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The Dhāraṇī of the Six Gates

Ṣaṇmukhīdhāraṇī

འཕགས་པ་སྒོ་ལྷན་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་གཟུངས།

'phags pa sgo drug pa zhes bya ba'i gzungs

The Noble Dhāraṇī of the Six Gates

Āryaṣaṇmukhīnāmadhāraṇī



Toh 141
Degé Kangyur, vol. 56 (mdo sde, na), folios 299.a–300.a.

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SUMMARY

- s.1 While the Buddha is abiding in the space above the Śuddhāvāsa realm with a retinue of bodhisattvas, he urges them to uphold *The Dhāraṇī of the Six Gates* and presents these gates as six aspirations that vanquish the causes of saṃsāric experience. He then presents the dhāraṇī itself to his listeners and instructs them to recite it three times each day and three times each night. Finally, he indicates the benefits that come from this practice, and the assembly praises the Buddha's words. This is followed by a short dedication marking the conclusion of the text.

ac.

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ac.1 Giuliano Proença and Leticia Osorio produced and revised the translation. Joaquim Monteiro provided comparisons with the Chinese versions of the consulted texts and gave valuable references throughout the translation process. Giuliano Proença wrote the introduction and other ancillary elements while Leticia Osorio revised them.

The translation was completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

INTRODUCTION

i.

i.1 *The Dhāraṇī of the Six Gates* is a short text that consists mainly of a dhāraṇī taught by the Buddha to an assembly of bodhisattvas. According to Pedro Sánchez,¹ this style of dhāraṇī appeared between the third and eighth centuries CE. Since Xuanzang's Chinese translation dates to 645 CE, this text must have already been available at the beginning of the seventh century. It appears to have enjoyed a certain level of popularity, since we find many copies of it among the Dunhuang documents in Tibetan and Chinese, as well as several Indian, Tibetan, and Chinese commentaries and recitation texts based on it.

i.2 One of its commentaries, the *Ṣaṇmukhīdhāraṇīṭyākhyāna* (Toh 3989), appears in the Tengyur and is attributed to Vasubandhu (fourth to fifth century); its Chinese translation is in the Taishō. Its subcommentary (IOL Tib J 430) written by Jñānadatta has been preserved only in Tibetan and Chinese among the Dunhuang manuscripts. According to the colophon of the Dunhuang texts, these Indian commentaries were translated into Tibetan by the Indian paṇḍitas Dharmapāla and Prajñāvarman and the Tibetan translator-monk Yeshé Dé.

i.3 There are four known Tibetan commentaries on the *Ṣaṇmukhīdhāraṇī* composed by the renowned scholars Butön Rinchen Drup (1290–1364), Jonang Tāranātha (1575–1634), the seventh Dalai Lama (1708–57), and the Geluk scholar Ngülchu Dharmabhadra (1772–1851). The Phangthangma, one of the imperial catalogs of translated works, also mentions two sādhanas related to the *Ṣaṇmukhīdhāraṇī*, which we could not locate. There are available, however, some relatively modern recitation texts related to this dhāraṇī composed by Ngawang Khedrup (1779–1838) and Losang Tsültrim Gyatso (1845–1915).

i.4 It is not known who translated *The Dhāraṇī of the Six Gates* into Tibetan. Neither the colophons, the Denkarma and Phangthangma imperial catalogs, nor Tibetan historical works mention the translators. The inclusion of our

text in the Denkarma catalog, dated to ca. 812 CE, confirms that the translation was made by the early ninth century at the latest. It seems likely that this dhāraṇī was translated from an Indian original since, according to the Phangthangma catalog, it was not among the dhāraṇīs that were translated from Chinese.

