community. Furthermore, since women were never granted the opportunity to become major teachers, they failed to attract the same level of support from lay donors as did their male counterparts.

There are numerous reasons behind the degradation of female Buddhist communities in many parts of the Buddhist world — economic disability, indirect effects of the eight special rules, and a hint of misogyny that surfaced from Buddha’s hesitation to establish the nuns’ order. Buddhism is a tradition heavily dependent on transmitting its teachings from teacher to student. When the female opportunity to become a distinguished teacher stagnated, the deficiency in transmitting the Buddhist teachings to the subsequent generation virtually decimated the nuns’ order. These eight special rules had grave consequences, both immediate and long-term, by essentially erasing a
woman’s prospect to become a prominent spiritual leader whom one might admire and call upon for spiritual guidance. Regrettably, this irreparable damage took place during the establishment of the great universities; the unspoken message of subordination and absence of female teachers subliminally communicated to the outside world that monks were more worthy than nuns. Thus, suppressing the path to enlightenment for future generations of female Buddhist practitioners and further reinforcing society’s skewed patriarchal views.

The Divergence in Bhikkhu and Bhikkhunī Precepts

The bhikkhunī and bhikkhu precepts were passed on by early Buddhist communities who developed these rules in response to specific problems between individuals within the monastic community, as well as between Buddhist monastics and the general population. These precepts eventually developed into a monastic code, Prātimokṣa, and served as disciplinary guidelines for Buddhist monastics. Organized based upon severity, the most serious offenses are pārājika, or root downfall, which results in expulsion from the saṅgha. The second, saṅghāvaśeṣa, concludes with grounds for suspension. And the third, nihsargika-patayantika, or abandoning downfall, results in forfeiture of the item involved. Pārājikas, the most serious offenses resulting in expulsion from the saṅgha, total four for bhikkhus and eight for bhikkhunīs. The justification for this extreme difference is based upon the monk order being chronologically five years older than the nuns order, thus making it obligatory for the nuns, in addition to the precepts specifically imposed on them, to observe those already in
The additional precepts were added to assure bhikkunīs physical safety and prevent sexual liaisons between male and female celibate monastics.

The first four pārājikas are the same for bhikkhus and bhikkunīs, these are prohibitions against any form of sexual activity, stealing, killing of human beings, or lying about one’s spiritual achievement. The four additional pārājikas for bhikkunīs all point to sexual behavior. The fifth and sixth precepts describe intended bodily contact and immodest sexual behavior. The purpose behind these two particular precepts was to prevent the inexperienced bhikkunīs from putting themselves into compromising situations with men, which might lead to a violation of the first pārājika and expulsion from the monastic community. The strong emphasis on the bhikkunīs fifth and sixth precepts concerning sexual behavior, are often justified because of a female’s potential fertility — a sexual liaison and potential nun pregnancy would pose a problem for the entire Buddhist monastic community. Interestingly, the additional precepts were not intended to control the sexual behavior of celibate nuns and monks, but to protect bhikkunīs against laymen — those not bound by the laws of monastic code and supervision. The seventh pārājika prohibits withholding the knowledge of a major offense of another Bhikkhunī, and the eight pārājika disallows following a bhikkhu expelled from the saṅgha.

Upon close examination of these additional major offenses imposed on female renunciates, they might seem discriminatory when viewed as mere numbers. However, their lone intention was to maintain the moral purity of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. The blossoming of the saṅgha is strongly linked to material support from the lay community,
whose donations ensure its survival. Furthermore, the additional rules were added to educate female celibates, who usually had very little experience dealing with men. However, it is not a far-fetched expectation for bhikkhus to follow the same precepts regarding proper sexual behavior. These rules would not only increase their knowledge of appropriate behavior around women, but heighten respect towards females, be it a celibate nun or a laywoman. The seventh and eighth pārājikas — not supporting the pārājika of another and not following one expelled from the saṅgha — are appropriate rules that could also benefit bhikkhus.

In order to keep the saṅgha pure, and safeguard the flow of material support by lay-donors, it takes the mutual effort of both bhikkhunīs and bhikkhus. The additional four precepts are truly practical, though they initially seem highly discriminatory against female practitioners. Closer examination will substantiate the necessary addition of these rules to ensure the survival of the Buddhist monastic community. However, the incorporation of these precepts into the Bhikkhu Saṅgha could undoubtedly benefit the spiritual and moral health of both saṅghas, as well as eliminate a source of gender bias.

Modifications for Vinaya rules have always been a part of Buddhist monastic record-keeping convention, which was heavily influenced by the current attitudes of constantly changing historical and cultural circumstances. The rules and procedures evolved over time, new additions and subtractions were made based on social pressures, as well as inner debates and ever-changing needs in the various saṅghas as they spread across Asia. This conclusion is based on the observance that all three Vinayas contain slightly different, modified vows and rules.
When breaking pārājika precepts will result in expulsion from the saṅgha, the other categories of precepts are less severe and also easier to break. Buddha was aware that until the practitioner’s mind is subdued, the purification process and restoration of precepts were necessary. He formed a bi-weekly saṅgha confession ceremony, or Sojong, merely for the purpose of purifying and restoring monastic precepts. This confessional ceremony involves generating regret, making a determination to avoid the harmful action in the future, taking refuge in the Three Jewels, generating altruistic intentions, and engaging in some sort of remedial behavior.54

Altered Record-keeping by the Monks

Early Buddhist records are filled with misogynistic texts asserting the male opinion concerning women and one-sided statements on female nature.55 It is virtually impossible to determine which statements attributed to Buddha were actually articulated by him and which statements were written by monks, the main record keepers in ancient India. Having studied these statements closely, Buddhist scholars concluded that these texts were recorded by monks hundreds of years after the passing of Buddha.56

The misogynist Sutric literature, written by monks, often disparages women and addresses them as temptresses.58 Monks often struggled with the difficulty of remaining celibate and found it easier to blame the problem on women for being too attractive.59 The ancient Sutric literature is irredeemably androcentric and should not be testimony to the capabilities or insights of women within their societal existence. Misogynistic
sources do not truthfully reflect the reality of women’s lives, but they do help depict the society in which they lived.\(^6^0\)

The negative attitudes toward women are often found in early Indian or Mahāyāna Buddhism, but not generally found in religious texts as formal points of doctrine.\(^6^1\) Scholars established that during the presence of Buddha on earth, women were relatively well-situated in society and Buddhism. The misogynist texts, stating women were less capable than men, were slowly added and then modified by the monks throughout ancient Indian Buddhism until the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism.\(^6^2\)

Buddha allegedly said that by admitting women into the monastic community, thus creating a community of nuns, the life of his teachings would be shortened by five-hundred years. The current belief among Buddhist scholars is that these words are attributed to Buddha by the monks who followed and wrote down what Buddha is suppose to have said hundreds of years after his death.\(^6^3\) It is unsound to assume that Buddha accepted women into the Buddhist saṅgha knowing full well that this decision would cause his teachings to decline early. This quote and its interpretation is without doubt the result of reading Buddha’s statement out of context.\(^6^4\)

About three months after Buddha’s parinirvāṇa, death of the body of someone who has attained complete awakening, five-hundred arhats attended the First Council to discuss, recite and collect Buddha’s teachings. The records from the First Council do not mention the presence of any women, yet it would have been impossible for monks to recite Bhikkhunī Pāṭimokkha Sutta, which was only recited by bhikkhunīs, apart from the
presence of monks, on *uposatha* days every new and full moon. The *Pāṭimokkha Sutta* is the code of monastic precepts leading to the liberation.

I.B. Horner’s study in her book, *Women Under Primitive Buddhism*, states that Buddha hesitated to accept women into the monastic order because he was torn between his cultural conditioning and the Hindu social system, which clearly and unequivocally regarded women as predominately child-bearers and servants to their family. Buddha firmly believed that women were equally as capable as men of attaining enlightenment. However, there was a societal prejudice against Jain nuns which thought the idea of women living a religious life outside of the family threatened social stability. The subordination of nuns to monks was most likely a compromise allowing women to pursue the spiritual path ascribed by Buddha without completely disregarding the conventions of Hindu society of the day. The life of a Buddhist nun also provided a positive alternative for unmarried and widowed women who had little status in Hindu society.

The outlook of some monks being unhappy that Buddha allowed women to join the *saṅgha*, was never expressed in Buddha’s lifetime. Allowing women to become nuns created a situation akin to a household that had many women but few men, one that easily falls prey to robbers and thieves. In other words, the thought was that women must be protected by some androcentric social structure like the family, but unrealistic to place this responsibility on monks who were ill-suited to that task because they had given up just such social responsibility when they renounced lay life. The irony of this decision is that some formally organized order of nuns already existed by the time this dilemma became a social issue. The nuns had regulated themselves quite successfully for some
time and probably continued to do so even though they were now officially under the control of the monks. When Mahāprajābatī first accepted the eight special rules, she also placed the nuns’ order under the authority of the monks. While nuns gained a more acceptable place in the eyes of the broader society, the order of nuns was subsequently demoted to a second-class status, a constraint that was to be reflected in diminishing prestige, educational opportunities, and financial support.

