Daughter of Self-Liberation: Lineage Position and Transmission in the Namthar of Do Dasel Wangmo

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Daughter of Self-Liberation: 
Lineage Position and Transmission in the 
Namthar of Do Dasel Wangmo

by
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Dr. Holly Gayley

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Daughter of Self-Liberation: Lineage Position and Transmission in the Namthar of Do Dasel Wangmo
Thesis directed by Assistant Professor Holly Gayley

Abstract

Scholarship regarding the complexity of lineage transmission within the Nyingma sect of Tibetan Buddhism is scant. The namthar, or "complete liberation story," of Do Dasel Wangmo provides many details as to the variety of lineage transmissions that have occurred within what was originally the family-based lineage of the treasure teachings of Do Khyentse Yeshe Dorje. This thesis argues that Do Dasel Wangmo, a living female Tibetan Buddhist master and Tibetan medical doctor, constructs her religious authority primarily through her relationship to the genetic Do family and the Do Khyentse lineage of teachings as a lineage holder. I argue this through a close reading of her namthar, highlighting moments of her religious authority. Despite the fact that many namthars of female Tibetan Buddhist masters emphasize gender, the namthar of Do Dasel Wangmo does not particularly follow this trope and instead focuses on her connection to both the Do family and Do Khyentse's lineage of teachings. I also provide a detailed analysis of both the genealogy of the Do family, as well as the two forms of lineage transmission, "descendant" and "disciple," that appear in the namthar. Through a quirk of fate, despite being a genetic member of the Do family, Do Dasel Wangmo herself is a member of the "disciple" lineage for Do Khyentse's lineage of teachings. The current main lineage holder of Do Khyentse's treasure teachings is Zenkar Rinpoche, who, despite not being a genetic member of the Do family, is a member of the "descendant" lineage.

The work of this thesis is based on my original translation of "The Namthar of Do Dasel Wangmo," a 35-page Tibetan language text, as well as partial translations of other members of the Do family line.
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I. Introduction

Family lineages in the Nyingma sect of Tibetan Buddhism offer a unique opportunity for Tibetan women to be recognized as Buddhist leaders. Do Dasel Wangmo is an example of one such woman. She is the great-granddaughter of the famed 19th century master Do Khyentse Yeshe Dorje (1800-1866), the mind incarnation of Jigme Lingpa (1729-1798), and treasure revealer who discovered the Dzinpa Rangdrol cycle of teachings. Do Khyentse was also a lineage holder of the Longchen Nyingthig treasure cycle of Jigme Lingpa and famously taught Patrul Rinpoche (1808-1887) through unconventional means. The Tibetan treasure tradition has arisen almost exclusively from within the Nyingma sect although some treasure discoveries have had tremendous impact on the whole of Tibetan Buddhism.

The Do Khyentse family contains a number of exceptional female practitioners, including his sister and lifelong disciple Losel Drönma (1802-1861), his granddaughter and Tibetan medical doctor, Do Tsedzin Wangmo, and her daughter, Do Dasel Wangmo, the subject of this thesis. Do Dasel Wangmo is currently employed as a medical doctor and professor of Tibetan medicine at the Sichuan Province Tibetan Language (SPTL) School in Darsedo, Sichuan Province. Beyond her extraordinary antecedents and intensive religious training, Do Dasel Wangmo endured fourteen years of forced labor and re-education during the various communist campaigns of the 1950s-60s. She is also a spirit-medium, reputed treasure discoverer and author of a book of her own teachings. At age eighty-four she remains lucid, still practicing and teaching Tibetan medicine and

2 Tibetan treasures are said to be special teachings initially taught by a Buddha, that came to be hidden in Tibet via Padmasambhava, the renowned eighth century Indian master and his close Tibetan disciples. (Gyatso, Janet. 1993. “The Logic of Legitimation in the Tibetan Treasure Tradition.” History of Religions Vol. 33, No. 2, pp. 98) Treasure discoveries with particular impact include the Tibetan Book of the Dead and those practices encouraging the non-regnant Avalokiteshvara cult.
has many Buddhist disciples. In sum, Do Dasel Wangmo is an extraordinary woman whose life and works have yet to be studied academically.

For this thesis I plan to examine Do Dasel Wangmo’s situated role as a member of the Do family line and lineage holder for his treasure cycle, the Dzimpa Rangdrol, through a close reading of her namthar. Namthar, a term I will be using throughout, is a genre of Tibetan life writing that highlights the achievement of the Buddhist goal of liberation. My two primary sources for this project both fall within the genre of namthar. They are “The Namthar of Do Dasel Wangmo” (“Mdo zla gsal dbang mo’i rnam thar”), authored by Thubtan Chödar and published in 2008 in “The Sacred Biographies of the Family Genetic Line of Do Khyen Yeshe Dorje” (Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes mdo rje’i gnyis rgyud rim byon gyi rnam thar), and “The Collected Namthars of the Do Household” (Mdo tshang gi brgyud pa’i rnam thar mdo bsdud), authored by Do Dasel Wangmo and published in 2007 in A Collection of the Writings of the Jetsunma Do Dasel Wangmo (Rje btsun ma mdo zla gsal dbang mo’i gsung rgyos bsgrigs). Both works were published in Minyag, Sichuan Province, through the Tibetological Publishing House of China.

Do Dasel Wangmo’s position as both a genetic family member and lineage holder has proved to be a rich one. The namthar itself identifies two different types of lineage holders for the treasures of Do Khyen Yeshe Dorje: descendant lineage (sras bgyud), which is transmitted from lineage founder through his children, and later to incarnations of family members, and disciple lineage (slob bgyud), which is transmitted from lineage founder through his disciples.

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The term *gdung rgyud* is also employed, which indicates a patrilineal family descent line or lineage, in a non-religious sense. Do Dasel Wangmo is identified as a member of the Do family line (*gdung rgyud*) indicating her genetic relationship to the Do family, in both the narration of the namthar and a chart at the end of the text, as well as being a member of the disciple lineage in terms of carrying forward the lineage of Do Khyenmê’s religious teachings and most specifically the Dzinpá Rangdrol treasure. She is not, however, included in the descendant lineage, despite being a direct genetic descendant of Do Khyenmê.

The Do Khyenmê lineage of teachings is an involved affair complicated by Tibetan conceptions of religious genealogy that incorporate incarnations into the family [lineage] tree. Do Dasel Wangmo herself is the emanation\(^5\) of her great-great-aunt Losel Drönma\(^6\), and this pattern of family members emanating or incarnating as former family members is not uncommon within religiously elite families.\(^7\) Do Dasel Wangmo is also the holder of an unofficial lineage of medical teachings that she received from her mother at a young age, and the “dharma custodian” (*chos bdag*) for a set of Gesar teachings received from Gapa Khyenmê, a self-identified incarnation of Do Khyenmê.\(^8\)

Despite being a compact text of 35 pages, the namthar itself is flush with the mundane details of a traditional religious education in pre-1959 Tibet; disturbing, though thin, descriptions of Do Dasel Wangmo’s experience during the various communist campaigns of the 1950s-1960s;

\(^4\) *Gdung rgyud* is defined by the *Bskir mdzod chen mo* (p. 1374) as “*rigs rgyud kyi zhe sa*” or “the honorific form of someone’s ancestry, descent or lineage.” I was unable to locate the term *gdung rgyud* in either the dictionary or the verb chart.

\(^5\) Translation for the term *rnam ’phrul*.


\(^8\) Chödar, p. 391.
and a summary of the post-1979 flurry of her reconstruction efforts of Tibetan Buddhist and medical institutions within the Tibetan regions of the Peoples’ Republic of China (PRC). While Do Dasel Wangmo’s gender plays a role in each of the main temporal divisions of her life, I would argue that it is almost always eclipsed by her elite status as a member of the Do family and practicing Tibetan physician. As stated previously, family lineages in the Nyingma sect offer women unique opportunities for religious and social authority and Do Dasel Wangmo exemplifies this fact. The namthar of Do Dasel Wangmo is significant as one of the few published biographies of a contemporary female Buddhist leader and it spans an incredible seventy-nine years, covering periods of tremendous social and religious change in Tibetan regions of the PRC. More importantly, it provides a fascinating case study in the different forms of lineage transmission within a largely family-based lineage. It is also interesting to note that the namthar begins and ends with Do Dasel Wangmo’s ongoing and active relationship with the Do Khyentse lineage of teachings signaling the importance of the Do family in the namthar.

