

The Dharma King Who Took Care of His Family: Penden Trashi and the Rise of a Clan-Based Tibetan Buddhist Society in the Fifteenth-Century Northern Sino-Tibetan Borderland

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The discovery of new primary sources is one of the most exhilarating and inspiring experiences for historians. The revelations of *The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven* (*Xitian fozi yuanliulu* 西天佛子源流錄) and two letters issued by this alleged Buddha's son from the western heaven to his disciples are such headlines that have captured the interest of scholars of Tibetology, Sino-Tibetan interaction, and Chinese frontier studies. For decades, scholars had paid little attention to the role that Minxian 岷縣 (named Minzhou 岷州 in the fifteenth century), a small county in modern-day southern Gansu, played in Chinese history, Tibetan history, or regional geopolitics. This situation dramatically changed when *The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven* was found as a manuscript in a Minxian farmer's dusty cabinet corner in 2008,¹ and the two letters were retrieved in 2015.²

These rediscovered sources all center on the Tibetan Buddhist master Dpal ldan bkra shis, also known as Penden Trashi (Bandan zhashi 班丹扎釋, 1377–ca. 1452).³ Growing up in the rural region of the Sino-Tibetan borderland,

1 *Xitian fozi yuanliulu: Wenxian yu chubu yanjiu* 西天佛子源流錄：文獻與初步研究, ed. Zhang Ruiping 張潤平 et al. (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2012), 2–3.

2 This information was shared by Li Zhiming, who helped to find, translated, and researched the letters. In his article, Li Zhiming did not reveal any information about the texts' preservation situation. But in our most recent personal correspondence, he told me that the letters were found in Wazhu Village in Xijiang of Minxian 岷縣西江哇住村, and they were kept by the *gnas po* of Fazang monastery. More information on the two letters and the *gnas po* can be found in following sections; see Li Zhiming 李志明 and Zhouta 洲塔, “Xin faxian de liangjian Bandan zhashi fazhi ji xiangguan shishi kaoshu” 新發現的兩件班丹扎釋法旨及相關史事考述, *Zhongguo zangxue* 2016.3: 21–30.

3 For the sake of readers who are more familiar with standard English spellings, this article uses

Penden Trashi was not raised as the successor to any prestigious dharma lineage. Yet, eventually he was recognized as one of the most renowned clerics in Ming China's history. On the one hand, Penden Trashi made great contributions to the facilitation of Sino-Tibetan contacts; on the other hand, he played an important role in promoting Tibetan Buddhism at the Ming court, rendering Tibetan Buddhism one of the most popular cultures within the early Ming imperial house. Because of his political and religious achievements, Penden Trashi became the fourth Tibetan Buddhist monk to receive the title of "dharma king" (*fawang* 法王) from the Ming court,⁴ joining the ranks of the powerful Tibetan Buddhist hierarchs of the Kagyu, Sakya, and Geluk sects.

Compiled in 1447, *The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven* is the Chinese-language version of the non-extant *Dad pa'i rgyan rin po che'i phreng ba* (The Rosary of the Precious Ornament of the Faith), a Tibetan hagiography documenting the life story of Penden Trashi. The two letters were religio-political orders for abbotship succession and monastic property distribution sent by Penden Trashi in 1431 and 1449 to his disciples in Minzhou (see transliteration and translation in Appendices 1 and 2). Before the publication of these sources, most scholars either relied on the Ming court records or the nineteenth-century reconstructions in *Mdo smad chos 'byung* to understand Penden Trashi's service, which spanned the reign of four Ming emperors, and his achievements in knitting together a transregional religio-political network.⁵

the Wylie system to transliterate Tibetan words, especially for the names of important figures, in their first appearances, but uses simplified phonetic transcription of standard Tibetan afterwards. For example, དཔལ་ལྷན་བཀྲ་ཤིས་ is transcribed as *dpal ldan bkra shis* here; however, it will be written as Penden Trashi in the following sections. Regarding Penden Trashi's lifespan, the last historical record about him is from 1452; he must have died in the following years.

- 4 Elliot Sperling's translates *fawang* as "king of the dharma;" see his "Early Ming Policy toward Tibet: An Examination of the Proposition that the Early Ming Emperors Adopted a 'Divide and Rule' Policy toward Tibet" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana Univ., 1983), 19. In this article, I follow Hoong Teik Toh's lead and use "dharma king" to refer to the Chinese word *fawang* 法王 and the Tibetan word *chos kyi rgyal po* or *chos rgyal*. Occasionally, Toh also uses "dharma lord" to translate the Tibetan word *chos rje*, and he uses *chos rgyal* and *chos rje* interchangeably in his dissertation; see Hoong Teik Toh, "Tibetan Buddhism in Ming China" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard Univ., 2004), 2, 35, 48, 131.
- 5 Chen Nan's work is a typical example of how scholars used Ming court records to reconstruct Penden Trashi's achievements in facilitating Sino-Tibetan interaction. Karl Debreczeny provides a complete translation and a reliable guide of the biography of Penden Trashi as given in *Mdo smad chos 'byung*. Yet even the author of *Mdo smad chos 'byung*, Brag dgon pa dkon mchong bstan pa rab rgyas himself mentions in the work that when he wrote the life story of Penden Trashi, "a woodblock print of his own biography" was an important reference. *The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven*, in this regard, is just the Chinese version of the Tibetan biography that Brag dgon pa dkon mchong bstan pa rab rgyas had once read

But little is known about how Penden Trashi converted his political capital in the Ming court into a new form of religious authority that became entrenched in the early fifteenth-century Sino-Tibetan borderland and reshaped the social structure of the local society. Juxtaposing *The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven* and the letters with other Chinese and Tibetan materials, this article addresses questions regarding Sino-Tibetan relationships, Tibetan Buddhist monastic succession, and the local manifestations of Ming China's imperial policies in a borderland society.

but could not find anymore (the Chinese and Tibetan versions might be slightly different regarding their sources, a point that will be touched upon below). Therefore, more consideration of the similarities and differences between *Mdo smad chos 'byung* and *The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven* would be valuable to better understand Penden Trashi's personal experience. While this is obviously a topic for another article, for now, I can offer three basic observations after comparing the two accounts.

First, the account in *Mdo smad chos 'byung* is only a summary of Penden Trashi's Tibetan biography, and the account in *The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven* is much more detailed. But *Mdo smad chos 'byung* also provides information not included in *The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven*, such as the description of how Yuanjue monastery 圓覺寺 was built; see Karl Debreczeny, "Ethnicity and Esoteric Power: Negotiating the Sino-Tibetan Synthesis in Ming Buddhist Painting" (Ph.D. diss. Univ. of Chicago, 2007), 411; Zhiguanba Gongquehu danba raoji 智觀巴貢卻乎丹巴饒吉, *Anduo zhengjiaoshi* 安多政教史, tr. Wu Jun 吳均 (Lanzhou: Gansu minzu chubanshe, 1989), 644). Secondly, while the account in *Mdo smad chos 'byung* is a summary of Penden Trashi's Tibetan biography, *The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven* is not merely a Chinese translation of the Tibetan source. According to Zhang Runping and Su Hang, *The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven* includes Chinese sources that are likely not recorded in the Tibetan version of biography. Thirdly, the account in *The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven* could help correct many errors in Wu Jun's translation of *Mdo smad chos 'byung* (as well as Debreczeny's translation that has used Wu Jun's Chinese translation). Just to name a few: the Tibetan word "gcen" that was translated as elder brother 兄長 (Debreczeny, "Ethnicity and Esoteric Power," 399; Wu Jun, tr., *Anduo zhengjiaoshi*, 640) is in fact part of the person's name as "gcen dar ba," as is shown on p. 159 of *The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven*. The Tibetan word "zhan zi" that was translated as Xinsi 新寺 (Debreczeny, "Ethnicity and Esoteric Power," 401; Wu Jun, tr., *Anduo zhengjiaoshi*, 641) is in fact Shanxi 山西 as is shown on p. 163 of *The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven*. The Tibetan word of "ha'i yen sde" that was identified as Fayuansi 法淵寺 by Debreczeny and translated as Haiyuansi 海淵寺 by Wu (Debreczeny, "Ethnicity and Esoteric Power," 403; Wu Jun, tr., *Anduo zhengjiaoshi*, 642) is in fact Haiyinsi 海印寺 as is shown on p. 170 of *The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven*. More similar errors, especially about people and place names, can be found in Debreczeny and Wu's translations. For a study on Penden Trashi's lifespan, see Chen Nan 陳楠, *Zangshi congkao* 藏史叢考 (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1988), 235–44; for Zhang Runping and Su Hang's observations on the source base of *The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven*, see *Xitian fozi yuanlianlu*, 212; for Karl Debreczeny's and Wu Jun's translations, see Debreczeny, "Ethnicity and Esoteric Power," Appendix II, 399–414; Wu Jun, tr., *Anduo zhengjiaoshi*, 640–45.

For a long time, Ming China has been understood as an inward-looking, Han ethnic empire contrasted with the Mongol Yuan and Manchu Qing, two massive continental empires featuring multiethnic and multicultural governmentality. Two clichés embedded in the received historical narrative are that the Ming never implemented substantial rule over the Tibetan region and that all the Ming rulers could do was confer gifts and titles to Tibetan leaders in return for their obedient gestures.⁶ However, recent scholarship suggests that Ming China was in fact quite savvy at dealing with Tibetan affairs, at least during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.⁷ The Ming rulers not only established religio-political relationships with various secular and religious communities in central Tibet,⁸ but also conferred court patronage on Tibetan hierarchs in the Sino-Tibetan borderland as an indirect way to manage relations with and between various local non-Han communities.⁹ Moreover, the early Ming rulers were deeply engaged in Tibetan Buddhist activities, such as *sūtra* compilation and translation, ritual practices, and religious complex construction, which demonstrates the religion's significant place in court culture.¹⁰ In this regard, some scholars even propose that the Ming emperors were more deeply involved in Tibetan Buddhism than the preceding Mongol Yuan rulers.¹¹

6 Sabine Dabringhaus, "Chinese Emperors and Tibetan Monks: Religion as an Instrument of Rule," in *China and Her Neighbors: Borders, Visions of the Other, Foreign Policy, 10th to 19th Century*, ed. Sabine Dabringhaus and Roderich Ptak (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997), 119–34.

7 Most of these revisionist works focus on the reigns of Emperor Hongwu and Yongle, leaving the court's engagement with Tibetan Buddhism in the mid to late fifteenth century largely untouched. Yet the interactions in later periods should not be underestimated. Marsha Weidner, from the perspective of art history, has uncovered the extensive patronage by Emperor Chenghua for Tibetan thangka production. He Xiaorong also points out that Emperors Xuande, Zhengtong, Jingtai, and Chenghua all developed considerable interest in Tibetan Buddhism, even if not as full-fledged practitioners. Yet more scholarship is needed before a full picture can be drawn; see Marsha Weidner, "Beyond Yongle: Tibeto-Chinese Thangkas for the Mid-Ming Court," *Artibus Asiae* 69 (2009): 7–37; He Xiaorong 何孝榮, "Mingdai huangdi chongfeng Zangchuan fojiao qianxi" 明代皇帝崇奉藏傳佛教淺析, *Zhongguoshi yanjiu* 2005.4: 119–37.

8 Satō Hisashi 佐藤長, "Mindai Chibetto no hachi daikyōō ni tsuite" 明代チベットの八大教王について, 3 parts, *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 21.2 (1962): 51–70; 22.2 (1963): 79–101; 22.4 (1964): 74–89.

9 Elliot Sperling, "Tibetan Buddhism, Perceived and Imagined, along the Ming-Era Sino-Tibetan Frontier," in *Buddhism Between Tibet and China*, ed. Matthew Kapstein (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2009), 156–58.

10 David Robinson, *Culture, Courtiers, and Competition: The Ming Court (1368–1644)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center), 371–82.

11 Shen Weirong 沈衛榮 and An Haiyan 安海燕, "Mingdai hanyi Zangchuan mijiao wenxian he xiyu sengtuan: Jiantan Hanzang fojiaoshi yanjiu de yuwenxue fangfa" 明代漢譯

While a number of scholars have researched the Ming court's interactions with the Tibetan world, the question of how such long-distance communications affected local society along the Sino-Tibetan borderland largely remains understudied. In other words, one may wonder what ramifications the early Ming court's proactive Tibet policies had on the ground, what the local response was, and how borderland society changed as a result. Although some scholars have investigated how Tibetan Buddhist communities along the Sino-Tibetan borderland interacted with the Ming military system and received imperial patronage for monastic architecture and religious arts, scholarship focusing on the change of social mechanisms on the local level of borderland society is still insufficient.¹² This article highlights the resilience and malleability of daily politics in a borderland society, one in which imperial endorsements were translated into local interests at the cost of reshuffling existing social structures and patterns of power. I argue that Ming China's reliance on the Tibetan Buddhist clergy and preferential policies for Tibetan Buddhism tremendously reshaped the social structure and religious landscape of the frontier world, resulting in the rise of a fifteenth-century model of Tibetan Buddhist society that featured imperial patronage in the Sino-Tibetan borderland.

Power Dynamics in the Late Fourteenth-Century Northern Sino-Tibetan Borderland

This article defines the northern Sino-Tibetan borderland as the area of contemporary eastern Qinghai province 青海 and the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Southern Gansu (Gannan zangzu zizhizhou 甘南藏族自治州). This region served as the geographical bridge between the Chinese heartland and the Tibetan plateau from the thirteenth to the fourteenth century. The region's geopolitical significance was first recognized by the Mongols in the thirteenth century. At that time, it included the eastern part of the Tufan and Vicinity Pacification Commission (Tufan dengchu xuanwei si 吐蕃等處宣慰司), one of the three administrative units the Mongol khans set up to govern Tibet. When the Ming empire took over the region in the late fourteenth century, the northern Sino-Tibetan borderland continued to occupy a significant posi-

藏傳密教文獻和西域僧團：兼談漢藏佛教史研究的語文學方法, *Qinghua daxue xuebao* 2011.2: 83.

