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The Dhāraṇī of the Buddha's Essence

Buddhahṛdayadhāraṇī

Translated into Tibetan by
Jinamitra · Dānaśīla · Bandé Yeshé Dé

འཕགས་པ་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་སྙིང་པོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་གཟུངས།

'phags pa sangs rgyas kyi snying po zhes bya ba'i gzungs

The Noble Dhāraṇī of the Buddha's Essence

Āryabuddhahṛdayanāmadhāraṇī



Toh 855
Degé Kangyur, vol. 100 (gzungs 'dus, e), folios 74.b–76.a

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SUMMARY

- s.1 *The Dhāraṇī of the Buddha's Essence* is structured as a dialogue between the Buddha and a retinue of gods from the Śuddhāvāsa realm. The dialogue revolves around the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa* and the role that the gods of Śuddhāvāsa can play in continuing to guide beings in his absence until the next tathāgata appears in the world. *The Dhāraṇī of the Buddha's Essence* is then introduced as the specific instruction that the gods of Śuddhāvāsa should preserve and propagate after Śākyamuni has departed. The Buddha then provides a list of benefits that members of the saṅgha can accrue by reciting this dhāraṇī.

ac.

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ac.1 Translated by the Dharmachakra Translation Committee under the supervision of Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche. The translation was produced by Adam Krug and then checked against the Tibetan and edited by Ryan Damron.

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i.

INTRODUCTION

i.1

The Dhāraṇī of the Buddha's Essence is structured as a dialogue between the Buddha and a retinue of gods from the Śuddhāvāsa realm. The dialogue revolves around the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa* and the role that the gods of Śuddhāvāsa can play in continuing to guide beings in his absence until the next tathāgata appears in the world. *The Dhāraṇī of the Buddha's Essence* is then introduced as the specific instruction that the gods of Śuddhāvāsa should preserve and propagate after Śākyamuni has departed. The Buddha then provides a list of benefits that members of the saṅgha can accrue by reciting this dhāraṇī.

i.2

The translators' colophon tells us that *The Dhāraṇī of the Buddha's Essence* was translated by the Indian preceptors Jinamitra and Dānaśīla along with the Tibetan translator Yeshé Dé (ca. eighth and ninth centuries). The text appears in the Phangthangma¹ imperial Tibetan inventory of translated works among the collection of various dhāraṇī. In the Denkarma inventory's list of dhāraṇī, there are two texts entitled *The Buddha's Essence* ('*phags pa sangs rgyas kyi snying po*),² and while neither of them matches the full title of the present work, the second mention is the more likely to correspond to it judging by the recorded length of the text (thirty-eight ślokas); the first record (fifty-five ślokas) probably corresponds to another, slightly longer text with a similar title, *The Dhāraṇī Discourse on the Buddha's Essence* ('*phags pa sangs rgyas kyi snying po zhes bya ba'i gzungs kyi chos kyi rnam grangs*, Toh 514, 854). These works appear alongside each other in the Degé Kangyur in both the Tantra Collection (*rgyud 'bum*) and the Compendium of Dhāraṇīs (*gzungs 'dus*).

i.3

The Dhāraṇī of the Buddha's Essence does not appear in the Kangyurs of mainly Thempangma lineage, but it is present in the predominantly Tshalpa Kangyurs and in a number of mixed, Bhutanese, and Mongolian Kangyurs,

and is mentioned in the catalog of the old Mustang Kangyur.³ Butön recorded the mantra from this text in his *Collection of Dhāraṇī of the Four Classes of Secret Mantra* (*gsang sngags rgyud sde bzhi'i gzungs 'bum*).⁴

i.4 The text was translated into Chinese in 650 CE by Xuanzang⁵ (Taishō 918) and again in the late tenth century by Fatian⁶ (Taishō 919). No Sanskrit witness to this text has been identified to date.

i.5 This translation is based on the Tibetan translations of the text from the Tantra Collection and the Compendium of Dhāraṇīs in the Degé Kangyur in conjunction with the text as it appears in the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*) of the Kangyur.

**The Noble
Dhāraṇī of the Buddha's Essence**

1.

The Translation

[F.74.b]^Z

1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas.

1.2 Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was seated upon a lion throne in a seashore grove surrounded on all sides by the forest that was the Buddha's domain. There, he taught the Dharma to a retinue of gods that had gathered around and paid their respects to him.

