The Excellent Path of Devotion: An Annotated Translation of Sera Khandro’s Short Autobiography

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SERA KHANDRO DEWAI DORJÉ (1892–1940) may have been the most prolific female author in Tibet prior to the 1950s. Her writings include several thousand pages of treasure revelations (gter ma), more than six hundred pages of biographical and autobiographical writings (rnam thar), extensive commentaries on great perfection (rdo rje chen) teachings, as well as large compilations of hymns (mgur), advice (zhul lung), and prophecies (lung btan). She was one of only a handful of Tibetan women to write an autobiography and rare among Tibetan religious exemplars for being female. Despite her many extraordinary qualities, until recently her manuscripts and her memory have not spread widely, circulating only among a select group of her disciples based in the eastern Tibetan regions of Sera, Kanze, and Riwochê, as well as in the Tibetan diaspora primarily among the disciples of Düjom Jikdril Yeshé Dorjé Rinpoché (1904–87) and Jadral Sangye Dorjé Rinpoché (b. 1913).¹

¹ I never would have learned of Sera Khandro had I not met Jadral Rinpoché many years ago, a meeting that came about thanks to Hubert Decleer and Nazneen Zafar. When I was an undergraduate enrolled in the School for International Training’s Tibetan Studies Program in India, Nepal, and Tibet, Nazneen and Hubert suggested that the best place to pursue my research interests was Pharping, Nepal, with Jadral Rinpoché and his community. This essay is one of the many outgrowths of these auspicious connections, for which I am very grateful.

The translation included here of Sera Khandro’s short autobiography has benefited greatly from the generosity and wisdom of Tulkü Thondup and Khenpo Sangye (Thupten Lodrö Thaye), who have kindly and tirelessly answered my many questions. Additionally, the input of Hubert Decleer, Christina Monson, and Heidi Nevin has made it a better work.

For ease of reading, throughout this essay I have written Tibetan words phonetically according to the convention used by Wisdom Publications. See the index at the end of the translation for correspondences between phonetic and exact Tibetan spellings of person and place names using the Wylie transliteration system.

Acquired at wisdompubs.org
In Tibet, Sera Khandro’s works are just beginning to reach broader audiences through their publication in Tibetan almost a century after she wrote them. In 2009 through the efforts of the Golok Regional Government Office of Historical Manuscripts under the main editorship of Ju Kalzang, a large collection of Sera Khandro’s writings were published for the first time in China and made widely available in Tibet. This six-volume collection includes her short and long autobiographical writings, four volumes of revealed treasures, and one volume containing her commentary on Düjom Lingpa’s *Buddhahood Without Meditation* (*Ma bsgom sangs rgyas*). These recent publications now join the portion of Sera Khandro’s works published in the Tibetan language in India during the 1970s and 1980s under the guidance of Düjom Rinpoche, which include four volumes of mostly liturgical texts from her revealed treasures and the 248-folio biography she wrote of her main teacher Drimé Özer (1881–1924), who was one of the eight sons of the renowned visionary Düjom Lingpa (1835–1904).

Almost none of Sera Khandro’s writings have been translated into English. In order to offer English-language readers a glimpse of Sera Khandro’s life story as she wrote it, this essay includes a complete translation of Sera Khandro’s short autobiography written in verse. This work is titled *The Excellent Path of Devotion: The Short Story of a Mendicant’s Experiences in Response to Questions from My Vajra Kin.* It appears as the first text in the Cycle of Prophecies (*lung bstan skor*) section of Sera Khandro’s guidance manual (*khris yig*) on her treasure cycle titled *Secret Treasury of Reality Dakinis* (*chos nyid mkha’ ’gro gsang mdzod*). In the colophon, Sera Khandro writes:

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2. Mgo lo snying rgya’ ’gro sgrub bya ba’i gzhung las khang.
3. Dbus bza’ mkha’ ’gro, *Dbus bza’ mkha’ ’gro’i gsung lbum.* Previously, Sera Khandro’s commentary on Düjom Lingpa’s *Buddhahood Without Meditation* was also published in the PRC as a separate volume; see Dbus bza’ mkha’ ’gro, *Ma bsgom sangs rgyas sin bris.*
4. Sera Khandro’s collected revelations are published in India as Bde ba’i rdo rje, *Zah gser chos mdzes.* The only published version of Sera Khandro’s biography of Drimé Özer that I know of is Mkha’ ’gro bde skyon dbang mo, *Dri med ’od zer rnam thar.*
5. Two exceptions are a short biography of Padmasambhava Sera Khandro revealed as a treasure text (Zangpo 2001) and an excerpt from her long autobiography describing one of her treasure revelation experiences at Mount Anyê Machen (Jacoby 2013). At the time of this writing, another English-language version of Sera Khandro’s short autobiography translated by Christina Monton is soon to be available, and my translation of Sera Khandro’s long autobiography is forthcoming.
6. *Kyi to la’i rgyan byung gi gnas tiklo bza’ yon la’i ’je’i sgyur gnyis mdzes pa’i lam ba’ang.*
7. The short verse autobiography (*Mdo pa’i la’i lam ba’ang*) appears in this location in both the Serta and Karmé manuscript versions of Sera Khandro’s collected treasure scriptures that
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Sera Khandro notes that she completed writing the text when she was thirty-seven in the earth snake year (1929) at a hermitage near Sera Monastery in Serta, now part of Kanzé Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province, PRC. During this time, she was also in the process of composing a far longer autobiography, totaling more than four hundred folios, titled *The Biography of the Central Tibetan Woman Dewai Dorjé: A Chariot Leading to Renunciation and a Reliquary of Faith for Fortunate Ones.* Roughly half of Sera Khandro’s long autobiography recounts events that occurred in her everyday life, such as conversations she had, journeys she undertook, teachings she attended, and so on. The other half details her vibrant visions of bodhisattvas, siddhas, and dākinīs in elaborate buddhasfields. In contrast, Sera Khandro’s short verse autobiography translated here is suffused with visionary encounters with a range of extraordinary presences, including mother deities and dākinīs, nonhuman girls, famous female Tibetan masters of the past, protector spirits, and even Guru Padmasambhava himself, with only brief allusions to the events that were transpiring concurrently in her mundane life in Lhasa and Golok. If Sera Khandro’s verse autobiography is the shortened version (*ngor bsdus*) of her life, then what we learn from this essentialized portrait is that more than the exoteric backdrop of her quotidian affairs, her esoteric visionary interactions formed the heart of her story of the self.

The prophecies these figures provide, at times inspirational and at times enigmatic, validate Sera Khandro’s identity as a treasure revealer (*gter ston*), or one destined to extract the teachings hidden in the Tibetan earth and sky for the benefit of future generations by illustrious figures from the golden age.

are available to me. It has also been printed (in Tibetan) in a privately circulating collection edited by Jadral Rinpoche that was sponsored by Christina Monson. For a published version of this verse autobiography, see Dbus bza’ mchab ’gro, Dbus bza’ mchab ’gro gi gzungs ’bum, vol. 5, 83–103. A version of the same text under a slightly different title (*Rang rnam tshig bral ma ba sa lu’i rnam gsung gi gsum*) also appears in vol. 1, 548–68, but I cite page numbers from the former in this essay.

8. Sera Khandro recorded her age according to the Tibetan system, which I have transposed to align with the international convention. Hence, Sera Khandro wrote thirty-eight, but I give the age as thirty-seven.

9. Dbus mo ba la’i rdo rje’s rnam par thar pa nges’ byung ’dren pa’i shing rin shal ldan dgal pa’i mchod sdong. Two unpublished Tibetan manuscript versions of this long autobiography completed by Sera Khandro in 1934 are available to me in addition to the recently published version (2009) mentioned above. One is a 407-folio version lent to me by Jadral Rinpoche, and the other is a 526-folio version from a private library in Serta. These three versions of the autobiography vary only slightly; the differences in page numbers reflect handwriting size/publication font and not substantial differences in content. For a study of this autobiography as well as her biography of Drimed Ozer, see Jacoby 2007.
of the Tibetan empire (seventh–ninth centuries), most often by the Indian tantric master Padmasambhava. Prophecies elucidate Sera Khandro’s identity as an incarnation of the preeminent Tibetan dakini Yeshé Tsogyal, Padmasambhava’s Tibetan consort renowned for transcribing and concealing his teachings as treasures. Despite Sera Khandro’s karmic inheritance as an emissary of the dakinis, her ability to produce revelations was not guaranteed but rather contingent upon a set of conditions or auspicious connections (tren ‘brel). These conditions included being the proper revealer for a given treasure, going to the proper site for the discovery at the proper time, and having the appropriate companions present during the revelation process, including a consort (bsab sgrags) and a doctrine holder (chos bdag)—a disciple who will maintain and propagate the newly revealed teaching. Many of the visionary interactions at the center of Sera Khandro’s short autobiography concern the difficulties she experienced gathering these auspicious connections necessary for her revelations, challenges she gradually overcame with great efflorescence.

