




Research Article

# Buddhist Pro-Woman Attitudes Towards Full Ordination: Tibetan and Himalayan Monastics' Views

Darcie M. Price-Wallace   
Northwestern University

Since the 1980s, Tibetan religious leaders and Vinaya scholars have been examining the possibility of restoring the Buddhist full ordination vow for women (Tib. *dge slong ma*, *gelongma*) in India. These leaders and scholars focus primarily on canonical prescriptions and emphasize that this issue precludes questions of gender equality (*pho mo 'dra mnyam*). However, little attention has been paid to the perspectives of Himalayan and Tibetan monastics outside of leadership positions. In order to understand how these Buddhist nuns and monks reconcile Vinaya prescriptions and gender equality, I interviewed and surveyed monastics residing in Bodh Gaya, India, between January 2018–March 2019. Their responses indicate a diversity of views about the relationship between restoring *gelongma* vows, Vinaya, and gender equality. And yet taken as a whole, they hold a view that is pro-woman but also accounts for gender asymmetries in ways that are sometimes at odds with a gender-justice and rights-based feminism. Their monastic version of feminism downplays social differences and instead emphasizes similarities between men and women's practices as sites for ethical cultivation within the confines of celibate Buddhist monasticism.

**Keywords:** Buddhist nuns and monks; women's monasticism; full ordination (*gelongma*); gender equality; feminism; Buddhist feminism; Tibetan Buddhism; Vinaya

## 1. Introduction

**T**SÜNMA (*btsun ma*, a title for an ordained woman) Tenzin, a forty-year-old Ladakhi nun, and I are sitting together on a warm spring day in Bodh Gaya, India. She shares a foundation narrative about Buddhist nuns:

Initially, the Buddha did not give Mahāprajāpatī, [the Buddha's foster mother] vows. I do not know the main reason for this; but Mahāprajāpatī and a group of women came from far away. It was quite an ordeal. It was not until Mahāprajāpatī requested Ānanda's help that she received ordination. Ānanda told the Buddha that his own mother had passed away in childhood and Mahāprajāpatī cared for him. She faced many hardships on the way to request ordination. Ānanda insisted that it would not be a good idea if the Buddha refused her again. So, the Buddha ordained her and she practiced *gelongma* vows. This is what I heard from others or read in stories.<sup>1</sup>

Tsünma Tenzin's re-telling of this foundational *gelongma* (*dge slong ma*, fully ordained nun) ordination speaks to some of its complexities, including the Buddha's ambivalent response to Mahāprajāpatī's initial request and Ānanda, the Buddha's main attendant's, intercession. Tsünma Tenzin notes she cannot account for why the

<sup>1</sup> Interview 3F—Tsünma Tenzin, March 16, 2018, Bihar. All interlocutors' names have been changed to maintain confidentiality. The locations indicate the site of the interview and names of nunneries and monasteries are not included. This author conducted all interviews in Tibetan, Hindi, and/or English on her own. Dorje Choephel initially transcribed the interviews. This author edited and revised transcriptions.



narrative suggests the Buddha was initially ambivalent about accepting women into the monastic order. Her own uncertainty mirrors how canonical accounts similarly do not explicitly address the Buddha's hesitation, but "the implication is he worried the laity would not respect and give generously to a mendicant order that included women" (Langenberg 2018: 2). Tsünma Tenzin insinuates that this was an issue of gender equality, since "In ancient times in India, women faced discrimination and the Buddha was trying to accommodate this traditional society."<sup>2</sup> Tsünma Tenzin's re-telling and analysis of the first ordination narrative for Buddhist nuns provides us with insight into how monastics view feminism and gender equality in the context of the debate about restoring *gelongma* ordination.

For contemporary debates on ordination, this foundational narrative and its many aspects are a central point of reference for debates that are often framed around gender equality (Tsomo 1988; Gyatso 2003, 2010; Salgado 2013). However, as Damchö Diana Finnegan notes, this common narrative crowds out the numerous instances in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* in which the Buddha is depicted as nurturing and sustaining the monastic order he established (2009: 6). Anālayo's analysis of the foundational ordination narrative across Buddhist canonical texts illustrates "the differences in attitudes towards nuns evident in parallel versions" (2016: 12). Reiko Ohnuma (2012), Pascale Engelmajer (2020), and Wendy Garling (2021) de-emphasize Mahāprajāpatī's role as a nun to highlight her life as a sister, queen, and mother. These scholarly perspectives give us variable interpretive possibilities for thinking about Mahāprajāpatī's nuanced roles (Engelmajer 2020: 89–90). Tibetan nuns, similarly, highlight Mahāprajāpatī's significance, but the practitioners in this case study emphasized her role as a religious professional and as the harbinger of women's Buddhist monasticism.<sup>3</sup>

This article focuses on the ongoing discussion within present-day monastic communities in India about restoring *gelongma* ordination for women. Nuns in the Tibetan tradition cannot receive their full ordination vows since the requisite number of nuns and monks did not transmit the lineage into Tibet and religious leadership remains divided about the proper way to revive the lineage (Tsomo 1988; Gutschow 2004; Mrozik 2009; Dechen 2010; Gyatso 2010; Hannah 2012; Schneider 2012; Tsedroen 2016; Roloff 2020). Inquiring into *gelongma* ordination and its relationship with gender equality and feminism is a longstanding question in present-day debates among religious leaders. As Tsünma Tenzin suggested, questions of gender discrimination even appear within the first women's ordination narrative in Buddhism 2600 years ago. However, within contemporary debates, little attention has been paid to the perspectives of Himalayan and Tibetan monastics outside of leadership positions. This article addresses this gap by considering monastics' perspectives on attempts to restore *gelongma* ordination, and on the way in which this issue relates to Vinaya (monastic ethical guidelines), gender equality, and the valences of terms for feminism within Tibetan language. My interlocutors' responses depart from religious leaders' dualistic perspective positing *gelongma* ordination as related to only Vinaya and not approachable from a feminist perspective.<sup>4</sup>

Before thinking through ways to theorize *gelongma* ordination and its correlation with Vinaya and the many expressions of feminism, I briefly consider the perspectives of religious leaders as a way to underscore how and why I pursued questions about *gelongma* ordination through a survey. I was interested in how Himalayan and Tibetan monastics think about *gelongma* ordination, since several Tibetan leaders assert that restoring *gelongma* ordination is definitively not a feminist issue and a solution can only be found within the context of the Vinaya. For instance, at the International Congress on Buddhist Women's Role in the Sangha (hereafter,

<sup>2</sup> Interview 3F—Tsünma Tenzin, March 16, 2018, Bihar.

<sup>3</sup> Some scholars suggest that the introduction of the order of *bhikṣuṇīs* occurred soon after the death of the Buddha. For more on this topic, see Oskar Von Hinüber (2008).

<sup>4</sup> I am using the term Vinaya broadly to refer to the body of teachings on monastic discipline. For a closer look at the history of *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinayas*, see Shayne Clarke's (2015: 73) research. See also Carola Roloff (2020).

the Hamburg Conference) in 2007, the previous Kalön Tripa for the Tibetan government in exile, Venerable Samdhong Rinpoche, stated,

Our efforts toward re-establishing the Mūlasarvāstivāda *bhikṣuṇī* ordination are not driven by Western influence or feminist concerns about the equality of the sexes—this issue cannot be determined by social or political considerations. The solution must be found within the context of the *Vinaya* codes (Mohr and Tsedroen 2010: 256).

Samdhong Rinpoche's assertion can be further broken down. He positions ordination in juxtaposition with either Western influence or feminism. Ordination solutions should only be addressed within the context of monastic code, *gelongma* vows fall outside the confines of what may be deemed either a social or political consideration, and restoring this ordination cannot be based on feminism. Here, Samdhong Rinpoche defines feminism as an approach that advocates for gender equality. Samdhong Rinpoche emphasizes that restoring *gelongma* ordination is an exclusively canonical *Vinaya* issue, insinuating that the issue remains internal to monastic communities and has nothing to do with gender equality. His position also reflects a desire for a coherent, timeless, and holistic understanding of foundational events, which cannot be transposed or explicated through present-day concerns (Bell 2001).

Another religious leader, the 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje, who is the head of the Karma Kagyü lineage, does not directly link ordination and feminism, but he does address women's empowerment and equality on an institutional level (Ogyen Trinley Dorje 2015).<sup>5</sup> When we talk about the equality of women, he says, it must go beyond addressing institutional inequality as it is not enough to really “empower women” (Ogyen Trinley Dorje 2015). Thus, establishing proper measures to re-instate a lineage of fully ordained nuns addresses institutional inequality and is merely one step in addressing issues of gender.<sup>6</sup> Further, like Samdhong Rinpoche, he disassociates restoring ordination from ‘Western influence’ and feminist concerns; instead, he explains his reasoning for initiating a path for giving full ordination vows in the future. For instance, on March 13, 2017, during the Annual Nuns Gathering, he stated,

Some people might think that we are making these efforts to restore the full vows due to the influence of Western nuns. But the purpose is as I have described before: without a Sangha of *bhikṣhunīs*, it is very difficult to give proper and authentic vows to individuals in a female body. This is why it is extremely important to reinstitute the community of *bhikṣhunīs*. When we look at the ceremonies for the vows that can be taken with a female body—such as a female lay practitioner with precepts, the female who has gone forth, and the novice nun—as they are described in the *Vinaya* (and many of the ceremonies have been translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan), they all state that the *bhikṣhunīs* should bestow the vows that can be given to women. If we seek these authentic true vows, then the *bhikṣhunīs* are key.<sup>7</sup>

Similar to Samdhong Rinpoche, the Karmapa makes a canonical argument, but he emphasizes the necessity of *gelongmas* for conferring *gelongma* ordination. Here, his attitude illustrates an intriguing puzzle of restoring *gelongma* ordination that cannot be adequately addressed here, but demonstrates how religious leaders

<sup>5</sup> Also revered as 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa is Trinley Thaye Dorje. Both Ogyen Trinley Dorje and Trinley Thaye Dorje met during October 2018 and discussed preserving and strengthening the Karma Kagyü lineage. Both issued statements to this effect (Trinley Thaye Dorje 2018) and composed a joint prayer and is cited on both of their respective sites (Ogyen Trinley Dorje 2019; Trinley Thaye Dorje 2019). A recent court case against the Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje was discontinued. See (Agsar 2022).