12 See Sperling, "Tibetan Buddhism, Perceived and Imagined," 165–72; Karl Debreczeny, "Sino-Tibetan Artistic Synthesis in Ming Dynasty Temples at the Core and Periphery," *Tibet Journal* 28 (2003): 49–107.

tion in the early Ming's strategic layout. In response to his generals having failed to conquer the region by 1371, the Ming founder Emperor Hongwu 洪武 (r. 1368–1398) even postponed the new dynasty's victory ceremony and proclaimed that he had to wait for the region's incorporation into the imperial orbit.¹³ As the Ming forces established preliminary control over the area later in the fourteenth century, the region was divided into four military units—Xining 西寧, Hezhou 河州, Taozhou 洮州, and Minzhou 岷州 garrisons—within the Ming's frontier governance system. This article takes Minzhou as its historical focus.

In addition to its geopolitical value, the northern Sino-Tibetan borderland was also known as a sacred Buddhist realm, and this characteristic greatly affected how the Ming forces interacted with the locals. Since at least the Mongol era, the region acted as a zone of cultural contact between the Tibetan realm and the Sinitic world, and Tibetan Buddhism dominated the local cultural sphere. It is said that when Rolpe Dorje, the fourth Karmapa of the Tibetan Buddhist Karma Kagyu School, passed through the northern Sino-Tibetan borderland on his way from central Tibet to the Mongol court in 1356, he performed initiations and gave liberating instructions to 100,000 sangha members.¹⁴ When the Ming forces entered the region, they soon recognized the significant role Tibetan Buddhist monks played on the ground and devoted much effort to patronizing these religious communities, an action that Karl Debreczeny summarizes as “part of a larger Ming Sino-Tibetan border strategy to establish an alliance between the local authorities and the imperial court.”¹⁵

From a religious perspective, the northern Sino-Tibetan borderland region also played an important role in shaping the Ming's perception of the Buddhist realm in the late fourteenth century. Hoong Teik Toh convincingly argues that, beginning in the late fourteenth century, Tibet replaced India in terms of Chinese people's religious conceptualization of Xitian 西天 (Western Heaven) and thus became a new sacred land of Buddhism in the eyes of the Ming.¹⁶ In this regard, the northern Sino-Tibetan borderland was not only a remote frontier for the Ming, but also, more importantly, its gateway to access the Buddha's holy land. One stele in Ledu 樂都 suggests that since the region was adjacent to Tianzhu 天竺 (usually the designation of India, but here referring to Tibet), it

13 *Ming Taizu shilu* 明太祖實錄, *juan* 51, 3rd year (Hongwu), month iv, yichou.

14 Dpa' bo gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (A Scholar's Feast) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2006), 488.

15 Debreczeny, “Ethnicity and Esoteric Power,” 149–50.

16 Hoong Teik Toh, “Tibetan Buddhism in Ming China,” 33–58.

was the place through which the Buddha's teachings entered China.¹⁷ Another stele from Minzhou also implies that local people were remarkably devoted to Buddhism due to the region's proximity to the Buddha's realm.¹⁸

However, for such a geopolitically and religiously significant region, the Ming did not implement a Han-style administrative system for local governance at the outset. Rather, the court converted indigenous non-Han leaders, who were already powerful in local society, into frontier agents. This strategy was adopted after careful evaluation of the newly founded empire's capacity to impose its rule over such a distant frontier region. It was implemented in the overwhelming majority of the empire's newly acquired territories, including the northern Sino-Tibetan borderland and other regions such as the north-east Manchuria frontier and the southwest Yunnan frontier. In this context, we can understand why the coopted local leaders constituted quite a large portion of the northern Sino-Tibetan borderland's bureaucratic landscape in the early Ming. For example, among the fifteen senior officials in Hezhou recognized by the early Ming court,¹⁹ eleven were Tibetan or Mongol leaders.²⁰ The same process took place in Minzhou. In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, local figureheads, rather than the officials dispatched by the Ming court, determined the power dynamics of the local daily politics.

In early Ming Minzhou, the most prestigious and powerful indigenous non-Han clan was the Bao 包 clan. Their privilege in the local society dates back to as early as the eleventh century. Local gazetteers indicate that during the Song dynasty, a Tibetan figurehead submitted to the Chinese emperor, and hence his whole clan was given the Chinese surname Bao.²¹ Since then, the Bao clan members became active in local affairs. One monastic stele shows that when the Song court intended to build a Buddhist monastery in the region to pacify the locals' alleged barbaric mentality, it was the Bao clan that provided financial support for monastic construction.²² In the early Ming, the Bao clan continued its hegemonic influence over local affairs. The Bao leaders were the first

17 *Anduo Zangzu diqu jinshilu* 安多藏族地區金石錄, ed. Wu Jingshan 吳景山 (Lanzhou: Gansu wenhua chubanshe, 2015), 59.

18 *Ibid.*, 70.

19 Senior refers here to ranks higher than company commander, including commander 指揮使, vice commander 指揮同知, assistant commander 指揮僉事, and battalion commander 千戶.

20 He Wei 何威, *Hezhou tusi Hesuonan jiazu yanjiu* 河州土司何鎖南家族研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2016), 24.

21 Tang Kaijian 湯開建, *Songjin shiqi Anduo tufan buluoshi yanjiu* 宋金時期安多吐蕃部落史研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2007), 295.

22 *Anduo Zangzu diqu jinshilu*, 24.

of the local figureheads to submit to the Ming, and thus they were promised local privileges and appointed as the Ming's indigenous officers.²³ One inscription engraved on a huge bronze bell provides a detailed list of names of the bureaucrats in early Ming Minzhou, including many Bao clan members recognized as regional military officials.²⁴ Other clan members became interpreters and played important roles in convincing local Tibetan communities to surrender to the Ming.²⁵ In addition to actively cooperating with the Ming forces, the Bao clan conducted wide intermarriage in the local society to strengthen their authority. The mother of Penden Trashi, the protagonist of *The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven*, was a Bao.²⁶

In contrast, the Hou 后 clan, in which Penden Trashi was born, was not obviously powerful in the late fourteenth-century Minzhou power structure due to the Ming's personnel arrangement. The aforementioned list of names inscribed on the bronze bell included bureaucrats from various non-Han clans, such as Bao, Zhao, and Ma; yet none of them are surnamed Hou.²⁷ The Hou's seemingly marginal importance in local politics was the result of the Ming court's personnel transfer policies. One entry from the *Ming Veritable Records* indicates that a certain Hou Dorje 后朵兒只 was the one who submitted to the Ming when the Chinese army entered Minzhou, and he was recognized as a low-level local military commander.²⁸ However, although he was assigned indigenous officialdom in 1380, Hou Dorje was relocated to Taozhou in 1382 and died soon after in the Ming's conquest of Yunnan.²⁹ His son inherited his official position but then was immediately summoned to Beijing and later transferred to, and died at the Ming's northeast frontier.³⁰ This series of events likely explains why the Hou clan leaders were not recorded in the bronze bell inscription made in 1383: they were transferred to other areas and thus did not retain their influence in Minzhou. Other records from the *Ming Veritable Records* further support this hypothesis. Two Hou clan members, probably Hou Dorje's sons, were named

23 *Ming Taizu shilu* 明太祖實錄, juan 60, 4th year (Hongwu), month 1, guimao.

24 Gao Zhihui 高智慧 and Wu Mu 武沐, "Minzhouwei jiancheng beiwen yu Minxian Erlangshan tongzhong mingwen kaolun" 《岷州衛建城碑文》與岷縣《二郎山銅鍾銘文》考論, *Qinghai minzu daxue xuebao* 2011.2: 45.

25 *Minzhou zhi jiaozhu* 岷州志校註, ed. Minxianzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui bangongshi 岷縣志編纂委員會辦公室 (Minxian: Minxian zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui bangongshi, 1988), 247.

26 *Xitian fozi yuanliulu*, 157.

27 Gao Zhihui and Wu Mu, "Minzhouwei jiancheng beiwen," 45.

28 *Ming Xuanzong shilu* 明宣宗實錄, juan 58, 4th year (Xuande), month 1X, guichou.

29 *Xitian fozi yuanliulu*, 207.

30 *Ming Xuanzong shilu*, juan 58, 4th year (Xuande), month 1X, guichou.

military officials of Taozhou in the 1400s and 1420s respectively.³¹ Although not all Hou clan members were transferred to other places, one can imagine that those few who stayed in Minzhou had little voice in local affairs thereafter.

As several Hou clan patriarchs were requested to move away or died in battle, their influence in Minzhou further dwindled. The early Ming policies, in this regard, did not leave the Minzhou Hou clan members much space for social mobility. While those who managed local authority, such as the Bao, remained powerful after the Yuan-Ming dynastic transition, second-tier clans like the Hou lacked channels to rearrange regional power dynamics in their favor. However, the Minzhou Hou clan members were still able to regain and even boost their social status via other channels. Religion, specifically the Ming's religious policies, was one such channel. Because the region functioned as the gate to Tibet, the Ming heavily relied on local religious leaders to facilitate Sino-Tibetan political and religious contacts.³² It is against this historical background that we shall understand how Penden Trashi acquired his position in the early fifteenth-century Ming court.

Penden Trashi, Dachongjiao Monastery, and Tibetan Buddhism in the Early Ming Court

Penden Trashi was a typical Tibetan Buddhist monk who rose to power by establishing close connections with the Ming imperial house in the late fourteenth century. Born in 1377 to the Hou clan in rural Minzhou, Penden Trashi was ordained locally as a monk at the age of thirteen. In 1394, he went to Shanxi with his master Dpal ldan rgya mtsho, Penden Gyatso (Bandan Jiacao 班丹嘉措), at the invitation of the Jin prince of Ming (Jinfan 晉藩).³³ It is unclear how long Penden Gyatso and Penden Trashi stayed in Shanxi, but in 1396, Penden Gyatso was again invited to Taiyuan 太原 for *sūtra* printing, dharma teachings, and Buddhist canon translations.³⁴ Such frequent contact between the

31 *Ming Taizong shilu* 明太宗實錄, *juan* 38, 3rd year (Yongle), month 1, yisi; *Ming Xuanzong shilu*, *juan* 42, 3rd year (Xuande), month 14, xinchou.

32 Elliot Sperling, "The Ho Clan of Ho-Chou: A Tibetan Family in Service to the Yuan and Ming Dynasties," in *Indo-Sino-Tibetica: Studi in Onore Di Lucian Petech*, ed. Paolo Daffinà, (Rome: Bardi, 1990), 350–78.

33 *Xitian fozi yuanliulu*, 163.

34 In his examination of the Ming princely courts and their cultural activities, Craig Clunas convincingly demonstrates that the Jin princely court constituted a passionate patron behind various artistic communities and intellectual projects, making Taiyuan the cultural center in early Ming northern China. Yet he pays less attention to how the princes

Jin prince and Tibetan Buddhist monks irritated Emperor Yongle 永樂 (r. 1403–1424), as such quasi-diplomatic interactions technically were exclusive to the Son of Heaven and hence should not have been carried out by any other imperial nobles.³⁵

Penden Trashi's trip to Nanjing in the early fifteenth century laid the foundation for his later participation in Sino-Tibetan networks. Likely due to his active interaction with the prince of Jin and rising reputation among the Ming's ruling house, Penden Gyatso was invited to the Ming capital of Nanjing in 1404.³⁶ Penden Trashi again travelled with his master. In retrospect, we can recognize that this trip was the starting point of Penden Trashi's decades-long service at the Ming court. The two monks' major task was to help prepare for the reception of Dezhin Shekpa 得銀協巴, the fifth Karmapa of the Kagyu school.³⁷ While Penden Gyatso instructed the court craftsman in the techniques for making Buddhist statues and various religious instruments,³⁸ Penden Trashi was dispatched to eastern Tibet to greet Dezhin Shekpa and escort the Buddhist master back to the Ming capital.³⁹

The reception of Dezhin Shekpa became Penden Trashi's first trial in Sino-Tibetan diplomacy. During Dezhin Shekpa's stay in Nanjing, Penden Trashi was by his side day and night as both personal and religious assistant.⁴⁰ When Dezhin Shekpa left for Tibet in 1408, Penden Trashi was selected to serve as his

patronized Tibetan Buddhism; see Craig Clunas, *Screen of Kings: Royal Art and Power in Ming China* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2013), 63–101. For *sūtra* printing and various Buddhist activities organized by Penden Gyatso, see Saerji 薩爾吉, "Yidali paerma Zhongguo yishu bowuguan suocang Zangwen mukeben fojing" 意大利帕爾瑪中國藝術博物館所藏藏文木刻本佛經, *Zhongguo zangxue* 2008.4: 70; *Xitian fozi yuanliulu*, 163.

35 *Ming Taizong shilu*, *juan* 24, 1st year (Yongle), month x, jiazi; *juan* 86, 6th year (Yongle), month xii, bingxu.

36 *Xitian fozi yuanliulu*, 163.

37 *Ibid.*, 163.

38 Wang Jiapeng 王家鵬, "Ming Yongle Xuande foxiang yuanliu xinzheng: jianlun Mingchu chaoting zhizang fanglüe zhong Ganqing diqu de zhongyao diwei" 明永樂宣德佛像源流新證：兼論明初朝廷治藏方略中甘青地區的重要地位, *Zhongguo zangxue* 2016.4: 5–16.

39 *Anduo zhengjiaoshi*, 641; For Emperor Yongle's meeting with Dezhin Shekpa, Peter Schwieger, based on the writing of a Karmapa's retainer, argues that Yongle's ultimate goal in inviting Dezhin Shekpa was to install a patron-priest relationship with the Kagyu school, a direct copy of the Yuan model in which the Mongols patronized the Sakya leaders; see Peter Schwieger, *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2015), 21–22.