**Sera Khandro’s Life Narrative**

In the following verses, Sera Khandro divides her life into five different phases: (1) her religious aspirations and obstacles during her childhood in Lhasa from birth through age twelve, (2) the difficulties of her departure from Lhasa and entry into Golok from age thirteen through seventeen, (3) her life as Gara Gyalse’s spouse at Benak Monastery in Golok from age eighteen through twenty-seven, (4) her reunion with her root lama Drimé Özer from age twenty-eight through thirty-one, and (5) her life afterward based at Sera Monastery in Serta from age thirty-two to the time she completed the short autobiography when she was thirty-seven in 1929.

In her short autobiography Sera Khandro records that “I, Kunzang Dekyong Chönyi Wangmo,” was born in Lhasa, Tibet, into a wealthy

10. For a traditional Nyingmaa history of the treasure tradition, see Dudjom Rinpoche 1991.

11. One of the most common names Sera Khandro used to sign her writings, meaning “The All-Good Bliss-Nurturing Queen of Reality.” The other name she often signed was her treasure name (gter ming) Dewai Dorjé (Blissful Vajra). She is popularly remembered in Golok as Üza Khandro, “Dakini Lady from Central Tibet,” and in the Tibetan diaspora as Sera Khandro.
noble family of imperial rank.” In her long autobiography, she elaborates that she was born in 1892 to a father of royal Mongolian heritage (sug po dbang gi dang rgyud) named Jampa Gönpo and a Tibetan mother from the Nup (Gnubs) clan named Tsering Chönzom. She describes her birthplace as her family’s estate named Gyaragashar (Rgya ra ga shar), located west of the Jokhang Temple in an area called Lumothil (Klu mo mathil).\(^1\) According to Sera Khandro’s writings, her father was a “Chinese official” (rgya dpon), which most likely refers to his status as an official within the Qing dynasty and not his ethnicity, which she specifies was Mongolian. Her parents treated her affectionately and afforded her the greatest luxuries money could buy in turn-of-the-century Lhasa, but “they were political leaders who wanted power.” As a result their intentions for Sera Khandro and her own religious yearnings were in conflict from her earliest years. Although her father refused her requests to dedicate her life to religion and ordered her to remain a householder, bodhisattvas, dākinīs, and siddhas appeared in her visions and dreams, nurturing her resolve to abandon worldly life and training her in tantric Buddhist practices.

The next phase of Sera Khandro’s life from age thirteen to seventeen was a time of multiple hardships. In her short autobiography she doesn’t elaborate on the specific problems she faced, but in her long autobiography she writes of the devastation she experienced when her father began arranging a marriage for her with the son of a Chinese district official (rgya sdei dpon) from Kyirong when she was only ten. Two years later her mother died and her father remarried. These events confirmed the decision she made at the age of fourteen to “abandon my homeland as if it were the demons’ island.” Her chance to escape the confines of her Lhasa life came when a group of traveling religious pilgrims from Golok headed by Drimé Özer sought shelter at her brother’s residence. Instantly she felt great devotion for Drimé Özer and secretly followed his entourage out of the city, vowing to spend the rest of her life practicing the great perfection, the pinnacle contemplative practice of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism.

Sera Khandro left Lhasa with strong resolve, but the land of Golok to which she traveled proved to be a harsh environment in which to pursue her religious ambitions. Sandwiched between Kham and Amdo in an area that today straddles the border between China’s western provinces of Qinghai and Sichuan, Golok is known not only for its many illustrious Nyingma

\(^1\) Dbus ba’ mkha’ ’gro, Mtsa pa’i lam baang, 83. All quotations not otherwise footnoted in this introduction come from my translation of Mtsa pa’i lam baang included here.

\(^2\) Dbus ba’ mkha’ ’gro, Dbus ba’ mkha’ ’gro’i yung ’bum, vol. 1, 9.
masters but also for its history of aggressive warriors and banditry. With an average altitude of 15,000 feet and below-freezing temperatures most of the year, the majority of Golok’s rolling grasslands and snow peaks are hostile to any livelihood other than nomadic pastoralism. During Sera Khandro’s time there from 1907–40, Golok’s severe climate and remote location at the headwaters of the Yellow River (Rma chu) aided the Golok people in maintaining their status as a polity that was largely independent from both the Dalai Lama’s Tibetan government to their west and the Chinese government (first the Qing dynasty and after 1911 the Republican government) to their east.14

In the early twentieth century. Sera Khandro’s birthplace of Lhasa and her chosen land of Golok shared little: their Tibetan dialects were mutually unintelligible, their political allegiance differed, and they lived, respectively, as urbanites in stone houses on the one hand and as nomads in yak-hair tents on the other. Given these cultural chasms, it is not surprising that members of Drimé Özer’s religious encampment (chos sgar) viewed Sera Khandro’s appearance amid their group with suspicion. As Sera Khandro succinctly phrased it, “Being an inferior woman of poor means, everyone reviled me in various ways.” Though she had been a wealthy daughter of nobility in Lhasa, on the road to Golok she became a starving beggar, shunned by many in Drimé Özer’s community for her difference from them, unable to converse in Golok-dialect Tibetan, and without family or friends to support her. Gradually, however, during this phase from age fifteen through seventeen, she picked up the Golok dialect while working for a local nomad family as a maidservant in order to earn the necessary resources to spend her winters in retreat. During these winters she lived near Drimé Özer’s residence (bla brang) in Dartsang, a small nomadic settlement in the Washul-family-controlled territory of Serta that corresponds roughly with what is today Serta County in northwest Sichuan.15 There she dedicated herself

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14. Golok was not a monolithic entity but rather a confederation of principalities divided into three main parts (Akyong Burn, Wangchen Burn, and Pema Burn), each of which contained multiple subdivisions. In the early twentieth century, some of these divisions did pay tribute to the Dalai Lama’s Tibetan government, while others at times were forced to pay tribute to the Ma-family warlords who ruled Qinghai, but the region as a whole was remarkably successful at evading direct rule by any outside authority until its incorporation into the People’s Republic of China in the early 1950s. For an essay on Golok history, see Jacoby 2010b. For more information on the battles between the Ma warlords and Goloks, see Don grub dbang rgyal and Nor sde, Mgo leg la rgyus dbek ther, 272–92. Regarding a few Golok leaders’ tribute to the Dalai Lama’s government, see Lhuwang 1994.

15. Though Serta shares close linguistic, genealogical, religious, and cultural ties with Golok, it was not technically a part of tripartite Golok but rather was an independent territory to its
wholeheartedly to the teachings that he and his brothers gave her on preliminary practices (sngon gro), channel and wind practices (risa rlung), severance (gcod), and the great perfection.

Sera Khandro describes this early phase of her religious training as one of intensive focus amid ongoing social difficulties. In her long autobiography, she writes that she completed the full requirement of 100,000 prostrations in only seventeen days! Even so, some of her fellow Golok religious devotees “say I am an idiot who can’t tell the difference between good and bad, like a dog.” Lamenting her situation to the dākinīs, Sera Khandro prayed to abandon her “negative body” (i.e., female body) in exchange for “a [male] body endowed with the Dharma,” only to be reprimanded by them for displaying bias against feminales. This as well as the other four instances in the translation below that Sera Khandro refers to her inferior female body (skye las dam pa) reflect the very real constraints that went along with being a woman in Sera Khandro’s milieu. However, her mantra about being an inferior woman also served the rhetorical purpose of emphasizing her humility while she simultaneously accomplished the feat of being one of the few Tibetan women prior to the 1950s to eulogize her life in writing.16

The next phase Sera Khandro records of her life from the age of eighteen through twenty-seven mirrors the period in which, “following the orders of a lama from whom I received empowerment, I lived as a householder and exerted myself in worldly activities.” This lama from whom Sera Khandro had received teachings was Khangdong Wonpo Gönwang from the Kharnang area of Golok, and his orders were to live with a lama named Gara Gyalsé (Pema Namgyal, 1882/83–?), son of the treasure revealer Gara Terchen Pema Dundul Wangchuk Lingpa (1857–1910). He directed her to do this because she had a duty, he informed her, to preserve Gara Terchen’s treasure teachings. The Gara family’s religious community was centered at Benak Monastery, which is situated on the bank of the Mar River in what is today a few miles outside of the county seat of Pema, Golok. Sera Khandro writes little about this turbulent decade of her life in which she disagreed with her “life partner” (tshe grols) Gyalsé, who criticized her treasure-revelation activities.

South. Given their close ties and the fact that Sera Khandro traveled frequently between the two regions without any mention of political hindrances, I refer to Sera as part of a greater Golok region, or simply as Golok in this essay. There is debate among Tibetans about whether Sera was traditionally a part of Golok; see Geser la tsul kuhrins, Dzhul shul guer riques le rgyur dang ’brul ba’i gsum, 2006.