My translation and close reading of the namthar of Do Dasel Wangmo will provide data as to current understandings of family-based lineage transmission as they are complicated by gender and a changing historical milieu. Lineage transmission for religious teachings is a complicated process when the lineage founder procreates and some of their progeny or later descendants are female, dies or chooses to ordain. Such vicissitudes of life necessitate a variety of lineage transmission methods as illustrated in the namthar of Do Dasel Wangmo, i.e. the variety of lineage transmission modes have developed in order to deal with such vicissitudes. She is the only living member of the Do family, yet nonetheless she does not hold the descendent lineage, but rather the disciple lineage in the treasure tradition of Do Khyentse Yeshe Dorje. The Do Khyentse lineage of teachings overall will continue through Alak Zenkar Rinpoche, who, despite
not being a member of the Do family, holds the descendant, rather than disciple, lineage. I plan to demonstrate the complexity and flexibility of the process of lineage transmission, using the elite Do family, as illustrated through the namthar of Do Dasel Wangmo and the short namthars of her family antecedents.

I argue that in the namthar, Do Dasel Wangmo’s position of religious authority as a lineage holder of the Dzimpa Rangdrol treasure teachings is primarily constructed through her relationship to the Do family line, and descendant and disciple lineages of Do Khyentse’s teachings. Though while she was born into a religiously prominent family, through her own efforts Do Dasel Wangmo has surpassed her elite antecedents and grown into her religious authority. To illustrate my argument, the thesis is divided into four main sections; first, I describe my own efforts to meet Do Dasel Wangmo and how the experience of visiting her outside of the text provided evidence as to her ongoing connection to the Do Khyentse lineage of teachings. Second, I provide an overview of her life as taken from my translation of her namthar, highlighting major life events and achievements in order to establish her religious mastery and authority initially gained through her connection to the Do family. Third, I examine lineage transmission within the namthar, combining this with a detailed explanation of the Do family genealogy, both genetic and incarnate. This section serves as the primary textual evidence of Do Dasel Wangmo’s familial and lineage-based affiliation with Do Khyentse Yeshe Dorje. Lastly, I do a close reading of various sections of the namthar as they serve to illustrate or buck common tropes found within the genre of namthar. While gender is a common theme in Tibetan female namthars, in the namthar of Do Dasel Wangmo, gender is eclipsed by her connection initially by her connection to the Do family and later by her connection to the Do Khyentse lineage of teachings.
II. The Lived Encounter

In June of 2011, I traveled to Chengdu, Sichuan Province in order to venture up to Dartsedo (Ch. Kangding) and seek out Do Dasel Wangmo. Although I had the phone number for a fellow teacher, Phunstok, at the SPTL School and had made contact with him through a Tibetan English-speaker in Chengdu, he had been unclear about how and when I would actually meet Do Dasel Wangmo, but told me to come anyways and see what would transpire. The bus trip to Dartsedo was long (over 14 hours), and I arrived at night in a town where my Lhasan Tibetan dialect was unintelligible and a landslide had closed the hostel where I had made reservations. Serendipitously, in the pouring rain, I found a fellow English-speaker and booked into the local hostel where she was staying, and there, with increasingly anxiety I attempted to reach my one contact in Chengdu for news as to my meeting with Do Dasel Wangmo. After two days I received a message that another teacher, Dorje, from the Sichuan Province Tibetan Language School would meet me the next day and that he spoke English.

Eventually Dorje arrived and drove me to buy the appropriate offerings and then to visit the SPTL School, approximately ten minutes outside the town. Dorje introduced me to my telephone contact Phunstok, who ushered me up a dark concrete staircase and into Do Dasel Wangmo’s apartment. Do Dasel Wangmo, whom everyone referred to simply as the Khandroma, was a small, elderly woman dressed in monastic garb with a shaved head and seated cross-legged on her Tibetan-style bed. She received me without surprise and I suspect this may be because a

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9 This is also a pseudonym on the off chance that something I write will endanger one of these teachers.
10 This is a pseudonym.
11 This is a Tibetan term meaning “sky-goer”, Skt. क्षण. It was a wide range of meanings, but in this case it means a very accomplished female Buddhist practitioner.
small but steady flow of Western students have been to see her since Lama Tsultrim Allione\footnote{12} made her a figure somewhat known to the American Buddhist scene.

In researching the connection between the Dzinpa Rangdrol and Dzogchen, Lama Tsultrim Allione had traveled to Dartsedo in November 2010 and unexpectedly received the entrustment (\textit{bka' \textit{gtad}}) for all of Do Khyentse's treasure teachings from Do Dasel Wangmo. This itself is an unusual event since Do Dasel Wangmo has only given this entrustment a few times in her life and certainly this was the first Western practitioner to receive it. Afterwards, Tara Mandala emailed a description of the event to its many supporters and began organizing pilgrimages to Dartsedo and Dzogchen Monastery, in part to meet Do Dasel Wangmo. At the time of their meeting Lama Tsultrim Allione had already been recognized as an emanation of Machik Labdrön (1055-1145)\footnote{13}, on a previous trip to Tibet and Do Dasel Wangmo is regarded as the incarnation of her great-grand-aunt Losel Drönma, who was considered an incarnation of Labdul Dorje Drönma\footnote{14}, Machik Labdrön's daughter. The preliminary practices of the Dzinpa Rangdrol were first taught at Tara Mandala in 2008 by Tulku Sang-ngag and it continues to be spread there\footnote{15}.

When I arrived I made offerings and she presented me with a photo of herself, her great-grandfather\footnote{16} and one of her uncles, along with a book of her own teachings and some chocolate treats. Since Do Dasel Wangmo speaks a nomadic dialect, I posed my questions in English and Lhasan Tibetan to Dorje, who translated them into a Kham dialect for Phunstok, who then translated them into her dialect. The translation challenge undoubtedly affected which questions I posed and the answers I received, but I recorded the responses of Dorje faithfully and

\footnote{12} Lama Tsultrim Allione is an American-born Tibetan Buddhist teacher, founder of the retreat center Tara Mandala in southwestern Colorado who was recognized as an emanation of Machik Labdrön in 2007. \footnote{13} Lama Tsultrim Allione was recognized by Lama Karma Dorje Rinpoche as well as Lama Tsering Wangdu (\url{http://taramandala.org/about/lama-tsultrim/}). \footnote{14} I have only found this via the Tara Mandala website: \url{http://taramandala.org/about/lineage/}. \footnote{15} \url{http://taramandala.org/about/lineage/}. \footnote{16} This was a photograph of a painting of Do Khyentse.
later added who said what to my notes. Do Dasel Wangmo did not say much to any of my queries, except when I asked her to take my pulse (the Tibetan medical diagnostic tool). Then she questioned me about any symptoms I was having and after feeling my pulse, gave an explanation for my upset stomach (which was that I was allergic to something I ate).

Having not yet read her namthar or “full liberation story,” my questions focused on gender, which was a topic that did not seem to interest either translator, and they occasionally answered my questions themselves without posing it to her. The details that I did learn from this encounter that are also not to be found in the namthar are as follows: Do Dasel Wangmo is equally regarded as a masterful Buddhist practitioner and a famous Tibetan medical doctor. She has many Buddhist disciples, including my two translators and even while I was there a number of monks from Dzogchen Monastery arrived to visit her, including someone introduced to me as her grandnephew. While another Western visitor told me that she is indeed a secret treasure revealer, Dorje would not confirm this and refused to query whether she was a prophesized treasure revealer, possibly because I was an outsider, but perhaps also to protect Do Dasel Wangmo from any further attention from the Chinese government. In her responses, Do Dasel Wangmo stated that her gender had not made any difference to her path as a Buddhist, but did feel that there was a cultural difference in how society regarded women. Most of her Buddhist disciples were male, but she said that this was because there are more monks than nuns at Dzogchen Monastery.