<sup>6</sup> Nirmala Salgado's work is also instrumental for examining higher ordination and issuing a call to capture voices of nuns' interest and disinterest in such pursuits. She also puts forth the idea that “equality” as intrinsically desirable is problematic and that nuns will be treated “equally” as a result of higher ordination is uncertain (2013: 214–15). Saba Mahmood sees “particular kinds of inequality (racial, religious) strongly inflect other dimensions of hierarchy (class, gender) that permeate a given society, their mutual imbrication producing historically distinct paradoxes and problems” (2016: 209).

<sup>7</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa, Arya Kshema, Bodh Gaya, India, March 15, 2017, translation by Michele Martin.

continue to build the groundwork for restoring *gelongma* ordination.<sup>8</sup> Yet since this question of restoring *gelongma* ordination impacts all of the monastic community, what perspectives do nuns and monks hold on whether to restore *gelongma* ordination?

In order to better understand nuns and monks' perspectives, I used surveys and interviews about *gelongma* ordination with a specific emphasis on feminism and gender equality, defined in their own terms. Since monasticism is structured around a strict gender binary, I wondered what nuns and monks think about *gelongma* ordination within the gendered limitations in canonical prescriptions. I asked how nuns and monks express the nuances of feminism and gender equality in light of the question of restoring *gelongma* ordination. The results of my surveys show that even though there are very specific gendered asymmetries and hierarchical requirements in monasticism (Finnegan 2009: 368–69), my interlocutors do not perceive these as a form of inequality; instead, these social differences act as intersections for ethical cultivation through the maintenance of their vows.

After briefly contextualizing my field site, my interlocutors' demographics, and the techniques I applied in this ethnographic case study, this article foregrounds how nuns and monks define the Tibetan terms of feminism for monastics. Having defined these terms, my interlocutors' survey and interview responses illustrate their pro-woman (Padma'tsho and Jacoby 2020: 3) overtones and the way they situate *gelongma* ordination within conversations of Vinaya and gender equality rather than an either/or proposition.

## 2. Methodology: Place, Approach, and Demographics

### 2.1 The Setting

Annually since the 1980s, the different Tibetan Buddhist lineages in-exile in India developed their own Great Prayer Festival for World Peace, also called a *mönlam* (*smon lam*), in Bodh Gaya, the pilgrimage site celebrated as the seat of the Buddha's enlightenment (Geary 2017). An elevated sacred space for the Tibetan diaspora, other teachings and annually sponsored empowerment practices are central to Bodh Gaya's annual ritual cycle, tailoring to Tibetans, Bhutanese, Nepalese, and East Asian Buddhists, especially from Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong, as well the international *sanghas* from Europe and the Americas (Geary 2017).

Initially held at the Mahabodhi Temple, the Kagyü Mönlam, with upward numbers of 12,000 participants, relocated to the newly constructed Kagyü Pavilion to accommodate approximately 7,000 monastics and more than 3,000 laity from around the world. The international crowd gathers annually to practice the Dharma together through listening to the Karmapa, lineage leaders, and other well-known *lamas*' (*bla ma*, spiritual master) teachings, receive empowerments, join in collective prayer, and/or sponsor various events, activities, and monastic institutions.<sup>9</sup>

Since this article specifically examines how monastics perceive *gelongma* ordination in relationship to feminism and given the 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa's initiation of restoring *gelongma* ordination, I surveyed monastics attending the 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Kagyü Mönlam January 9–21, 2019 and the Arya Kshema Tsünma Gathering January 24–February 11, 2019, the Karmapa's annual gathering for nuns. Additionally, I draw from select field interviews conducted between January 2018–February 2019 when respondents engaged in conversations about ordination and gender equality. While I begin with religious leaders' perspectives to provide some context, this article intentionally decenters religious leaders' perspectives to foreground how practitioners speak for Buddhist tradition.

<sup>8</sup> The 70th Je Khenpo of Bhutan recently gave *gelongma* ordination to more than one-hundred and forty nuns in June 2022. (See Finnegan and Roloff 2022; Je Khenpo 2022; Zangmo 2022).

<sup>9</sup> About the Kagyü Mönlam, <http://www.kagyumonlam.org/index.php/en/2017-04-14-18-14-07/about-kagyü-monlam> (last accessed July 7, 2021).

## 2.2 Demographics

For this case study, I analyze twenty surveys from twelve Tibetan and Himalayan nuns and eight monks. All of the nuns were *mönlam* participants whereas one of the monks did not participate in the *mönlam* as he practiced in the Geluk lineage, but temporarily resided in Bodh Gaya for other teachings. The demographics among the nuns include one born in the 1950s, two born in the 1970s, three born in the 1980s, five born in the 1990s, and one participant did not answer this question. The eldest four participants were born in Tibet, three were born in Nepal, one was born in Bhutan, and four were born in India. Six participants were from the same institution in Himachal Pradesh, two from Sikkim, and four from Kathmandu, Nepal. All practiced in Karma Kagyü institutions hence their presence at the Kagyü Mönlam and Arya Kshema gathering. Among the monks, one was born in the 1970s, two were born in the 1980s, and the other three in the 1990s. The eldest was born in Tibet, four were born in Nepal, one in Bhutan, and one in India. Five were from a *shedra* (*bshad grwa*, monastic college) in Sarnath, India, one from Mundgod, India, one from Kathmandu, Nepal, and the final from a monastery in Bhutan. Even among the five participants from the same *shedra*, their answers varied.

These demographics represent the movement of monastics. For instance, while the nun from Bhutan had several options for monasteries in her country, part of her path to ordination includes her decision to leave Bhutan because she initially faced difficulties and lack of support from her family to ordain. Her survey, in this regard, was an extension of an earlier interview. She had shared her life story with me in a previous interview and subsequently participated in the survey. I intended the survey to be anonymous, meaning that the monastics completed them and submitted them without discussion. Instead, the surveys often turned into interviews, demonstrating how these nuns and monks were more interested discussing this topic than merely giving anonymous responses. As they explored *gelongma* ordination and feminism, through these conversations, they also highlighted their ethical commitments.

## 2.3 Technique

I created anonymous surveys in Tibetan and English with twenty-two questions that focused specifically on nuns and monks' perceptions of ordination and the relationship between Vinaya as the canonical basis for vows and questions about gender equality with regard to restoring *gelongma* ordination. During the tea breaks of the Kagyü Mönlam, initially, I gave out ten anonymous multilingual surveys, but in follow up, I found that respondents either lost their surveys or changed their mind about responding, most often indicating lack of time due to the demanding schedule of annual prayer gathering. Thus, I had to revise my data collection methods into interviews-by-survey.

I understood the initial low response rate as indicative of the fully packed schedule and the necessity for in-person data collection among my interlocutors, but it pointed to several other issues of cultural translation. On the topic of cultural translation, Talal Asad predicts, "attempts at translation may meet with problems rooted in the linguistic materials [s]he works with and the social conditions [s]he works in—both in the field and in [her/]his own society" (Asad 1986: 149). As a technique, a qualitative and quantitative survey serves to capture the story of the interlocutor through an anonymous form that offers privacy alongside agency. Its constraint, however, was the survey's occlusion of partnership, a requisite dynamic of ethnography in this context. Where I assumed this topic would be more easily addressed anonymously, my interlocutors preferred completing the survey together. In this way, my interlocutors' responses were not anonymous, but part of an intimate conversation between themselves and with me.

This speaks to how social science methods such as anonymous surveys are not necessarily a translatable cross-cultural practice. On the one hand, this untranslatability stems from the uncertainties of the stateless status of living in-exile and being presented with a form. As stateless refugees, for many interlocutors,

forms are associated with state control, which is aligned with torture and/or imprisonment under Chinese controlled Tibet. On the other hand, it illustrates how, among my interlocutors, conversation about this topic did not need to be individual and private, but shared. This shared aspect speaks to monastics' collective discursive project occurring at the *mönlam* itself where the event centers on the mutual, collaborative obligation of all participants to direct their prayers, aspirations, and attention to benefit others. In this way, a survey did not resonate with the communal nature of living as Buddhist monastics.

As I realized this in process, I remedied the situation by no longer simply giving out surveys, but consulting with nuns and monks about their interest in participating and scheduled interview times for completing the surveys. These responses are reflective of the twenty interlocutors who agreed to sit down with me and complete the survey in between attending the *mönlam*. This data captures a glimpse of possible renderings of feminism and is not meant to be conclusive, but to offer insight into the nuances of these monastics' perspectives on the relationship between *gelongma* ordination and their definitions of feminism and its various connotations in Tibetan terms. While several of my interlocutors were known to me, others were new. Thus, the duration of our relationship was not a factor but our mutual investment in the relationship took precedent. In some instances, the survey process became like an interview. The interlocutor and I would read the questions together while they wrote their answers. In one instance, I was asked to record a monk's response. Therefore, the initial constraints I felt with my survey turned to possibilities, which I highlight in subsequent sections.

The institutionalized practices of cultural translation on the one hand suggests an asymmetrical relationship where the ethnographer is soliciting specific data. In this regard, monks and nuns who participated were invested in dialogue and collaboration with me but were not necessarily concerned about any correlations between monastic vows and feminism. On the other hand, as a white, American laywoman, my status was beneath that of monastics. Thus, while my positionality as ethnographer in some regards establishes an uneven power dynamic insofar as I am seeking information, I was also in a position of gratitude as I elicited these stories and experiences from experts. All the while, however, my interlocutors were collaborators in this complex transaction of multidimensional translation, linguistically and culturally.

Regarding bridging translation equivalence and cultural translation, I intended for an interlingual model, inclusive of open-ended questions, to address the possible equivalences across terminology while holding in mind Asad's idea that to push beyond the limits of the habitual uses of language "depends on the willingness of the translator's *language* to subject itself to this transforming power" (Asad 1986: 157). To address this, I had my interlocutors define these terms—gender equality, women's rights, women's empowerment, and feminism—and consider their relevance within their own definitions of these terms as related to *gelongma* vows. While on the surface, this seems relativistic, it actually encapsulates the necessity of cultural translation—the process of interpreting and thinking critically about how we define things in relation to the world around us, specifically *gelongma* ordination as it relates to feminism.