1.3 The Blessed One addressed [F.75.a] the gods of the Śuddhāvāsa realm such as Maheśvara, Suvrata,⁸ and the rest, saying, "Gods, listen well, pay attention, and I will teach. The Thus-Gone One, in order in future times to gather a fourfold retinue, look after them, care for them in all manner of ways, and cause them to advance, to bring those who possess all the teachings and their meanings to perfection, and to bring all who are properly established in the Great Vehicle to specific attainment in all its aspects, teaches and explains the dhāraṇī discourse called *The Buddha's Essence*. You should retain it and, both now and in future times after I have passed into *parinirvāṇa*, teach and explain it to all members of the fourfold retinue who are properly established in the Great Vehicle. Never forsake it, and always teach it and promote it. As long as there are beings who are destitute and affected by the obscurations, you should preserve the teaching of the Thus-Gone One for them, teach it, and promote it."

1.4 The gods replied, "Blessed One, we will do just that. We will sincerely and perfectly carry out the Thus-Gone One's command."

1.5 The Blessed One addressed them, saying, "Gods, this is the Dharma discourse called *The Buddha's Essence*:

*tadyathā amale nirmale sarvākārārthapariprāpte asamantasarovakunākāre
tryadhvāsaṅgānāvṛte samantadaśadīśaparipūrṇajñāne sarvāsaṅgadarśanaprāpte
sarvadharmam aviśataparipūrṇe sarvākārasaṅgasamanvite samantāpra tihatateje*

*tryadhvadaśasu dikṣupariprāptārthe śānta-prāsanta-upaśānta-samaśānta-
vimokṣānuprāpte supratibuddhadharmadhātu atyantasunisrite sarvākāraṇiḥsaraṇa
[F.75.b] anavaśeṣaparaṅgate vipramukta asaṇiyoga viprayoga-sthite dharmate
gaganasama-prakṛtipariśuddha-nirmale asamanta-tryadhvānugata-suprāpte
pūrvānta-aparanta madhyatryadhvasamantānuprāpte anavaśeṣa parijñāprahana-
bhavana-sakṣātkriyaparamaparaṅgate yathāvati tathākāri sarvākārasaṃpanne
sarvākāramahā maitrimahākaraṇā sarvākārasamasagrahānuprāpte*

- 1.6 “Gods, this is the dhāraṇī discourse called *The Buddha’s Essence*. If noble sons or daughters from the fourfold community who are properly established in the Great Vehicle wear it on their bodies, recite it well, and uphold it, they will never give rise to inferior mental states. The Thus-Gone One will likewise remain with them, seated above the crowns of their heads. Some will certainly see the Buddha, some will hear him teach, some will become Dharma teachers, and some will gain the dhāraṇī power of not forgetting. Students who are on the path will never have that path interrupted, and they will have a continual stream of Dharma teachers. They will understand everything, never forget it, and be only one birth away from awakening. With those qualities, they will gain the power of retaining the entire ocean of knowledge.⁹ They will receive all the attainments, beginning with acceptance of the fact that phenomena do not arise up to becoming fully liberated, perfect buddhas who are free from obscurations. You gods will understand the meaning of my teachings in this lifetime. You should teach it and promote it among the sons and daughters of the lineage. Do not cast it aside, do not forsake it, and do not forget it!”
- 1.7 The gods responded, “Blessed One, we shall do just as you have said. We will teach and explain the Blessed One’s dhāraṇī discourse called *The Buddha’s Essence* [F.76.a] to the fourfold assembly, without hesitation, in its entirety. We will teach it and promote it among noble sons and daughters. It will be just as the Thus-Gone One has said. We will fully comprehend the Thus-Gone One’s holy Dharma, and for the noble sons and daughters will be of great meaning and something of great benefit.”
- 1.8 The Blessed One replied, “That is why you gods must do as I have said. This is the teaching that I give to you.”
- 1.9 After the Blessed One had spoken, the gods of the Śuddhāvāsa realm such as Maheśvara and Suvrata, along with the entire assembly, praised the Blessed One’s words.
- 1.10 *This concludes “The Dhāraṇī of the Buddha’s Essence.”*

Colophon

c.

c.1 This work was translated and edited by the Indian preceptors Jinamitra and Dānaśīla along with the great editor and translator Bandé Yeshé Dé. It was then corrected according to the new translation guidelines and then finalized.

NOTES

n.

