

Digitisation of 20 remote Bhutanese archives (EAP1494)

Details of people

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Lama Yeshi

Chumeybang, Bumthang, 20th century

Lama Yeshi was born in Chumigbang, under Chumig Gewog, Bumthang. While the exact dates of his birth and death remain unknown, he served as the fifth abbot of Nimalung Monastery from 1955 to 1961. Before assuming this role, he is said to have joined Tharpaling Monastery, where he studied Buddhist philosophy for many years.

Source: Oral account

Doring Trulku Jamyang Kunzang Lungrig Chökyi Nyima

Nimalung, 1901-1952

Doring Trulku, born in 1901 in the village of Doring in Kham, eastern Tibet, was recognized as the reincarnation of Do Khyentse Yeshe Dorje, an emanation of Jikme Lingpa. Showing extraordinary spiritual aptitude, he completed his foundational Buddhist studies by the age of 13 and was inspired by the teachings of Longchenpa. Over 17 years, he traveled across Tibet and Kham, studying under renowned masters like Khenpo Shenga and Nyarong Tulku, gaining expertise in sutras, tantras, and Dzogchen Nyingtik teachings.

In 1933, at 32, Doring Trulku fled Tibet to avoid being conscripted as a bodyguard for the 13th Dalai Lama, settling in Bhutan. Initially intending to focus on the recitation of Longchenpa's Seven Treasuries at Tharpaling Monastery, he soon collaborated with Chumig Drungpa Gönpö Dorje to establish Nimalung Monastery in 1934. As its leader until 1940, Doring Trulku enriched the monastery with sacred texts, instituted the annual Karling Shitro Drupchen, and made Nimalung a vibrant center for Longchen Nyingtik and Peling lineage teachings.

Returning to Tibet in 1940 to secure resources for Nimalung, Doring Trulku continued his spiritual journey, teaching at Dorje Drak Monastery and studying with luminaries like Dudjom Rinpoche. He devoted himself to meditation retreats and advancing Buddhist education until his death in 1952 at age 51, a passing marked by miraculous signs. His enduring legacy includes the establishment of Nimalung Monastery and the preservation and dissemination of Longchen Nyingtik teachings.

Source: https://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Doring_Tulku

Dzongpon Ngawang Peljor

Zhongar, 16th century- 17th century

Ngawang Peljor served as one of the Dzongpons of Zhongar Dzong. During his tenure in this important role, he was responsible for producing the Zhongkar Kanjur. Currently, there is limited information available about his life and contributions. The position of Dzongpon was the highest authority in the local government under Bhutan's feudal system.

Source: Tenzin Dorji (n.d), *Shar Phyogs kyi Rje Dpon Byung Rabs* ("The Narrative Accounts of the Lords and Rulers in Eastern Bhutan"). Manuscripts

Nyerpa Ngawang Thinley

Zhongar, 16th century- 17th century

Ngawang Thinley served as the Nyerpa, or Treasurer, of Zhongar Dzong. During his time in this role, he was responsible for producing the Zhongkar Kanjur. He and his master, the Dzongpon, were brothers. The position of Nyerpa was second only to the Dzongpon in the local government under Bhutan's feudal system. Currently, there is limited information available about his life and contributions.

Source: Tenzin Dorji (n.d), *Shar Phyogs kyi Rje Dpon Byung Rabs* ("The Narrative Accounts of the Lords and Rulers in Eastern Bhutan"). Manuscripts

Rinchen Dorji

Tshelingkhor, 18th century

Rinchen Dorji, known locally as Ratnavajra, was a disciple of Jigme Lingpa, a prominent Tibetan scholar of the Nyingma School. Although information about Ratnavajra is limited, it is believed that he was a colleague of Jigme Kundrol, the founder of Yongla Gonpa. This claim is supported by the colophon of Jigme Lingpa's advice, written for Jigme Kundrol.

Source: The oral narratives and collected works of Jigme Lingpa

Lama Dawa Norbu

Woongchilo, 17th Century-18th Century

Dawa Norbu, the founder of Pemachöling Lhakhang, commonly known as Woongchilo Lhakhang, is believed to be a descendant of Pema Lingpa, according to manuscripts found in the temple's collection. However, aside from this, no further information about his life or background is available.

Source: Oral accounts

Je Khenpo, Kunga Gyatso

Lhadzong Tashigang, 1722–1771

The Twelfth Je Khenpo, Kunga Gyatso (1722–1771), was born at Toeb Phendekha and began his monastic education at five. He entered monkhood at thirteen under the First Tritrul, Mipam Wangpo, and received novice vows from the Seventh Je Khenpo, Ngawang Trinle. Kunga Gyatso excelled in grammar, poetry, and Sanskrit, studying under Drukpa Lotsāwa Ngawang Pelzang and later at Tibetan monasteries, where he mastered Drukpa and Geluk teachings.

He received full ordination from the Ninth Je Khenpo, Shakya Rinchen, and served as Tsennyi Lopen, gaining renown as a Sanskrit scholar. At forty-seven, a visionary experience inspired him to establish Lhadzong Tashigang Monastery. He ascended as Je Khenpo at forty-eight, serving for two years before dedicating his remaining years to teaching his disciples. Kunga Gyatso passed away in 1771 at the age of fifty-one, leaving a legacy of spiritual leadership and scholarship.

Source: Karma Rigzin, "The Twelfth Je Khenpo, Kunga Gyatso," Treasury of Lives, accessed January 08, 2025, <http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Je-Khenpo-12-Kunga-Gyatso/7895>

Yonten Taye

Lhadzong Tashigang, 1724–1784

Yonten Taye (1724–1784), born into the Tsamdrak Choje family of the Churu lineage, became a monk at the age of eight under the First Tritrul, Mipam Wangpo, and received novice vows from the Eleventh Je Khenpo, Ngawang Trinle. He studied poetry and Tibetan and Sanskrit grammar in Tibet before returning to Bhutan, where he served at Paro Lateng Monastery and later as Tsennyi Lobpon.

At forty-eight, Yonten Taye was enthroned as the Thirteenth Je Khenpo, overseeing the reconstruction of Tashichoedzong and Punakha Dzong following devastating fires. At fifty-two, he stepped down to pursue a hermitic life and established Dodedrak Monastery in 1779. He later undertook a pilgrimage to Tsari in Tibet to promote the Drukpa Kagyu tradition.

After Kunga Gyatso's passing, Yonten Taye, at the request of Kunga Gyatso's disciples, assumed responsibility for Lhadzong Trashigang. He later entrusted the monastery to Tenzin Namgyel. Yonten Taye passed away in 1784 at the age of sixty-one, leaving a profound legacy in Bhutan's spiritual and cultural history.

Source: Karma Rigzin, "The Thirteenth Je Khenpo, Yonten Taye," Treasury of Lives, accessed January 07, 2025, <http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Je-Khenpo-13-Yonten-Taye/8028>

Je Khenpo Tenzin Namgyel

Lhadzong Tashigang, 1733-1781

Tenzin Namgyel was born in 1733 in the Wang region. He joined the monkhood at the age of 10, receiving his novice vows from the 8th Je Khenpo, Tenzin Norbu, and later full ordination from the 9th Je Khenpo, Shakya Rinchen. He studied under Kunga Gyatso and traveled with him to Tibet to study Sanskrit.

After returning to Bhutan, he was appointed abbot of Dongka Kunzangchöling and later entered retreat at Chumophu in Paro, where he realized the nature of mind and became an accomplished master. At the age of 43, he was enthroned as the 14th Je Khenpo and served for six years. However, at 48, a fire incident at Punakha Dzong affected his health, and he passed away the following year at the age of 49.

Source: 'Brug rje mkhan po 69 dge 'dun rin chen. (1976). *Lho 'brug chos 'byung* (Vol. 1–1). Nges don zung 'jug grub pa'i dga' tshal. <http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW19809> [BDRC bdr:MW19809]

Je Khenpo Kunzang Gyeltshen

Lhadzong Tashigang, 1729- 1786

Kunzang Gyeltshen, born in 1729 in the Wang region, entered the monkhood at a young age. He received his novice vows and full ordination from the 8th Je Khenpo, Tenzin Norbu, and the 9th Je Khenpo, Shakya Rinchen, from whom he also received empowerments and teachings.

He studied sutra and tantra treatises under Kunga Gyatsho, excelling in poetry and grammar. Kunga Gyatsho was deeply impressed by his writings and regarded him as his heart son. Through diligent practice of the essential teachings he received, Kunzang Gyeltshen became an accomplished master.

Appointed as the tutor to Zhabdrung's reincarnation, Choki Gyeltshen, he later became the Drapai Lopen. In 1781, he was enthroned as the 15th Je Khenpo. After serving for three years, he stepped down due to health issues in 1784, resided at Lhadzong Trashigang, and passed away in 1786.

Source: 'Brug rje mkhan po 69 dge 'dun rin chen. (1976). *Lho 'brug chos 'byung* (Vol. 1–1). Nges don zung 'jug grub pa'i dga' tshal. <http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW19809> [BDRC bdr:MW19809]

Je Khenpo Yeshi Dorji

Lhadzong Tashigang, 1757-1851

Yeshi Dorji was born in 1757 in Gon Shari and was recognized as the reincarnation of Jamgon Yeshe Dorji by Choje Ngawang Thinley. He received full ordination and essential teachings from Ngawang Thinley and later studied under Kunga Gyatsho, whom he regarded as his root teacher. With Kunga Gyatsho's guidance, he practiced diligently and attained spiritual accomplishment.

In 1851, Yeshe Dorji was enthroned as the 17th Je Khenpo, serving for six years before stepping down in 1857. He then resided at Lhadzong Trashigang, where he continued guiding disciples, and passed away in 1865.

Source: 'Brug rje mkhan po 69 dge 'dun rin chen. (1976). *Lho 'brug chos 'byung* (Vol. 1–1). Nges don zung 'jug grub pa'i dga' tshal. <http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW19809> [BDRC bdr:MW19809]

Je Khenpo Ngawang Chogyel

Lhadzong Tashigang, 1756-1816

Ngawang Chogyel was born in 1756 in Toeb Phandekha and was the nephew of Kunga Gyatsho. He received his novice and full ordination from his uncle, Kunga Gyatsho, and Yonten Thaye. Under their guidance, he also received empowerments and essential teachings, diligently practicing until he realized the ultimate truth.

He was appointed as the tutor to Jampel Gyatsho and later enthroned as the 19th Je Khenpo in 1803. After serving for four years, he stepped down from the throne in 1807 and resided at Lhadzong Trashigang. There, he took the initiative to expand the retreat center. Ngawang Chogyel passed away in 1816.

Source: 'Brug rje mkhan po 69 dge 'dun rin chen. (1976). *Lho 'brug chos 'byung* (Vol. 1–1). Nges don zung 'jug grub pa'i dga' tshal. <http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW19809> [BDRC bdr:MW19809]

Lam Ngawang Pekar

Khaling Gonpa, 18th century

Ngawang Pekar is believed to have been the first abbot of Khaling Gonpa. He was a disciple of Kuenga Gyeltshe, recognized as the first reincarnation of Jampel Dorji, the son of Zhabdrung Rinpoche. During his tenure as the abbot of the temple, Ngawang Pekar produced a set of the Perfection of Wisdom in One Hundred Thousand Lines and a volume of the Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines. In addition to these sacred texts, he authored a catalog and narrative account associated with the collection.

While the identity of Lama Ngawang Pekar remains elusive, it is highly plausible that he was the same individual who authored the *Rgyal Rigs Byung Khungs Gsal Ba'i Sgron Me* (Lamp that Clarifies the Origins of Royal Lineages).

Source: The Narrative Account of the Perfection of Wisdom in One Hundred Thousand Lines

Lam Tenzin Dondrup

Khaling Gonpa, 18th century- 19th century

Tenzin Dondrup was one of the resident lamas of Khaling Gonpa. During his tenure, he produced a set of Heaps of Jewels, one volume of Good Aeon, and two volumes of the Collection of the Names of the Buddha. Although these works are accompanied by a narrative account of the collection, the exact year of their production remains unclear. However, records indicate that by this time, Khaling Gonpa had been renamed Trashichoeling. Based on this, it can be reasonably assumed that Tenzin Dondrup served as the resident lama after Ngawang Pekar.

Source: The Narrative Account of the Collection of the Heaps of Jewels

Lopen Kunzang

20th century- 21st century

Lopen Kunzang was the last resident lama of Khaling Gonpa. Oral accounts suggest that he was appointed to the position by Trashigang Dzongpon Dasho Dopola, the regional governor of Trashigang Dzong. He served as the resident lama until his passing. However, no detailed records exist regarding the exact date of his appointment or the duration of his service at Khaling Gonpa.

Source: Oral Accounts