### 3. In the Field: What is Feminism in Tibetan Terms?

Framed by the mosquito net, tossed up upon a wooden t-frame, Tsünma Chödrön, a thirty-year-old nun from Kinnaur, and I sat adjacent in her room. Afternoon sunlight beamed across the far wall. While she read through my interview questions, I listened to the quick-paced chanting from her roommate on the other bed. Immersed in her recitation, she rarely interrupted her textual memorization to engage us aside from our initial introductions. Part way into our interview, I directly asked Tsünma Chödrön whether she considered *gelongma* ordination a feminist issue. We had been alternating between Hindi and Tibetan. Unsure of the best Tibetan term to use, I inserted the English term, feminist. She questioningly said, "feminist?" indicating her

own uncertainty of my English term. I tried one Tibetan term, “women’s rights” (*bud med kyi thob thang*) and then remembered, “gender equality” (*pho mo ’dra mnyam*). In this instance, I was offering different Tibetan terms which suggested aspects of some feminist approaches rather than Tsünma Chödrön defining feminism. However, Tsünma Chödrön repeated, “*pho mo ’dra mnyam*”, and then rhetorically asked herself how to define gender equality for me. She said:

Some people say men and women are equal, but there really is not much gender equality. Both men and women are able to work. I think that it is the *result* of their work that is equal; that is my view. But there is little benefit to loud expressions about gender equality. Whether a woman or a man, either can have great accomplishments. I have never considered myself superior because I am a woman or they are superior because they are men. I believe anyone is fortunate to be born as a man or a woman. However, it is our own choice to act non-virtuously; we all have the potential to act positively or negatively. Both women and men possess this capability, but this is not about equality. This is how I understand it.<sup>10</sup>

There are several aspects of her statement to unpack: first, women and men’s accomplishments were the only measure for gender equality; second, she downplays any notions of inferiority; and third, she had a distaste for “loud” assertions for gender equality.

Regarding the first, Tsünma Chödrön bases her definition of gender equality on results of one’s actions having the capacity for expressing some type of equality rather than the opportunities between men and women being equal. She does not understand gender equality to mean one-to-one parity, but a type of gender equivalence in which the result of one’s accomplishments are equal. Alan Sponberg’s oft-cited essay on the feminine in early Buddhism qualifies, “an attitude of gender equivalence allows for physiological and psychological differences without implying a hierarchy of difference” whereas equality implies sameness, which is not possible due to the requisite monastic gender binary demands in Vinaya literature (Sponberg 1992: 12). While Sponberg refers to the ways in which women are positioned differently in Buddhist literature, these assumptions also play out within lived monasticism where equality is not same-to-same pairing, but an equivalence that recognizes possibilities in light of differences. As Charles Hallisey notes,

In their reflections on the religious life, Buddhists have affirmed both human equality and human difference. They have, however, generally seen human equality as being of greater spiritual significance—all humans have the capacity of becoming awakened, regardless of their social locations—but of lesser social significance (2001: 113).

While Tsünma Chödrön does not speak directly to the main Buddhist soteriological aim of enlightenment, her response mirrors the soteriological inclusion that Buddhists often emphasize, recognizing spiritual equality in terms of accomplishments while accepting social difference.

While practicing in different communities, a *khenmo* (*mkhan mo*, female monastic scholar) featured in Padma’tsho and Jacoby’s ethnography at Larung Gar Five Sciences Buddhist Academy in eastern Tibet shares a similar response as Tsünma Chödrön on the general topic of equal rights. Whereas Tsünma Chödrön bases her definition of gender equality on results of one’s actions, the *khenmo* also focuses on action: “For all of us, I think the main thing is taking action. If we have done this work, then we don’t need to just talk. I never talk about just words of equality between women and men—I don’t like this, it is not right. Taking action is the main point” (Padma’tsho and Jacoby 2020: 6). In Jue Liang and Andrew S. Taylor’s examination of the *khenmo* program at Larung Gar, a *khenmo* also emphasizes taking action over talking about equality (Liang and Taylor 2020: 241). Liang and Taylor’s interlocutors perceived equality being practiced rather than preached.

<sup>10</sup> Interview 2F—Tsünma Chödrön—March 13, 2018, Bihar.

Although these nuns are living and practicing in regions far from each other, when thinking about gender equality, both emphasize the merit of taking action over talk.

Tsünma Chödrön, however, downplays any notion of male superiority. It is unclear whether this mirrors her own experience, reflects her own cultural sensitivity of talking about women's equality, or signifies the socio-cultural points of difference for a Kinnauri Tibetan nun. Padma'tsho and Jacoby's interlocutors did nuance the ways in which women's lives in rural eastern Tibet were often harder than men's situations. Padma'tsho and Jacoby emphasize that this *khenmo*, while recognizing her own perceptions of women's lower status in eastern Tibet, cautioned that she was not criticizing Tibetans as an ethnic group (Padma'tsho and Jacoby 2020: 5).

Lastly, Tsünma Chödrön also makes a point to challenge loud assertions advocating for gender equality. In this way, she mirrors the language of her spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama. For instance, the Dalai Lama described himself as a feminist during an acceptance speech for an International Freedom Award when he said, "I call myself a feminist. Isn't that what you call someone who fights for women's rights?" He then went on to say, "'some feminists have too much emotion, that I don't like'" (Conniff 2009). This latter aspect speaks to an emphasis upon controlling one's response to afflictive emotions, which in the Buddhist sense impede rather than produce positive results. For instance, in Gampopa's *Ornament of Precious Liberation*, he makes this point by emphasizing the three poisons that impede the path to enlightenment:

Attachment, anger, ignorance, and the actions

To which they give rise are nonvirtue

Nonvirtue brings all the sufferings

And hence all the lower states of existence (Gampopa 2017: 82).

While one may experience anger, how one reacts and responds to anger results in consequences; ideally this emotion remains skillfully redirected rather than outwardly reflected.

The nuances of the Dalai Lama and Tsünma Chödrön's statements reflect an uncomfortable tension this article hopes and attempts to caveat—a danger of falling into Orientalist stereotypes and arbitrary East-West divisions which do not account for the plurality of perspectives that exist in both contexts (Gyatso 2010). As Tsünma Chödrön defines gender equality, she notes, "There is really not much gender equality" (*pho mo 'dra mnyam zhe drags min 'dug*), but she qualifies that this is not a point for argument because the consequences of one's actions become the site for equality to flourish. Equality has significance even if her position may be at odds with a gender-justice and rights-based feminism. She makes a Buddhist argument that underscores the import of *karma* (actions) and their effects rather than a rights-based argument.

An important point to consider is that when I inserted the English term 'feminist' in the middle of the interview, this gave my interlocutor pause. When I shifted into other Tibetan terms, I attempted to account for the valences among these terms when discussing women's issues. As Padma'tsho and Jacoby's research with nuns in eastern Tibet on the topic of gender equality indicate, the Tibetan terms for feminism have different connotations, "but all carry a ring of neologism" (Padma'tsho and Jacoby 2020: 4). Since these terms are not fully integrated into the mainstream, there are numerous Tibetan words for feminism including: gender equality (*pho mo 'dra mnyam*), women's empowerment (*bud med kyi nus stobs*), women's rights (*bu med*



*kyi thob thang*), and feminism (*bud med kyi dbang lugs* and *bud me kyi thob thang 'bthab rtsod*).<sup>11</sup> In exploring these terms, I wanted to think with my interlocutors about the terms for feminism and its pluralities.

### 3.1 Assessing Interlocutors' Definitions

To better comprehend my interlocutors' use and understanding of these terms in their daily lives, I employed open-ended survey questions, hoping these questions created the possibility for dialogue. I requested respondents to write their own definitions of terms, and, subsequently, to answer a follow-up question about the importance of any of these terms in their daily lives. My interlocutors' range of responses for defining the aforementioned terms clarify a spectrum of ideas—positing egalitarian and soteriological ideals of Buddhism, commenting on the applicability or inapplicability of these terms within their daily lives, and speaking within metaphors to emphasize a universal relevance of these terms within Buddhism.

#### 3.1.1 Definitions of Equal Rights

When defining equal rights, some of the nuns' definitions of *pho mo 'dra mnyam* (equal rights) included: “equal rights means rights for everyone” (2A)<sup>12</sup>, “men and women are equal” (2E)<sup>13</sup>, and “women and men are equally similar” (2D).<sup>14</sup> While these responses give a definition of the term, my interlocutors' often clarified how the term itself mirrors Buddhist soteriological inclusivity. For instance, one said, “Generally, equality of the sexes is such that in terms of knowledge and performance, both men and women can achieve these. There is no difference between men and women regarding generating *bodhicitta* [the mind of enlightenment]” (1G).<sup>15</sup> This mirrors Tsünma Chödrön's interview mentioned above. Similarly, this Nepali nun gives a general definition of *pho mo 'dra mnyam* and a particular example to show that the key practice of generating the mind of enlightenment for the benefit of others is not limited by a gendered binary. These notions are also reflective of Buddhism's soteriological inclusivity insofar as enlightenment is an equal access opportunity (Sponberg 1992). Sponberg also highlights the institutional androcentrism in Buddhism, but neither this respondent nor Tsünma Chödrön situate their responses in terms of any limitations of a gendered binary or hierarchy. Instead, they focus upon the results of their actions and practices as intersections for equality (Sponberg 1992).

These responses, among others, situate their understanding of gender equality specifically within Buddhist discourse. For instance, a monk wrote, “we are equal in the sense that both men and women have the eight freedoms and the ten endowments.”<sup>16</sup> Here, he addresses equality on the level of humanness. Precious human existence is the basis for achieving Buddhahood; this rare opportunity cannot be practiced in the realms of gods, demi-gods, animals, hungry spirits, and hell-beings (Gampopa 2017). The eight freedoms refer to being free from the unfavorable states for attaining enlightenment—“a hell dweller, a hungry spirit, an animal, a barbarian, a long-living god, someone with fixed aberrant views, one born in a time without a Buddha, or a person with severe difficulty in understanding” (Gampopa 2017: 25). Of the ten endowments, five are personal and five are other-related. The first five include: “to be human, born in a central land, with complete faculties, free from having committed the worst of actions, and having appropriate trust”; and the latter five

<sup>11</sup> I chose these terms because they were part of the call for papers in a panel titled, “What is ‘Feminism’ in Tibet about?” organized by Nicola Schneider and Hamsa Rajan that I participated in during the 15th International Association of Tibetan Studies Meeting in Paris on July, 11 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Anonymous survey female response 2A, responses written in *umé* (*dbu med*), born 1952, from Western Tibet, HP. Most respondents wrote in a cursive written script. Dorje Choephel rewrote these in *uchen* (*bdu can*) font so that I could read them. Both of us translated these definitions together. *Uchen* is the upright block style of Tibetan script and *umé* describes the cursive forms.