In Sri Lanka, “Mothers of the Ten Precepts” (Sinhala: dasa sil mātavo) have expressed the desire to remain free from the control of the monks. Most of them wear ochre color blouses to symbolize a complete break from lay life. They relate their autonomy with power, declaring that if they were granted pabbajjā — “going forth” and thus accept the Eight Chief Rules, they would lose the independence they have gained by renouncing lay life. They resent such suppression, because they consider themselves equal to the monks in regard to the purity of their practice. Other dasa sil mātavo are insisting that the formal ordination to the saṅgha would lift their status and deem them worthy of the same alms as monks. However, in regards to necessary monetary donations, contributions are traditionally made in support of the male Bhikkhu Saṅgha, because according to the Canon, a collection of texts regarded as the word of Buddha, the Bhikkhu Saṅgha is the best source of “field of merit” for the donor.

Before Buddha’s passing, he asserted that if the saṅgha finds some of the minor rules troublesome in the future, these rules can be changed or eliminated. During the First Council, the saṅgha could not decide which rules should be considered minor, and at the proposal of Mahākāssapa, thus decided to keep all the rules without new additions.
or subtractions. To this day, the Buddhist conservatives follow Mahākāśapa’s judgment over Buddha’s statement to continue modifying the minor rules based on current needs and present-day situations.72

Will we ever truly know what Buddha’s exact words were when he allowed women to pursue enlightenment and join the Buddhist saṅgha? Scholarly examination already affirmed the supposed statements of Buddha were actually recorded by monks hundreds of years after his passing. Alternatively though, Buddha may have simply changed his mind, realizing that not only are women capable of achieving enlightenment, but by involving the other half of the population, the fundamental principle of Buddhism — the liberation of all sentient beings — could be completed in half the time. A rational calculation since this decision would eliminate the need for women to wait until male rebirth to pursue the ultimate goal of enlightenment, thus halving the completion time of Buddha’s teachings from a thousand years to five-hundred, exactly as he predicted.

Thus, we have seen that the misogyny against women in Buddhist institutions is not inherent for Buddhism as a doctrine but a result of innate values of a surrounding and influential society. In Indian and Tibetan societies, the top priority has always been given to a male child and therefore they are considered the ones deserving of a better education. With educational opportunities being scarce, many rules impacting the nuns’ order were fabricated with the mere intention of limiting the number of female practitioners. Some of the rules imposed upon women are unquestionably discriminatory. While they may have been written with a better purpose in mind, the eight special rules, along with
altered record keeping by senior monks, have played key roles in women’s subordination within Buddhist institutions.
CHAPTER 3
WOMEN’S ROLE IN THE SANGHA

This chapter covers the efforts put forward in order to establish the bhikkunī ordination. The Dalai Lama himself requested to look into the missing link in the four-fold saṅgha and conduct studies to reverse that unfortunate outcome. The large part is given to the presentations during the first International Congress on Buddhist Women’s Role in the Saṅgha in Germany in 2007. Research presented discussed the issues and possible solutions posed by the monastic rules in Vinaya and how to make the bhikkunī ordination possible. In the end of the chapter I present a few valid options presented by the Buddhist scholars and senior practitioners which implied that the bhikkunī ordination in Vajrayāna Buddhism is accomplishable.

Women’s Role in the Saṅgha

Historically, the Tibetan nuns are able to have only the basic novice ordination. As a result of their lower social status, they were often shown very little respect within society. Some Himalayan border regions regarded nuns as single women with no responsibilities. They were often called away from their studies or meditation program to look after aging parents or care for the sick. Traditionally, many nuns were unpaid servants in their own households or that of their Lama.¹

Some senior Tibetan masters have pointed out that there was not yet a need for full ordination among the local Tibetan women. This statement, in fact, is a true reflection of how successfully Tibetan women have been kept in the dark about their
roles within the *saṅgha* and their responsibilities within the four-fold.\(^2\) Venerable Karuna Dharma has been breaking new Buddhist ground by orchestrating ordination ceremonies in the United States, since 1994, for women of all Buddhist traditions. Women come from all over the world to be ordained as *bhikkhunīs*. Venerable Karuna Dharma attended the Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2006. She discussed the gender equality issues in Buddhism and her pioneering role in the rebirth of female ordination. The Tibetan women who heard her speak had no idea that American *bhikkhunīs* had already taken control of their lives. This realization opened their eyes to the possibility of ordination and encouraged other Buddhist women throughout the world to request full *bhikkhunī* ordination from their senior lamas.\(^3\)

A full ordination for women within the Buddhist tradition is available for women in China, Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam. However, full ordination is not available to women in the Tibetan and Theravāda traditions.\(^4\) Many women are pursuing their spiritual path and developing alternative routes to attain enlightenment. One example is the socially-minded community of nuns in Thailand, who reduced a number of restrictions which now permits them to tend to prostitutes and other unfortunate people in places where fully ordained women are actually not permitted to enter.\(^5\) This being the case, why does the desire for full ordination still appeal to some women?
The International Congress on Buddhist Women’s Role in the Sangha

In 1987, His Holiness, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, requested an examination of the current Tibetan Buddhism issues of not ordaining bhikkhunīs. This gender-biased practice, at odds with Buddha’s teachings, has been under extensive study by many Buddhist experts, and the conclusive results were presented during the first International Congress on Buddhist Women’s Role in the Sangha, in Germany, 2007. Hosted by the University of Hamburg, this conference included the international Buddhist community from more than 19 countries who overwhelmingly encouraged the establishment of a full bhikkhunī ordination in Tibetan Buddhism. The congress took a deep look into women’s requests for bhikkhunī ordination, based on Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, and exclusively discussed problems stemming from legal text. By the conclusion of the conference, a number of Buddhist scholars, bhikkhus, and bhikkhunīs from various Buddhist traditions presented their profound studies in complete support of establishing a full bhikkhunī ordination in Tibetan tradition, under the rules of Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya.

The rules of Vinaya are handed down as the authoritarian rules in Buddhism. During the congress, however, the variations within the different Vinaya texts created additional obstacles for approaching the unified agreement of introducing the bhikkhunī ordination in Tibetan Buddhism. One particular question raised was if a bhikkhunī ordination needs to be performed by monks alone, or by both bhikkhu and Bhikkhunī Saṅghas. Another question brought forth asked whether monks and nuns belonging to different Vinaya traditions are allowed to perform a valid ordination. Historically, the bhikkhunī ordination was never formally introduced into Tibet, presumably due to the
lack of five Indian bhikkhunīs, the minimum number required for a valid initiation ceremony. Their journey across the Himalayan range was too perilous during that time.⁹

**Highlights of the Congress**

During the congress, Venerable Tenzin Palmo, a Tibetan Buddhist nun, teacher, and founder of the Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery, addressed the audience and His Holiness on the topic “A Brief Overview of the Situation for Nuns in the Tibetan Tradition in Exile,” she stated:

The Lord Buddha himself decreed the full ordination for nuns. He did not say that nuns should only receive a sramanerika ordination. Whatever the controversy over his reasons for His initial hesitation, the bhikshunis were definitely bhikshunis, so we are merely following the Buddha’s own intention. In addition for a country or nation to be considered as a truly Buddhist Middle Country, there must be the fourfold sangha of bhikshu, bhikshuni, upasaka, upasika.

In those countries such as China, Taiwan, Korea and Vietnam where the bhikshuni ordination is still extant the status of nuns is high and they receive the support and respect of society almost on a level with monks. They are brothers and sisters in the Dharma. However the vinaya makes it clear the monks always enjoy a higher status so there is no cause for monks to feel concerned.

How does this relate to nuns in the Tibetan tradition? One point is the question of the Geshema or Khenmo degree. Several Lamas of various traditions have stated to me that these degrees can only be given to one holding Full Ordination, since one of the subjects to be examined is the Vinaya which can only be studied by the ordained. Even if a nun received permission to study the bhikshuni vinaya (which they read when reciting the Kangyur anyway) without having herself received the bhikshuni vows, there would probably exist the stigma that she was not really a geshema but only allowed the title out of consideration for her scholastic efforts.

Also since they do not have bhikshuni vows, Tibetan nuns cannot take part in the monastic ceremonies such as full sojong or ordination ceremonies. They are therefore barred from important aspects of their lives as monastics.¹⁰
Tenzin Palmo’s speech addressed the primary issues the absence of a Bhikkhuni Saṅgha within Tibetan Buddhism is creating for Buddha’s female followers and the Buddhist community as a whole:

- Buddha’s own intention has been ignored by not establishing the full ordination for women
- The absence of the four-fold saṅgha disqualifies Tibet as the Buddhist Middle Country
- The absence of the full ordination disqualifies Tibetan nuns from receiving the Geshema or Khenmo degree, leaving the pursuit for highest Buddhist degree available only for monks
- The nonexistence of highly educated female teachers keeps the support and respect for nuns to minimum
- Tibetan nuns are kept away from important monastic rituals because they are not fully ordained

These five crises within Tibetan Buddhism once again make one question the equality within Buddhism, which firmly maintains that the Buddhist goal is equally available to everyone, regardless of their gender.