16. For an analysis of Sera Khandro’s repeated references to her inferior female body in her autobiographical writing, see Jacoby 2010a.
summing it up in the lines, "Half of what happened was for the sake of the Dharma,/ and the other half was worldly, which caused me to experience suffering." Part of this suffering was childbirth related; Sera Khandro gave birth to three babies during these years, only one of whom lived to adulthood: her daughter Yangchen Drölma (whom she also calls Chöying Drönma, 1913–7). The dakini’s elusive prophecies, which form the bulk of the verses encapsulating this decade, chastise Sera Khandro for “quarreling with her partner,” meaning Gyalse, and “abandoning [her] consort,” meaning Drimé Özer. Although Sera Khandro writes that “negative circumstances swirled around me like the wind,” these obstacles did not thwart her many treasure discoveries during this period.

After Sera Khandro experienced a severe bout of an arthritic illness that left her unable to walk, Gyalse “expelled [her] like an unwanted dog.” He sent her to live with her prophesied consort, Drimé Özer, for fear that she would die if she stayed with him. This adversity initiated what would become the happiest years of Sera Khandro’s life, from age twenty-eight through thirty-one. She writes that Drimé Özer “took care of me and . . . uprooted the dark ignorance of my mind.” Practice in union with Drimé Özer led to Sera Khandro’s spiritual realization as well as her enhanced ability to reveal treasures.

Sadly, the joy of liberation soon met with the reality of impermanence when in 1924 a plague struck Drimé Özer’s religious community in Dartsang, Serta, causing the death of both Sera Khandro’s five-year-old son Rikzin Gyurmé Dorje and Drimé Özer himself within a matter of days. Before the embers of Drimé Özer’s funeral pyre had cooled, the factions within Drimé Özer’s household who didn’t like Sera Khandro, namely those affiliated with his other consort Akyongza, expelled the deeply grieving Sera Khandro and her eleven-year-old daughter from their community. Sera Khandro was “left behind without a protector,” “without a partner or a home.” The one who stood up for Sera Khandro at this critical moment, viewing her as “[Drimé Özer’s] kind, supreme consort,” was Soturul Natsok Rangdröl Rinpoche (1869–1935). He was a close disciple of Drimé Özer as well as an important and powerful incarnation lama from Sera Thekchen Chönkhor Ling Monastery in Serta. Sera Khandro came to be known by this name, meaning the dakini of Sera, because Soturul Rinpoche housed her at his monastery for several years.7

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7. The Sera Monastery in Serta connected to Sera Khandro is unrelated to the famous Geluk monastery by the same name in Lhasa. Founded in 1736, Sera’s Sera Monastery became a nonsectarian monastery in the nineteenth century. Its name “Sera” derives from the toponym of the valley in which it was originally located in the western region of the Washul Serta
During this phase when Sera Khandro was based at Sera Monastery from the age of thirty-two onward, Sera Khandro wrote prolifically, authoring both a 248-folio biography of Drimé Özer and her own 400-plus-folio autobiography, all the while continuing to record many treasures. Additionally, along with two of her scribes, she undertook a major textual project editing, correcting, and copying the entire collected manuscripts of Düjom Lingpa (22 volumes), Drimé Özer (18 volumes), and her own (4 volumes), a monumental task which she completed in 1933. Also during this highly productive yet sorrowful phase of her life at Sera Monastery, she began teaching widely throughout eastern Tibet, primarily “the profound Dharma of the father and son great treasure revealers,” meaning the revelations of Düjom Lingpa and Drimé Özer. Additionally, she taught her own revelations and other important great-perfection teachings, such as Longchenpa’s Heart Essence in Four Parts (Snying thig ya bzhig). Her acclaim led her to be invited to many retreat centers and monasteries throughout Golok and Kham, including Sanglung Monastery (a branch of Dodrupchen Monastery), Tsang Gar in Dané, Anzom Gar, the Khandro Yangzong Vairocana Cave in Dzakhok, Riwoché, and many others. Her fame went beyond her own Nyingma religious lineage to include disciples from the Jonang, Kagyü, and Bön lineages. She taught those of high and low social standing, exhorting laymen and women to recite many mantras and undertake fasting rituals (bshungs gnas) as well as conferring empowerment on the king and crown prince of Lingkar, from whom she received royal sponsorship for some of her publication projects.9

After completing her short autobiography in 1929, Sera Khandro lived for another decade, during which she renown as a treasure revealer and as an important holder of the Düjom lineage burgeoned. She died in 1940 at the age of forty-eight at Riwoché while residing at the estate of her disciple, the Riwoché Zhabdrung Tsewang Drakpa. Since that time, multiple Tibetan women and men have been recognized as her incarnations, some heirs to illustrious religious lineages and some born to ordinary laity, a fact that follows her own prediction according to Jadiral Rinpoché.20 In Golok figures recognized as Sera Khandro’s incarnation include Táré Lhamo

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19. “The Lingkar (Gling dkar) royal family that patronized Sera Khandro probably refers to the royal family of Lingtang (Gling thang), which was an independent kingdom near Depé whose rulers were associated with the Tibetan mythic hero Gesar of Ling.
(1938–2002), the daughter of Dzongrul Rinpoche named Lhacham Chökyi Dröma (n.d.), Khandro Rinpoche (b. 1954), and Drimed Özer's great-great-grandson Trinlé Tenzin (n.d.), who is recognized as her speech incarnation. Additionally, in the Tibetan diaspora Jadral Rinpoche's oldest daughter Seno Saraswati (b. 1965) is widely recognized as Sera Khandro's incarnation.

11. Pad ma 'od-gsal mtha' yas, *jigs phun tā re rnam thar*, 110. Pema Ötal Thayé, the author of this dual biography of Namtrul Jikmé Phuntsok (1944–2011) and Tāré Lhamo, respectively, emphasized Tāré Lhamo's affiliation with Sera Khandro by quoting nearly the entire short autobiography translated here as part of Tāré Lhamo's biography. Almost half of Tāré Lhamo's biography consists of Sera Khandro's short autobiography, although Pema Ötal Thayé omitted a few stanzas from the beginning where she wrote humbly about herself (specifically the section from "Despite this I myself am an inferior woman" to "Assembly of dékinis who course in the Ultimate Sphere, grant me permission!").

12. Pad ma 'od-gsal mtha' yas, *Deb chen gnyis nu ral'i ye're tsho*, 73. According to Tulku Thondup, Lhacham Chökyi Dröma died during the tumultuous years of the Cultural Revolution.

21. Personal communication with Khandro Rinpoche in Serta, 2005, and in Barkham, 2007. This is not the internationally known Mindrolling Jesso Khandro Rinpoche but another woman with a similar name who is from Golok.

THE EXCELLENT PATH OF DEVOTION

The Short Story of a Mendicant’s Experiences
In Response to Questions from My Vajra Kin

E ma ho! How wonderful!
In the dharmakāya realm, you are the Buddha Samantabhadra.
In the sambhogakāya realm, you are Great Glacial Lake, the buddhas of the five families.25
As the nirmanakāya, you are Padmasambhava, the three protectors.26
In the realm of disciples, you are the guide, teacher, and Dharma master.
I pray to you, Pema Lendrel,27 protector residing on my [crown] cakra—having ripened and liberated my mind stream,
please remain as the sovereign of the buddha family on my [crown] cakra of great bliss
and bestow the experience of brilliantly lucid intelligence upon me.

Several great beings from the past clarified in vajra prophecies that I am an illusory emanation of the dharmakāya Samantabhadri, sambhogakāya Vajravārāhi, nirmanakāya Yeshé Tsogyal of Kharchen,
and the mind incarnation of her speech, Dorjé Shiwatso.28

Despite this, I myself am an inferior woman,29
with little insight and an ordinary body.

25. Great Glacial Lake (Gangs chen mo, Mahābhūmāsāgara) is a cosmic buddha encompassing all of existence and the five buddha families within it, namely Vairocana, Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi.
26. Padmasambhava, the eighth-century Indian Buddhist master credited with spreading Buddhism in Tibet, is said to embody the three protectors—the bodhisattvas Manjushri, Avalokiteśvara, and Vajrapāṇi.
27. Pema Lendrel (Pad ma las bral), “One with a Karmic Connection to Padmasambhava,” is an epithet of Drimed Özer.
28. A single realized being can emanate incarnations of his or her body, speech, and mind, which can each respectively emanate body, speech, and mind incarnations, making nine possible emanations.
29. “Inferior woman” is a translation of skye lus dmar pa, literally “low (or inferior) birth-body.” Given that skye dmar, “low birth,” is a common colloquial Tibetan word for woman, I have included this valence in my translation. For a discussion of the term skye dmar, see Aziz 1987, 79, and Diemerberger 2007, 10–13.
Entirely lacking the good qualities of listening, contemplation, and meditation,
I am forever tormented by the armies of laziness and distraction.