40 *Xitian fozi yuanliulu*, 164.

escort again.⁴¹ Luo Zhao claims that in addition to being Dezhin Shekpa's companion, Penden Trashi had another, likely much more important mission during his trip to Tibet: he was the Ming court's representative to ease the conflicts in central Tibet between the Sakya sect figureheads and Phagmodrupa hierarchs.⁴² The Sakya sect held religio-political power in Tibet during the Mongol era but was greatly undermined by the Phagmodrupa forces in the mid-fourteenth century. In the early fifteenth century, the Sakya-Phagmodrupa struggle continued, especially around the control over the Sakya monastery, and was primed to erupt. Emperor Yongle, who maintained close interactions with Tibetan secular and religious forces at the time, decided to intervene. In this context, he dispatched Penden Trashi to Tibet to deliver his imperial edicts, in which the emperor threatened that if the two sides failed to regulate their actions, he would order a military intervention. Such mediation was effective, as the tension soon died down.⁴³

41 Ibid., 165.

42 Luo Zhao 羅炤, "Mingchao zai Xizang de zhuquan diwei" 明朝在西藏的主權地位, *Zhongguo zangxue* 2011.3: 27.

43 The Sakya-Phagmodrupa struggle, Emperor Yongle's intervention in the conflict, and his following invitations to the Sakya hierarch Kun dga' bkra shis to visit Beijing provide an important angle to revisit early Ming Sino-Tibetan interactions. Before the publication of *The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven*, there is no Chinese record on this series of incidents, rendering the discovery of this document even more valuable. In comparison, Tibetan records on the series of incidents can be found in *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (A Scholar's Feast), *Rab brtan kun bzang vphags gyi mam thar* (Biography of situ Rabten Kunzang Pak), *Mdo smad chos 'byung* (Religious History of Amdo), and other sources. In *Mdo smad chos 'byung*, for example, the author describes the incident as "mdo smad du byon. Sa skya dang phag gru'i dus zing gi skabs gong ma zon jung(dzung)gis dmag 'dren par brtsams pa la dmag bshol zhus" (The master arrived at Amdo. During the turbulent times of Sakyapa and Phagmodrupa, the emperor Xuanzong intended to start a military expedition, but the idea was later put off as [the master] suggested). In this paragraph, Brag dgon pa dkon mchong bstan pa rab rgyas makes a mistake by identifying Emperor Xuande as the one threatening to initiate a military intervention, but from other Tibetan primary sources and *The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven*, we know that Emperor Yongle made this move.

In terms of academic research, Giuseppe Tucci, based on the records in the *Sakyapa Chronicles*, briefly mentions Kun dga' bkra shis's trip to Beijing and how he exchanged gifts with the Ming emperor. Elliot Sperling, in his dissertation, points out the fact that Kun dga' bkra shis received two invitations from Emperor Yongle, but does not specify the reason for the invitation as well as why the monk finally accepted the invitation and decided to go to Beijing at a rather advanced age. Now, according to the aforementioned materials as well as new research, we know that Kun dga' bkra shis's decision was tied to the geopolitical situation in Tibet at the time, especially the Sakya-Phagmodrupa power struggle, and both Dezhin Shekpa and Penden Trashi played important roles in this process. Chinese scholars like Chen Qingying and Luo Zhao have already shed some light on this series of

In addition to his political missions, Penden Trashi also played an active role in facilitating religious exchange between Ming China and Tibet, and his own religious training was strengthened in the process. As a middleman, Penden Trashi brought numerous Buddhist statues and scriptures to Tibetan hierarchs and delivered their requests and concerns back to the Ming court. In 1411, he received a request to take the newly printed Tibetan Tripitaka from Nanjing to Dezhin Shekpa. Penden Trashi spent the following years in Tibet, travelling and attending the dharma teachings of various Tibetan Buddhist masters. One of these masters was Tsongkhapa 宗喀巴, the founder of the Tibetan Buddhist Geluk sect. In their meeting, Tsongkhapa told Penden Trashi that he should build a monastery in the Chinese realm to spread the Buddhist dharma.⁴⁴ This monastery would be Dachongjiao monastery 大崇教寺.

Penden Trashi's role in the construction of Dachongjiao monastery in Minzhou is of particular interest in terms of understanding how he projected power from Beijing to the Sino-Tibetan borderland. Since 1404, when he came to the Ming capital for the first time, Penden Trashi had been busy travelling between the Chinese heartland and Tibet and therefore spent relatively little time in his hometown. However, when he received Tsongkhapa's suggestion to build a monastery, Minzhou became an ideal location in his mind. Penden Trashi initiated the monastery construction project in 1416 and named it Chos sde dgon lhun grub bde chen gling. In 1417, when the project was nearly complete, Penden Trashi was summoned to Beijing and left the construction and management work to one of his disciples, Shakya dpal bzang po, a story

incidents. The most updated research was done by Yang Tianxue. Having discovered in total sixteen letters between Emperor Yongle and Kun dga' bkra shis preserved in the Cultural Palace of Nationalities in Beijing, Yang has contributed a series of studies on early Ming's interaction with the Sakya monks.

For relevant primary sources, see Vjigs med grags pa, *Rab brtan kun bzang vphags gyi mam thar* (Biography of situ Rabten Kunzang Pak) (Lhasa: Xizang renmin chubanshe, 2013), 39–40; Dpa' bo gtsug lag phreng ba, *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (A Scholar's Feast), 515; Brag dgon pa dkon mchong bstan pa rab rgyas, *Mdo smad chos 'byung* (Religious History of Amdo) (Lanzhou: Gansu minzu chubanshe, 1982), 685; for Penden Trashi's role in this process, see *Xitian fozi yuanliulu*, 165. For relevant Chinese and English scholarship, see Giuseppe Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, vol. 2 (Rome: La Libreria dello Stato, 1949), 686; Sperling, "Early Ming Policy toward Tibet," 138–40; Chen Qingying 陳慶英, "Lun Mingchao dui Zangchuan fojiao de guanli" 論明朝對藏傳佛教的管理, *Zhongguo zangxue* 2000.3: 57–74; Luo Zhao, "Mingchao zai Xizang de zhuquan diwei," 26–32; Yang Tianxue 楊天雪, "Ming Chengzu zhaoqing dasheng fawang shishikao" 明成祖召請大乘法王史事考, *Zhongguo zangxue* 2020.1: 68–80; "Huangdi he shangshi de tongxin yi: dasheng fawang zhi Ming Chengzu diyifeng shuxin yanjiu" 皇帝和上師的通信 (一): 大乘法王致明成祖第一封書信研究, *Zangxue xuekan* 2020.2: 46–64.

44 *Anduo zhengjiaoshi*, 27.

that will be explained in detail below.⁴⁵ In 1419, Penden Trashi was granted authority as the “right supervisor monk for Buddhist practices” (*you chan-jiao* 右闡教) over the Central Buddhist Registry (Senglusi 僧錄司), the Ming’s administrative office for Buddhist affairs. In 1423, he was dispatched again to Tibet to inspect the authenticity of the reincarnation of Dezhin Shekpa, the sixth Karmapa.⁴⁶ Thanks to the success of this mission, Penden Trashi was promoted to grand state preceptor (*daguoshi* 大國師) in 1426 by the Ming court.⁴⁷ As a reward for his achievements in Ming-Tibet diplomacy, in the same year the Ming emperor decided to expand the master’s monastery in Minzhou. The emperor not only dispatched a eunuch to Minzhou to announce the imperially bestowed name, Dachongjiao (Grand and Sublime Teachings), to the monastery; he also proclaimed the expansion of the monastery with court-commissioned funding, labor, and construction materials. In this way, Dachongjiao monastery was upgraded from a local to an imperially commissioned religious complex.

The construction of Dachongjiao monastery in 1427 demonstrates that religion was an important channel for extending imperial power from Beijing to the distant frontier regions of the empire. Tibetan records indicate that more than one hundred Chinese officials, two hundred Tibetan indigenous leaders, 1,100 technicians and craftsmen, and 25,000 transportation *ula* corvée laborers were summoned for Dachongjiao’s expansion.⁴⁸ When the construction was completed, the emperor further requested seven non-Han leaders and all residents within their districts allocated to Dachongjiao monastery to serve as its lamp-butter providing households, and all of their obligations to the Ming, including taxation and labor corvée, were exempted.⁴⁹ Two years later, in 1429, the Ming emperor made another announcement to assign one Han military officer and fifty soldiers and craftsmen from the Minzhou garrison to be the tenants of Dachongjiao monastery, and their household members to take charge of the monastery’s security and daily maintenance.⁵⁰ Berthe Jansen argues that “living on a ‘state’ income is one of the easiest, if not the earliest, monastic

45 *Xitian fozi yuanliulu*, 171.

46 *Ibid.*, 171–72.

47 *Ibid.*, 173.

48 *Anduo zhengjiaoshi*, 643. Wu Jun’s Chinese translation makes a mistake by translating “dmag ’u lag stong phrag nyi shu rtsa lnga” as 2,005.

49 *Xitian fozi yuanliulu*, 175.

50 *Ibid.*, 175. One has to notice that these people, as well as the tenants and the members of the so-called lamp-butter providing households were essentially taxpayers that the imperial government assigned to the monastery, only with different daily work.

modes of subsistence.”⁵¹ For Dachongjiao monastery, it was indeed the case that state income sustained the monastery’s daily operations and facilitated its development.

Besides funds for the expansion and personnel for the maintenance of Dachongjiao monastery, the Ming emperor bestowed, and palace eunuchs donated various types of religious decorations, such as Buddhist statues, *sūtras*, and ceremonial instruments in the monastery. Eunuchs during the Ming dynasty were active patrons of Buddhist monasteries. Susan Naquin emphasizes that “Eunuch contributions to the religious infrastructure of Peking were considerable, greatly outweighing that of the throne or any other single identifiable type of donor.”⁵² Among these eunuchs, many were devoted patrons of Tibetan Buddhism. For example, Karl Debreczeny highlights the dense Tibetan Buddhist aesthetics of Fahai temple 法海寺 outside Beijing. Examining the Tibetan imagery on the walls of the temple, he argues that Li Tong 李童, one of the top-level eunuchs serving the Ming court in the early fifteenth century, patronized the construction of the temple and its Tibetan Buddhist artistic elements.⁵³ What is even more intriguing is that Penden Trashi was also involved in the construction of Fahai temple, as noted on a stele.⁵⁴ Such information further consolidates the close connection between Penden Trashi and the religio-political force in the imperial center. In the case of Dachongjiao monastery, *The Origin of the Buddha’s Son from the Western Heaven* also provides detailed accounts of the donations made by palace eunuchs, ranging from a Tripiṭaka written with gold ink to hundreds of Buddhist statues made from sandalwood, ebony, and ivory.⁵⁵

In addition to court-allocated funding, corvée labor, and material offerings, the Dachongjiao monastery also received two safety-assuring edicts (*huchi* 護

51 Berthe Jansen, *The Monastic Rules: Buddhist Monastic Organization in Pre-Modern Tibet* (Oakland: Univ. of California Press, 2018), 91.

52 Susan Naquin, *Peking: Temples and City Life, 1400–1900* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2001), 180.

53 Debreczeny, “Sino-Tibetan Artistic Synthesis,” 49–51.

54 Ibid., 52. In this article, Debreczeny also claims that Penden Trashi was appointed the abbot of Qutan monastery by the Yongle emperor in 1408, which I believe is incorrect. On the one hand, the 1408 stele from Qutan monastery indicates that it was a Penden Zangpo (dPal ldan bzang po), not Penden Trashi, who was named the abbot of the monastery; on the other hand, according to *The Origin of the Buddha’s Son from the Western Heaven*, Penden Trashi was at the Ming court in Nanjing in 1407 serving Dezhin Shekpa, and in 1408 he left for Tibet with Dezhin Shekpa and spent the following years in Tibet. Therefore, there is no evidence from existing primary sources to attest to the connection between Penden Trashi and Qutan monastery.

55 *Xitian fozi yuanliulu*, 176–80.

敕) that protected the absolute rights of the monastery over its wide array of property, rendering Dachongjiao's rich possessions immune to appropriation.⁵⁶ From a social history perspective, these privileges were public demonstrations of the intimate relationship between Dachongjiao monastery and the Ming court, and they would undoubtedly attract more followers to the monastery and boost its status in the Minzhou Buddhist community. In the late 1420s, the Ming court's imperial commission significantly consolidated Dachongjiao monastery's religious authority in local society, making it the most important religious site in Minzhou and one of the three most significant Ming-patronized grand monasteries in the Sino-Tibetan borderland in addition to Qutan 瞿曇 and Honghua 宏化 monasteries.

After decades of travelling between Beijing and Lhasa, Penden Trashi spent his later years in Beijing to consolidate his religious authority in the imperial court. In the mid-1420s, he completed his mission in Tibet and returned to the Ming court. Going forward, he spent most of his time in Beijing, and gradually fostered an intimate relationship with Emperor Xuande 宣德 (r. 1426–1435), who was a devoted Tibetan Buddhist practitioner according to Cairang.⁵⁷ Emperor Xuande frequently attended Penden Trashi's dharma instructions and ritual ceremonies, and he even asked Penden Trashi to translate Buddhist *sūtras* for his private use.⁵⁸ In 1428, Penden Trashi gave the emperor the Mahā-cakra empowerment and the nine deities of Amitāyus empowerment.⁵⁹ From a religious perspective, this means that the emperor officially acknowledged Penden Trashi's mentorship and was willing to follow his dharma instruction. In 1430, Penden Trashi sponsored the reproduction of, and perhaps also wrote the colophon for, the Dalongshan xylographic edition of *Jātakamālā*, a version supplemented by the third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje.⁶⁰ In 1435, Penden Trashi's disciples in Beijing made him a statue. In the stele inscription celebrating the

56 Ouyang De 歐陽德, *Ouyang De ji* 歐陽德集 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2007), 411.

57 Cairang 才讓, "Ming Xuanzong yu Zangchuan fojiao guanxi kaoshu" 明宣宗與藏傳佛教關係考述, *Zhongguo zangxue* 2007.3: 17–18.

58 *Xitian fozi yuanliulu*, 176–79.

59 *Anduo zhengjiaoshi*, 642.