During the International Congress of Women’s Role in the Sangha, Bhikkhuni Jampa Tsedroen, a Western nun, teacher of Buddhist philosophy at Tibetisches Zentrum in Hamburg, lecturer and research fellow at Hamburg University,11 came forward and recalled her conversation with His Holiness, the fourteenth Dalai Lama:

It was exactly twenty-five years ago in 1982, when I was a one-year novice, that you gave your first public talk in Germany, in this very hall. At that time I first asked you about bhikkhuni ordination; you asked me whether I was in a hurry. After asking several more times over the next three years, you told me in 1985 that the time was right, and I went to Taiwan.12

The ordination of Bhikkhuni Jampa Tsedroen was performed in Taiwan by a Bhikkhu Saṅgha — fully-ordained male Buddhists. However, mandate dictates that a dual saṅgha, consisting of fully-ordained male and female Buddhists, is required for a
full ordination. As a result, Tsedroen has often feared that her single saṅgha ordination, missing the female duality component, would be judged invalid and nullified.13

Bhikkhunī Jampa Tsedroen, born in Germany, was delighted when she got the “go ahead” from His Holiness to travel to Taiwan to receive the full ordination. Tsedroen’s own teacher, Geshe Thubten Ngawang advised her to wait until she corrected her personal motive for her ordination. He said, “The correct motivation for going for full ordination is renunciation of cyclic existence. You should not seek full ordination because you want to have equal rights with the monks.”14 Her teacher’s comment demonstrates the importance of the teacher’s role in Buddhism and the personal attention given to each student during their training. The teacher should be knowledgeable and properly guide the student in their path of spiritual development. Being a western nun and accustomed with equal rights among the sexes, Jampa Tsedroen understood that her motivation for the full ordination was erroneous and she suffered greatly upon hearing that comment. Realizing the cold reality of the comment, she gradually turned her motivation around, and this achievement was awarded with a plane ticket to Taiwan, where she received Dharmaguptaka bhikkhunī ordination.15

**The Dalai Lama Voices His Support for the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha**

The Dalai Lama acts, not only as a well-known Buddhist leader in the world, but also as a leader of his own Tibetan Buddhist community. He addressed the concern of the single saṅgha ordination received by Bhikkhunī Jampa Tsedroen in Taiwan, and the absence of Tibetan bhikkhunī ordination:
I just want to make clear that we all accept and recognize as Bhikkhunīs those Tibetans and Westerners who have received Dharmaguptaka Bhikkhunī ordination. This is not the issue. The issue is to find the way to ordain Bhikkhunīs that is in accordance with the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya texts. There needs to be a Buddha alive and here and now to ask. If I were a Buddha, I could decide; but that is not the case. I am not a Buddha. I can act as a dictator regarding some issues, but not regarding matters of Vinaya.

...But as for re-establishing the ordination ceremony, this is a different matter. Although I may wish for this to happen, it requires the consensus of the senior monks. Some of them have offered strong resistance.

...Based on the common-sense viewpoint, I am 100 percent certain that were the Buddha here today, he would give permission for Bhikkhunī ordination. That would make things much easier. Unfortunately there is no Buddha here, and I cannot act as the Buddha.16

The Dalai Lama’s response to the concern of those women ordained under the Dharmaguptaka tradition found peace in his assurance that they were considered bhikkhunīs, regardless of being ordained by the single Bhikkhu Saṅgha. The Tibetan nuns who expressed interest in being ordained under the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition, however, their spiritual aspirations are indefinitely postponed in order to satisfy impossible demands and excuses.17 It is important at this time to point out that the ordination lineage handed down by Buddha was a simple ordination without specific tradition. Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna are all new divisions and much later developments in Buddhism.18 It is also important to reveal that His Holiness, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, also known as Tenzin Gyatso or the Great Ocean of Wisdom, is regarded by his people as an emanation of Chenrezig, the Buddha of Compassion.19

Granted, by saying that “I am not a Buddha,” he may have suggested that he is not the Buddha who was born in an Indian kingdom around 563 B.C.20 the person whose teachings we follow today.
Regardless of being Buddha or not, several issues arise from the following statement to leave one skeptical: “I am 100 percent certain that were the Buddha here today, he would give permission for bhikkhunī ordination.” The first blatantly obvious point is that it is unrealistic to hope the Śākyamuni Buddha, a person born around 563 B.C., to be present and decide on issues concerning the full ordination of bhikkhunīs. Second, Buddha already accepted women to the saṅgha and granted them a full ordination; proven and reinforced by the eight precepts he proposed during the acceptance process. Lastly, the one-hundred percent certainty of Buddha’s decision should be logic enough to go forward with the full bhikkhunī ordination.

What truly hinders the Buddhist authorities’ decision on establishing full ordination for Tibetan nuns? The Dalai Lama highlights that even though he is fully aware of the bhikkhunī ordination issues and supports women’s efforts to establish the bhikkhunī order, he cannot make the decision alone. The main problem is that many lamas refuse to treat nuns and monks equally. Excuses vary from “Women didn’t have it in Tibet” to “Nuns are perfectly happy just being novices.” His Holiness has repeatedly stated that he is very keen for nuns to receive full ordination. However, many people behind him are not ready and he may only proceed knowing he has the full support of the monks behind him. Yet he still lacks the support, although the subject has been under debate for the last thirty years.²¹

In order to better understand the lack of support the Dalai Lama faces, it is helpful to clarify the state of internal affairs of the Buddhist monastic community. Every monk who is formally accepted by the monastic authorities becomes a member of a monastery.
As a member, he automatically gains certain rights and privileges, such as the option to share in the wealth of the monastery. Given that he has received a certain level of seniority, he can also participate in making decisions governing the life of the community. Monks govern themselves through chosen representatives, and while the Abbot or Lama leading the monastery has some power, he has to be considerate of the traditions of the monastery and the wishes of the monks, whose representatives have the option to nullify the leader’s actions.

Monks are well aware of their privileges and quite frequently severely criticize the monastic officers who do not perform their duties adequately. The combination of privilege and entitlement has a propensity to turn the monks conservative and uncompromising, addressing any changes as fabrications that would eventually emasculate the traditions of their monastery. This conservatism has proven to be frustrating for those who try to move forward and rectify the unsettled changes in the community. The Dalai Lama’s attempts to push improvements upon his own monastery have been limited. He has control over some aspects of monastic life, such as the appointment of abbots and the regulations of monastic exams, but outside of this conventional side of the community’s life, everything has to be agreed upon by the monks.

Until present day, the Dalai Lama’s progressive way of thinking has been met with considerable opposition by conservative leaders of the Buddhist community. His speech during the International Congress of Women’s Role in the Sangha in Hamburg was an attempt to educate his own community on the aspirations of feminism. He
admitted that women have not had equal opportunities in Buddhism. This assertion made by the Dalai Lama will hopefully help to reverse the prejudice women have endured within the Buddhist tradition. It may be seen as a deliberate attempt to point out that the eight heavy rules imposed on women are an archaic relic from a previous period in Buddhist history.

In his last speech during the congress, the Dalai Lama offered invaluable suggestions and urged that steps immediately be taken to accomplish the establishment of the Tibetan bhikṣūnī ordination for women. He addressed the participants during the final day, stating:

Whether due to biological or cultural factors, women seem to have more sensitivity to the feelings and suffering of others. Intelligence is good, but without compassion, it can create enormous problems. It must be bound with warm-heartedness to foster a more peaceful society, and for this, women’s involvement I think will be crucial. I’m not saying this to flatter you.

In the area of religion, yes, sometimes women are sidelined, though I think Buddhism is better on this score, since the Buddha gave equal rights for full ordination to both sexes. The fourfold community of Buddha’s disciples—bhikṣus, bhikṣunīs, upāsakas, and upāsikās—is so precious. But, at present among the Tibetans, the fourfold community is incomplete.

The Dalai Lama elaborates that in comparison to other religions, Buddhism allows equal rights to men and women alike. The teachings of Buddha are collected in the Vinaya, the monastic code, where Buddha himself ruled for the equal right of women and men. His Holiness agrees that in some forms of practice, there is a degree of discrimination against women practitioners where the code is modified or not precisely followed. The Dalai Lama acknowledged that in the West there is a lot of consciousness about equality, especially when it comes to the rights of women. He considers that the
current emphasis and plight for equality will help to open the minds of other lamas and Buddhist teachers.  

The Dalai Lama firmly believes that women possess a greater degree of compassion, and that it comes easier for them than male practitioners to imagine taking on the suffering of others. It is true, life is suffering. There are biological factors that we cannot control. The cultural factors that cause additional suffering for women could be easily eliminated by granting them equal spiritual and educational opportunities. The Dalai Lama attributes a woman’s nurturing nature to the reason why women are more successful in meditating on love and compassion. It is one thing to know how to practice meditation, and another to make progress on a spiritual path and become more compassionate. The Dalai Lama asserted that if women would become more involved in society, the world would be more peaceful with less conflict.  

He further added that women should nurture and develop their full potential as Buddhist leaders in the twenty-first century — a time in which people, more than ever, have to learn to live together. 