For such an inferior woman of unfortunate rebirth,
having a secret account of my excellent qualities
is impossible, like a lotus blooming in the sky—this everyone can see.

Yet two of my vajra brothers
have made such insistent appeals—so as not to refuse them,
I will elaborate a bit about the true story
of my current birth, the result of merit I accumulated in the past.
Assembly of dākinis who course in the ultimate sphere, grant me permission!

In a former life, in front of Śākyamuni I was Utpali.30
In India I was Rolangderöl,
and in the presence of Padmasambhava I was Dorje Shiwatso.
In the land of Khotan, I was the Nepalese lady Jangchup Drön.

Then, after successive rebirths,
I, Kunzang Dekyong Chönyi Wangmo, was born in Lhasa, Tibet,
into a wealthy noble family of imperial rank.
From my youth I was devoted to the Dharma and possessed the altruistic intention to become enlightened.

Having seen the meaninglessness of the eight worldly dharmas,31
I constantly prayed to the Three Jewels.
As a result of that, when I was seven,
the dākinis cared for me and blessed me, nurturing me like their cherished child.

Venerable Tātā manifested in the form of a nun,
cared for me, and advised me on generating the aspiration to benefit others.

30. Utpali (spelled by Sena Khando as U+pal ma) was a nun whose vow to be the first to see the Buddha Śākyamuni upon his descent from the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, where he had gone to teach his deceased mother, was granted due to her great merit.
31. The eight worldly dharmas refer to being caught up in gain and loss, fame and infamy, praise and blame, and pleasure and pain.
Kunga Buma\textsuperscript{32} guided me through the door of the Dharma by giving me refuge precepts and so forth, showing me the path to liberation.

Although my parents were from a noble family and felt favorably toward the Dharma, they were political leaders who wanted power. Because of that, having engaged in a mixture of worldly and religious activities, I maintained subjects and attendants for a few years.

Father ordered that I should live as a householder.\textsuperscript{33} Tormented by excruciating suffering, I prayed with fervent yearning to Padmasambhava, Tsogyal, and the heroes and dākinīs of the ultimate sphere. As a result I was able to repel these samsaric conditions.

When I was eleven, my karmic heritage awakened. Sarahapa\textsuperscript{34} cared for me, taught me the path of ripening and liberation, and bestowed pith instructions on the fourth cakra. He gave me this complete teaching as if it were a precious treasure. Through practicing this, the obscurations of my channels and winds diminished slightly, and I made progress in the six signs of entering, holding, and dissipating.\textsuperscript{35}

Miraculous displays of substantial and insubstantial gods and demons enhanced my realization, and I experienced the primordial wisdom of awareness. Having understood that the gods and demons were just appearances of my mind,

\textsuperscript{32} Kunga Bumpa may be the fifteenth-century female treasure revealer whose name is listed as Kunga Bumpa (Kun dga'bum pa) in Jam mgon Kong sprul's Gier ston byrgya rtsa, 395–97, but there were also others with this name.

\textsuperscript{33} This refers to the political marriage that Sera Khandro's father began arranging for her when she was ten, but she ran away from home at the age of fourteen before the wedding.

\textsuperscript{34} Sarāha (pa) is one of the eighty-four great siddhas or “accomplished ones” of the Indian Buddhist hagiographical tradition, famous for his dohās, or rhyming couplets.

\textsuperscript{35} This refers to specific practices pertaining to manipulating winds within the channels of the subtle body.
there was no need to mentally fabricate a semblance of realization.
I looked after the gods and demons as if they were my disciples for a while.

When I was twelve, on account of my past aspirations,
I met the sovereign of siddhas Kukuripa.\(^{36}\)
He introduced me to the pith instructions on removing obstacles related to
channels and winds.
Relying on the five cakras, he taught me
the secret Dharma of the stages of the path of outer and inner mahāmudrā.

Invoked by the loosening of the knot of channels in my heart,
the mother deities and dākinīs gave me an unerringly symbolic prophetic
guide,\(^{37}\)
and I actually beheld the faces of Padmasambhava and Yeshé Tsogyal.
The mother deities and dākinīs empowered me as their messenger,
prophesying that the time had come to benefit others.
They advised me on how I would gradually bring benefit to myself and
others, saying:

In the demonic land\(^{38}\) of Eastern Tibet
await your consorts, doctrine holders, and disciples.
In a humble manner, skillfully guide them in the three lands.\(^{39}\)

They gave several prophecies and much advice like this.

36. Kukuripa (spelled by Sera Khandro as Xu ku pa) is another of the eighty-four great
siddhas. He is known for his love of his dog, who later manifested as a dākinī. See Robinson

37. "Symbolic prophetic guide" is a translation of brda byang, a variant of the more typi-
cal term kha byang, which I translate as "prophetic guide." Prophetic guides precede treasure
revealers' discoveries and can be oral or written predictions bestowed on them by Padma-
sambhava himself in some instances or by dākinīs and treasure guardians in others. They in-
dicate details such as when, where, with whom, and how treasure revealers will discover their
treasures. For more information on prophetic guides and the process of treasure revelation,
see Thondup 1986, 137–38; Gyatso unpublished.

38. Specifically, Sera Khandro is comparing Eastern Tibet (Mdo kham) to the demons' island (Skt. cānandāgūpa, Tib. sde po'i dpal), which is a subcontinent in Buddhist cosmology
inhabited by rākṣasa demons, a group of humanoid cannibals found in many traditions of
South Asian mythology.

39. The "three lands" (yul gsum) could refer to Amdo, Kham, and Central Tibet, but the
prophecy leaves this open to interpretation.
I received empowerment in both cycles of the Secret Treasury of the Dakinis.\textsuperscript{40}

The [mother deities and dākinis] entrusted me with a symbolic prophetic guide foretelling what would happen, saying that in the future I would have the power to lead those connected to me to the naturally appearing pure realm of the Land of Dākinis. They gave me a rendition of their pronouncements in symbolic written form.

Yudrönma actually befriended me and wrote down a symbolic prophetic guide regarding future occurrences. In particular, she advised me on how to examine bodhisattvas of the five buddha families and how to perform the activities of summoning, training, and ripening them.\textsuperscript{41}

She gave me texts containing the symbolic writings of the awareness holders, [the Guru from] Copper Island in Oḍḍiyāna,\textsuperscript{42} and the dākinis. Based on the pith instructions on the symbolic indications about the present and future that she bestowed upon me, I was able to benefit formless gods and demons.

Land deities who protect Tibet, such as Nyenchen\textsuperscript{43} and so forth, provided what I needed and gave me a few treasures. However, I reconcealed the treasures for the well-being of Tibet.

At that time a nun stating that she was the fully-ordained monastic Kunga Bumma said:

\textsuperscript{40} Sera Khandro’s two major cycles of revelations that she discovered over the course of her life were the Secret Treasury of Reality Dakinis (Chos nyid mkha’ gro gsang mkad) and the Dakinis’ Heart Essence (Me’ kho’ gro thugs thig).

\textsuperscript{41} These bodhisattvas were the male consorts that Sera Khandro needed to attract and train in order to reveal her treasures.

\textsuperscript{42} This refers to Guru Padmasambhava, whose land of origin is called Oḍḍiyāna (O rgyan).

\textsuperscript{43} Nyenchen Thanglha is a mountain deity connected with a mountain range in Central Tibet south of Namtso Lake (Gnam mtha’). He is believed to be a powerful force that Padmasambhava bound by oath to protect Buddhism and has a special importance in Sera Khandro’s life as the figure she claims was her real father instead of the “Chinese official” Jampa Gönpo.
Do you know the meaning of emptiness?
If you don't realize the meaning of emptiness,
though you may direct your body and speech toward virtue, the
results will be limited.
Thoroughly entangled in the tight bonds of self-cherishing,
you will spend this life behaving with an equal measure of virtue
and vice.
The result of this will be that you will remain within the limits of
cyclic existence,
circling through the three upper and three lower realms.
For this reason, don't let your eyes of insight be blind!
Knowing what to accept and reject,
put into practice the primordial wisdom abiding within you, the
great secret of the mind.

I responded with the following words:

Yoginī arising as an illusory primordial wisdom display
of Vārāhi, queen of the ḍākinīs of the three kāyas,
I pray to you with undivided faith.
I beseech you to show me the secret of my mind!
Bless me that I may not remain within cyclic existence in this life,
but that I may be like you, Venerable Lady!

When I said this, the Venerable Lady replied:

How wonderful! Listen, fortunate one endowed with spiritual
training—
I will teach you the pith instructions regarding the secret of your
mind.
First, to relax your body, speech, and mind:
The key point of the body is to place yourself in the seven-point
posture of Vairocana.
The key point of speech is to remain silent, like a lute that has ceased
to play.
Making no effort to talk, let your breath naturally rest.
The key point of mind is to remain in the state of unconstrived clarity
and emptiness.
The empty essence is dharmakāya, free from conceptual elaborations.
Clarity is sambhogakāya, unobstructed natural radiance.
The projection and reabsorption of manifestations, whatever arises, is nirmāṇakāya.
Awareness, inseparable from the three kāyas, is perfected at its basis.