When I asked who would hold the lineage of the Dzinpa Rangdrol after she passed, Do Dasel Wangmo replied that although she is the blood of her great-grandfather, the actual

\[17\] Gyatso, p. 6.
\[18\] This is certainly a blood relative, but since her three siblings died in early childhood, I am not sure how this person is related.
\[19\] This person resided in Dartsedo for two months visiting with Do Dasel Wangmo regularly.
incarnation of Do Kyemise, Alak Zenkar Rinpoche, holds the lineage for the Dzimpa Rangdrol, and it would continue through him. This statement holds two-fold poignancy since Alak Zenkar Rinpoche is not a Do family descendant (although he is the second in a line of Do Kyemise Rinpoche incarnations), and a male. She brought the visit to an end by telling me that even though she gave her blessing for me to translate her namthar, to remember that she was nothing special, just a normal, regular person and not to believe anything else I might have heard about her. Such humility is to be expected from most Buddhist masters, especially female ones. Nonetheless such speech goes against the reverent tone of her namthar.

My encounter with Do Dasel Wangmo outside of her text provided a certain amount of confirmation of her importance, despite the dissonance with regards to her self-presentation. While eating at a Tibetan restaurant I asked the owners in Tibetan (and then writing it down for them), whether they knew of a female Tibetan doctor in town and they indicated yes, the Khandroma at the school. This encounter lightly demonstrates her importance as a medical doctor and religious master (through the use of the term “Khandroma”), outside of her Do family affiliation. Do Dasel Wangmo herself explicitly told me she was nothing special and yet gifted me with a copy of a book she herself authored. She was surrounded by attendants and disciples—some who had traveled from Dzogchen Monastery to visit—and yet I was told she did not give many teachings. During my brief visit to these Tibetan regions there was a constant undercurrent of paranoia regarding Chinese spies, and yet the last third of her namthar is permeated with accounts that showcase her tremendous achievements, accomplished without any political resistance. These dissonances were only possible through the comparison of my visit with the text, and yet, overall, just as the namthar serves as a rhetorical vehicle, so was my visit highly

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20 Gyasto, p. 105.
constructed as a disciple-researcher coming from afar to pay respect. The question that is raised by this tension is that of audience. To whom is Do Dasel Wangmo a religious authority? To whom is she simply a Tibetan medical doctor? To whom (if anyone) is she "nothing special," as she characterized herself?

III. The Life of Do Dasel Wangmo

Do Dasel Wangmo was born in 1928 in the Golok region of Eastern Tibet. Her mother, Do Tsezin Wangmo, was the granddaughter of the renowned treasure revealer Do Khyensee Ye Shes Dorje. One of three recognized incarnations of the great treasure revealer Jigme Lingpa (1729-1798). Do Khyensee was a close disciple of the first Dodrupchen Jigme Trinley Özer (1745-1821) and began privately revealing treasure texts (gter ma) at age 18. He taught widely, giving many transmissions of Jigme Lingpa's treasure cycle, and performing miracles bringing both people and animals back from the dead. In 1844, he revealed his own treasures to the public, including the Cycles on Pema Gyalpo, Yangsang Khandro Yikshik and the Dzimpa Rangdrol. The Dzimpa Rangdrol is the most famous of his teachings and forms the core of his treasure lineage.

21 This brief summary of the life of Do Dasel Wangmo is taken from the chapter Mdo zla gsal dbang mo'i rnam thar ("The Namthar of Do Dasel Wangmo") from Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes khyen po rje'i gdung rgyud rim byon gyi rnam thar ("The Sacred Biographies of the Family Lineage of Do Khyensee Yeshe Dorje"), with details added from the namthars of Do Khyensee Yeshe Dorje and the first Alak Zenkar Rinpoche from Tulku Thondup's Masters of Meditation and Miracles: Lives of the Great Buddhist Masters of India and Tibet. This is only a sketch of the main themes and accomplishments of her life; I will address hagiographic tropes and narrative strategies in a later section on the genre of namthar.

22 In Tibetan reckoning, someone is one year old at birth. I will be using Tibetan age reckoning for Do Dasel Wangmo throughout.

23 Thondup, p.181.
Do Dasel Wangmo’s father was the mahsiddha Kragtung Tshunob Pamo, but beyond his name, nothing more is reported about him. This omission is a reversal from the usual trope in namthars in which the mothers of prominent religious figures are named, sometimes only as the daughter of so-and-so, but never described. Do Dasel Wangmo was named “Luminous Moon” according to an auspicious dream had by her maternal grandmother, Raza Rigche Wangmo. While Do Dasel Wangmo had three siblings, all recognized as emanations, they died in early childhood. The term ‘emanation’ refers to a similar process as the incarnation recognition process, but it is applied more loosely. In the namthar the terms for ‘emanation’, rnam sprul and sprul pa, are used interchangeably.

Do Dasel Wangmo was raised by her mother, Do Tsedzin Wangmo, maternal Uncle Rangjung and maternal grandmother, Raza Rigche Wangmo, at the Do family encampment. Encampments, a collection of tents that can move for either religious or livestock grazing patterns, are a particular feature of life in eastern Tibet. They can vary in size, and sometimes grow up around religious figures. Since Do Dasel Wangmo was the only remaining genetic member of the Do family line, her mother groomed her for marriage and procreation. Although from a very young age she repeatedly requested permission to ordain as a Buddhist nun and received the robust religious training befitting her status as the great-granddaughter of Do Khyentse. When Do Dasel Wangmo turned eight years old, her Uncle Rangjung began to teach her to read and her education then progressed to the study of foundational Buddhist texts. It is worth noting here that her early education and religious training occurred entirely within her family, and, it appears, without other pupils her own age.

24 Chodor, p. 380.
25 According to the Tara Mandala website, Uncle Rangjung has the same mother, but different father from Do Tsedzin Wangmo (http://taramandala.org/about/lineage/).
From her maternal Uncle Do Rinpoche (Zilnön Gyepa Dorje), she began receiving empowerments and reading transmissions for various Dzogchen texts, including the Dzinpa Rangdrol treasure of her great-grandfather. The Dzinpa Rangdrol is a Chöd practice that is one of the mind treasure revelations of Do Khyentse. However she did not receive the full transmission of his treasure cycle from him due to the death of Do Rinpoche in 1939. This incomplete transmission meant that Do Dasel Wangmo was unable to transmit the Dzinpa Rangdrol to others until she received the full transmission from Khenpo Gönri at age 23. It also meant that Do Dasel Wangmo would not be included in the descendant lineage, but shifted to the disciple lineage, since she did not receive the full transmission from a family member.

From ages 12 to 14 she continued to receive teachings and empowerments from Adzom Gyalse Gyurme Dorje, the son of Adzom Drugpa, at the Adzom encampment. During this time she also developed as a spirit medium (lha bab), for Gesar of Ling and various dharma protectors. At age 17, Do Dasel Wangmo, her mother and Uncle Rangjung went on pilgrimage to Lhasa. They visited many monasteries along the way, including Kardze, Dargyas, Dzogchen, Ratreng, Sera, Drepung, Nechung, Ganden, Samye and Tsering Jong. In the namthar each monastery, statue, hermitage and religious figure are mentioned and their proper visitation rituals are detailed. The pilgrimage took about a year to complete, and afterwards they began to move the Do encampment to the Minyag region in order to increase their chances of locating the reincarnation of Do Rinpoche, who had prophesied that he would be reborn there. While two incarnation possibilities were put forth, one failed his identification test and the other died young.26

26 The candidate who failed the identification test was the son of Aphang tertön Chöying Dorje. The candidate who died young was the son of the minister of Guthang, who remains unnamed in the namthar. According to a clairvoyant they visited during the Lhasa pilgrimage, the child from Guthang was the correct incarnation.
She began to receive medical training at age 18 from both Guru Sanglo and her mother, who was a practicing physician. This training included the intensive study of the Four Medical Tantras, the Exposition Tantra on Medicine and others, as well as methods for treating diseases such as depression and cancer. The next year Uncle Rangjung passed away and she contracted smallpox. Her illness kept her at Dzogchen Monastery for many months and only after a longevity empowerment, blessings for longevity and many healing ceremonies did she recover. After this ordeal, Do Dasel Wangmo received the empowerment and became the “dharma custodian” for a Gesar treasure cycle received from Gapa Khyemse, a self-identified incarnation of Do Khyemse. This encounter is another example of Do Dasel Wangmo serving as a lineage holder for a cycle of treasure teachings.