The Dalai Lama’s two speeches during the congress were unrewarding for those with high hopes to establish the bhikkhunī ordination. In his first speech, he said that bringing forth full ordination is not possible because of the absence of the living Buddha, yet the final day he encouraged women to continue their practice without assuring a certain future date when the first ordination would take place. Regardless of the congress ending without a final outcome, the studies presented were firm evidence that the full bhikkhunī ordination in Vajrayāna Buddhism is possible and strongly supported.
Various studies and models were presented, the most notable were from Bhikkhunī Myongsong Sunim, President of the National Association of Korean bhikkhunīs; and Bhikkhu Bodhi, former president of the Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy. Bhikkhunī Myongsong Sunim proposed a model that would follow a successful Korean model, where Dharmaguptaka bhikkhunī lineage was revived after World War II by a single Bhikkhu Saṅgha, and eventually switched to the dual saṅgha method in 1982.31 Two possible models were presented by Bhikkhu Bodhi, who stated that many Tibetan Buddhist practitioners have already taken bhikkhunī vows in the Dharmaguptaka tradition. They have been practicing Tibetan Buddhism for more than twenty years, wearing Tibetan Buddhist robes, speaking the Tibetan language, as well as practicing and living in Tibetan centers. He boldly proposed that the Mūlasarvāstivāda bhikkhus accept the Dharmaguptaka bhikkhunīs as Mūlasarvāstivāda bhikkunīs. This model was backed up by the research where, within the Theravāda tradition, the dāśhīkamma custom allows a monk of one Nikāya to transfer to another. The second model proposed by Bhikkhu Bodhi was that of a single saṅgha ordination. He affirmed that according to Pāli sources, before there were any bhikkhunīs, Buddha said that bhikkhus alone may ordain bhikkhunīs.32

His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama’s final thoughts about the ordination of bhikkhunī was simple and whole-hearted. He reminded the Buddhist community that in today’s world, women are participating in government, science, medicine, law, arts, humanities, education, and business. Equally as enthusiastic about involvement in spiritual activities as men, women are receiving spiritual education and training, serving
as role models, and contributing to the overall well-being of society. As a result, nuns and female lay followers of Tibetan Buddhism wish to receive full ordination in their tradition. Women have the ability to achieve the ultimate goal of Buddha’s teachings, therefore the means and opportunities to achieve this goal should be completely accessible, regardless of gender. Receiving full ordination and being supported by the saṅgha is the ultimate means of assuring that Tibetan nuns achieve their full potential. The full ordination will allow nuns to fully pursue their spiritual and educational goals, as well as enhance their opportunities to benefit society in research, teaching, counseling, and other activities while also spreading the Buddhadharma.

While praising women for being more compassionate, the congress offered no solution for women waiting for years, some more than decades, for the full bhikkhunī ordination. The Dalai Lama was right. The decision to establish a Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in the Tibetan tradition would be easier if Buddha were here today. It would, once again, be his decision. Nearly 2,500 years ago, a single individual became powerful enough to go against the known social customs and accept women as full members of the saṅgha. It is useless to ignore that fact and linger in the hope of the next Buddha to appear. It is much harder to successfully persuade the conservative Buddhist authorities, who firmly stand against the full bhikkhunī ordination. They obviously have no respect for Buddha’s deeds, and even nowadays, undermine the progressive ideas of His Holiness, the Dalai Lama.

When would the full ordination for Tibetan nuns take place? Should they wait for the coming of the Buddha, or a time when every monk agrees with this idea? How long
will it take to educate every narrow-minded person of the positive outcomes of women’s spiritual pursuit? Why have requests by women to establish the full bhikkhunī ordination in Vajrayāna Buddhism gone unanswered for decades? We might not know when the first bhikkhunī ordination will take place, but we know why this decision is indefinitely postponed. The bhikkhunī ordination is delayed because of the fear of women succeeding. While it is easy to ignore Buddha’s past deeds in his absence, the knowledge that women are capable, striving, and able to succeed, is the fully acknowledged and an anticipated threat. The rationale that causes so much anxiety among the Buddhist conservatives is the threat of women competing alongside the monks for the few precious degrees available. Giving full rights to women, as members of the saṅgha, combined with higher education, will soon result in the filling of leadership positions presently available only for men.

The Geshe Degree—Tibetan Buddhist Academic Degree

In Tibet, prior to the seventeenth century, nuns had their own educational institutions that produced exceptional scholars. Several reports describe public debates that took place between monks and nuns. However, this is not the case during the last two centuries when the educational opportunities for nuns were negligible and the opportunity to receive the same education available for monks, nearly impossible.33

Shortly after 1959, the Tibetan government-in-exile in India and Nepal focused their efforts to re-establish the monasteries and preserve the Dharma for the next generation of monks. A few small nunneries were set up for the nuns, frequently
overcrowded and often lacking the presence of a qualified philosophy teacher.\textsuperscript{34} The Dalai Lama recognized the need to improve educational opportunities for nuns. He realized that improving the educational opportunities did not require the approval of the whole Buddhist community. He introduced a training program for nuns, many of whom soon reached a high level in Buddhist philosophy. The Dalai Lama boldly proposed an opportunity to prepare nuns for a \textit{geshema} examination, in order to become \textit{geshemas}. When a senior monk remained silent and skeptical at the mention of his intentions, the Dalai Lama joked, “I don’t think this senior monk was being particularly negative; he was just not accustomed to this line of thinking.”\textsuperscript{35}

The Dalai Lama has faced many difficulties since taking up the task to create educational opportunities for nuns, mostly instigated by the monastic establishment. Regardless of many setbacks, his vigorous work on establishing schools for young nuns has been met with a great enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{36} The Dalai Lama’s resilient work to provide women an equal access to excel scholarly and receive the Geshe degree finally paid off when, in April 2011, Geshe Kelsang Wangmo, a Western nun born in Germany, successfully passed the 18-year program and became the first female \textit{Geshe}.\textsuperscript{37} While Kelsang Wangmo and many others are celebrating the new era of scholastic breakthrough for nuns, giving women an option to fill valuable teaching roles, Geshe Wangmo’s level of ordination is still that of a novice.

Traditionally, Geshe degrees were awarded to monks who completed extensive studies on the five major treatises of Buddhist philosophy. Tibetan nuns were discouraged from any kind of philosophical study and debate, which prevented them
from any hope of obtaining the Geshe degree. This educational disadvantage for nuns continued even after the Chinese takeover of Tibet and building of new monasteries in India. In the mid-1990s, the Dalai Lama began advocating for the awarding of Geshe degrees to nuns. The topic was discussed in various forums, from religious conferences to meetings among representatives of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism. However, the conclusive decision was never reached because of the complexities and divergence of views.38

His Holiness, however, kept working to change the inferior situation of nuns, noting that many nuns are very sincere with no opportunity to ascend to the highest ordination level. Previously, only monasteries had been authorized to award Geshe degrees, even though Tibetan nuns had completed the same Geshe degree as monks, but if one was not a part of a monastery, they were unable to receive the Geshe degree. In 2011, His Holiness and the Department of Religion and Culture authorized the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics to award Rime Geshe degree for the first time.39 Rime Geshe Degree is a non-sectarian degree not limited to any specific sect of Buddhism and includes the studying and debating of all four Tibetan traditions.40 A committee set up by the Department of Religion and Culture, consisting of members from the Tibetan Nuns Project, the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics and surrounding area nunneries of Dharamsala, concluded after meeting in May 2012 that they have formed the rules and regulations granting Geshe degrees for all qualified nuns. This means that nuns who already completed the program, and those still in the process, have the opportunity to take exams and be awarded the Geshe degree.41
The Four-fold Saṅgha and the Buddhist Middle Country

A Buddhist saṅgha is a four-fold community of Buddha’s followers. These followers include bhikkhu — fully ordained male Buddhist monastics; bhikkhunīs—fully ordained female Buddhist monastics; as well as upāsakas and upāsikās — male and female lay people who are not monastic, but will undertake some Buddhist vows. Among the Tibetan saṅgha, the one component missing from the four-fold community are bhikkhunīs, fully ordained female Buddhists.

An intrinsic patriarchal authority and cultural tendency to control women in Buddhism have caused the four-fold saṅgha to perish in almost all Buddhist countries. Whereas the bhikkhu ordination lineages exist in almost all of them, the bhikkhunī ordination lineage only exists in a few. For this reason, the Dalai Lama stresses the impact of the incomplete four-fold Buddhist community and emphasizes the necessity to offer the full bhikkhunī ordination in all schools of Tibetan Buddhism in order to complete the tetrad.42

His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, further explained the importance of being born in a central land, which should be one of the eighteen qualities of human rebirth. In the Buddhist tradition, the central land is possible only when the four-fold community is complete. Unfortunately, due to the missing bhikkhunī component, Tibet does not qualify as a central land. To make matters worse, the Dalai Lama pointed out that because of this missing link, being born in Tibet does not qualify as a condition for precious human rebirth.43
In Buddhism, the constant cycle of birth, aging, and death, being born as a human is considered “precious human rebirth.” The human birth is considered precious over other forms of rebirth, because only humans can practice the Dharma. The sentient being who are able to practice the Dharma should be free from the four unfavorable states of a non-human and the four unfavorable states of a human. The Buddhist wheel-of-life illustrates the following states as non-human:

- hell beings
- hungry ghosts
- animals
- long-lived gods

Whereas the four unfavorable states of a human are considered:

- Being born in a place not embracing Buddhas teachings
- Being born in a time in which Buddhas teachings were unavailable
- Absence of faith in the Three Jewels
- Being handicap, such as mute, since it is an obstacle to one who wishes to practice Dharma.44

Thus we have seen that the rules in Vinaya were designed with the intention to establish the bhikkhunī ordination with or without the presence of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. As we have seen in this chapter the monastic rules in all three Vinayas support the establishment of the bhikkhunī ordination. The obstacle here is not the rules of Vinaya, even though many agree that the eight special rules should be invalidated. The major obstacles are the narrow-minded attitudes of authorities who, to this day, think of women as inferior and thus prevent them from receiving full ordination or higher education. However, many Buddhist women are beginning to swim against the current.
CHAPTER 4
CELEBRATED WOMEN IN TIBETAN BUDDHISM

Female Lamas

Aside from the lack of full ordination for females, another major concern of gender inequality in Tibetan Buddhism is the near absence of female lamas. Tibetan Buddhists believe that their masters experience rebirth after each of their deaths, and have been meticulously following the tradition of finding, recognizing, enthroning, training, and venerating the highly virtuous teachers or lamas for over a millennium.¹ The tulkus, or high-ranking lamas, take rebirth because of their meritorious deeds and realizations of their past karma. However, they also have the potential to experience suffering and are susceptible to negative karmic effects such as confusion, anger, and craving.²