60 I thank one of the reviewers of this article for pointing out the connection between Penden Trashi and this xylographic edition of *Jātakamālā*. This information could also attest to the point that Dalongshan monastery was the stronghold for Kagyu sect monks in Beijing at the time. For more information on this topic, see Matthew T. Kapstein, "The *Jātakamālā* of Āryasūra with the Supplement of the Third Rgyal-dbang Karma-pa Rangbyung-rdo-rje: The 1430 Dalongshan xylographic edition conserved in the Berthold Laufer Collection of the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago," in *On a Day of a Month of the Fire Bird Year: Festschrift for Peter Schwieger on his 65th Birthday*, ed. Jeannine Bischoff et al. (Kathmandu: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2020), 437–51.

statue, he was juxtaposed with Po-Śrimitra, Vajrabodhi, and Amoghavajra, all eminent Indian monks who brought Buddhist knowledge to China.⁶¹ By the 1430s, Penden Trashi already held extensive influence at the Ming court. In 1442, following Penden Trashi's petition, more than 37,000 monks were granted ordination by the Ming court.⁶² In 1447, when Penden Trashi was seventy years old, his disciples and followers in Beijing published *The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven* as a birthday gift for their Buddhist master. In 1452, Penden Trashi was granted the title of the "dharma king of great wisdom" (*dazhi fawang* 大智法王).⁶³

Penden Trashi's rise to power in the 1430s and 40s exemplified the Ming court's favorable policies toward Tibetan Buddhism and the active roles played by Tibetan Buddhists from the northern Sino-Tibetan borderland in Beijing's religious community. David Robinson notes that although Tibetan Buddhism was present in the Ming capital from the dynasty's beginning, it did not reach its full blossom until the mid-fifteenth century.⁶⁴ However, few scholars have highlighted the significance of Sino-Tibetan borderland monks, like Penden Trashi, in promoting such a religious florescence. At the time, there were three strongholds of Tibetan Buddhism in Beijing, and they each were controlled by a different Tibetan Buddhist community with specific sectarian affiliations. Du Changshun claims that Dalongshan monastery 大隆善寺 was the stronghold of Penden Trashi and his disciples, and was closer to Kagyu forces; Daci'en monastery 大慈恩寺 was mainly controlled by Geluk Tibetan Buddhists from Hezhou 河州, a significant political and cultural center of the northern Sino-Tibetan borderland; and Danengren monastery 大能仁寺 was the stronghold of Sakya sect monks, who were mainly from Baota monastery 寶塔寺 in Lintao 臨洮.⁶⁵ Thus it can be said that the three grand Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in Beijing were religious outposts for the northern Sino-Tibetan borderland Buddhist communities in the Ming capital.

After establishing religious bases in Beijing, Tibetan Buddhists from the northern Sino-Tibetan borderland had a chance to build networks at court and

61 *Beijing tushuguan cang Zhongguo lidai shike taben huibian* 北京圖書館藏中國歷代石刻拓本彙編, vol. 51, ed. Beijing tushuguan jinshizu 北京圖書館金石組 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1989), 79.

62 *Xitian fozi yuanliulu*, 184.

63 *Ming Yingzong shilu* 明英宗實錄, *juan* 222 (feidi chengliwang fulu *juan* di sishi), 3rd year (Yingzong), month x, renzi.

64 Robinson, *Culture, Courtiers, and Competition*, 371–82.

65 Du Changshun 杜長順, "Mingdai Zangseng zhujing de sanda siyuan kaoshu: jianlun jiaopai secai yu famai chuancheng" 明代藏僧駐京的三大寺院考述：兼論教派色彩與法脈傳承, *Zongjiaoxue yanjiu* 2018.1: 178–84.

develop direct relationships with the Ming throne. Some of them frequently hosted religious ceremonies and gave dharma teachings for Ming elites, and many others were hired to translate Buddhist texts specifically for the Ming ruling house.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, from the 1430s on, Tibetan Buddhists were allowed to stay in Beijing without any limit on their dwelling.⁶⁷ The borderland Tibetan Buddhist monks subsequently took advantage of these many forms of special treatment to accumulate political capital and religious authority at the Ming court. In return, they would also project these court privileges back to their hometown. Such a process is clearly shown in *The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven* and the two aforementioned letters. These documents not only offer meticulous accounts of how Penden Trashi gradually acquired power and influence in the early fifteenth-century Ming court, but also provide valuable information regarding the process through which Penden Trashi converted his court prestige into religious hegemony in Minzhou.

The First Letter and Changing Succession Pattern

While Penden Trashi consolidated his position in the Ming court through his diplomatic achievements and religious cultivation, he also proactively extended such religious and political capital back to his hometown, Minzhou. The monk's personal connections, especially his blood ties, played an important role in this process. This section situates the shift of dharma succession modes in Minzhou's religious community in this context. By examining the prestigious dharma titles that Penden Trashi's disciples received from the Ming court and the reasons for why they were able to enjoy these privileges, I trace how Penden Trashi spread dharma seeds among his clan members as a strategy for clan construction.

The first letter illustrates how Penden Trashi intervened in the religious power structure of Minzhou (Appendix 1).⁶⁸ In 1431, Penden Trashi sent a let-

66 An Haiyan 安海燕, *Mingdai Hanyi Zangchuan mijiao wenxian yanjiu* 明代漢譯藏傳密教文獻研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo zangxue chubanshe, 2019).

67 Hu Xiaobai 胡蕭白, "Mingchao zhengce yu shiwu shiji zhongqi Zangchuan fojiao zai Hanzang zoulang de chuanbo jizhi shulun" 明朝政策與15世紀中期藏傳佛教在漢藏走廊的傳播機制述論, *Zhongguo zangxue* 2021.3: 44–45.

68 In Li Zhiming's article, he uses the term *fazhi* 法旨 (dharma edict) to describe the documents Penden Trashi issued to his Minzhou disciples. This mode of translation, I argue, derives from Yuan-dynasty practices in which many announcements made by Tibetan Buddhist hierarchs were often deemed as "dharma edicts." But Penden Trashi's announcements are different from the Mongol-era documents in two ways. First, during the Yuan

ter to his disciples in Minzhou. Only recently discovered, the letter was issued by Penden Trashi as instructions for abbotship succession at Dachongjiao monastery. Since its completion in 1427, Dachongjiao monastery played an important role in facilitating Minzhou-Beijing religious interaction. As Penden Trashi rose to power at the Ming court, many Dachongjiao monastery monks also were able to access Beijing's Buddhist community. Technically, Penden Trashi was the abbot of Dachongjiao monastery; however, he was too busy to oversee the monastery's daily management. Thus, he issued the letter in 1431 to pass the monastic abbotship to his first disciple, Shakya dpal bzang po (Shakya Palzangpo 釋迦巴藏卜, ca. 1393–1460).⁶⁹ Yet as the letter indicates, Shakya Palzangpo's term had a time limit: he was only supposed to be the monastery's abbot for twenty years. After that, the position, according to Penden Trashi, should be succeeded by Penden Trashi's own nephew, Chos grub bzang po

era, there indeed were official positions for imperial preceptors (*dishi* 帝師) in the administrative system, and the Yuan emperors explicitly empowered the imperial preceptors to issue dharma edicts (see the edict from Kublai to Pakpa). Yet the Ming did not inherit this practice. In other words, even if Penden Trashi held great religious status at the Ming court, he did not enjoy the same level of political-administrative power as his Yuan-era predecessors; secondly, many Yuan-dynasty *fazhi* were either engraved on bilingual steles or translated into Chinese, providing us with the opportunity to see how such terms were understood during the Mongol era. There is a 1317 edict written in Tibetan preserved in Nanhua chansi 南華禪寺 of Shaoguan, Guangdong, and the line “ti shi'i gtam” was translated into “dishi fazhi” 帝師法旨 (the dharma edict from the imperial preceptor) by a Tibetan Buddhist monk in 1464. In the bilingual stele erected in 1341 in Changqing dalingyansi 長清大靈岩寺 of Shandong, there is a line that reads as “gu shri'i gtam,” and its Chinese corresponding line is “guoshi fazhi” 國師法旨 (the dharma edict from the state preceptor). One must note that the Tibetan term *gtam* only means “talk/discourse,” but when it comes with terms like “ti shi” or “gu shri” that indicate the official identity of the Tibetan Buddhist monk, the whole word can be translated into Chinese as *fazhi*. Yet such political identities did not exist in the Ming's administrative system, rendering the jurisdictional status of Penden Trashi's announcements to his disciples less strong as the Yuan-dynasty documents. In this vein, I argue that the announcements made by Penden Trashi should not be translated as *fazhi*, and hence I use “letter” to refer to the two documents he issued. For the edict from Kublai to Pakpa, see Duoje caidan 多傑才旦, *Yuan yilai Xizang difang yu zhongyang zhengfu guanxi dang'an shiliao huibian* 元以來西藏地方與中央政府關係檔案史料彙編, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongguo zangxue chubanshe, 1994), 12; for the Yuan-dynasty dharma edicts, see Chang Fengxuan 常鳳玄, “Guangdong Nanhua chansi cang Yuandai dishi fazhi kaoshi” 廣東南華禪寺藏元代帝師法旨考釋, *Zhongguo minzu guwenzi yanjiu* (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1994), 176–94; Wang Yao 王堯, “Shandong Changqing dalingyansi Dayuan guoshi fazhi bei kaoshi” 山東長清大靈岩寺大元國師法旨碑考釋, *Wenwu* 1981.11: 45–51.

69 There are multiple ways in historical materials to present the monk's name, such as Shakya Shri dpal bzang po, Shakya Shri, and Shakya dpal bzang po. This article uses Shakya dpal bzang po (Shakya Palzangpo).

(Chödrup Zangpo 綽竹藏卜, ?–ca. 1462). One can imagine how such a way of appointing two successors at one time would likely create friction between them. Why then did Penden Trashi choose to make such a move? The answer, I argue, lies in Penden Trashi's intention to construct and consolidate his own clan's authority in Minzhou in order to compete with other hegemonic clans in the local society.

Two modes of dharma succession existed in early Ming Minzhou through which a Tibetan Buddhist could pass down his religious authority and legitimacy. One was clan-based. That is, when a Buddhist master passed away, his dharma line would be succeeded by one of his own relatives. The most typical example in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition for clan-based dharma succession practices comes from the Sakya school. The main trunk of the Sakya lineage is closely bound up with one specific clan, with succession passed through father to son, and this unbroken line has continued from the eleventh century to the present. Clan-based dharma succession also existed in early Ming Minzhou, yet the succession passed from uncle to nephew, as opposed to father to son. A certain Samdrup Gyaltsen was the first Tibetan Buddhist monk from Minzhou to appear in Ming court records with the title of state preceptor (*guoshi* 國師). In 1424, when the monk became old, his nephew inherited his state preceptor title.⁷⁰ Moreover, when two Tibetan Buddhist masters gave dharma teachings in Minzhou in 1427 under Penden Trashi's invitation, they were also uncle and nephew.⁷¹ It is worth noting that such blood relationships were signified in Chinese texts via the term of *wanbu* 完卜, which is the transliteration of Tibetan *dbon po*, referring to the nephew of nobles or religious masters.

The second mode of dharma succession in early Ming Minzhou was non-clan-based, meaning that the master and the disciple shared no familial bonds. The relationship between Penden Gyatso and Penden Trashi falls into this category. When Penden Trashi was young, one of his uncles, who was also a monk, approached his parents and told them that Penden Trashi should become a monk.⁷² But when Penden Trashi was ordained, it was Penden Gyatso, rather than his uncle, who became Penden Trashi's master.⁷³ This indicates that Penden Trashi's religious training followed the non-clan-based model. Penden Gyatso's decision to take a non-clan member as his disciple, instead of a nephew, most likely came from his own experience: when Penden Gyatso became a

70 *Ming Taizong shilu*, juan 268, 22nd year (Yongle), month 11, dingmao.

71 *Xitian fozi yuanliulu*, 175.

72 *Ibid.*, 161.

73 *Ibid.*, 162.

monk at the age of eight, he himself did not follow the uncle-nephew path as his master, Penden Tso, was not his relative.⁷⁴ Penden Trashī followed this pattern when he took his first disciple, Shakya Palzangpo, who shared no blood ties with him as well. Therefore, we can conclude that up until Shakya Palzangpo, the dharma line from Penden Tso and Penden Gyatso to Penden Trashī and Shakya Palzangpo was non-clan based.

Existing primary sources are insufficient to support a quantitative study to examine which mode of dharma succession was more popular in the early fifteenth-century Minzhou Tibetan Buddhist community. But from the case of Penden Trashī, we can see his gradual inclination toward the clan-based dharma succession mode. At the outset, Penden Trashī mingled the two modes by taking both relatives and non-relatives as disciples. Yet within these two groups, it was the disciples who were blood relatives (i.e. nephews) that benefitted more. This tendency is suggested through the dharma titles that Penden Trashī's disciples received from the Ming court and the time and context in which these titles were granted.

A dharma title bestowed by the Ming court was a typical indicator of one's religio-political prestige in the fifteenth century. As an eminent Tibetan Buddhist master, Penden Trashī had hundreds of disciples in both Beijing and Minzhou, and it is unlikely that they all left an imprint in history. But some of them, for various reasons, were granted dharma titles by the Ming court, such as Chan master (*chanshi* 禪師), state preceptor, grand state preceptor, Buddha's son from the Western Heaven (*Xitian fozi* 西天佛子), and dharma king (*fawang* 法王). These dharma titles may not necessarily reflect these Tibetan Buddhists' religious achievements, but they do attest to how the Ming court valued the title bearers. In addition, these titles were closer to hereditary official positions in an administrative regime, rather than special designations for special people. In this regard, these dharma titles performed important ideological functions. Other than abundant material wealth, these titles also were a source of significant religious capital and various types of political privilege. Peter Schwieger notes that the imperial titles and seals conferred by the Ming court played a crucial role in the legitimization of political authority in fifteenth-century central Tibet, and "perhaps the Tibetan headmen were even more eager to ask for imperial seals than that the emperor was interested in granting them."⁷⁵ In other words, these titles bestowed by the court were sym-

74 *Xitian fozi yuanliulu*, 162.

75 Peter Schwieger, "Significance of Ming Titles Conferred upon the Phag Mo Gru Rulers: A

bols of recognition from external powers that could boost the authority of the bearer; thus they were quite attractive to the religious and secular Tibetan hierarchs.