i.5 Texts that include dhāraṇīs, as well as those referred to as dhāraṇīs by their titles, are widespread in the Mahāyāna sūtra literature as well as featuring in the tantras. Gergely Hidas, for example, notes that dhāraṇī scriptures have been assigned both to sūtra and tantra categories in Buddhist canonical collections and that their classification is “sometimes controversial within Tibetan and Chinese textual systems.”² In this regard, it is interesting to note that three almost identical versions of the *Ṣaṣṭhāraṇī* are assigned to the Sūtra, Tantra, and Dhāraṇī sections of the Kangyurs of the Tshalpa group. In the Thempangma Kangyurs, such as the Stok Palace Kangyur, it is included exclusively in the Tantra section. In the Lhasa and Narthang Kangyurs, we find almost identical versions of *The Dhāraṇī of the Six Gates* in both the Sūtra and Tantra sections. Our text is also found among the Dunhuang manuscripts.³ All versions are roughly the same length. There were probably different sources for the Tibetan translations that were found in Dunhuang: Pelliot tibétain 415 is almost identical to the Thempangma versions, while Pelliot tibétain 77 is in some cases closer to the Tshalpa versions.

i.6 Fortunately, there are a few extant Sanskrit manuscripts of *The Dhāraṇī of the Six Gates*. Mimaki (1977b) prepared a critical edition based on these manuscripts and prepared a critical edition of the Tibetan based on various canonical translations. The Tibetan versions seem to be quite accurate translations of the Sanskrit text, although there are minor differences between them. It is noteworthy that the versions of the Thempangma Kangyur group, like that of the Stok Palace, and Pelliot tibétain 415 are closer to the extant Sanskrit version than versions from the Tshalpa Kangyur group. *The Dhāraṇī of the Six Gates* was translated into Chinese by the great translator Xuanzang in 645 CE (Taishō 1360). The Chinese translation differs considerably from the Sanskrit and the Tibetan, especially in its presentation of the six gates, despite having the same structure as the Sanskrit and Tibetan texts. Interestingly, the Tibetan and Chinese translations of the above-mentioned commentary and subcommentary are similar in content and wording. Even the quotations of the six gates in the Chinese subcommentary more closely match the Tibetan text of *The Dhāraṇī of the Six Gates* than Xuanzang’s rendering of the six gates.

- i.7 In addition to his critical editions of the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions of the text, Mimaki (1977a) offers a French translation. Mimaki also examines references to *The Dhāraṇī of the Six Gates* in later treatises and its possible affiliation to the Sautrāntika school. He lists the extant Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese manuscripts of the text, as well as the Tibetan editions and the commentaries. He also compares his Sanskrit edition with the Tibetan and with the Chinese canonical versions. Mimaki's research proved invaluable for preparing our own translation.
- i.8 We have based our translation mainly on the Tibetan text as found in the Sūtra section of the Degé Kangyur (Toh 141), but consulted the other versions found in the Action Tantra and Dhāraṇī sections to clarify ambiguous passages (Toh 526 and Toh 916, respectively).⁴ Whenever our main source text diverged from the Sanskrit, we compared the passage in question with other Tibetan translations, including the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*) and Stok Palace versions, and the two complete Tibetan manuscripts from Dunhuang, and we recorded variant readings in the notes. Moreover, in cases where both the Tibetan and Sanskrit texts allowed for different readings, we consulted the Indian commentaries on *The Dhāraṇī of the Six Gates* for clarification.
- i.9 As suggested by its title, *The Dhāraṇī of the Six Gates* consists in an account of the six gates, which are presented as a series of six aspiration prayers, followed by the presentation of the dhāraṇī itself. The goal of the dhāraṇī is to transcend worldly suffering by eradicating the causes of saṃsāric experience.
- i.10 The text begins with the Buddha advising his audience of innumerable bodhisattvas to uphold *The Dhāraṇī of the Six Gates* for the good of the entire world. He then utters the six aspirations, which can be summarized as recognizing one's own sufferings as no different from those of all beings in saṃsāra, using worldly happiness for the benefit of others as well as oneself, purifying one's misdeeds through confession, understanding demonic actions, developing virtue through supreme knowledge, and liberating all beings from saṃsāra.
- i.11 He finally instructs the assembly to recite the dhāraṇī three times each day and three times each night and then highlights the benefits that derive from this practice, including the ultimate benefit of attaining spiritual awakening. The text concludes with the assembly praising the Buddha's teaching. This is followed by a short dedication marking the conclusion of the text. In one Tibetan canonical version (Toh 141), two auspicious sayings in Sanskrit and the "Verse on Dependent Arising" (*Pratītyasamutpādagāthā*) appear after the dedication.