In most cases, a tulku is recognized by a highly-realized lama before the age of five. Soon after they have been recognized as an incarnation, their intensive, twenty-year training begins. They are privileged to be educated by the best teachers in the finest facilities available. The main purpose of this training is to raise a skilled teacher and leader who can serve the public, monasteries, and nunneries.³ Although, not all great beings are officially recognized at a young age, some of them become known as tulkus with extraordinary qualities later in their lives, or even posthumously, while other will always remain unknown.⁴

In the Tibetan practice of finding reincarnations of great teachers, major institutional preference is given to find male incarnates over highly accomplished females.⁵ No other leader could earn greater merit, respect, honor, devotion or have
greater power and influence than those who are recognized as heads of major lineages or important monasteries. Unfortunately, the assumption exists that each successive incarnation will be found in a male rather than a female child. From a societal perspective, parents themselves, present only boys for inspection rather than become subject to public ridicule by bringing forth an exceptionally talented girl. The boy child chosen as the incarnation will bring honor and wealth to his parents, and receive an extremely privileged education. No matter how exceptional some girls may be, it is hard for them to compensate for the institutional preference and assumption that incarnates are male.6

In Tibet, only one incarnation lineage holder is expected to be female, Vajrayogini, a central figure in the Tibetan mythic universe. The present incarnation, Samding Dorje Phagmo, renounced her position as a living Buddha and became a ranking political official in the Chinese-run government in Tibet. Tibetan Buddhists sometimes regard an adult with great spiritual attainments as an incarnation. The practice of finding an incarnation at an early age and recognize one later as an adult is often confusing, resulting in claims that female incarnations are not as rare as a this single instance of Vajrayogini.7 Such recognition is vastly different from choosing a female child who would then receive the best training available and grow up to become an exceptional leader.

Yet there are some extraordinary cases of late recognition of female teachers. One such example, Catharine Burroughs of Poolesville, Maryland, was recognized by the high-ranking Tibetan lama Penor Rinpoche as an incarnation of Ahkön Lhamo. A
seventeenth century saint, Ahkön Lhamo, was one of the founders of the Palyul tradition, the lineage within the Nyingma school led by Penor Rinpoche for decades.⁸

Catharine Burroughs extraordinary story begins when Penor Rinpoche’s visited the United States in spring 1985. At the time, she taught a group of followers and introduced them to His Holiness. After a few days of observation, Penor Rinpoche made a dramatic announcement, informing the group they follow Mahāyāna Buddhism which Catharine had been teaching them without herself ever receiving formal training in it.⁹ The group Catharine Burroughs led was open for all. It was not like in Indian tradition where nuns are not allowed to attend monastic universities or sit in the same prayer room with monks. The women and men in her group were predominately well-educated and attended empowerments and teachings together, women often overpowering male disciples, if only because of sheer numbers.¹⁰

On September 24, 1988, Penor Rinpoche enthroned Catharine Burroughs as the official reincarnation of Ahkön Lhamo.¹¹ Catharine became known as Jetsunma Ahkön Norbu Lhamo. Penor Rinpoche himself stated that giving her the recognition as Ahkön Lhamo would inspire Westerners, women in particular, to practice Buddhism.¹² Jetsunma Ahkön Lhamo herself said that she wanted to see Buddhism belong in America, as any religion belongs in America, to see it become another option, something that fits, suits us — not some exotic foreign practice, or cult that belongs only in the East.¹³ She also toyed with the idea of opening a tantric college in the west, an opportunity to receive a higher education of Buddha’s teachings.¹⁴ Ahkön Lhamo, a woman and Western tulku, was granted the highest spiritual authority within the overtly masculine world of Tibetan
Buddhism. She founded a Dharma center in Poolesville, Maryland entitled the Kunzang Odsal Palyul Changchub Chöling (the Fully Awakened Glorious Dharma Continent of Absolute Clear Light).

Jetsunma Ahkön Norbu Lhamo is a prime example of a spiritual person not discovered at an early age, nor taken into a Tibetan monastery to shape and bring forth her full potential. She developed it entirely herself, secretly and alone in the middle of America, without help from anyone. She had achieved her spiritual mastery and taught directly from her own memory. Her first visions started when she lived with her family in Brooklyn at age ten. In the sequence of dreams, she soon uttered stock Tibetan Buddhist concepts such as “I commit myself to benefiting all beings, my life has no meaning other than the benefit of all beings.” After this she meditated on death and impermanence, followed by contemplating absolute reality, or ultimate truth, the primordial wisdom state — the most difficult subject of all Buddhist meditations. What yogis and scholars, in Tibetan monasteries, take years to achieve after long intellectual study and years of retreat, Ahkön Lhamo had arrived at entirely on her own. While she meditated on absolute nature and compassion, she simultaneously started offering up her body. This practice is known as the ritual of Chöd. Around age thirty she had a spiritual experience that showed it was time to begin her work as a teacher.

Penor Rinpoche had a lifetime goal to track down the reincarnation of Ahkön Lhamo, the female Tibetan yogini. He knew that female reincarnates were immeasurably harder to find. Tibetan yoginis, although reaching the same exalted peaks of consciousness as their male counterparts, were generally free spirits who did their
meditations alone in the caves. There was no system in place for finding them. The seventeenth century saint, Ahkön Lhamo, spent most of her life meditating alone in a cave before founding the Palyul tradition of Tibetan Buddhism with her brother, Kunzang Sherab. While her brother, Kunzang Sherab, has been recognized over and over, his sister Ahkön Lhamo made her first recorded incarnate appearance as westerner Catharine Burroughs.

Catharine Burroughs’ story is extraordinary, especially because the main teachings of Buddhism are about the irrelevance of gender. There is a vast divergence between Buddhist beliefs and Buddhist practice when it comes to finding reincarnates. Interestingly, the Buddhist law itself does not rule out that a male could be reborn as a female. It is unacceptable to assume that the hundreds of reincarnations are always born as males. The practice of finding reincarnations is heavily prejudiced against females, and heavily influenced by people and society themselves who bring forward only boys for reincarnate search parties.

Buddhist institutions are still in denial about gender equality within the Buddhist teachings. The current male order is anxious about the change of social and religious balance between the sexes if equality in Buddhist institutions would occur. If finally recognized by high lamas as reincarnations, female practitioners would gain a high standing in Buddhist society and possibly in the world. The institution of finding reincarnations is still persistently androcentric, insisting on the preservation of conventionally accepted societal roles of male authority over female.
Female Teachers, Venerable Tenzin Palmo

Women, under a patriarchal system, have continued to prove that their spiritual needs and capacity are as great as that of men. However, they have been relating to religious systems created by men and intended to fulfill male needs. Why do women still want to strive for spiritual enlightenment under such circumstances? Some women have found ways to cope with the patriarchal background of the Buddhist institution, while others have taken action to actively change the Tibetan nun situation. One such woman, Englishwoman Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, traveled to India in 1964 to become ordained as a Buddhist nun. While in India, she met His Eminence, the Eighth Khamtrul Rinpoche, who became her principal teacher. In 1967, Palmo received her novice ordination from His Holiness, the sixteenth Karmapa, at Rumtek. Despite the fact that the novice level was all she could attain, since Tibetan tradition did not allow her to receive full ordination, she was overjoyed. A few years later, she undertook a trip to Hong Kong, China where she received the bhikkunī ordination. Although feeling a deep satisfaction, at the same time, she realized the injustice inflicted upon the Tibetan nuns by refusing them the full ordination.

Soon after her arrival to India in 1964, Palmo recognized the additional suffering women were encountering because of the male prejudice against women. She explains:

Tibetan Buddhism, as with all Buddhism, was basically hierarchical and patriarchal. That’s just the way it was. Traditionally, women were not educated and nuns also were not educated and therefore they played a much lower role in society, and as far as Buddhism was concerned, women had no voice.

Initially, Tenzin Palmo was the only nun in the monastery, living with 100 monks. While living in the monastery, monks told her that they prayed that in her next life she
would be more fortunate and be reborn as a male so she could attend all the monastery activities. They also said that they didn’t necessarily hold her inferior rebirth in the female body against her.²⁸

Palmo herself had a very different viewpoint than the monks. She is renowned for her compassionate commitment to become enlightened as a woman. She explained: “As long as there is discrimination against females, then one should strive to be born again and again in a female body to help that situation. Should the time come when males are in a weaker position, then one would vow to be reborn in a male body.”²⁹

In the beginning of 1990, Tenzin Palmo was already well-known as a Buddhist nun and spiritual teacher who had spent twelve years alone, retreated in a Himalayan cave. In 1993, she had the opportunity to participate in the first Western Buddhism Conference held in Dharamsala, India. Many high lamas and His Holiness, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, were among the people who attended this conference. The main purpose of the Western Buddhism conference was to discuss transitioning the Buddha-dharma into Western culture.³⁰

In the early 1990s, more than three decades had passed since the Dalai Lama went into exile in India. His work to advance Tibet’s cause was underway. The Western world became intensely interested in Buddhism and its promise to end suffering. Interestingly enough, the Tibetan government-in-exile found the spread of Buddhism into Western culture to be a top priority over the ongoing internal question of Tibetan nuns’ ordination. During the 1993 Western Buddhism conference, Tenzin Palmo had an opportunity to address high lamas and His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, himself. She spoke
from personal experience, addressing major problems Westerners practicing Buddhism were facing. In her speech, she stated that after the lamas ordain people, the newly ordained are left alone without additional support and guidance. They do their best to run Dharma centers and keep their ordination vows but many eventually end up disrobing. It is disheartening to see the newly ordained begin with so much enthusiasm and then fail because of lack of encouragement or counseling. She reiterated that this is a new, rising concern never experienced in Buddhist history before. Traditionally, a lama ordaining a disciple will guide them through their spiritual growth.\textsuperscript{31} Palmo continued on a slightly pleading note:

In the past the sangha was firmly established, nurtured and cared for. In the West this is not happening. I truly don’t know why. There are a few monasteries, mostly in the Theravada tradition, which are doing well, but for the nuns what is there? There is hardly anything, quite frankly. But to end on a higher note, I pray that this life of purity and renunciation which is so rare and precious in the world, that this jewel of the sangha may not be thrown down into the mud of our indifference and contempt.\textsuperscript{32}

In order to practice Buddhadharma, a person also needs a personal instructor. Realistically, Palmo meant Buddhadharma practitioners who were able to receive the ordination. In the previous two decades, many of these ordained people had moved on to become teachers themselves, without having proper training or a teacher to guide them. In this instance, Tenzin Palmo did not necessarily mean women who practice Buddhadharma, but drew attention to many Westerners who are taking up the Buddhist path. During her twelve years of meditating in a Himalayan mountain cave, Palmo continued to periodically meet her personal teacher, Khamtrul Rinpoche. The quest for enlightenment is a process, taking years and a lifetime of practice, and often new questions and issues
arise. Palmo was very fortunate to have a teacher who supported her goal and encouraged her throughout her practice. She started her speech by addressing the issues she had encountered during her visits to various countries while accumulating the funding to establish a nunnery. Her personal observations already highlighted major issues Buddhist teachers faced in other countries. She emphasized that Western practitioners lack the necessary support regardless of their gender.33

Many monasteries were destroyed during the Chinese Cultural Revolution in Tibet, the new ones being rebuilt for refugee monks. As for the Western nuns, they had no place to practice. The last part of Palmo’s speech was an outcry for the existing plight of Buddhist nuns. Many Buddhist nuns were forced to return home to earn their livelihood, while others were reduced to cooking in monastery kitchens for the monks.34

At the end of Palmo’s speech, she reminded the audience that being born human is considered “rare and precious” in the Buddhist tradition and should not be ignored. She simply meant that from the three jewels, one of them is the saṅgha, a place of development for the Buddhist practitioner. The purpose of the saṅgha is to care and nurture its members and the lack of support by senior members caused many Westerners following the Buddhist path to fail in reaching the Buddhadharma. Palmo’s speech, especially her final statement about the ignorance amongst the Sangha leaders, greatly angered many senior lamas. Any woman standing up against lamas and publicly admonishing them was previously unheard of, in fact, it is a written unlawful act. The Dalai Lama, himself, was listening carefully, weeping silently with his head in his hands. When he finally lifted his head, he said softly: “You are quite brave.”35
Palmo’s speech and her statement that there is currently an issue within the *saṅgha* was not as choking as the responses it triggered by the male senior leaders. This is a perfect example of how attached monks are to all of the privileges bestowed upon them, and how little tolerance they have for any discomfort when these privileges are threatened. Hearing the criticism of poor leadership, they instantly disregarded Buddha’s root teaching of the Three Poisons — *kleśas*: ignorance, desire, and hatred. The Three Poisons being the main cause why all the beings are trapped in *samsāra* — in a continuous cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth. What they did not fail to overlook was that a nun was standing in front of them blatantly pointing out the weakness within the current *saṅgha*, obviously run by the same senior monks and lamas. They quickly implemented their knowledge of the eight special rules, the same rules that for more than two millennia have subordinated nuns to monks. These rules state that nuns are not allowed to revile, criticize or admonish monks, though monks could admonish women. Years of meditation to suppress desire, ignorance and hatred seems to have been wasted within this leadership group. These eight rules have forced one-sided conversation within the *saṅgha* for far too long, the time for two-sided conversations to resolve issues within the *saṅgha* is now.

After the Western Buddhism conference in Dharamsala, Palmo’s life took a major turn. She decided that it was time to do something about the issues Buddhist women were facing rather than complaining about them. She believed that the time was right to fulfill the promise she made to her lama, Khamtrul Rinpoche, in the seventies — to build a nunnery and preserve the *yogini* lineage. She also consulted the Dalai Lama and he
optimistically suggested giving it two years before once again retreating back to the Himalayan mountain cave for isolated self-meditation.\textsuperscript{37} Instead, she set off to collect funds to build a nunnery for the women in the Kangra valley of India, near Tashi Jong.\textsuperscript{38} Palmo traveled around the world delivering Dharma talks by sharing her spiritual practice experience to everyday people, the lectures very different from those usually delivered within a monastic environment.\textsuperscript{39}

Her new lifestyle of traveling and teaching was very different from the private meditation Palmo preferred. Upon future completion of the nunnery from the funding acquired by Palmo, the old Togdens — \textit{yogis} living in the neighboring Tashi Jong monastery — were instructed to educate the dedicated young nuns. Her firm belief in the Todgens and their ability to lead young nuns to enlightenment led her to a long journey throughout the world. During Palmo’s travels, her main objective was to bring the practice and the nuns together, eventually restoring the precious Togdenma — female \textit{yoginis} lineage.\textsuperscript{40} The teaching of Togdenma, a mystical Buddhist tradition, was virtually wiped out during the 1959 Chinese Communist takeover of Tibet.\textsuperscript{41}

The Togdenmas, the female counterpart of Todgens, had long ago practiced special spiritual techniques allowing women to practice meditation, and within a short time, realize the truth within. Palmo revealed her plan to restore the female \textit{yogini} lineage through construction of a nunnery and by utilizing the aforementioned spiritual techniques, specifically designed for women practitioners in the twelfth century by Milarepa’s leading disciple, Rechungpa. Rechungpa, a patriarch of the Kagyu lineage, created precious teachings passed on from one generation to the next by living
transmission from the master to disciple. Palmo feared if the Todgens died before these teachings were passed on that they were in danger of dying out altogether.\textsuperscript{42}

Palmo’s vision of the Dongyu Gatsal Ling nunnery came to fruition and its construction started in early 2000. In 2005, the first nuns were able to move in to their newly completed living quarters at the permanent nunnery while construction continued around them. Palmo planned to continue the Drukpa Kagyu lineage and provide young nuns the opportunity to realize their intellectual and spiritual potential. After numerous centuries of neglect, women once again have the chance to reinstate the Togdenma Lineage. As of May 2010, seventy-five nuns were living, studying, and practicing at the Dongyu Gatsal Ling nunnery.\textsuperscript{43}

In February 2008, His Holiness, the Twelfth Gyalwang Drukpa, head of the Drukpa Kagyu lineage, gave the honorary title of Jetsunma to Palmo. Literally meaning “venerable master,” this title was awarded to Palmo for her hard work towards spiritual enlightenment and her efforts to promote the status of female practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism. Gyalwang Drukpa believes the future of the Buddhist tradition may lie with women who have such a high level of dedication and devotion.\textsuperscript{44}

**Female Treasure Revealers, Sera Khandro**

A treasure revealer (\textit{gter ston}) is one who discovers scriptural and material Tibetan Buddhist revelations.\textsuperscript{45} Being a treasure revealer is one of the most misunderstood roles for spiritual Tibetan woman and has been met with a lot of controversy. This role does not fit into any accepted norms cherished by the monastic or
lay community. The idea of female treasure revealer has met with calculable speculations, especially damaging is one denoting them as mere aids for the male pursuit of enlightenment, a common misconception after a hasty study of Buddhist paintings depicting male and female consorts in each others embrace. The knowledge of treasure revealing is secret, transmitted from teacher to disciple or between treasurerevealers. Very little is actually known about the practice, and even less is known about the treasure revealing practice from the woman’s point-of-view.

Fortunately writings exist of the Tibetan Buddhist treasure revealer, Sera Khandro (1892-1940), who was only one of a handful of pre-1959 Tibetan women to write her own autobiography, and the biography of her main consort.\(^{46}\) Sera Khandro was the most prolific female writer in Tibetan history. Her writings include more than two-thousand Tibetan folio pages of revealed Treasure teachings in four volumes.\(^{47}\) She was born into a wealthy half-Mongolian, half-Tibetan noble family in Lhasa. Her first vision occurred at the tender age of eight while in a suicidal mood. A terrifyingly ugly woman appeared in front of her, brandishing a sword and threatening to kill her.\(^{48}\) At age fifteen she ran away from home with a group of traveling pilgrims to escape an arranged marriage. The head of the traveling group was Drimé Özer, her future teacher and main spiritual consort.\(^{49}\)

Sera Khandro was the mother of two children and married to Gara Gyalsé, the son of a well-known treasure revealer from the Golok area. Gyalsé disrespected Sera Khandro’s spiritual calling, forcing her to wait until he left to visit relatives to finish up writing her Treasure text. An old monk, Kyaga Künzang, arrived and scolded her for
“contaminating” Lama Gyalsé’s Treasure scripture.\textsuperscript{50} The old monk was completely unable to see Sera Khandro’s ability to produce Treasures because she was a woman. Shortly after this incident, Sera Khandro interpreted her difficulties as a result of her “inferior birth,” writing that because of her “inferior birth” it was difficult to benefit beings.\textsuperscript{51} Her remark referred to the Tibetan word for women — \textit{kye men (sky e dman)} — literally meaning “low birth.”\textsuperscript{52} Her remark about “difficulties to benefit beings” should not be understood as her failure to produce Treasures, but as her community’s inability to see and support her spiritual and literary pursuit. Her authenticity was constantly doubted on the grounds of her gender.\textsuperscript{53}