For those of the highest capacity who have experienced self-appearing awareness, these pith instructions are supremely profound. For those of middling capacity whose minds rely on objects, the pith instructions on destroying mental constructs are necessary, starting from separating the three doors up to [searching for] the origin and dwelling place [of mind] and so forth.

Don’t be a lazy child! Do not allow my profound pith instructions to dissipate—integrate them into your mindstream!
That which is called “the view of emptiness” is nothing other than this.
That called “awareness of the three kāyas” is just this, the great self-emergent primordial wisdom itself.
You won’t find a higher secret of the mind than this even if you search the three-thousandfold world system.
Because your mind is the actual perfect buddha, don’t go searching elsewhere for the so-called buddha.

Saying this, she disappeared like a rainbow in the sky.

I resolved to practice intensively in accordance with the dākini’s instructions as long as I lived.

From age thirteen to seventeen years old, I endured physical and verbal hardships for the sake of Dharma.
For nearly a month I went without a single morsel of food and yet did nothing that was not Dharma.

Ever since I was young I relied on the lama, the Three Jewels, and my tutelary deity.

44. “Separating the three doors” (sky guṇa ru shun) is an abbreviated reference to “separating saṃsāra and nirvāṇa of the three doors” (sky guṇa keşer d’as ru shun ddiy je), which is a preliminary practice for great-perfection contemplation.
No matter how difficult my suffering was to bear,
I perceived everything as the result of karma I had accumulated in the past.
In this life, I thought, if I fail to accomplish the pure holy Dharma,
I will have no way to repay the great kindness
of sentient beings in general and my parents in particular.

With this in mind, I abandoned my homeland as if it were the demons’
island.
Enduring hardships with great determination,
I was propelled by the force of my previous aspirations and karmic
connections
toward Eastern Tibet to the land of Golok.
Being an inferior woman of poor means,
everyone reviled me in various ways.
Although I was empowered in profound earth treasures,
my consorts and doctrine holders were hindered by other conditions.
When I was tormented by many negative circumstances such as these,
I presented a feast offering to the maṇḍala of ḍākinīs who course in the ultimate
sphere
and I invoked them with the following words:

Alas! Primordial wisdom ḍākinīs,
don’t rest your compassion in the peaceful expanse—
look upon me with compassion, this woman with negative karma!

Although I acted in accordance with the ḍākinīs’ predictions,
it is difficult for me to benefit the teachings and beings.
Beings of the degenerate age act perversely, deceived by demons.
Those who act in accordance with the Dharma are as rare as stars in
the daylight.
Degenerate beings perceive the corrupt earnings obtained from the
faithful as medicine.45
Unable to care for themselves, they deceive others [into thinking they
can care for them].

45. This line is literally “They perceive food obtained from the corrupt livelihood of [collecting] harmful religious offerings as medicine.” Offerings (dhāraṇī) donated to religious specialists by the faithful become harmful (nāg) when their recipients consume them with self-interest and without the proper intention and ability to benefit others.

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They take debt from dead bodies and faith offerings from the living. Disregarding karma and its consequences, they perform all kinds of nonvirtuous acts. When these true signs of the degenerate age appear, how can someone like me counteract the decline of the teachings and beings?

If I affectionately care for these wild people with their vastly wrong views, they respond with hatred. If I behave in accord with the Dharma, they say I'm stupid. Just like the Buddha taught, if I treat others as more important than myself, perceiving good and bad as equal and wearing the armor of patience, they say I am an idiot who can't tell the difference between good and bad, like a dog!

Those who scorn me with such insults see me as lacking any good qualities. Based on such criticisms and wrong views, I can forget about benefiting beings; I am the cause of my own and others' ruin.

Therefore I pray to discard this negative body and be reborn in a [male] body endowed with the Dharma. I will fulfill the wishes of the Guru couple, and following the ḍakini's commands I will strive to benefit the teachings and beings. Please consider this now, you who reside in the ultimate sphere of primordial wisdom!

On account of my intense wailing,

46. "Debt from dead bodies" (gshin po'i ra dem) refers to the karmic debt that religious specialists who conduct funerary rituals accrue if they accept offerings for saying prayers and meditating on behalf of a deceased person without actually being able to help that person. Those who can help the dead in their transmigration do not accrue karmic debt for accepting offerings, but those who deceive the dead and their loved ones pay heavy karmic consequences for their duplicity.

47. That is, Padmasambhava and Yeshe Tsogyal (gu ru yesh yum).
the emanation of the ultimate sphere, who shines as the ornament of the ultimate sphere, great mother and lady of the ultimate sphere, Kunsalma, uttered the following in the secret symbolic language of the dakinis who appear in the ultimate sphere:

_Eb, eb, ya!

The radiance of the jewel of the eastern sky, the sun, dispels the darkness of beings without discrimination. How is it that a messenger invoked by mother dakinis discriminates between a good and bad body? This depends on your disciples and prayers. Don’t feel weary and sad!

From the time you were seven until thirteen, you were able to benefit gods and demons a bit by the power of your prayers in the past when you were Pema Tsokyi. Don’t be proud; this was the result of your previous karma.

From age fourteen to nineteen, your karma will bring you many experiences of unbearable suffering. Don’t be discouraged! This will be the end of your [negative] karma.

When you reach the age of twenty through twenty-seven, on account of the degenerate conditions of your region and disciples, those with negative connections to you will far exceed those with positive connections. If you are able to persevere without doubts in supplicating Padmasambhava and Mother Tsogyal, from this time forward you will meet the appropriate consorts and doctrine holders for your treasures.

You will gradually bring about great benefit for the teachings and for beings. Those with positive connections to you will gradually outnumber those with negative connections.

48. Sera Khando lists Pema Tsokyi, also known as Jomo Menmo (13th cent.), as one of her former incarnations in her long autobiography. Jomo Menmo was one of two female treasures revealed out of the one hundred that Jamgon Kongtrul included in his _Gyur sen brag yas rtse_, 578–84.
Once more, because those with either type of connection to you—
positive or negative—
are your disciples,
abandon involvement with attachment and aversion, joy and sorrow.
Your fortress of equanimity must not be weak!

For messengers appointed by the mother ḍākinīs,
everything depends on the Dharma of auspicious connections.
Hence, it is very important to be careful regarding skillful means—
whether you become a treasure revealer or not depends on you.

If you don't obey the commands of the ultimate-sphere ḍākinīs,
even though you are empowered in Dharma treasures, you will be
beset with hindrances.
You will be the one who brings undesirable karma upon yourself.
Even though you are empowered in treasures, you will lose them due
to other conditions.
Having lost the Dharma due to others' influence, you will become a
householder.
Activities related to your own treasures will become obscured.
How sad to behave in this way!

If you act in accordance with the advice of mother ḍākinīs,
in this lifetime you will definitely benefit yourself and others.
Did you understand the symbols, young noble woman?
I, emanation of the ultimate sphere, return to the ultimate sphere. Ab!

After saying this, her appearance vanished midair into light within the
ultimate sphere.

From age eighteen through twenty-seven
my happiness and suffering fluctuated like ripples on water.
Half of what happened was for the sake of the Dharma,
and the other half was worldly, which caused me to experience suffering.

In particular, following the orders of a lama from whom I received
empowerment,
I became a householder and exerted myself in worldly activities,
but I was never able to please anyone.
On account of this, I became fed up with cyclic existence.
When I longed to go to the Invisible Glorious Mountain Buddhafield, two beautiful girls from a nonhuman land adorned with various jewels uttered these melodious words:

How wonderful! Listen girlfriend—
do you know the two of us?
We two ḍākinīs with beautiful faces
came from the Invisible Buddhafield
to give you this clear message:

It would be excellent if you, friend, could come to the citadel of the very blissful ḍākinīs, wouldn’t it?

In these bad times, people’s minds have fallen under the control of demons, haven’t they?

Don’t quarrel with your partner! The damage caused by the defilement of violated [commitment vows] will bring harm upon you, won’t it?

The woman named Clarity will inspire you to be virtuous. Abandon attachment and aversion toward her. Let her be, okay?

49. This refers to Padmasambhava’s buddhafield, the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain, here referred to in Tibetan as mi ngen dpal ri’i sking. “Going to the Buddhafield” can be a euphemism for dying.

50. The meter of these two girls’ message differs from what came before and what follows, as it switches from the nine-syllable classical Tibetan verse form in which Sera Khando wrote all the previous verses to a six-syllable meter divided into three equal feet, and then back again to the nine-syllable line after their misgivings. According to Sujata (2005, 123), this meter of three disyllabic feet is typical of Central Tibetan folk songs (gshags) and is also found in songs from both eastern and western Tibetan regions.