At age 22 Do Dasel Wangmo finally received permission from her mother to ordain. The first authority she approached, Tulku Gracen, offered only to take a snip of hair as a symbol of her intention to ordain and gave her the upsik vow. Nonetheless she put on nun’s robes, took on the monastic discipline of chastity, and shaved her own hair as a demonstration of her determination to ordain. After this, she went to Dzogchen Monastery where she took novice vows from Khenpo Thubtan, who gave her the ordination name Thubtan Tsultrim Palmo. This formal ordination occurred in front of the entire monastic assembly of Dzogchen Monastery and, as it is narrated in the namthar, Do Dasel Wangmo appears to be the only person receiving ordination further emphasizing her elite status. While novice ordination usually entails a shift in lifestyle, for Do Dasel Wangmo ordination did not appear to substantially alter her activities of dharma study and practice, and some medical care.

After this she resumed her intensive studies and only took time off to search for her uncle, Rangjung’s, reincarnation and treat her mother for illness. When her mother passed away,
she arranged a large funeral service and did a short pilgrimage. Since she was now the only remaining member of the Do family, she inherited the Do encampment and various precious objects, some of them related to the treasure of Do Khyentse. This inheritance detail is interesting because the items are passed to the blood family member (Do Dasel Wangmo) as opposed to Do Khyentse's incarnation, highlighting the importance of the Do family line. However, she discarded the Do encampment, presumably because she was a monastic with no need for mundane possessions or the desire to assume leadership of the encampment, and returned to Dzogchen Monastery to do retreat, practice and study for the next nine years. This is the end of the first part of her life.

In the next part of her life, when Do Dasel Wangmo was 31 years old (1958), communist Chinese forces entered Kham. She, along with others, attempted to escape over a mountain pass. For about six months they hid in the mountains and withstood attacks. In the summertime of 1959 they surrendered by returning to Dzogchen Monastery and she was then sent to the Minyag region to work under the direction of the new government. For some of 1959 she lived with Lama Lithar, who had been a student of Do Rinpoche, and the namthar emphasizes that he took good care of her. However, by 1960 she was forced to do manual labor and experienced fierce beatings, likely as part of a struggle session. Such sessions of public humiliation were a common method of persecuting "class enemies" as identified by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Struggle sessions were particularly common from 1958 forward and during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), when the Red Guard eagerly attacked the "four old elements within Chinese society – old customs, old habits, old culture, and old thinking." She was labeled a "black hat", indicating that she had been formally criticized for her elite religious status, and forced to reside with

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herders. Do Dasel Wangmo, along with everyone else in the community, was required to participate in weekly meetings regarding their behavior and thinking. If they were not in alignment with the various Communist campaigns, they were beaten and forced to do intense re-education.28

In 1969 Do Dasel Wangmo was appointed to be the doctor of the Goro community. For the next ten years, her medical training enabled her to escape some of the trials of the Cultural Revolution and the chaos of its aftermath and the death of Mao Zedong. While details in the namthar are scarce, she spent some time with her medical mentor Doctor Kunub Özer, revitalizing her medical skills, and collecting medical implements, manuals and herbs. From 1970-1979, she worked treating throngs of ill people arriving from various far-flung regions. She also used the opportunity to find a particular herbal medicine (sman khrab)29, and to visit the current incarnation of Do Kyemse, Alak Zenkar Rinpoche (b. 1943). Alak Zenkar is the reincarnation of Alak Zenkar Pema Ngödrup Rolwé Dorje (1881-1943), and his early life was divided between the Max Kyilung Monastery established by Do Kyemse and the Sakya Lhaga Monastery in Minyag. He received the transmission of the treasure cycle of the Dzinpa Rangdrol from Trimé Drakpa through the descendant lineage. In 1979, when communist regulations lifted Do Dasel Wangmo regained her autonomy. This is the end of the second part of her life.

The third section of her life is characterized by the activities of rebuilding Tibetan cultural, religious and medical institutions after the devastation of the past 30 years. Do Dasel Wangmo immediately went to work with others re-opening the printing house of Dege Monastery, compiling what had survived the Cultural Revolution and arranging for new wood block prints of those dharma texts. This was a major undertaking that in traditional times would have been

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28 Chödar, p. 399.
29 Both Professor Phil Stanley and Lama Tenpa thought this term referred to a Tibetan medicinal herb.
embarked upon only by the highest class of religious elites. However, since many of these elites fled, were imprisoned or killed in 1959 or during the Cultural Revolution, non-standard religious elites (such as women) were afforded the opportunity to fully participate in these religious revitalization projects. Then in late 1979 she was called back to the Kardze health clinic and there, working with her mentor Doctor Kunub Özer, arranged for various medical texts to be printed.

In 1981, when she was 54 years old, Do Dasel Wangmo was invited to help establish the Sichuan Province Tibetan Language School at Dzogchen Monastery along with Zenkar Rinpoche and Bapa Lasxi Isering. She taught medicine and astrology at the school and also received many dharma teachings from various Khenpos also residing at Dzogchen. In 1983 she, Doctor Kunub Özer traveled with their medical attendants to Lhasa to further their medical studies at the Department of Medicine and Astrology. Even at age 56, Do Dasel Wangmo took this opportunity to study hard and visit the major pilgrimage sites of Lhasa. Although she began her medical studies at age 18, due to the long period of forced labor devoid of any educational opportunities, she undoubtedly wanted to continue to update and hone her skills.

Due to the poor condition of the roads to Dzogchen Monastery, the Sichuan Province Tibetan Language School was moved to Tau and eventually to Dartsedo, where it is located today. From 1987 to 2007, Do Dasel Wangmo worked at the school as a teacher and doctor. Due to the tremendous poverty of her patients she charitably charged nominal or no fees. During this time she gave empowerments, reading permissions and oral instructions to many people and spent each summer at the r Si xa College at Dzogchen Monastery. There she gave both medical care as well as empowerments and reading permissions for the Dzimpa Rangdrol and other texts from Do Khyenese's cycle of teachings. These dual roles indicate that while Do Dasel Wangmo's main role
in the PRC, is as a physician, she also assiduously maintained her religious responsibilities as lineage holder (through the descendant lineage) and the last living genetic member of the Do family. It is extremely rare for a female Buddhist master to give empowerments, and this is yet another example of the flexibility of social and religious roles female members of the Do family enjoyed.

Beyond her main work as a medical doctor and Buddhist teacher, in 2000 Do Dasel Wangmo worked to edit the compiled teachings of the main lineage holders (male) of the Do family and incarnate lineage: Do Khyentse, Trimé Drakpa, Zilnön Gyepa Dorje and Zenkar Rinpoche himself. Once the texts were edited, they were entered into the computer in order to change from the traditional pecha format to that of western-style books. While this formatting is a detail, it demonstrates that Do Dasel Wangmo, even at her advanced age, is unafraid of changing traditional formats for the formats of the modern world. Her own teachings were compiled into a volume entitled *A Collection of the Writings of the Jetsunma Do Dasel Wangmo* (*Rje btsun ma mdo zla gsal dbang mo'i gsung rtsom phyogs bsgrigs*), published in 2007.