Sera Khandro was a non-monastic woman involved with Treasures and practicing their related rituals, she did not fit in with Golok laypeople nor monastics, and continually seemed to incite peoples’ suspicion.\textsuperscript{54} One of the first persons to recognize Sera Khandro, at the age twenty-four, as an incarnation of Yeshé Tsogyal was a prominent lama from the Pelyül Tartang Monastery in Golok, named Gotrül Rinpoché. In a monastery gathering he said: “You all don’t need to have doubt. I think this ḍākini is certainly the speech incarnation of Yeshé Tsogyal. You all abandon your wrong views and be faithful. This is not a deception; it is real.”\textsuperscript{55}

Sera Khandro’s writings include the Vajrayāna interpretation of the significance of the union of male method and female wisdom for the realization of Buddhahood.\textsuperscript{56} Even in cases of monastic Treasure revealers there is a persistent belief that without sexual yoga, a Treasure revealer cannot reveal all the Treasures that are available to him or her. In her writings, Sera Khandro constantly laments her inability to reveal a
particular Treasure due to not having a consort. Visualizing a consort is a possible option, but according to Sera Khandro, that produces less powerful auspicious connections than engaging with an actual physical consort. Based on Sera Khandro’s writings there is another reason to practice sexual yoga besides treasure revealing and the goal of spiritual liberation. Sexual yoga is also concerned with curing sickness, prolonging life, dispelling obstacles, as well as preventing illness and death.

In her autobiography, Sera Khandro depicts tensions related to consort practices. These included unhappy relationships, patriarchal and nonconsensual exchanges of women between powerful men, jealousies among women, and negative gossip. Sera Khandro’s life partner, Gara Gyalsé, was abusive and disapproving of her revealing treasures, often punishing her verbally and physically. Gyalsé felt that he was losing control over Khandro as she became locally renowned as a ḍākinī and a female Treasure revealer. At one point, Gyalsé offered twenty-four year old Sera Khandro to Drimé Özer as a consort, exchanging ownership over her as if they were trading ownership of a common object. Although Sera Khandro desired to live with Drimé Özer, she felt humiliated and rejected by Gyalsé and his community. Sera Khandro lived with Gyalsé for nearly eight years and during that time traveled to visit Drimé Özer, her main spiritual consort, but always returned home to Gyalsé. To make matters worse, Gyalsé took another wife; Khandro was replaced by another woman right before her eyes.

At the age of thirty, Sera Khandro became very ill and her disciples took her to see Drimé Özer, who was also ill. The two of them were both prophesied consorts who gradually cured each other and decoded each other’s Treasures through igniting the
auspicious connections of method and wisdom. Sera Khandro stayed with Drimé Özer, regardless of the other consorts displeasure of sharing their man and their communities’ resources with an outsider and her two children.62

Sera Khandro’s autobiography points out many tensions in pre-1959 Tibetan society. Since she was foreign to the Golok area, not only did she not fit in, she did not receive help from the local people. The other consorts were jealous, telling her to stay away, even though she had received invitations from male consorts. Like the old monk earlier, many people did not believe in her abilities. People who were well-aware of her abilities were jealous of her power, just as her husband, who found he did not have as much control of her as he would have liked and preferred to correct the situation through verbal and physical abuse.

Sera Khandro’s autobiography depicts a view of consort practices that are neither gynocentric nor misogynist. Both men and women acted as agents and aides to each other on the spiritual path. Her writings explicitly represent the practice of sexual yoga from the perspective of a female subject gaining spiritual realization for herself through the use of male consorts.63 The large source of contention in her writings indicate that Sera Khandro was constantly thinking about how to walk the fine line between a monastic and non-celibate tantric practitioner and what may be considered ideal Vajrayāna conduct.64 After Drimé Özer’s death, Sera Khandro moved next to the Sera Monastery, to live in a nearby cave, and became a well-known and respected teacher.65

Throughout Sera Khandro’s childhood and adulthood, she received transmissions and prophesies in many pure visions of wisdom dākinīs and adepts. When she ran away
from home, she endured hardship, begging for food to survive and walking barefooted for months after Drimé Özer’s caravan, often without food. Since she was a stranger to the other pilgrims, and a woman, the pilgrims wouldn’t extend support or protection. She had no opportunity to talk to the group leader, Drimé Özer, since he was heavily guarded by pilgrims who were quite ignorant and prejudice towards her. When the group finally reached Golok, Sera Khandro survived nearly a decade doing menial jobs for local nomad families. Despite these hardships, she never considered going back to Lhasa. She considered the best few years of her life when she spent with Drimé Özer discovering _ters_, the mystical revelations of esoteric teachings.

**Conclusion of Celebrated Women in Tibetan Buddhism**

Bhikshuni Karma Lekshe Tsomo suggests that in Buddhism, women should assume a greater sense of responsibility for their own future. The issues of autonomy and leadership need to be addressed forthright, cutting dependencies on male authority, and thus gaining a sense of self-reliance and fostering independent communities. Buddhist female practitioners need to develop self-support and self-confidence in an effort to take full responsibility of their own community. It is true that in the beginning, due to a scarcity of qualified female teachers, nuns were forced to rely on male teachers in developing study programs. Tsomo suggests that women adopt the goal of nurturing and developing themselves, as fully qualified teachers and spiritual masters, with an idea of guiding not only other women, but society at large.
As previous examples of Ahkön Lhamo, Tenzin Palmo, and Sera Khandro have shown, there are women in Buddhism who have done just that. Ahkön Lhamo, a well-known Buddhist teacher, established a meditation center in Poolesville, Maryland. She has further aspirations to establish higher educational institution for Buddhist nuns and monks in America. Her teachings precisely follow Buddhist teachings without gender distinction, everyone in her meditation center are treated equally.

Tenzin Palmo built a well-established nunnery in India for Tibetan nuns. Her attempt to re-establish the female yogini lineage is underway with many nuns reaching higher levels of education and becoming teachers themselves. And yes, she has even created shockwaves along the Buddhist androcentric view of a subordinate nun with no rights around the monks, by opening up a controversial conversation between female and male practitioners.

Sera Khandro has shown her flourishing talent against many odds created by society and nature. She was a mother, wife, and treasure revealer. While many practitioners prefer taking on only the single role of a celibate practitioner to cut themselves loose from everything that ties them to everyday world, she demonstrated that one can work toward enlightenment, even in the everyday situation of doing household chores. In addition to becoming an author and recording her experiences, she became a well-respected teacher who took on her own consorts after Drimé Özer’s death.

These women have shown that Buddhist women are capable of everything men do without a fraction of the support available to men. They have built up self-reliant communities that follow their own course of action, without the need of male approval.
CONCLUSION

No evidence exists proving Buddhism, as a doctrine, to be inherently sexist and misogynistic against women pursuing Buddhist spiritual and educational opportunities. A meticulous study of the rules imposed upon women concludes that they are not intrinsically gender-biased. While the sheer number of precepts imposed on nuns may seem unfair at first, the nuns themselves find these rules oddly liberating, not restricting. These rules are actually helpful tools to train the mind, speech, and body in order to reach enlightenment. The only proof of sexist tendencies lies within the Eight Special Rules established by Buddha when he first admitted his aunt Mahāprajāpatī and her followers to the meandering life of a Buddhist follower. Though these rules were originally created to protect women from male violence, prevent them from becoming personal servants to monks, or prey for lay practitioners, these eight rules continually place women inferior to men.

It is important to remind ourselves that these eight special rules were created nearly 2,500 years ago, in ancient India, with the intention of protecting women who had no families to protect them. They were placed under the care of monks who despised the idea of being liable for these women. Since the rules placed the nuns order under the care of monks, it soon conveyed to the lay community a message that nuns were less capable and therefore, worth less merit. It eventually shifted into a method to control women and remind them of their roles and limitations around monks, totally forgotten was its original intention to protect and have access to eminent teachers.
In contemporary Buddhism, many women have shown great leadership — self-supporting, living and practicing without the protection of monks. Better yet, nuns in Sri Lanka prefer not to receive novice ordination which enables them to practice without being controlled by the Bhikkhu Saṅgha. Others still wish to become a fully ordained bhikkhunī, and be a part of the four-fold saṅgha. To have both the Bhikkhu and Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Tibetan Buddhism would benefit the monastic community by enforcing healthier competition, keeping corruption within the saṅgha low. The big problem here is that the Bhikkhu Saṅgha presents heavy opposition for establishing the nuns order. As soon as the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha is established, monks have to work harder to qualify for only a few Buddhist educational opportunities available. Additionally, looking after bhikkunīs is considered burdensome when all the male monks desire to simply practice Buddhism. Nonetheless, both saṅghas competing for resources would result in healthy competition with less corruption. The absence of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Tibetan Buddhism is one of the criticisms in the West depicting Buddhism as inherently patriarchal.

The promise of establishing Tibet as a Buddhist Middle Country does not garner enough support for the Bhikkhu Saṅgha to work towards instituting the bhikkhunī ordination. To establish the female ordination simply translates to the monks that they will soon be forced to compete for prestige along with economic and educational support. No matter how compassionate monks are for the plight of nuns, they cannot take full responsibility for promoting the bhikkhunī ordination.
With more information becoming available about Tibetan female practitioners, we realize that there are many women who have attained enlightenment without the help of a conventional Buddhist education. How can we consider female birth inferior after this accomplishment? Only imagine completing the highest degree available without the projected curriculum! These women pieced together any teachings given to them by anyone willing to bestow their knowledge upon them. They travelled far and wide to find teachers, then listened, contemplated, and integrated every individual puzzle piece into an unknown puzzle, until the picture finally revealed itself and they reached the ultimate goal of enlightenment.