The Noble Dhāraṇī of the Six Gates

1.

The Translation

[F.299.a]⁵

1.1 Homage to Mañjuśrī Kumārabhūta.⁶

Thus did I hear at one time. The Bhagavān was dwelling together with an assembly of innumerable bodhisattvas in a pavilion ornately decorated with the seven kinds of precious jewels⁷ that was located in the firmament of the sky above Śuddhāvāsa.

1.2 On that occasion, the Bhagavān said to the bodhisattvas, “Children of a noble family, [F.299.b] may you uphold *The Dhāraṇī of the Six Gates* for the benefit and well-being of the whole world.⁸ It is as follows:

1.3 “As I pass through life after life in saṃsāra,⁹ whatever suffering I experience, may it not be characterized by my not understanding that it is the same for all beings.

1.4 “Whatever happiness due to worldly success I experience, may I make use of it in common with all beings to bring about thorough understanding.¹⁰

1.5 “Whatever misdeeds and non-virtuous actions¹¹ I have done, may I not fail to confess each one of them through unsurpassed confession.

1.6 “Whatever demonic actions have been done to me,¹² may I not fail to thoroughly understand them through unsurpassed thorough understanding.

1.7 “Whatever roots of virtue I may have, both mundane and supramundane, endowed with the perfections, may they become the fruit of unsurpassable wisdom for all beings.¹³

1.8 “Whatever liberation I may have, through it may all sentient beings be released.¹⁴ May I stay neither in saṃsāra nor in nirvāṇa.¹⁵

1.9 *tadyathā oṃ kṣame kṣame kṣānte kṣānte dame dame dānte dānte bhadre bhadre subhadre subhadre candre candre sucandre sucandre candrakiraṇe candravati tejovati yaśovati¹⁶ dharmavati brahmavati sarvakleśaviśodhani sarvārthasādhani*

*sarvānarthaprasāmani*¹⁷ *paramārthasādhani* *kāyaviśodhani* *vāgviśodhani*¹⁸
manāḥsaṃśodhani svāhā

1.10 “Therefore, children of a noble family, if any sons or daughters of a noble family recite *The Dhāraṇī of the Six Gates* three times by day and three times by night, [F.300.a] then, having purified all their karmic obscurations, they will remember their previous lives up to seven lifetimes¹⁹ and will swiftly²⁰ and fully awaken to unsurpassed perfect buddhahood.”²¹

1.11 When the delighted Bhagavān had spoken these words, the assembly of bodhisattvas,²² and the world with its devas, humans, asuras, and gandharvas²³ rejoiced in what the Bhagavān had said.²⁴

1.12 *Thus ends “The Noble Dhāraṇī of the Six Gates.”*

1.13 *śubham astu sarvajagatām*²⁵

ye dharmā hetuprabhavā hetuṃ teṣāṃ tathāgato hy avadat
*teṣāṃ ca yo nirodha evaṃvādī mahāśramaṇaḥ*²⁶