Fully aware of the value of these dharma titles, Penden Trashi, as the leader of the Minzhou Tibetan Buddhist community, made much effort at the Ming court to facilitate dharma title bestowal to his disciples. One should note that Penden Trashi was named the right supervisor monk for Buddhist practices of the Central Buddhist Registry as early as 1419. Therefore, he was one of several high-level monks who took charge of religious affairs regarding dharma title granting and inheritance. In the 1420s, Penden Trashi's political and religious status further increased when he was promoted to state preceptor. Therefore, it is highly likely that he would have had the final say regarding which disciple could accept which dharma title. Scrutinizing who among Penden Trashi's numerous disciples received dharma titles, as well as how, when, and why they were received, is a useful analytical framework through which we may identify Penden Trashi's understanding of and logic concerning dharma succession.

In total, nine dharma titles were bestowed to Minzhou Tibetan Buddhist monks during the Ming dynasty, among which six were granted in the early fifteenth century. Four of these six titles were bestowed to Penden Trashi and his disciples. The other two were granted to the aforementioned Minzhou monks whose dharma successions were clan-based; one of them, the title of "state preceptor of pure enlightenment and wide compassion" (Jingjue hongci guoshi 淨覺洪慈國師), was granted to Samdrup Gyaltsen. Although it is unclear when Samdrup received the title, we do know that the title was inherited by his nephew in 1424.⁷⁶ Records for the succession of this title disappear from the Ming court accounts thereafter, most likely indicating this dharma line's distance from Ming power or even cessation. The other title, "state preceptor of benevolence promotion and extensive kindness" (Hongci guangshan guoshi 弘慈廣善國師) was granted in 1436 to a certain Sonam Zangpo,⁷⁷ and Sonam Zangpo's nephew later inherited it in 1472.⁷⁸

The chronological order and possible reason for the bestowal of the other four dharma titles are shown in Table 1:

Reevaluation of Chinese-Tibetan Relations during the Ming Dynasty," *The Tibet Journal* 34/35 (2009): 326.

76 *Ming Taizong shilu*, juan 268, 22nd year (Yongle), month 11, dingmao.

77 *Ming Yingzong shilu*, juan 20, 1st year (Zhengtong), month VII, jiajin.

78 *Ming Xianzong shilu*, juan 101, 8th year (Chenghua), month 11, renshen.

TABLE 1 Dharma titles, their bearers, conferred time and possible reason for bestowal

Dharma title	Title bearer	Bestowal time	Possible reasons for bestowal
Jingjue ciji guoshi (State Preceptor of Pure Enlightenment and Benevolent Benefit 淨覺慈濟國師) ⁷⁹	Penden Trashi	1417	
Jingjue ciji daguoshi (Grand State Preceptor of Pure Enlightenment and Benevolent Benefit 淨覺慈濟大國師) ⁸⁰	Penden Trashi	1426	Succeeded in checking the authenticity of the reincarnation of the fifth Karmapa
Miaoji chanshi (Chan Master of Marvelous Benefit 妙濟禪師) ⁸¹	Chöpel Trashi *	1426	
Youshan chanshi (Chan Master of Blessed Kindness 佑善禪師) ⁸²	Shakya Palzangpo	1427	Completion of Dachongjiao monastery
Jingjue youshan guoshi (State Preceptor of Pure Enlightenment and Blessed Kindness 淨覺佑善國師) ⁸³	Shakya Palzangpo	Before 1434	
Jingjue ciji daguoshi (Grand State Preceptor of Pure Enlightenment and Benevolent Benefit 淨覺慈濟大國師) ⁸⁴	Chödrup Zangpo *	1436	Penden Trashi was promoted to a Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven, thus the title was re-assigned
Qingxin jiexing chanshi (Chan Master of Pure Mind and Moral Practice 清心戒行禪師) ⁸⁵	Paljor Zangpo *	Before 1443	
Qingxin jiexing guoshi (State Preceptor of Pure Mind and Moral Practice 清心戒行國師) ⁸⁶	Paljor Zangpo *	1445	Completion of <i>The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven</i>
Guanding Jingjue youshan daguoshi (Empowered Grand State Preceptor of Pure Enlightenment and Blessed Kindness 灌頂淨覺佑善大國師) ⁸⁷	Shakya Palzangpo	1445	Completion of <i>The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven</i>

Title bearers marked with * were Penden Trashi's nephews.

79

Xitian fozi yuanliulu, 171.

80

Ibid., 173.

81

Beijing tushuguan cang zhongguo lidai shike taben huibian, vol. 51, 63–64.

82

Xiong Wenbin 熊文彬, “Ming feng Youshan chanshi zhaoshu” 明封佑善禪師詔書, *Zhongguo zangxue* 2006.2: 188–90.

83

Ming Xuanzong shilu, *juan* 108, 9th year (Xuande), month I, yisi.

84

Ming Yingzong shilu, *juan* 20, 1st year (Zhengtong), month VII, jiayin.

85

Beijing tushuguan cang zhongguo lidai shike taben huibian, vol. 51, 115.

86

Ming Yingzong shilu, *juan* 126, 10th year (Zhengtong), month II, yisi.

87

Ibid.

The information in the table above illustrates the shift in Penden Trashi's favoring the non-clan-based dharma succession mode to the clan-based one. As is demonstrated, the four dharma titles indicate four dharma lineages: Jingjue ciji 淨覺慈濟, Miaoji 妙濟, Youshan 佑善, and Qingxin jiexing 清心戒行. They were granted to Chödrup Zangpo, Chöpel Trashi, Shakya Palzangpo, and Paljor Zangpo respectively. Among the four disciples, three were nephews of Penden Trashi. The only non-nephew disciple was Shakya Palzangpo, his first disciple.

Shakya Palzangpo's dharma succession situation was dramatically different from that of Penden Trashi's other nephew disciples, and his personal experience exemplifies the different treatment Penden Trashi's nephew disciples and non-relative disciples received. Shakya Palzangpo was Penden Trashi's right hand during the Buddhist master's early years. He travelled to Tibet with Penden Trashi several times for diplomatic missions in the 1410s and 1420s and served as the main manager and supervisor for the initial construction of Dachongjiao monastery.⁸⁸ When Penden Trashi left for Beijing in 1417, he entrusted the entire monastery project and all monastic personnel work to Shakya Palzangpo.⁸⁹ Yet, even as his master's first disciple and helpful assistant, Shakya Palzangpo was not the first whom Penden Trashi recommended to the Ming court for prestigious dharma titles. As Penden Trashi's nephew, Chos dpal bkra shis (Chöpel Trashi 綽巴扎釋), was summoned to Beijing in 1425 and later bestowed with a Chan master title in 1426. Shakya Palzangpo's junior by over twenty years, Chöpel Trashi at this point had no experience in Ming-Tibet diplomacy and presumably little influence in the Minzhou Buddhist community. However, Penden Trashi chose him to be the first disciple for a court dharma title.

Chöpel Trashi's learning experience reveals the reason for his recognition ahead of his senior, Shakya Palzangpo. Shortly after Chöpel Trashi reached the age of ten, Penden Trashi took him to Tibet to receive Buddhist instructions from both the fifth Karmapa and Tsongkhapa, two of the most knowledgeable and eminent Tibetan Buddhist masters in Tibet at the time. One should remember that Penden Trashi himself had learned from these two masters in his youth. Therefore, it is highly possible that Penden Trashi sought to apply his own training model to Chöpel Trashi in order to cultivate him as his successor. From this series of events, we may understand why Chöpel Trashi and Shakya Palzangpo received different treatment. To Penden Trashi,

88 *Xitian fozi yuanliulu*, 172.

89 *Ibid.*, 171.

Shakya Palzangpo was a good disciple and useful assistant; yet in contrast, Chöpel Trashi was meant to be the candidate for Penden Trashi's dharma successor. In 1427, one year after Chöpel Trashi was named a Chan master, Shakya Palzangpo received a Chan master title of "Chan master of blessed kindness" (Youshan chanshi).⁹⁰ However, the bestowal of this title was most likely only intended to recognize Shakya Palzangpo's efforts in helping taking charge of Dachongjiao monastery's extension work.⁹¹ Becoming Chan master in 1426 and 1427 respectively, Chöpel Trashi and Shakya Palzangpo were bestowed dharma titles for different reasons and with different levels of importance.

Penden Trashi undoubtedly had high expectations for his nephew disciple Chöpel Trashi, but the latter unfortunately died at a young age, passing away in Beijing in late 1430. Penden Trashi personally requested a top Buddhist official in Beijing to pen a eulogy for him.⁹² I argue that if it were not for his early demise, Chöpel Trashi would have been designated by Penden Trashi as the rightful abbot of Dachongjiao monastery. Only after his death did Penden Trashi start to consider Shakya Palzangpo as a candidate. Two months after Chöpel Trashi's death, Penden Trashi summoned Shakya Palzangpo to Beijing.⁹³ The next year, he officially issued the letter naming Shakya Palzangpo abbot of Dachongjiao monastery. But at the same time, he named Chödrup Zangpo, another of his nephews, as Shakya Palzangpo's successor, as introduced in the beginning of this section.

One may think that Penden Trashi's appointment of two generations of successors at one time was not an appropriate move to maintain stability in Dachongjiao monastery. However, I argue that this seemingly troublesome decision attests to Penden Trashi's desire to keep the control of Dachongjiao monastery, as well as the religio-political capital the monastery symbolized, in the hands of his own clan members. As one of Penden Trashi's most important religious achievements in Minzhou, Dachongjiao monastery was not something the monk was willing to give away to non-clan members, even to his most senior and perhaps most capable disciple.

90 Xiong Wenbin, "Ming feng Youshan chanshi zhaoshu," 188.

91 *Xitian fozi yuanliulu*, 175.

92 *Beijing tushuguan cang zhongguo lidai shike taben huibian*, vol. 51, 63. The eulogy is in fact bilingual, and the Chinese and Tibetan parts do not correspond with each other verbatim. For a detailed study on the eulogy, see Li Zhiming 李志明, "Miaoji chanshi taming yu Mingdai Hanzang fojiao jiaoliu" 妙濟禪師塔銘與明代漢藏佛教交流, *Zhongguo zangxue* 2020.2: 45–53.

93 *Ming Xuanzong shilu*, juan 60, 4th year (Xuande), month XII, wuyin.

One may wonder what role the Ming court played in such title succession procedures: did the imperial force intervene or not? In the case of Penden Trashi, I argue, the Ming was at most only a nominal supervisor. On the one hand, in the first half of the fifteenth century, the Ming court granted a number of preferential policies toward Tibetan Buddhist communities, and one of them was to empower religious leaders to decide their inheritor on their own;⁹⁴ on the other hand, Penden Trashi enjoyed a rather high position at the time, and the Ming court, as one might imagine, would do little about the seemingly private matters of the monk, especially one serving as the right supervisor monk for Buddhist practices of the Central Buddhist Registry.

Having made the aforementioned arrangements for the Dachongjiao monastery abbotship succession, Penden Trashi made another series of strategic moves to further consolidate Chödrup Zangpo's religious authority and hegemony, even as Shakya Palzangpo's local influence as Dachongjiao monastery's actual founder and manager grew rapidly. In 1435, Emperor Xuande passed away, and the newly enthroned Zhengtong emperor 正統 (r. 1436–1449) decided to upgrade Penden Trashi's dharma title from grand state preceptor to Buddha's son from the Western Heaven.⁹⁵ After this promotion, Penden Trashi's dharma title of "Grand state preceptor of pure enlightenment and benevolent benefit" (Jingjue ciji daguoshi) required an inheritor. For the second time, Penden Trashi chose his own nephew over Shakya Palzangpo and gave the prestigious dharma title to Chödrup Zangpo. In doing so, Penden Trashi created an awkward situation at the Dachongjiao monastery, in that the current abbot, Shakya Palzangpo, was still a state preceptor, but the next abbot, Chödrup Zangpo, had already surpassed his superior to attain the rank of grand state preceptor. Moreover, Chödrup Zangpo's new dharma title was not chosen at random: it was the one that Penden Trashi had used for decades, indicating that Chödrup Zangpo was chosen by Penden Trashi as his closest dharma heir. These sophisticated arrangements again point to the fact that Penden Trashi intentionally cultivated and promoted disciples from his own clan. In contrast, Shakya Palzangpo remained a state preceptor for almost a decade. Only after he finished *The Origin of the Buddha's Son from the Western Heaven* in 1445 did Shakya Palzangpo finally receive a grand state preceptor title.⁹⁶ But at the same time, Dpal 'byor bzang po (Paljor Zangpo 班卓兒藏卜), another

94 Hu Xiaobai, "Mingchao zhengce yu shiwu shiji," 51–52.

95 *Xitian fozi yuanliulu*, 180.

96 *Ming Yingzong shilu*, juan 126, 10th year (Zhengtong), month 11, yisi.

young nephew of Penden Trashi, also received the title of state preceptor. This is most likely due to his assistance in the completion of Penden Trashi's hagiography.

In retrospect, Shakya Palzangpo's treatment as Penden Trashi's first disciple seems unfair. Shakya Palzangpo was a knowledgeable Tibetan Buddhist master and a capable manager of monastic affairs. The *Religious History of Amdo* documents that during his years as abbot of Dachongjiao monastery, Shakya Palzangpo helped establish the practice of monastic debate in the monastery, which greatly improved the monks' level of knowledge and won Minzhou the reputation of being the second central Tibet.⁹⁷ Yet to Penden Trashi, all these achievements were secondary to the concern he had for the power of his own clan. In the fifteenth century, choosing one's own nephew as religious successor was in fact quite common, as many Tibetan Buddhist masters sent their nephew successors to Beijing to foster a relationship with the Ming court before the nephews' formal succession. In their hometown, these nephews pursued religious authority to achieve mutual reinforcement between their dharma lineage and clan. This practice stands in sharp contrast with monastic rules in the Chinese heartland that stipulated that monks and nuns should maintain distance from their original households.

With his hegemony established in both the Ming court and the Beijing Buddhist community, Penden Trashi succeeded in acquiring dharma titles for his nephew disciples. This section has examined how the Hou clan accrued dharma titles as a source of religious capital. The next focuses on how the Hou clan exemplified the rise of a Tibetan Buddhist society in the fifteenth-century northern Sino-Tibetan borderland.

