

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF FOUR TIBETAN LAMAS  
AND THEIR ACTIVITIES IN SIKKIM

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*Translators' note*

It is hoped that this summarised translation of Lama Tsultsem's biography will shed some light on the lives and activities of some of the Tibetan lamas who resided or continue to reside in Sikkim. This summary is not a direct translation of the original but rather an interpretation aimed at providing the student, who cannot read Tibetan, with an insight into the lives of a few inspirational lamas who dedicated themselves to various activities of the Dharma both in Sikkim and around the world. For the benefit of the reader, we have been compelled to present this work in a clear and straightforward manner; thus we have excluded many literary techniques and expressions which are commonly found in Tibetan but do not translate easily into the English language. We apologize for this and hope the reader will understand that this is not an 'academic' translation, but rather a 'representation' of the Tibetan original which is to be published at a later date.

It should be noted that some of the footnotes in this piece have been added by the translators in order to clarify certain issues and aspects of the text and are not always a rendition of the footnotes in the original text<sup>1</sup>. As this English summary will be mainly read by those who are unfamiliar with the Tibetan language, we have refrained from using transliteration systems (Wylie) for the spelling of personal names, except in translated footnotes that refer to recent works in Tibetan and in the bibliography.

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<sup>1</sup> Those footnotes added by the translators are followed by the initials [SM].

*Introduction*<sup>2</sup>

According to the earliest traditions relating the blessing of Tibet by Avalokiteshvara<sup>3</sup>, Sikkim (also known as Beyul Demojong or ‘the sacred hidden land of the rice valley’)<sup>4</sup> was blessed by a host of supreme beings and Bodhisattva such as Avalokiteshvara. With their blessings, this place was sanctified as a hidden land for future generations. Many thousands of years later, in the eighth century of our current era, the great master of Uddiyana, the one who emerged from a lotus flower, Padmasambhava and his disciples set foot in this land. For three months, the twenty-five Siddha disciples performed meditations and recitations.<sup>5</sup> Blessings were bestowed upon the four supreme caves of the four cardinal directions<sup>6</sup> as well as upon Drakar Tashiding, considered the centre of this rice valley,<sup>7</sup> the supreme of all hidden lands of Tibet. The gods, demons and local deities of the upper, lower and middle regions<sup>8</sup> of this great hidden land were bound by oath (to protect the Dharma).

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<sup>2</sup> This work is based on sources found in the library of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, oral sources, and documents listed in the bibliography. Although it is not within my reach to write an inner, outer and secret biography of the great masters, it is hoped that this may provide some information for those who are interested. Whilst many Tibetan lamas have visited, worked, and practised in Sikkim, in this present work, I have only touched at the lives of four recent lamas.

I would like to thank both Dr Anna Balikci-Denjongpa and Mr Saul Mullard for their support and help during the time of this research. Furthermore, I would like to thank, from the bottom of my heart, the great scholar Tashi Tsering, advisor to the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology and Director of the Amnye Machen Institute, Dharamsala, for his essential instructions and advice. I deeply apologise for any mistakes that may be present and despite the help from the above people, all errors remain my own.

<sup>3</sup> There is a belief amongst Tibetans that in their pre-history, Tibet was a dark land until it was blessed by Avalokiteshvara in a number of different ways such as the bestial origins of the Tibetan peoples. This is a common literary trend found in many historical works such as *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* [SM].

<sup>4</sup> According to ‘*Bras ljongs gnas yig*, the hidden land of Sikkim is not just a ‘rice’ valley as has been misreported in numerous works but actually a valley of ‘fruit’, the latter having numerous meanings.

<sup>5</sup> *Pad gling bka' thang*: 321-327, as referred to in bKra shis tshe ring, 2003: 26.

<sup>6</sup> For more details see Rig 'dzin dngos grub, 1998: 5-8.

<sup>7</sup> From the earliest writings on the hidden land of Sikkim by Rigzin Goedemchen, Tashiding is considered to be the centre of the hidden land, whereas the political region of Sikkim is much larger.

<sup>8</sup> *Phu mda' bar gsum*. Generally this means the geographical division of territory into the upper valleys, lower valleys, and all in between [SM].

Later, when the five poisons arose in Tibet at a time of Mongolian invasions and political instability, thanks to the revelation of various treasures previously hidden by Guru Rinpoche regarding the direction and paths into this hidden land, many fortunate people were able to seek refuge there. A prophecy revealed that the guardian deities would protect such texts until the right time for these to be revealed had come.

From the eighth until the end of the thirteenth century, during the time of the three Dharmarajas of Tibet, this land of Sikkim became familiar with the teachings and traditions of Tibetan Buddhism thanks to the blessing of Guru Rinpoche. In accordance with the hidden land's prophecies, a mind-incarnation of Guru Rinpoche, Rigzin Goedemchen (1337-1408) visited Sikkim in the fourteenth century. He was the first to open the doors to the hidden land.<sup>9</sup> Later, his Tulku Ngari Rigzin Legdenje<sup>10</sup> also visited this hidden paradise.

In the thirteenth century, Gye Bumsa,<sup>11</sup> a descendent of the kings of Minyak, arrived in Sikkim. He was the first to extend his political authority and implement rules in the land. Gradually, between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Buddhist religion of Tibet firmly established itself in Sikkim.

Then during the seventeenth century, the three incarnate yogis of Tibet arrived in Sikkim<sup>12</sup> and re-opened all the hidden doors to the land. Furthermore, Phuntsog Namgyal, who was a descendent of the lineage of the kings of Khams Minyak, was enthroned Dharmaraja of Sikkim.

During the reign of this lineage of Dharmarajas (mid-seventeenth to the twentieth century), which was characterised by the protection and authority of the Dharma, many great lamas of various religious traditions and lineages arrived in this blessed land. Among these was the reincarnated Nyingma lineage of Lhatsun Kunzang Namgyal<sup>13</sup> as well as Kagyud and Sakya lamas. Similarly, the lineage of Ngadag Sempa Chenpo Phutsog Rigzin<sup>14</sup> gradually established itself in Sikkim

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<sup>9</sup> For further details 'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs: 18, and mKhan po lha tshe ring, 2002: 12-18 and 1997: 20-21. mKhan po chos dbang, 2003: 12 and 61 and Rig 'dzin dngos grub, 1998: 8, and 1999: 1-13.

<sup>10</sup> 'Bras ljongs rgyal rab: 18, mKhan po lha tshe ring, 2002: 23-26; mKhan po chos dbang, 2003: 61.

<sup>11</sup> For more information see 'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs: 20-36; mKhan po lha tshe ring, 1997: 21 and 2002: 196-206; mKhan po chos dbang, 2003: 48 and 61.

<sup>12</sup> For more information see the relevant sections of the above sources.

<sup>13</sup> Another name for Lhatsun Namkha Jigme, one of the founding saints of Buddhism in Sikkim. See mKhan po lha tshe ring, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

along with many great lamas who were followers of Guru Padmasambhava. By the grace of these many great lamas, there spread in Sikkim a number of Buddhist traditions such as Dzogchen and Mahamudra.<sup>15</sup>

Due to the disturbances in Tibet caused by the Chinese occupation of the mid-twentieth century, a number of Tibetan lamas from the various Buddhist traditions came to Sikkim where many became active and contributed to the practice of Buddhism. In this article, I will be looking into the lives and contributions of the following four Tibetan lamas who became active in Sikkim. This choice has been determined by the availability of sources and documents, which have been roughly compiled into the brief biographies of:

1. The 16<sup>th</sup> Gyalwang Karmapa Rangjung Rigpe Dorje (1924-1981)
2. The 4<sup>th</sup> Dodrup Chen Thubten Thinley Palzangpo (b.1927)
3. Serdup Dungzin Paljor Lhundup Dorje (1917-1980)
4. The 10<sup>th</sup> Rigzin Yolmo Tingkyey Gonjang Tulku, Orgyen Jigme Thinley Kunkhyab (b.1961)

Below is a list of other major Tibetan lamas who came to Sikkim after 1959.

1. His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama (b.1935)
2. Sakya Trizin Dolma Phodrang (b.1945)
3. Sakya Phuntsog Phodrang Dagchen Rinpoche (previous and present)
4. The 13<sup>th</sup> Shamar Rinpoche (b.1952)
5. Drigung Kyabgon Chetsang Rinpoche (b.1946)
6. Gyalwang Drugchen Rinpoche (b.1963)
7. The 12<sup>th</sup> Palpung Tai Situ Rinpoche (b.1954)
8. The 12<sup>th</sup> Tshurphu Goshri Drungpa Gyaltshab Rinpoche (b.1954)
9. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Jamgon Kontrul Rinpoche (1954-1991/92?)
10. Taglung Zhabdrung Chokyi Nyima (1915-1994)
11. Taglung Zhabdrung Tenzin Gurmed Chokyi Wangchug
12. Minling Trichen Rinpoche (b.1930)
13. The 7<sup>th</sup> Dzogchen Rinpoche (b.1964)

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<sup>15</sup> Dzogchen is one of the principle doctrines of the Nyingma tradition; Mahamudra is a key doctrine of the Kagyud tradition.

14. Rongchen Kirti Rinpoche
15. Zhechen Rabjam Rinpoche (b.1966)
16. Dzogchen Ponlob (previous and present)
17. Zurmang Garwang Rinpoche (b.1964)
18. The 8<sup>th</sup> Khamgar Dongyud Nyima
19. Taglung Matul Rinpoche (previous and present)
20. Dzongsar Khyentse Choekyi Lodroe (1893-1959)
21. Dzongsar Kyentse Yangsi Rinpoche (b.1961)
22. Sogyal Rinpoche (b. circa 1950)
23. Dudjom Rinpoche (1904-1987)
24. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche (1910-1991)
25. Zurmang Drungpa Rinpoche (previous)
26. Khenchen Khragu Rinpoche (b.1933)
27. Khraleq Kyabgon Rinpoche (b.1955)
28. Ga A khro Rinpoche
29. Palyul Drubwang Penor Rinpoche (b.1932)
30. Benchen Sangye Nyenpa Rinpoche (previous and present)
31. Palyul Dzongnang Rinpoche
32. Ripa Bagyod Rinpoche (b.1942)
33. Derge Chedrog Yonggi Migyur Rinpoche (previous and present)
34. Neten Chogling Rinpoche (1928-1972)
35. Zhadeu Dzarong Trulzhig Rinpoche (previous and present b.1923)
36. The 9<sup>th</sup> Tingkye Gonjang Rinpoche (1907-1959)
37. Dzongsar Ngari Choeje Tulku
38. Gojo Dordzong Rinpoche
39. Grugu Chogyal Rinpoche
40. Palpung Ongen Rinpoche (1926-1987)
41. Benchen Tenga Rinpoche (b.1932)
42. Yardrog Taglung Tsetrul Rinpoche (b.1927)
43. The 8<sup>th</sup> Dodrag Chuzang Rinpoche (b.1933)
44. Drigun Lho Oentrul Rinpoche (b.1958)
45. Beu Ri Gyalsay (previous)
46. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Trijang Rinpoche (1900-1981)
47. Nyangtod Kyibug Rinpoche (b.1924)
48. Rechung Rinpoche (1927-2001)
49. Kham Draggo Domang Terchen Yangthang Rinpoche (b.1929)
50. A Pho Yeshe Rangdrol (a nephew of Togdan Sakya Sri)
51. Tshurphu Garchen Choje Karma Thinlay Rinpoche
52. Bongsar Kyentse Rinpoche

53. Drongpa Lamkhyen Gyalpo Rinpoche (b.1939)
54. Ngor Luding Khen Rinpoche (b.1931)
55. Ga Tharlam Dezhung Lungrig Tulku (1906-1987)
56. Thartse Zhabdrung
57. Luding Zhabdrung
58. Gaje Kham U Rinpoche (b.1927)
59. Derge Pekar Rinpoche
60. The 8<sup>th</sup> Khyungpo Gyaton Rinpoche (1908-1970)
61. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Dromo Geshe Rinpoche (1937-2001)
62. Dromo Kagyu Tulku
63. Lingtshang Ringu Tulku (b.1952)
64. Zurmang Bardo Tulku
65. Drubla Kalu Rinpoche (1905-1989)
66. Chadral Rinpoche (b.1913)
67. Drugpa Thugsay Rinpoche (1917-1984)
68. Kham Minyag Changchub Dorjee Rinpoche
69. Trulzhig Pawo Dorjee Rinpoche (1897-1962)
70. Khamgar Togden Choleg
71. Dilyag Drubpon Tenzin Rinpoche (previous and present)
72. Drubpon Bokar Rinpoche (1940-2004)
73. Terton Tulzhug Lingpa (c.1916- c.1965)
74. Gangri Lopon Kunzang Dorjee
75. Dzogchen Khenpo Dazer (1922-1990)
76. Dzogchen Khenpo Thubten Tsondu Phuntsog (1920-1978)
77. Dzogchen Khenpo Mewa Thubten Odzer (1928-2002)
78. Sakya Khenpo Rinchen
79. Sakya Khenpo Lodro Zangpo (1925-1986)
80. Dzongsar Khenpo Dosib Kunga Wangchug
81. Dzongsar Khenpo A Pad
82. Khenpo Lodro Donyod
83. Dragyab Kyabgon Rinpoche
84. Chogyam Trung pa Rinpoche (1939-1987)
85. Akong Rinpoche
86. Tharthang Rinpoche
87. Chogyal Rinpoche (Italy)
88. Gyakhar Khenpo Chodrag Tenphel
89. Khadro Chemo Ogyen Tshomo
90. Dzongsar Khyentse Khadro Tsering Chodon
91. Trulzhig Pawo Dorjee Khadro Pema Dechen

In addition to these rinpoches, many Tibetan doctors (amji), ngagpas (tantric practitioners), nuns as well as venerable and learned laymen came to Sikkim.

If the appropriate sources become available, it is my hope to compile the biographies of those lamas who made spiritual contributions to the development of Dharma in Sikkim.

#### THE 16<sup>TH</sup> GYALWANG KARMAPA RANGJUNG RIGPE DORJE<sup>16</sup>

The brief biography of the 16<sup>th</sup> Karmapa Rangjung Rigpai Dorje, the supreme head of the Kargyudpa lineage, is as follows.

Among the four major and four minor Kargyud lineages which originated from the teachings of Pal Dorje Chang, Drupchen Telopa, Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa, Namey Darpo Lhaje, etc., the Karmapa Rangjung Rigpai Dorje is the throne holder of one of the major Kagyud lineages, namely the 'Kamtsang Kargyud'. He was born at Singe Namzong in Dhenkhok in the Derge province of Khams, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June 1924. His father's name was Ah thup Tsewang Phuntsog and mother was Gyalkar Kalsang Choedon.

With clear instructions and the will of the previous Karmapa, he was recognized as the reincarnation of the 15<sup>th</sup> Karmapa. On 5<sup>th</sup> August 1931, at the age of eight, the reincarnated boy was enthroned as the 16<sup>th</sup> Karmapa. A huge gathering of leaders, lamas, rinpoches, the general Tibetan public as well as representatives from the governments of India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim and Ladakh attended the enthronement ceremony which was performed by 11<sup>th</sup> Jamgon Tai Situ Rinpoche (1868-1952).

The young incarnated Karmapa received his religious education from Tai Situ Rinpoche, Bho Gangkar Rinpoche (1903-1957), Jangon Kongtrul Palden Khyentse Worser (1904-1953) and many other eminent teachers and became the master of all forms of Buddhist teachings. From 1940, at the age of seventeen, the Karmapa predicted that he would have to leave his homeland due to problems in Tibet. Later, following the invasion of his country, he reached Sikkim via India.

The relation between the Karmapa and Sikkim dates back to the eighteenth century when the 4<sup>th</sup> Chogyal or king of Sikkim, Gyurmed Namgyal (1703-1732), visited Tibet on a pilgrimage. Following an

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<sup>16</sup> Sources used for each biography are separately listed in the bibliography.

audience with the 12<sup>th</sup> Karmapa Jangchub Dorje (1703-1732), he became his disciple and founded the relationship of ‘mchod yon’.<sup>17</sup> Upon his return, the Chogyal built three Kagyud monasteries in Sikkim. They were Karma Rabtenling at Ralang (South Sikkim), Karma Thubten Choekhorling at Rumtek (East Sikkim) and Karma Tashi Choekhorling at Phodong (North Sikkim). It is said that the Karmapa offered prayers and blessed the three Kagyud monasteries directly from his seat at Tshurphu in Tibet. In some of the documents of those times it is mentioned that it was the 9<sup>th</sup> Karmapa Wangchuk Dorje who was involved with the meeting and consecration of the Sikkimese Chogyal and monasteries. However, this is incorrect as the 9<sup>th</sup> Karmapa lived during the sixteenth century and at that time the dynasty of the Sikkimese kings had yet to be established.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Chogyal of Sikkim Sidkeong Namgyal (1819-1874) was recognized as the reincarnation of Situ Panchen’s uncle, Tulku Karma Rinchen Naiton Tenzin of Khams Dege Palpung Gompa by 14<sup>th</sup> Karmapa Thakchog Dorje (1798-1868). The Karmapa ordained him as a monk and gave him the name Kyabgon Sidkeong Karma Dupgyud Tenzin Dhargay Lhundup Nedhon Wangpo. He was appointed as the head of all the Kargyud monasteries in Sikkim and on account of which developed a very close and cordial relationship between the Karmapa lineage and Sikkim. The 15<sup>th</sup> Karmapa recognised the 9<sup>th</sup> Chogyal Thutob Namgyal’s son as the incarnation of Sidkeong Namgyal and gave him the name Sidkeong Tulku (1879-1914).

The 16<sup>th</sup> Karmapa has given many religious teachings in Sikkim and at the request of the three Sikkimese Kargyud monasteries, he was invited at the age of 25 to Gangtok. He reached Sikkim in 1948 via India. The Karmapa met with the Sikkimese Chogyal Sir Tashi Namgyal (1893-1963) and gave many religious initiations to him, the council of ministers, lamas, and the general public and displayed the ‘Back Hat’ to the crowd. In 1954, he returned to Lhasa and gave an audience to the then Prince of Sikkim, Lama Palden Thundup (1923-1982) who was then staying in Lhasa.

In 1956, at the age of 33, the Karmapa attended the Buddha Jayanti, which marked the 2500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the Buddha. He was invited by the Government of India and the Mahabodhi Society of India. The Karmapa was well received in Sikkim by the Chogyal, the

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<sup>17</sup> ‘mChod yon’ is a Tibetan religious concept which defines the relationship between a religious practitioner and his lay sponsors. In short, the religious figure becomes the principle teacher of the layman and he in turn makes regular offerings to support the activities of the teacher [SM].



ministers, and the general public and performed the 'Black Hat' ceremony for all the devotees on that occasion.

In 1957, the Karmapa again returned to Gangtok where he was met by the Chogyal and ministers. He was invited to Phodong monastery where he performed rituals and blessings for all who had gathered and displayed the 'Black Hat' for the people of that area. Though Rumtek Samten Choeling requested the Karmapa to visit that monastery, the Karmapa had to decline due to lack of time but vowed to return in the near future.

In 1959, the Karmapa left Tibet on account of the Chinese occupation and arrived in India via Bhutan in the same year. The Royal Government of Bhutan opened a dialogue with India regarding the residence of the Karmapa and the Government of India agreed to make the town of Dharamsala, in Himachal Pradesh, the permanent residence of the Karmapa. However, just as the Karmapa left Bhutan and arrived in India, a representative of the Government of Sikkim, Barmiok Athing Tashi Dadul Densapa (1902-1989) and a representative of the Government of India, Atuk Babu, had a private audience with the Karmapa at Buxa in the Dooars. They reminded the Karmapa of the close connection between the Karmapa and Sikkim which dates to the times of the 4<sup>th</sup> Chogyal of Sikkim Gyurme Namgyal (1707-1733) and the 12<sup>th</sup> Karmapa (1703-1732), a relation which had continued up to the then king of Sikkim Sir Tashi Namgyal. The Karmapa, the Governments of Sikkim and India agreed that the entire entourage of the Karmapa should be relocated to Sikkim and thus, in accordance with the earlier prediction, the Karmapa moved to Sikkim. On the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> month of the Tibetan calendar (1959), the Karmapa, aged 36, arrived in Gangtok. The traditional Tibetan welcome was extended to the Karmapa and his entourage by the three Kagyud monasteries of Sikkim and the entire public of the kingdom. Members of the royal family and the ministers of Sikkim had an audience with the Karmapa and made the necessary arrangements for his temporary residence at the site of the old Rumtek monastery.

According to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, 150 incarnated lamas and monks offered daily prayers in the morning and evening on different subjects of Buddhism. The Crown Prince Palden Thundup visited Rumtek and had an audience with the Karmapa. He informed him of the plans to construct a new monastery for the Karmapa's permanent residence and it was agreed that the new monastery should be built near the site of the original Rumtek monastery.

According to the astrologer's auspicious predictions, the foundation of the monastery was laid with prayers and rituals in accordance with the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. During the ceremonies, the Karmapa presented a statue of Guru Rinpoche to the Crown Prince of Sikkim.

At the request and invitation of Ralang Kargon Rabtenling, the Karmapa led the special 29<sup>th</sup> day ritual performance of 'Gu Tor'.<sup>18</sup> At that time, the Bon system of animal sacrifice prevailed in some areas of Sikkim so the Karmapa initiated special ritual performances and composed appropriate ritual prayers. The Karmapa asked the people to follow his instructions and perform the new rituals in lieu of animal sacrifices. From that point, the ritual sacrifice of animals was stopped in Sikkim. He returned to Rumtek after his visit to Ralang. From the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of the Tibetan calendar, the Karmapa gave teachings on the eight main teachings of the Kagyud lineage and gave initiations. Around that time, he ordered the carving of 20,000 wood blocks of the non-sectarian movement and printed many Tibetan texts including some from the 'Kamtshang Kagyud' lineage.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> month of the Tibetan calendar (1960), the Karmapa, aged 37, began giving teachings on the 'Kargyud Ngakzod Chenmo' to four of his principle disciples, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche (1910-1991), fifteen rinpoches, hundreds of monks and thousands of Sikkimese devotees. He concluded the teachings on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of the Tibetan calendar (the same day the Buddha gave his first teaching after attaining enlightenment). The teachings were finally concluded with special offerings and prayers.

In 1961, the Karmapa recruited monks and instructed them on the original form of the 'Vinaya Pitaka' (rules of monastic conduct). The monks were to follow all the monastic rules and regulations contained within the Vinaya and the three months 'yarnay' monsoon meditation which included making special offerings, prayers and strict religious activities was initiated. During 'yarney', the monks could not travel long distances or eat meat and had to devote their time to religious activities. This was probably the first time that the tradition of the summer retreat was followed in Sikkim.

On account of the long and close relationship of teacher and disciple that existed between Sir Tashi Namgyal, his son the Crown Prince and the Karmapa, the Chogyal offered 74 acres of land to the Karmapa on 22 November 1962 and started the construction of the

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<sup>18</sup> This is a ritual of offering 'torma' or sacrificial cakes on the last day of the Tibetan year. The reason for doing this is to expel the previous year's inauspicious forces and to prevent negative forces proceeding into the New Year [SM].

main chapel or Tsuglakhang, as well as quarters for monks above the location of the old Rumtek monastery.

By 1966, the newly built monastery and exile seat of the Karmapa, Shedup Choekhorling, was completed and all the statues, religious texts, relics and blessed articles which were brought from Tibet were placed in the main temple of the monastery. The monastery became a site for worship and benefit for all sentient beings.

Finally on the first day of the first month of the Tibetan calendar i.e. Losar, the Karmapa, his closest disciples and the entire population of monks moved to the new monastery. Since that day the rules and regulations of the Vinaya have governed the monastery. Further, the monthly ritual of forgiveness known as 'Soljong' was initiated, regular religious activities such as prayers on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> day of the Tibetan calendar, monastic dances and other rituals were all learnt and practised on time.

Everyday, all the young incarnate lamas, rinpoches and monks devoted their time to the learning of Buddhism, meditation and practice of tantric and non-tantric aspects of Buddhism such as debate, reading and writing and the recitation of religious scriptures. They also learnt how to make 'torma' (ritual cakes), perform religious dances and to play religious instruments. 'Tormas' are made of 'tsampa' or flour dough and come in various shapes and sizes according to the ritual that is to be performed. After all these ritual aspects were introduced, a strong foundation for learning and spiritual training in Buddhism was firmly laid. As symbols of the Body, Speech, and Mind of the Buddha, 500 copies of the real and authentic teachings of the Buddha, known as Kanjur Rinpoche, were re-printed according to the edition of the Derge Printing press.<sup>19</sup> Those copies were distributed to many monasteries, regardless of their sect, and many of the damaged religious texts and artefacts were either replaced or repaired.

In 1968, when the Karmapa was 45 years old, Yarpa Sonam Gyatso Trateng and his wife Princess Sonam Padeun of Sikkim had an audience with the Karmapa. Princess Sonam Padeun was pregnant at that time and the Karmapa predicted that the child would be the reincarnation of Zurmang Gharwang.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the Karmapa's previous attempt to prevent the sacrifice of animals in Sikkim, many villagers still followed the old tradition. So

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<sup>19</sup> The Derge printing press in Eastern Tibet was one of the most famous publishing houses in Tibet [SM].

<sup>20</sup> Zurmang Gharwang Rinpoche's current monastery, Pal Karmae Zurmang Shedup Choekhorling, is located at Lingdum in East Sikkim.

again in 1970, the Karmapa advised the villagers to stop the sacrificial offerings of animals. Many people took the oath to refrain from performing blood offerings and replace these with a special prayer and ritual composed by the Karmapa.

In 1978, at the age of 55, the construction of the meditation cells for those monks who wished to undertake the 'three year three month' meditation were completed and the first monks took up residence for their retreat. By this time, all aspects of the monastery, both physical and spiritual were completed and this can be credited to the Karmapa's wish to promote Buddhism and increase the wellbeing of all sentient beings.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 1981, the Karmapa presented the 103 volumes of the 'Derge Kanjur' to the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology. He also presented a large number of tantric texts before a large crowd of dignitaries and officers, including the Governor of Sikkim, Shri Homi Taleyarkhan, Chief Minister N.B. Bhandari, Tibetology Director A.C. Banerjee and state ministers.

In order to reveal the mortality of all beings and the impermanent nature of all phenomena, the 16<sup>th</sup> Karmapa resigned his earthly body and passed into the clear heavenly light on Friday 6 November 1981 at the age of 59 in John High Hospital, Chicago, USA. His body was brought back to Rumtek and cremated, after which the remains were entombed in a stupa, with various relics, and precious stones. The stupa is known as Kudung Chorten Rinpoche and can be seen today at Rumtek's Dharma Chakra Centre as a relic for devotees and religious practitioners.

#### THE 4<sup>TH</sup> DODRUP CHEN THUBTEN THINLEY PALZANGPO

Herein follows a brief biography of the life of the 4<sup>th</sup> incarnation of Dodrup Chen Rinpoche, the lineage holder of Jigme Lingpa's Dzogchen treasure text. As predicted by the 5<sup>th</sup> Dzogchen Rinpoche, Thubten Choekyi Dorje (1872-1935), Dodrup Chen Rinpoche was born in 1927 in the village of Tse, on the bank of the Serchu River, in the region of Serkhog in the Amdo province of Tibet. His father was called Drala and his mother Kali Kyi. When Dodrup Chen Rinpoche was a child, Dzogchen Rinpoche gave him the name of Thubten Thinley Palzangpo. In 1930, at the age of four, he was enthroned amongst a great crowd of lamas, laymen, and women in the monastery of Sangchen Ngodrup Palwarling. He studied how to read and write from

the age of five. From 1936 to 1951, he studied Buddhist teachings with many great scholars, including the sutras, tantras, commentaries, and Jigme Lingpa's Dzogchen treasure text. Since he dedicated himself to the understanding of these teachings, he became profoundly accomplished in the realisation of the essence of all phenomena.

In 1941, he gave a thorough and perfect initiation in his monastery on the 'Longchen Nyingthig' to a vast gathering of the monastic community. From 1946 onwards, he held the position of Master of his monastery and was invested with spiritual and administrative authority. In 1956, he built a new temple for the monastic college where he gave initiations and teachings on the 'Rigzin Terdzoe', the 'Lama Gongdu' and the oral tradition of the Nyingma school.

He nurtured and preserved the Buddha-Dharma in Sikkim in some of the following ways. By 1956, it was clear that the political situation was changing in Tibet and it was believed that these changes were in accordance with the prophetic tradition of Sangyay Lingpa, Aphan Terton, and the writings of the 3rd Dodrup Chen Rinpoche (which included a number of prophesies regarding events in the life of his next incarnation). In these prophetic texts, it is stated that such changes indicate that this Lama should flee to the holy land of India. So it was that on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 1957, Dodrup Chen Rinpoche arrived in Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim. The Dodrul Stupa's area in Deorali was selected as a suitable site for the Lama, and Trulzhig Rinpoche (1897-1962)<sup>21</sup> advised Crown Prince of Sikkim Palden Thondup Namgyal to become a personal supporter of Dodrup Chen Rinpoche.

Around this time, the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology was being established. Sir Tashi Namgyal along with the Crown Prince and N.C. Sinha, the director of the Institute, offered Dodrup Chen Rinpoche the opportunity to conduct research on the religions of Tibet. So it was that he took up the responsibility of working diligently for the benefit, and in the service, of all sentient beings and the Dharma. From the 26<sup>th</sup> of April 1960, he worked at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology where his main area of research was concerned with the vast range of mandalas found in the oral and treasure teachings of the Nyingmapa school. In addition, he gave teachings on 'The Seven Treasure Stores of

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<sup>21</sup> Trulzhig Pawo Dorje Rinpoche was originally from Khams Minyak in eastern Tibet. He arrived in Sikkim at the age of fifty around 1946 via Chorten Nyinma and Lachung. Trulzhig Rinpoche built the Dodrul Chorten in 1948 according to the wishes of Chogyal Tashi Namgyal and Crown Prince Palden Thondup Namgyal. Later, Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal's third son, Prince Palden Gyurmed Namgyal (b.1964), was recognised as the reincarnation of Trulzhig Rinpoche.

Philosophical Treatises of the Quintessential Instructions of the Profound and Visionary Revealed Teachings of the Venerable Longchen Rabjam'. He also re-published 'The Seven Treasures of Longchen Rabjam', including 'The Trilogy of Natural Ease', and 'The Trilogy of Natural Freedom'. He also re-published Rigzin Jigme Lingpa's 'Heart Essence of the Great Expanse' as well as the teaching of Jigme Lingpa's 'Sky Treasury of Visionary Revealed Teachings'. Furthermore, he gave transmissions and empowerments on such texts as the 'The Great Assembly of Peaceful and Wrathful Deities' which is from 'The Garland of Temporary Illusions, the King of the Tantras', 'The Wrathful and Peaceful Deities as an Assemblage', and the oral transmissions of the tantra class. In brief, for a period of 15 years, the master conducted research at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology until 1975 on the scriptures of Buddhism, the early transmissions of the Nyingma School as well as on the general teachings of Buddhism. His contribution towards the service of the Dharma and sentient beings was thus extensive and he dedicated himself and his spiritual activities towards the benefit of others.

In 1961, Trulzhig Rinpoche decided to establish an institute for the two traditions of academic study and meditation. The construction of the Institute for Higher Nyingma Studies (Thubten Do ngag Choeling) began and a large number of monks joined the institute upon its completion four years later. Then, Trulzhig Rinpoche discussed the need to establish a meditation college in the area of Lukshyama, around four kilometres above Gangtok, and asked Dodrup Chen Rinpoche to establish it. However, it was never built in that location and eventually, the centre was built near the Dodrul Stupa in Deorali.

In 1978, Dodrup Chen Rinpoche began the initial construction of the meditation college called Pema Urling (the sanctuary of the light of the lotus) according to the wishes of Trulzhig Rinpoche, the Chogyal of Sikkim, the Queen Mother, the ministers, the clergy, the laity, and the various donors. On 31st May 1979, the meditation college was successfully completed, a celebration was held and later that year, the first intensive retreat began. On that occasion many people—Tibetans, Bhutanese, Sikkimese, Nepalese, Tamangs, Sherpas, etc.—assembled and the Sikkimese abbot of Phensang monastery (North Sikkim) was enthroned as Khenpo by Dodrup Chen Rinpoche and was given the name Dechen Dorje. He had studied in the Sikkim Government Shedra under Khenpo Rinchen and Khenpo Daser for 16 years. This may have been the first Sikkimese khenpo.

Following this, the main assembly hall, the monks' quarters, and the Ngondro temple of what is known today as the Chorten monastery were built. A new storeroom for housing the scriptures and books was also added.

In 1975, Dodrup Chen Rinpoche gave the oral transmission and initiation of the 'Nyingma Kama' text at Namnang. In 1978, he gave the oral transmission of 'The Seven Treasures of Longchen Rabjam' at Phensang monastery.

In 1983, Dodrup Chen Rinpoche identified the son of the Private Secretary to the Sikkimese Palace, Tashi Gyaltzen Lachungpa—commonly known as Tashi Babu—and Tsering Yoden as the genuine incarnation of Rongnye Gomchen Changchup Dorje of Khams Minyak. The present incarnate is known as Kunzang Tenpai Gyatsen (Lachung Tulku).

In 1985, Rinpoche gave the oral transmission and initiation of the 'Longchen Nyingthig Yashe' at the Chorten monastery. Then in 1987, Prince Wangchuk Namgyal of Sikkim offered to be the benefactor of Buddhism and teachings on the 'Rinchen Terdzoe', which were given in Tashiding over a period of two months. Then in 1991, for the sake of maintaining the teachings and restoring them from defilement, Rinpoche gave initiations and instructions in his own monastery on the 'Lama Gongdu' and the oral transmissions of the early Nyingmapa. Thus he set hundreds of people, such as lamas, tulkus, students and masters who had come from all directions of India, Bhutan, Sikkim and Nepal on to the path of maturation and liberation.

Dodrup Chen Rinpoche conducted research into the early translations of the Nyingmapa, the treasure texts and the oral transmissions, the 'Rigzin Sogdrup', the six volumes of Jatshon Nyingpo, the 'Treasure Scriptures' of Pema Lingpa, the mandalas of all the upper and lower teachings of the 'Longchen', and all the 'tsakli'.<sup>22</sup> In his Chorten monastery, he gave teachings on the general and specific doctrines of Buddhism and the traditions of the old translations. In 1995, for a period of five days, he gave initiations and instructions on the 'Longchen Nyingthig' and then again in the same year, in the western Sikkimese monastery of Pemayangtse, he gave teachings on 'The Six Volumes of the Pure Treasures of Jatshon Nying po'. Furthermore, he gave teachings at the Chorten monastery on 'The Seven Treasures of Longchen' and the 'Collected Works' of Jigme Lingpa and established the summer retreat system known as 'yarney'.

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<sup>22</sup> 'Tsakli' are small images of deities used by rinpoches when giving initiations.

He also initiated a yearly ‘Drupchen’ on ‘Phurba gyug lug’ held at the end of the twelfth month at his own monastery. Then in 1997, he met with Sikkim’s Chief Minister Shri Pawan Kumar Chamling who had expressed the wish to build a statue of Guru Rinpoche in Namchi. The construction of the statue was initiated in 2001 and was consecrated three years later.

Dodrup Chen Rinpoche visited several monasteries in Sikkim, and led the practices of rituals and empowerments. He maintained the lineage of Jigme Lingpa’s teachings of ‘Longchen Nyingthig’ in the territory of Sikkim, and made those particular teachings widespread and popular. Today he is regarded as one of the greatest masters of the Nyingmapa tradition.

Dodrup Chen Rinpoche is currently revered as the most senior Rinpoche in Sikkim; it was thanks to Trulzhig Rinpoche’s insistence that he settled in this land. A very serious practitioner, Rinpoche prefers to lead a peaceful life within the retirement of his monastery. He is however accessible and a large number of Sikkimese seek his advice and blessing on a daily basis.

#### SERDUP DUNGZIN PALJOR LHUNDUP DORJE<sup>23</sup>

Serdup Dungzin Paljor Lhundup Dorje Jigme Wangchuk Rinpoche was born as the son of Khyentse Rigpai Dorje at Nyang Shung Serdrak Dupde, in the Tsang province of Tibet on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month of Fire Snake year of the 15<sup>th</sup> Rabjung (according to the lunar calendar), which corresponds to the year of 1917. His father, Khyentse Rigpai Dorje (1880-1938) was the 10<sup>th</sup> incarnate of Lama Shakyai Gyaltsen and the pure descendent of Chimton Shakya Badra. Lama Shakyai Gyaltsen was the root Guru of Nangsa Hodboom. He had been born out of a bamboo tree in Sikkim and therefore was also known as Nyukdong Sangay (Bamboo tree Buddha).

Serdup Dungzin Rinpoche was educated under the spiritual guidance of his own father and his father’s root guru, Tertön Shakdeu Trulshig Dongak Lingpa, one of the greatest Dharma masters of the nineteenth century. At the age of eleven, he completed the basic course ‘Chyakbum’ according to the Dharma text ‘Sabcheos Yangti Nagpo Sergyi Dru Chig’. At the age of twelve, he received the empowerment

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<sup>23</sup> Nangzey Dorjee, former Secretary to the Government of Sikkim and eldest son of Serdup Dungzin Rinpoche, provided much of the following information.



of the yogic practice known as ‘Tummo Padmai Druzing’ and maintained the life of a yogi with minimum clothing as a ‘ray kyang’ (single cloth). At the age of thirteen, he studied, with great effort and hardship, the advanced courses of yoga known as ‘Tsalung Dechen Tyingyi Lahdrei Trhulkhor’ according to the Dharma text ‘Or sal Dorje Nyingpo’. He was thus, from the very young age, respected by all as an accomplished and spiritually attained person.

At the age of 22, Rinpoche’s father attained Parinirvana and from then on until the age of 37, he dutifully shouldered the responsibility of holding his late-father’s lineage as ‘dungzin’ (hereditary lineage holder). One of the important responsibilities was to perform ‘Tshedup’ (longevity prayer) for H.H. the Dalai Lama. This demanded a yearly six months retreat followed by offerings on the occasion of the Tibetan New Year. This had been performed by his late-father since the reign of H.H. the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama (1876-1933).

Rinpoche’s father, Khyentse Rigpai Dorje, had visited Sikkim at the age of 27 with his root guru, the treasure discoverer, Trulshig Dongak Lingpa. The latter had been assigned by the Government of H.H. the Dalai Lama to perform a number of prayers in the blessed hidden land of Sikkim for universal peace and prosperity in the New Year of the Horse (1906). In the course of this visit, the treasure discoverer Trulshig Dongak Lingpa, in a mere instant, revealed from the treasure store the hidden treasure text of ‘Kunzang Thugthig’ from Tashiding, the central place of the holy land of Sikkim.

During this 1906 visit, Rinpoche’s father met the 8<sup>th</sup> Khachod Rinpoche, Drupwang Lungtok Tenzin Palzangpo of Khachodpalri monastery in West Sikkim, and from him Khyentse Rigpai Dorje received all the teachings of Lhatsun Chenpo including the tantric skill of stopping hailstorms known as the ‘zabbel zubtrid’ method. Lungtok Tenzin Rinpoche was 85 years old at that time and willed that his incarnate would be born as the son of Khyentse Rigpai Dorje. Accordingly, the 9<sup>th</sup> Khachod Rinpoche (1920-1981), Dudjom Dorje Rinpoche—second brother of Serdup Dungzin Rinpoche—was born in 1920. He later became the Dorje Lopen or abbot of Pemayangtse monastery.<sup>24</sup>

Again, at the age of 34, in the year of the Mouse (1912), Khyentse Rigpai Dorje Rinpoche visited Sikkim. He performed ‘Thamsi Nenpa’

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<sup>24</sup> The 10<sup>th</sup> Khachod Rinpoche was born on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1989 at Gangtok as the youngest son of Taming Dorjee and Sonam Doma (daughter of Serdup Dungzin Rinpoche). Although the 10<sup>th</sup> Khachod Rinpoche is Sikkimese, his lineage is Tibetan.

(subduing the evil spirits by tantric power) and built a ‘dodrul chorten’ (stupa) in each in four sacred caves of Sikkim as per the wishes and instructions of the Government of His Holiness. Those numerous Dharma deeds indicated his connection with Sikkim, the land blessed and protected by Guru Rinpoche, over countless life times.

His son, Serdup Dungzin Rinpoche, strongly intended to remain in the secluded places of the hidden land of Sikkim in the later part of his life which was in accordance with the prophesies of Guru Rinpoche. His younger brother, Dudjom Dorje Rinpoche was already in Sikkim since he was the reincarnation of Khachoeed Drupwang Lungtok Tenzin Rinpoche of Sikkim’s Khachoeedpalri monastery.

Thus, at the age of 38, Serdup Dungzin Rinpoche left Tibet and arrived in Gangtok via Dromo on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of 8<sup>th</sup> month of the Wood Horse year (1954). The brothers re-met at the hermitage of Rabdentse Palace in West Sikkim, visited Pemayangtse, the premier monastery of Sikkim and attended the Tashiding Bumchu ritual the following year. In 1956, Serdup Dungzin Rinpoche then met with Dorje Chang Jamyang Khyentse Choekyi Lodroe and received many teachings from him. In the same year, he went with his brother Khachoeed Rinpoche on pilgrimage to Tolung monastery in North Sikkim and received blessings from the precious objects and books held there. In the first month of the new Tibetan year, Serdup Dungzin Rinpoche and the lamas of Pemayangste monastery went to Tashiding and performed the rituals of the death anniversary of Chagtha Rinpoche, for a period of one week.

In 1957, the two brothers visited Sakyong Tsenkhar Gon in West Sikkim where their father Khyentse Rigpai Dorje Rinpoche had stayed and meditated. The Sakyong Jomo Yudon offered Serdup Dungzin Rinpoche all of his father’s belongings and household objects along with his dwelling place.

During his years in Sikkim, Serdup Dungzin Rinpoche visited a number of monasteries and remote sacred places, performed rituals and gave teachings, notably to the Pemayangtse lamas.<sup>25</sup> Rinpoche spent a number of years in meditation at his residence in Sakyong.<sup>26</sup> He remained in ‘mun tsham’ (dark meditation), one of the highest stages of

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<sup>25</sup> In Pemayangtse, he gave a number of teachings such as the Dzogchen practice of cutting through the resistance to primordial purity, the oral transmission of inner-fire and the instruction on the primary practice of ‘Ngondol’.

<sup>26</sup> For example, in 1959, at the age of 43, Rinpoche stayed in retreat for two years at his residence in Sakyong named Sakyong Deden Pema Urling, meditating and practicing in realization of Vajra Kilaya.

meditation. He mentioned that he felt confidence spiritually by reading the 'Longchen Dzoedun' and the 'Dorje Nyingpo' and a number of Lhatsun Chenpo's teachings.

Serdup Dungzin Rinpoche is well known in Sikkim for having build the Sangdopalri structure of Pemayangtse monastery mentioned below. Never trained as a wood carver or statue maker, it is generally not known that through his inborn skills, he built, renovated and consecrated a large number of statues in the monasteries of West Sikkim which are hereby listed in this footnote.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> In Pemayangtse monastery:

He constructed two new large statues of Guru Dragmar and Vajrakumara in Pemayangtse and consecrated them with ritual prayers. He made and inaugurated eight statues of 'Guru tshen gyey' (eight manifestations of Guru Rinpoche) and in 1958, along with his younger brother, Serdup Rinpoche performed the consecration of the three statues of Guru Rinpoche with two consorts made of gold gilt and copper installed in the same monastery.

The original box frame in which the body of Khyentse Dorje Chang Chokyi Lodey Rinpoche was enshrined before cremation was brought to Pemayangtse monastery before the cremation at Tashiding. Rinpoche made a replica clay statue of Khyentse Rinpoche with his own hands, which is now kept in the Lhatsun Lhakhang in Pemayangtse.

On the request of his younger brother Khachod Rinpoche, he prepared and made the complete 'thang gor' (scroll row) of all lineage masters and related deities to be displayed and hang on the ceiling beams of Pemayangtse monastery with the assistance of thangka painters.

Other monasteries and locations:

Rinpoche built the statue of Guru Nangsid Silnon for each of the four holy caves of Sikkim.

He rebuilt and consecrated a life-sized statue of Guru Rinpoche and repaired all other statues of Khachodpalri monastery that had been damaged by an earthquake.

In Chyang Lhari Nying Phug (one of the four holy caves of Sikkim), he repaired and re-consecrated the old statues as well as installed a new one.

In Silnon, over ten statues of various sizes including a human-size statue of Guru Rinpoche and a statue of Avalokiteshvara inside the cremation ground hermitage near that monastery were repaired and consecrated by him.

In accordance with the Government of Sikkim's order, he performed the re-consecration of the refurbished images of Hayagriva and Vajravarahi in Dubdi monastery, the first monastic seat of Gyalwa Lhatsun Chenpo where he also repaired the four life-sized statues of Rigzin Guru Tshokye Dorje, Karma Guru Lhatsun Chenpo, Khenchen Rolpai Dorje and others.

His last major statues were those of Sangachoeling, which was rebuilt after being gutted by fire. These are the statues of Dorje Sempa, Buddha with his two disciples, and Guru Rinpoche with his two consorts.

In 1965, during the coronation of Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal of Sikkim (1923-1982), one 'Tshangpai sokkhor' (Brahma's life wheel) in golden written mantra was required to be offered to the Chogyal by Khachod Tulku, the head lama

At Tashiding, he received the complete empowerment of the treasure text ‘Lama Gondu’, from Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche (1910-1991). The practice of observing the monthly ‘Tshechu’, according to the ‘Lama Gondu’, was then introduced along with the publication of the required textbooks. At Tashiding, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche had the vision of Gyalwa Lhatsun Chenpo and composed the Guru Yoga prayer ‘Dorje Nyingpo Dongyi Thol lu’ which was then given to Serdup Dungzin Rinpoche and the Dorje Lopen of that monastery with the necessary empowerments.

In 1971, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> month of Iron Pig year, Rinpoche performed ‘Mani Dungdrup’ prayers according to ‘Chyenray Zig Dhug Ngäl Rangdrol’ text along with Khachoed Rinpoche and monks of many monasteries and lay devotees at Namchi Dechen Hermitage. These prayers were dedicated for the well being of the Chogyal of Sikkim as that particular year was one of obstacles according to the latter’s personal astrological calculations.

In 1967, at the age of 51, on the request of the Government and the monk body, he took the responsibility of rebuilding the wooden structure of the Sangdopalri (mandala of Guru Rinpoche’s abode) of Pemayangtse monastery. The original old wooden structure was in a decayed condition and did not fit in the newly renovated monastery. He had no knowledge or experience of such handicrafts and had never done such work in the past. Yet he could not decline the request. By the blessings of his prayers to his Dharma Gurus, a number of spiritual indications enabled him to take up the task. With his great effort and dedication, the entire wooden structure of Sangdopalri was completed within five years and remains to this day as his masterpiece.

On the request of Serdup Dungzin Rinpoche and his brother Khachoed Rinpoche—the Dorje Lopen of Pemayangtse—Dudjom Rinpoche Jigdral Yeshe Dorje (1904-1987) came to Pemayangtse monastery on the 8<sup>th</sup> of the 3<sup>rd</sup> month of the Water Mouse year, 1972. The main consecration ceremony of the Sangdopalri mandala and the refurbished monastery was held on the 15<sup>th</sup> of that month. The great mandala rituals according to the ‘Rigzin Sogdup’ text with ‘Dud tsi Mendrup’ preparation prayers were performed. On this auspicious day, many high incarnates led by Dzongsar Khyentse Choktrul Rinpoche, along with monks from all regions of Sikkim, the Chogyal of Sikkim Palden Thondup Namgyal, the Gyalmo, the ministers and members of

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of Pemayangtse monastery, as part of the enthronement rituals according to Ngawang Rinpoche Barwa text. This very detailed golden mantra wheel was prepared and written by Rinpoche.

the public assembled at Pemayangtse monastery. Serdup Dungzin Rinpoche submitted the written catalogue of the Sangdopalri structure to the Chogyal.

In 1978, as prayed for by the two Rinpoche brothers, Dudjom Rinpoche Jigdral Yeshe Dorje again visited Pemayangtse monastery. The great prayer mandala according to the 'Rigzin Sogdup' with 'Dud tsi Mendrup' preparations and 'Tshog Bum' (one hundred thousands feast offering prayer) were performed on that auspicious occasion. Dudjom Rinpoche advised that the statue of Guru Nang Sid Silnon must be built and installed in the four directions of Sikkim for the welfare and benefit of the world in general and the Himalayan region of Tibet in particular. Serdup Dungzin Rinpoche volunteered and made the clay statues with his own hands and placed them in the four directions of Sikkim. This was how he devoted himself to the service of the Dharma and sentient beings in all parts of Sikkim. He thereafter stayed in seclusion at Namchi Serdup Choeling<sup>28</sup> practicing the precious Dharma according to 'Yangtig Nagpo' and the 'Rigzin Sogdup', Sikkim's principle text.

During the Iron Monkey year (1980), all of a sudden and without any illness, Serdup Dungzin Rinpoche past into emptiness and attained Parinirvana. The cremation took place at Serdup Choeling and Kyabje Dodrup Chen Rinpoche was kind enough to perform the funeral prayer rituals. The funeral ceremonies were performed by Dodrup Chen Rinpoche at Namchi Sedrup Choeling. Chatral Rinpoche, without any concern for the potential difficulties, did everything that was needed to bring about the construction of a stupa to contain the funeral relics of the deceased lama. During the preparation of the bones (breaking them into powder) one hidden yogi named Wag Tsag Sherpa who was doing the job noticed 'naturally emerged' images on Serdup Dungzin Rinpoche's bones. One bone bearing an image had already been crushed into powder but another two images appeared on the bones, one being a blue relic. These were shown to Chatral Rinpoche who praised both the images as signs of high Dharma attainment. The blue relic was identified as a relic of Buddhahood. Those bones and relics were enshrined inside the 'Kudung Chorten' (body remains stupa) built at Serdup Choeling, Namchi, in South Sikkim.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The land on which Serdup Choeling was built was given to Khachoeed Rinpoche by the Chogyal of Sikkim.

<sup>29</sup> His son, Serdup Dungzin Ngawang Loday Chopel Rinpoche, born on the 21st of March 1959 at Sakyong in West Sikkim, is the current seat holder of the Serdup lineage. He first studied with his father Serdup Dungzin Rinpoche and his uncle

THE 10<sup>TH</sup> INCARNATION OF THE RIGZIN YOLMO TINGKYEY GONJANG TULKU, ORGYEN JIGME THINLEY<sup>30</sup>

By the power of his previous intention to gain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings he, in accordance with that wish, was reborn in human form in this very hidden land of Sikkim. During the time of his 3<sup>rd</sup> incarnation known as Yolmo Tulku Tenzin Norbu (1598-1645), the latter went to the supreme mountain of Riwo Trazang in Mang yul<sup>31</sup> where Lama Rigzin Trazangpa paid him great respect and honours, and requested him with a degree of urgency in the following way: “Since you are the one who is prophesized in the oral transmissions of the place holders of the hidden land of Demojong, it is imperative that you should go to that hidden land”. Thus, the 5<sup>th</sup> incarnation Rigzin Thuthob Dorje (1725-1773), in ‘the foothills of the sunrise’ (in the hills of the eastern direction) established the monastery of Wen Nay Reoding. During the lifetime of the 6<sup>th</sup> incarnation, Rigzin Pema Choepel, the Dzogchen Rinpoche of Sikkim was born into the family lineage of Guru Chowang (1212-1271) whose lineage was close to the root guru (Rigzin Kunzang Dorje 1736-1805) of the 6<sup>th</sup> Gonjang Tulku and on account of this the two traditions became integrated.

During the time of the 5<sup>th</sup> Chogyal of Sikkim Namgyal Phuntsog (1733-1779), a capable messenger by the name of Throgyal was sent by the Sikkimese General Yug Chogthup to receive blessings and protection wheel for safeguard from the barbarous acts of the Gorkhas. In return, Rigzin Pema Choepel advised them to stay united and send the protection wheels.

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Khachoe Rinpoche (Dudjum Dorje) and later at the Institute of Higher Nyingma Studies under Khenpo Tsondu. He received Dharma empowerments and transmissions from Dudjom Rinpoche, Dodrup Chen Rinpoche, Trulzhig Rinpoche and most Venerable Suktse Rinpoche.

<sup>30</sup> Gonjang Rinpoche is commonly referred to by the Sikkimese as Sangmo Rinpoche because his family lives in the village of Sangmo near the eastern hidden cave of Shar chok be phuk.

<sup>31</sup> Mang yul was an old principality in Tibet, which played an important role in the establishment of the ‘Northern Treasure’ tradition of the Nyingmapa school of Tibetan Buddhism. It was amongst the kings of this principality that Rigzin Goedemchen found his first patron. This region is now located to the north of Kathmandu with half of its traditional territory inside the modern borders of Nepal and half in the Tibetan regions of Kyirong, Latoe, etc. For more details on this region see Everding, Karl-Heinz. 2004. ‘rNying ma pa Lamas at the court of Mang yul Gung thang - The meeting of the gter ston bsTan gnyis gling pa with King Kun bzang nyi zla grags pa’. In Cueppers (ed.) *The relationship between religion and State in traditional Tibet*. Lumbini International Research Institute, Lumbini: Nepal [SM].

The 7<sup>th</sup> Chogyal of Sikkim, Tsuphud Namgyal (1785-1863) said to the 6<sup>th</sup> incarnation Rigzin Pema Chopel (1773-1836): “Since you are the true follower of Guru Rinpoche you should come, if only for a short time, to his blessed hidden land, anything else would be disrespectful and insufficient.” However, due to his old age he was unable to travel to Sikkim.

However, the 9<sup>th</sup> incarnation of Gonjang Tulku Rigzin Ngawang Yonten Gyatso (1905-1959) paid homage to Lama Khyentse Rigpai Dorje (1880-1938), the 10<sup>th</sup> incarnation of Lama Nyugdong Sangay who had been born in the hidden land of Sikkim. From Khyentse Rigpai Dorje, he received the ‘Wishing Vase’ initiations, the ‘Single Golden Syllable of the Black Quintessence’ (which was revealed by Duntso Repa) and the father doctrine of Sikkim the ‘Rigzin Sogdup’. Since the understanding of prior omens regarding a change of circumstances in Tibet had been recognized, he escaped from Tibet to India. On the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> month of the Earth Female Pig year of the 16<sup>th</sup> Rabjung,<sup>32</sup> (1959), at the age of 53, he lay down in the lion pose and passed from this body into emptiness.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Kyabje Dodrup Chen Rinpoche (born in 1927) carried out the funeral rites and offerings of the relics of this incarnation and there emerged many symbols of enlightenment such as the appearance of a rainbow in the clear sky, which shone towards the direction of Sikkim. Furthermore, in the mind of Dudjom Rinpoche Jigdrel Yeshe Dorje there arose the understanding of the birthplace and region as well as the names of the parents of the next incarnation. And so, in the place of Yangang near to the eastern hidden cave, which is one of the four principle caves of the four directions of Sikkim, a son which showed all the signs of being the reincarnation was born to the father Tsering Norbu and the mother Ah kyi on the 19<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> month of the Iron Ox year of the 16<sup>th</sup> Rabjung (1961).

In order to conduct a proper examination of the reincarnation, the treasurers and direct disciples of the previous incarnation, such as Thadrol Dorje, went to this remote region of Sikkim where they were received by the mother of the new incarnation and had an audience with the young Tulku. Dudjom Rinpoche gave the name Orgyen Jigme Thinley Kungyab Palzangpo to the young boy. Then both the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama and the 16<sup>th</sup> Karmapa agreed and confirmed that Orgyan Jigme Thinley was indeed the incarnation of the 9<sup>th</sup> Gonjang Tulku.

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<sup>32</sup> A ‘rabjung’ is the cycle of sixty years of the Tibetan calendar [SM].

Rinpoche was enthroned at the age of four by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche (1910-1991) amongst a crowd of rinpoches and monks in the monastery of Dortsug Sang ngag Choeling<sup>33</sup> in Darjeeling in 1964 (Wood Dragon year). In 1969, when the young Tulku was nine years old he received the entire teachings of the oral transmission from Dodrup Chen Rinpoche. In the Chorten monastery, the residence of Dodrup Chen Rinpoche, he learnt how to read and write and received many teachings on Buddhism. After which he studied the Tantras, Sutras and philosophy of Buddhism for five years at the Sikkimese government Nyingmapa Shedra (college) under the guidance of two great scholars: Khenpo Thubten Tsondu Phuntsog<sup>34</sup> and Khenpo Dazer. At the age of 19, he practised for three years in the retreat centre Dupde Pema Orling at the residence of the 4<sup>th</sup> Dodrup Chen Rinpoche and completed the practice of 'The Three Roots' according to the 'Longchen Nyingthig' tradition. In 1980, he received the teaching of the 'Rigzin Sogdup' from Chadral Rinpoche (b.1913) in Pemayangtse. In the 1980s, he purchased some land six kilometres from the capital of Sikkim, Gangtok, and built the present monastery of Orgyen Dongag Choekhorling at Penlong. In 1981, the Dalai Lama was invited and on account of His Holiness's involvement, the essence of the area was nourished by his great benevolence and blessings. In this way Gonjang Rinpoche received the complete Nyingma teachings from his extraordinary root guru, the 4<sup>th</sup> Dodrup Chen Rinpoche, and great beings such as Dudjom Rinpoche, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Penor Rinpoche and Taglung Tsetul Rinpoche, etc. Thus he accomplished beyond excess the common and extraordinary transmissions and initiations of both the scriptures and revealed texts of the early transmission of Buddhism.

In some of the secluded meditation sites of the hidden land, such as Khechoepalri in West Sikkim, he gave instructions and carried out an intensive retreat for a number of months. There he meditated on the methods of ensuring happiness in Sikkim and maintaining peace and happiness for the whole world. Further he refurbished every stupas in the eastern cave of the hidden land and the stupas in the very centre of the hidden land in the place of Tashiding. In Rabongla, South Sikkim and at Phensang monastery, North Sikkim, Gonjang Rinpoche gave oral transmissions of the sixteen volumes of the Prajnaparamita.

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<sup>33</sup> This monastery was constructed in 1878 as a branch of the Phodong monastery in North Sikkim. It is under the administrative control of Ecclesiastical Affairs Department, Government of sikkim.

<sup>34</sup> He was also known as Dzogchen Khenpo (1920-1979) [SM].



In 1987, in Tashiding, Dodrup Chen Rinpoche gave the empowerment and Gonjang Rinpoche gave a direct transmission of the 'Rinchen Terdzoe'. In the year 2004, in his own monastery of Orgyen Dongag Choekhorling, he gave the teaching of 'Kunkyen Longchen's Treatise on Dzogchen' to a large gathering of the Sangha as well as giving the scriptural transmission of the 'Kunsang Lama Shelung' of Orgyen Jigme Choekyi Wangpo (1808-1887). During the 9<sup>th</sup> month of the lunar calendar, he holds a yearly 'Drubchod' in his monastery on the 'Northern Treasure' of the Yolmo tradition known as the 'Phurba Lhanag'. He was also presented with the supervision of the Taktse retreat centre and the chairmanship of the Tsuglakhang Trust<sup>35</sup>. When the Dalai Lama visited Sikkim in 2005, he was given the responsibility of being the head of all Sikkimese religious lineages for the preservation of the Buddha-Dharma in the region.

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<sup>35</sup> Established by Prince Wangchuk Namgyal in 1982, one of the Tsuglakhang Trust's objectives is to uphold and propagate for the benefit of all sentient beings the traditional and social customs, ceremonies and teachings as expounded by Guru Rinpoche, introduced into Sikkim by the Naljorcheshe (the four yogin brothers) and patronized by successive Chogyals of Sikkim.

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