Establishing Lineage Legitimacy and Building Labrang Monastery as “the Source of Dharma”: Jikmed Wangpo (1728–1791) Taking the Helm

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Abstract: The eighteenth century witnessed the continuity of Geluk growth in Amdo from the preceding century. Geluk inspiration and legacy from Central Tibet and the accompanying political patronage emanating from the Manchus, Mongols, and local Tibetans figured prominently as the engine behind the Geluk influence that swept Amdo. The Geluk rise in the region resulted from contributions made by native Geluk Buddhists. Amdo native monks are, however, rarely treated with as much attention as they deserve for cultivating extensive networks of intellectual transmission, reorienting and shaping the school’s future. Therefore, I propose that when we approach Geluk hegemony and their broad initiatives in the region with respect to the school’s intellectual and cultural order and native Amdo Buddhist monks’ role in shaping Geluk history in Amdo and beyond in Tibet. Such a focus highlights their impact in shaping the trajectory of Geluk history in Tibet and Amdo in particular. The historical and biographical literature dealing with the life of Jikmed Wangpo affords us a rare window into the pivotal time when every effort was made to cultivate a vast network of institutions and masters across Tibet. This further spurred an institutional growth of Buddhist transmission, constructing authenticity and authority thereof, as they were closely tied to reincarnation lineage, intellectual traditions, and monastic institutions. In doing so, we also have a good grasp of the creation processes of Geluk luminaries such as Jikmed Wangpo, an exemplar scholar and visionary who faced great opposition from issues with his lineage legitimation at Labrang and among the larger Geluk community.

Keywords: Jikmed Wangpo; Jamyang Zhepa; Labrang; Amdo; Geluk School; transmission; reincarnation

1. Introduction

Modern scholarship already addresses Geluk developments in Amdo in the eighteenth century, emphasizing the significant political patronage and Central Tibetan influence and the agency of Amdo Geluk Buddhists. Still, an understanding of this era remains limited given that it is impossible to know exactly how Amdo’s mega-monasteries, such as Labrang, fostered Buddhist intellectual and cultural heritage and growth and interacted or competed with fellow Geluk institutions and communities in the region and beyond. As part of a multifaceted relationship between Labrang and other Geluk monasteries in Amdo and elsewhere, it is important to examine the intellectual initiatives led by Konchok Jikmed Wangpo (hereafter Jikmed Wangpo), resulting in Labrang’s rise as a major center for Geluk transmission in eighteenth-century Amdo. The unusual expansion of the influence of Labrang and Jikmed Wangpo’s lineage in the region meant that the status quo of the religious and intellectual climate was contested, renegotiated, and reshaped.

Although the factionalism at Labrang was disruptive to its monastic community, ironically, Jikmed Wangpo’s taking of the helm at the Labrang Monastery may have inaugurated the heyday of the same monastic establishment that initially resisted him. Indeed, Jikmed Wangpo was a Buddhist visionary credited with initiating significant developments at
Labrang Monastery though he was also instrumental in fostering institutional developments in Tibet’s larger Geluk community. He embarked on a series of institutional building projects both at Labrang and in the surrounding region. Several monasteries offered Jikmed Wangpo their estates and lay communities, and Konchok Tenpa Rabgye would claim that Jikmed Wangpo was responsible for running a network of nearly 40 monasteries (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, p. 375). During Jikmed Wangpo’s tour to Tsayu Monastery (tsa yu dgon pa), while giving an inauguration speech to mark this occasion, he declared that “[...] although all the monasteries, large and small, in the region are not officially satellite monasteries, they are so technically as they exist in dependence on Labrang as [their] foundation [...]”.

Moreover, he made an explicit agenda that envisioned a vast network of monastic institutions that would follow the orthodoxy of ritual pedigree emanating from Labrang (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, p. 390), of which he was the vanguard. At Labrang, he spearheaded a series of institutional initiatives throughout his eventful career. Labrang’s developments included creating strict monastic rules, a rigorous curriculum and examination system, a printery and a library holding massive textual collections, lineages of scholastic and ritual orthodoxy, and a summer retreat institution and economic support systems for monastic populations and rituals.

In 1773, three decades after the enthronement of the young Jikmed Wangpo, monastic enrollment peaked, and the central assembly hall at Labrang (supported by 80 pillars) did not have the seating capacity for the increasing enrollment of monks. Thus, the scaled-up assembly hall commenced construction (ibid., p. 229). Also, at that time, because of Jikmed Wangpo’s scholastic focus, he ensured that most of the monks enrolled in the scholastic college. It is explicitly recorded in the biography that he limited enrollment to 211 monks at Tantric College and 151 at Kalachakra College, thus implying the disproportionate size of the scholastic college.

Later at Labrang, Gungthang Tenpe Dronme indicates that his transmissions of most of his own collected works were attended by over a thousand monks. It does not suggest that any other monks from outside Labrang were present, and it is tempting to consider this figure as a rough measure of the monastic population at Labrang Monastery (ibid., p. 259). It puts into perspective the extraordinary size of Labrang as a mega-monastery, dwarfing Rongwo, another regional monastery, which had a monastic population of merely 180 monks during the abbatial office of Rongwo’s charismatic leader and Jikmed Wangpo’s tutor, Khenchen Gedun Gyatsho (mkhan chen dge ‘dun rgya mtsho, 1679–1765).

This article will examine the significance of transmission lineage and networks for mapping out the Geluk School’s religious history of in Amdo. I endeavor to do this by focusing on the life of Jikmed Wangpo; specifically, the role transmission lineage played in his upbringing as the legitimate successor to Jamyang Zhepa and in building his successful career as a model for the Buddhist scholarly community. Jikmed Wangpo’s legitimacy seems largely dependent on his role as keeper of the transmission of teachings from Jamyang Zhepa and being as formidable a scholar as his predecessor. Other factors such as his personality, enlightened visions, magical displays, and the religious and political influences of his clan are discussed to a much lesser extent across the source materials.

Within the restraints of this space, I will map out a network of Buddhist masters who were sources for these teachings passed down from Jamyang Zhepa.

This paper seeks to consult the relevant sources to reconstruct the historical contexts where Jikmed Wangpo’s receipt of lineage transmission was invaluable to his legitimacy as the rebirth of Jamyang Zhepa. Beyond concerns of legitimacy, Jikmed Wangpo embarked on a long campaign to widely seek textual and oral transmissions in Tibet so as to rebuild Labrang Monastery as a central Geluk transmission hub. The transmissions he sought were believed to be rare in Central Tibet and even more so in his native Amdo. His keen interest in a broad pursuit of transmissions and his growth as an unrivalled scholar in his own right convinced his peers that he was the legitimate reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa.

My examination of Jikmed Wangpo’s central role in the Geluk transmission lineage in Tibet and the closely related issue of his legitimation is mainly based on the study
of his biography (Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me 1990) and Amdo’s religious history (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982) by Konchok Tenpa Rabgye (dkon mchog bstan pa ra rgyas, 1801–1866). This study also benefits greatly from a thorough examination of two major unstudied textual sources: Jikmed Wangpo’s Records of Teachings Received (gsan yig) and the biography of his tutor Khenchen Gedun Gyaltsen (Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan [1764] n.d.), who played a significant role in Jikmed Wangpo’s scholastic career.

There are a number of publications on Buddhist lineage transmission history in Tibet, most of which focus on the records of teachings received and are only useful for introducing a general audience to the formulaic text structures, genre requirements, technical language and providing overviews of well-known works in the genre. Additionally, there is considerable scholarship attending to the topic of legitimacy in the Nyingma and Geluk schools of Tibetan Buddhism. For example, David Germano describes the Nyingma lineage succession, proposing that lineage accounts were created to legitimize lineages within the Nyingma School, whose transmission authenticity was challenged from new translation schools (Germano 2012). Janet Gyaltsen is the first to thoroughly study the issue of legitimation and details the carefully managed discursive strategy in the Nyingma School’s treasure tradition. Many articles on the Tibetan Buddhist reincarnation institution disproportionately centers the preincarnation lineage pedigree for the majority of reincarnates in establishing their religious success and legacy, without paying attention to the significance of religious transmission in their careers. It is also worth noting that in Sangseraima Ujed’s dissertation, which is based on the study of Zaya Pandita’s Records of Teachings Received, four mediums for establishing religious authority are identified: ancestral lineage; reincarnation lineage; transmission lineage; and master–disciple lineage. Ujed points out that there is an overlap in the latter two mediums and occasionally with the latter three (Ujed 2017, pp. 180–89). Each of these power venues still requires an in-depth exploration with attention to their sociohistorical context. In the Culture of the Book in Tibet, Kurtis Schaeffer references the cultural importance of oral transmission being highly valued over textual transmission in the Tibetan Buddhist world, alluding to the long-standing tensions between oral and textual mediums (Schaeffer 2014, pp. 1–3). However, his monographic study is entirely devoted to textual practices at major Buddhist centers across Tibet from the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries.

Currently, not much is known about the peculiarities of transmission lineage’s historical or social implications in Tibet at a particular moment in time and space; there is only a generic image of the historical context where discursive authority is raised and explored. Our limited understanding of the past is exacerbated partly due to the dearth of sources dealing with the intellectual and cultural histories of early modern Tibet. This study aims to reconstruct the central role that Jikmed Wangpo played in the intellectual and institutional developments of the Geluk School in general, and more precisely, the Labrang Monastery, and deal with such matters in concrete social terms, giving appropriate attention to inspiration and constraints of larger political and religious trends in Tibet.

In contrast to the previous scholarship on Tibet, the present study brings the oral transmission of the Geluk School with its accompanying discursive practices of authenticity and authority front-and-center. It situates the question firmly in its sociopolitical and religious matrices. In Jikmed Wangpo’s biography—and despite its misogynistic attitude—the following verse aptly describes the primacy of oral tradition and its pedigree, as Gungthang Tenpa Dronme (gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me, 1762–1823) emphasizes the distinction of transmissions Jikmed Wangpo collected on his long campaign:

Knowledge learned through books;
Not learned from the masters;
Is like a pregnant woman who is a prostitute;
Which is an unpleasant sight among the crowds.
The above verse indicates the primacy of the master-disciple relationship, and by extension, continuity and immediacy inherent in the oral transmission at the center of discursive practices of lineage authority and legitimation. By contrast, transmission by text is regarded as stripping off the bond with a master and rendering the loss of immediacy in a spiritually intimate relationship.\textsuperscript{17} While noting the prevalence of rhetorical strategy with regard to spiritual authenticity and authority, the strong notion of rhetorical power surrounding the oral lineage should not preclude us from exploring the rich oral culture of Buddhist transmission that has continued into the twenty-first century. Treating oral lineage entirely as a rhetorical tool presupposes that we find the content of teachings beyond the rhetoric form of orality only in the textual form. Frequently, it is forgotten that textual and oral transmissions go hand in hand, that textual lineage is animated and intertwined with oral instructions in an ongoing process of creative interpretations. This partially explains the continuous and increasing amounts of commentaries orally transmitted, then put into writing.

In most cases, teachings were orally transmitted, then scribed as notes and eventually compiled into a collection of works, near or proceeding the end of a master’s life.\textsuperscript{18} There were instances where oral transmissions were the benchmark against which earlier manuscripts or print versions were cross-checked to produce authoritative block prints (‘Jigs med rigs pa’i blo gros 2007, p. 470). In the present work, my case study of the Geluk School transmission is a testimony to its component of rich and vibrant oral lineage and culture, existing alongside textual traditions in eighteenth-century Tibet. Within the context of discussing the religious career of Jikmed Wangpo initiating a pivotal moment of Geluk history in Tibet, I argue for the close interaction between religious transmission, discourse, reincarnation legitimacy, scholarly tradition, and ritual institution. The detailed investigation of these forces’ intersections helps us look more closely into social, religious, and intellectual implications in concrete terms of the network of Tibetan Buddhist masters, institutions, and transmission.

First, to establish the significance of historical and social milieu, this study identifies the unusual frequency of instances where Jikmed Wangpo’s reincarnation legitimacy was called into question, delaying his identification and subsequent enthronement at the Labrang Monastery. Second, I provide a brief yet important analysis regarding Jikmed Wangpo’s co-option of criticism and resistance against his religious authority. Jikmed Wangpo does this by emulating and “becoming” Jamyang Zhepa, in part because of the social expectations of him. Part three and four of this work are devoted to discussions that map a wide network of transmissions that are crucial for galvanizing Jikmed Wangpo’s reincarnation status, religious authority and the vibrant intellectual lineage that he recreated and propagated at Labrang and beyond. In the fifth section, I offer a brief discussion of textual and ritual tradition and a program of non-Buddhist arts initiated by Jikmed Wangpo, further consolidating his lineage and Labrang as “the source of dharma” in Konchok Tenpa Rabgye and Gungthang Tenpe Dronme’s term,\textsuperscript{19} and the learning center of non-Buddhist cultural traditions. Finally, I note the peculiar context of the eighteenth century and the narrative function and rhetoric embedded in the main biographical source at our disposal. Possibly, they affect perceptions of the intellectual and religious history of eighteenth-century Tibet, especially the intellectual legacy extending from Jikmed Wangpo’s outstanding career.

2. Controversy Surrounding Lineage Identification

Reincarnation lineage claims and legitimacy were constantly contested, negotiated, and reaffirmed throughout the Tibetan Buddhist world, and the identification processes in Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama lineages were no exception. Rather, they were especially prone to disputes with rival religious and political groups.\textsuperscript{20} Jikmed Wangpo’s contested legitimacy is an example of such controversy. In our main sources, the issue of Jikmed Wangpo’s legitimacy as Jamyang Zhepa’s reincarnation seems to resurface several times. We might conclude that given the frequency of doubt, Jikmed Wangpo’s efforts and in-
sistence on receiving the transmission originating from Jamyang Zhepa can be better understood in terms of its significance in building up his status as Jamyang Zhepa’s legitimate successor. I will therefore explore numerous historical contexts where his legitimacy appears to be contested, as it is imperative for justifying his receipt of teachings passed down from Jamyang Zhepa.

Preincarnation lineage accounts are a permanent fixture in the Tibetan Buddhist biographical literature. It seems to be the case that the efficacy of lineage charts significantly helped to establish the reincarnates’ authority and influence. However, Jikmed Wangpo’s biography is an anomaly in that his preincarnation account is absent. It is hard not to wonder why this was the case for a major reincarnation lineage lama such as him. This is likely because Jikmed Wangpo composed the preincarnation lineage account of his predecessor, Jamyang Zhepa, and by extension, his own preincarnation lineage account (Dkon mchog ’jigs med dbang po 1999d). In fact, assertions of his preincarnation are futile, as there was a rival claimant to the same successorship. Hence, further effort was required of Jikmed Wangpo; he had to prove the qualities that he would share with his immediate preincarnation.

After Jamyang Zhepa’s death, disagreements ensued over his reincarnation. On one side was the first Se Ngawang Tashi (bse ngag dbang bkra shis, 1678–1734), on the other was Detri Lozang Dondrup (sde khris blo bzang don grub, 1673–1746), commonly known as Detri Rinpoche (sde khris rin po che), both of whom were close disciples of Jamyang Zhepa. While Ngakwang Tashi, after a short stint as a monastic disciplinarian, served as abbot and headteacher for many years until his death, Detri Lozang Dondrup was the treasurer. Detri Lozang Dondrup and Queen Namgyel Drolma (rnam rgyal sgrol ma, u.d.) supported Jikmed Wangpo’s candidacy, whereas the first Se Ngawang Tashi advocated for Ganden Samdrup (dga’ ldan bsam ‘grub, u.d.), a prince of Qinwang Tshewang Tendzin (tshe dbang bstan ‘dzin, r. 1699–1735), to be the successor.

Due to intense conflict, neither candidate was enthroned, and the successor’s place was left vacant for some time. Only after the death of Ngakwang Tashi, did Detri Lozang Dondrup prevail by having sixteen-year-old Jikmed Wangpo enthroned at Labrang in 1743. A critical sign calling Jikmed Wangpo’s legitimacy into question was the rebellious nature of the factionalist monks, which did not dissipate even when the mature Jikmed Wangpo was at the helm of the Labrang Monastery. The intensifying conflict led to the permanent departure of the second Se Ngakwang Jamyang Tashi (bse ngag dbang ’jam dbyangs bkra shis, 1738/39–1813), Se Ngawang Tashi’s reincarnation, from Labrang (See pp. 8–9 in the present work; Nietupski 2011, pp. 126–27).

Next, I will present numerous occasions where Jamyang Zhepa’s status as the successor was at stake. Jikmed Wangpo’s uncle Tonkhor Sonam Gyatso (stong ’khor bsod nams rgya mtsho, 1684–1752), himself an influential lama with an illustrious reincarnation lineage, recognized Jikmed Wangpo as the rebirth of Jamyang Zhepa. Tonkhor Sonam Gyatso consulted dharma protectors in Central Tibet about whether he should have kept the identification of Jikmed Wangpo a secret. The consultation said that it was fine in the short term, but it did not look good in the long term. Word eventually reached the Mongol Queen Namgyal Drolma. Jamyang Drakpa (’jam dbyangs grags pa, u.d.), a disciple of Rongwo’s major lama, Jamyang Lodro (gzer gshong ’jam dbyangs blo gros, 1651–1733), visited the urge (U rge), the qinwang’s administrative office, and the queen disclosed that she regularly prayed for the reincarnation’s birth. She had many lamas, including Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, perform rituals for Jamyang Zhepa to reincarnate quickly, and to that purpose, she undertook a regimen of recitation. However, there was no sign of his successor’s rebirth. Jamyang Drakpa tried to console her and told the queen about Tongkor Sonam Gyatso’s (stong skor bsod nams rgya mtsho, 1684–1752) visit to Yershong Monastery. During that visit, Tongkhon Sonam Gyatso mentioned a potential candidate being born to his brother. When Jamyang Drakpa said he was confident that the candidate was the true
successor based on the description of the signs by Tongkhor Sonam Gyatso, the queen was “infinitely delighted much like a peacock who had heard thunder.”

Following this lead, the queen secretly investigated the potential candidate with an extended, secret visit near Nangra (snang ra)—Jikmed Wangpo’s birthplace (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, pp. 28–29). Although the queen and Detri Lozang Donrup supported Jikmed Wangpo’s candidacy, he could not go to Labrang until he turned sixteen because of intense opposition to his candidacy. Unfortunately, Jikmed Wangpo’s Mongol supporter Queen Namgyal Drolma passed away the year before his entry to Labrang, and did not live to witness his eventual enthronement (ibid., p. 43).

When Jikmed Wangpo eventually travelled to Labrang for his enthronement, Detri Lozang Dondrup issued an official decree mandating that Jamyang Zhepa’s students, who were not residing at Labrang, be present (ibid, p. 45). Ngakwang Tenzin (ngag dbang bstan ’dzin, u.d.), a disciple of Jamyang Zhepa at Labrang, was appointed as young Jikmed Wangpo’s tutor (ibid., p. 51). When Jikmed Wangpo trained with his debate partners, they were amazed by his skills and were “terrified” (shin tu ’jigs zhum pa); it was as if they were debating the deceased Jamyang Zhepa (ibid., p. 51).

At one point, Detri Lozang Dondrup and his tutor tested Jikmed Wangpo, asking him to recognize his predecessor’s copies of treatises and he was able to identify many of them without mistakes (ibid., p. 52). Detri Lozang Dondrup could not be more pleased, and the tutor was moved to tears. Later, as requested, Jikmed Wangpo successfully composed a poem praising Tsongkhapa, befitting Jamyang Zhepa’s reincarnation (ibid., p. 53).

At age 18, Jikmed Wangpo was taught poetry and language arts under Ngawang Jamyang (ngag dbang ’jam dbyangs, u.d.), who served as a chef (gsol dpon) and was a scholar previously trained under Jamyang Zhepa (ibid., p. 46). Given his remarkable progress, the tutor praised him as “the true reincarnation of the all-knowing predecessor”. Here, his identification as Jamyang Zhepa was not actually in question, yet the fact that his tutor uttered such a remark two years after his enthronement at Labrang suggests that his reaffirmation of Jikmed Wangpo as the true successor of Jamyang Zhepa may well have been pertinent. Later, when Jikmed Wangpo returned home for his father’s funeral, Jamyang Gyatso (’jam dbyangs rgya mtsho, u.d.), likely from the Lamo Dechen Monastery (la mo bde chen dgon pa), advised Jikmed Wangpo. He pleaded, “as a reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa, if you miss the opportunity to train in sutra and tantra in the Central Land, it is a misfortune for Buddhism. You must go at any cost”. Possibly, Jikmed Wangpo took such requests to heart, and perceiving the high expectations for him to be as well established a scholar as his predecessor, he studied intensively for the rest of that year. When he narrowly passed the examination on the perfection of wisdom teachings, Jikmed Wangpo was even more convinced that he should go and study in Central Tibet for intellectual refinement (ibid., p. 66).