<sup>13</sup> Anonymous survey female response 2E, responses written in English, born 1998, from Kinnaur, HP.

<sup>14</sup> Anonymous survey female response, 2D, responses written in English, born 1999, from Tawang, HP.

<sup>15</sup> Anonymous survey female response, 1G, responses written in *umé*, birthdate not reported, from Nepal, KT. Co-translated with Dorje Choephel.

<sup>16</sup> Anonymous survey male response, 1J, responses written in *umé*, birthdate not reported, from Nepal, UP. Translated by Dorje Choephel.

include, “a Buddha has manifested in the world, the noble Dharma has been taught, the teachings of the noble Dharma are still extant, there are those who follow them, and loving kindness can be developed due to others” (Gampopa 2017: 27). Instead of defining gender equality particularly in terms of their own monastic vows, these interlocutors more generally explored gender equality in Buddhist terms, addressing the inclusive potential of obtaining enlightenment, a soteriological aim which is not precluded by one’s sex.

### 3.1.2 Definitions of Women’s Rights and Women’s Empowerment

Regarding definitions of *bud med kyi thob thang* (women’s rights) and *bud me kyi nus stobs* (women’s empowerment), I concentrate on two Himalayan nuns’ responses because of the instructive interplay between the similarity of their definitions, and how the nuns see the terms’ applicability in their own lives quite differently. Both Tsünma Drölkar (2E), a twenty-year-old from Kinnaur, and Tsünma Yangdön (2D), a twenty-one-year-old from Tawang, reside in the same nunnery, share the same root teacher, and annually attend the Kagyü Mönlam and Arya Kshema. Compare their similar definitions: Tsünma Drölkar wrote, “women’s rights are formulated by women themselves” (2E),<sup>17</sup> whereas Tsünma Yangdön wrote, “women’s rights include whatever women want to do—we must be given freedom”<sup>18</sup> (2D). For *bud me kyi nus stobs* (women’s empowerment), Tsünma Drölkar wrote, “women’s empowerment is progress towards making women more valuable” (2E), and Tsünma Yangdön wrote, “women’s empowerment is women having authority” (2D).

While there are shared valences such as a definitive sense of agency within these definitions, the nuns uniquely depart in how they see these terms applicability in their daily lives. The survey prompts respondents to write an answer to the question, “Are any of these terms applicable in your daily life as a nun?” Tsünma Drölkar (2E) wrote, “I never face these kinds of problems.” Tsünma Drölkar’s response suggests that women’s rights and women’s empowerment are solutions to problems she does not encounter. In this way, Tsünma Drölkar’s response distances the applicability of these terms from her day-to-day life.

So what is relevant for Tsünma Drölkar in her daily life? She responded, “As nuns, we have many more responsibilities than laypeople who are free from these vows.” Previously, she had written that most important for her is “to protect my own vows.” Her vows are a site of ethical cultivation that require care because the monastic community distinguishes itself through holding vows, which require both external and internal conditions. For instance, in one of the great nineteenth-century compendiums on ethics, Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Thayé provides this overview: “Ethical conduct is maintained by reliance on others, purity of mind, recognition of incompatible factors, engagement in the training, and relying on the conditions for living comfortably” (Kongtrül 1998: 98). Monastics like Tsünma Drölkar rely on the external condition of reliance on others which requires following examples of elder monastics and studying with the Dharma. She also has to address internal conditions such as purity of mind which requires conscientiously following precepts, vigilantly examining her own mind, and taking note of shame in response to others’ judgment (Kongtrül 1998). By protecting her vows, she remains vigilant towards the external and internal conditions that sustain the monastic community through her commitment to maintain her vows as professed during her novice ordination.

Although Tsünma Yangdön also wrote about the importance of protecting her vows (2D), she sees the relevance of women’s rights and women’s empowerment quite differently. She wrote, “These terms are applicable in my daily life because gender equality provides the opportunity to do anything.” While Tsünma Yangdön specifically addresses gender equality, her response indicates that all these terms—gender equality,

<sup>17</sup> My interlocutor wrote in English: “Women’s rights headed by women oneself.” I have edited her response as seen above.

<sup>18</sup> My interlocutor wrote in English: “Women’s rights is whatever she want to do, we must be given liberty.” I have edited her response as seen above.

women's rights, women's empowerment, and feminism—have some relevance. She sees the applicability of these terms in her day-to-day life and as particularly relevant for her wish to share Buddhist teachings. She is not making a correlation between gender equality, women's rights, women's empowerment, feminism and sharing Buddhist teachings, but sees sharing the teachings as the most relevant aspect of her life. She writes, "As a nun, I would like to share with you and everyone the Buddha Dharma because it is incomparable with other religions." This is one of Tsünma Drölkar's acts of ethical cultivation. She sees her religious tradition as unparalleled; therefore, she wishes to share her religious tradition out of her concern for others' benefit.

Thus, while these nuns completed the surveys together, chose to write their responses in English, and their definitions share similarities, they perceive the relevance of women's rights and women's empowerment to their lives differently. The overall significance of this divergence suggests their own process of cultural translation regarding the specific questions. First, their divergent views on the applicability of these terms also mirrors how Tsünma Drölkar spoke in terms of her individual practice and Tsünma Yangdön responded in accord with the broader reach of Buddhism. Tsünma Drölkar does not draw correspondence between women's rights or women's empowerment for her practices surrounding her vows whereas Tsünma Yangdön speaks to sharing Buddhist teachings.

Second, their decisions to write in English also marks the multi-layered aspects of cultural translation. I suspect their decision to write in English signifies the shared learning in process and their way of relating to me as a native English speaker interchanging Hindi and Tibetan words throughout our conversations. As Paul Ricoeur notes,

To communicate at the level where we have already conducted the work of translation, with its art of transference and its ethics of linguistic hospitality, calls for this further step: that of taking responsibility, in imagination and in sympathy, for the story of the other, through the life narratives which concern that other (Ricoeur 1996: 6–7).

Thus, in the process of completing the survey, these nuns unnecessarily, but kindly, granted me some linguistic hospitality. English is a third language for these nuns and both are equally fluent in Tibetan and Hindi. Their written responses indicate a beginner-intermediate level of English. As I am also engaged in the process of cultural translation and hope to provide some linguistic hospitality to my reader, I edited their handwritten grammar mistakes, which signifies their and my own shared intention and responsibility of translating this survey for an audience reading in English.

### 3.1.3 Definitions of Feminism

The ways in which my interlocutors engage with the terms *bud med kyi dbang lugs* and *bud me kyi thob thang 'thab rtsod* (feminism) indicate the valences of these terms not only cross-culturally, but also inter-culturally. When defining these terms, interlocutors' responses included: literal definitions of the Tibetan terms, situational aspects of feminism, addressing a common Buddhist notion of kindness regarding all sentient beings as having once been your mother, and foregrounding the conditions of feminism rather than writing a definition.

#### *Literal Definitions*

In defining feminism, a twenty-three-year-old Tibetan monk, Tsünpa Nyima, born in exile and living in a monastery in Uttar Pradesh, wrote what seemed to be a literal definition of feminism: "women are the most powerful" (1H).<sup>19</sup> Here, he seems to be defining the term *bud med kyi dbang lugs* and reflecting its literal meaning: a system of women's power. On the survey, I included two terms. Therefore, he could have been expanding on the primary term I was familiar with for feminism, *bud med kyi thob thang rtsod*, also a compound

<sup>19</sup> Anonymous survey response 1H, responses written in *umé*, male monastic, UP, January 21, 2019. Translated by Dorje Choephel.

term. When broken down, it comprises a formula of a noun, woman (*bud med*), a genitive (*kyi*), with the compound comprised of the noun—rights (*thob thang*) and another noun—debate (*rtsod*). Thus, the compound phrase signifies a women’s rights debate where the final term, *rtsod*, stands out as positing the notion of feminism as possibly oppositional. However, *rtsod pa* is a practice in monastic institutions that develops the tools for liberating wisdom. He and I did not explore the etymological and hermeneutical aspects of this term, rather he made a situational observation about feminism.

*Situational and relational nature of feminism*

One could translate Tsünpa Nyima’s understanding of feminism as a system in which women are most powerful. Another analysis includes thinking along with his other responses, which depict the situational and relational nature of feminism. When he writes, “women are the most powerful,” he could be addressing what he perceives as a generalized efficacy of women due to his understanding of an inherent equality between the sexes. For example, in another response he minimized any gender discrimination within Buddhism and wrote: “As Buddhist followers, we do not need to fight for rights. We have not had discrimination from the beginning.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, between Tsünpa Nyima’s two responses, one demonstrates a belief in an inherent equality between sexes whereas his other defines feminism as a situation in which women are the most powerful.

Minimization of any gender discrimination in present day Buddhist communities also appears in nuns’ responses as well. Consider, Lopön Wangmo, a forty-year old abbess of Sakya nunnery from Arunachal Pradesh telling me about the foundational women’s ordination narrative:

Mahāprajāpatī was the Buddha’s aunt, as we all know. I have read about her since my early studies. Now, we can see Buddhist nuns around the world because Mahāprajāpatī made the honorific request for women to be ordained. Unlike our contemporary moment where women are equal with men when requesting the Dharma, when Mahāprajāpatī made her request, there was no gender equality due to the social environment. As women, she is highly respected by us these days.<sup>21</sup>

Lopön Wangmo’s response signifies what she deems as progress—there are so many nuns in the world today because of Mahāprajāpatī’s first ordination. Her response signifies that these present-day nuns, however, are equal with monks because they do not face discrimination when requesting to become a nun. She did not distinguish between the limitations placed on receiving *gelongma* ordination. Further, when specifically discussing restoring *gelongma* ordination, terms such as feminism or gender equality never surfaced. Instead of asking questions that would have interrupted her narrative and/or felt like an interjection of my own interests, I listened. She said, “In Tibet we only have had one tradition from the beginning, I think the Tibetan *tsünmas* would love to have ordination through the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*; and they wish for a revival of that *gelongma* lineage.”<sup>22</sup> In Lopön Wangmo’s response, she also assumes that nuns would only want *gelongma* vows from the Vinaya most commonly observed among Tibetan monastics. She spoke within a metaphor of fruit juice combinations.