51. “Partner” (grogs) here refers to Sera Khando’s “life partner” (che grogs) Gyalé. I refer to him as her “life partner,” translating literally from the Tibetan, instead of “spouse” because Sera Khando never mentions a formal marriage ceremony taking place.

52. “Clarity” (gsal) refers to Saldron, the name of the woman Gyalé took up with during his partnership with Sera Khando. In some recent Tibetan editions of Mogs pa’i lam brang, it is misprinted as dpa’i but is consistently gsal in older manuscript versions of the work.
If the mule-colored iron snake from the south
is honored on the crown of the dragon,\textsuperscript{53}
not very long from now,
you will receive the jewel of benefitting yourself and others,
won't you?

If you cannot journey
to our land this time,
then through the inspiration of the man
born in the horse year,\textsuperscript{54}
the favorable condition of [meeting] the one named Vajra\textsuperscript{55}
will come together in time, won't it?

For three years and three months
give up having visitors.
If you exert yourself in accomplishing your practice,
during the unerring time of the \textit{\=d\=akinis}
known as Sagadawa,\textsuperscript{56}
he will mostly dispel [your obstacles], won't he?

If you thoroughly accomplish
whatever work and activities you do
in accord with the \textit{\=d\=akinis}' advice,
you will be empowered
in the banner of the two treasure teachings,\textsuperscript{57} won't you?

We will tell you the meaning of the indications
regarding what will happen in the future.

\textsuperscript{53} The exact meaning of this phrase remains elusive, as it is a prophecy meant to be understood only by a select few, but one possible reading of it is that the iron snake refers to Drimé Özer, whose birth year (1881) was the iron-snake year in the Tibetan calendar, and the dragon refers to Sera Khandro, who was born in the water-dragon year (1892).

\textsuperscript{54} This may refer to Gyalé, who according to Sera Khandro's long autobiography was born in the horse year.

\textsuperscript{55} "Vajra" here is a symbolic name for Drimé Özer.

\textsuperscript{56} Sagadawa (\textit{sa ga zla la}) is the fourth month of the Tibetan calendar. The full moon on the fifteenth day of this Tibetan month is the holiest day of the Tibetan year, as it marks the time of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death.

\textsuperscript{57} The two treasure teachings are those of Drimé Özer and his father Düjom Lingpa.
Not telling anyone else, keep this secret; 
hide it deep in your heart.

After saying this, they disappeared like a rainbow into the expanse of the sky.

On account of this, I became a bit sick. 
Knowing this, the true incarnation of the great treasure revealer Karma Lingpa, 
Jikdrul Chökyi Lodrö Rinpoche, \(^{58}\) commanded me [not to go to the buddhafield] with a strict Dharma commitment vow. 
Hence, I had no way to follow the dākinis' directive to go. \(^{59}\)

At that time, a monk dressed in the scholarly attire of a pandita 
saying he was Guru [Padmasambhava] 
came to the place where I was herding livestock 
and asked three times, "Do you know me?"

I replied:

If you are the Guru, 
you possess clairvoyance that knows the past, present, and future. 
You perform inconceivable enlightened activities and have unimpeached miraculous powers. 
One who has found supreme accomplishment, chief among all buddhas, 
unsurpassed lama, to you I prostrate.

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\(^{58}\) Jikdrul Chökyi Lodrö Rinpoche (ca. 1876–1919) was a lama affiliated with Pelyul Drang Monastery in Golok. Sera Khando also calls him Gochen Tulku Jikdrul Chökyi Lodrö, or Goruru Rinpoche for short. In her long autobiography Sera Khando writes of an important meeting with him in 1915 when she was twenty-three years old during which the respected lama recognized her as a dākini incarnation of Yeshe Tsogyal. She also specifies that he was one of the four pillars or main doctrine holders who would uphold her treasure teachings. For a brief biography of him, see Ö rgyan lotso' grus, Dar thong dbyan pa'i gdon rabs, 395–91.

\(^{59}\) In other words, Jikdrul Chökyi Lodrö Rinpoche forbade her to die. Sera Khando's long autobiography contains a more detailed account of their conversation in which he urged her not to succumb to illness and depart for the buddhafield; see Bde ba'i rdo rje, Bde ba'i rdo rje rnam thar, 1943–6.
As soon as the appearances of this life wane, 
may I and all those connected to me 
attain enlightenment in the primordial expanse of the ultimate 
sphere of reality 
insparable from you, Venerable Guru.

After I offered these words, the monk responded:

I am an incarnation without causes and conditions, 
spontaneously present and self-arisen for the benefit of sentient 
beings. 
I, this monk, have no purpose aside from benefitting beings.

Because Padmasambhava has attained the formless supreme form of 
the vajra body, 
ordinary beings are far away from [seeing] his face. 
But if faithful ones invoke him through the power of their former 
aspirations and devotion, 
they will always see Padmasambhava’s face, 
hear his voice, and attain the blessings of his enlightened mind.

Since you also have a karmic connection [to me], we have met. 
But because you have abandoned your method consort and have 

doeds about mantra, 
you see me as a monk with an ordinary body.

Now, if you want to practice your share of treasure, 
a short distance south of here 
there is someone practicing treasures who is not me but is inseparable 
from me. 
He is a bodhisattva of the vajra family named Raśmi.60
If you join with this hero, 
the teachings of the two treasures will spread southward.

When the black iron snake enchants the belly of the dragon, 
the flock of swans will gather from all directions like a cloud. 
If the black crow does not rain down poison,

60. [Vima] Raśmi is the Sanskrit translation of Drimé Özer, which means Stainless Light 
Ray in English.
the turmoil of foreign invasions will be eliminated for sixty years.
The sun of peace and happiness will shine for a while in Tibet.
It is extremely important [to adhere to] the key points of time, signs,
auspicious connections, and so forth as specified in your treasure’s pro-
phetic guide.

On account of his words, my perception was transformed,
and I arrived in the feast row of pure dakinis.
From [them, whose voices resemble] the lute-like call of the kalavīṅka
bird.61
I received the middle prophetic guide of profound treasure Dharma.

Immediately after that Vima Raśmi looked after me
and in the vicinity of the Seven Powerful Ladies62 at the western gate
of the second snow mountain Machen Pomra,63
I removed the profound treasure Secret Treasury of Reality Dakinis.

Also, from important sacred sites and minor ones, including
Möndrup Asha Stūpa,
Chakri Ombar, Dong Dzongné,
Kyung Drakṣé, Pema Ritho, Drelzong, and so forth,
I withdrew Dharma treasures from some and substance treasures from
others.

During the time of these [treasure revelations], although many prophecies
appeared,
the auspicious connections were hindered
on account of my disciples’ corruption.

The profound Dharma endowed with auspicious connections and
timeliness

61. According to Krong dbyigs sun, *Bod rgya tshig med chen mo*, vol. 1, 6, a kalavīṅka is a sea
bird with a melodious call.
62. The Seven Powerful Ladies (Dbang phyug ma bdun) were the protectresses of the treasure
Sera Khadro removed from their territory on the western side of Mt. Anyé Machen.
63. Machen Pomra is both the name of the powerful mountain deity who resides at Anyé
Machen Mountain in the Golok region of Amdo and also a name for the mountain itself. The
description “second snow mountain” could refer to its status as the second holiest mountain
after Mount Kailash in western Tibet, but this is not clearly explained.

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is like a bubbling spring that cannot be obstructed by solid ground; although negative circumstances swirled around me like wind, I remained fearless.
I met fortunate ones who were my Dharma lineage holders and had the power to abandon activities associated with the eight worldly dharmas.

From the age of twenty-eight through thirty-one, present conditions and the ripening of my former karma led to my partner [Gyalsté] abandoning me, expelling me like an unwanted dog.

Propelled by my severe unbearable illness, Lendrel,⁶₄ the refuge master and protector residing on my [crown] cakra, took care of me, and by means of his Dharma treasury of ripening and liberation teachings, he uprooted the dark ignorance of my mind. He opened the one hundred doors of the secret treasury of insight and primordial wisdom and enriched me with the wealth of the good qualities of listening and contemplation. In particular, the inner dimension of primordial wisdom actually awakened in me, and I attained the path of liberation of the union of mahāmudrā.

By the power of this, on the outside, my renown among disciples expanded. On the inside, the knots in the channels in my head and throat loosened. Secretly, my realization of nonconceptual primordial wisdom enabled me to write down and disseminate profound treasures, thus greatly expanding the Buddhist teachings. My ability to benefit beings as my disciples proliferated effortlessly. An assembly of deities and dākinis, Dharma protectors, and treasure guardians accompanied me like a shadow and provided me with favorable conditions. I have recorded the prophecies and advice they gave me elsewhere.

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⁶₄. That is, Drimé Özer.
On one occasion, upon the insistence of Drondul Pawö,65 I went to stay with him near Tongra Drakar in Trom.66 While I was there, four nonhuman girls with the faces of a tiger, lion, bear, and parrot67 said the following melodious words in unison:

_Haya bi!