Today, at age 83, Do Dasel Wangmo continues to reside at the Sichuan Province Tibetan Language School teaching and practicing medicine; she also continues to spend each summer at Dzogchen Monastery where, though she does not give public teachings, she is said to have many devoted disciples.

IV. Lineage and Genealogy

Do Dasel Wangmo exists in several roles as a lineage figure who both breaks and abides by the uncertain rules of Tibetan lineage transmission. There are two standard types of lineage transmission mentioned in the namthar: the disciple lineage (*slob brgyud*), and the descendant:
lineage (sras brgyud). By lineage transmission, I refer to the line of transmission for the
treasure corpus of Do Khyentse Yeshe Dorje’s treasure texts, rather than the genetic line of
descend. The disciple lineage can be transmitted to either gender, in the case of the Do Khyentse
cycle of teachings and treasures, although the only disciples explicitly mentioned in the namthaar
are male, with the exception of Do Dasel Wangmo herself. The descendant lineage can be passed
to either gender, although again, there are only males included in Do Khyentse’s descendant
lineage.

In both modes of lineage transmission what is being passed from master to disciple, is the
empowerment (dbang) for the practice, the reading permission (lung) for the practice, and
instructions on how to do the practice (ksri dpal). Although Do Khyentse has an entire collection of
discovered teachings (gter chos), his lineage holders are primarily concerned with the
preservation and transmission of his main treasure cycle the Dzinpa Rangdrol (“Self-Liberation of
Grasping”), due to its singularly original nature.

In attempting to untangle the many complex issues surrounding lineage transmission, let
us first address the genealogy of Do Dasel Wangmo beginning with her great-grandfather Do
Khyentse Yeshe Dorje and consisting of both genetic relations and relations via incarnations. As
previously stated Do Khyentse was recognized at an early age as the mind incarnation (dkhrigs
sprul) of the prolific 18th century treasure revealer Jigme Lingpa (1729–1798). Do Khyentse had

30 Despite sras literally meaning “son” or “child”, I was also informed that in the case of lineage, sras
brgyud has the connotation of a treasure lineage passed from father to children of either gender.
(Personal communication from Kelsang Lhamo, librarian at the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center, 4.6.12).
31 Personal communication from Kelsang Lhamo, librarian at the Tibetan Resource Buddhist Center (4.6.12).
one sister, Losal Drönma (1802-1861), who was recognized as an emanation of the bodhisattva
and who devoted her life to be his attendant and disciple; she did not have any children.

Do Khyentse himself had three children: daughter Khaying Drolma (1823-1855), and sons
Sherap Mebar (1829-1842) and Rigpé Raltri (1830-1874). Sherap Mebar was recognized as the
incarnation of the first Dodrupchen, Jigme Trinley Özer (1745-1821), and he died young at age
eighteen. His own incarnation was popularly known as Do Rinpoche, also called Trimé Drakpa.
The genetic relationship between Do Khyentse and Sherap Mebar mirrors the teacher-disciple
relationship between Jigme Lingpa and the first Dodrupchen, since Do Khyentse was the
incarnation of Jigme Lingpa and Sherap Mebar the incarnation of the first Dodrupchen. Do
Khyentse’s second son Rigpé Raltri was recognized as the incarnation of Jigme Lingpa’s son,
Gyalse Jnyinche Wangpo (1793-?). This parallel recognition served to further align the Do
family with the accomplishments of the great treasure revealer Jigme Lingpa. Khaying Drolma
was born to miraculous signs, married the King of Trokyap in 1841, and died childless.

Do Khyentse’s son, Rigpé Raltri had a son and a daughter with Raza Rigsche Wangmo,
namely Zilnön Gyepa Dorje (1890-1953) and Do Tsedzin Wangmo (1914-1953). He also had a
daughter much earlier in life with the Queen of Sa Mang. This daughter, despite being the
incarnation of the sister of Rigpé Raltri, Khaying Dölma, remains nameless and excluded from
both the disciple and family lineage. Zilnön Gyepa Dorje, known as the second Do Rinpoche,

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32 This is a generic recognition, as opposed to the specific recognition bestowed upon her brother and his
sons.
33 In the case of the two Do Rinpoches, it is unclear to me whether that Mdo refers to the place Dar mdo
(Darisedo, Ch. Kangding), or to the Dodrupchen line.
34 “Do” here refers to the region of Darisedo and “Rinpoche” is a title meaning “precious one”.
35 Thondup, p.181.
36 Thondup, p.192.
37 Thondup, p. 191.
38 Wangmo, Do Dasel. 2007. Mdo tshang gi brgyud pa’i rnam thar mdor bsdud (“The Collected Namthars
of the Do Household”), from Rje btsun ma mdo lla gsal drang mo’i gsung bshesom phyogs bsnyigs (“A
ordained and did not have children. Do Besdtin Wangmo had four children with the mahāsiddha Kragtshub Pamo, three of whom died in their infancy. Her fourth child, Do Dasel Wangmo, ordained and never had children herself. For this reason, the genetic line of the Do family is now extinguished.

While it is safe to assume that most Do family members received at least partial teachings and transmission of the Dzimpa Rangdrol, there is still an important distinction between who is officially considered part of the disciple and descendant lineages. In the namthar there is a short section detailing the holders of both these transmission lineages of the treasure corpus of Do Khyense, centered on the Dzimpa Rangdrol.\textsuperscript{40} In terms of the descendant lineage, Do Khyense transmitted the Dzimpa Rangdrol treasure cycle to his son, Rígpe Raltri, who transmitted it to his son Zilnön Gyepa Dorje (the second Do Rinpoche). Although the descendant lineage begins with members of the Do family line, at this point in the transmission it moves from genetics to incarnation and is passed to Trimé Drakpa, the incarnation of the eldest son of Do Khyense, Sherap Mebar and the tulku (sprul sku) of Dzogchen Monastery.\textsuperscript{41} From Trimé Drakpa, this descendant lineage was passed to its present holder, Alak Zenkar Rinpoche Ixwban Nyima (b. 1943), the incarnation of Alak Zenkar Pema Ngödrup Rolwé Dorje (1881-1943), who was recognized as the incarnation of Do Khyense. From this delineation of the descendant lineage in "The Namthar of Do Dasel Wangmo" we can conclude that the initial transmission must be to a family member and from there it can be transmitted to incarnations of family members.

\textsuperscript{39} Zilnön Gyepa Dorje is the incarnation of Sherap Mebar.
\textsuperscript{40} Chödar, p. 396.
\textsuperscript{41} I have been unable to determine which Dzogchen incarnation Trimé Drakpa is, although via the Dzogchen Monastery website, there was a "Dzogchen Tulku Drime" said to be the incarnation of the attendant of Do Khyense (\url{http://www.dzogchenmonastery.cn/html/kow_xeq_sevemh_dzogchen_rinpo.html}).
Notably, while there are no females in the descendant lineage as described in the namthar of Do Dasel Wangmo, the final page of the namthar contains a chart entitled “A Diagram of the Birth and Death Dates of the [Members] of the Do Khyenise Yeshe Dorje Family Line, in Successive Order.” This chart includes Do Khyenise, Losel Drönma, Khaying Dölma, Sherap Mebar, Rigpé Raltri, So Mang Tulku, Trimé Drakpa, Zilnön Gyepa Dorje, Do Tsedzin Wangmo, and Do Dasel Wangmo, although both Losel Drönma and Trimé Drakpa are noted to not be part of the family line because neither are genetic descendants of Do Khyenise.

In the narrative account of the descendant lineage, Do Dasel Wangmo is explicitly excluded, which is surprising since she is a genetic descendant of Do Khyenise and one would assume she would thus belong to that lineage. Her lineage, however, is the disciple lineage. The disciple lineage began with Do Khyenise passing the Dzinpa Rangdrol to his disciple Özer Drayé, who transmitted it to Max siddha Kyamo Manlha, who transmitted it to Dzogchen Khenpo Gönri. Khenpo Gönri transmitted it to Do Dasel Wangmo, who spread it to several other disciples. This is an interesting moment in the namthar because it is when Do Dasel Wangmo, at age twenty-three, received the full lineage transmission. Earlier, at age eleven, she is said to have received a partial transmission of the treasure cycle of Do Khyenise from her maternal uncle Do Rinpoche (Zilnön Gyepa Dorje), but due to his death the transmission was incomplete. Since the descendant transmission was incomplete, Do Dasel Wangmo became part of the disciple lineage, both of which are important modes of lineage transmission for the author of “The Namthar of Do Dasel Wangmo” due to their unbroken nature.