The Second Letter and the Rise of a Clan-Based Tibetan Buddhist Society

Penden Trashi simultaneously named two Dachongjiao abbots in his 1431 letter, which seems to be a risky scenario in retrospect. Indeed, such a precarious power structure quickly crumbled. In 1449, when Penden Trashi was already 73, he sent a second letter from Beijing back to Dachongjiao monastery (Appendix 2). Similar to the one penned in 1431, Penden Trashi used the 1449 letter to make further remote arrangements for Dachongjiao's monastic affairs.

97 *Anduo zhengjiaoshi*, 646. The primary source in Tibetan reads as "dbus gnyis pa lta bu;" see *Mdo smad chos 'byung*, 685.

This section explores the content and historical context of this second letter, charting the clan-based framework of the Minzhou monastic associations and its influence on non-religious aspects of the local society.

The second letter concerns property distribution in the Minzhou Buddhist community and reveals the tension between Chödrup Zangpo and Shakya Palzangpo after Penden Trashi's 1431 arrangement. The letter was meant to be read by the Dachongjiao monastery clerics, led by Chödrup Zangpo, but the content primarily concerns Shakya Palzangpo. In the opening lines of the letter, Penden Trashi addresses Chödrup Zangpo as the abbot of Dachongjiao monastery, indicating that he had already replaced Shakya Palzangpo as the monastery's abbot by 1449. Later, Penden Trashi praises Shakya Palzangpo for his religious achievements and his decades-long service and myriad contributions to Dachongjiao monastery. A statement follows that explicitly lists the properties and assets that belonged to Dargye Lhunpo monastery 達吉隆布寺, where Shakya Palzangpo was in residence at the time. The letter records numerous belongings in detail, ranging from valuable objects such as three gold statues of the Buddha, two sets of Buddhist instruments, and daily items like desks, chairs, and farming tools to livestock, such as fifty dairy yaks. In addition, the document delineates the exact reach of Dargye Lhunpo monastery's territory. The last portion of the letter includes two sections. The first communicates Penden Trashi's decision that one estate near the upper stream of the Tao River should be given to Shakya Palzangpo. The second section, written in a strict tone, requests the monks of Dachongjiao monastery to maintain a harmonious and amicable relationship with Shakya Palzangpo and the monks of Dargye Lhunpo monastery. Penden Trashi warned the clerics of Dachongjiao monastery that if they failed to obey his order by listening to vile slander and refusing to get along with the Dargye Lhunpo monastery monks, they would be not only punished by dākinīs and dharma-protectors, but also mocked in the secular world.⁹⁸

Let us look at the details of the letter. First, the document begins with the line, "Homage to the Bhagavān and Guhyapati, the glorious lord of secrets." This opening is already quite different from that of the 1431 letter, in which Penden Trashi simply praises the Ming emperor. Guhyapati is the bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi in his guise as guardian of the esoteric tantric scriptures. As the second document explicitly concerns discord and menaces, the opening invocation of Guhyapati must be understood as part of the menace, invoking the

98 Li Zhiming 李志明, "Dazhi fawang Bandan zhashi nianpu" 大智法王班丹扎釋年譜, *Xizang yanjiu* 2017.3: 29.

power of the tantras to enforce order. Second, although Penden Trashi makes it clear in the 1431 letter that Shakya Palzangpo should hold the Dachongjiao abbotship for twenty years, it is clear that he had completed the term prematurely and ceded the abbotship to Chödrup Zangpo by 1449. The abbotship transfer most likely was not a smooth one. Penden Trashi's harsh lines indicate that the two parties must have disagreed over monastic affairs. In this case, it is very likely that the dissention concerned the treasuries managed by Dachongjiao monastery. The conflict must have been irreconcilable as Penden Trashi felt the need to give a detailed account in the letter to clarify the property rights for items as trivial as desks and chairs. The fact that Penden Trashi, one of the most eminent Tibetan Buddhist clerics in the empire, had to go so far as to deal with a remote property dispute in Minzhou suggests that the struggle between two of his most senior disciples was too grave to ignore.

I argue that money played a significant role in the struggle between Shakya Palzangpo and Chödrup Zangpo. In the 1430s and 40s, when Penden Trashi rose to power in Beijing, he also brought a huge amount of material wealth to Minzhou, including land, corvée labor, taxation rights, items of particular economic value, and other tangible assets and properties. The rapid development and expansion of the monastery became a source of internal tension. Although Dachongjiao monastery still recognized Penden Trashi as the nominal hierarch at the time, it was Shakya Palzangpo who managed the daily affairs of the institution since its initial construction in 1416. Therefore, Shakya Palzangpo was the practical supervisor of Dachongjiao's monastic affairs, including the management and allocation of the monastery's abundant wealth. This critical role allowed Shakya Palzangpo to become quite powerful in the early to mid-fifteenth century as the monastery itself continued to grow richer. Given the situation, Shakya Palzangpo's conflict with Penden Trashi's nephew disciples, especially Chödrup Zangpo, became inevitable.

The tension between Chödrup Zangpo and Shakya Palzangpo emerged from Penden Trashi's preference for his nephew disciples and Shakya Palzangpo's hegemony over the abundant wealth of Dachongjiao monastery. When the tension between the two successors grew too intense to mediate, Penden Trashi issued the 1449 letter and dictated the division of property between them. We do not know to what extent Penden Trashi knew of the crisis or whether he played a role in easing or intensifying the conflict. Nevertheless, we can be certain that Penden Trashi personally intervened in 1449 to settle the disputes and draw a clear line between the two parties in terms of property distribution. The document indicates that Shakya Palzangpo would retain the rights to Dargye Lhunpo monastery's assets, as well as a piece of an estate in Minzhou's rural

areas, but share little of the wealth that Dachongjiao monastery possessed. Here again we see that Penden Trashi treated Shakya Palzangpo differently from his clan members.

The 1449 letter finalized the discord between Shakya Palzangpo and Penden Trashi's nephew disciples, and the two parties began to develop along their own paths. One of their major strategies for religious expansion was incorporating other monasteries as sub-monasteries. In what follows, I argue that these monastic associations also demonstrate a clear clan-based character.

From the mid-fifteenth century, two monastic associations gradually took shape in Minzhou. Existing Tibetan and Chinese materials provide some accounts regarding the scale of these monastic associations. The *Religious History of Amdo* indicates that Dachongjiao monastery had in total twenty-eight sub-monasteries, while Quzong monastery 曲宗寺 (aka. Fazang monastery 法藏寺, the stronghold of Shakya Palzangpo and his followers) was the head monastery for another fourteen sub-monasteries.⁹⁹ However, these records are incomplete, especially in regard to information about Dachongjiao monastery. Several monasteries, such as Tianzhu monastery 天竺寺, were not included in this list but recorded as Dachongjiao's sub-monasteries in other Ming dynasty Chinese materials.¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, many of these monasteries are not currently identifiable due to the fact that they were renamed, relocated, or simply destroyed. Still, a number of case studies are available to help us understand how such sub-monasteries were incorporated in different scenarios.

Imperial commission was the first method following which different monasteries formed an association. In 1427, shortly after Dachongjiao monastery's expansion project, the Ming court allocated funds for the construction of Yuanjue monastery 圓覺寺 and then assigned it as Dachongjiao's sub-monastery.¹⁰¹ Voluntary submission was the second method. In 1447, a Han-Chinese monk named Wu Mao 悟瑁 went to the Ming court and claimed to be a disciple of Penden Trashi. In addition to willingly abandoning his Han Buddhist identity, Wu Mao wished to convert his monastery into a Tibetan Buddhist one and become one of Dachongjiao's sub-monasteries. His requests soon received the emperor's permission.¹⁰²

99 *Anduo zhengjiaoshi*, 648.

100 *Ming Xiaozong shilu* 明孝宗實錄, *juan* 53, 4th year (Hongzhi), month VII, dinghai; *Zhongguo guojia bowuguan guancang wenwu yanjiu congshu, Mingqing dang'an juan, Mingdai* 中國國家博物館館藏文物研究叢書·明清檔案卷·明代, ed. Zhongguo guojia bowuguan 中國國家博物館 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2007), 18–19.

101 *Anduo zhengjiaoshi*, 644.

102 *Chongxiu Dingxi xianzhi jiaozhu* 重修定西縣志校註, ed. Zhengxie Dingxi shi Andingqu

The Minzhou monks were well aware of the causal relationship between gaining sub-monasteries and promoting religious influence. Therefore, proactive expansion constituted a third way to establish a monastic association in Minzhou. One land transaction contract found in rural Minzhou demonstrates that in 1426, at the same time that the Ming court announced Dachongjiao's imperial-commissioned expansion, Penden Trashi used his own savings to purchase two pieces of land southeast of Minzhou for new monastery construction. Soon afterwards, he erected Gongbu monastery 拱卜寺.¹⁰³ Penden Trashi made this decision for two reasons. On the one hand, as Dachongjiao monastery and some of its sub-monasteries were already located in the Minzhou valley, it was not particularly advantageous to build another monastery nearby. Choosing a relatively distant region for the new monastery could have maximized the spread of Penden Trashi's religious reputation and thus attract more Buddhist followers. On the other hand, the region sat squarely along the route through which people travelled back and forth between Minzhou and the Chinese heartland. Therefore, having a monastery located along a major corridor best served Penden Trashi's interests, as it functioned as a waystation for Penden Trashi and his disciples when they commuted between their hometown and the Ming capital.

What specific trends can we recognize in the rapid development of monastic associations in Minzhou during the mid-fifteenth century? Li Zhiming has conducted careful fieldwork in the region over the past decade and discovered valuable information for us to reconstruct how monastic society grew in Ming-dynasty Minzhou. Among the eighty-four monasteries in contemporary Minxian identified by Li, thirty-two monasteries were built in the Ming dynasty. Moreover, for twenty-one of these thirty-two monasteries, Li was able to collect either paper documents or historical memory regarding the family background of the monastery's *gnas po*. The Tibetan term *gnas po* can be translated literally as "owner" or "host," and Li argues that the *gnas pos* of Minzhou monasteries were those in charge of the monastery's daily management. One can even say that it was the *gnas po* who chaired the monastery in part. According to Li Zhiming's meticulous survey, these *gnas po* positions were inherited along specific clan lines (Table 2).

weiyuanhui 政協定西市安定區委員會 (Lanzhou: Gansu wenhua chubanshe, 2011), 396–97.

103 Zhang Runping 張潤平, "Dachongjiaosi suocun Mingqing shiqi wenshu" 大崇教寺所存明清時期文書, *Zhongguo zangxue* 2012.1: 299.

TABLE 2 Ming dynasty Minzhou monasteries and family background of abbots^a

Name of the monastery	<i>Gnas po</i> 's surname	Name of the monastery	<i>Gnas po</i> 's surname	Name of the monastery	<i>Gnas po</i> 's surname
Chonglong 崇隆	Hou 后	Cangjing 藏經	Chang 常	Yangjuan 羊圈	Yang 楊
Qianchuan 前川	Hou 后	Gongbu 拱卜	Chang 常	Fazang 法藏	Ding 丁
Dachongjiao 大崇教	Hou 后	Chaoding 朝定	Chang 常	Dargye Lhunpo 達吉隆布	Ding 丁
Hongjiao 弘教	Hou 后	Yongning 永寧	Bao 包	Tanggu 唐古	Tang 唐
Yuanjue 圓覺	Hou 后	Sanzhu 三竹	Bao 包	Hongfu 宏福	Qi 漆
Chimu 赤木	Xue 薛	Chenjia 陳家	Chen 陳	Huguobao'an 護國保安	Qi 漆
Guangde 廣德	Qi 祁	Shiya 石崖	Jin 金	Ni'er 尼兒	Che 車

a Li Zhiming 李志明, "Hanzang jiaorong: Mingqing shiqi Minzhou Zangchuan fojiao yanjiu" 漢藏交融：明清時期岷州藏傳佛教研究 (Ph.D. diss., Lanzhou Univ., 2018), 190–91.

The identity of the *gnas pos* of the surveyed monasteries indicates that the Hou clan enjoyed religious dominance in the Minzhou Tibetan Buddhist community. As the table indicates, the *gnas pos* of five out of the twenty-one monasteries came from the Hou clan. In fact, the Hou clan probably controlled more monasteries during the Ming dynasty because many monasteries originally controlled by them were later sold to or taken by other clans. For example, Gongbu monastery, whose *gnas po* bears the surname of Chang in Li's survey, only began to associate with the Chang clan from the early Qing dynasty. According to the aforementioned contract, the monastery was originally a Hou clan property built on the land Penden Trashi purchased in 1426.¹⁰⁴ It is highly likely that another nearby monastery associated with the Chang clan, Cangjing monastery 藏經寺, was also a Hou clan property during the Ming dynasty. Furthermore, Li identifies three other Minzhou monasteries that were controlled by *gnas pos* surnamed Hou—Houjia monastery 后家寺, Hacha monastery 哈岔寺, and Lude monastery 鹿德寺—though he is unable to determine the precise date of their construction.¹⁰⁵ We can even say that as many as half of all the monasteries built in Minzhou during the Ming dynasty were controlled by the Hou clan. In contrast, among all the eighty-four monasteries that Li Zhiming investigated, only two monasteries, Fazang and Dargye Lhunpo, were associated with *gnas pos* surnamed Ding 丁, Shakya Palzangpo's native clan.¹⁰⁶ This

104 Zhang Runping, "Dachongjiaosi suocun Mingqing shiqi wenshu," 299.

105 Li Zhiming, "Hanzang jiaorong," 190–91.

106 This also explains why the two letters were kept by the *gnas po*, surnamed Ding, of Fazang monastery, as they, especially the second one, were quasi-legal documents that legitimized the property rights of the monastery.

means that although Shakya Palzangpo and his disciples incorporated a total of fourteen monasteries into their monastic association, this group of monasteries was not associated with a specific clan to the same degree as Dachongjiao's sub-monasteries.