*maṅgalaṃ bhavatu*²⁷

ab.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>A</i>	Comparative Edition (<i>dpe bsdur ma</i>) of the Kangyur
<i>D (Toh 141)</i>	Degé (<i>sde dge</i>) Kangyur—Sūtra section
<i>D (Toh 526)</i>	Degé (<i>sde dge</i>) Kangyur—Tantra section
<i>D (Toh 916)</i>	Degé (<i>sde dge</i>) Kangyur—Dhāraṇī section
<i>H_T</i>	Lhasa (<i>zhol</i>) Kangyur—Tantra section
<i>K</i>	Peking (<i>pe cin</i>) Kangxi Kangyur
<i>K_Y</i>	Peking Yongle (<i>g.yung lo</i>) Kangyur
<i>N_T</i>	Narthang (<i>snar thang</i>) Kangyur—Tantra section
<i>PT</i>	Pelliot tibétain (numbers denote specific texts in collection)
<i>S</i>	Stok Palace (<i>stog pho brang</i>) Manuscript Kangyur
<i>Skt.</i>	Mimaki's Sanskrit edition (1977)
<i>Toh</i>	Degé (<i>sde dge</i>) Kangyur (numbers denote specific texts in collection)

n.

NOTES

n.1 Sánchez 2011, p. 28.

n.2 Hidas 2015, p. 130.

n.3 Complete and fragmentary, as PT 77, PT 414, PT 415, PT 416, IOL Tib J 426, IOL Tib J 427, and IOL Tib J 432.

n.4 Note that there is a discrepancy among various databases for cataloging the Toh 916 version of this text within vol. 100 or 101 of the Degé Kangyur. See Toh 916 note 4 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh916.html#end-note-UT22084-056-009-132>) for details.

n.5 In the Toh 526 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 5 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh526.html#end-note-UT22084-056-009-133>) of the Toh 526 version of this text.

n.6 In the Skt. edition we find *om namo buddhāya* (“om homage to the Buddha”), while S, PT, N_T, and H_T read *sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa’ thams cad la phyang ’tshal lo* (“Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas”). According to the instructions regarding Tripiṭaka translations decreed to the translators by the king Tri Ralpachen, a translators’ homage made to Mañjuśrī was supposed to be a mark of Abhidharma texts, while homage to the Buddha and homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas were deemed appropriate for Vinaya and Sūtra texts, respectively.

n.7 We have followed the Tib. reading. The Skt. reads “decorated with various jewels, among which the seven kinds of jewels were arranged.” For the critically edited Skt. text, see Mimaki 1977b, p. 10.

- n.8 We follow the Tib. *'gro ba thams cad la phan pa dang bde ba'i phyir*. The Skt. reads *sarvajagaddhitārthaṃ* (“for the benefit of the whole world”).
- n.9 Translated based on the Skt. *saṃsāre saṃsarato* and S, PT *'khor ba na 'khor ba'i tshé*. All witnesses in A have *'khor ba nas 'khor ba'i skye gnas gzhan dag tu* (“from saṃsāra to other saṃsāric rebirths”).
- n.10 The sūtra versions in D (Toh 141) and N, K, H, and C all read *yongs su shes par byed par spyod par gyur cig*, whereas the tantra and dhāraṇī versions in D (Toh 526 and 916) and the other Kangyurs read simply *yongs su spyod par gyur cig*. The extant Sanskrit versions do not include any equivalent to the phrase *yongs su shes par byed par* (“to bring about thorough understanding”).
- n.11 PT 77 adds *las kyi sgribs pa* and S adds *las kyi sgrib pa* (“karmic obscurations”). The phrase in the Skt. is *pāpakarmākuśalamūlaṃ karmāvaraṇaṃ* (“misdeeds, roots of nonvirtue, karmic obscurations”).
- n.12 The Skt. reads *me mārakarmāṇi*. All witnesses included in A have *bdag gi bdud kyi las gang ci byas pa de yongs su shes pas*, except for N_T and H_T. N_T, H_T, and S read *bdag la bdud kyi las gang dag yod pa de dag yongs su shes pas*. Although versions of this phrase could be interpreted as speaking of one’s own “demonic actions,” the commentary attributed to Vasubandhu suggests that the obstacle to be overcome here is rather actions done *to* one (and influences exerted on one) by others. However, Tāranātha’s commentary (p. 355), while confirming that for experienced practitioners “demonic actions” may be interpreted as applying mainly to others, lists them as including such things as procrastination, laziness, rowdiness, belittling others’ virtuous actions, disliking perfections, slandering bodhisattvas, favoring false views, getting distracted while in meditation, turning away from and diminishing virtuous actions, and having incompatible attitudes after engaging in them—all tendencies that less-than-perfect practitioners could potentially interpret as applying to themselves.
- n.13 The Sanskrit text reads *sarvasattvānām* (“for all sentient beings”) and omits the equivalent for “fruit.” N_T, S, and PT omit *thams cad* (“all”).
- n.14 PT 77 reads *gang bdag gi rnam par grol ba de sems can thams cad kyi rnam par grol bar 'gyur cig* (“may my liberation be the liberation of all sentient beings”). It is closer to the Skt. *yā ca me vimuktiḥ sā bhavatu sarvasattvavimokṣāya* (“may my liberation be for the liberation of all sentient beings”).
- n.15 Most of the versions in the Sūtra sections of Tshalpa Kangyurs do not specify that this aspiration to remain neither in saṃsāra nor nirvāṇa is made