Listen, powerful yogini— from the dakini fortress at Tidro, Kunziki Yeshé Wangmo has sent you a clear message:68

In the supreme holy site of Dorje Drakzong at the vajra dakini’s gathering place is the profound Dharma Embodiment of Realization, the heart-instruction of the dakini. Through excellent auspicious connections and timeliness, the one named Aksa69 will appear. The time will be the year of the horse. A protectress from far away, not nearby,

65. Drondul Pawö, or “The Hero Who Tames Beings,” refers to Drondul Pawö Dorje (1843–1924), a famous treasure revealer from Anzom Gar located in Palyul County, Kham. In her long autobiography, Sera Khando records that Anzom Drondul Pawö Dorje sent a letter to Drimed Özer requesting her to visit him in 1923 when she was thirty-one and he was eighty-one years old.

66. Trom is the name of the region in which Anzom Gar is located, and Tongra Drakar is a sacred mountain in this area. Tongra Drakar is spelled three different ways in different editions of _Men pa’i lam brang_ Sejong ra brag dkar (White Cliff Upper Enclosure) in _Dbus bas’ mtha’ gro’i gsung bum_, vol. 5, 33; Rdo ra brag dkar (White Cliff Stone Enclosure) in _Dbus bas’ mtha’ gro’i gsung bum_, vol. 1, 563; and Stongra brag dkar (White Cliff Hollow Interior) in _Zab gier chos mchod_, vol. 4, 120.

67. The last animal, rnam mkhas, literally “eloquent speaker,” is unclear but in her long autobiography Sera Khando mentions a type of small bird with an eloquent voice (rnam mkhas byi’u chung).

68. Like the clear message above conveyed by the two nonhuman girls from the Glorious Mountain Buddhaisfield, this clear message is in the same six-syllable meter divided into three equal feet characteristic of central Tibetan songs. After Sera Khando asks, “Who are you all?” the lines return to nine-syllable meter for the remainder of the work.

69. The Sanskrit Aksa (ra) is Gyurmé in Tibetan, or “changeless.” Based on a similar passage in Sera Khando’s long autobiography, Aksa may refer to Aksa Vajra, or Gyurmé Dorje, which was the name of Anzom Drondul Pawö Dorje’s son.
will certainly give you your treasure.
Because of its profundity, there will be great agitation.
You must be careful about how you handle this.

If the groaning sound of the earth
stirs up black clouds,
the radiance of the all-illuminating maṇḍala of the sun
could diminish.
Don't lessen your insight pertaining to this.

Demon-hearted people
will welcome you with pleasant words,
but when a person named Speech⁷⁰ brings about
a variety of undesirable and disturbing [events],
it is uncertain what will happen.
In time, new ḍākini prophecies will arise
containing definitive words about the future.

Do you understand? Do you understand, girlfriend?

In response, I asked, "Who are you all?"

But before I finished talking, something else woke me up,
and the visionary experience disappeared into itself.
Nevertheless, following the ḍākinis' symbolic prophetic guide,
I discovered profound treasures, wrote them down, and disseminated them.

At that time, a black man wearing white woolen clothes
who said he was the King of Gojo⁷¹
roared out the following in a terrifying voice:

You, strange lady,
why did you come to this land? Where are you from?
Don't stay here or we will have a fight.
Now, while you are well, get away from here and go home!

Biting his lower lip, he displayed his rage.

⁷⁰. Smra.
⁷¹. Gojo (Go 'jo) is a present-day county in Sichuan just southwest of Antsón's religious encampment.

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I said to him:

I have never seen a strange person
with karma as bad as yours.
The Tsom Valley is a pathway for all Chinese and Tibetans.
I never heard that you alone own it.

Nevertheless, I have no homeland and no parents.
I go alone wherever I please within this country.
I have no attachment to my body or wealth.
I distribute them as alms to the gods and demons, who are delusions
based on karmic perceptions.
I have eliminated pride over all of them, those with and without
forms.

I know that whatever arises and whatever appears are miraculous
displays of my mind.
I possess the instructions for destroying attachment to delusional
appearances and self-cherishing.
The mind and body of someone like you arises from circumstantial
conditions.
Beneficial and harmful alike, everything is the dynamism of the
dharmakāya,
the expanse of the realization of the primordially liberated unborn
great mother. Phat!

When I rested for a while in the ultimate sphere of purity and equality,
the great state of awareness and emptiness free from extremes,
this delusional appearance disappeared into the ultimate sphere like
a dream.

When I was thirty-two
because of my meager merit
the omniscient refuge master and jewel of my heart,
Pema Lendrel, departed to the ākāśa’ land.72

72. In other words, Driné Özer passed away when Sera Khadro was thirty-two in 1924.
As for me, since that time I was left behind without a protector. I was expelled, without a partner or a home, to a remote land. Even so, I offended everyone's eyes like a thorn.

Only the heart son of my refuge master lama, my vajra sibling Natsok Rangdrol,73 said:

Since you are the supreme consort of the greatly kind one, you cannot be exiled to a distant land.

He made me swear [to stay] by means of a strict Dharma commitment vow. Hence I stayed at Sera Monastery for some years.

Like the refuge master had commanded me to do, I maintained, protected, and disseminated the profound Dharma of the father and son great treasure revealers.74 I propagated the profound Treasures widely to everyone, near and far. In particular, I gave karmically-destined ones, mainly my doctrine holder Prajña Rašmi,75 their paternal inheritance of the two treasures. In addition, innumerable fortunate ones practiced the profound Dharma in secluded places.

By acting for the benefit of myself and others, I maintained the teachings of the two treasures. When the incarnation of my refuge master lama was enthroned, my mental suffering subsided a bit.

Nevertheless, that an ordinary watchdog like me is called a lion with a turquoise mane stems from the kindness of the refuge master Wish-Fulfilling Jewel. When I think about this, my sadness is unceasing.

73. This is Sotul Natsok Rangdrol Rinpoche (1869–1935) of Sera Tselkhen Chömkhor Ling Monastery.
74. The great father and son treasure revealers refer to Düjom Lingpa and Drimé Özer.
75. That is, Sherap Özer, one of Sera Khandro's main disciples, who appears often toward the end of her long autobiography. He was associated with a Vajrocana cave called Khandro Yangseong in Drakshok.
When the all-illuminating sun maṇḍala rises,
I remember the body maṇḍala of the refuge master Wish-Fulfilling Jewel.
When its light dispels the darkness in all directions,
I remember his good quality of unbiased compassion.
When from the sky’s zenith it sets behind the western mountain,
I remember how the master himself came to protect us beings
and then how his physical body passed beyond misery.

When I see the vast expanse of the sky,
I think of his self-arising and spontaneously present body,
which appeared from the expanse of the dharmakāya, the pure basis
of the ultimate sphere.
Whatever symbols and signs I see, whatever arises,
I think of the refuge master Wish-Fulfilling Jewel.

Whatever hermitage or monastery I stay in, I miss my lama.
When I think about his oral instructions on practice, I miss my lama.
When I see my Dharma siblings after a long time, I miss my lama.
No matter what I think about, I miss my lama.
My guide and teacher, Pema Lendrel— I miss him.

Missing him, a perpetual stream of tears flows from my eyes.
Weared by mental torment, my memory is deluded:
Although I continually relied upon him, it seems like it was for just a second;
even though I’ve received many ripening and liberating teachings, it seems
like they lasted for just a moment.
When I recall what has happened, what grief I feel!

When I saw his face, I felt deep faith and devotion.
By just hearing his voice, I entered the path of ripening and liberation.
Through his mind’s realization, he opened one hundred doors of the secret treasury.
He brought down a rain of Dharma that accorded with beings’ capacities,
thus liberating them from the perils of cyclic existence.
Having attained the supreme unsurpassed level of everlasting happiness,
he guided beings toward liberation in the primordial ultimate sphere.

His kindness is inconceivable and cannot be repaid.
Thinking about this, my mind is filled with anguish,
and lamentations about missing my venerable lama come forth.
Nevertheless, in order to return the lama's kindness,
I have cast my negative self-serving thoughts far behind
and taught profound treasures to fortunate ones.

The activities of my body, speech, and mind accorded with the Dharma,
and like a rhinoceros I maintained my practice in seclusion.
Although I was empowered in treasures, I thought that I would not engage
in treasure activities,
that it was enough for a child to maintain her father's Dharma.

Regarding the locations of my profound earth treasures,
the three sacred places of the body, the three sacred places of the mind,
the three white cliffs, the three fortresses, the two hidden lands—
these are said to be the locations of my treasures.

My profound Dharma [includes] the root, trunk,
branch, flower, and fruit of the Dharma.\(^{76}\)
The changeless treasures of enlightened mind are like the earth.
The supplementary treasures of enlightened activities are inconceivable.