Penden Trashi applied his clan-centric strategy to monastery management in a way similar to that for dharma titles. This convergence exemplifies a Tibetan style of rulership based on the unity of religious and lay authority, lending Minzhou's Tibetan Buddhist society an explicit clan focus. This feature also extended to the non-religious sphere of local society. As mentioned above, the Hou clan had little voice in early Ming Minzhou because its patriarchs were relocated to other regions. The clan's lack of power and authority in local society is best illustrated in a 1429 memorial made by a certain Hou Neng 后能. In this memorial, Hou Neng first describes the military achievements and especially the sacrifices his father and grandfather made for the Ming during their transfers to various frontiers for military action. Later, he claims that he himself had also served the empire in a similar manner and suppressed many rebellions. As an indigenous officer, Hou Neng received no salary from the court because of Ming regulations; yet, upon his return to Minzhou, he discovered that the properties that were supposed to belong to his clan—including farmland, estates, and water mills—had all been embezzled by other local clans. Therefore, Hou Neng hoped that the emperor would intervene and return those embezzled clan properties back to him as his salary. Eventually, Hou Neng succeeded in convincing the emperor to grant his requests.¹⁰⁷

The timing of this memorial deserves our attention. It was made in 1429, only two years after Dachongjiao monastery received its imperial commission. Therefore, it is highly possible that Penden Trashi's success in the Ming court provided Hou Neng with a chance to retrieve the occupied clan properties. Conversely, some scholars proposed that Hou Neng was in fact taking advantage of Penden Trashi's rising status in the Ming court to appropriate other clans' property in Minzhou.¹⁰⁸ It is difficult to determine which hypothesis is closer to historical fact, but it is certain that as Penden Trashi was favored by the Ming emperor, his clan members in the secular arena also gained power in Minzhou.

From 1429 onwards, Hou Neng's power steadily increased in Minzhou, particularly in the military system. In 1436, Hou Neng is reported to have claimed others' military merits for rank promotion, but such serious misconduct was

107 *Ming Xuanzong shilu*, *juan* 58, 4th year (Xuande), month IX, guichou.

108 Wu Mu 武沐 and Jin Yanhong 金燕紅, "Mingdai Minzhou houshi jiazou buque" 明代岷州后氏家族補闕, *Qinghai minzu daxue xuebao* 2012.4: 60.

pardoned by the Ming emperor, resulting in a slight downgrade of Hou Neng's court bestowal as punishment.¹⁰⁹ In 1438, the Ming's imperial censors again impeached Hou Neng for enslaving a large number of garrison soldiers, leading to a series of military failures, yet he only received verbal warnings.¹¹⁰ Hou Neng's growing authority in local affairs is also supported by a 1444 personnel adjustment, in which he intervened in an official's transfer and kept the official in Minzhou instead of allowing him to leave for Beijing.¹¹¹ Throughout his life, Hou Neng acquired thirty-five estates in Minzhou; when he passed away, his ten sons fought over the huge inheritance until one of them committed murder, was arrested, and dismissed from officialdom.¹¹² Though it was accompanied by tragedy, Hou Neng's growing power in Minzhou in the mid-fifteenth century is undeniable.

Although there is no direct proof in historical materials to confirm the connection between Hou Neng's rise to power and Penden Trashi's favorable treatment at the Ming court, the maintenance of secular and religious authority within the same clan was a common and effective strategy for the northern Sino-Tibetan borderland clans to build local influence. This situation offers an interesting case for comparison with what was happening in Central Tibet at the same time. Peter Schwieger suggests that in fifteenth-century central Tibet, "the degree to which individual aristocratic families were able to influence monastic affairs was weakened, as was the dependence on the political and economic fate of a single family."¹¹³ In contrast, clans in the northern Sino-Tibetan borderland had strong intentions to hold both religious and secular power in hand. When the Ming army marched into Hezhou in the late fourteenth century and came into contact with the local non-Han communities, the elder brother of a certain Han 韓 clan took charge of the region's religious affairs, and the younger brother oversaw the secular.¹¹⁴ In Taozhou 洮州, the patriarchs of an indigenous officer clan also followed this custom, having one of two sons inherit the officer position while the other succeeded the dharma title as Chan master.¹¹⁵ In this regard, the story of Penden Trashi, his nephew disciples, and Hou Neng was just the tip of an iceberg.

109 *Ming Yingzong shilu*, juan 19, 1st year (Zhengtong), month VI, xinmao.

110 *Ming Yingzong shilu*, juan 47, 3rd year (Zhengtong), month II, guiwei.

111 *Ming Yingzong shilu*, juan 112, 9th year (Zhengtong), month I, yihai.

112 *Xitian fozi yuanliulu*, 201.

113 Schwieger, *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China*, 23.

114 *Xunhua tingzhi* 循化廳志, ed. Gong Jinghan 龔景瀚 (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 2016), 181.

115 *Taozhou tingzhi jiaozhu* 洮州廳志校註, ed. Zhang Junli 張俊立 (Beijing: Zhongguo wen-shi chubanshe, 2013), 418.

In fifteenth-century Minzhou, religious forces gradually converged with clan organizations, forming what this article characterizes as a clan-based Tibetan Buddhist society. This does not necessarily mean that influential clans were not visible in the local religious arena prior to the Ming; the aforementioned stories attest to the close relation between clan force and religious power since at least the Song dynasty. In this regard, considering that existing materials do not allow for a quantitative comparison of the degree of religious influence, one may ask what makes Ming-era cases special? This article argues that the imperial patronage from the Ming court stimulated the rise of a clan-based Tibetan Buddhist society in Minzhou, forming a specific mode of “center-periphery” interaction. In other words, as the Ming court provided the initial and fundamental stimulus for Penden Trashi and his clan to build hegemony in Minzhou’s religious arena, it was imperial commission that accelerated the rise of Tibetan Buddhist power and its deep entrenchment in the local society. This trend drastically shaped the power structure of Minzhou. Even today, Minzhou people continue to state that “while there were 36 monasteries here patronized by the imperial court, as many as 72 monasteries were in fact family temples,”¹¹⁶ attesting to the point that Minzhou Tibetan Buddhist communities were still perceived as having a distinctive clan-based nature.

Conclusion

The history of Minzhou’s Tibetan Buddhist society is a story of imperial policies’ frontier ramifications. It was the Ming court’s preferential policies and the Ming emperors’ personal devotion to Tibetan Buddhism that provided significant institutional stimulus for the rise of a clan-based Tibetan Buddhist society in the empire’s western frontier. However, this does not necessarily mean that the imperial center was omnipotent and able to decide unilaterally how frontier societies evolved over time. This article has highlighted the agency of individual monks, such as Penden Trashi, who reshaped the religious landscape in Beijing and redefined the relationship between the Ming court and his hometown. In this regard, though focusing on a different period, Paul Nietupski’s study of Labrang monastery in northeast Amdo is relevant. Centering on Labrang’s rise to power in the midst of eighteenth-century geopolitical struggles, Nietupski claims that the key to the monastery’s success was its charismatic Buddhist leadership that strove to retain local autonomy while

¹¹⁶ Li Zhiming, “Hanzang jiaorong,” 22.

maintaining strong ties with Lhasa and numerous Mongol and Manchu lords.¹¹⁷ For monks from the northern Sino-Tibetan borderland, acutely judging transregional power dynamics was always a wise and necessary move.

This article constructs a fifteenth-century model for how religious hierarchs in the northern Sino-Tibetan borderland took advantage of the region's distance from various political centers for local society's benefit. Penden Trashi and his relatives actively contributed to this process. To analogize, the Hou clan's kinship networks functioned as irrigation canals, providing nutrients for the development of Tibetan Buddhism on the ground. This convergence between monastery-based network and clan-based social web was not specific to Minzhou monastic associations; it also manifested in the other two imperially commissioned monasteries in the northern Sino-Tibetan borderland region. While in Hezhou the monks from the Zhang 張 clan always took charge of Honghua monastery with the Ming court's support,¹¹⁸ the religious authority in Qutan monastery was held by the Mei 梅 clan from the late fourteenth century to the 1940s.¹¹⁹ One historical source precisely summarizes the relationship between monastic institutions and clan organizations in the northern Sino-Tibetan borderland region, noting that "there always is a powerful clan behind each Buddhist monastery."¹²⁰ One must note that this article does not define the Ming's support as a requirement for the formation of clan-based Tibetan Buddhist societies. Clans without the Ming's endorsement could also take control over regional religious affairs. Rather, this article proposes that the Ming's patronage functioned as a sufficient condition in many places along the northern Sino-Tibetan borderland for clan-based Tibetan Buddhist society to grow. The convergence of the Ming's preferential policies and the agency of borderland hierarchs allowed people like Penden Trashi to reshape power dynamics and social structures on the ground. In this regard, this article identifies the alleged center-periphery interaction during the Ming dynasty as neither a process of imposition and integration nor one featuring resistance and conflict. Rather, it was a process of negotiation in which the metropole-frontier relationship was situationally restructured and their nature constantly redefined. As Minzhou monks played active roles in the construction of Beijing's Tibetan Buddhist culture, the Ming court's special treatment influenced the

117 Paul Nietupski, *Labrang Monastery: A Tibetan Buddhist Community on the Inner Asian Borderlands, 1709–1958* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington, 2010), 203.

118 *Hezhou zhi jiaozhu* 河州志校註, ed. Liu Dianneng 劉電能 and Shen Wenxue 沈文學 (Lanzhou: Gansu wenhua chubanshe, 2017), 344.

119 Xie Zuo 謝佐, *Qutan si* 瞿曇寺 (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1982), 17.

120 *Hezhou zhi jiaozhu*, 345.

contour of Minzhou's Tibetan Buddhist society. As a Tibetan Buddhist society took shape in fifteenth-century Minzhou, the dharma king who took care of his family eventually brought his clan to glory.

Appendix 1¹²¹

Letter 1

Wylie Transliteration:

1. om svasti siddhi: gong ma chen po'i sku'i bsod nams dang: dkon mchog gsum gyi byin rlabs la
2. rten nas / hUng thung dme'u kya'i: phu hu'i: gshen g.yi: hu'u gu'i chen kya'u: kon ting tsing gyo tshi tsi
3. ta'i gu'i shri: dpal ldan bkra shis dpal bzang pos: yul phyogs thad thad na yod pa'i mi dpon: bla dpon: dmag
4. mi sde gra (grwa) ba slob bu: yon bdag echung (che chung) thamd (thams cad) la spring ba: spyir semn (sems can) thamd (thams cad) kyi phan bde'i dpal 'byor ma lus pa 'byung ba'i rtsa ba: srgyas (sangs rgyas)
5. bcom ldan 'das kyi bstan pa rin po che yin la: de 'dzin skyong spel ba la: 'chad pa po dge ba'i bshe gnyen bzang po
6. dang: nyan pa po gra (grwa) ba slob gnyer ba sogs mang po dgos: de rnams kyi 'du tshogs dang spro bsdu byed pa la: chu tshogs med na
7. chu bya mi 'khor zhing / / shing phu med na bya tshogs mi 'du ltar / / zhe pa dang: dri ldan me tog rgyang ring yang / /
8. bung pa'i tshogs rnams sprin bzhin 'khor / / zhe pa bzhin: chos sde 'dzugs pa'i 'chad nyan gyi gnas gzhi
9. gtsug lag khang bzang po dang: bdag rkyen byed mkhan skyes bu dam pa yon tan lsogs (la sogs) gang sa nas 'dzom pa cig dgos
10. pa yin: de'i don la: ta'i thung kya'u gsi'i bstan pa mtho ba'i lhun grub sde chen gyi gdan sa la: nged kyi lus
11. po'i tshab du dge ba'i bshes gnyen yotan (yon tan) dand ldan zhing chos 'jig rten gang la'ng phun sum tshogs pa chen shri shakya shri
12. dpal bzang po bskos yod pas: khyed gdul byar gyur pa thad (thams cad) kyi: nga la ci ltar bsam zhing dad pa las lhaq par khong la mthong
13. bskur sti 'bul ba: zhabs rtogs : gang bsgo ba nyan pa la swogs yang dag par byed pa gal che zhing: chos sde'i mthun rkyen

121 I would like to thank Monica Thunder for preparing and proof-reading the translation of the two letters.

14. 'bul ba sogs khong gis ci ltar bskul ba bzhin rang rang gi 'khos nus gang yod kyis 'bad nas bsgrub na: tshe 'di phyi
15. gnyis kar ru dge rtsa che chung gang bsags pa la 'bras bu'ang de bzhin du thob pa yin: dper na sa bon mang nyung gang btab pa
16. la yotan (yon tan) thog yang mang ba la mang du 'byung zhing: nyung ba la yang nyung ngu las med pa bzino (bzhin no): des na rang don yin pas blo spobs dang:
17. brtson 'grus bskyed nas tshogs bsogs pa gal che: khong gdan sa bas kyang khag 'dzem dang: snyom las lsogs (la sogs) ma mdzad par:
18. bshad gra (grwa): sgom gra (grwa): dang tshugs lsogs ci myur du tshugs pa mdzad nas lo nyi shu tshun la lus dang khamis kyi ci nus kyi bar dgan sar
19. bzhug mdzod: sngon mnyam med shakya'i rgyal pos bstan pa gnas brtan chen po 'od bsrungs la gtad: des bcods (bcom ldan 'das) kyi bcung kun dga 'o
20. nas rim par gtad pa bzhin: bdag cag rnams kyang de'i rjes 'jug yin pas ngas gdan sa dang bstan pa khyed la gtad: khyed kyis chos grub bzang
21. po la des yotan (yon tan) dang ldan zhing las dang bskal ba dang ldan pa la / rgyal ba'i bstan pa gnas kyi bar la rim pa bzhin: rgyun mi 'chad par gdod par
22. smon pa yin pas: smon pa bzhin du grub par gyur cig / yang smras pas dge bstan dang semn (sems can) gyi / don la bsams nas lus ngag yid / / ngal
23. ba du mas rab 'bad pas / / lha dang bsrungs mas byin brlabs nas / / gong gi bka' drin chen po dang // mthun phyogs gzhis byes kun gyi (gyis)
24. ni / / brston pas bsgrubs pa'i sde chen 'di / / sems yod rnams kyis phyogs cig tu / / 'dun pa rtse cig bgyis nas su / / dar rgyas don du brtson par
25. rigs / / thub dbang lsogs (la sogs) rgyal ba thad (thams cad) dang / / byams mgon 'jam dpal dbyangs sogs rgyal sras tshogs / / rgyal dang de'i sras rnams kyi byin
26. rlabs kyi / / bdagi (bdag gi) bsam pa yid bzhin 'grub gyur cig / zon de lo drug pa lza ba lnga ba'i tshes lnga la ta'i lung bshen sde chen nas bkris (bkra shis) dpal
27. 'bar 'dzam gling brgyan du shog / /

Om auspicious accomplishment!