for oneself, but here we have followed K and K_Y in the Sūtra section, all witnesses in A for Toh 916 and Toh 526, and S and PT 415, which read *'khor ba dang mya ngan las 'das pa la bdag gnas par ma gyur cig*. The Skt. has *mā ca me bhūt saṃsāre nirvāṇe pratiṣṭhitatā*, with the same meaning.

- n.16 The Skt. reads *dhanavati*.
- n.17 Following Skt. and PT; D and other Kangyurs read *sarvārthaprasāmane*, which would mean “O remover of everything that is valuable.”
- n.18 Following Skt., K, S, and K_Y in the Tantra section; D and other Kangyurs read *vākaviśodhani*.
- n.19 Skt., S, N_T, H_T, and PT 415 omit this passage on the recollection of former lives.
- n.20 Following the Skt. which has *kṣipram* (“swiftly”), translated in S, N_T, H_T, and PT as *myur du*.
- n.21 The Skt. reads, “If anyone, son or daughter of a good family, recites this *dhāraṇī* of the six gates three times each night and three times each day, then, having abandoned all karma, they will quickly reach the supreme state of perfect awakening.” For the critically edited Skt. text, see Mimaki 1977b, p. 10.
- n.22 Instead of “assembly of bodhisattvas,” the Skt. reads *bodhisattvā mahāsattvā*, and S, N_T, H_T, and PT 415 read *byang chub sems dpa' sems dpa' chen po* (“bodhisattvas mahāsattvas”).
- n.23 This passage is missing in the Sanskrit. In PT 415, S, D (Toh 916), and D (Toh 526) following “the assembly of bodhisattvas,” it instead reads *gnas gtsang ma'i ris kyi lha'i bu de dag* (“the gods of Śuddhāvāsa”).
- n.24 The Skt. reads, “When the delighted Bhagavān had thus spoken, the bodhisattva mahāsattvas rejoiced in what the Blessed One had taught.” For the critically edited Skt. text, see Mimaki 1977b, p. 10. Commentators and translators have disagreed over whether the adjective *ravi* (“delighted”) here applies to the Bhagavān, to the bodhisattvas (as in the Chinese translations), or to both (as in the Tibetan translations that have *dgyes* for the Bhagavān and *yi(d) rang(s)* for the assembly). On this delicate issue, see Mimaki 1977b, p. 13, n. 9.
- n.25 “May there be benefit for all beings.” Only D (Toh 141) has this and the following auspicious sayings in Sanskrit.

n.26 For the translation of these verses, see the Buddhavacana Translation Group, trans., *The Sūtra on Dependent Arising* (Toh 212), 2016, 1.5 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh212.html#UT22084-062-012-12>).

n.27 “May it be auspicious.”

b.

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g.