Buddha’s opposition to ordain women was broken by a member of the Bhikkhu Saṅgha nearly 2,500 hundred years ago. Is there another man in the present Bhikkhu Saṅgha to convince others to establish the Bhikkhuni Saṅgha? The Dalai Lama himself has heavily relied on his saṅgha members, unsupportive of his enlightened vision. The ordination of bhikkhunīs is not a matter of diplomacy between countries, it is an issue within the same belief system. How is it so poorly handled amongst a sect renowned for its compassion? While the Dalai Lama has been a great advocate for the subject, he seems to receive more love and respect from around the globe than from his own saṅgha. His efforts to change educational opportunities for women have finally produced the first female nun who earned the title Geshe. What message does it send to the world when the first woman to receive a higher degree in Buddhist studies is in the twenty-first century? It is understandable why so many criticize and claim Buddhism to be gender-bias.
The equalitarian rights in the Western Buddhist Community are already a reality. American women, like the Venerable Karuna Dharma, have found a way to ordain people within various Buddhist sects. She revealed that many men are coming to her because they are tired of the patriarchy and want to see strong women in leadership roles.\(^1\)

Similar notions come from Sri Lanka, where the dominant force of Buddhism on the island is Woman.\(^2\) Women wear yellow robes and act in a clerical capacity toward the laity and are as active in the religious life as fully ordained men.\(^3\) In Sri Lanka, the fate of the new female order is being decided by the lay donors who are increasingly skeptical of the corruption and worldliness of the male saṅgha. They regard the new order of bhikkhunī nuns, who act in benefit of society yet haven’t taken the novice ordinations, as especially devout, earnest, and pure adherents of Vinaya law. As a result, there is now a societal shift in which the laity is gradually requesting more female monastics, rather than male, to perform meritorious ceremonies, such as rites for the dead.\(^4\)

Will women ever get ordained in Vajrayāna Buddhism? It is possible with a lot of effort on women’s behalf instead men’s. If nuns rely on the Bhikkhu Saṅgha to ordain women, the chances are slim. It is no cause for concern to the monks to ordain women, they already enjoy all the benefits that come with being a member of the saṅgha. Like Sri Lanka, it is time for female practitioners to take matters into their own hands. The first step is to become self-sufficient and stop relying on the bhikkhu order for support. If women think that they are equal to men, they should act the part. Records indicate that there have not always been sufficient numbers of bhikkhus, yet they have always found a
way to reestablish their order, therefore women, too, can persevere with the current bhikkhunī shortages.\textsuperscript{5}

The inferior treatment of women in Vajrayāna Buddhism has resulted in low self-esteem amongst female practitioners, consequently leading them to look to the male order for support. In order to realize the full female ordination in Vajrayāna Buddhism, it is time to share equal responsibility within the four-fold saṅgha. If women would further promote their inherent worth by getting actively involved in society, this would eventually draw support from the lay community and help breakdown generations of misperceived gender barriers regarding women, as well as assist in redefining their roles and impact on society. Buddha’s own last words were: “Be beneficial to yourself; be beneficial to others.”\textsuperscript{6} Traditions currently without the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha should follow the example of successful Taiwanese bhikkhunī who have benefitted society by opening the high level educational institutions to nuns, a hospital for poor people, a medical school, and a college for engineering. The bhikkhunī nuns show of support for, and positive impact of the surrounding society, has made Taiwan a stronghold for bhikkhunī ordination.\textsuperscript{7}

While certain society-based gender stigmas would have to be overcome, with the support of the lay community and the eventual discontinued reliance on the Bhikkhu Saṅgha, full ordination for women could become a true possibility. Willing the Bhikkhu Saṅgha to take action regarding full ordination is a false hope, as female ordination is of little concern to them and actually a hindrance. In Buddhist lay communities, daughters take on more responsibilities than sons. It is time to transfer this responsibility, and way

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of life over to the Buddhist monastic community, and truly demonstrate equality among the sexes. Time has come to restore the pre-fifteenth century supremacy of bhikkhunī and reinstate the authority of Buddhist female teachers.

There are a couple of things that need to change before the full female ordination becomes a reality, such as the gradual social and monastic transformations in which women are seen as equal to men, a trend already existing in many western countries. Another is to work hard towards leadership opportunities within Buddhism, and in society, to show how women can be advantageous to society. Only then is there a hope that monks and senior lamas will recognize the true benefit of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha.

Women were mistreated as second class citizens well before Buddhism was established. It is unfortunate that society’s attitudes towards women have found their way into the Buddhist community. While there is neglect towards women by the Buddhist community itself, this viewpoint is not inherent to Buddhism as a doctrine. The cause of gender-discrimination is a result of erroneous beliefs within Buddhism, inherited from the surrounding society which classifies women as innately inferior to men. Buddhist practitioners have consistently followed societal moods, while misinterpreting or closing an eye to Buddha’s gender-neutral teachings.

While many Buddhist women are considered to be swimming against the current in regards to challenging societal attitudes and gender-biased attitudes in Buddhism, they should be more likened to the water in which they swim. Water is essential to life, as well as the growth and success of a community. Like water, which has the ability to carve its way through stone, women too can endure and cut a path through societal stigma.
and gender discrimination. And like water, which when trapped will find a new path, so too will Buddhist women until they prevail in the implementation of Buddha’s gender-neutral teachings.
NOTES

CHAPTER 1


2 Ibid., 285-286.

3 Ibid., 290.


5 Ibid., 80.


7 Ibid., 117.

8 Ibid., 5-6.

9 Ibid., 6.

10 Ibid., 3.

11 Ibid., 4-5.

12 Ibid., 3.


16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 283.

18 Ibid., 284.

19 Ibid., 285.


21 Ibid., 103.

22 Ibid., 105.


28. Ibid., 187.


31. Ibid., 70.

32. Ibid., 66.

33. Ibid., 68.


36. Ibid., 143.

37. Ibid., 144.

38. Ibid., 145.

39. Ibid., 144.

40. Ibid., 145.

41. Ibid., 144.

42. Ibid., 153.

43. Ibid., 154.

44. Ibid., 155.

45. Ibid.
46 Ibid., 186.

47 Ibid., 187.


50 Ibid., 189.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid., 190.

53 Ibid., 191.

54 Ibid., 192.

55 Ibid., 193.

56 Ibid., 195.

57 Ibid., 196.

58 Ibid., 197-198.

59 Ibid., 202-203.

CHAPTER 2


4 Ibid., 54.

5 Ibid., 55.


7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., 158-159.

10 Ibid., 56.


24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 36.


28 Ibid., 130.
29 Ibid., 25.
30 Ibid., 26.
31 Ibid., 27.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 266.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 37.
39 Ibid.
45 Ibid., 57.
46 Ibid., 58-59.
47 Ibid., 60.
48 Ibid., 59.
49 Ibid., 60.
50 Ibid., 62.
51 Ibid., 61.
52 Ibid., 63.
57 Ibid., 89.
59 Ibid., 45.
62 Ibid., 33.
64 Thea Mohr and Jampa Tsedroen, eds., *Dignity & Discipline: Reviving Full Ordination for Buddhist Nuns* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2010), 156.
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70 Ibid., 51.
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CHAPTER 3


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5 Ibid., 9.


7 Thea Mohr and Jampa Tsedroen, eds., *Dignity & Discipline: Reviving Full Ordination for Buddhist Nuns* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2010), IX-X.

8 Ibid., 27.


10 Ibid.


12 Ibid., 265.

13 Ibid.


15 Ibid., 41.

17 Ibid., 263.

18 Ibid., 156.


23 Ibid., 43.

24 Ibid., 44.


26 Ibid., 16.

27 Ibid., 274.


30 Ibid., 12.

31 Ibid., 263.

32 Ibid., 257.


38 Ibid., 36.

39 Ibid.


44 Ron Garry, trans., *The Teacher-Student Relationship by Jamgdöm Kongtrul the Great* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1999), 35.

CHAPTER 4


2 Ibid., 23.

3 Ibid., 3-4.

4 Ibid., 25.


6 Ibid., 89.

7 Ibid.


9 Ibid., 57.
10 Ibid., 75.
11 Ibid., 167.
12 Ibid., 139.
13 Ibid., 303.


15 Ibid., 55.
16 Ibid., 56.
17 Ibid., 58.
18 Ibid., 60.
19 Ibid., 61-62.
20 Ibid., 63-64.
21 Ibid., 65.
22 Ibid., 69-70.


31 Ibid., 155.
32 Ibid., 155-156.
33 Ibid., 157.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., 156.
36 Ibid., 157.
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47 Ibid., 15.
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51 Ibid., 151.
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53 Ibid., 150.
54 Ibid., 161.
55 Ibid., 186.
56 Ibid., 210.
57 Ibid., 213.
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59 Ibid., 262-263.
60 Ibid., 269.
61 Ibid., 270.
62 Ibid., 273.
63 Ibid., 305-306.
64 Ibid., 307.
65 Ibid., 275.
67 Ibid.
69 Ibid., 15.

CONCLUSION

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6 Ibid., 29.

7 Ibid., 27.