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42 Thubten, p. 396.
43 Chödar, p. 413.
44 Thus far I have been unable to identify So Mang Tulku.
45 Chödar, p. 396.
46 Chödar, p. 383.
These various threads of Do family line, descendant and disciple lineages, complicated by interwoven genetic and incarnate genealogy, have been difficult to untangle. During my visit, I asked Do Dasel Wangmo whether she was the lineage holder for the Dzinpa Rangdrol and she immediately demurred, indicating that the lineage holder was the current Alak Zenkar Rinpoche, whose photo hung above her bed. However, given various indications in the namthar, it is difficult to envision Do Dasel Wangmo as anything other than a lineage holder, though through a quirk of fate, not as a descendant lineage holder. While Do Dasel Wangmo is perhaps the only female member of the family line who has transmitted the practice herself, it is still important to note how many females are listed as part of the family line, when so often in Tibetan historical and hagiographic writing, they are left unnamed.

V. Namthar: Genre and Themes

Namthar is a genre of Tibetan life writing that highlights or presumes the achievement of the Buddhist goal of liberation. It has been translated as “full liberation [story]” by Janet Gyasto, “liberation from all [worldly phenomena and concerns]” by Hildegard Diemberger, and more broadly as a Life by Kurtis Schaeffer reflecting the Latin genre of vita rather than the Tibetan rnam thar, meaning “complete liberation”. Schaeffer also uses namthar to refer to Tibetan hagiographic writing in general, describing this medieval genre as “a richly layered literature containing philosophy, folk practices, local history, social theory, political rhetoric,

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47 Do Dasel Wangmo is reported to have given the empowerment for the Dzinpa Rangdrol on several occasions. To be able to give the empowerment and / or entrustment for a specific practice, let alone an entire treasure cycle, indicates the position of a lineage holder.

48 Gyasto, p.6.

and pyrotechnic miracle displays in addition to personal and emotional musings. I have chosen to keep the term in Tibetan so as to distinguish it from the term hagiography, which has Christian overtones and thus excludes the distinctly Buddhist phenomena of ‘liberation’ due to the difference between Christian and Buddhist eschatology.

Namthars have traditionally been used as inspirational tales for Buddhist readers, although for academics interested in social history they also contain fascinating details regarding the relationships between great masters and their disciples; how certain teachings were discovered and/or transmitted (with regards to treasure texts); the social and sexual dynamics between masters and disciples of different genders, and occasionally details regarding the social and political milieu of their particular place and time (such as epidemics, environmental events, and political shifts). As a genre namthar is drenched in often quite dramatic rhetoric centered on the construction of the central figure as a worthy Buddhist saint who will attain liberation in their present life and thereby legitimate their religious authority, activities and lineage founding.

Despite Do Dasel Wangmo’s humility regarding her personage during my visit, the fact remains that her disciple Thubtan Chödar recorded her life story in the style of a namthar, and named it as such, with her permission and assistance. This juxtaposition of the humility expressed by the person of Do Dasel Wangmo and her literary image as an exalted religious figure is a tension common to the genre of namthar, especially in its more rarified form of rang rnam (autobiography). As Gyasto notes, the autobiographical image in Tibetan life writing is mercurial, but there are instances of “expressly self-aggrandizing accounts” that underscore a sense of

51 Chödar, p. 6.
52 Gyasto, p. 111.
"personal uniqueness" driving the author to record their experiences. While such written glorification appears to be acceptable in both rangnam and namthar, personal humilific speech is a necessity for Buddhist masters, serving to demonstrate their lack of personal investment in their accomplishments and thus engender faith in their disciples.

Within both namthar and rangnam, there are outer, inner and secret types. These labels refer not to who has access to these texts, but to the amount of their esoteric content. According to Gyatso, secret autobiography (gsang ba'i rang rnam), typically focuses on the "visions, yogic attainment, and memories of past lives" of the author, whereas the outer autobiography (phyi’i rang rnam), focuses on the public events and activities of their life. These same basic distinctions also apply to namthar, although the characteristics of an "inner" namthar or autobiography are not defined. The namthar of Do Dasel Wangmo can be categorized as "outer" since it chronicles the outer activities of her life and does not include any details as to her possible visionary or realization experiences. In fact, whatever reports are made as to her miraculous abilities always refer to occasions that occur explicitly 'off-stage' from the narration of the namthar.

In terms of situating "The Namthar of Do Dasel Wangmo" within the overall genre of Tibetan life writing, note that Schaeffer reports that there are perhaps two thousand religious biographies of Tibetan Buddhist figures from the eighth to the twentieth centuries and among those, more than one hundred and fifty are autobiographies, and among those, only three or four are authored by women. While this text is not an autobiography, nor is its author female, it contains sentences throughout that have been narrated by Do Dasel Wangmo herself, as evidenced

53 Gyatso, p. 110-111.
54 Gyatso, p.6.
55 Diemberger, p. 92.
56 Schaeffer, p. 4.
by the honorific form of the verb “to speak” (gsungs). This verb was initially confusing to me, as I was not sure who was speaking. However, in the introduction to the text, the author Thubtan Chödar clarifies that this is indeed an indication of the direct speech of Do Dasel Wangmo. Her namthar is the result of Thubtan Chödar weaving together Do Dasel Wangmo’s own narration of certain events, the oral tradition of her life well known to disciples, her own writings with events and activities that he witnessed personally. Few texts are independent endeavors and the namthar of a religious figure situated within a complex and famous family lineage is even less likely to be so due to the increased likelihood of her actions being recorded or remembered by disciples.

Although I argue that Do Dasel Wangmo’s gender is less important than her membership in the elite Do family, the namthars of female religious figures are often thematized in early life around the central obstacle of their protagonist leading a religious life due to their gender. This theme can be partitioned into three tensions, the first of which is between expectations for marriage versus desires for ordination or a life of retreat, as exemplified in the namthars of Yeshe Tsogyal (8th century), Drenchen Rema (14th century), and A-Yu Khadro Dorje Paldron (1838-1953). According to Lady of the Lotus Born, the early life of Yeshe Tsogyal provides the paradigmatic literary example of parental pressure to marry contrasted with her own insistence to pursue a life of dharmic activity.

As it is told in her dramatic namthar, Yeshe Tsogyal was born to many miraculous signs and grew into such a beautiful young woman that her parents were besieged with requests for her hand in marriage, while she herself only wanted to pursue the dharma and begged her parents repeatedly to let her do so. However, since so many of her suitors were local chieftains, her...
father felt compelled to acquiesce to their desires. He told them that whoever could capture
Yeshe Tsogyal first could have her and then pushed his daughter out of his house.59 That night, at
her captor’s campsite, Yeshe Tsogyal mourned her fate in song and called upon the Buddhas of
the ten directions and all the bodhisattvas to help her escape: “My pure white wish / Was whiter
than the snow / But through the deeds of demon foes / It clouds and darkens / Blacker than the
rust / O look on me with eyes of great compassion!”60 Through the power of her song and the
blessings of the Buddhas, her captors fell into a deep sleep and she slipped away to pursue her
“pure white wish” to practice dharma. Eventually, Yeshe Tsogyal was captured again and forced to
marry King Trisong Deutsen, who made her the steward of religion and eventually gifted her to
the great Indian master Padmasambhava.61