GLOSSARY

g.1

Asura

lha ma yin

ལྷ་མ་ཡིན།

asura

One of the six classes of sentient beings. The asuras are engendered and dominated by envy, ambition, and hostility and are metaphorically described as being incessantly embroiled in disputes with the gods (*deva*). They are frequently portrayed in brahmanical mythology as having a disruptive effect on cosmological and social harmony.

g.2

Bhagavān

bcom ldan 'das

བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས།

bhagavān

“Blessed One,” an epithet of the Buddha.

g.3

Bodhisattva

byang chub sems dpa'

བྱང་ལྷུབ་སེམས་དཔལ།

bodhisattva

A being who is dedicated to the cultivation and fulfillment of the intention to attain perfect buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings.

g.4

Demonic action

bdud kyi las

བདུད་ཀྱི་ལས།

*māra**karman*

An action that is either done by the god-demon Māra (the personification of evil) himself; or by beings belonging to the class of demons; or by humans either (literally) under demonic influence or (figuratively) under the influence of whatever distractions, obstacles, and afflictions act as an impediment to liberation.

g.5 Deva

lha

ལྷ།

deva

Lit. “god.” A class of beings in the higher planes of existence in the desire realm, as well as in the form and formless realms.

g.6 Dhāraṇī

gzungs

གཟུངས།

dhāraṇī

A verbal formula or phrase that can serve a variety of purposes depending on the genre of text. It often refers to a magical incantation for attaining mundane or supramundane goals.

g.7 Gandharva

dri za

དྷིཟ།

gandharva

A class of sentient beings who live on scents and are particularly known to be musicians.

g.8 Karmic obscurations

las kyi sgrib pa

ལས་ཀྱི་སློབ་པ།

karmāvaraṇa

Obstructions due to past actions.

g.9 Mañjuśrī Kumārabhūta

'jam dpal gzhon nur gyur pa

འཇམ་དབལ་གཞོན་ནུ་རྒྱུ་བ།

Mañjuśrīkumārabhūta

The bodhisattva who is considered the embodiment of wisdom, with the additional honorific title for a young man, since he is perennially youthful.

g.10 Nirvāṇa

mya ngan las 'das pa

སྤྱི་རྣམ་ལས་འདས་པ།

nirvāṇa

Final liberation from suffering. The Sanskrit literally means “extinguishment” and the Tibetan “the transcendence of suffering.”

g.11 Perfection

pha rol tu phyin pa

ཕ་རོལ་ཏུ་ཕྱིན་པ།

pāramitā

Typically refers to the practices of the bodhisattvas, which are embraced with knowledge. The six perfections are generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, concentration, and wisdom.

g.12 Roots of nonvirtue

mi dge ba'i rtsa ba

མི་དགེ་བའི་རྩ་བ།

akuśalamūla

Usually referring to the ten unwholesome actions, which are taking life, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct, lying, sowing discord, harsh speech, worthless chatter, covetousness, wishing harm on others, and wrong views.

g.13 Roots of virtue

dge ba'i rtsa ba

དགེ་བའི་རྩ་བ།

kuśalamūla

Wholesome actions that are conducive to happiness.

g.14 Saṃsāra

'khor ba

འཁོར་བ།

saṃsāra

The cyclic existence in which beings are confined to suffering and unsatisfactoriness.

g.15 Seven kinds of precious jewels

rin po che sna bdun

ཇིག་པོ་ཆེ་སྣ་བདུན།

saptaratna

The list of seven precious materials varies. One possible listing is gold, silver, cat's eye, crystal, ruby, emerald, and amethyst.

g.16 Śuddhāvāsa

gnas gtsang ma

གནས་གཙང་མ།

Śuddhāvāsa

Name for the five highest levels of existence within the form realm.

g.17 Thorough understanding

yongs su shes pa

ཡོངས་སྤྱི་ཤེས་པ།

parijñāna

A general term that may here imply not just understanding or knowledge but realization or even awakening.