- n.1 *dkar chag 'phang thang ma* (2003), 28.
- n.2 Denkarma, folios 302.a.7 and 302.b.4-5; see also Yoshimura (1950), 151; 152.
- n.3 For a complete listing see Resources for Kanjur and Tanjur Studies:
<http://www.rkts.org/cat.php?id=514&typ=1> (<http://www.rkts.org/cat.php?id=514&typ=1>).
- n.4 Butön Rinchen Drup (1965–1971), folios 246.b–247.a.
- n.5 玄奘 Xuanzang. For more information on this figure, see Lewis R. Lancaster, “K 444,” *The Korean Buddhist Canon*, accessed November 16, 2018, http://www.acmuller.net/descriptive_catalogue/files/k0444.html (http://www.acmuller.net/descriptive_catalogue/files/k0444.html).
- n.6 法天 Fatian. For more information on this figure, see Lewis R. Lancaster, “K 1134,” *The Korean Buddhist Canon*, accessed November 16, 2018, http://www.acmuller.net/descriptive_catalogue/files/k1134.html (http://www.acmuller.net/descriptive_catalogue/files/k1134.html).
- n.7 In the Toh 515 version of the text there is a slight discrepancy in the folio numbering between the 1737 *par phud* printings and the late (post *par phud*) printings of the Degé Kangyur. Although the discrepancy is irrelevant here, further details concerning this may be found in [note 7](https://read.84000.co/translation/toh515.html#end-note-UT22084-088-009-53) (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh515.html#end-note-UT22084-088-009-53>) of the Toh 515 version of this text.
- n.8 Tibetan: *dbang phyug chen po dka' thub bzang po la sogs pa*. This translation interprets *dbang phyug chen po* and *dka' thub bzang po* as two separate deities, the Śaiva godhead Maheśvara and Suvrata (also rendered as *munisuwrata*), the twentieth Jain arhat of the present descending period of the cosmic cycle (*avasarpinī*). The reader should note that it is possible to interpret the term

dka' thub bzang po/suvrata as an epithet for Maheśvara, but this is likely not the correct interpretation in this case. The setting for this text, Śuddhāvāsa, is the highest heavenly realm of existence that, in Buddhist traditions, is accessed by attaining the fourth and highest level of meditative absorption (*dhyāna, bsam gtan*). This places the setting at the zenith of reality, which various Śaiva traditions identify with the Maheśvara form of Śiva. It is also the realm in which the Jain traditions locate those arhats who, like Suvrata/Munisuvrata, have ascended to the highest reality where they await the arrival of the next Tīrthāṅkara and final liberation. In this work, the point of listing the two divine beings that occupy the highest level of reality in the Śaiva and Jain traditions is both to identify them among the worldly deities occupying the highest level of saṃsāra that can carry on the Buddha's teaching after his parinirvāṇa and to place them in a position that is subordinate to the Buddha himself.

- n.9 Tibetan: *thos pa rgya mtsho thams cad kyi gzungs*. The term *gzungs/dhāraṇī* is translated here as “the power of retaining” instead of being left in the Sanskrit. In this case it refers to a specific power that bodhisattvas gain, not a *dhāraṇī* in the sense of a set of verses that are recited as a means to attain some form of benefit.

b.

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GLOSSARY

· Types of attestation for Sanskrit names and terms ·

AS	<i>Attested in source text</i> This term is attested in the Sanskrit manuscript used as a source for this translation.
AO	<i>Attested in other text</i> This term is attested in other Sanskrit manuscripts of the Kangyur or Tengyur.
AD	<i>Attested in dictionary</i> This term is attested in Tibetan-Sanskrit dictionaries.
AA	<i>Approximate attestation</i> The attestation of this name is approximate. It is based on other names where Tibetan-Sanskrit relationship is attested in dictionaries or other manuscripts.
RP	<i>Reconstruction from Tibetan phonetic rendering</i> This term is a reconstruction based on the Tibetan phonetic rendering of the term.
RS	<i>Reconstruction from Tibetan semantic rendering</i> This term is a reconstruction based on the semantics of the Tibetan translation.
SU	<i>Source Unspecified</i> This term has been supplied from an unspecified source, which most often is a widely trusted dictionary.

g.1 acceptance of the fact that phenomena do not arise

mi skye ba'i chos la bzod pa thob pa

མི་སྐྱེ་བའི་ཚོས་ལ་བཟོད་པ་ཐོབ་པ།

anutpattikadharmakṣāntilabha

The name of a meditative state associated with the path of seeing after which a bodhisattva's progress on the path is irreversible.

g.2 Maheśvara
dbang phyug chen po
དབང་ཕྱུག་ཚེན་པོ།
maheśvara
A name for the Hindu deity Śiva.

g.3 Śuddhāvāsa
gnas gtsang ma'i ri
གནས་གཙང་མའི་རི།
śuddhāvāsa
The “Pure Abode” heaven; a name for the five highest levels of existence within the form realm.

g.4 Suvrata
dka' thub bzang po
དཀའ་སྲུབ་བཟང་པོ།
suvrata · munisuvrata
The name of the twentieth Jain arhat of the present descending age (*avasarpinī*).