My treasure consorts include the supreme two, the excellent three,
and the five great bodhisattvas belonging to the five Buddha families.
As for my doctrine holders, there are four sons who hold the lineage,
eight supreme ones, twenty-five, one hundred, and so forth.
In this lifetime, they will attain the results of the two stages.\(^{77}\)

Ḍākinīs provided prophetic guides, inner prophetic guides, quintessential
prophetic guides,
supplemental prophetic guides, and so forth that prophesied the
circumstances
including the appropriate times, signs, auspicious connections, and so
forth in which I should reveal Dharma treasures.
They predicted that the lands in which I would benefit beings
numbered five

\(^{76}\) See Thondup 1986, 115, for Driné Özer's elder brother the third Dodrupchen Jikmé
Tenpai Nyima's explanation of how various categories of treasures are analogized to the parts
of a tree.

\(^{77}\) The two stages are the generation stage (sbyed rim) and perfection stage (rdo rje rim) of
Tantric meditation.

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and, in particular, that my teachings would spread in the eastern and southern directions.

* * *

I have written this short root text about my treasures to fulfill the wishes of my fortunate disciples. For them, I have written about my enlightened activities in a manner that has great significance but little difficulty. How could secret excellent qualities manifest in someone like me, a simple and ordinary inferior woman?

Nevertheless, by the true compassion of lineage-holding lamas and the ripening of the fruit of the two accumulations [of merit and wisdom], for many lifetimes I was reborn in a body endowed with the Dharma, delighting the hearts of noble ones.

The sovereign of profound treasure, Pema Lingpa, looked after me and infused me with the Dharma of ripening and liberation. By this, our connection from earlier times awakened, and I was empowered in a few treasures.

Then, in several successive births, I attained a bit of realization [from practicing] profound treasures. Even though I didn’t want to look after an entourage of disciples, by the power of my prayers, I skillfully guided them.

Although my secret excellent qualities are minimal, [I wrote] this short story giving the gist of my life not to attract status or the eight worldly dharmas but so as not to disappoint my fortunate disciples.

By the virtue of writing down these lies, may the great beings who preserve the Dharma ever remain.

78. Pema Lingpa (1450–1521) was a treasure revealer and Nyingma religious hierarch from the Bumthang region of Bhutan. Sera Khandro lists Pema Lingpa as one of Driné Özer’s former incarnations in Dri med la zarrnam shur, 7.
May outer and inner auspicious connections come together well, and may merit proliferate.
May the troubles of the entire world and its inhabitants be completely dispelled.
Once all the wars and famines of this unfortunate era have been pacified, may the profound treasure teachings spread in the ten directions and may the deeds and enlightened activities of those great beings who uphold these teachings expand.
May the power and wealth of sponsors increase and flourish.
May sentient beings become abundantly happy and practice the Dharma.

All beings having become my disciples, may they be welcomed by awareness holders, heroes, and dakinis to the Palace of Lotus Light on Cāmara [dvipa]. 79
While singing the Guru Siddhi hymn, 80 may all be born in the dakinis’ land of Oḍḍīyāna inseparable from Pema Drondul Ling. 81
With minds indivisible from that of the Guru, may all attain buddhahood.

Colophon:
This concludes the account of “A Mendicant’s Experiences.” Though the name of the omniscient refuge master is difficult to express, I will do so for a specific reason: the sovereign of Siddhas, the great awareness holder Gelek Palzangpo, had two direct disciples named Dönlü and Rangjung, two vajra siblings who are holy Buddhist monks and sky yogis free from concepts. They both strongly urged me for a long time to write this along with offering me silver and a stainless silk scarf. My disciple the renunciate Sherap Özer also exhorted me again and again to write this by building supports for the three profound treasures and by [vowing] to spend his whole life in a

79 Cāmara [dvipa] (rngag phyag gling) is the southwestern subcontinent in Indian cosmology and is here analogous to Padmasambhava’s Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain buddhfield, at the center of which is his Palace of Lotus Light.

80 The Guru Siddhi hymn is the famous seven-line prayer to Padmasambhava. Tulku Thondup’s translation of it (Thondup 1995, 170–71) is as follows: “Hūṃ / In the northwest of the country of Oḍḍīyāna / Born on the pistil of a lotus / Endowed with the most marvelous attainment / Renowned as the Lotus-Born (Padmasambhava) / Surrounded by a retinue of many Khandros / Following you I practice. / Please come forth to bestow blessings. / Master Padmasambhava, please bestow attainments upon us.”

81 Pema Drondul (Snamgak) Ling (pa) is another name for Drimé Özer, whom she also often called Wish-Fulfilling Jewel (Yid bzhin nor bu).

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secluded hermitage and to do everything in his power to uphold and protect the profound Dharma. In particular, he offered his body, speech, and mind to his lama and promised to abandon non-Dharmic activity for a long time and to devote himself to practice. Additionally, my faithful disciples including Rikzang Gyurmé Trinlé and others begged me again and again [to write this]. So as not to disappoint them, I, Kunzang Dekyong Chönyi Wangmo, the lowest among all the group of disciples of the omniscient refuge master, wrote this when I was thirty-seven on the sixteenth day of the ninth month of the earth-snake year (1929) at Sera Monastery’s secluded retreat place. My attendant, the Buddhist monk Tsültrim Dorjé, gathered the resources necessary to produce this text. May it spread throughout all of space and time, and may it bring good fortune! Sarva mangalam!
**Tibetan Spellings**

**PHONETICS**

Akyong Bum  
Akyongra  
Anzom Gar  
Anyé Machen  
Benak Monastery  
Bön  
Chekri Önbbar  
Dámé  
Dartsang  
Deqé  
Dewai Dorjé  
Dodrupchen Monastery  
Dong Dzongné  
Dónló  
Dorjé Drakzong  
Dorjé Shiwatso  
Drezhong  
Drinmé Özer  
Drondul Pamo Dorjé  
Düjom Jikdral Yeshe Dorjé  
Dzalhok  
Dzongtrul Rinpoché  
Gara Terchen Pema Dun Doming Wangchuk  
Lingpa  
Gcül Gentsangpo  
Gojo  
Golok  
Gyalé  
Jadral Sangye Dorjé  
Jangön Kongtrul  
Jampa Gönpo  
Jangchup Drön  
Jikdral Chöekyi Lodrö  
Jikmé Tenpai Nyima  
Jonang  
Ju Kalzang  
Kagyu  
Khandro Yangzong  
Khandro Rinpoché  
Kanzé  
Karma Lingpa  

**WYLIE TRANSLITERATION**

a sgyong 'bum  
a sgyong bza'  
a 'dzom sgar  
a myes rma chen  
ban nag dgon (alt. ban yak dgon)  
bon  
legs ni 'od 'bar  
za smad  
zlar tshang (alt. gedar tshang, bdla  
tshang, bedar tshang)  
sde dge  
bde ba'i rdo rje  
rdo grub chen dgon  
slong rdzong gnas  
don li  
rdo rje brag rdzong  
rdo rje zhi ba mtsho  
sprel rdzong  
dri med 'od zer  
'gro 'dul dpa' bo rdo rje  
bdbus 'jams 'jigs brag ye shes rdo rje  
rdba khog  
rdzong sprul rin po che  
mgar ra geer chen pad+ma bdud 'dul  
dbang phyug gling pa  
cge legs dpa blang po  
go 'jo  
ngo log  
grual nas  
bya bral sga'i rgyas rdo rje  
'jam gon kong sprul  
byams pa mong po  
byang chub sgon  
'jigs bral chos kyi blo gros  
'jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma  
jo nang  
'ju skal bzang  
'bka' rgyud  
mkha' 'gro yang rdzong  
mkha' 'gro rin po che  
dkar mkhes  
kar+ma gling pa
Khangdöng Wönpo Gönwang
Kharchen
Kharnang
Kunga Bum/a Bumpa
Kunsalma
Kunzang Dehyong Chönyi Wangmo
Kunzit Yeshé Wangmo
Kyung Draktsé
Lingkar
Liacham Chökyi Drönma
Machen Pomra
Mar River
Mönstrup Acha Stōpa
Namtrul Jigmé Phuntsok
Nyenchen ('Thangflia)
Pema Bum
Pema Dronchul (Sangjungk) Ling
Pema Lendrel
Pema Lingpa
Pema Ritho
Pema Tsekyi
Rangjung
Rikzang Gyurmé Trinlé
Rikzin Gyurmé Dorjé
Riwoché
Riwoché Zhapdrung Tsewang
Drakpa
Rolang deal
Saldrōn
Sanglung Monastery
Sera Khandra
Sera ('Thekchen Chönkhor Ling') Monastery
Serta
Sherap Özer
Sotrul Natsok Rangdröl
Tirdé Lhamo
Tidro
Tôngra Drakar
Trinlé Tenzin
Trom
Tsang Gar
Tsering Chönzom
Tshultrim Dorjé
Üza Khandra
Wangchen Bum
Washül
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