The second tension is between the expectations for motherhood versus a life of retreat, as
exemplified in the namthars of Machik Labdrön (1055-1145), Nangsa Obum (12th century), and
Chökyi Drönma (1422-1455). The life story of Nangsa Obum is well-known as a folk opera and
one of the most poignant moments of the tale occurs when Nangsa Obum and her son, Lhau
Darpo, trade verses about her desire to leave her household (and thus him) to practice the
dharma and his desire to make her stay. Illustrating the foundational Buddhist teachings of non-
attachment and impermanence, she sings: “I am like a snow mountain / And you are a snow lion /
Do not be attached to me! / I am just like an ordinary snow mountain . . . / So I can be melted by
the sun . . . / It is very dangerous.”62 Lhau Darpo extends the metaphor and pleads with his mother
to stay and care for him, singing: “If I am a snow lion / If I do not stay with you, the snow
mountain / Even if lightning does not kill me / My blue mane won’t grow / So until I get my

60 Changchub, p. 15.
61 Changchub, p. 19.
blue mane please stay!" Nangsa Obum's husband and family-in-law join Lhak Darpo's pleas and she stays, but not for long. Eventually she escapes her unhappy marital home as well as her natal home and goes to study with the lama Sakya Gyaltsen. However, it is not until Nangsa Obum and Sakya Gyaltsen demonstrate their miraculous abilities, achieved through dharma practice, that her family finally gives their permission for her to relinquish her householder life and child-rearing responsibilities.

The final tension is between the expectations for conventional relationships (hagiographically portrayed as leading to attachment and further suffering in sa s ra) versus the consort position (hagiographically portrayed as furthering the practitioners' realization), as exemplified by the namthars of Yeshe Tsogyal and Jomo Menmo (1248-1283). The example of Jomo Menmo is perhaps not a normative one, but it does serve to illustrate that the consort position is open only to a certain few practitioners (both male and female), and assumed in order to further the realization of both participants. Jomo Menmo was herself a treasure revealer at the tender age of thirteen when she dozed off near a cave where Padmasambhava and Yeshe Tsogyal were said to have practiced together. Upon her awakening she is said to have entered into the visionary landscape of Dorje Phagmo who welcomes her and presents her with a text, her treasure. Through this experience Jomo Menmo attains spontaneous realization and her behavior changes drastically, frightening her fellow villagers who label her a demoness and drive her away. Eventually, she meets Guru Chökyi Wangcuk (also known as Guru Chöwang) and enters into a consort relationship with him, through which he is able to decipher several treasure texts.

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63 Allione, p. 100.
64 Allione, p. 128.
65 Allione, p. 209.
The theme of females being more suited to marriage and childbearing than the ordained life, acting as a spiritual consort or the lifestyle of a wandering yogin runs throughout the first part of Do Dasel Wangmo’s life. Since all three of her siblings died during early childhood, the namthar reports that Do Tsezin Wangmo, Uncle Rangjung and Raza Rigshe Wangmo all held great hope that Do Dasel Wangmo would propagate the Do family, and for that reason her mother allowed her hair to grow long. The implication of the hair detail is that Do Dasel Wangmo was being groomed for matrimony and childbearing rather than ordination. Her relatives adorned her with ornaments, including a special set of gold earrings and a golden belt, both of which she destroyed in fits of temper. Although Do Dasel Wangmo repeatedly begged her mother to cut her hair, she was also repeatedly rebuked for this aspiration.

However, marriage was never pressed on her as it was in the case of Yeshe Tsogyal, A-Yu Kxorlo and Chökyi Drönma. Similar to Chökyi Drönma, Do Dasel Wangmo demonstrates her

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66 Although it is said to be only one treasure in the Dudjom Rinpoche version, Gyatso mentions that it was several treasures, p. 174-175.


68 Do Dasel Wangmo’s maternal grandmother.
determination to ordain by cutting off her own hair and bringing it, perhaps as an offering or a
demonstration of her mettle to her proposed preceptor, Tulku Gracen. However, the tone of this
episode is in stark contrast to that of Chökyi Drönma who, although already married and having
borne a daughter who died, was likewise determined to ordain but could not obtain permission
from her family. Living with her in-laws, Chökyi Drönma decided to change her behavior so that
they might be more willing for her to leave and one night chopped off her hair and in so doing
badly injured herself. Chökyi Drönma appeared bleeding and crazed in front of her father-in-law
who asked why she had cut herself, to which she replied: “Even a king cannot close the door of
the dharma. Since my wish was not accepted, this is the result.”69 This dramatic gesture, coupled
with her younger sister agreeing to marry her husband in her place, finally freed Chökyi Drönma
to pursue ordination, “the path of knowledge and liberation.”70

Despite familial pressure against ordination, Do Dasel Wangmo is nonetheless also
constructed in her namthar as being eminently suited to dharma practice. She is said to have
shunned secular games as a child and instead played at building monasteries, giving and receiving
dharma talks, and making flower garlands as offerings. As a member of an elite family, Do
Dasel Wangmo was afforded educational and accessibility opportunities usually available only to
male incarnations and monastics. For example, her Uncle Rangjung began to teach her to read at
age eight, however, since she learned so incredibly fast, he found he did not need to teach her
anything and her education rapidly progressed to the study of foundational Buddhist texts. The
speed of her educational progress is another hagiographic trope, although one that is not
necessarily gendered. By the time she was ten years old, she began receiving empowerments and

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70 Diemberger, p. 173.
reading transmissions from Do Rinpoche, Zilnön Gyepa Dorje, for a variety of Dzogchen practices. The reception of such teachings is unusual for laywomen, and in the case of a ten-year-old girl who appears to be the main recipient (as opposed to being in the entourage of a tulku brother) it is extraordinary. This is further evidence that advantageous elements of Do Dasel Wangmo’s elite status largely eclipse the negative connotations of her female gender within Tibetan Buddhist culture.

By the age of fourteen, Do Dasel Wangmo had begun to hold major ritual roles at the Do encampment and had also developed as a spirit medium. While the narrator recounts that Do Dasel Wangmo has told him about her medium experience many times, we, as readers, are not privy to how this ability has affected or interacted with the rest of her life. Thubtan Chödar only recounts one episode of mediumship in 1986-87 during which he describes Do Dasel Wangmo’s face as becoming radiant and her body as trembling. She told him, “It’s coming on me — like this... I must go outside,”[71] and after an hour she returned, but no one other details are provided. Beyond this description, we learn nothing about what the possessing spirits do and whether they have a role related to her religious or medical practice. Although this detail is mentioned in the first third of the namthar, because of the flash-forward to the 1986-87 incident, we know that Do Dasel Wangmo has remained a medium throughout the majority of her life. This lack of details regarding her mediumship perhaps indicates a discomfort with supernatural events in the namthar due to its modern readership.

The first third of the namthar also provides several indications as to the religious weight Do Dasel Wangmo carries. The first of these occurs at age nineteen when, after contracting smallpox, Do Dasel Wangmo was forced to remain at Dzogchen Monastery. There, the Dzogchen

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[71] Chödar, p. 384-385. While Thubtan Chödar is not named in the passage, it appears that Do Dasel Wangmo is speaking to him.
Rinpoche and other luminaries performed various healing rites for her, as did the entire monastery and its attached monastic seminary (r'i Siha). This type of religious intervention is usually reserved for only the most august personages, and clearly Do Dasel Wangmo is considered to be such a member of the Do family. This assessment is only supported by her formal ordination ceremony, also at Dzogchen Monastery, in front of the full monastic assembly. The third example of increasing religious authority is when, after a foiled identification of the reincarnation of Uncle Rangjung by another religious figure, Do Dasel Wangmo herself makes the identification of a relative's son.\(^7^2\) This remarkable demonstration of her prowess is described in only one sentence with no commentary, downplaying her religious authority. Since all three examples occur in her late teens and early twenties, I do not think it can be argued that it was only due to her elite Do antecedents, but also due to her own merits as a practitioner with intensifying religious mastery even at such a comparatively young age.