With the support of the merit of the Great emperor, and the blessings of the Three Jewels, this is a message from Penden Trashī Palzangpo, the Empowered State Preceptor of Extensive Knowledge, Marvelous Commandment, Wide Wisdom, Kind Cause, State Supporting, Teaching Promoting, Pure Enlightenment, and Benevolent Benefit, to all the lay leaders, spiritual leaders, soldiers, laity, monks, students, and benefactors, great and small, residing in the surrounding region:

In general, the root from which all the benefit, happiness, and prosperity of sentient beings arise, without exception, is the precious teaching of the Awakened One, the Bhagavān. In order to grasp, protect, and propagate that [teaching], we need an excellent teacher—a virtuous friend—and an audience of many monks, students, and the like, who meet, grow, and gather.

It is said that “without a body of water, swans do not gather, and without high trees, coveys do not come together”; [it is also said] that “even if a fragrant blossom is far away, swarms of bees gather like clouds.” Likewise, an excellent monastery, an abode for teachers and students that establishes the dharma teachings, needs to connect with a human director—an excellent person of good qualities.

In that interest, here at the main monastery of Dachongjiao, Tenpa Thowé Lhundrub, a replacement for my own person has been appointed. [This person is] a virtuous friend endowed with qualities. He is excellent [and learned] in all dharmas that exist in the world: Shakya Śri Palzangpo.

Therefore, it is important that all of you, my disciples, think of him and regard him with even greater faith than you do me. Honor and venerate him, and listen to his every command. Do so authentically.

Whatever good conditions he entreats [you all] to offer for the dharma teachings and so on, endeavor to accomplish it by means of your own resources and capacity. [If you can do so], then in this life, and for the two next lives, whatever roots of virtue you have accumulated, big or small, will affect a result of like proportions. Just like the number of seeds sowed [affects the yield], when there are more qualities to begin with, many will arise. But few results in no more than few.

As it is to your own benefit, it is important to gather the accumulations with courage and diligence. The head of the monastery in particular, [Shakya Śri Palzangpo], shall establish a monastic college, retreat facilities, and a temple as quickly as possible, without complaints or laziness. Then, for a duration of twenty years—or as long as his health and disposition allow—he shall reside [as the head] of the monastery.

In the past, the peerless King of the Śākyas entrusted the teachings to the Great Elder Kaśyapa. He then entrusted them to Ānanda, and gradually the teachings were entrusted to the Bhagavān’s ten [disciples], one after the next. Likewise, as we are also his followers, I entrust the monastic seat and teachings to you, [Shakya Śri Palzangpo]. [Yet eventually,] you [shall entrust them] to Chödrub Sangpo; and he [will entrust it] to another, one endowed with qualities, [good] karma, and good fortune. It is my fervent wish that this will continue gradually and without interruption, as long as the teachings of the Victorious One remain.

Please carry out this wish! By this command, I thought to benefit the virtuous teachings and sentient beings. Through undertaking hardships of body, speech, mind, and receiving the blessings of the deities and dharma protectors, the great kindness of His Majesty and all of our friends, at home and abroad, this great monastery shall be accomplished. Through our efforts, those of intelligence should strive one-pointedly towards this goal! It is proper and good to endeavor in the spread and growth [of the teachings]. The King of Sages, all victorious ones, Maitreya, Manjuśrī, and so on, the assembly of bodhisattvas, through the blessings of the victor and his heirs, may my wishes be accomplished, exactly as I imagine them!

This was written on the fifth day of the fifth month of the sixth year at the Dalongshan monastery. May auspiciousness increase, and may [our monastery] become an ornament of the world!

Appendix 2

Letter 2

Wylie Transliteration:

1. om svasti siddhi: bcom ldan 'das dpal gsang ba'i bdag po la phyag 'thsalo ('tshal lo) // hung thung dme'u kya'i : phung ho'i bshen g.yi : tshi tsi'i hwu gwo'i: chen kya'u kon ding:
2. tsi gyo'a zi then hwu'o dzi ta'i gwo shri dpal ldan bkra shis dpal bzang po'i gdam: ta'i khrung kya'u bsi lhun grub sde chen gyi : gdan sa ba ta'i gwo'i shri
3. chos grub bzang pos 'go byas: gwo'i shri: chen shri: ban dpon: bla ma: gnyer las pa swogs /: sde chen la gtogs pa'i ban skya che chung thad (thams cad) kyis go rgyu la:
4. kwon ding ta'i gwo'i shri shakya shri: nga'i slob ma mams kyī mthu bo yin cing: ta'i khrung kya'u sde chen gyi gdan sa la lo bcu lhag tsam bsdad nas: ta'i gwo'i shri chos
5. grub bzang po la: gdan sa gtad pas: khong gi bzhugs pa'i yang dben stag bor ri bo che'i zhol: dgon pa dar rgyas lhun po'i khang gzhis dang bcas pa:
6. nang du spyad dngos yod pa'i grangs la: gser sku khri rgyab yod dang bcas gsum: mchod pa sna snga nub gnyis: khar ('khar) rkong gsum: sum gser gyi khrus
7. sder cig: khar ('khar) lhang: lcags lhang che chung brgyad: lcags dkar gyi skyen bu gnyis: yi'a dzi bcu: cha dmar po gsum: dkar po gnyis: gin tshi byas pa'i lcog tse

8. bco lnga: dmar po bcu: khyul (khyel) ring rgyab yol can gnyis: khyul (khyel) ring ba gnyis: 'o tse gnyis: snyug ma'i zhis lo che ba 1: tshi nag po byas pa 1:
9. sum gser gyi skyog 1: gin tshi byas pa'i zang mu'i phor ba dang: sder ma lcog tse tshang ma yod: thing tsi'i phor ba sder ma: dkar yol yu ring
10. dang: yu thung mang rabs yod: gzhan skag sta: lcegs khem (lcags khem): sta re: lcags: lcags thag: za tshe: sgams che chung: zo ba che chung la swo: bzhon ma'i
11. rgyu 'bri g.yag lnga bcu dang: dgon pa dar rgyas lhun po'i sa zhing: shar gru gu nang la thug pa: lho lam dang mdun ri la thug pa: nub yul
12. gong gi grong la thug pa: byang stag bo ri bdun la thug pa dang: klu chu'i ya ri'i sa yi khyon gyi gzhas kha: nang gi spyad pa: lcags
13. lha 1 gis 'go byas: lcog tse: khyul (khyel): 'o tse : shing rta: shul lcags dang bcas pa ri zhing thang zhing gang yod dang: tsa sgo thang gi
14. chu skor: yul khang: khang pa ldum ra dang bcas pa 'di nmams phye te byin yod pas: khyod gdan sa ba snga rting: bla dpon: mi dpon:
15. las 'dzin che chung: mdor na dgon pa gnyis ka la gtogs pa'i ban skya che chung thams cad kyi: sde ris so sor bcad yod snyam par byed par: bdun ma
16. gcig du bsgril la: nor sdzas (rdzas): kha tshigs la swogs pa: gcig gis gcig la grogs ldan du 'gyur bar byed cing: bstan
17. jus cig tu (gcig tu) byas nas: chos sde dar rgyas dang: sde pa'i bstan jus yun ring bstan pa'i thabs la brtson par gyis: mi bsam
18. chung gi ngag la nyan nas: gong du smras pa bzhin ma byung na: gang byung ba de la: mkha' 'gro chos skyong gi bka' chad yong zhing: mi
19. gzhan gyi bzhad bgad dang: smod pa'i gnas su 'gyar ba yin: gong du ji ltar smras pa bzhin byung na: mkha' 'gro chos skyong
20. gis byin gyis brlabs nas: bsod nams yar 'phel du 'gyur zhing: mi gzhan gyis smon pas gnas su 'gyur ba yin pas thamd (thams cad) kyi
21. go bar gyis // cing thung lo bcu bzhi pa'i sbrul lo'i zla ba brgyad pa'i tshes gcig la: ba'i ging tai lung bshen bsi'a dge ba rgya chen 'phel
22. ba'i sde chen du bris / /

Om auspicious accomplishment!

Homage to the Bhagavān and Guhyapati, the Glorious Lord of Secrets!

A message from Penden Trashi Palzangpo, the Empowered State Preceptor of Extensive Knowledge, Marvelous Commandment, Wide Wisdom, Kind Cause, State Supporting, Teaching Promoting, Pure Enlightenment and Benevolent Benefit, to the head of the main monastery of Dachongjiao, Lhundrub—the leader Grand State Preceptor Chödrub Sangpo and other state preceptors, Chan

masters, monastic leaders, spiritual teachers, lay officials, and all ordained and lay people, great and small, included in this great county. Please understand the following:

The Empowered Grand State Preceptor Shakya Śrī is the authority among my disciples. He resided at the Dachongjiao monastery for a little over ten years, and now it has been entrusted to the Grand State Preceptor Chödrub Sangpo. Shakya Śrī dwelled at the foot of Mt. Tagbor Riwoche, the hermitage of Dargye Lhunpo, and [his holdings] consists of his remote dwelling place, the house, estate, and everything inside.

To list these, [they include]: three golden statues with throne backs, two sets of offerings,¹²² three bronze lamps, a golden wash basin, bronze and iron gong of eight sizes, two tin vessels, ten chairs, with three red pairs and two white, fifteen wooden tables, among which ten were red, two high-backed chairs, two high chairs, two milk-tea bowls, one ancient bamboo basket, one black resin [table], one golden ladle, wooden bowl, a whole set of dishes and tables, offering dishes, and many long- and short-stemmed glasses. There is also a hoe, an iron shovel and hatchet, an iron chain, a lock, boxes of different sizes, buckets of different sizes, and so on. There are [also] fifty milk cows and a yak.

The property of the Dargye Lhunpo Monastery extends to Drugu to the east, the southern road and the seven hills, the upper village of the western valley, the seven hills of Tagwo to the north, and the land in the upper hills of Luchu. Inside the estate of the upper Tao River, there are: foremost, an iron deity [statue], and also a table, a high-backed chair, a milk-tea bowl, and a chariot. [The land contains] hills and grasslands rich with iron ore, a water mill, the village houses, and a residence with a garden.

Having divided these [assets], I have distributed them between the former and current heads of the monastery. I am thinking to partition, accordingly, the spiritual teachers, lay leaders, caretakers great and small, and in short, all of the monastic and lay community included within both hermitages. You have a single aim. Share wealth, communicate, and the like, each will help the other and the teaching will be united. When that happens, the teachings will spread and prosper. So, endeavor in strategies to ensure the lasting stability of your leader's teaching approach.

When you listen to the advice of small-minded people, what is called for above will not come to pass. Whatever does happen will incur the wrath of the dākiṇīs and dharma protectors. [Our monastery] will be a laughingstock, dis-

122 "Mchod pa sna snga nub" could be a misspelling of "mchod pa sna lnga," meaning five-fold offerings.

paraged by others. If what is called for above does come to pass, then know this: the dākiṇīs and dharma protectors will rain down blessings, merit will abound, and it will become a place admired by others.

This was written on the first day of the eighth month of the snake year, the fourteenth year of the Zhengtong reign, at the Dalongshan monastery, the county where virtue, vast and great, abounds.

Abstract

In the fifteenth century, Tibetan Buddhist monks from the northern Sino-Tibetan borderland played an important role in facilitating religious and political contacts between Ming China and the Tibetan world. With the rise of their political status and religious influence at the Ming court, these Buddhist hierarchs also projected imperial endorsements to the Sino-Tibetan borderland and reshaped the local social structure. This article examines how Penden Trashi, one of the most eminent Tibetan Buddhist monks of the fifteenth century, contributed to the rise of a clan-based Tibetan Buddhist society in early Ming Minzhou 岷州. By scrutinizing Penden Trashi's biography and personal letters to identify his role in forging the dharma succession pattern and monastic association mode in Minzhou, this article illuminates how imperial patronage reconstructed the power dynamic in the fifteenth-century Sino-Tibetan borderland.

Résumé

Au xv^e siècle, les moines bouddhistes tibétains de la région frontalière sino-tibétaine septentrionale ont joué un rôle important dans les contacts religieux et politiques entre la Chine des Ming et le monde tibétain. Avec l'essor de leur statut politique et de leur influence religieuse à la cour des Ming, ces hiérarques bouddhistes ont également acclimaté le pouvoir impérial dans cette région frontalière et ont remodelé la structure sociale locale. Cet article examine comment Penden Trashi, l'un des moines bouddhistes tibétains les plus éminents du xv^e siècle, a contribué à l'essor d'une société bouddhiste tibétaine fondée sur des clans dans le Minzhou 岷州 du début des Ming. En examinant la biographie et les lettres personnelles de Penden Trashi afin d'identifier son rôle dans l'élaboration d'un nouveau modèle de succession du dharma et d'association monastique à Minzhou, cet article montre comment le patronage impérial a façonné la dynamique du pouvoir dans la région frontalière sino-tibétaine du xv^e siècle.

提要

十五世紀漢藏走廊北部地區的藏傳佛教高僧在中原及藏地間的政治、宗教互動過程中扮演了重要角色。伴隨著這些高僧在明朝宮廷漸長的政治地位與日增的宗教影響，他們亦多以明廷贊助與優禮特權回饋家鄉，從而改造了漢藏走廊地區的社會結構。高僧班丹扎釋對岷州地方之宗族式藏傳佛教社會形塑的參與和推動即為典型。通過分析班丹扎釋的漢文傳記及其向岷州僧徒發出的兩封藏文書信，本文考察班丹扎釋對岷州藏傳佛教之法脈傳承和寺廟網絡構建的影響，檢審王朝賦權對十五世紀漢藏走廊邊地社會的形塑力量。

Keywords

Sino-Tibetan borderland – clan-based Tibetan Buddhist Society – Penden Trashi