When Jikmed Wangpo prepared to visit for extended training in Central Tibet as an adult monk, many at Labrang opposed his plan. As a result, serious discussions ensued about whether he should travel to Central Tibet that year or at all. Some senior monks pointed to the Geluk division that might still prevail, dating back to its origin during the life of his predecessor Jamyang Zhepa and voted against it. Some thought he should go but cited political chaos in Central Tibet as the main reason for stopping his plan (ibid., p. 75). Puntshok Tendzin (phun thogs bstan ’dzin, u.d.), a disciple of Jamyang Zhepa, warned that Jikmed Wangpo should be cautious with his diet, as poisoning was a common assassination strategy in Central Tibet. Jikmed Wangpo explicitly connected his journey to the legitimacy of his reincarnation, dismissing fears by saying, “if I am the reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa, I will not be burnt by poisoning”. As the challenges to his legitimacy grew, Jikmed Wangpo’s extended stay and training in a significant monastic learning center seems to be necessary for establishing himself as the legitimate successor to Jamyang Zhepa. Further, and even more importantly, it would have established his status as an intellectual


genius on a par with his predecessor—something that Jikmed Wangpo probably realized too (see p. 10 in the present work).

Circumstances surrounding the Achok Demo Thang Monastery’s (a mchog bde mo thang) founding are major indicators that Jikmed Wangpo’s legitimacy was still in question in 1759, the year he returned to Amdo following eight years of monastic education at Gomang College at the Drepung Monastery. This monastic foundation is a testimony to an era of aggressive power growth for Labrang in the region. The monastic foundation was traced to a prophecy that the third Panchen Lama Palden Yeshe (pdal ldan ye shes, 1738–1780) revealed to Jikmed Wangpo regarding the future monastery. When Jikmed Wangpo resided at Khyungtse (khyung rtse), the local lama Ngago Ponlop (rnga rgod dpon slob, u.d.) and local ruler Zhakdor Bum (phyag rdor ‘bum, u.d.) visited him, and Jikmed Wangpo announced his plan to build a monastery in the area. Later, at Labrang, Jikmed Wangpo sent for Mutu Ponlop (mu to dpon slob, u.d.), Ngago Ponlop and Zhakdor Bum (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, p. 597); before meeting with Jikmed Wangpo, Zhakdor Bum suggested that they would prostrate only once. During the meeting, Jikmed Wangpo started discussing the issue of founding a new monastery and Zhyakdor Bum objected, “for us, each of the clan has a small monastery, therefore, there is no need for founding a new one. There is also no point for you to exert your power”. Jikmed Wangpo rebuked, “up to Oka (‘ob kha) in Chone (co ne) is my [domain], therefore, your [domain] is mine too”. Zhakdor Bum abruptly walked out without offering a definitive answer. The two lamas, Mutu Ponlop and Ngago Ponlop, also followed him by exiting the meeting. It seems that Zhakdor Bum was a local secular leader powerful enough to swing the decision out of Jikmed Wangpo’s favor. Later, however, the two lamas were successfully convinced to comply with the request from Jikmed Wangpo, as the latter claimed that the creation of a new monastery was purely for the sake of dharma. Jikmed Wangpo also threatened that doing otherwise would trigger negative rumors, making them the subjects of public criticism. However, right before the deal was reached, Konchok Tenpa Rabgye records an important dialogue between Zhakdor Bum and the fifth Kirti Lozang Tenpe Gyaltsen (kirti blo bzang bstan pa’i rgyal mtshan, 1712–1777). Zhakdor Bum defended his decision by saying, “it is also said that the middle one in the all-knowing [lineage] is the reincarnation of the [first] Detri [Rinpoche]. If not Jamyang Zhepa, founding [the monastery] is not allowed”. Kirti Lozang Tenpe Gyaltsen responded, “there are three reincarnations of Jamyang Zhepa. There is a fully ordained one. It is His Eminence Jikmed Wangpo. There is a king. It is Emperor Qianlong. Lastly, there is one who is neither lama nor lay tantric Buddhist”. Zhakdor Bum was excited and anxious to learn the third identity, to which Kirti Rinpoche responded, “that one may be biting the chest meat of a pig at this very moment”. As Konchok Tenpa Rabgye rhetorically suggests, the humor here intended to clarify that Jikmed Wangpo was, indisputably, the reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa. Since Kirti Lozang Tenpe Gyaltsen visited Zhador Bum’s home, there is some indication that Jikmed Wangpo orchestrated the meeting to obtain consent and support from Zhyakdor Bum.

From above, it is evident that Zhakdor Bum had reservations that Jikmed Wangpo was the heir to Jamyang Zhepa’s reincarnation line. However, Kirti Lozang Tenpe Gyaltsen brokered, and, as it turns out, successfully convinced him of Jikmed Wangpo being the successor of Jamyang Zhepa. Consequently, the monastery was founded towards the end of the same year, resulting from several small monasteries in the area merging. Its enrollment of over 600 monks evidences the success of this new monastery (ibid., p. 598). Additionally, due to Zhakdor Bum’s advocacy, Jikmed Wangpo had to build a scholastic college there, adding to the two existing colleges. Jikmed Wangpo’s previous plan to establish a Kalachakra college as instructed by the Panchen Lama was thus aborted (ibid., p. 599).

1760 marked one year since Jikmed Wangpo returned from Central Tibet. That year, he initiated a series of institutional developments at Labrang and in the greater Amdo region.
Two years later, major conflict erupted at Labrang, indicating the ongoing factionalism and contestation of Jikmed Wangpo’s legitimacy as Jamyang Zhepa’s successor and his leadership role at Labrang. Before the conflict, there was a dispute with a faction of monks, some of whom were truant, flouting their studies and choosing to gather elsewhere. Abbot Lozang Nyandrak (blo bzang snyan grags, 1718–?), who served between 1761 and 1767 as the thirteenth successor in the abbatial lineage, knew about the faction in the monastery but failed to mitigate it. Shortly after the conflict, Lozang Nyandrak received an appeal from the faction, and he surrendered it—the content of which was never revealed—to Jikmed Wangpo; however, we know that upon reading it, Jikmed Wangpo was furious. Jikmed Wangpo responded by reassuring Lozang Nyandrak that he would retain his teaching duties and instructed that the abbot revert to his state of ignorance regarding the monks’ improper behaviour. This anecdote suggests that Jikmed Wangpo’s leading the scholarly community at Labrang remained contested and protested, indicating that a large portion of the Labrang monks were noncompliant with his leadership, fueled by ongoing speculation about the legitimacy of Jikmed Wangpo’s reincarnation (ibid., p. 372).

Later, when the obstinate monks gathered, their names were recorded and the faction’s leaders, including Arik Kukye (a rig sku skye, u.d.), Hortsang Rikma (hor gtsang rig ma, u.d.), and Gyazai Lama (rgya bza’i bla ma, u.d.), were captured. The same night, three hundred factionalist monks fled capture at Labrang. When Arik Kukye was punished by latik (la thigs), these monks returned and attempted to break him out of imprisonment, failing thrice, succumbing to capture on the final attempt. Arik Kukye was later released and apostatized to the Rongwo Monastery. The majority of factionist monks went on to appeal to the urge for pardon. At that point, Jikmed Wangpo lamented that the monastic community was embroiled in factional struggles during his entry and enthronement at Labrang, and thus explaining his subsequent efforts and attempts to regulate and equally distribute monastic positions and improve relations in the monastery. Some of the monks whom Jikmed Wangpo interrogated say that the dispute over his succession was the catalyst for the division in the Labrang community, while others claim that they were protesting the young reincarnation of Detri Rinpoche, who did not want to serve as the abbot. The outcome of the appeal was unclear, but in his religious history of Amdo, Konchok Tenpa Ragye implies that conflict between the two sides was successfully resolved.

The full-blown crisis within Labrang was a long time coming. In 1760, Jikmed Wangpo appointed the second Se as the abbot of Labrang Monastery, a position he held temporarily before leaving Labrang permanently. Soon the tension rose at Labrang between the factions when the second Se stepped down as abbot, and he was punished with performing ritual services. Aware of how the second Se was treated, the Se clan ruler based in Rebong, appealed to Qinwang Ngakwang’s (ngag dbang) father Besu (be su) about the mistreatment, who summoned both Jikmed Wangpo and the second Se. According to the second Se’s biography (Blo bzang bkra shis rab rgyas n.d., p. 25), he was accused of five wrong-doings by Jikmed Wangpo, justifying the punishment the latter dispersed. Such wrong-doings included the second Se’s lack of courtesy towards messengers from Central Tibet and China; expelling a monk against Jikmed Wangpo’s will; his predecessor’s refusal to recognize Jikmed Wangpo as the true reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa; leaving abbatial office at his will; and instructing the Khagya clan ruler to worship a particular protector. As expected, Jikmed Wangpo’s influence dominated the mediation process, so the meeting was a total failure. Later, the monks who supported Jikmed Wangpo defiled the residence of the second Se, who, along with several others, were forced to flee. After their escape, monks broke into the residence and slashed the second Se’s shoes with knives, and they looted images of sixteen sthaviras and other religious objects, dumping them in the nearby river. The monks’ sacrilegious behaviour angered the communities of Namla (gnam lha), Rongar (rong ngar), and Khagya (kha gyi), who would soon support the second Se’s transition to Terlung Monastery (gter lung dgon pa). Terlung was a modest-sized monastery with an assembly hall and limited residential quarters, which was later expanded as the
second Se made it his main seat. After this series of events, Jikmed Wangpo and the second Se never met in person again.

Jikmed Wangpo’s life is often read and appreciated as a straightforward success story of Buddhist leadership and intellectual prominence. However, the series of events discussed above indicates that his legacy was subject to major upsets, especially as it pertains to his legitimacy and leadership being contested within the Labrang and local patron community. This might explain the opposition to Jikmed Wangpo’s projects at Labrang, his aggressive leadership role in extending his lineage and Labrang’s institutional influence in the greater Amdo area. The fact that Jikmed Wangpo faced opposition at the peak of his career is a testimony to how ingrained the factionalism was within the local Geluk community.

3. Social Expectations Affecting Jikmed Wangpo’s Role

Generally, Tibetan Buddhist lamas’ preincarnation pedigree was evoked to build and enhance the authority and legitimacy of their religious domain and legacy. To some extent, they were expected to live up to their predecessors’ exemplary lives. Throughout the lives of many great reincarnates, they reconnected with teachings, practices, monasteries, retreat sites, close disciples, and patrons. In the case of the third Thukn Lobzang Chokyi Nyima (thu’u bkan blo bzang chos kyi nyl ma, 1737–1802), there are numerous instances where his predecessor’s strong association with the Sakya School teachings were mirrored explicitly in his life. On the contrary, the sixth Dalai Lama Tsangyang Gyatso (tshangs dbayang rgya mtsho, 1683–1706) failed to abide by his pure vow, undertake monastic education, and carry out his duties appropriately for the high status of Dalai Lama (van Schaik 2011, pp. 131–32; Petech 1972, p. 9; Shakabpa 1984, pp. 129–31). As a result, Qoshud King and Geluk elites criticized the sixth Dalai Lama’s legitimacy, and his lineage status was annulled. In part, this happened because he was caught in an escalating political strife between the regent Sanggye Gyatso (sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, 1653–1705) and Lhazang Khan (lha bzang han, d. 1717) (van Schaik 2011, pp. 133–34; Petech 1972, pp. 10–12; Shakabpa 1984, pp. 131–33). As with all the previously mentioned reincarnation lamas, in the case of Jikmed Wangpo, it is no less important for him to embody the qualities of his predecessor and mirror his past life to some extent. His “reconnection” with some historical sites was more significant precisely because they were better known for their strong association with major events in the life of his predecessor. It was even required that Jikmed Wangpo match his predecessor as a high caliber scholar, given that his legitimacy was in question. Later, this study will show that Jikmed Wangpo excelled at emulating his predecessor, who embodies ideals of a famed scholar and institutional leader.

The majority of the scholarship on the Tibetan Buddhist incarnation system proposes that reincarnation lamas are portrayed as replicating their predecessors’ lives (Cabezón 2017a, pp. 9–10, 22–23). Tibetan Buddhist biographical literature is full of rhetoric of tradition and lineage, expressing unity and continuity to disguise personal individuality. However, it is currently accepted that successors in the reincarnation lines, in fact, reinvent their religious personae while also partially mirroring their previous lives. In his discussion of the transcedents in the making in early China, Robert Company argues that the adepts had creative agency in fashioning their careers and personas. Despite their rhetorical withdrawal from society, their role-making was partly affected by social expectations held by the communities they interacted with (Campany 2009, pp. 24–25, 28, 41). Likewise, notwithstanding the vast gaps in cultural milieu and tradition, I argue that the case of Jikmed Wangpo cultivating his lineage identity is a strong parallel in Tibetan Buddhist history. The growth of Jikmed Wangpo’s role as a pre-eminent scholar and monastic leader was partly inspired by what was expected of the young Jikmed Wangpo within the Geluk community at Labrang and beyond. Tibetan Buddhist masters accrued charisma, prestige, and other social and economic capitals from being part of an illustrious reincarnation lineage. They were, however, expected to nurture and then “become” the
successors in the lineage. The creation processes or their social roles were what made and qualified them as their predecessors’ legitimate rebirths.

As commanded by his predecessor, intellectual prowess was a significant component in Jikmed Wangpo’s formative period, enriching his legitimacy as the reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa and, by extension, his religious authority. Therefore, Jikmed Wangpo was required to travel and undertake the ordeal of rigorous training at Gomang College, one of the major learning centers of the Geluk School in Central Tibet. He was aware that intellectual refinement and sophistication were necessary for his lineage authority and reputation. On his part, this realization is evident that Jikmed Wangpo confided to his disciple Gungthang Tenpe Dronme, “by all accounts, a lama should have intellectual talent. Without intellectual talent, it is meaningless to hold onto a high rank of a lama.”

Below, I will note a few examples that support the idea that Jamyang Zhepa was “imposed” on Jikmed Wangpo as a role model. The lives of reincarnation lamas such as Jikmed Wangpo are compared to the success of their predecessors. When Jikmed Wangpo entered Labrang for his enthronement, many who were there to welcome him were inspired by his presence. Some among them could not help but reminisce about his predecessor’s life. In other words, those onlookers saw Jamyang Zhepa in Jikmed Wangpo (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, p. 48). When Jikmed Wangpo was 22 and just before his travel to Central Tibet, he met with Jamyang Drakpa (’jam dbyangs grags pa, u.d.) at Yershong Monastery in Rebgong. The master was a source for transmitting Jamyang Lodro’s teachings to Jikmed Wangpo and urged, “since the previous all-knowing is a custodian of the yellow hat dharma, you should also hold an extremely pure view.”

This indicates the expectation that Jikmed Wangpo lives up to his predecessor’s role model in the broader Geluk community. When the Labrang community tried to delay or stop young Jikmed Wangpo’s trip for monastic education in Central Tibet, Jikmed Wangpo’s mother was enlisted to dissuade him from going. In opposition, she suggested that the journey to Central Tibet was necessary and he should seek extensive monastic training fit for him as the reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa (ibid., p. 77). Ultimately, he embarked on the journey, and upon his arrival in Central Tibet, he made it clear that he was keen to undertake rigorous education in his predecessor’s example (ibid., pp. 80–81).

Master Ngawang Shampa (ngag dbang byams pa, 1682–1762) turned Jikmed Wangpo away the first time he sought teachings in Central Tibet. Ngawang Shampa held the conviction that all reincarnation lamas lived off charisma accruing from their predecessors, believing that reincarnate lamas were unqualified, and their intellectual qualities were inferior to their predecessors’, opining that reincarnations exemplified religious failure. Jikmed Wangpo’s determination persisted, and Ngawang Shampa finally took him in as a disciple. In Jikmed Wangpo’s biography, it is recorded that Ngawang Shampa recognized a special quality in him and foresaw Jikmed Wangpo’s potential to thrive as a scholar comparable to his predecessor (ibid., pp. 83–84). Later, the master requested that Jikmed Wangpo compose his predecessors’ biography, which was an earnest indicator that he validated Jikmed Wangpo’s reincarnation identity (ibid., p. 107).

Later, in 1757, when Changja Rolpe Dorje arrived in Central Tibet on his second mission trip overseeing the succession of the late seventh Dalai Lama Kalsang Gyatso (skal bzang rgya mtsho, 1708–1757), he had a fierce intellectual debate with Jikmed Wangpo. For reasons not specified in the biography, Changja Rolpe Dorje deliberately endorsed controversial points made by KhedrupNorzang Gyatsho (mkhas grub nor bzang rgya mtsho, 1423–1513), who was critical of Tsongkhapa and his two heart disciples (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, p. 107). Jikmed Wangpo only subscribed to the intellectual authority of the Geluk founder, walking out on Changja Rolpe Dorje during the meeting in a fit of rage. The following day, Jikmed Wangpo went to prostrate before Changja Rolpe Dorje, wishing to be excused for his rude behavior the day earlier. To his surprise, Changja Rolpe Dorje was not upset, and instead, was eager to meet Jikmed Wangpo, saying in a complimentary tone, “your predecessor also stands by the supreme doctrine of the lord and his heart disciples in the face of opposition from anyone. [You] should too.”
Jikmed Wangpo was constantly compared to Jamyang Zhepa, relegated to live in the shadow of his predecessor until his eventual rise as a central figure in building a thriving intellectual tradition, and it is important to note the many instances where Jikmed Wangpo sought his predecessor’s transmission from a number of authoritative sources. At least, the famed master Lozang Tenpe Nyima (blo bzang pa’i nyi ma, 1689–1762) realized that he was simply returning the transmission to its source. The master was delighted and anxious to bestow the transmission onto Jikmed Wangpo; this was an explicit affirmation of Jikmed Wangpo’s lineage identity as Jamyang Zhepa (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, pp. 140–41; see also p. 17 in the present work).

Not only did Jikmed Wangpo have intimate knowledge of the general status and perceived crisis facing Geluk Buddhist transmission, but was also smart and fearless in acquiring oral and textual transmissions from all over Tibet. In many instances recounting Jikmed Wangpo’s role in Geluk transmission, he was constantly compared to his predecessor in terms of their legacies in building scholastic and institutional Geluk influence. However, there are few instances where Jikmed Wangpo was portrayed as not only preserving but inspirational, going above and beyond to enhance his predecessor’s legacy, and by extension, his own spiritual charisma and authority.

Finally, Jikmed Wangpo demonstrated major concern in enhancing and building upon his predecessor’s legacy of scholarly writing. For example, towards the end of his life, Jikmed Wangpo corrected dates in the Chronology of Dharma (bstan rtsis) composed by his predecessor (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, p. 427). Further, in colophons to two other works by Jikmed Wangpo, we learn that those works are condensed versions of philosophical texts composed by his predecessor, for pedagogical reasons (Dkon mchog ’jigs med dbang po 1999a, f. 35a; Dkon mchog ’jigs med dbang po 1999b, ff. 38b1–39a1). Also among his collection of works is a sadhana, related to a form of Vajrabhairava. The colophon indicates this work was prepared based on one work of his predecessor (Dkon mchog ’jigs med dbang po 1999c, f. 20b5–6). His efforts to revise the Religious History of Vajrabhairava (’jigs byed chos ’byung), one of his predecessor’s signature works, attract the most attention (Schaeffer 1999, p. 171).

4. Intimate Teacher and Student Relationship between Khenchen Gedun Gyatso and Jikmed Wangpo

In Tibetan Buddhism, emphasis on transmission and its cherished notion of authenticity and authoritative source belies a hierarchy of teachings largely dependent on transmission validity (Schaeffer 2014, pp. 1–3). In textual transmission, generations of Tibetan Buddhist scholars were devoted to their textual practices, ensuring the integrity of their scholarly tradition and future legacy. According to the established scholarly criterion, the text critics valued the best possible recensions of volumes of Buddhist canon or individual texts. However, within a scheme of religious power and authority, textual transmission takes an inferior status vis-à-vis oral lineage characterized by its distinction of immediacy or embodied transmission.

Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet is generally known for secrecy and restricted transmissions. Within the Geluk community following esoteric lineages, the oral tradition of transmission explored in the present work are closely guarded; in some cases, particular transmissions are identified with particular reincarnation lines. However, it should be noted that the transmissions discussed in the present work include an unusual host of major esoteric teachings. The fact that many of these major teachings required extended periods to complete transmissions partially explains the infrequency of their transmission. Despite
their exoteric orientation, transmissions conducted in a private setting means an intimate teacher–disciple relationship or denotes immediacy of embodied, intact transmission. In cases where there are multiple sources of the same transmission, there is a hierarchical system of prestige and authenticity based on the masters’ level of spiritual accomplishments. Significant transmissions are also dispensed during mass gatherings, wherein the lack of intimate engagement or one teacher leading a mass, strips the intimacy and immediacy inherent in ideal settings, such as in one-on-one settings or small circles. That general Tibetan Buddhist transmissions are embedded in a hierarchical system with accompanying religious discourse has continued into the twenty-first century.

The oral components in the exoteric realm of Tibetan Buddhism entail the transmission of intellectually rigorous learning. The oral commentaries, a great deal of which were later composed as textual works, also involved creative interpretations, especially when different commentarial lineages were compared and contrasted. However, reading transmissions that include Kanjur and Tenjur are essentially recitation practices not requiring intellectual engagement or training. While major esoteric teachings are lectured as part of monastic education, nearly all of them, alongside reading transmissions for exoteric teachings, are often ritualized practices. The abundant lore of secrecy and rhetoric of efficacy, power, and authority surrounding those transmissions established and safeguarded them as the elitist repertoire of esoteric knowledge and ritual skills reserved for the few, selected ones. In the form of legitimation tactics in South Asian tantric tradition, the esoteric discourse is first extensively explored in works by Hugh Urban (1997, 1998). Robert Campany follows the same approach in his discussions of esoteric power concerning magic and transcendent reality in early medieval China (Campany 2006). I am not entirely comfortable with modern scholarship treating the tantric and other esoteric traditions as simply the rhetoric form bereft of any content-based, substantial transmission. Like in any Buddhist tradition in Tibet and elsewhere, mainstream Geluk Buddhist transmission is closely guarded by its ritual and religious cultural parameters, even more so or to the extreme, in the tantric context of secrecy. In other words, regardless of exoteric or esoteric orientation in Buddhism, the issue of authenticity and orthodoxy is the central concern building Buddhist lineage legitimacy and sectarian authority. Overall, my discussions throughout the present work will point to the problematic issue of positing a rigid dichotomy between discourse as form and transmission as content and then dismissing the transmission content altogether to focus on its discourse. One can sense my unease with dissecting the form of transmission as its only constituent, ignoring its pair with the content in a dialectic process, as implied in the case of Jikmed Wangpo’s career in the present work.

The biographical and other historical writings on Jikmed Wangpo and his teacher Khenchen Gedun Gyatso offer insight into their intimate teacher–disciple relationship and the complex history of oral transmission emanating from the reputable master. Trained extensively in Central Tibet, Khenchen Gedun Gatso figures as a major scholar and authoritative source of transmission in eighteenth-century Amdo. His privileged status as the central transmitter of teachings to Jikmed Wangpo deserves much scrutiny. Throughout his teaching career, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was frequently sought after for his teachings in Rebgong and beyond, some of which were rare transmissions. There is no question that his leadership and teaching career made an indelible imprint on the intellectual history of the Geluk School, particularly in Rebgong and beyond in Amdo. There were several other teachers from Rongwo who seem to be important transmitters of teachings to Jikmed Wangpo. However, as I face a grave lack of sources to study any of these roles in detail, I turn to Khenchen Gegun Gyatso, as the only one of whom there is a complete biography whose composition was on Jikmed Wangpo’s initiative under his auspices. Our focus on him makes even more sense, as this major Rongwo abbot and leader was also a designated tutor to Jikmed Wangpo. Therefore, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso’s role in transmitting teachings to Labrang, especially to Jikmed Wangpo, merits a special mention as their teacher–student relationship plays a significant role legitimizing Jikmed Wangpo’s lineage authority and status as an indisputable reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa.
As mentioned earlier, Detri Lozang Dondrup and Mongol Queen Namgyal Drolma identified Jikmed Wangpo in 1735. Jikmed Wangpo’s candidacy was disputed by the first Se Ngawang Tashi, who instead supported the Mongol prince, Ganden Samdrup, as the true successor (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, p. 368). This powerful opponent’s death allowed the chance for Detri Lozang Dondrup and the Mongol queen to present their candidate. However, the enthronement still awaited several years, suggesting a deeply entrenched opposition to Jikmed Wangpo’s candidacy within the Labrang monastic community. In 1742, the year before Jikmed Wangpo’s enthronement, Detri Lozang Dondrup and the Mongol queen sent an envoy to Central Tibet to consult dharma protectors over identifying Jamyang Zhepa’s successor. The envoy returned, confirming their candidate. The enthronement of Jikmed Wangpo was earnestly planned that year. However, it was postponed due to the queen’s death. The following year, Jikmed Wangpo’s entry to Labrang was protested by the segment of the monastic population loyal to the late Se Ngawang Tashi (ibid., p. 369).

After the death of the first Se, Serkha Sonam Gyatso (gser kha bsod nams rgya mtsho, u.d.) was one of the main monastics opposing Jikmed Wangpo’s enthronement, attempting to appeal to the urge and block Jikmed Wangpo’s entry into Labrang. However, Serkha Sonam Gyatso was contained and then expelled from Labrang along with a few other influential monks, including Kangtsa Khynrap (rkang tsha mkhyen rab, u.d.) and Ngawa Kharil (rnga ba mkhar ril, u.d.) (ibid., p. 369). Among students of Jamyang Zhepa and the first Se Ngakwang Tashi at Labrang, Konchok Tenpa Rabgye records that Serkha Sonam Gyatso and Kangtsa Khynrap were the most learned, with the expectation that they serve as abbots succeeding Se Ngawang Tashi at Labrang Monastery. Serkha Sonam Gyatso was particularly famous for being the main keeper of the transmission of teachings passed down from Jamyang Zhepa, which were later transmitted to Labrang. Ngawa Kharil was known for taking and assembling notes of Se Ngawang Tashi’s significant teachings (ibid., p. 379). According to Konchok Tenpa Rabgye, all three masters were faction leaders in opposition to Jikmed Wangpo at Labrang, hence their exiles. We know that Serkha Sonam Gyatso left for Bido Monastery (Bis mdo dgon pa), where his future lineage was based thereafter. Palmang Lozang Dondrub (dbal mang blo bzang don grub, 1696–1756), the future sixth abbot of Labrang, was also expelled for his unidentified role but brought back to Labrang by Detri Lozang Dondrup, who treated the former as his heart disciple, and therefore appealed to the urge and was pardoned (ibid., p. 369). Thus, the exodus of monks, including the abovementioned major scholars trained under Jamyang Zhepa, and for the most part, under Se Ngakwang Tashi, dealt a major blow to the vibrant intellectual climate and the monastic institution at Labrang. As expected, seeking transmissions from Jamyang Zhepa was at the heart of Jikmed Wangpo’s campaign for rebuilding its scholastic and transmission lineage in the context of his vision of Geluk expansion in Amdo, which also involved an aggressive expansion of Labrang’s influence in the form of an ever-increasing monastic network. As discussed in the preceding section, Jikmed Wangpo’s status as the custodian for his predecessor’s teachings is of major significance in legitimizing his reincarnation authority as the successor of Jamyang Zhepa.

Due to this rare example of controversy over lineage succession, there was a long delay before Jikmed Wangpo was successfully enthroned at Labrang. Thanks to the awareness of this major concern in the Labrang community concerning the lineage authority and authenticity of transmission, there were discussions regarding the search for a tutor who could pass down the transmission from his predecessor Jamyang Zhepa in 1746, three years after Jikmed Wangpo’s enthronement. As Jamyang Zhepa was a well-established scholar, it was safe to assume that a lineage successor of his must meet expectations set up by his model of scholarship. Generally, it is not uncommon that reincarnates required the receipt of transmissions passed down from their predecessors to demonstrate the continuity/unity of transmission within the lineage. Therefore, reincarnates usually sought those transmissions from learned disciples of their predecessors. When the time
came for his monastic education, it was easily concluded within the monastic elites at Labrang that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso serve as his tutor (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, p. 62). Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was a natural fit to serve in the role of a tutor, for he lived an illustrious life as one of the most learned Geluk scholars of the day, serving the abbot of the historic Pkhor Chode Monastery (dpal ‘khor chos sde) in Central Tibet, plus his intense training directly under Jamyang Zhepa while in Gomang College.

Ling Dondrup Gyatso (gling don grub rgya mtsho, u.d.), then abbot of Labrang Monastery, travelled in person with a letter from Jikmed Wangpo to Rongwo inviting Khenchen Gedun Gyatso to Labrang to serve as Jikmed Wangpo’s tutor. The choice of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was a result of deliberate thought at Labrang, and even more so on the part of Jikmed Wangpo. Previously, during the enthronement of the second Se Ngakwang Jamyang Tashi, the senior Rongwo nangso was present at Labrang. Jikmed Wangpo not only expressed his interest to Rongwo Nangso in seeking Khenchen Gedun Gyatso as his tutor but particularly asked the nangso to help make the arrangements. At that time, the nangso thought this was an auspicious occasion to establish the teacher–student relationship between them. When Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was visited by the abbot of Labrang Monastery requesting his tutoring service to Jikmed Wangpo, he gladly accepted the invite and set off to Labrang (Ngag dbang ’jam dbyangs dpal ldan [1764] n.d., p. 261).

At Labrang, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was seated at a higher throne on Jikmed Wangpo’ left side. Their conversations started with Jikmed Wangpo asking questions for clarification regarding the authorship of some important exoteric and esoteric scriptures and important intellectual points therein (ibid., p. 262). In written form, he also made a query on the availability of a certain Buddhist treatise (ibid., p. 264). It likely showed that Jikmed Wangpo was genuinely interested in seeking Khenchen Gedun Gyatso as his tutor. Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was also pleased with the opportunity to be Jikmed Wangpo’s tutor, for the former was trained as a scholar by Jikmed Wangpo in his previous existence. In other words, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was simply returning the transmission to its original source.

In fact, well before his meeting with Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, Jikmed Wangpo was keenly aware of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso’s exceptional scholarly career. He consulted one lesser-known Rongwo scholar, Mergan Choje (mer rgyanchos rje, u.d.), who was, at that point, a tutor to Jikmed Wangpo in his training on Indic-inspired poetry, over the scholarly qualities (sku yon) of lamas based at Rongwo. Specifically, he asked Mergen Choje about scholarly qualities of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso. For that matter, Mergen Choje addressed Khenchen Gedun Gyatso’s expertise in each of the three areas of a scholarly career—lecturing, debate, and composition—point by point. He reminisced about his witnessing Khenchen Gedun Gyatso presiding at the great prayer festival and lecturing elegantly and precisely on the Life Stories of Buddha (ston pa’i māzād rnam) at Rongwo Monastery. Mergen Choje acknowledged that he was impressed with the precise quotations Khenchen Gedun Gyatso cited to facilitate his articulated presentation.

In terms of debating skills, Mergen Choje simply pointed to the well-known fact that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso achieved his fame by establishing himself as a debate scholar, which was proven when he won first place during the debate examination organized by the Dzungar Mongols. For his skills of composition, Mergen Choje admitted that he had no intimate knowledge of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso’s skills as a writer and was not really familiar with his written corpus (ibid., p. 263). Mergen Choje said that he, however, got a chance to look at a few poems composed by Khenchen Gedun Gyatso to address some of the latter’s teachers. It happens that he had also read some of the non-fiction works by Khenchen Gedun Gyatso. He concluded that he was convinced that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was a great writer too (ibid., p. 264).

According to the Tibetan scholarly tradition, a scholar must excel in the three areas mentioned above. In Mergan Choje’s opinion, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was a well-rounded scholar based on that criteria. Later, during Mergan Choje’s visit to Rongwo Monastery, he revealed Jikmed Wangpo’s intention to seek Khenchen Gedun Gyatso as a tutor and
appealed to him that he should travel to Labrang to serve as a tutor. Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was pleased with such an honor, but he was also worried whether or not it was appropriate that a teacher at Rongwo Monastery travel to Labrang and serve in the same capacity there. Nevertheless, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso had a two-month residence during his first visit to Labrang, initiating Jikmed Wangpo into a series of teachings.92

When Jikmed Wangpo met with Changja Rolpe Dorje prior to the former’s journey to Central Tibet, the latter particularly instructed that Jikmed Wangpo receive the transmission of Jamyang Zhepa’s teaching on Tsongkhapa’s Essence of True Eloquence (legs bshad gsar phreng). According to the biography of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, Changja Rolpe Dorje believed that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was the best scholar to lecture on the treatise because Khenchen Gedun Gyatso won first place in the debate examination, earning the highest Lharampa degree (ibid., pp. 270–71). Furthermore, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was one of the most learned disciples and was in direct receipt of the transmission from Jamyang Zhepa, and who coincidentally happens to be Jikmed Wangpo’s tutor. Besides, most learned scholars such as Serkha Sonam Gyatso, who held a reputation for possessing teachings originating from Jamyang Zhepa, had been expelled from Labrang. Who better than Khenchen Gedun Gyatso to serve in the capacity of tutor? Even though Serkha Sonam Gyatso was highly valued as the main source for transmitting Jamyang Zhepa’s teachings, he was primarily trained under Se Ngawang Tashi. Changja Rolpe Dorje admitted to Jikmed Wangpo that he regretted not being able to meet with Khenchen Gedun Gyatso in person and actually receiving the transmission of the Essence of True Eloquence. Jikmed Wangpo was set to leave for Central Tibet shortly thereafter, and Changja Rinpoche was preparing for his trip to China, so both had to resign to a future arrangement for receiving the transmission from Khenchen Gedun Gyatso. In recognition of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso’s excellence in learning and his status as a highly reputable source of transmission, both Changja Rolpe Dorje and Jikmed Wangpo wrote poems praising him for being a model scholar.93

The transmission of the Essence of True Eloquence is an example of numerous central teachings that Jikmed Wangpo received from none other than Khenchen Gedun Gyatso (Grags pa rgyal mishi 1999a, vol. 1, f. 114b.5), and Jikmed Wangpo was given recognition for holding and passing along this special explanatory transmission later in his life (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, pp. 303–4). The famed Longdol Lama also requested this transmission from Jikmed Wangpo (ibid., p. 364). Later, during an extended stay at Labrang, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso gave as many teachings to Jikmed Wangpo as was requested. He also lectured on the four tantras following the commentarial tradition of Jamyang Zhepa. However, when it was time to transmit the Essence of True Eloquence, Jikmed Wangpo was away from Labrang seeking alms in the surrounding communities to prepare funds for his trip to Central Tibet in 1752 (Ngag dbang ’jam dbyangs dpal ldan [1764] n.d., p. 278).

Upon his return in 1759 from his extended stay in Central Tibet, Jikmed Wangpo was greeted by Khenchen Gedun Gyatso at the urge before going to Labrang. On that occasion, he received a series of unidentified teachings from Khenchen Gedun Gyatso. The following year, he visited Labrang as requested by Jikmed Wangpo and received an elaborate welcome. Finally, at Labrang, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso gave the teaching on the Essence of True Eloquence based on various commentarial works. This is the very transmission Changja Rolpe Dorje asked Jikmed Wangpo to seek from Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, right before his trip to Central Tibet. Even at this old age, as a renowned teacher and treasury of transmission, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was still leading an active teaching career. During this visit, his teaching was disrupted because the young third Shar Gedun Trinle Rabgye requested that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso administer the full ordination vow to him at Rongwo (ibid., p. 310). However, shortly after the full ordination was complete, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso left again for Labrang, where he gave teachings on Guhyasamāja and stages of path. Eventually, when his tutor requested esoteric teachings, Jikmed Wangpo reciprocated the favour.94
The last meeting between Jikmed Wangpo and Khenchen Gedun Gyatso took place in Dani Suruk (da ni surug), which is midway between the Labrang and Rongwo monasteries. For the occasion, Jikmed Wangpo sent his own palanquin from Labrang to Rongwo to pick up his tutor (Ngag dbang 'jam dbyangs dpal ldan [1764] n.d., p. 337), and sought Changja Rolpe Dorje to compose a prayer for the tutor’s longevity (ibid., p. 339). Jikmed Wangpo also earnestly requested Khenchen Gedun Gyatso’s disciple, Ngawang Jamyang Palden, to author the tutor’s biography and ensure its completion (ibid., pp. 350–51). The culmination of these details suggest that Khenchen Gedun Gyatso and Jikmed Wangpo had an intimate relationship that went beyond that of a teacher–student, especially when we consider Khenchen Gedun Gyatso played a significant role in shaping Jikmed Wangpo’s lineage legitimacy and influence. In addition to this paradigmatic teacher, there were other well-established masters who played crucial roles in transmitting authoritative teachings to Jikmed Wangpo, as will be discussed in the succeeding section.

5. Other Major Sources for Transmission to Jikmed Wangpo

The transfer and continuity of lineage transmission through the reincarnation succession via a network of eminent masters ascertain legitimacy and authority, evidenced by Jikmed Wangpo’s life. There were numerous instances of his efforts to receive the transmissions of his predecessor from reputable sources other than his designated tutor Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, explaining the wide network of masters and institutions that he engaged with across Tibet throughout his religious career. Jikmed Wangpo underwent a series of opportunities and hardships in his efforts to seek transmissions from these respectable masters. In the section below, I will identify important sources of major teachings and offer a contextual analysis of their significance to Jikmed Wangpo’s key role as a seeker and propagator of transmission in eighteenth-century Tibet.

According to Jikmed Wangpo’s biography, the Ganden golden-throne holder Gyaltsen Senge (rgyal mtshan seng ge, 1678–1756) was invited to the urge in 1747, one year after Khenchen Gedun Gyatso’s designation as the tutor. However, the biographer does not reveal that the objective was to retain Gyaltsen Senge as Jikmed Wangpo’s tutor. There is only a reference to his visit to Labrang and nothing else (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, p. 64). However, in his religious history of Amdo, Konchok Tenpa Rabgye provides more details surrounding Gyaltsen Sengge’s meeting with Jikmed Wangpo, saying that he and Detri Lozang Dondrup asked Qingwang Tendzin Wangchuk (bstan ’dzin dbang phyung, r. 1736–1752) and Queen Erkhe Shar (Er khe shar, u.d.) to bring Gyaltsen Senge to Labrang, because he was one of Jamyang Zhepa’s most prestigious disciples. He also reveals that Jikmed Wangpo intended to pursue him as a tutor, but when Gyaltsen Sengge was not allowed to take a seat on the throne of Jikmed Wangpo’s predecessor, he was offended. Although the specifics of their meeting and the cause of the relationship’s souring are unknown, the seating arrangement anecdote is an indicator of a falling out between the two major Geluk reincarnation lamas (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, pp. 555–56).

Jikmed Wangpo sought Ngakrampa Topden Gyatso (sngags rams pa stobs ldan rgya mtsho, u.d.) to receive Jamyang Zhepa’s transmissions. According to Gungtang Tenpe Dronme, Jikmed Wangpo received a series of teachings from this master, but only the transmission for exposition and practice on the Magical Wheel of Complete Victory Over the Three Realms (khrul ’khor khams gsum rnam rgyal gyi khris kyi len) were identified among them (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, p. 63). Ngakrampa Topden Gyatso received teachings directly from Jamyang Zhepa. Jikmed Wangpo’s Records of Teachings Received indicates that there were three other exposition transmissions (bshad lung) of the Four Yogas of Generation and Completion Stages of Bhairava (’jigs byed bskyed rim dang rdo rje rim rnal dbor lzhis) that he received from Ngakrampa Topden Gyatso; it recorded Jamyang Zhepa as an intermediary in these transmissions. Ngakrampa Topden Gyatso received another transmission of the same teaching from Palden Yeshe (dpal ldan ye shes, u.d.), a headteacher at Labrang, who, in turn, received it from Jamyang Zhepa (Grags pa rgyal mtshan 1999b, vol. 2, ff. 35b–36a.1).
Filling his role as one of Jikmed Wangpo’s primary teachers, Changja Rolpe Dorje also sought major transmissions and played a significant role in propagating them. In fact, this was a continuation of close ties between the two lineages since their immediate predecessors. In 1749, as soon as Jikmed Wangpo heard about Changja Rolpe Dorje’s return from the court to Gonlung, he immediately visited Gonlung, where he received his full ordination and new name Konchok Jikmed Wangpo, from Changja Rolpe Dorje (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, pp. 68–69). It seems that they established a substantial exchange, wherein Jikmed Wangpo received some of Jamyang Zhepa’s transmissions through Changja Rolpe Dorje. The most valued transmission that Jikmed Wangpo received from him was the exposition transmission of Tsongkhapa’s central work on the Guhyasamaja teaching, titled *Lamp Illuminating the Five Staged-paths* (*rim lnga gsal sgron*). Both Changja Rolpe Dorje and Jikmed Wangpo were credited with its broad transmission. For example, Gungthang Tenpe Dronme comments, “the life of listening and explaining was broken in the Land of Snow Mountains. The treatise of the five staged-paths turned into a dead book. In the land of Tsina (*tsi na*), these two, father and disciple, revived its lecturing and listening from the dead with a medicinal cure” (ibid., pp. 193–94). With every significant transmission, Gungthang Tenpe Dronme makes a similar comment to extol the spiritual legacy of his master Jikmed Wangpo.

While in Central Tibet, Jikmed Wangpo extensively received teachings from the master Takpu Lozang Tenpe Gyeltsen (*stag phub lo bzang bstan pa’i rgyal mtshan*, 1714–1762). Around that time, Jikmed Wangpo composed a biography of his predecessor at the request of the acclaimed master Ngakwang Jampa (ibid., pp. 106–7), and taught teachings passed down from his predecessor to monks at Drepung Monastery (ibid., p. 109; Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan [1987] 1989, p. 58). Now, not only was he seeking teachings from his predecessor from various sources he also started to act as a confident authority on his predecessor by composing a biographical account of his early existence and giving teachings to the monastic community at Drepung, where at least in Gomang College, his lineage authority was revered. Additionally, in 1749, while in Amdo, Jikmed Wangpo arranged for an artisan from Yershong Monastery in Rebgong to carve the sadhana teachings by his predecessor into blocks (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, p. 71). These series of activities are meaningful in consolidating his place as the legitimate successor of Jamyang Zhepa.

In 1762, Jikmed Wangpo received word that the eminent monk Lozang Tenpe Nyima returned to Lamo Dechen Monastery from China. Meanwhile, Jikmed Wangpo sent one Donyo Tshultrim (*don yod tshul khrims*, u.d.) on his behalf to make an arrangement for Jikmed Wangpo to receive the teaching on this cycle. Already aging, Lozang Tenpe Nyima was not sure that he would be physically capable of transmitting the teaching to Jikmed Wangpo. However, he realized that he was transmitting the teaching to Jamyang Zhepa’s reincarnation; thus, he believed that he was simply transmitting the teaching back to its source or keeper and decided to try his best to give the teaching. When he started transmitting the teaching, he eventually had to stop due to his worsening health. Jikmed Wangpo performed a longevity ritual on his behalf, but Lozang Tenpe Nyima passed away soon after (ibid., pp. 140–41). The Mitra cycle transmission was significant because when Jamyang Zhepa was in Central Tibet, he received that transmission from Lozang Khetsun (*blo bzang mkhas btsun*, u.d.) of the Jonang (*jo nang*) School (ibid., p. 363). The transmission was highly valued because it was thought to be near extinction in Central Tibet and Amdo. Konchok Tenpa Rabgye, acknowledging Jamyang Zhepa’s legacy, informs us that Jamyang Zhepa was “reviving the transmission when it was nearly gone.” Konchok Tenpa Rabgye further claims that the transmission’s revival was solely credited with Jamyang Zhepa; therefore, the transmission passed down from Jamyang Zhepa was actually the source of many transmissions from the later period, and Jikmed Wangpo’s appropriation of it would have enhanced his reincarnation lineage identity.

As Changja Rolpe Dorje was a reputable source of this transmission, Jikmed Wangpo also waited several years for Changja Rolpe Dorje to give him the transmission of the Mitra
cycle. However, Changja Rolpe Dorje suggested Jikmed Wangpo receive the transmission from Lozang Dargye (blo bzang dar rgyas, u.d.) (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, p. 321), a Rongwo lama who had received it previously from Lozang Tenpe Nyinma, indicating that Lozang Tenpe Nyima and Lozang Dargye were more authoritative sources than Changja Rolpe Dorje, who later requested that Lozang Tenpe Nyima be his own tutor in China (Thu’u bkwan blo bzang chos kyi ngyi ma 1989, pp. 144, 146). Additionally, Jikmed Wangpo was interested in obtaining the Lamp Illuminating the Five Stages (rim lnga gsal sgrom) transmission from Changja Rolpe Dorje (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, p. 372), and travelled to receive it from Lozang Dargye, who was based in Yehor (ye hor, Chengde) (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, p. 178). It was during the stopover in Yehor on his return trip from the court that Jikmed Wangpo received the Mitra cycle transmission; it lasted more than forty days (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, pp. 190–91, 198).

Lozang Dargye was a scholar well trained in Central Tibet, and Jikmed Wangpo initially studied under him. After Lozang Dargye died, Changja Rolpe Dorje and Jikmed Wangpo were involved in identifying his successor (ibid., p. 321).

Jamyang Lodro, one of the central reincarnation lineages at Rongwo Monastery, was a famous tantric master trained at Lower Tantric College in Lhasa and later at Tantric College at Tashi Lhunpo Monastery. As a contemporary of Jamyang Zhepa, Jamyang Lodro received the Mitra cycle transmission from him. This transmission was scribed and compiled into the collection of works by Jamyang Lodro, whose recording of the oral transmission was highly valued because his lecture notes were thoroughly examined in consultation with Jamyang Zhepa. His transmission, furthermore, was widely regarded as an authoritative teaching (ibid., p. 333; ‘Jam dbyangs grags pa 1991, p. 224).

Lozang Dargye was impressed with Jamyang Lodro’s written works on the Mitra cycle, and came specifically to meet Jamyang Lodro and inquired about the teachings. At Lozang Dargye’s request, Jamyang Lodro gave the transmission at Kumbum Monastery (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, p. 261). It is likely that this transmission to Lozang Dargye via Jamyang Lodro was the one pursued by Jikmed Wangpo. Additionally, there were multiple sources of major transmissions available to Jikmed Wangpo. This is because Merge Choje and Tongkhor Sonam Gyatso were both Jamyang Lodro’s disciples, with Merge Choje as a designated tutor to Jikmed Wangpo and Tongkhor Sonam Gyatso being an uncle to Jikmed Wangpo (ibid., pp. 168, 171, 173–75, 184, 201–2).

The transmission of the Mitra cycle, however, was not identified as one emanating from either of these two masters in Jikmed Wangpo’s Records of Teachings Received.

The transmission of the Religious History of Vajrabhairava from Jamyang Zhepa was also in danger of extinction. Realizing how urgent it was to rescue and retain the transmission from his previous existence, Jikmed Wangpo sent four monks on his behalf to obtain the transmission from Lozang Jamyang (blo bzang ‘jam dbyangs, u.d.) (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, p. 260). According to Konchok Tenpa Rabgye, Lozang Tenpa Rabgye (blo bzang bstan pa rab rgyas, c. 1647–1726) indicated the same urgency a generation earlier. Lozang Tenpa Rabgye was also a famous tantric master, better known for being chosen to perform tantric rituals for military success against Bhutan. He also had a reputation for being handpicked to repel singan (sri ngan), afflicting deaths of abbots’ succession at Zhakhyung Monastery (bya khyung dgon pa) (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, p. 320). Lozang Tenpa Rabgye could not record the Religious History of Vajrabhairava transmission, whereas Jamyang Zhepa successfully committed the transmission to written form, which, however, required revising. Thus, such revisional work fell to Jikmed Wangpo (Schaeffer 1999, p. 171). The revision of this major work was a large undertaking, which further emphasized Jikmed Wangpo’s legitimacy as the successor in the lineage. What is better than continuing the spirit of the lineage by inheriting or/and enhancing his predecessor’s scholarly legacy?

Ngawang Drakpa (ngag dbang grags pa, u.d.) was a major transmission keeper and the main reincarnation lineage master at Drakar Phuntshok Ling Monastery (brag dkar phun tshogs gling) in Gengya, where Jamyang Zhepa was born. His close relationship with
his teacher Serkha Sonam Gyatso was pivotal, as the majority of teachings passed down from Jamyang Zhepa were maintained for further transmission via this learned master. Ngawang Drakpa’s status as Jikmed Wangpo’s teacher was also important because, on numerous occasions, Ngawang Drakpa received major transmissions in the genres of the stages of path, and generation and completion stages of Cakrasamvara, Guhyasamāja and Bhairava, from the famed master Ngakwang Jampa, another best mind of the day in Tibet. Konchok Tenpa Rabgye takes note of Ngakwang Drakpa’s exceptional abilities to commit these transmissions to his memory and transmit them to his audience nearly verbatim, even imitating the gestures used by his teacher (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, pp. 348–49), further enhancing the authoritative status of the embodied transmission in a personally intimate context. In fact, his religious authority was recognized in the Labrang community. For example, when Hortsang Sertri Jikmed Rikpe Senge (horn tshang ’jigs med rigs pa’i seng+ge, 1747–1846) consulted with Jikmed Wangpo about who the better source was to seek Geluk transmission between Lozang Gyatso, heart disciple and secretary (drung yig) of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, and Ngawang Drakpa, the latter commented, “the secretary has an extremely broad range of transmission that he received; on the contrary, whatever transmission that Kachutsang (bka’ bcu tshang) received is authentic and definitive.” Hence, Hortsang Sertri received extensive teachings from Ngawang Drakpa (ibid., p. 123).

Ngakwang Drakpa was several years older than Jikmed Wangpo, but they were enrolled in the same class at Gomang College. Upon returning from Central Tibet, Ngakwang Drakpa secured permission for leave from Labrang for further training under Serkha Sonam Gyatso, who was previously expelled from Labrang. When Ngakwang Drakpa received essential instructions from the master, which they thoroughly examined and discussed, the master was so pleased that he asked his disciple to transmit the teachings back to Labrang (ibid., p. 349). Jikmed Wangpo met with Serkha Sonam Gyatso away from Labrang shortly before the master’s death. Keen to get the transmission back to Labrang—and probably to Jikmed Wangpo, Serkha Sonam Gyatso confided to Ngakwang Drakpa, “it was a good opportunity to meet His Eminence this year. There is no use for you of these meager instructions transmitted down from the vajradhara of the Sad tradition (srad rgyud). Please, be quick in transmitting back to Tashi Khyil.”

In Palmang’s biography, Konchok Tenpa Rabgye further notes that Jikmed Wangpo relayed his doctrinal queries through Ngawang Drakpa to Serkha Sonam Gyatso, who responded positively to the request (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 2001, p. 122). It might be that Serkha Sonam Gyatso had a change of heart and accepted Jikmed Wangpo’s legitimacy. Ngakwang Drakpa, who was regarded as the treasury of vast teachings, regularly travelled to Labrang to give teachings at Jikmed Wangpo’s request (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, p. 349).

Another master, Sangye Dorje (sangs rgyas rdo rje, u.d.), who was first trained at Labrang Monastery and then went for further study at Gomang College, eventually achieved the Lharampa degree and served as Gomang College abbot for twelve years. When young Jikmed Wangpo first went to study in Central Tibet, he received teachings from this master. According to Konchok Tenpa Rabgye, the Bhairava initiation was the only teaching identified. Although Jikmed Wangpo was keen for more teachings from the master, he stopped seeking them due to Sangye Dorje’s age (ibid., pp. 398–99); it is not clear that any teachings Jikmed Wangpo received from the master included Jamyang Zhepa’s transmissions. Given his early training at Labrang and seniority at that time, he likely studied directly under Jamyang Zhepa and Se Ngakwang Tashi. The importance of his role as teacher to Jikmed Wangpo is perhaps evident because Jikmed Wangpo looked after his reincarnation Drakpa Gyaltsen (grags pa rgyal mtshan, 1762–1837) at Labrang, and gave him full ordination precepts (ibid., p. 399).

Jikmed Wangpo’s co-founder of the Ngonpo Tang (sngon po thang) Monastery, Palmang Lozang Dondrup, trained under Se Ngakwang Tashi and was fully ordained by Jamyang Zhepa, who transmitted important teachings to him, including the Mitra cycle (ibid., p. 609).
Khyage Lodro Gyatso (khya dge blo gros rgya mtsho, 1664–1740), Ngawa Chokyong Gyatso and Gyaltsen Sengge, all disciples of Jamyang Zhepa, were also listed among his primary teachers (ibid., p. 610). The latter two were especially well known for having transmissions from Jamyang Zhepa, and due to the fallout with Jikmed Wangpo, they were both based away from Labrang. That is to say, when the second Se Ngawang Jamyang Tashi left the Labrang Monastery, most learned disciples with Jamyang Zhepa’s transmissions trained under the first Se had to leave Labrang too. Thus, Jikmed Wangpo had to exhaust his means to seek transmissions both at home and outside of Labrang. Among the group of significant scholars exiled from Labrang was Palmang Lozang Dondrup, who was later recruited back to Labrang. However, compared to Serkha Sonam Gyatso and other masters trained at Labrang but later exiled from there, he lacked the prestige and fame. In order to defend Palmang Lozang Dondrup as a reputable source of transmission, or even more qualified than the other masters, Jikmed Wangpo was quoted as saying, “although you all claim that Gothob (go thob) and Serkha are good, I think they are not as good as Tharmichi”.

That said, Lozang Dondrup and Serkha Sonam Gyatso sought transmissions from each other (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, p. 611).

Finally, Khyage Lodro Gyatso and his foremost disciple, Lozang Tashi (blo bzang bkra shis, u.d.), also figure prominently in the intellectual life at Labrang. While being trained under Jamyang Zhepa, Lodro Gyatso scribed sections on generation stages of Bhairava and Cakrasamvara from Jamyang Zhepa’s lectures (ibid., p. 610). Later at Labrang Monastery, he received transmission of the Mitra cycle from Jamyang Zhepa; he himself gave a series of tantric teachings to over 2000 monks at Labrang, including Se Ngakwang Tashi. On numerous occasions, his disciple Lozang Tashi visited Labrang to give extensive teachings to Jikmed Wangpo. Konchok Tenpa Rabgye identifies transmission of the collection of teachings by Lodro Gyatso among those Lozang Tashi taught at Labrang (ibid., p. 692). Jikmed Wangpo did not receive teachings from Khyage Lodro Gyatso due to the age gap, and it is not recorded in Jikmed Wangpo’s Records of Teachings Received. Instead, Jikmed Wangpo received Jamyang Zhepa’s transmissions via the master’s disciple, Lozang Tashi. However, Jikmed Wangpo’s Records of Teachings Received only identifies four transmissions of Khyage Lodro Gyatso that Lozang Tashi bestowed on him, including one passed down via Jamyang Zhepa (Grags pa rgyal mtshan 1999a, ff. 157b4, 177a3; Grags pa rgyal mtshan 1999b, ff. 65a5, 68a4). Lastly, it is interesting to note that Jamyang Zhepa’s nephew, Jamyang Khechok (’jam dbyangs mkhas mchog, u.d.), was a source for a few of Jamyang Zhepa’s transmissions to Jikmed Wangpo (Grags pa rgyal mtshan 1999a, ff. 110a6, 110b3; Grags pa rgyal mtshan 1999b, f. 37a5).

The extensive discussions above map out a complex web of transmissions cultivated in Jikmed Wangpo’s life through an in-depth study of rich details extracted from our few available historical sources. The claims of power, authenticity, and authority were constantly invoked and contributed in some ways to the religious edifice of Jikmed Wangpo and the institutions that he led. In addition to consolidating his intellectual prominence and lineage identity, bringing together authoritative transmissions for the institution of a vibrant tradition at Labrang and their broader propagation was equally an important issue at stake in the context of his religious career.

6. Building Labrang as the “Source of Dharma”

As extensively explored in the preceding section, Jikmed Wangpo cast a wide net to seek oral transmissions emanating from the predecessor in his reincarnation line. There is no question that the earnest pursuit of these transmissions was a major feat for building his intellectual career and legitimizing his reincarnation lineage authority. However, Jikmed Wangpo’s intellectual campaign was not solely concerned with the question of legitimacy threatening his lineage status; in the larger context of the Geluk growth, he envisioned establishing authenticity and broad transmission of lineage teachings. In that respect, his institutional endeavor was one that sought both oral and textual transmissions of Buddhist teachings in the wider Tibetan Buddhist world. Hence, below is an extensive discussion
of clues and other dispersed details provided in the historical sources to reconstruct his central role in initiating intellectual and institutional growth at Labrang and in the larger Geluk community.

Reading through Jikmed Wangpo’s *Record of Teachings Received*, we can quickly realize that there is a systematic, traditional classification of transmissions outlining the entire two-volume work. For the purpose of analysis in the present work, we can treat it as consisting of three parts. The first part is the group of transmissions of teachings composed and compiled into the collection of works originating from Jamyang Zhepa. The second part is the corpus of transmissions passed down via Jamyang Zhepa, with himself not as their originator. The third part is the majority of transmissions, which exclude Jamyang Zhepa as a central link or any intermediate place in lineage records. The majority of teachings originating from Jamyang Zhepa, later compiled into his collection of works, were transmitted to Jikmed Wangpo entirely through two reputable sources: Lozang Jamyang (*blo bzang 'jam dbyangs*, u.d.) and Khenchen Gedun Gyatso. Yet, only transmissions of twenty-nine individual teachings were passed down from Khenchen Gedun Gyatso (*Grags pa rgyal mtshan* 1999a, f. 171b3–5). Despite the obvious importance of Lozang Jamyang, he was an obscure figure; future research would benefit from verifying his identity. However, a disproportionate number of transmissions outside of Jamyang Zhepa’s collection of works were equally valued because Jamyang Zhepa was an important interlinking master in these transmission lineages.

It is evident from the *Record of Teachings Received* that Changja Rolpe Dorje, Lozang Tenpe Gyaltse, Ngakwang Lozang (*ngag dbang blo bzang*, 1719–1794), Ngakrampa Tobten Gyatso, Tongkhor Sonam Gyatso, and the Seventh Dalai Lama Kalsang Gyatso were major sources of transmissions that did not originate from or were not transmitted via Jamyang Zhepa. For example, the Seventh Dalai Lama, along with Khenchen Gedun Gyatso, dominate transmissions of Indian treatises received by Jikmed Wangpo. We know that obtaining Jamyang Zhepa’s transmissions was particularly significant for legitimizing Jikmed Wangpo’s lineage authority. Hence, given that the majority of teachings he received fell outside Jamyang Zhepa’s transmission lineage, there is a legitimate question to be asked about the significance of the transmissions that he sought in earnest, but were not passed down from Jamyang Zhepa.

In light of Jikmed Wangpo’s campaign seeking textual and oral transmissions that were rare in Tibet, I further argue that seeking transmissions emanating from Jamyang Zhepa can be understood as part of his many efforts to simultaneously rebuild scholastic and transmission lineage in general, to establish Labrang as “the source of dharma,” in the wake of the division from the long dispute over his lineage legitimacy. Besides seeking the transmission of teachings by Jamyang Zhepa, Jikmed Wangpo initiated a long campaign for seeking both textual and oral teachings in Central Tibet, not only those originating from Jamyang Zhepa. Once, at the end of his teaching on the *Essence of Eloquence*, he said:

In the past, oral commentarial transmissions were kept intact of the majority of sutra and tantra teachings as well as Indian treatises. However, today, even names of [these transmissions] are gone. Later, even when I heard that Kachen Yeshe Gyaltse (*dka’ chen ye shes rgyal mtshan*, 1713–1793) gave the oral commentarial transmission of the *Eight Thousand One* (*brgyad stong pa*), that was beneficial for my heart.

His brief remark brings insight into his perception of the general status of oral transmissions being subject to a number of disruptive forces, especially political wars in Tibet. Perhaps this could represent the reality of Buddhist lineage teachings in eighteenth-century Tibet to some extent.

Jikmed Wangpo’s campaign was in search of a massive amounts of texts; a great number of these manuscripts seem to be rarely circulated, even in Central Tibet. In 1778, when Jikmed Wangpo sent his master chef Kunga (*kun dga’,* u.d.) and one scholar monk known as Konchok Gyatso (*dkon mchog rgya mtsho*, u.d.) to Central Tibet in search of rare texts composed by early Tibetan scholars, he sent an appeal to the seventh Dalai Lama, the
sixth Panchen Lama Lozang Palden Yeshe (blo bzang dpal ldan ye she, 1738–1780) and the heads of the Sakya School, and other prominent monks for their assistance in obtaining the rare texts. The two monks spent three years in search of manuscripts, only to find about half of them from the inventory they brought with them initially, but their original copies were not available. According to Gungthang Tenpe Dronme’s hyperbolic language, many contemporary Tibetan scholars “were surprised that they had not even heard the names of these manuscripts.”123

Jikmed Wangpo was credited with setting up the first library at Labrang Monastery, the success of which was evidenced by its initial collection of over a thousand texts.124 It seems Jikmed Wangpo mobilized massive efforts in creating an ever-increasing collection of manuscripts. In Jikmed Wangpo’s biography, Gungthang Tenpe Dronme reports that the artist known as Gegye (dge rgyas) was hired as a scribe for several years. For his service, he was rewarded with a handsome payment in silver and other goods.125 Artisans, including scribes and painters, were also hired and brought to Labrang from places such as Chamdo (chab mdo) and Drakgo (brag ‘go) in Kham. Gungthang Tenpe Dronme comments that text production by Jikmed Wangpo was the optimal course of action to redeem the dharma (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, p. 261). At this point in his life (prior to his second visit to Central Tibet between 1784 and 1786) and due to the scant information provided in the biography, we can only assume that hiring these artisans was part of his early efforts in organizing a workshop and producing a large library collection at Labrang. As a hallmark of his intellectual career, this major initiative continued henceforth and was in full swing during and after his second trip to Central Tibet.

Looking back over his life from this point onwards, there are few instances where we learn exactly which scriptures were scribed and/or carved for block print as part of his massive efforts culminating in the eventual establishment of the library holdings. In 1760, under the auspices of Jikmed Wangpo, the printery first began training of few monks, followed by the initial carving and printing of texts on typologies of the mind and reasoning (blo rtags). The printing facility was operated on a continuous basis (ibid., p. 132). More than a decade before (in 1749), Jikmed Wangpo commissioned the carving and printing of a cycle of sadhana teachings by his predecessor Jamyang Zhepa (ibid., p. 71). Later, in 1767, Jikmed Wangpo arranged that three scribes from Chamdo scribe and carve the cycle of Kalachakra teachings composed by Khedrup Je (mikhas grub rje, 1385–1438), and a great number of his own works (ibid., p. 164). Labrang also had a copy of the Lithang Kajur (li thang bka’ gyur) edition which was on display at the assembly hall. This edition was missing many pages and its folios were not arranged sequentially. For that matter, Jikmed Wangpo had those missing pages reprinted and had the cannon rearranged in its correct order (ibid., p. 259).126

Jikmed Wangpo leapt at every opportunity to secure textual transmission. At one point during his second visit to Central Tibet (in 1785), when he was seeking copies of a massive number of rare texts, Konchok Tutop Wangpo (dkon mchog n猛地 stobs dbang po, u.d.) visited him to seek teachings, and in return, was obligated by Jikmed Wangpo to search and obtain a copy of the collection of works by Karma Chakme (karma chags med, 1613–1678) of the Kagyu School (ibid., p. 325).127 As expected, when Jikmed Wangpo visited Shantse College, he secured a chance to look through their holdings of manuscripts of nearly 300 works and catalogued them by author. When he was able to ascertain an unidentified work on the subject of thought and form (bsam gzugs) by his predecessor, those present were impressed with his vast knowledge of Buddhist treatises (ibid., p. 333). However, it is not surprising given his efforts to acquire transmission of teachings originating or passed down from his predecessor. At the same time, it was a sure sign of his eventual growth as an established scholar with profound, wide-ranging knowledge.

When Jikmed Wangpo met Longdol Lama at the Rinchen Gang Palace (rin chen sgang) of Sakya Monastery, Longdol Lama would offer to give all, except for a few of the books, to Jikmed Wangpo. Jikmed Wangpo was really grateful for the master’s generosity; however, he would only take copies of ten texts (ibid., p. 336).128 This occasion also made the
exchange of teachings between the master and Jikmed Wangpo possible (ibid., p. 334). Jikmed Wangpo would never miss out on a chance to acquire texts. He borrowed a copy of a text from one unidentified monk while in Lhasa, and it was precisely what he was seeking. Texts were also borrowed from the collection at Purwu Chok (phur bu lcog), a famed retreat site near Sera Monastery (ibid., p. 335).

Jikmed Wangpo’s second visit to Central Tibet was an extended stay with a lot of time spent with Longdol Lama, who was, as Record of Teachings Received indicates, a major source of teachings outside the Jamyang Zhepa transmission lineage. Only a few teachings from him list Jamyang Zhepa as a linking point in the transmission lineage; this is a good indicator of Jikmed Wangpo’s wide pursuit of teachings. On this second trip to Central Tibet, Jikmed Wangpo’s efforts to preserve both textual and oral transmissions were not confined to his own sect. He travelled to visit Sakya Monastery, where he had intimate conversations with the head of the Sakya School Dakchen Ngakwang Kunga Lodro (ngag dbang kun dga’ blo gros, 1729–1783) and exchanged rare teachings with the Sakya master.

In addition to him receiving numerous Sakya transmissions directly from this major source, Jikmed Wangpo also received Sakya teachings from his teacher Lozang Tenpe Gyaltse, who was also a primary transmitter of his own Geluk teachings. An exchange of rare teachings also took place at other Sakya monasteries, including Zhalu. Jikmed Wangpo particularly valued receiving an initiation on the Integration of Amitayus and Hayagriva (tshe rta zung ’brel gyi rjes gnang), as this was traced back to the very transmission that Milarepa’s close disciple Rechung Dorje Drak (ras chung rdo rje grags, 1058–1161) brought from India (ibid., pp. 342–43).

There is an interesting detail to note: Sakya Monastery’s distinctive transmission of the Seventeen Facial Expressions (zhal rnam ’gyur bcu bdun) was extinct. There was no one else that the Sakya monks could turn to, so a tutor to Dakchen Ngakwang Kunga Lodro was sent to Jikmed Wangpo, who fulfilled the request for the teaching (ibid., p. 348), indicating his immense repertoire of transmissions, which allowed him to serve as an authority on some Sakya transmissions. As instructed by Jikmed Wangpo, his disciple, Drakpa Gyaltse, author of his Records of Teachings Received, proceeded to seek teachings, including a healing ritual practice known as Healing Za (gza’ boos) in the Yazang (g.ya’ bzang) branch of the Kagyu School, from an elderly monk who resided at the Sakya Monastery of Pakde (’phags sde dgon) (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, p. 401). Thus, his expedition to collect manuscripts at these Sakya monasteries was very successful. There, Jikmed Wangpo obtained many rare and original books (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, p. 344).

After concluding his long expedition in Central Tibet, Jikmed Wangpo had an estimated 3000 manuscripts that had been either purchased or offered as gifts. Then, there were an estimated 10,000 volumes of text being copied at a rate of eighteen silver coins per volume. In the process, Jikmed Wangpo’s growth as a scholar and familiarity with textual heritage were so exceptional that at one time in Central Tibet, one Dargye (dar rgyas, u.d.) was sent to search for texts at an unspecified monastery, he brought back an old handwritten manuscript without a title and colophon. Jikmed Wangpo randomly turned to a page and instantly identified the obscure manuscript, and also briefly lectured on the history of its textual transmission (ibid., p. 374).

During his second stay in Central Tibet, Jikmed Wangpo’s fame grew in the larger monastic community. There, he was frequently requested to give teachings in the major Geluk monasteries. At one point, he conducted a teaching session to a large group of monks from Sera, Drepung, Gandan, Tashi Lkunpo, Upper and Lower Tantric Colleges, and Namgyel College (rnamrgyal grwa tshang), in addition to several unidentified regional monasteries. His teachings were based on his predecessor Jamyang Zhepa, Changja Rolpe Dorje, and his own instructions (ibid., p. 357). Jikmed Wangpo’s central role as a key
transmitter of teachings was highlighted when Yeshe Gyaltsen confided to Gungtang Tenpe Dronme:

In the past, Central Tibet is like the source of dharma so one can obtain any dharma transmission as one likes. However, today, in general the dharma transmission is weak. It is rare that there will be the master of all teachings like him in the future. Therefore, it is important to spread [his] teachings [you] received on this occasion. This is my wish.\textsuperscript{138}

Gungthang Tenpe Dronme shared the same concern regarding the possibility that Central Tibet’s influence as the source of transmission within the Geluk Buddhist world was dwindling. He commented, “in general, Central Tibet was the source of dharma. Due to [tumultuous] times, several major dharma transmissions were impaired and broken […].”\textsuperscript{139} This is likely an acknowledgement of the political turmoil disrupting religious transmission in Tibet when Jikmed Wangpo was deeply invested in building up Geluk intellectual influence. Having sensed this urgency, Gungthang Tenpe Dronme claims that Jikmed Wangpo made every effort and was eventually successful in restoring the transmission of central Geluk teachings (ibid., p. 367).\textsuperscript{140}

Inevitably, as Jikmed Wangpo’s authority and fame grew, he developed intimate relationships with Geluk patriarchs in Lhasa, even giving teachings to the eighth Dalai Lama Jampal Gyatso (’jam dpal rgya mtsho, 1758–1804). During his stay at the Potala Palace, he received the teaching on Great Seal from the Dalai Lama’s tutor and famed master Yeshe Gyaltsen. The intimate conversation between these two great minds of the Geluk School was revealing in terms of their take on the status of the intellectual tradition of the Geluk School. Jikmed Wangpo appealed to Yeshe Gyaltsen:

Especially, Your Highness, the dharma source of the Geluk School is the trio of Sedrege (se ‘bras dge gsum).\textsuperscript{141} Their scholastic programs depend on the actions of the Dalai Lama. Previously, during the time of the fifth Dalai Lama and his predecessors, geshes (dge bshes) were given great care/attention, therefore, there were obvious benefits. Today, to the government, instead of a geshe from a great monastery, a wealthy old man is more valuable. The political and religious wellbeing of the government and lecturing and listening at a great monastery are interdependent like naga and sea. However, the secretaries of the Potala Palace do not listen even they are told so. It will be none other than your words that will ever enable the Dalai Lama actually work for the affairs of political and religious wellbeing of the government. Please keep in mind.\textsuperscript{142}

Yeshe Gyaltsen agreed with him, responding, “in the current age, since you are truly the master of dharma, you must live long and take to heart of spreading in a hundred directions the dharma in general and the great tradition of Lama Mañjuśrī, the Savior,\textsuperscript{143} in particular”.\textsuperscript{144} Instead of dismissing their conversation as entirely literary rhetoric, the image presented alludes to the intellectual history of the Geluk School in a shifting context of both political and religious significance, which the final section of this work will cover in more detail.

At Norbu Lingka (nor bu gling ga),\textsuperscript{145} Jikmed Wangpo gave a series of teachings attended also by Longdol Lama. On that occasion, the group, including Longdol Lama, requested Jikmed Wangpo’s teaching on provisional and definitive meanings. Guntang Tenpe Drome praised his teacher Jikmed Wangpo for delivering an extended version of the teaching with such clarity, “as if the two great charioteers were actually present”\textsuperscript{146} He records highest compliments bestowed on Jikmed Wangpo by Longdol Lama and one Ngakwang Tashi of Upper Tantric College in Lhasa. Longdol Lama, for example, praised Jikmed Wangpo in the strongest terms: “there is no better authority than Yeshe Gyaltsen on Bodhi-Mind and no better authority than Jamyang Zhepa on the middle-way philosophy” (ibid., pp. 364–65). Thus, rhetoric language aside, this major Geluk teacher and leader in Central Tibet perceived Jikmed Wangpo to be as successful a scholar as his predecessor, and simply addressed him as Jamyang Zhepa.
Not only did Jikmed Wangpo teach extensively at Labrang, training a vast number of students, he also made sure that major transmissions were introduced back to Labrang, establishing it as a major center of Geluk Buddhism. Gungthang Tenpe Dronme alludes to Jikmed Wangpo’s long held vision when he records that during his second extended stay in Central Tibet, Jikmed Wangpo once confided to Yeshe Gyaltsen, “I have a plan of making good explanations of all scholars in intact form reach Tashi Khyil”.[147]

During his leadership at Labrang, Jikmed Wangpo went to great lengths to seek and propagate the reading transmission of the complete Kanjur canon in the Labrang community. When Jikmed Wangpo was sixty years old, only then did he successfully locate Chahar Kajurwa (cha har bka’ ‘gyur ba, u.d.) as a reliable source for transmission. Previously, Labrang boasted having an authentic transmission of Kajur originating from the Kajur master Lobzang Nyima. However, there was no one at Labrang who retained the transmission during Jikmed Wangpo’s time. Hence, Jikmed Wangpo’s efforts in its revival. His campaign identified a few lineages of transmission, though they were not propagated at Labrang, as they were believed to be adulterated with the Nyingma influence. A more authoritative transmission was not available for some time. Fortunately, when Jikmed Wangpo assumed the abbot office at the Zhakhyyong Monastery, he was visited by Chahar Lozang Tashi. During that meeting, Jikmed Wangpo learned that Chahar Lozang Tashi was, in fact, a keeper of a respectable transmission of Kanjur (ibid., p. 435). Therefore, Jikmed Wangpo made sure that Chahar Kajurwa came to Labrang and passed down the transmission to a group of elite monks.

Among them was the second Palmang Konchok Gyaltsen (dpa mang dkon mchog rgyal mtshan, 1764–1853),[148] Geshe Konchok Dargye (dkon mchog dar rgyas, 1742–1798),[149] Lozang Jikmed (blo bzang ‘jigs med, 1745–1792),[150] and Jikmed Rabgye. The Second Palmang then passed the transmission to the monastic community at Labrang, comprised of monks in upper-level classes in the scholastic college and monk students visiting Labrang. Jikmed Rabgye gave the transmission five or six times at Kumbum Monastery.[151] Thanks to his successful propagation of the transmission, he was known as the Great Kanjur Master (bka’ ’gyur ba chen po). Soon, it spread from Labrang and Kumbum, to major monasteries in Amdo, including Zhakyung, Serkhok (gser khog)[152] and Gonlung. Thus, the reputable transmission of Kanjur was rescued from its near extinction status and kept alive (Grags pa rgyal mtshan 1999b, f. 239 a.3, 240a.3; Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, p. 375).

Under the auspices of Jikmed Wangpo, at Labrang, the famed Drakar Ngakwang Drakpa gave the transmission of teachings in the Sad tradition passed down from Jamyang Zhepa, and led an active teaching career there until age ninety. When Jikmed Wangpo himself was transmitting the teaching on the Kadam Book (bka’ gdams glengs bami) at Labrang,[153] he confided, “I myself wanted to teach ordinary monks without partiality, however, it did not go as I wished”. [154] Obviously, Jikmed Wangpo felt that he should have done better in terms of preserving and propagating teachings at Labrang, amid what he and other Geluk patriarchs perceived as the decline of the Geluk tradition. Thus, beyond issues concerning his lineage identity, Jikmed Wangpo’s life demonstrates a model example of a monastic career in fostering an institutional center for propagating authoritative tradition.

The brief discussion above affords a rare glimpse into Buddhist transmission history in eighteenth-century Tibet. This is an important testimony, which, to some extent, allows us to reconsider inter-personal and inter-regional dynamics in the context of transmission lineage. Against the stereotyped image of Central Tibet’s dominance, we should re-evaluate the success of Geluk institutional centers such as Labrang, headed by its charismatic leader and scholar Jikmed Wangpo, who committed every effort to realize his vision of Labrang as “the source of dharma.” The majority of previous scholarship boils down to the point that although we witness the rise of Geluk institutions in Amdo, the elite intellectual community and Geluk lineage authority were still concentrated in the major monasteries of Central Tibet. I largely agree with the narrative of Central Tibetan Geluk monasteries’ prominence. Recent scholarship points to Amdo’s growth of Geluk Buddhist institutions with its accompanying surge in the number of reincarnation lineages (Tuttle 2017, pp. 29–32,
44) and massive output of Buddhist biographical literature (Schaeffer 2010, p. 268). Support from the extensive patronage network was critical to the Geluk rise in the region. As a case for making further arguments on the intellectual and religious prominence of Amdo, broad initiatives undertaken by native Amdo Geluk Buddhists such as Jikmed Wangpo are significant enough to greatly improve our understanding of multilayered agency and developments of the Geluk School in the region. The sources examined in this study offer limited information; however, they allowed us to get a very narrow yet intimate look into the dynamics of some major factors involved in shaping Geluk transmission across the Tibetan Plateau in the eighteenth century.

7. Monastic Liturgy and Language Arts

Jikmed Wangpo’s career marked an outburst of scholarly tradition at Labrang. He placed much emphasis on authoritative transmissions in the context of propagating traditional Buddhist education. However, his return from Central Tibet also marked a historic point for the institution of liturgical tradition, and Sanskrit and literary education at Labrang. According to his biographer Gungthang Tenpe Dronme, the Kalachakra lineage faced its imminent danger of being extinct at Labrang. Thus, the circumstances dictated he create the Kalachakra College with its ritual calendar and curriculum. The ritual practice related to the Full Enlightenment of Vairochana (rnam snang mngon byang) was among those he propagated, which was noted for its utmost importance of continuity, as this authoritative transmission faced its near extinction in all over Tibet (Gungthang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, pp. 144–45).

One unidentified master hailing from Tashi Lhunpo Monastery played a significant role in further ritual transmission at Labrang, as he was well trained in the ritual tradition followed at Tashi Lhunpo. Considering his contributions to the growing ritual system at Labrang, it is unusual that the master was not named. Jikmed Wangpo was previously instructed by the third Panchen Lama Lozang Palden Yeshe to have the ritual tradition including cham and Irion Castle from Tashi Lhunpo to propagate at Labrang. The Panchen Lama also specifically asked that Jikmed Wangpo seek this master for that purpose (ibid., p. 177). Therefore, Jikmed Wangpo arranged that approximately forty monks be trained in cham, later inspecting their performance upon finishing training (ibid., p. 179).

In addition to the ritual repertoire introduced from Tashi Lhunpo, Jikmed Wangpo sought transmissions from multiple sources to further enhance the ritual tradition instituted at Labrang. About ten monks were then sent to train in the Kalachakra ritual at Namgyal Monastery in Lhasa. Upon their return to Labrang, these monks were given wages and other renumeration for their service in transmitting those ritual practices (ibid., p. 233). Other initiatives include creating the tradition of singing religious songs (mgur) and performing the large-scale ritual dance known as chamchen (cham chen), with the latter of which was either to fulfill a request or was inspired by the late Detri Rinpoche (ibid., pp. 232, 251).

Furthermore, Jikmed Wangpo was interested in scholarly learning that fell outside of the normative Buddhist curriculum. Shortly after returning from his first extended training in Central Tibet, he undertook rigorous training in Sanskrit, poetry, and composition at Labrang, where he trained extensively in these areas under Sanskrit master, Kunga Sangye (kun dga’ sangs rgyas, u.d.), whom Jikmed Wangpo requested as a tutor from Situ Panchen Chokyi Jungney (si tu pan chenchos kyi ‘byung gnas, 1700–1774), based in Dege, Kham. Upon completing training, Jikmed Wangpo penned a letter of gratitude to Situ Panchen. Jikmed Wangpo also had his master chef Tenpa Dargye (bstan pa dar rgyas, u.d.) and one tantric master Choedzin Dargye (chos’ dizin dar rgyas, u.d.) trained under Kunga Sangye in astrology (ibid., pp. 142–43). Later, it was indicated that Jikmed Wangpo sent one Sherap Gyatso (shes rab rgya mtsho, u.d.) to Dege and sought textual copies of treatises on the aforementioned subjects on his behalf (ibid., p. 236).
8. Notes on the Political Times of Jikmed Wangpo

The eighteenth century was marred with a series of outburst in Tibetan political and religious spheres. There were countless conflicts; however, brief notes of three major incidents are provided below. They are significant for shaping the course of history and our interpretations of the chain of events that took place during this chaotic period.

First, the 1724 Qing persecution of Geluk monasteries in the northern part of Amdo implicated in the rebellion of Lobjang Danjin had a devastating impact on the Geluk School in Amdo. The outcome of the Qing wrath led to looting in Gonlung, Serkhok and Kumbum monasteries. The prominent Buddhist master, the second Chuzang Lozang Tenpe Gyaltse (chu bzang blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, 1652–1723), a tutor to the seventh Dalai Lama, died violently during this period of political and religious chaos (Kapstein 2005, p. 108). The staunch Mongol patron of the Geluk School, Lobjang Danjin, and his subjects faced a crackdown from the Qing army. Following the strong presence of the Qing power with its military and administrative outposts, the overall Mongol influence in the Kokonor region and Central Tibet declined drastically afterwards (Petech 1966, p. 289). Brenton Sullivan recently argued that in the wake of the 1723 revolt, there were signs of Qing administration (such as Qing-appointed monastic offices and taxation of monastic estates) in the Gonlung or Xining region, and they were focused on Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. Previously, Max Oidtmann pointed out that borders along administrative boundaries were secured as part of the Qing response to the frontier revolt. He indicated the Qing efforts to police and secure borders to prevent rebellion, raiding, and illegal trading (Oidtmann 2014, pp. 350, 361, 410).

Although far removed from the time of Jikmed Wangpo, the Qing policy had far-reaching effects, greatly impacting later Buddhist developments. The travel regulation for Amdo monks travelling to Central Tibet was a significant cause factoring into the interruption of Buddhist transmission and scholarly tradition emanating from the major Geluk centers in Central Tibet. Due to the dearth of historical materials on the matter, I can only guess that contrary to the notion that monks could travel freely across the plateau, many restrictions were imposed on the movement of Amdo native Buddhist monks travelling to Central Tibet. For example, in the biography of Jikmed Wangpo’s close disciple, the third Thukan Lozang Choyky Nyima, there is mention of a lawsuit from 1792, implicating in a border control case when monks, mostly from Kumbum and Gonlung, were traveling to Central Tibet for monastic education. According to the biographer of the third Thukan, travel law requiring documents for entry into Central Tibet were put in place by order of the imperial Qing court due to the Gurkha–Tibet wars (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1992, pp. 797–98).

When the Amban in Lhasa learned they were in the city without permission, the Qing official reported the matter directly to the court and the Xining-based Amban was ordered to look into the matter. Thanks to the diplomatic skills of the third Thukan, the Amban showed grace and all the monks were excused for violating the travel regulation. The Xining Amban even eased the travel law by allowing local leaders to take the charge directly when dealing with future travels for Amdo monks. The rule was such that Amdo natives were allowed to travel to Central Tibet after obtaining permission from the local leaders (rang rang gi sa cha’i dpon po) (ibid., p. 798). The legal case implicating the third Shar Gedun Trinle Rabgye for his “illegal” travel to Central Tibet dates back to 1786, indicating that there were restrictions even before the wars (Jigs med dam chos nga mtsho 1997, pp. 295–96). In fact, it was customary for the majority of Amdo reincarnates of the Geluk School to petition the Xining Amban or the court and only proceed to travel with Qing court approval. The case of the third Thukan more compellingly suggests that entry to Central Tibet was strictly controlled in 1753 when the third Thukan requested a travel pass. The court approval came too late—the following year. However, he waited another year, so he in fact travelled and enrolled in Gomang College outside Lhasa, only three years after he petitioned the court (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1992, pp. 61, 64, 66). Jikmed Wangpo sought travel permission before embarking on his second journey to Central Tibet.
in 1784 (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, pp. 316, 319). However, it seems no such permission was petitioned, or there was no record of a court petition for his first journey.

Second, the religious status quo in Tibet was further exacerbated by the Qing strategy of “relocating” the Geluk Buddhist centers to Qing China. Many high-profile reincarnates from the Geluk School, commonly known as zhujing huotuketu in Chinese, were designated lamas of residence at the court. Arguably, the third Changja Rolpe Dorje was the most influential Geluk reincarnate at the Qing court. These lamas served as imperial preceptors helping the court oversee significant historic events in Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhism (Li 2011; Pu [1993] 2006a; Chen [1994] 2006a). Although the Yuan and Ming dynasties were also invested in similar endeavors, including the entitlement of Tibetan Buddhist lamas with ranks such as guoshi, dishi, fawang, and chanshi (Li 2011, p. 64; Pu [2000] 2006b, pp. 366–67); it was unusual that during the Qing era, the court had nearly exclusive patronage of the Geluk School. More importantly, the Qing political initiative, coupled with its concurrent support of the Geluk School, manifested in the form of replicating Tibetan Buddhist monastic centers and monuments—Samye (bsam yas), Tashi Lhunpo, and Potala—as well as creating new Tibetan Buddhist sites in Mongolia and Qing China (Chen [1994] 2006a, pp. 949–51; Chayet 2004, pp. 38–42). These Buddhist establishments were operated and staffed by Tibetan Buddhist masters who were reassigned from their responsibilities for monastic centers in Tibet.

The court’s lavish gifts and prestigious titles did not always win the hearts of Geluk reincarnates. For example, the third Thukan Lozang Chokyi Nyima perceived the Qing court’s constant demand for his services in China as a major hurdle to his religious practice back in Amdo (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1992, pp. 152–54). There were signs to suggest that these sites were the emerging centers of Tibetan Buddhism in Qing, especially because of the extended residence of Geluk luminaries there. For example, in order to seek authoritative transmissions from Changja Rolpe Dorje, Lozang Tenpe Nyima, and Lozang Dargye, Jikmed Wangpo planned to travel all the way to meet them at the court or Chengde, the site of the Qing summer palace, north of the capital. The great distance from the reputable sources of these teachings made the already rare transmission all the more fragile. Added to the mix was the old age and death of lineage masters, putting the transmissions at high risk for extinction. When Lozang Tenpe Nyima returned to Amdo from the court, Jikmed Wangpo seized the opportunity to visit the master and seek transmission from him. The master’s old age and eventual death left his major transmission to Jikmed Wangpo incomplete, thus, compelling Jikmed Wangpo to travel to China and seek the transmission.

The smallpox outbreak was also a factor for endangering the network of transmissions. During his second visit to Central Tibet, the epidemic of smallpox interrupted his teaching program (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, pp. 358–59). The disease also cost the third Panchen Lama his life in 1780, during his visit to the Qing court summer resort (Shakabpa 1984, p. 155). In fact, the high risk of contracting smallpox was often cited as a reason that Tibetan Buddhist lamas politely refused invitations from the Qing court (Benard 2004, p. 126). There are plenty of instances in the Tibetan biographical literature, indicating that the epidemic was a cause of disruption and threat hindering the public religious life of Tibetans.

The Qianlong emperor further consolidated the Qing conquest and legitimacy in the inner Asian frontier by financing massive Tibetan Buddhist scriptural production. Qianlong’s reprint of the Kanjur canon was executed based on the edition prepared by the Kangxi emperor. Qianlong also commissioned a translation of the Kajur canon into Manchu and Mongolian (Benard 2004, p. 124). Such degree of the Qing efforts during the Qianlong era in creating new Inner Asian Buddhist canons, Tibetan Buddhist religious institutions and the monastic community in China and Mongolia suggests that the emperor was heavily invested in exerting his influence over Tibetan Buddhism as part of his political agenda. The Qing emperor intervened in Tibet’s political and religious reshufflings and enhanced its previously dysfunctional administrative outpost Amban, and also attempted and
partially succeeded at reincarnation succession regulation, via the method of golden urn towards the end of the eighteenth century. Thus, the Qing court showed political interest in managing a close control of Tibetan Buddhism and, by extension, its unruly Inner Asian subjects (Tsyrem pilov 2006, pp. 60–61).

With the sprout of Tibetan Buddhist sites at or near the court and the long residency of Tibetan Buddhist masters serving as royal priests and envoys at the court, it was much easier for the court’s attempts to oversee matters regarding Buddhist and political affairs in Tibet and Mongolia. Thus, it is clear that the emerging influence of Tibetan Buddhism in Qing China curated by the court was a political boon of Qing policy. However, the Qing strategy disrupted the Tibetan Buddhist network of masters, disciples, and institutions, hindering the smooth transmission of teachings, and by extension, undermining traditional religious life and authority within the larger Geluk community in Tibet.

Third, it is commonplace to consider the life and times of historians to analyze the constraints and impacts on their perceptions of history because of the peculiar time period in which they lived and wrote. In the present work, I also attempt to explicate the factors that might influence Gungthang Tenpe Dronme’s biographical writing project, which could very well affect our understanding of Buddhist developments in eighteenth-century Tibet, especially the religious career of Jikmed Wangpo. Since Tibetan Buddhist biographies are, to some extent, rhetoric tools to edify the subjects of biographies, it is important to note the role of biographical narratives as partially constructing the personae of masters recounted in their biographical accounts. It can be discerned that biographers’ time and place partially shape the historical lens through which our understanding of Jikmed Wangpo’s role and time is reconstructed. It may be the case that Gungthang Tenpe Dronme was situating the life of Jikmed Wangpo within the context of the eighteenth century. He started writing Jikmed Wangpo’s biography in 1791, the same year Jikmed Wangpo passed away, and it was only completed in 1799 (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, pp. 490–91). The Gurkha–Tibet war broke out twice (in 1788 and 1791), destroying several monastic sites of the Geluk School in the Tsang region. Panchen Lama’s seat, Tashi Lhunpo Monastery, was hit hard during the looting by the Nepali force. Samten Tharwa Ling (bsam gtan thar ba gling), the famed retreat site of Yeshe Gyaltse, was also severely affected and required major reconstitution (‘Jam dpal rgya mtsho 2011, p. 295). The wars just mentioned implicated the two major Geluk institutional centers headed by two Geluk masters who were among the most crucial figures in Jikmed Wangpo’s formative period as a scholar and institutional leader. The sheer terror and confusion from the wars caused the Lhasa Ambans to try in vain to persuade the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama to take shelter in Kham (Oidtmann 2014, p. 32; Rose 1971, p. 54; Shakabpa 1984, pp. 165–66).

Looking back on the life of Jikmed Wangpo in his biographical writing, Gungtang Tenpe Dronme would very well locate these central moments of Geluk history in Central Tibet where Jikmed Wangpo achieved his intellectual and spiritual prominence. It should be further noted that political and religious structures in eighteenth-century Central Tibet were plunged into chaos (including the assassination of the Qoshot King Lhazang Khan, Dzungar persecution, civil war, the extended exile of the seventh Dalai Lama followed by the killing of King Gyarmed Dorje and fatal revenge on two Ambans based in Lhasa right before Jikmed Wangpo’s first travel to Central Tibet). Some of these events were implicitly noted in the biography of Jikmed Wangpo because of their potential implication when elites at the Labrang Monastery debated whether young Jikmed Wangpo should travel to Central Tibet.

While removed from these tumultuous times by temporal distance, and especially the war and political confusion inflicted by the Gurkha invasion in Central Tibet by geographical divide, Gungthang Tenpei Dronme’s composition of Jikmed Wangpo’s biography in Amdo during the wars could still influence his framing of the narratives of his master in relation to the latter’s intellectual legacy. Jikmed Wangpo’s intellectual career was marked by his long search for textual and oral transmission in Central Tibet, among many other things. Now, the fact that the Geluk monastic centers in Central Tibet were
under existential threat from the hostility of the Gurkha forces at the time of writing the biography heightens the intellectual prominence and legacy of Jikmed Wangpo in Amdo. In other words, it is most revealing to entertain the literary imagination that Gungthang Tenpi Dronme’s narrative of Jikmed Wangpo’s life in general and his master’s spiritual heritage is set against the backdrop of much religious and political volatility across the tumultuous eighteenth century. His proud celebration of Jikmed Wangpo’s intellectual feats was a deliberate contrast to the era before the master’s active career and legacy in Tibet, marked by the latter’s success in securing rare and disappearing teachings, making him a cultural icon for initiating the revival of strong Buddhist tradition and community. Reasonably enough, Jikmed Wangpo’s intellectual prominence was the primary focus of biographer Gungthang Tenpe Dronme. Thus, our impression of this central Geluk figure is considerably influenced by the literary imagination of the era, as penned by his heart disciple. Nonetheless, the eighteenth century was widely noted for its chain of political struggles and confusion, making a tremendous impact on Tibet’s religious structure and intellectual traditions.

9. Conclusions

This study reconstructs a central moment of the transmission lineage network, a part of the multilayered engagements between Geluk masters and institutions in eighteenth-century Tibet. As a result, the internal dynamics of the extensive Buddhist intellectual network is presented in this context as a major factor in its institutional growth. The focus of intellectual history as reflecting from the illustrious career of Jikmed Wangpo in the present work, however, does not elide significant roles of other external influences, such as political patronage, as extensively treated in current scholarship. Jikmed Wangpo led a successful monastic career taking the helm at the Labrang Monastery and its branches. His intellectual prominence and wise leadership at Labrang and beyond were even more extraordinary feats considering he faced intense opposition within the Labrang community. It was extreme that his own lineage succession was contested for a greater portion of his life. The escalation of internal strife at Labrang dealt a major blow to the monastic community and intellectual system there. Against all the odds, Jikmed Wangpo brilliantly turned it around and made Labrang into the “source of dharma”; he was able to ensure an ever-flourishing monastic and intellectual community at Labrang radiating out its influence in the larger Buddhist community.

Since his legitimacy was a major concern throughout his contested religious career, it might be deduced that his scholastic and monastic life was driven by his strong determination and constant efforts to prove the legitimacy of his lineage succession. Although the question of his lineage loomed large for much of his life, Jikmed Wangpo’s role and growth as a scholar and monastic leader are better understood in the larger context of the intellectual and institutional developments that he envisioned and initiated at Labrang and beyond. At the crux of Jikmed Wangpo’s initiative was legitimizing Buddhist transmission with its accompanying religious discourse, as extensively discussed in the main body of this work.

Jikmed Wangpo’s religious career is a rare example of a tremendously successful, accomplished life in Tibetan Buddhist intellectual and institutional history. His success as both a scholar and institutional leader fueled major developments in the Geluk School in Amdo; Labrang’s growth brought it to its place as the center of an ever-increasing network of monastic institutions either created or fostered by Jikmed Wangpo’s leadership. Understandably, the expansion of Labrang’s domain and its branch monasteries, coupled with the increased influence of their main lineages, posed a threat to and an encroachment on the religious power of neighboring monasteries—particularly Rongwo and Tso—towards the end of his life (see endnote 84; Nietupski 2011, pp. 127–28, 131).

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Notes

1. The shift of the early Qing policy with its patronage influencing the Amdo region is explored in a recent study; see (Kung 2018, pp. 132–134). In addition to the Manchu and Central Tibetan Geluk influence, the active agency of native Amdo monks as a crucial factor in Geluk growth in the region is identified in a survey (Tuttle 2012, pp. 137–38). The case of Geluk growth represented by Labrang and Rongwo monasteries under the leadership of native Amdo monks is a good indicator of greater agency of local Geluk Buddhists in Amdo. For a study on Labrang, see (Nietupski 2011). See also (Oldtman 2014, chps. 6 and 7), for rethinking the role of monasteries implicated in the geopolitics of Amdo in the context of legal pluralism eventually culminating in a Qing-centered pluralist legal order. On the surge in Geluk reincarnation series in Amdo in the eighteenth century, see (Tuttle 2017, pp. 32, 34, 44). For the growth in Geluk production of the biographical literature in Amdo, see (Schaeffer 2010). For a very brief survey of the textual collection produced by Geluk masters highlighting Amdo’s lead in the eighteenth century, see (Kim 2016).

2. For examples, see (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, pp. 262, 277, 283, 313, 389, 396, 425, 454).

3. ‘di phyogs gi gdon che phra thams cad dgon lag gi ming btags ma btags gang ltar yang ...gzhi bkru shis ’kyi la brten nas chags dgos pas don gyi gdon lag yin (ibid., p. 390).

4. In several cases, it is notable that his role was that of instituting and overseeing the academic curriculum and monastic regulations as well as the appointment of monastic leadership.

5. For details, see (ibid., pp. 125, 127, 129, 132, 155, 165–68, 228–29, 232, 248–49, 251, 405).

6. gdan sa ‘di nyid kyi khyadchos bla na med pa’i gtsos bo ni mtshan nyid kyi ‘chad nyan yin pas/grwa ‘tshogs gang sa nas thos bsam gling gtsos che dgos par gezis te rgyud par grva ba nyis brya dang bcu ge’gadus ‘khor la brgya dang nga ge’g las lhag zhugs mi chog pa so so skabs su gang bubs kya sgrigs lam ’ga’ gsar tshugs mdza (ibid., p. 233).

7. In the biography, it is remarkable in the consistency that whenever there was a mass teaching, monks attending the teaching were identified of their origin of monasteries. Nietupski (2011, p. 20) mentions that nearly one thousand monks were enrolled at Labrang when the first Detri Rinpoche served as the abbot of Labrang. I have yet to identify his source on that estimated figure.

8. At one point, while Khenchen Gedun Gyatso was serving its abbot, there were 180 monks at Rongwo. I can establish this figure as it is recorded in the biography of Khenchen Gedun Gyatso that during a trip, Khenchen Gedun Gyatso obtained a total of 180 pieces of lambskin as donations, just enough to give one piece to each of the monks at Rongwo. See (Ngag dbang ’jam dbyangs dpal ldan [1764] n.d., p. 296).

9. For a study of this main source, see (Tuttle 2011).

10. Jikmed Wangpo’s Records of Teachings Received comes in two full volumes in block print format (Grags pa rgyal mtshan 1999a, 1999b).

11. The version of the biography used in the present study is a print in modern book format, based on a block print edition kept at the library of Labrang Monastery. However, the block print restricts access at the moment.

12. These works include (Sobisch 2007; Sobisch 2002; Kramer 2008; van Schaik 2000; Ehrhard 2012).

13. (Gyatso 1993) identifies a variety of legitimation strategy in the treasure tradition. See also (Gyatso 1986).

14. It may be understood as a retrospective projection of the stream of a Tibetan Buddhist master’s previous lives; it is an important way to advance one’s lineage pedigree, even extending to the lives of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

15. These include (Faggen 2020; Besserenger 2017; Lin 2017; Maher 2006). For an example on the inventive process of actively extending a preincarnation lineage, see (MacCormack 2020).

16. rigs pa glebs dam las bslab kyi/bla ma’i thad nas ma bslabs pa/’phyon ma’i bud med sbrum ma lzhin/tshogs pa’i nang na mi mdzes so (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, p. 444). Gungthang Tenpe Dronme cites the verse from the Tree of Wisdom (shes rab sdom bu), an ethical work composed by Nāgārjuna.

17. More pertinent in this context is scholarship surveying the issue regarding construction and corrosion of transmission authority across major phases of Buddhism—pre-Mahayana and Mahayana Buddhism. (David McMahan 1998, pp. 251–52, 269–72) explores various strategies for establishing scriptural authority within the Mahayana Buddhism during its ascendance vis-à-vis the orthodox monastic tradition. The latter makes self-conscious preservation of oral tradition to claim their lineage legitimacy. One among them concerns its particular kind of transmission. He argues that the sacred status of Mahayana Buddhism was established on a “higher” register of discourse, bypassing oral or hearing proximity to the physical body of historical Buddha, with a direct visionary encounter with transcendent Buddhas. However, it is important to note that there are also other criteria such as not contradicting reality and spiritual function for legitimizing scriptural transmission across different phases of Buddhism (Davidson 1990, pp. 300–2; Lopez 1995, pp. 26–27). Within Mahayana Buddhism, although a link to the transcendent realm in Buddhism was invoked in general, unbroken oral lineage in a master–disciple relationship grounded in the historical/human world was still a critical component of transmission, at least in Tibet, as extensively explored in the present work. The treasure tradition of Nyingma School is an exception laying its claim of authority to the revelation of teachings buried in the human world but originated in a transcendent realm (Gyatso 1986, pp. 8–18; Gyatso 1993, p. 113). There were also occasional transmissions revealed in visionary contexts in other traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. Within the Geluk School, Tsongkhapa’s receipt of teaching on Madhyamika philosophy during a revelation is a well-known example. In contrast to the view of Mahayana Buddhism as a scriptural tradition.
For a full biography of Se Ngawang Tashi, see (Blo bzang bkra shis ‘phrin las rgya mtsho n.d.). For a brief account of his life and \( 'brug sgra thos pa'i rma bya bzhin du dgyes tshor dpag med mdzad \) (Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me 1990, p. 132).

The controversy surrounding reincarnation succession after the sixth Dalai Lama Tsangyang Gyatso was widely known (Lcang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje 2015, pp. 18–19; Bse Ngag dbang bkra shis 2015, pp. 137–38; van Schaik 2011, pp. 130–31, 136–37). On the tension between the fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lozang Gyatso and Drakpa Gyaltsen (grags pa rgyal mtshan, 1619–1656), each claiming his legitimacy as the reincarnation of the fourth Dalai Lama Yonten Gyatso (yon tan rgya mtsho, 1589–1617), see (Kapstein 2015, p. 169).

This account spans 37 folios, independent of the biography Jikmed Wangpo wrote of his predecessor.

For a full biography of Se Ngawang Tashi, see (Blo bzang bkra shis ‘phrin las rgya mtsho n.d.). For a brief account of his life and works, see (Uspensky 1997, pp. 1005–10).

There was disproportionately a short biography of Detri Lozang Dondrup (Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me 2003, pp. 485–517). Detri Lozang Dondrup’s important, yet less known role in building Labrang Monastery, especially buttressing the legitimacy and authority of Jikmed Wangpo, was acknowledged in the Labrang monastic community from the main sources of this study, see (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, p. 393; Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me 1990, pp. 30–42).

(Gung mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, p. 391). Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas explicitly states that Se Ngawang Tashi led Labrang Monastery for thirty-two years. Given that the institution of Labrang Monastery in 1709 initially had a large tent for the monastic assembly, there were more or less 30 intervening years until his death in 1738.

(ibid., pp. 368–69). It seems that with the endorsement of the Mongol queen, Jikmed Wangpo was first publicly recognized as the reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa in 1735 (the year of wood hare). I have yet to verify whether the qingwang played an active role in endorsing his son as the heir in the reincarnation line. It is more likely due to the fact that even after the death of the abbot and main detractor Se Ngawang Tashi in 1738, Jikmed Wangpo was not brought over to Labrang until four years later. That said, in celebration of Jikmed Wangpo’s enthronement at Labrang, qingwang arranged an elaborate banquet and offered abundant wealth to Jikmed Wangpo and his entourage. Jikmed Wangpo’s father Ngawang Dargye (ngag dbang dar rgyas, u.d.) and uncle Ujong (Us jing, u.d.) were both granted new titles (Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me 1990, p. 50). It is also known that at the death bed of the Mongol queen, as requested by the queen, qingwang pledged to bring Jikmed Wangpo over to Labrang for his enthronement (ibid., pp. 41–42). Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me in his biography of Jikmed Wangpo also records that whereas Detri Lozang Dondrup’s recognition of Jikmed Wangpo as the reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa was confirmed by the late master’s recount of his past and future lives whereas an auspicious sign was dreamt by Se Ngawang Tashi suggesting the latter’s opposition and future controversy surrounding the re-incarnation succession, but avoids directly identifying Se Ngawang Tashi’s rejection of Jikmed Wangpo’s legitimacy as the successor (ibid., pp. 28–29).

For a biography of Tongkhor Sonam Gyatso, see (Stong 'khor zhabz drung Inga pa'ng dbang bsod nams rgya mtshor skyes pa'i rabs kyi le'u 2005, pp. 221–48). According to the preface, this modern book print is based on a block print obtained from Kardze Monastery (dkar mdzes dgon pa) in Kham.

(Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me 1990, pp. 14–15). The family previously consulted an obscure yogin visiting the family following the birth of Jikmed Wangpo. The yogin proclaimed that Jamyang Zhepa would have three emanations—corresponding to his body, mind, and speech aspects. And the boy was confirmed as the emanation of the mind of Jamyang Zhepa. The reincarnation was confirmed on separation occasions by one Drakpa Lhundrup (grags pa lhun grub, u.d.), a direct disciple of Jamyang Zhepa, and one of young Jikmed Wangpo’s uncles, who was not named, but identified other than the famed Tongkhor Sonam Gyatso (ibid., pp. 24–25). Jikmed Wangpo’s mother herself also later saw her son as the reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa in a dream vision, but kept it secret at that time. In three instances, it is recorded in the biography of Jikmed Wangpo that Tongkor Sonam Gyatso simply addressed him as Gola ('sgo bla) on a constant basis, the short for Lama of Gomang ('sgo mang bla ma), indicating his endorsement of his nephew as the reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa. In fact, he was the main person responsible for grooming of young Jikmed Wangpo until his enthronement at Labrang (ibid., pp. 32–35).

For a full biography, see (Jam dbyangs grags pa 1991, pp. 119–281).

Urge is a generic term loaned from Mongolian referring to a local administrative office among the Mongols of Kokonor region (Oidtmann 2014, pp. 357–58).

\( 'brug sgra thos pa'i rma bya bzhin du dgyes tshor dpag med mdzad \) (Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me 1990, p. 27).

This probably suggests the enthronement of Jikmed Wangpo was actually forced at Labrang.

As shown later in the present work, there were conscious efforts made throughout Jikmed Wangpo’s life to seek disciples of the deceased Jamyang Zhepa as tutor. This tutor is one in a major reincarnation lineage based at Labrang.

Jikmed Wangpo had the privilege that these debate sessions were held in private, not conducted on the public debate yard.
It is slightly unusual that this happened after the enthronement. It was customary for young potential candidates to identify scriptures and other religious objects belonging to their predecessors in the reincarnation lines as part of identification procedure. That said, a few years prior to his enthronement at Labrang, an envoy from Labrang sent by Detri Lozang Dondrup came to inspect and test Jikmed Wangpo to see if he could recognize the personal belongings of Jamyang Zhepa. Jikmed Wangpo regarded this as somewhat disrespectful in light of the ongoing controversy surrounding his reincarnation legitimacy. Therefore, according to Gung thang bstan pa’i sgon me, Jikmed Wangpo initially picked up items owned by his predecessor, but then refused to comply with the search delegation and deliberately took those items that did not belong to his predecessor (ibid., 29–30).

It is explicitly recorded that a chant leader especially requested this poem from Jikmed Wangpo to demonstrate himself as a reincarnation of Jamyang Zhepa.

The political chaos in this context should refer to the political incident involving the assassination of King Gyurme Namgyal (’gyur med rnam rgyal, d.1750) and the deaths of the two Ambans in Lhasa (van Schaik 2011, p. 144).

Going to Central Tibet to enroll for an extended period in one of three major Geluk monasteries (Sera, Drepung, and Ganden) was almost a rite of passage as well as the most formative period for aspiring Geluk monks for their intellectual refinement. For example, according to Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan, Jikmed Wangpo himself sent his heart disciple Gungthang Tenpe Dronme to Central Tibet for the same purpose (Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan [1987] 1989, p. 39).

Already senior in his age, at Labrang, Jikmed Wangpo himself confided to his main disciple Gungthang Tenpe Dronme that the status of wealth and rank had not been relevant in the process of identification of the latter that he presided over.

The name suggests that he was a local ruler of an area known as Ngagod. But, then he was afterwards referred to as Ngagod Ponlop as in Ngagod Ponpo is a typo. Ponlop is more or less the English equivalent of master.

This obscure person seems to be an influential local ruler. It is important to note that a monastic segment represented by Jamyang Zhepa lobbied for support of the Qoshud king sending away the sixth Dalai Lama Tsangyarg Gyatso against the wishes of the majority of monastic elites in Lhasa. And right before this incident, the conflict between the Tibetan regent and Mongol king escalated ending with the killing of the former in the hands of the Mongol queen (van Schaik 2011, pp. 133–34; Tsyrempilov 2006, pp. 37–58).

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This short biography of the second Se Ngawang Jamyang Tashi was prepared by the fifth Se Lozang Tashi Trinle Gyatso (blo bstan kun dga’ rgya mtsho, 1814–1879) in 1913. This was compiled on the basis of an earlier version composed by one Lozang Kunga Gyatso (blo bstan kun dga’ rgya mtsho, u.d.), to include information related to the subject’s life in the biographies of the third Shar Gedun Trinle Rabgye (sha bo gcod pa) and the seventh Dalai Lama, Jamyang Zhepa, and Jikmed Wangpo. There were also few seemingly insignificant things that Jikmed Wangpo did and that were rather perceived as a validation of his lineage identity. For example, Jikmed Wangpo threw a scarf as an offering to the statue of Jamyang Khoyonma (g.yer gshong ngag dbang dge ’du mtha’ gsal) during a tour in Lhasa, with the scarf eventually landing in the palm of the statue. Gungthang Tenpe Dronme also devotes a retelling of the highlights of Jikmed Wangpo’s life thematically in broad terms. It extols Jikmed Wangpo’s “straightforward” success despite its note of tension at the early stage of his career reeling from the controversy surrounding his reincarnation identification (Zhazha 1989a, pp. 119–24, 139; Zhazha 1989b, pp. 134–41). In general, in connection with the life of Jikmed Wangpo, the existing publications all easily gloss over the central question of transmission and its excruciatingly complex interplay with religious authority and legitimacy against a well-understood historical backdrop of increasing fragility and crisis in religious and political spheres of eighteenth-century Tibet. Nietupski instead briefly focuses on the example of Gungthang Tenpe Dronme’s intellectual life to demonstrate the wide range of topics of learning and pedigree of scholarship at Labrang (Nietupski 2011, pp. 26–31).

For examples, see (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1992, pp. 105–7, 109–10, 123–24, 262–64, 289).

After deposition of Tsangyang Gyatso, a monk by the name of Ngawang Yeshe Gyatso (ngag dbang ye shes rgya mtsho, 1686–1717) from Jakpori (lcags po ri) Monastery was installed as the sixth Dalai Lama. According to van Schaik, the abbots of major Geluk monasteries in and around Lhasa signed a statement to the effect that the spiritual enlightenment (bodhi) no longer dwelt in him. And he states it is not clear whether the abbots were coerced or in fact disillusioned with Tshangyang Gyatso. It is further noted that Lhasang Khan declared publicly falsity of Tshangyang Gyatso as a Dalai Lama (van Schaik 2011, pp. 134; Petech 1972, p. 16).

For details on these sites, see (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, pp. 91, 341). The best-known example here is Ribo Gephel (ri bo dge ’phel) where Jikmed Wangpo undertook a short retreat and gave a series of teachings. This visit was undertaken, perhaps entirely because that the site has a reputation for its strong association with Jamyang Zhepa’s extended retreat whereby he composed the majority of new text manuals for use at Gomang College. After that visit, in recognition of such historical significance of the site as well religious authority emanating from the lineage of Jikmed Wangpo and his predecessor, Yeshe Gyaltsen would carry out renovation of the chamber previously used by Jamyang Zhepa, and then commission the statues of Buddha, Tsongkhapa, the seventh Dalai Lama, Jamyang Zhepa, and Jikmed Wangpo. Having an iconographic representation of Jikmed Wangpo as a relatively permanent fixture of the site side by side that of his predecessor Jamyang Zhepa under the auspices of the prominent Geluk patriarch Yeshe Gyaltsen is a powerful confirmation and/or assertion of young Jikmed Wangpo’s lineage identity (ibid., pp. 360–61). There were also few seemingly insignificant things that Jikmed Wangpo did and that were rather perceived as a validation of his lineage identity. For example, Jikmed Wangpo threw a scarf as an offering to the statue of Jamyang Khoyonma (’jam dbyangs kbo yon ma) during a tour in Lhasa, with the scarf eventually landing in the palm of the statue. Gungthang Tenpe Dronme would comment that this gesture was none other than the same miraculous sign performed to the very statue by Jikmed Wangpo’s predecessor while in Lhasa (ibid., p. 327). Further, he records that when Jikmed Wangpo moved into his predecessor’s chamber, he later underwent an expansion and remodelling under his direction; more importantly, all these activities occurred without any

56 phogs lhung gi snol ngan rgyun chad (ibid., p. 372).
57 He was most likely Quinwang Ngawang Dargye (ngag dbang dar rgyas, 1736/1740–1807).
58 He was most likely Quinwang Dorje Phalam (ro bo rje pha lam, u.d.) who ruled as qinguang from 1753–1770. Besu is the Tibetan rendition of political rank beise in Chinese. For a wide range of such political titles administered by the Qing court, see (Nietupski 2011, p. 116).
59 For details on these sites, see (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, pp. 91, 341).
60 There were three divisions comprising the clan of Nambla.
61 Scholarship published in China devoted to the life of Jikmed Wangpo includes a number of journal articles. Danqu briefly noted the roles of the local Mongol royal house, Detri Rinpoche, Tongkhor Sonam Gyatso, and the ruler of Chentsa Ngawang Namgyal (ngag dbang rnam rgyal, u.d.) as advancing various political strategies when it came to recognizing Jikmed Wangpo. The latter two are Jikmed Wangpo’s uncle and father, respectively (Danqu 1987, pp. 53–55). In addition to the above factors, Sha wo gcod pa lists the influence of monastic leaders at Lamo Dechen Monastery in supporting the claim of reincarnation status to Jikmed Wangpo. Sha wo gcod pa’s second article is simply a summary of the life of Jikmed Wangpo, perhaps entirely based on the biography of Jikmed Wangpo (Sha bo gcod pa 2016, 2018). In one article, published in two separate parts, totalling fifteen pages, Zhazha also undertakes a retelling of the highlights of Jikmed Wangpo’s life thematically in broad terms. It extols Jikmed Wangpo’s “straightforward” success despite its note of tension at the early stage of his career reeling from the controversy surrounding his reincarnation identification (Zhazha 1989a, pp. 119–24, 139; Zhazha 1989b, pp. 134–41). In general, scholarship in China suffer from overgeneralisations as many of the claims are highly subjective and hardly grounded in historical evidence. In fact, our currently available sources can hardly afford us any substantial evidence to help us understand the roles of local Mongol rulers, monastic leaders at Lamo Dechen, Ngawang Namgyal, the Central Tibetan Geluk patriarchs as well as the Qing court and Changja Rolpe Dorje as briefly mentioned so or touted so for political/diplomatic benefits allegedly bestowed on Jikmed Wangpo for consolidation of his lineage legitimacy. Thus, while these political shallower connections may hypothetically serve as significant factors, they cannot be assumed a priori. In his monograph on Labrang, Paul Nietupski also devotes to treat the figure of Jikmed Wangpo in a few pages in a row as well as in numerous instances throughout the work, but provides few specific details regarding the political patronage of the local Mongol royal house contributing to growth of Labrang by helping acquire more estate and sponsoring institutional developments (Nietupski 2011, pp. 130–32). In general, in connection with the life of Jikmed Wangpo, the existing publications all easily gloss over the central question of transmission and its excruciatingly complex interplay with religious authority and legitimacy against a well-understood historical backdrop of increasing fragility and crisis in religious and political spheres of eighteenth-century Tibet. Nietupski instead briefly focuses on the example of Gungthang Tenpe Dronme’s intellectual life to demonstrate the wide range of topics of learning and pedigree of scholarship at Labrang (Nietupski 2011, pp. 26–31).
62 For examples, see (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1992, pp. 105–7, 109–10, 123–24, 262–64, 289).
63 After deposition of Tsangyang Gyatso, a monk by the name of Ngawang Yeshe Gyatso (ngag dbang ye shes rgya mtsho, 1686–1717) from Jakpori (lcags po ri) Monastery was installed as the sixth Dalai Lama. According to van Schaik, the abbots of major Geluk monasteries in and around Lhasa signed a statement to the effect that the spiritual enlightenment (bodhi) no longer dwelt in him. And he states it is not clear whether the abbots were coerced or in fact disillusioned with Tshangyang Gyatso. It is further noted that Lhasang Khan declared publicly falsity of Tshangyang Gyatso as a Dalai Lama (van Schaik 2011, p. 134; Petech 1972, p. 16).
64 For details on these sites, see (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, pp. 91, 341). The best-known example here is Ribo Gephel (ri bo dge ’phel) where Jikmed Wangpo undertook a short retreat and gave a series of teachings. This visit was undertaken, perhaps entirely because that the site has a reputation for its strong association with Jamyang Zhepa’s extended retreat whereby he composed the majority of new text manuals for use at Gomang College. After that visit, in recognition of such historical significance of the site as well religious authority emanating from the lineage of Jikmed Wangpo and his predecessor, Yeshe Gyaltsen would carry out renovation of the chamber previously used by Jamyang Zhepa, and then commission the statues of Buddha, Tsongkhapa, the seventh Dalai Lama, Jamyang Zhepa, and Jikmed Wangpo. Having an iconographic representation of Jikmed Wangpo as a relatively permanent fixture of the site side by side that of his predecessor Jamyang Zhepa under the auspices of the prominent Geluk patriarch Yeshe Gyaltsen is a powerful confirmation and/or assertion of young Jikmed Wangpo’s lineage identity (ibid., pp. 360–61). There were also few seemingly insignificant things that Jikmed Wangpo did and that were rather perceived as a validation of his lineage identity. For example, Jikmed Wangpo threw a scarf as an offering to the statue of Jamyang Khoyonma (’jam dbyangs kbo yon ma) during a tour in Lhasa, with the scarf eventually landing in the palm of the statue. Gungthang Tenpe Dronme would comment that this gesture was none other than the same miraculous sign performed to the very statue by Jikmed Wangpo’s predecessor while in Lhasa (ibid., p. 327). Further, he records that when Jikmed Wangpo moved into his predecessor’s chamber, he later underwent an expansion and remodelling under his direction; more importantly, all these activities occurred without any
bad omens or supernatural intervention. All those who witnessed these events could not be more convinced of Jamyang Zhepa reincarnating as Jikmed Wangpo (ibid., pp. 49, 159).

For an example of modern scholarship on reincarnation lineage concerning imitation and reinvention of personal identity, see (Cantwell 2020).

In addition to the effect of public expectation on the role of adepts in real life, Robert Campany also extensively discusses the pressure felt by Chinese hagiographers in meeting the expectations of his audience in crafting hagiographical writings (Campany 2009, pp. 15–16, 21). The paradigm here is reminiscent of the well-known discussions in social theory concerning the dialectic relationship between structure (society) and agency (individuals).

The reverse is also true as Turrell Wylie points out that Tibetan Buddhist reincarnation institution “would facilitate the transition from charisma of person to a charisma of office... (Wylie 1978, p. 584). This is cited in (Tsreympilov 2006, p. 51).

70 mi thams cad kyi kha ngag la 'ang bla ma la yon tan zhiq dgos/ yon tan zhiq med na bla ma zhes ming bhags te go sa ntho na yang don med (Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan [1987] 1989, p. 69).

Jikmed Wangpo explicitly conveyed his commitment to monastic training to his entourage in Central Tibet as well as the Labrang monastic community in Amdo. In fact, he penned a letter to declare his intention to the Labrang monastic community of his future extended training in Drepung Monastery (bras spung dgon pa).

There is another biography of Jamyang Zhepa, previously composed by his heart disciple Se Ngawang Tashi (Bse ngag dbang bkra shis n.d.). This earlier edition of the biography contains extensive details about the succession surrounding the sixth and seventh Dalai Lamas as well as the political strife between the regent Sangye Gyatso and Lhazang Khan. A comparative study of the two editions remains to be undertaken at the level of both content and style.

For a short biography of this major Geluk master, see (Cabezón 2017b).

The duration of an extended oral transmission could last up to a few days, months, or a year or more, given frequent intervals between sessions.

This is explicitly evident in the context of the transmission of the Mitra cycle, see (p. 18 in the present work). Likewise, in the treasure tradition, the credentials of spiritual realization are closely tied to the legitimacy of the revealed teachings (Gyatso 1993, pp. 121–22). In general, Jikmed Wangpo sought teachings from highly realized masters. However, there were few occasions when he also sought teachings from some hermits who were obscure or less known figures. According to Gungthang Tenpe Dronme, Jikmed Wangpo was mainly concerned with the authoritative status of transmission rather than reincarnation or the prestigious status of the masters who were the sources of his teachings. This is best captured by the pithy verse from Gungthang Tenpe Dronme: gang zag la mi rtom par chos la rton. Gungthang Tenpe Dronme asserts that this is in stark contrast to the trend of the majority of Tibetan Buddhists fervently seeking teachings from high-ranking teachers, not low-rank masters, so as to solely build one’s lineage reputation (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, p. 114).

For the earlier scholarship on secrecy and power, see (Urban 1997, pp. 2–4).

It is important to note that Hugh Urban did not flatly regard the esoteric transmission as nothing more than form when he entertains the possibility there may be an exception in some few cases. That said, he proposes and promotes the notion that secrecy being treated as tactics is a more fruitful research approach in the field (Urban 1998, p. 247).

For more details, see (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, p. 40).

Ngawa Kharil is alternatively known as Ngawa Chokyong (ngag bac hos skyong) (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, p. 379).

For a short biography of Dbal mang blo bzang don grub, see (Blo bzang dpal ldan chos kyi rdo rje 2001).
Konchok Tenpa Rabgye boasts an estimate of over forty monastic establishments pledging allegiance to Jikmed Wangpo (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, p. 375). They include either monasteries newly founded by him or/and his disciples or those that were offered to him. The custody of some of these monasteries was transferred to Jikmed Wangpo when he created colleges or liturgical traditions. Among them was Tso Monastery (gsos dgon pa), which Jikmed Wangpo managed to take over by coercion leading to a series of open conflicts and lawsuits between Labrang and Tso monasteries (OldmANN 2014, pp. 437–56; Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, pp. 556–57). There are, however, only brief, vague mentions of the conflicts in the biography of Jikmed Wangpo, painting the subject of the biography instead as a savior rescuing Tso Monastery from the Qing military intervention (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, pp. 260, 263–64). Jikmed Wangpo also threatened and then extracted the domain of the eight tribes of Aran (a ran) from the seizure by the Me kingdom for its own rule. When the eight tribes asked Jikmed Wangpo to build a monastery to worship in their domain, he arranged his biographer and heart disciple Gunthang Tenpe Drome to set up the future Gomang Monastery (sgo mang dgon pa) (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, pp. 755–56). Shingle Ka Tashi Chodzong Monastery (shing las ka bkra shis chos rdzong) is another example of Jikmed Wangpo absorbing religious domain under Rongwo Monastery and its head lama of the Shar lineage (ibid., p. 347; Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, p. 295).

His name is unidentified.

He asked about certain commentary on the Sutralankara.

His full name is Mer rgan chos rje ngag dbang rgya mtsho.

Geshes and scholars from the major monasteries of the Geluk School were required to and did attend the debate examination. The highly ranked contestants were then assigned to lead major regional Geluk monasteries (Ngag dbang ‘jam dbyangs dpal ldan [1764] n.d., pp. 53–55, 57).

On the details surrounding the teachings that Jikmed Wangpo received, see (ibid., p. 264).

The full transcripts of the poems can be found in (Ngag dbang ‘jam dbyangs dpal ldan [1764] n.d., pp. 271–72).

On the details of these teachings, see (ibid., p. 311).

It is customary for close disciples to compose a prayer verse to recite for the sake of the longevity of their masters.

In most cases, biographies of masters were written either by close disciples or other close associates under their own auspices. Alternative Tibetan name for China. Gungthang Tenpe Drome cites a verse passage from the biography of Changja Rolpe Dorje written by the third Thukan Lozang Choky Nyima to emphasize its rare transmission.

For a short biography of Takpu Lozang Tenpe Gyeltsen, see (Bod rang skyong ljongs rig dngos do dam u yon lhan khang gi po ta la rig dngos srung skyob do dam so’o n.d.)

According to the biography of Lozang Tenpe Nyima, there are two instances where he received teachings from Jamyang Zhepa. Only on the second occasion, he received partial teaching on the Mitra cycle from his master (Bskal bzang rgya mtsho 2016, pp. 47, 55–56). However, it is recorded that later in life, Lozang Tenpe Nyima was giving the complete cycle of empowerments of the Mitra cycle at Lamo Dechen Monastery in Chentsa (ibid., p. 69).

Old age is not an insignificant factor disrupting the line of transmission. For an example, see (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, pp. 104–5).

rgyun nub par nge ba gos (ibid., p. 363).

Other examples include the third Thukan Lozang Choky Nyima being requested by his master Changja Rolpe Dorje to seek a more authoritative transmission from Lozang Gyaltsen of the same teaching (vajra yogini teachings from Naropa), which he received from multiple sources, including Changja Rolpe Dorje previously. It was explicitly stated that the need for receiving the transmission from Yeshe Gyaltsen was justified that Lozang Gyaltsen was simply a great master of mother tantra (ma rgyud kyi bdag po), indicating the latter’s higher achievement in spiritual practice (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, pp. 108–9).

It seems that certain members represented by, or at least, the seventeenth prince of the Qianlong Emperor had a keen interest in the Nyingma teachings, and therefore intervened. Nonetheless, Changja Rolpe Dorje successfully brought the master over to the court for his monastic education. This is a good example of reincarnation lineages continuing close master–disciple relationships.

While in Beijing, although Jikmed Wangpo was in the presence of the emperor among the crowd with Changja Rolpe Dorje, he in fact did not have an audience with the Qing emperor. According to Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me (1990, p. 188), Changja Rolpe Dorje insisted, but Jikmed Wangpo shunned meeting with the emperor citing his health issues.

After repeated requests, at last, at the age of sixty-four, Jamyang Lodro received the Mitra cycle from Jamyang Zhepa, which lasted for a period of three months (Jam dbyangs grags pa 1991, pp. 217–18).
On this occasion, Lozang Dargye also facilitated in making available copies of manuscripts and paintings related to the Mitra cycle. Mergen Choje entertained a very intimate relationship with Jamyang Lodro when the former sought funds towards the ritual of the Vajra Garland (rdor phreng) as well as the future construction of Yershong Monastery from Ganden Dargye Poshok Thu. The construction of Yershong was suggested when Mergen Choje consulted a yogic master over the sickness of Jamyang Lodro. At Tongkor Monastery, Jamyang Lodro administered the novice precept to the mature Sonam Gyatso. In fact, his name, Sonam Gyatso, was also bestowed on him on this occasion.

For more details, see (Cuevas 2017). According to Cuevas, Jamyang Lodro was selected over Jamyang Zhepa and two other equally accomplished masters. But it does not mean Jamyang Zhepa was lesser as a tantric master. In fact, Jamyang Zhepa was the other’s revered teacher, especially as the source for the transmission of the Religious History of Vajrabhairava, with Vajrabhairava being a central protector deity in esoteric rituals of the Geluk School.

As Finnian Gerety (2018) explicates transmission of singing in a Vedic ritual context in India, the performative aspect of a transmission involving especially a disciple’s emulation of his master in terms of voice and bodily gestures in a face to face meeting is an indication of intimacy in a teacher–disciple relationship, which in turn helps command mastery of ritual singing skills and build the authority of the transmission. This is applicable in the context of my discussion of this very Geluk transmission.

The third in the reincarnation line associated with the major estate of Hortsang (hor tshang) and served as the twentieth abbot at Labrang.

The Sad tradition is one of the two major tantric lineages within the Geluk School. Jamyang Zhepa was considered a major transmitter of this lineage.

dal po chos la ma’ rgyu byung bas skal ba bzang/ srad rgyud rdo rje ‘chang nas brgyud pa’i man ngag phran tshigs khyed la byin yod pa ’di gzhan la dgos pa med/ slar bka’ shis’ khyil la ‘phrod thabs re rem (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, p. 369). See also (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 2001, pp. 122–23).

Konchok Tenpa Rabgye further notes that the master taught at Labrang until the age of 90 (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, p. 375).

He was alternatively known as Tharmichi Lozang Dondrup and a close disciple of Jamyang Zhepa and Se Ngawang Tashi. He was also extremely close to Detri Lozang Dondrup, the first treasurer at Labran.

The second part of the name used as the short for Ngawa Gothob.

The first part of the name used as the short for Serkha Sonam Gyatso.

khryed tsho go thob gser kha sos bzang zer gi ‘dug kyang ngas bglas na thar mi chi’i bzang mi ‘dug/khong gi shes rab lhag pa’i lhas byin gyis brlabs pa’i shes rab yin pa red (ibid., p. 610).

He is commonly known as Longdol Lama (klong rdo bla ma). For a short biography of Ngawang Lozang, see (Chhosphel 2010).

He was a tutor to many high-ranking lamas especially including the eighth Dalai Lama Jampal Gyatso (jam dpal rgya mtsho, 1758–1804). For a biography of Yeshe Gyaltset, see (Jam dpal rgya mtsho 2011).

The short for the version of Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in eight thousand lines.

snga mo bod na mdo rgyud dang/ rgyu gzhung chen mo phal che ba’i bsad pa’i rgyun yod ‘dug kyang/ da la ming tsam yang grags rgyu mi snang/ phyes su dka’ len ye shes rgyal mthshan gyis brgyud stong pa’i bsad lung gnang song zer ba’i gtim tshor pa tsam yang sams la phan pa zhis byang (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, p. 304).

dpe ‘di dag gi ming tsam yang singar thos ma myong zhes shing tu ya mthisan par byed (ibid., pp. 267–68).

de sngon dpe nzung kyi srol med kyang/don gyur can cha rkyen sras pa rnam s la phan pa’i phuy de’i srol bdsugs bas ma ’gyangs par po ti stong phrag brgal ba byung ste bstan rgyun la shin tu phan par song (ibid., p. 249).

For details regarding the payment for his service as a scribe, see (ibid., p. 268).

Our source does not record whether there was another Lithang Kajur edition or a different Kajur edition on which the emendation was based.

This master was well known for his non-sectarian outlook as well as his treatise on the pure land teaching (chags med bde smon).

The fact that Jikmed Wangpo only took copies of few texts probably suggests that he had already obtained those remaining texts from elsewhere.

This retreat site was famous due to its association with the eminent master Ngawang Shampa.

For a very brief introduction to the palace, see (Lhezur and Dezur 2009).

For a brief account of his life, see (Schmidt 2015).

See (Gung thang bstan pa’i sgron me 1990, p. 348) for details on some other Sakya teachings Jikmed Wangpo received while at Tashi Lhunpo Monastery.

On this occasion, Jikmed Wangpo reciprocated the master with a single teaching.

I have yet to verify the source of this transmission to Jigs med dbang po.

Pakde Monastery is located in the Nyal area. For a very brief history of the monastery, see (Sde srid sngas rgyas rgya mtsho 1989, pp. 237–238).
Despite his keen interest and relentless search of manuscripts, there was not a catalog of these manuscripts that he had collected among his works. Whereas there were two volumes of transmissions of teachings that he received, albeit being recorded by a major disciple of his.

The name of a ritual college attached to the Potala Palace.

Gungthang Tenpe Dronme records this master simply as Rabgye and specifies that he gave the transmission on five different occasions.

He once served as an abbot of Medical College at Labrang.

He was a major scholar and historian from Labrang. For his biography, see (Dkon mchog bstan pa 2001).

spyi dbus gtsang bstan pa'i 'byung khangs yin mod kyang dus dbang gis chos rgyan 'gangs che ba du ma nyam chags su gyur (ibid., p. 367).

However, Jikmed Wangpo's successful campaign for preserving authentic transmission was not without a few critics who questioned the credibility and authenticity of the transmissions he received on the cycles related to Vajaramala (rdo rje phreng ba) and Mitra.

Gungthang Tenpe Dronme rebuked critics by referring to quotations as well as biographies and records of teachings of early Geluk masters—including the first Panchen Lama Lozang Chogyam and the seventh Dalai Lama Kalsang Gyatso (ibid., p. 358).

The trio refers to Sera, Drepung, and Ganden monasteries.

khyad par rje nying nas zhwa ser gyi bstan pa'i 'byung khangs se 'bras dge gsun yin zhing/ de'i 'chad nyan gyi 'phel rgyas rgyal dbang mchog gi mdzad par rag las tshul dang/ sngar kun gezgs lnga ba chen po dang rgyal dbang gong ma sogs kyi skabs su dge bshes rnam la sphyi bskyangs shin tu che bas/ mig llos la phan pa byung dug/ da lta gzhung la grwa sa'i dge bshes cig las 'byor ldan gyi rgyan po Zhig ngo s mtho la bta bur 'dug na'ang chad nyan gyi bstan srid dang rgyal sa'i 'chad nyan gyis klu dang mtsho'i dpe liar phar brten tshur brten yin mod/ on kyang rise drung rnam la bshad kyang rna bar mi 'groslar rgyal dbang mchog nas gzhung gi bstan srid kyab las don rnam dngos gnas la mdzad rgyu zhig tu song na khyed kyi gsung las mi 'da' bas thugs la 'jog dgos (ibid., pp. 362–63).

The alternative name for Tsongkhapa.

deng sang gi dus 'dir khyed nges pa don gyi bstan pa'i bdag po yin pas bstan pa spyi dang bye brag 'jam mgon bla ma'i lugs bzang phyogs brgyar spel bu'i thugs klur bzhes te zhabz pad yin ring brtan dgos (ibid., p. 363).

The name of the summer retreat place for the Dalai Lamas in Lhasa.

shing rta chen po nram gyi snying rgyal mgon sum du byon po bzhin (ibid., p. 364).

ngeb khyi srnga phyi mkhas pa thams cad kyi legs bshad cha tshang ba bkra shis 'khyil du 'byor ha zhig byed bsam pa yod (ibid., p. 436).

He was a major scholar and historian from Labrang. For his biography, see (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 2001).

He once served as an abbot of Kalachakra College at Labrang.

He once served as an abbot of Medical College at Labrang.

Gungthang Tenpe Dronme records this master simply as Rabgye and specify that he gave the transmission on five different occasions (Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me 1990, p. 436).

Once a major monastery located in the northern Amdo.

A collection of biographical teachings given by Atisha at the request of his disciples.

ngeb khyis 'di bzhin grwa rkhyang kha nyams la re bu' i 'chad nyan zhig byed 'dod kyang go sa 'dis bsam thog tu ma khael (Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas 1982, p. 375).

While historically, a majority of Tibetan Buddhists were either critical of or negligent of classical literary tradition and Sanskrit education, like Jikmed Wangpo, certain prominent Tibetan Buddhist masters such as Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltsten (sa skya pa n+Ti ta kun dga' rgyal mtshan, 1182–1251) and his nephew Phakpa Lodro Gyaltsten ('phags pa blo gros rgyal mtshan, 1235–1280) earnestly advocated for an inclusive model of Buddhist education.

At the age of 42, in the Upper Dzoge area (mdzad dge stod), Jikmed Wangpo came upon this ritual master from Tashi Lhunpo.

The full versified poem can be found in the biography.

These treatises were unidentified.

Major monasteries implicated in the Qing persecution are identified in (Sullivan 2013, pp. 50, 322).

Cayan Danjin, more commonly known as Henan Qingshun, however, broke away from his former associate Lobjang Danjin to reaffirm his pro-Qing stance. Hence, the Mongol faction led by him was spared from the Qing assault.

For details, see (Sullivan 2020, pp. 737–70).

For contrasting visions of the later Qing statecrafts in managing the frontier in Amdo, see (Oidtmann 2014, pp. 368–69, 372).

In the relevant Tibetan passage, it is unclear whether these local leaders refer to Qing subprefecture officials or native Tibetan and/Mongol leaders who also bear ceremonial titles issued from the court. And within the same passage, one can also hardly make sense of the fact that the Qing travel regulation stipulates that only groups of more than ten people can refer their travel matters to the local leaders as the final decision-making authority, bypassing the higher offices of Qing administration. This awkwardly suggests that only groups of ten people or less than ten people are required to petition to the Amban or imperial court. The original import of the relaxed court order is probably such that any individuals or groups of less than ten people can travel to Central Tibet simply with permission of travel from the local authorities, which makes more sense in light of the lenience the Qing court demonstrated in the border crossing context. Hence, the semantic conflict in the passage arises most likely due to an editorial error.
However, the court made an exception to forgive the Tibetan reincarnate violating the travel law. This probably has to do with the influence of his teacher and close associate the third Changja Rolpe Dorje at the Qing court.

Jikmed Wangpo had to seek the court’s approval via the Xining Amban.

For a discussion of Changja Rolpe Dorje’s life in connection with the Qianlong emperor, see (Chen [1988] 2006b; Benard 2004, pp. 124–26). There was a major reincarnation lineage hailing from Amdo, associated with Labrang and Lamo Dechen monasteries, was better known as the Chinese (rgya nag pa) for their extended residence and service at the Qing court. A second reincarnation lineage also retains that title (Nietupski 2009, pp. 197–202).

For a brief, but insightful discussion of the extent to which these replications are similar to the original models, see (Chayet 2004, pp. 44–45).

For a more detailed study, see (Yongdan 2021).

For a brief account of the Nepal-Tibet wars, see (Shakabpa 1984, pp. 157–68). See also (Rose 1971, pp. 35–49), on the first Nepal-Tibet war, and (Rose 1971, pp. 52–67) on the second war.

According to Shakabpa (1984, p. 160), during the first invasion in 1789, a few monasteries were looted. Only during the second war, and (Rose 1971, pp. 52–67) on the second war.

According to Shakabpa (1984, p. 160), during the first invasion in 1789, a few monasteries were looted. Whereas Sakya Monastery was left untouched (Rose 1971, pp. 52–53; Shakabpa 1984, p. 165).

Gungthang Tenpe Dronme’s eight-year monastic education in Central Tibet was concluded in 1786 when he returned to Labrang.

For a more detailed study, see (Yongdan 2021).

For examples, see (’Jam dpal rgya mtsho 2011, pp. 131–32; Gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me 1990, p. 373; Yongdan 2021, pp. 64–65).

See (Oldtmann 2018, pp. 45–47), for rough periodization of the Amban office in Lhasa or their very limited influence at some intervals in the late eighteenth century. According to Shakabpa (1984, p. 169), the Lhasa Ambans are “a little more than political observers” prior to the close management of Tibetan Buddhism through its reincarnation system beginning in 1792. For details implying the short-lived yet competent role of the regent Ngawang Tshultrim (ngag dbang tshis khrims, 1721–1791) in limiting the Ambans’ involvement in political affairs in Central Tibet, see (ibid., p. 156).

In the majority of scholarship, a series of grand Buddhist activities undertaken by the Qing court were, for the most part, treated as a political expedience. But according to Elisabeth Benard (2004), there was an intimately religious side of the emperor showing his long, deep commitment to Tibetan Buddhism.

Ari Helo (2016) suggests (based on the study of a few historical accounts in the making) that historians remake history and the knowledge of the past recounted by a historian is only a version among the many possible varying accounts of the past, which is greatly shaped by the question the historian asks during his history writing. This is very well applicable in studying the vast amount of biographical literature, including the biography of Jikmed Wangpo, in Tibet (Schaeffer 2007, p. 209). Furthermore, in the current scholarship, the contextual study is regarded as not simply reconstructing but also constituting our history of the past. It is suggested that as a researcher, our contemporary interests and shifting contexts greatly shape our narrative of the past (Helo 2016).

For a survey of theories and methods in historical studies, see (Harlan 1989).

For a brief account of the Nepal-Tibet wars, see (Shakabpa 1984, pp. 157–68). See also (Rose 1971, pp. 35–49), on the first Nepal-Tibet war, and (Rose 1971, pp. 52–67) on the second war.

According to Shakabpa (1984, p. 160), during the first invasion in 1789, a few monasteries were looted. Only during the second war in 1791 was Tashi Lhunpo Monastery looted; whereas Sakya Monastery was left untouched (Rose 1971, pp. 52–53; Shakabpa 1984, p. 165).

Gungthang Tenpe Dronme’s eight-year monastic education in Central Tibet was concluded in 1786 when he returned to Labrang.

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