We did not have any other [Vinaya] traditions in Tibet. Importing a new tradition would not be a big problem if it is a flawless ordination. Nonetheless, since in Tibet we only have had one tradition from the beginning, I think Tibetan *tsünmas* would love to have ordination through the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*; and they wish for a revival of that *gelongma* lineage. If practices are in one lineage, it would be nice. Sometimes all fruits are mixed and maybe we get a good juice, but

<sup>20</sup> Anonymous survey response 1H, responses written in *umé*, male monastic, January 21, 2019. Translated by Dorje Choephel.

<sup>21</sup> Interview 22F—Lopön Wangmo, July 28, 2018, Uttarakhand.

<sup>22</sup> Interview 22F—Lopön Wangmo, July 28, 2018, Uttarakhand.

if one tradition mixes with another tradition would be a funny flavor, particularly the ceremony chants!<sup>23</sup>

In this way, she only spoke of restoring *gelongma* ordination in terms of Vinaya lineage, mirroring the language of religious leaders rather than within the valences of feminism. Embedded in her concern of “mixing” traditions is the purest mode for sustaining ethical cultivation. She cares for the tradition through keeping out what risks becoming a “funny flavor.” While she sees room for possible innovation, this is only if and when the broader monastic community considers a dual-Vinaya ordination flawless or speaking within her metaphor, when the right saturation of these different fruit juices combine into a pleasantly delicious flavor.

*“All Sentient Beings Have Once Been Your Mother”*

While Lopön Wangmo is speaking in metaphors about Vinaya, another monk, Tsünpa Ngawang, spoke in metaphors about feminism. Tsünpa Ngawang, a twenty-five year old monk also born in exile, who resides in the same monastery with Tsünpa Nyima, reported that the terms for feminism were not relevant in the daily life of a monk; however, he also wrote that all women are reminders of the great kindness of one’s own mother.<sup>24</sup> Here, this ubiquitous Buddhist metaphor calls to mind metaphor’s work as it “forces conceptual thought to think more” (Maitland 2017: 41). Tsünpa Ngawang is drawing from a standard Mahāyāna meditative technique that on the one hand minimizes all sexual attraction to women that a monk may feel; on the other hand, this is the starting point for cultivating universal compassion—first remembering one’s own mother and her many services on one’s behalf and then expanding upon this to recognize that all sentient beings have been one’s mother at one time or another (Ohnuma 2012). Interestingly, this monk made this link generally to all women rather than universally to all beings regardless of sex and/or gender.

*Conditions of Feminism*

When defining the terms, *bud med kyi dbang lugs* or *bud med kyi thob thang ’bthab rtsod*, some of my interlocutors speak about the conditions which make feminism possible rather than specific definitions. Often my interlocutors sound like anthropologist Saba Mahmood who says, “the political project of feminism is not predetermined but needs to be continually negotiated within specific contexts” (Mahmood 2005: 38). For example, rather than defining the term explicitly, a twenty-five year old Nepali nun living in a monastery in Himachal Pradesh wrote in Tibetan that “feminism has to be practiced in accordance with the culture and rules of a society.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, a twenty year old from Kinnaur at the same monastery responded in English that “feminism must go with traditions.”<sup>26</sup> These are only two out of several examples that echo thinking about feminism within and alongside particular environments. To even write about feminism, the first interlocutor responded in Tibetan indicating she was expressing these nuances within her primary language, whereas the second responded in English, suggesting that she also engaged in a process of linguistic and cultural translation

A senior nun from Tibet wrote in Tibetan that *bud med kyi dbang lugs* “has to be based on rules related to world peace.”<sup>27</sup> Her response, unlike the others, broadens feminism to a global moral imperative but is related to whichever specific rules harbor non-harm and non-violence. Her follow up response indicated, “these terms are relevant in our daily life. Whatever life we should lead, spiritual or not, these are the causes and conditions that help each other live life meaningfully.”<sup>28</sup> She elaborated that, “to sum up anything related with a nun’s

<sup>23</sup> Interview 22F—Löpon Wangmo, July 28, 2018, Uttarakhand.

<sup>24</sup> Anonymous survey response 1K, male monastic written in *umé*, HP, January 21, 2019. Translated by Dorje Choephel.

<sup>25</sup> Anonymous survey response 2B, HP, female monastic, January 21, 2019.

<sup>26</sup> Anonymous survey response, 2E, HP, female monastic, January 21, 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Anonymous survey response, 2A, HP, female monastic, January 21, 2019.

life, my life as a nun has to be more morally disciplined than that of a laywoman. My life is distinguished by the pure vows I have taken.”<sup>29</sup> This particular response, separating apart moral guidelines of monastics, is the strong undercurrent within the majority of interviews and surveys. It speaks to both the efficacy and demands of monastic vows as related to monastic practice.

When thinking about the term ‘feminism’ in Tibetan, considering translation equivalence and its relevance in translation theory is useful. Translation equivalence is “one of the pivotal definitory axes of translation since it functions as a reminder of the central problems a translator encounters” (Panou 2013: 5). The problem is the search for exactness rather than one-to-one parity; it is the search of similarity in the relationship between terms not only in language but also within cultural bounds and context of both languages. Translation theory goes to great lengths to compare the benefits of formal equivalence, a focus on the elements in source language, compared with dynamic equivalence, an emphasis on the relationship of receptor and message equivalence (Barnes 2011). While relevant, most important here is that “the relationship between a translation and its source text is equivalence, and equivalence is realized in terms of shared contextual features” (Malmkjaer 2011: 110). These notions of translation equivalence are also predicated on hermeneutic practice, intersubjective play, and the charitable desire for meaning-making in each interaction (Malmkjaer 2011).

These interlocutors’ definitions of feminism not only represent the nuanced ways they understand feminism, but also indicate a spectrum of meanings and associations with the term—ranging from speaking in Buddhist metaphors about women to the necessity of equality among the sexes. Additionally, many responses work within the language of Buddhism and embed philosophical practices of non-duality and soteriological inclusivity. Having this range of definitions, on the one hand, speaks to the multiplicity of views even among a small sample size; and on the other hand, indicates how widely the differences in usage are for these terms.

#### 4. Aggregating the Terms: Ordination as Pro-Woman

What is the primary take away from the valences of my interlocutors’ definitions? How do these terms come to intersect with questions about restoring *gelongma* ordination and Vinaya? As my interlocutors defined their terms for the valences of feminism, the common ground among these definitions is their pro-woman attitude, an inclusive notion for exploring how nuns and monks define Tibetan terms such as gender equality, women’s rights, women’s empowerment, and feminism. Drawing from Amy Langenberg’s ethnographic work on the “imperfect alliances” between Buddhism and feminism in Nepal and Malaysia and Padma’tsho and Sarah Jacoby’s examination of Buddhism and gender equality in Tibet, in my final analysis, I take up their terms pro-female and pro-woman (Langenberg 2018; Padma’tsho and Jacoby 2020).

A pro-woman attitude, in the way I am defining it based on my analysis of my interlocutors’ responses, does not hold Vinaya or gender equality in opposition. Rather it reflects the necessary, and perhaps uncomfortable, negotiations and compromises nuns and monks make to sustain their celibate Buddhist monastic practices in their communities in India. In this way, I am not attempting to situate my interlocutors’ attitudes as feminist, para-feminist, or anti-feminist, (Langenberg 2018) but emphasizing that their pro-woman attitudes reflect a positive, supportive orientation towards women monastics while accepting the limitations of the gendered binary and hierarchy within Buddhist institutional structures. In an adjacent manner with Padma’tsho and Jacoby’s study of the terms for gender equality among nuns in Tibet, my interlocutors’ own pro-woman attitude is an outgrowth of their Buddhist principles to protect their vows and benefit others (Padma’tsho

<sup>28</sup> Anonymous survey response, 2A, HP, female monastic, January 21, 2019.

<sup>29</sup> Anonymous survey response, 2A, HP, female monastic, January 21, 2019.

and Jacoby 2020: 4). Monastics' responses reflect this pro-woman undertone through defining their means of ethical cultivation within the confines of social differences.

I demonstrate how this pro-woman attitude emerges through the subsequent questions posed in this survey. Then I show how their responses allow for theorizing the possible intersections between monastics' responses about the valences of the terms for feminism and gender equality "in and on their own terms," the relationship with Vinaya, and the question of restoring *gelongma* ordination (Tsomo 2019: 18). On the survey, after monastics defined their own terms, I asked my interlocutors to answer a series of questions based on their definitions for gender equality, women's rights, women's empowerment, and feminism. Before these questions, the first question prompts a yes or no response to, "In your opinion, is whether or not *gelongma* vows are established a Vinaya topic?" (*khyed rang gi bsam tshul la brten pa dge slong ma'i sdom pa sgrub ma sgrub kyi skor la 'dul ba'i gleng gzhi*<sup>30</sup> 'dug gas). I framed all four subsequent questions similarly, exchanging the term Vinaya with gender equality, women's rights, women's empowerment, and feminism. In doing so, I wanted to give space for my interlocutors to express the nuances of feminism and gender equality in light of the question of restoring *gelongma* ordination. In this case study, in a distinctive departure from religious leaders' rhetoric, my interlocutors refute the idea that restoring *gelongma* ordination sits in an oppositional binary as either a legal Vinaya topic or an issue of gender equality. Instead of viewing full ordination as either a Vinaya issue or a feminist concern, my interlocutors' surveys and additional interviews posit a pro-woman attitude that accounts for gender asymmetries in ways that bump up against and may even be uncomfortable within a strictly gender-justice and rights-based feminism. Some monastics' pro-woman attitudes hold a type of revisionist history that holds Buddhism as perpetually egalitarian. Yet, their monastic-type of feminism downplays social differences and, instead, emphasizes that both monks and nuns have equivalent opportunities for ethical cultivation; in fact, many nuns and monks posit that monasticism, despite its gendered limitations, has been and continues to be inherently pro-woman.

#### 4.1 Nuns' and Monks' Perspectives

My interlocutors' responses depart from the religious leaders' binary made between *gelongma* ordination as related to only Vinaya and not approachable from a feminist perspective. Rather than suggesting that *gelongma* ordination is only related to Vinaya or primarily about feminism, monks and nuns' surveys illustrate how the intersection of a gendered limitation (such as women monastics not being able to receive their full vows) becomes a site for ethical cultivation—particularly for "protecting one's vows," "working in service of the Dharma," and/or "sustaining the spiritual bond with one's root guru." I aggregate their close-ended and open-ended responses alongside each other to reveal how these interlocutors avoid denouncing hierarchical systems in favor of working within the asymmetrical negotiations required of monastic conduct. Among survey respondents, 82 percent indicate that establishing *gelongma* ordination concerns the Vinaya, and 63 percent indicate also that this topic relates to the valences of feminism, signifying their pro-woman attitude (Figure 1).

There are several unique aspects to these responses. First, adding together all the feminism-related categories, a strong majority frame *gelongma* ordination as an issue related to women. For this reason, I suggest their attitudes toward restoring *gelongma* ordination are pro-woman. Their answers do not indicate that they are advocating for or against *gelongma* ordination, but they do not set the topic in juxtaposition with Vinaya. They emphasize, instead, women's practices without confining themselves to religious leadership's authoritative discourse, which posits this topic from an either/or position. Second, over half of the respondents indicated that this is a woman's issue within their own definitions of gender equality, women's rights, women's

<sup>30</sup> I believe the Tibetan term *gnad don* would have been a more appropriate term, but realized this post survey.

empowerment, or feminism (Figure 2). I did not juxtapose Vinaya and women's issues as mutually exclusive categories in this survey. Thus, there are overlaps and new puzzles that surface from their responses.

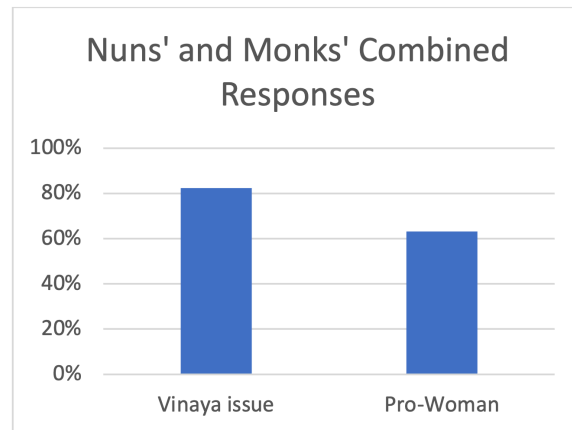


Figure 1: Aggregated data from nuns and monks surveys.

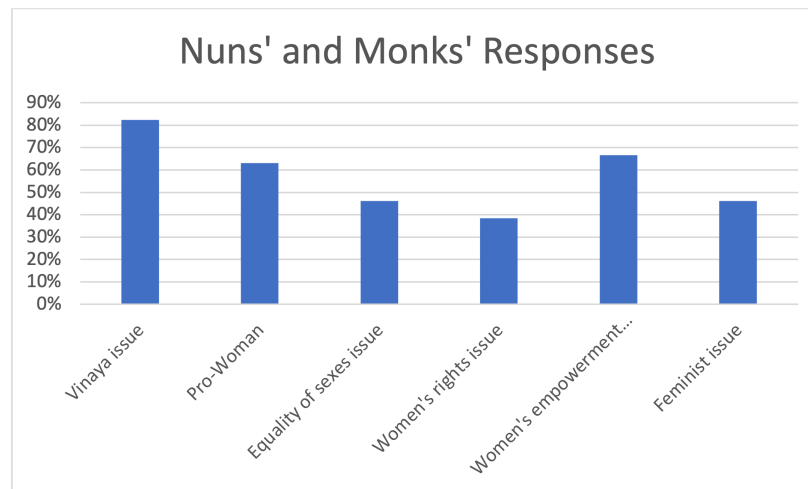


Figure 2: Pro-woman attitudes.

#### 4.1.1 Close-Ended Questions: Overlap and a Puzzle

I consider the overlaps and then a puzzle. Since respondents could indicate that *gelongma* ordination relates or not with Vinaya, gender equality, women's rights, women's empowerment, and/or feminism, the lens of cultural translation helps clarify these differences. It appears that respondents understood these questions in ways I did not initially account for. One quarter of respondents checked this was only a Vinaya issue and had no correspondence with women's issues. These respondents parallel the binary religious leaders establish. The remaining 75 percent of respondents marked that this issue overlapped and indicated "yes," in most categories. These respondents depart from juxtaposing Vinaya and pro-woman terms as it relates to *gelongma* ordination.

The puzzling aspect is this: in what seems to be a distinctive disjuncture with religious leaderships' position, while 82 percent indicated that this was a Vinaya issue, a majority 63 percent also associate it with pro-women terms. I interpret this in two possible ways. First, respondents see this as an issue related to women since, by definition, a *gelongma* is a fully ordained woman monastic. Second, an alternative meaning to this aspect of their responses suggests that respondents see this issue as falling outside of canonical concerns, since there is no evidence of the possibility of a lineage of *gelongma* without the required number of *gelongmas*. While my



survey questions did not accommodate a way to make this type of clarification, an instructive way to mediate between these two positions is to think with one of my interviewees, Tsünma Yangchen. Her response clarifies one way monastic women do not position Vinaya or gender equality in an oppositional binary, but as a topic that merit further investigation by the monastic community.

When I asked, “In your opinion how is *gelongma* ordination related to Vinaya and gender equality?” Tsünma Yangchen, a forty-year old Drikung Kagyü practitioner from Kham, Tibet, who resides in a nunnery in Uttarakhand, commented to me:

As for gender equality, there are many things that men can do that women cannot. It would, however, be nice if women could also do the things that men can do. In regard to discussing *gelongma* ordination in terms of the Vinaya, there is nothing wrong with it. If we examine this through debate, we will investigate and come to know whether or not there really was a genuine ordination lineage of *gelongmas* in Tibet. We can see where the lineage ceased or continued. That would be a good result. But, whatever the result, we still know that there are options in other traditions [like the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*]. We will also come to understand whether or not we can get the ordination vow from another tradition. I do not see these discussions as negative, but rather helpful so we can find a tradition within our own or from another.<sup>31</sup>

In this moment, she neither speaks about hierarchal limitations or exclusions nor does she explicitly speak to the absence of full ordination as evidence of gender discrimination; however, she does comment on the ability of women to have the same opportunities. Later, she also emphasizes her own support of nuns in Theravada traditions who also receive vows in innovative ways, “As a practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism, we do not have the *gelongma* vows, but I personally respect the fully ordained nuns in Thailand and Burma.”<sup>32</sup> In this way, her pro-woman attitude is not confined to monastic women within Tibetan Buddhism. Her nuanced response about gender equality suggests her own pro-woman attitude, which emphasizes continued investigation into the Vinaya by the monastic community for finding resolution into restoring *gelongma* ordination.

I see parallels between Tsünma Yangchen’s perspective with the overlapping responses among my interlocutors. When they indicate “yes,” for all the possible categories, they do not see Vinaya or gender equality, etc. as mutually exclusive or in opposition, but as possible sites for ethical cultivation. To make this leap, I included my interlocutors’ open-ended responses, which downplay social differences in exchange for similarities as a site for ethical cultivation within the confines of celibate Buddhist monasticism.

#### 4.1.2 Open-Ended Questions: Ethical Cultivation

My interlocutors’ responses to open-ended question, “What is the main objective and motivation of being a monastic from your perspective?” (*sku nyid dge ’dun pa zhig yin pa’i cha nas dmigs yul dang kun slong gang yin*) indicate their main objective is ethical cultivation—to protect vows, work in service of the Dharma, and sustain the bond with their teacher (Figure 3).<sup>33</sup> This speaks to my overall argument monks and nuns’ surveys illustrate how the intersection of a gendered limitation (such as women monastics not being able to receive their full vows) becomes a site for ethical cultivation.

These responses indirectly address their pro-woman attitude as they illustrate the necessary obligations my interlocutors promise to hold for the sake of ordination and the continuity of the men and women’s monastic communities. By aggregating these responses with their survey data, I interpolate a connection between

<sup>31</sup> Interview 25F—Yangchen, July 30, 2018, Uttarakhand.

<sup>32</sup> Interview 25F—Yangchen, July 30, 2018, Uttarakhand.

<sup>33</sup> Among my survey respondents, they emphasize ethical cultivation of the following: “protecting one’s vows” (1C, 1D, 1F, 1I, 1K, 1J, 1L, 1N, 2A, 2B, 2E), “working in service of the Dharma” (1A, 1E, 1G, 1H, 1I, 1J, 1N, 1O, 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D), “sustaining the spiritual bond with one’s root guru” (1E, 1I, 2C).

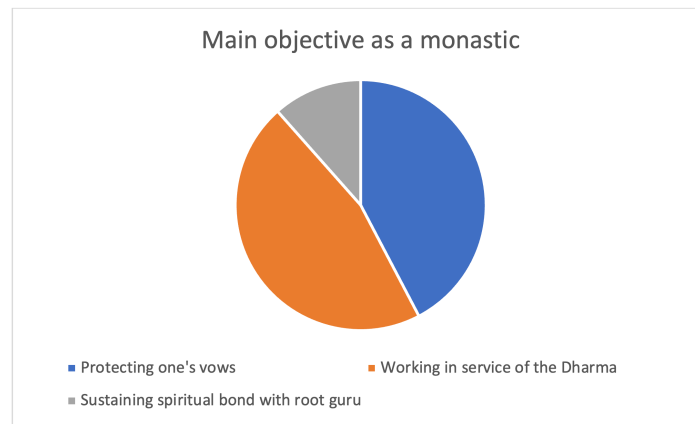


Figure 3: Aggregated data of monastic responses, ethical cultivation.

the mutual obligation that monastics share through their responses: sustaining the connection with their teacher, protecting vows, and working for the Dharma as aspects of their pro-woman attitude. Not only do their responses indicate community norms about their terms of gender equality and feminism, but they also highlight their Buddhist orientation, or the “outgrowths of Buddhist principles taking on new shape” (Padma’tsho and Jacoby 2020: 4).

My interlocutors’ objectives represent their pro-woman attitudes insofar as they speak in a language of an ethical particularism specific for monasticism, established on the generalized rule-based conduct which underlies their vows (Finnegan 2009: 85). Three of my interlocutors designated “sustaining the bond with the teacher” as the most important aspect of sustaining vows. For instance, a Kagyü monk in his mid-forties from Tibet wrote, “I definitely must keep my spiritual commitments with my root teacher from diminishing” (*rang gi tsa ba’i bla ma dang dam tshig ma nyams pa zhig nges par du gdos*).<sup>34</sup> In Dharma terms, progress along the path towards enlightenment *only* occurs with the encouragement and support of “a good Dharma master, who represents the *condition* [for enlightenment]” (Gampopa 2017: 37). This commitment is not limited by gender but by his Buddhist principles. Even though there are unquestionably more monks than nuns as teachers and religious hierarchs, my interlocutors do not dwell upon or even address this absence, instead their primary focus remains these acts of ethical cultivation, like keeping the bond with a teacher or protecting one’s vows.

When my interlocutors write, “protect their vows,” it implies practicing and sustaining their vows within the confines of monasticism’s gender binary. While monastics did not explicitly write about the sexed binary in which monasticism operates, one Geshe (*dge bshes*, academic degree for monks) in his sixties from Kham, Tibet, briefly addressed the necessity to protect vows as a requirement for both nuns and monks:

As for monks and nuns, the most important thing is to protect our vows. In addition to this, studying hard is a bonus. Lay people also have many responsibilities. Unlike them, we do not have similar concerns and responsibilities. So for us, both monks and nuns, to protect our vows and practice is the main responsibility. So I study as much as I can, but practicing the Dharma with secure vows is the most important aspect of being a monk.<sup>35</sup>

Here, he speaks about both nuns and monks, and only speaks about monks when he reflectively speaks about himself. In terms of the surveys, fifty-five percent indicated the importance of “protecting vows” in their written responses. Consider this Kagyü Nepali monk in his twenties who wrote, “protecting my vows well

<sup>34</sup> Anonymous survey, 1E, male monastic.

<sup>35</sup> Interview 5M-GDT–June 11, 2018, Himachal Pradesh.

is the most important [aspect of being a monk].” He also spiritedly responded with a Tibetan play on words by using the term *’dul ba* in three distinctive ways within one sentence. He wrote: “In terms of being a good monastic, we should have an attitude to benefit others. As Jetsun Milarepa realized, ‘I do not know the Sutras of the Vinaya-Dharma with certainty, but when I tame my wild mind, then this is training.’”<sup>36</sup> Here, he uses *’dul ba* to refer to Vinaya, taming, and training. His playful response also expands the way in which this survey did not account for the nuances of what *’dul ba* means. Read holistically, however, the implication of protecting one’s vows begins on an individual level and radiates widely across the monastic community. In this way, protecting vows is central to ethical cultivation since this on-going effort actively remains a shared, community endeavor among the individual monks and nuns and is not limited by the confines of the monastic gender binary.

Lastly, working in service of the Dharma is another practice of ethical cultivation. Geshema (*dge bshes ma*, academic degree for nuns) Jigmé, a forty-year old nun from Tibet, noted in her interview that:

First, our responsibility is to practice the Buddhist Dharma very deeply much like Jetsun Milarepa. Secondly, we teach nuns or women. Monks do not need our help since there are so many *geshes* and *khenpos*. We are all the same. All women. That’s why we help women. As nuns, we have a simple life and we have more time. We don’t look after parents. Lay people have so many problems. They have to look after their children, their spouse, and their parents. That’s why we teach the laity how to practice Dharma and keep good health. We help them.<sup>37</sup>

She clarifies the role of a teacher, the famous singer-saint, Milarepa. She emphasizes the importance of working in service of the Dharma. Here, she centers the role that monastics have as distinctive from the lay community. More than that, she emphasizes nuns’ roles in supporting women; and, she focuses on similarities rather than differences, clearly demonstrating her pro-woman attitude in very specific terms of women helping women. Geshema Jigmé’s response is akin to one of Padma’tsho and Jacoby’s interlocutors who also speaks to what women can do for each other. As she states, “Everyone should esteem each other properly. For women from each culture, whoever does beneficial work, all of us should esteem and support each other” (Padma’tsho and Jacoby 2020: 7). Here, both of these nuns emphasize collaboration as a means of mutual support.

These were not multiple choice responses, but written or spoken interview responses that repeatedly mirrored one another in different contexts. In this way, monastics speak to their practices of ethical cultivation which downplay social differences in exchange for similarities in order to sustain their communities. These commitments to ethical cultivation require “a hierarchal, norm-driven, non-secular space that, to the unreformed liberal secular feminist eye, may appear unliberatory” (Langenberg 2018: 21). Yet, as my interlocutors demonstrate, even if these techniques of ethical cultivation may be at odds with a gender-justice and rights based approach, my interlocutors’ attitudes are pro-woman. In fact, their pro-woman attitudes reflect a positive, supportive orientation towards both women monastics and lay women while accepting the limitations of the gendered binary and hierarchy within Buddhist institutional structures.

#### 4.1.3 Lost in Translation

While my interlocutor’s responses illustrate that the topic of *gelongma* ordination is both a Vinaya and a women’s issue, I also have to account for what is lost in translation in both directions. For instance, one respondent was a thirty-year old Karma Kagyü nun, Tsünma Trinlé who was born in India, was ordained when

<sup>36</sup> Anonymous Survey, IJ, male monastic. (*rang nyid dge ’dun yin pa’i cha nas dge slong bzang po zhig byed dgos pa dang/ phan sems byed dgos sogs/ rje btsun mi la’i shes nas/ chos ’dul ba mdo sde nges mi shes/ rang sems gyong po de ’dul na/ ’dul ba yin/*)

<sup>37</sup> Interview 15—Geshema Jigmé—July 21, 2018, Himachal Pradesh.

she was ten, and received a secular education. She indicated on her survey that she also knows Tibetan, Hindi, and English. She alternated writing her answers in Tibetan and English. Tsünma Trinlé's response on the open-ended questions of the survey are quite informative. She wrote that her motivation is to be mindful to help others (*bzhan la pha na sems byed pa*), and she added that as an ordained monastic, she wished to help all sentient beings (*sems chan thams cad la phan sems byed kyi yin*). In this way, her response falls under the category of “working for the Dharma.”

Unlike my other interlocutors, however, she is the sole respondent who did not define the terms, but wrote that gender equality, women's rights, women's empowerment, and feminism were all necessary (*pho mo 'dra mnyam dgos 'dugs, bud med kyi thob thang dgos 'dugs, bud me kyi nus stobs dgos 'dugs, and bud kyi dbang lugs/bud me kyi thob thang 'bthab rtsod dgos 'dugs* (Figure 4).<sup>38</sup>

12. གཤམ་འཁོད་ཀྱི་ཐ་སྙུང་ནུས་མི་རིགས་ཀྱི་རིག་གཞུང་དང་ ཐ་སྙུང་གནས་སྤྱི་ཚོགས་མི་མཐུན་པའི་ནང་དེ་དག་གི་གོ་དོན་མི་འདྲ་བ་ཡོད།  
 རྒྱུད་ཀྱིས་ཐ་སྙུང་འདི་ནུས་ལ་གོ་དོན་ག་འདྲ་ཞིག་འབྲེལ་བ་ཚོད་བྱེད་དཀ། (Terms are defined differently across cultures and even amongst local communities. How would you define the following?)

མི་མཐུང་མཉམ་(equality of the sexes) ཐོ་ཚོ་འདྲ་མཉམ་དགོས་འདུག།

བྱང་མེད་ཀྱི་ཐོབ་ཐང་། (women's rights) བྱང་མེད་ཀྱི་ཐོབ་ཐང་དགོས་འདུག།

བྱང་མེད་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་ཁྲིམས་ (women's empowerment) བྱང་མེད་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་ཁྲིམས་ཚོད་རྒྱ་འཕྲད་གོ་འདུག།

བྱང་མེད་ཀྱི་དབང་ལྷན་གས། or  
 བྱང་མེད་ཀྱི་ཐོབ་ཐང་འཐབ་ཚོད། (feminism) བྱང་མེད་ཀྱི་དབང་ལྷན་གས་དང་བྱང་མེད་ཀྱི་ཐོབ་ཐང་འཐབ་ཚོད་གཉིས་ཀ་དགོས་འདུག།

13. ཐ་སྙུང་འདི་དག་ཀྱི་བཙུན་མཐུན་མཐུན་མི་ཚའི་ཉིན་རེའི་ནང་འབྲེལ་བ་ཡོད་པའི་ལོ་ལོ་ལོ་ལོ་དཀ། གལ་ཏེ་ཡོད་ཚེ་ཐ་སྙུང་གང་དང་དེའི་རྒྱ་མཚན་འབྲི་རྒྱལ།  
 (Are any of these terms applicable in your daily life as a nun? If so, which ones and why?)

ཡོད།

Figure 4: Survey response 1A, HP.

For the last question, Tsünma Trinlé simply answered with the affirmative “yod” to the question of whether these terms were applicable to her daily life. Her cursory response only generates more questions. Interestingly, she is also one of five respondents who marked “yes” (*dug*) to whether ordination is a specifically feminist issue. Since she alternated between the two languages I used on the survey, it is difficult to know whether something was missing in translation. 46 percent of my respondents answered “yes” to whether *gelongma* ordination is related to feminism and gender equality as they defined it, whereas the majority indicate it is related to women's empowerment and the minority to women's rights. I collapse all these categories together to suggest that these monastics' collective responses illustrate their pro-woman attitude.

## 5. Conclusion

This case study attempts to better discern how nuns and monks outside of religious leadership positions understand restoring *gelongma* ordination as it relates to the monastic code and the valences of feminism in Tibetan terms within gendered, hierarchal systems. Rather than setting Vinaya or gender equality in opposition, my interlocutors' responses indicate a pro-woman attitude that downplays social differences in distinctive ways that are sometimes at odds with a gender-justice and rights-based feminism. Rather

<sup>38</sup> Anonymous survey response 1A, female monastic, HP, January 13, 2019.

than focusing in upon the limitations of gendered hierarchies, these nuns and monks prioritize ethical cultivation through their Buddhist practices: shifting the emphasis of gender equality from a condition to an action, insisting on an egalitarian ideal where monks and nuns have an inherent equality, contextualizing feminism within Buddhist metaphors of motherhood, and explicitly bringing focus to their vows, their teacher and/or being in service to the teachings themselves. As Tsünma Sönam, a sixty-year-old Tsünma from Ngari, Tibet who resides in Himachal Pradesh wrote, “All these terms [gender equality, women’s rights, women’s empowerment, and feminism] are relevant to our daily lives. Whatever life we lead, spiritual or mundane, these are the causes that help us and others lead meaningful lives.”<sup>39</sup>

Future case studies merit closely exploring how the valences of feminism become refined, whether these neologisms become everyday expressions and what resonances they carry within the ongoing conversations about *gelongma* ordination. Given their affirmative responses about restoring *gelongma* ordination as it relates to their own definitions for gender equality, women’s empowerment, women’s rights, and feminism, I interpret my interlocutors’ answers as suggestive of a pro-woman attitude, an inclusive term that accommodates the required negotiations and compromises nuns and monks make to sustain their celibate Buddhist monastic practices in their communities in India. Or as Tsünma Sonam notes, these terms “are the causes that help us and others lead meaningful lives.”

### Author Details

**Darcie Price-Wallace** recently received her PhD in Religious Studies from Northwestern University, where she completed her dissertation on textual narratives and oral histories of ordained Himalayan and Tibetan Buddhist nuns. She teaches at DePaul University in Chicago and trains in the Khyentse Vision Project Training and Internship Program.

### References

- Agsar, Wendy Biddlecombe. 2022. “Karmapa Case Discontinued.” *Tricycle*. <https://tricycle.org/article/karmapa-case-discontinued/>. Accessed November 2022.
- Anālayo. 2016. *The Foundation History of the Nuns’ Order*. Hamburg: Numata Center for Buddhist Studies, Projekt Verlag.
- Asad, Talal. 1986. “The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology.” In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, 141–64. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Barnes, Robert. 2011. “Translating the Sacred.” In *Oxford Handbook of Translation*, edited by Kirsten Malmjaer and Kevin Windle, 37–54. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bell, Catherine. 2001. “Who Owns Tradition? Religion and the Messiness of History.” Santa Clara Lecture, Santa Clara University.
- Clarke, Shayne. 2015. “Vinayas.” In *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, edited by Jonathan A. Silk, 60–87. Leiden: Brill.
- Conniff, Tamara. 2009. “The Dalai Lama Proclaims Himself a Feminist: Day Two of Peace and Music in Memphis.” *Huffington Post*. [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-dalai-lama-proclaims\\_b\\_297285](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-dalai-lama-proclaims_b_297285). Accessed October 12, 2020.

<sup>39</sup> Anonymous survey, 2A, HP, written in *umé*. Co-translated by Dorje Choephel and myself. (*gong gi tha snyad ‘di dag nga tshos’i mi tshe nang nyen re ‘brel ba yod/ de ni chos dang ‘jug rten gang byed kyang mi tshe don dang ldan pa zhiig dgos na/ rang bzhin gyi gzhan la phan pa’i rgyu zhiig red/*)

- Dechen, Lobsang. 2010. "Buddhist Women's Role in the Sangha." In *Dignity and Discipline: Reviving Full Ordination for Buddhist Nuns*, edited by Thea Mohr and Jampa Tsedroen, 207–10. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Engelmajer, Pascale. 2020. "Like a Mother Her Only Child: Mothering in the Pali Canon." *Open Theology* 6: 88–103.
- Finnegan, Diana Damchö. 2009. "'For the Sake of Women, Too': Ethics and Gender in the Narrative of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin -Madison.
- Finnegan, Diana Damchö, and Carola Roloff (Bhikṣuṇī Jampa Tsedroen). 2022. "Women Receive Full Ordination in Bhutan for First Time in Modern History." *Lion's Roar*. <https://www.lionsroar.com/women-receive-full-ordination-in-bhutan-for-first-time-in-modern-history>. Accessed November 2022.
- Gampopa. 2017. *Ornament of Precious Liberation*. Edited by Thupten Jinpa. Translated by Ken Holmes. Sommerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.
- Garling, Wendy. 2021. *The Woman Who Raised the Buddha: The Extraordinary Life of Mahaprajapati*. Boulder: Shambhala.
- Geary, David. 2017. *The Rebirth of Bodhi Gaya: Buddhism and the Making of a World Heritage Site*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Gutschow, Kim. 2004. *Being a Buddhist Nun: The Struggle for Enlightenment in the Himalayas*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Gyatso, Janet. 2003. "One Plus One Makes Three: Buddhist Gender, Monasticism, and the Law of the Non-Excluded Middle." *History of Religions* 43 (Nov. 2): 89–115.
- Gyatso, Janet. 2010. "Female Ordination in Buddhism: Looking into a Crystal Ball, Making a Future." In *Dignity and Discipline: Reviving Full Ordination for Buddhist Nuns*, edited by Thea Mohr and Jampa Tsedroen, 1–21. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Hallisey, Charles. 2001. "Buddhism." In *Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism on the Life of Virtue: What Do We Owe Ourselves?*, edited by Jacob Neusner and Bruce Chilton, 112–34. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth; Thomson Learning.
- Hannah, Michelle. 2012. "Colliding Gender Imaginaries: Transnational Debates about Full Ordination for Tibetan Buddhist Nuns." *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 18, 4: 7–43.
- Hinüber, Oskar von. 2008. "The Foundation of the Bhikkunīsamgha: A Contribution to the Earliest History of Buddhism." In *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University for the Academic Year 2007*, Vol. 11:3–29.
- Je Khenpo, Trulku Jigme Chodrak. 2022. "HH the 70th Je Khenpo Trulku Chodrak's Address on the First Bhikṣuṇī Ordination in Bhutan." Translated by the Translation Office of HH the Je Khenpo. Zhung Dratshang Central Monastic Body of Bhutan.
- Kongtrül, Jamgön. 1998. *The Treasury of Knowledge, Book Five: Buddhist Ethics*. Translated by Kalu Rinpoché Translation Group under the direction Ven. Bokar Rinpoché. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.
- Langenberg, Amy Paris. 2018. "An Imperfect Alliance: Feminism and Contemporary Female Buddhist Monasticisms." *Religions* 9 (6): 190.
- Liang, Jue, and Andrew S. Taylor. 2020. "Tilling the Fields of Merit: The Institutionalization of Feminine Enlightenment in Tibet's First Khenmo Program." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 27: 232–62.



- Mahmood, Saba. 2005. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Mahmood, Saba. 2016. *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Maitland, Sarah. 2017. *What Is Cultural Translation*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Malmkjaer, Kirsten. 2011. "Meaning and Translation." In *Oxford Handbook of Translation*, edited by Kirsten Malmkjaer and Kevin Windle, 108–22. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mohr, Thea, and Jampa Tsedroen. 2010. *Dignity and Discipline: Reviving Full Ordination for Buddhist Nuns*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Mrozik, Susanne. 2009. "A Robed Revolution: The Contemporary Buddhist Nun's (Bhikṣuṇī) Movement." *Religion Compass* 3: 360–78.
- Ogyen Trinley Dorje. 2015. "The 17th Karmapa Discusses Gender Equality and Activism." On Wisdom; Karmapa-Selected Buddhist Talks and Teachings Podcast." <https://wisdomexperience.org/wisdom-podcast/karmapa-vegetarianism-online-education-nuns-ordination/>. Accessed July 6, 2019.
- Ogyen Trinley Dorje. 2019. "Joint Long Life Prayer for Kunzig Shamar Rinpoche's Reincarnation by Ogyen Trinley Dorje and Trinley Thaye Dorje." <https://kagyuoffice.org/joint-long-life-prayer-for-kunzig-shamar-rinpoches-reincarnation/>. Accessed September 1, 2022.
- Ohnuma, Reiko. 2012. *Ties That Bind: Maternal Imagery and Discourse in Indian Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Padma'tsho, and Sarah Jacoby. 2020. "Gender Equality in and on Tibetan Buddhist Nuns' Terms." *Religions* 11: 153, 1–19.
- Panou, Desponia. 2013. "Equivalence in Translation Theories: A Critical Evaluation." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 3 (1): 1–6.
- Ricoeur, Paul. 1996. "Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe." In *Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Action*, edited by R. Kearney, translated by W. Domingo, C. Frielich, and P. McCormick. London: SAGE.
- Roloff, Carola. 2020. *The Buddhist Nuns' Ordination in the Tibetan Canon*. Hamburg: Numata Center for Buddhist Studies.
- Salgado, Nirmala S. 2013. *Buddhist Nuns and Gendered Practice: In Search of the Female Renunciant*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schneider, Nicola. 2012. "The Ordination of Dge Slong Ma: A Challenge to Ritual Prescriptions?" In *Revisiting Rituals in a Changing Tibetan World*, edited by K. Buffetrille, 109–35. Leiden; Boston: Brill.
- Sponberg, Alan. 1992. "Attitudes Toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism." In *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, edited by José Ignacio Cabezón, 3–36. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Trinley Thaye Dorje. 2018. "Joint Statement of His Holiness Trinley Thaye Dorje and His Holiness Ogyen Trinley Dorje." <https://www.karmapa.org/joint-statement-of-his-holiness-trinley-thaye-dorje-and-his-holiness-ogyen-trinley-dorje/>. Accessed September 1, 2022.
- Trinley Thaye Dorje. 2019. "Joint Long Life Prayer for Kunzig Shamar Rinpoche's Reincarnation by Trinley Thaye Dorje and Ogyen Trinley Dorje." <https://www.karmapa.org/joint-long-life-prayer-for-kunzig-sha>

- [mar-rinpoches-reincarnation-by-trinley-thaye-dorje-and-ogyen-trinley-dorje/](#). Accessed September 1, 2022.
- Tsedroen, Bhikṣuṇī Jampa. 2016. “Buddhist Nuns’ Ordination in the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya Tradition: Two Possible Approaches.” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 23: 165–246.
- Tsomo, Karma Lekshe. 1988. *Sakyadhītā: Daughters of the Buddha*. Edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications.
- Tsomo, Karma Lekshe. 2019. “Conceptualizing Buddhism Feminisms and Images of the Feminine.” In *Buddhist Feminisms and Femininities*, edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo, 1–24. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Zangmo, Tashi. 2022. “Gelongma Dampa (Dge Slong Ma’i Sdom Pa): The Blessing of the Bhikshuni Ordination in Bhutan. Buddhist Door Global.” *Buddhist Door Global*. <https://www.buddhistdoor.net/features/gelongma-dampa-dgeslongmai-sdom-pa-the-blessing-of-bhikshuni-ordination-in-bhutan>. Accessed July 2022.