The second third of the namthar is dedicated to the difficult years of 1958 to 1979. This was the historical period covering the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961), a campaign of rapid industrialization and collectivization, and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), a devastating campaign to uproot capitalist, traditional and cultural elements from Chinese society.\(^7^3\) This is a particularly unusual text in that regard because in contradistinction to the namthar of Khandro Tre Lhamo, another contemporary female Buddhist master, this namthar provides some details as to Do Dasel Wangmo's experience during various Communist campaigns.\(^7^4\) Though these details are scarce, we do learn that Do Dasel Wangmo was labeled a 'black hat' as a religious elite, forced to do manual labor, underwent a struggle session and intensive re-education. Despite these

\(^{72}\) Chödar, p. 394.

\(^{73}\) Spence, p. 579.

harrowing details, the namthar continues to hagiographically represent Do Dasel Wangmo as a realized being. This manifests by her being unaffected by the tremendous anxiety and suffering that arose during that time, and Do Dasel Wangmo herself reported that "regardless of how much difficulty and suffering arose [during that time], due to the power of compassion of the Three Jewels, vast difficulty and suffering did not arise in [my] mind." Such descriptions also serve to augment the power of the Do Khyentse treasure corpus since rhetorically Do Dasel Wangmo survives tremendous hardship due to her religious practice (largely centered on the teachings of her familial antecedents).

In the final third of the namthar I would argue that Do Dasel Wangmo's religious authority is represented through her whirlwind of activity from 1979 forward, caring for others directly (through her medical practice), and indirectly (through arranging for the printing of dharma texts, teaching, and so forth). She works as a doctor, helps to found two medical clinics, assists in the re-opening of the Dege Printing House and teaches at the SPTL School from its inception. While there is a hagiographic comparison to be made with the many worldly achievements of Chökyi Drönma, there is little rhetoric surrounding Do Dasel Wangmo's prolific activity, beyond her generosity in consistently treating destitute patients for little or no pay.

However, it is clear that these activities are building her authority, religious and otherwise within the region. It is also important to note that her participation in some of the more momentous happenings – such as the re-opening of the Dege Printing House – is perhaps possible due to both her survival and her prominence. In other words, prior to the Communist invasion, it is more likely that first-tier religious elites (almost exclusively male) would have led such reconstruction efforts, had there been the need. However, many of these figures fled abroad,

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75 Chödar, p. 399.
76 Diemberger, 199.
were killed or imprisoned, leaving second-tier religious elites, such as women, to helm such projects.\textsuperscript{77} Do Dasel Wangmo’s involvement in several of these projects is also commanded by Zenkar Rinpoche, with whom she maintains a close relationship.

Apart from the details particular to the Maoist period, this is a fairly conventional “outer” namthar; no visionary experiences or even dreams are detailed. There is an early mention of a dragon sighting, but even this is downplayed as Thubtan Chödar acknowledges that science today would dispute the fact of a dragon.\textsuperscript{78} Do Dasel Wangmo is said to have seen a dragon emerging from a spring at Eska-tsha Monastery at age thirteen, and at this point the narrator intervenes to note that while “ordinary people” cannot perceive dragons, there is ample evidence that “holy beings” can. In fact, he notes, there are several dragon sightings in the namthars of prominent religious masters. This type of interjection, based on quelling the possible doubts of a modern readership, is a new feature to the genre of contemporary namthar.

While I heard rumors as to Do Dasel Wangmo being a treasure revealer, there is no evidence to support that claim from “The Namthar of Do Dasel Wangmo”. While her female gender and elite status — as a member of the Do family, accomplished religious practitioner and medical doctor — are certainly themes of varying strength, the overarching theme of the text appears to be her relationship to the Do family lineage, as a member of its genetic line and disciple lineage. This connection is reinforced by the structure of the text as it begins with a verse explaining her existence as an emanation of her great-grand-aunt, and sister of Do Khyentse, Losel Drönma, who, despite not being of the genetic line of Do Khyentse, was considered his close disciple and lifelong companion. The final prose section of the text is a description of her efforts


\textsuperscript{78} Chödar, p. 384.
to compile and print the collected teachings of Do Khyentse, Trime Drakpa, Zilnön Gyepa Dorje and Zenkar Rinpoche himself, all members, genetic or incarnate, of the Do family genetic line and descendant lineages, reiterating again her personal connection to these teachings as the only living member of the Do family.

VI. Conclusion

In terms of “The Namthar Do Dasel Wangmo,” Do Dasel Wangmo is represented primarily in relationship to her great-grandfather, Do Khyentse Yeshe Dorje. Her relationship to the great treasure revealer is not simply genetic or via her inherited authority, but also salvific. As a genre, namthar is concerned with telling the tale of the achievement of liberation. However Do Dasel Wangmo’s liberation is not specifically highlighted; all we know is that at age twenty-five, during retreat, “she attained realization.”79 This seeming contradiction demonstrates the breadth of the genre of namthar. While some namthars are explicitly centered on the protagonist’s attainment of liberation, others, such as this text, presume the realization of the subject and then highlight their activities related to Buddhism. While there is no evidence that Do Dasel Wangmo’s realization was explicitly connected with her practice of the treasure cycle of Do Khyentse, the Dzinpa Rangdrol, it is abundantly clear that she received religious education and training opportunities by virtue of her being a member of the elite Do family. Those opportunities, of which she took full advantage, culminated in her being able to do retreat and reside at Dzogchen Monastery for nine years, during which time she achieved realization.

Do Dasel Wangmo also exemplifies the complexity and flexibility of Tibetan lineage transmission practices. She is a member of the Do family genetic line (gdung rgyud), and the disciple lineage (slob rgyud) of Do Khyentse’s treasure teachings, but not a member of the

79 Chödar, p. 395.
descendent lineage (*sras brgyud*), due to the incomplete transmission for the Dzinpa Rangdrol upon the early death of her maternal uncle Zilnön Gyepa Dorje. Since her transmission of the Dzinpa Rangdrol treasure cycle was not performed by a family member, Do Dasel Wangmo became a member of the disciple lineage when she received the complete transmission from Khenpo Gönri. The descendent lineage may contain non-genetic line members, although its initial transmission must occur from originator to progeny. The current incarnation of Do Khyentse, Ak Zenkar Rinpoche, is a non-genetic line member, though he belongs to the descendent lineage via Trimé Drakpa (also not a family member), who received the lineage from Zilnön Gyepa Dorje, the grandson of Do Khyentse. These twists and turns of genetics, incarnations and lineage categorizations demonstrate the intricacy of transmission practices. However, that the Dzinpa Rangdrol cycle exists to this day testifies to their efficacy.

"The Namthar of Do Dasel Wangmo" is a rich text that has opened many avenues for further ethnographic, textual and theoretical queries. It would be interesting to speak with the current Zenkar Rinpoche as to his understanding of Do Dasel Wangmo's position within the Do Khyentse lineage. Specifically, would he be able to shed light on whether there are any significant differences between the disciple and descendent lineages? It would also be interesting to learn more about the author of the namthar, Thubtan Chödar, beyond the fact that he was her medical student for two years. His narrative voice and editorial hand shaped this text, thus understanding more about their relationship might illuminate some of its emphases and deficits. The namthar might be further fleshed out by a full translation of Do Dasel Wangmo's own published work, *A Collection of the Writings of the Jetsunma Do Dasel Wangmo* (Rje btsun ma

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80 When I reached out to speak with Zenkar Rinpoche I was told he was out of the country for the next few months. I hope to speak with him in the future.
81 Chödar, p. 401-402.
This collection of essays contains a series of short teachings as well as a collection of short namthars of other members of the Do family, which I have partially translated.

Finally, "The Namthar of Do Dasel Wangmo" raises many questions about the uncertain practices of Tibetan lineage transmission within the Nyingma sect. It remains to be seen whether the lineage terms used in the text are part of a standard lexicon or whether they are mutable due to the chanciness of genetics, i.e. whether surviving family members are female or male. This is a fascinating micro-field for inquiry and I hope that continued research on Do Dasel Wangmo and other such family lineage figures can flourish.

VII. Do Family Chart

Do Khyentse Yeshe Dorje = wife is unnamed
(1800-1866)
VIII. Bibliography:


