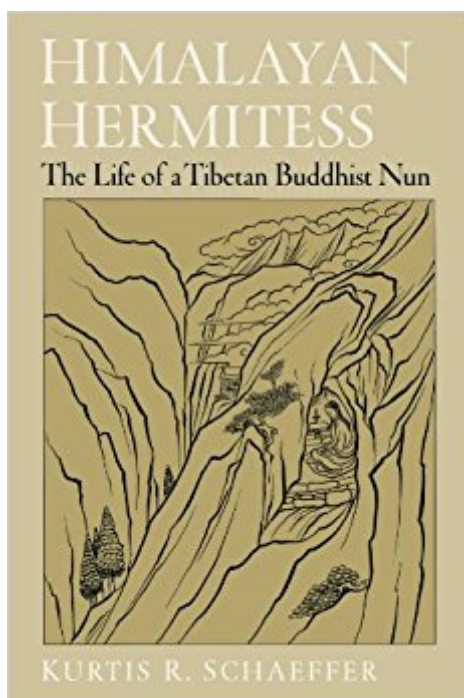


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# Himalayan Hermitess: The Life Of A Tibetan Buddhist Nun



## Synopsis

Himalayan Hermitess is a vivid account of the life and times of a Buddhist nun living on the borderlands of Tibetan culture. Orgyan Chokyi (1675-1729) spent her life in Dolpo, the highest inhabited region of the Nepal Himalayas. Illiterate and expressly forbidden by her master to write her own life story, Orgyan Chokyi received divine inspiration, defied tradition, and composed one of the most engaging autobiographies of the Tibetan literary tradition. The Life of Orgyan Chokyi is the oldest known autobiography authored by a Tibetan woman, and thus holds a critical place in both Tibetan and Buddhist literature. In it she tells of the sufferings of her youth, the struggle to escape menial labor and become a hermitess, her dreams and visionary experiences, her relationships with other nuns, the painstaking work of contemplative practice, and her hard-won social autonomy and high-mountain solitude. In process it develops a compelling vision of the relation between gender, the body, and suffering from a female Buddhist practitioner's perspective. Part One of Himalayan Hermitess presents a religious history of Orgyan Chokyi's Himalayan world, the Life of Orgyan Chokyi as a work of literature, its portrayal of sorrow and joy, its perspectives on suffering and gender, as well as the diverse religious practices found throughout the work. Part Two offers a full translation of the Life of Orgyan Chokyi. Based almost entirely upon Tibetan documents never before translated, Himalayan Hermitess is an accessible introduction to Buddhism in the premodern Himalayas.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A significant contribution toward filling the lacuna of research on female-authored Himalayan Buddhist sources."--Sarah H. Jacoby, *The Journal of Asian Studies*"This book is a must-read for specialists and an appropriate text for undergraduates in courses dealing with Buddhism, women and religion, or the Tibetan and Himalayan regions."--HOICE"Kurtis Schaeffer has made an important contribution to Tibetan and Buddhist studies by making this extraordinary autobiography of a female hermit in the Himalayas available for a wide readership." --*Journal of the American Oriental Society*

Kurtis R. Schaeffer is Assistant Professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Alabama.

The author takes a rare written story by a Tibetan Buddhist nun several hundred years old and gives a glimpse into the culture of the time especially the status of women. The first part of the book is analysis and history, with the last part, only a few pages long, the actual writing. He has done a good job of filling out the picture behind her story.

As an excellent brief intro. to the life of a Tibetan woman's life, those who want to make a visit there should have read this before.

The beginning of this book is a bit academic, but the story of her life is a very touching and moving story. It is a valuable insight into the life of a very advanced practitioner in the late 1600s and is well worth reading.

I have read over half the book and the narrative has not started yet. I was expecting a story and have so far received an analysis of the text and a description of the social and political world of the Himalayan region where and when the biography was written. Good for people researching the history of Tibet over the past 500 years or so, but if you want a good read about a Tibetan Nun then I would suggest something else.

I am sorry to have to write what may be a slightly negative review. However, as there were no reviews when I looked at this book here on , I bought it rather blindly. So I will now let you know what I think of it. Firstly I was getting ready for a lovely life story. There are excellent life stories written, such as the life of Milarepa, and the life of Marpa. However, this book is quite different. For a start, even though it is 220 pages long, the actual Life story only takes 51 pages (a fair amount of

which is empty space, so actually a good deal fewer true pages than that). Coming to the Life story then, we encounter quite a strange writing style. Here is an example of a sentence: "Some bad person took [them] away, and [I] wept a great deal." This makes me think, who is Mr Schaeffer writing for? If it were a paper he was writing as a translation assignment for a university course, I could understand. But for the public? It is cryptic scholar writing, and there is surely no need for this. It serves no benefit to write in that way. Then there are occasions when the text makes no sense. Here is an example: "Dirt got in my mouth and my hair, and then a rock went down my mouth." What does that mean? And Mr Schaeffer puts a note. If you look up the note in the back, it says "translation tentative". There are 8 such examples. So I thought, how is it possible that he studied this text (i.e. studied under a master) and could not get to grips with the meaning? So I turned to the Acknowledgments. There he seems to imply that he did not study this text with anyone, from what I can understand. In fact, the only Tibetan person he mentions at all in the acknowledgments is the fellow who painted the picture for the book cover. It may also be worthy to note the dedication. It is very nice. Mr Schaeffer dedicates the book to his mother, father, wife and daughter. That's very nice. However let's take another example. Let's take "Repeating the Words of the Buddha", and book by Tulku Urgen Rinpoche. The dedication for that book reads "This book is dedicated to the Buddhadharmas and all sentient beings. It is said that when the teachings of the Buddha flourish, there will be happiness for all beings in this life, in the bardo, and in following lives." The point seems to me to be, the former book (Himalayan Hermitess) seems to me to be a book about Buddhism, by a scholar perhaps, for students perhaps, or maybe anthropologists? The latter (Repeating the Words of the Buddha) seems to be a Buddhist book, by a Buddhist, for Buddhists. If you lie in the latter category, I highly recommend the latter book, or any by Tulku Urgen, or Chogyam Trungpa, or if you want to read something systematic, please see Reginald Ray's two volume Indestructible Truth and Secrets of the Vajra World. If this upsets anyone I do apologise. I do wish you find what will help you.

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