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## The Epithets of Mañjuśrī

འཕགས་པ་འཇམ་དཔལ་གྱི་མཚན།

*'phags pa 'jam dpal gyi mtshan*

The Noble Epithets of Mañjuśrī



Toh 548  
Degé Kangyur, vol. 89 (rgyud 'bum, pa), folios 14.b.1–14.b.2

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co.

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## SUMMARY

- s.1 *The Epithets of Mañjuśrī* is a concise scripture consisting of a salutation to Mañjuśrī that highlights the qualities of his speech, a thirty-six-syllable Sanskrit dhāraṇī, and a one-sentence statement of the benefit accrued by twenty-one recitations thereof.

ac.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ac.1 Translated by David Mellins and Kaia Fischer, with Geshé Lobsang Dawa and Phakyab Rinpoche (Geshé Ngawang Sungrab), under the auspices of the Tibetan Classics Translators Guild of New York. Introduction by David Mellins and Kaia Fischer. Special thanks to Paul Hackett for generously sharing his bibliographic expertise and resources. This translation would not have been possible without the kind and dedicated tutelage of Gen Lozang Jamspal, Executive Director, Tibetan Classics Translators Guild of New York.

ac.2 The translation was completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

## INTRODUCTION

i.

i.1 *The Epithets of Mañjuśrī* is the fourth of six dhāraṇī scriptures (Toh 545–550) gathered together within the Tantra section of the Degé Kangyur that provide instruction in incantatory practices that feature the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. Five of these scriptures (Toh 547 omitted) also appear in the Dhāraṇī section of the Degé Kangyur as Toh 892–896.

i.2 A concise scripture, it consists of a salutation to Mañjuśrī that highlights the qualities of his speech, a thirty-six syllable Sanskrit dhāraṇī, and a one-sentence statement of the benefit accrued by twenty-one recitations thereof. The dhāraṇī itself consists of six mantras, each six syllables in length, that each express epithets of Mañjuśrī. The single stated benefit accrued by recitation of this dhāraṇī is the purification of karmic obscurations incurred by the five misdeeds with immediate retribution.

i.3 The six mantras that constitute the Sanskrit dhāraṇī in this text also appear, with only minor variation, in chapter 7 of *The Root Manual of the Rites of Mañjuśrī*. There, the Buddha explains that this dhāraṇī has been taught by 760 million buddhas to tame beings, instruct them in the development of skillful means, and exhort them to adopt the practice of mantra.<sup>1</sup>

i.4 A Sanskrit version of *The Epithets of Mañjuśrī* is to our knowledge no longer extant, and it appears that the text was never translated into Chinese. The Tibetan translation lacks a colophon that might have offered information about the history of its transmission or the identity of its translators. The text's absence from the Denkarma and Phangthangma imperial catalogs suggests that it was translated into Tibetan later than the beginning of the ninth century CE,<sup>2</sup> but earlier than the flourishing of Butön Rinchen Drup (*bu ston rin chen grub*, 1290–1364), who listed its title, along with those of the other dhāraṇī texts in this collection, in his *History of Buddhism*.<sup>3</sup>

i.5 This English translation is based on the two versions in the Degé Kangyur, one in the Tantra section (Toh 548) and the other in the Dhāraṇī section (Toh 894), in consultation with the variant readings recorded in the



Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*) and with the Stok Palace Kangyur.

The Noble

**Epithets of Mañjuśrī**

1.

## The Translation

[F.14.b]

1.1 Homage to noble Mañjuśrī!

1.2 *om vākyetejāya | om vākyeśeṣa svā<sup>4</sup> | om vākyekhañjaye | om vākyeniṣṭhāya<sup>5</sup> | om  
vākyeya namaḥ | om vākyeda<sup>6</sup> namaḥ | |<sup>7</sup>*

1.3 Reciting these epithets of noble Mañjuśrī<sup>8</sup> twenty-one times will purify all the karmic obscurations resulting from the five misdeeds with immediate retribution.

1.4 *This concludes the noble “Epithets of Mañjuśrī.”*

n.

## NOTES

- n.1 See Dharmachakra Translation Committee, trans., *The Root Manual of the Rites of Mañjuśrī* (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh543.html>), Toh 543 (2020), 7.6 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh543.html#UT22084-088-038-1227>).
- n.2 The Denkarma catalog is usually dated to ca. 812 CE.
- n.3 Butön Rinchen Drup, *chos 'byung*, folio 172.a (p. 975).
- n.4 The Degé Kangyur in both versions (Toh 548 and 894) reads *vA kye Sha She sva*.
- n.5 The Degé Kangyur in both versions (Toh 548 and 894) reads *vA kye ni Sh+Tha a*.
- n.6 The Degé Kangyur in both versions (Toh 548 and 894) reads *vA kye daM*.
- n.7 In the seventh chapter of *The Root Manual of the Rites of Mañjuśrī*, 7.7 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh543.html#UT22084-088-038-1239>), the Buddha Śākyamuni recites, with only minor orthographic variations, the same sequence of mantras. He then extols their virtues: “These six mantras of yours, Mañjuśrī, each numbering six syllables, are of great power and equal in their great potency. They are the supreme heart mantras that bring the highest accomplishment, as if they originated from the Buddha himself. They have been proclaimed by every buddha for the benefit of all beings. They involve and activate the samaya and are suitable for all types of activity. They are signposts for the road to awakening and are the most important mantras of the Tathāgata family. They can be employed in all three levels of ritual, the highest, the medium, and the lowest. They bring the ripening of the fruit of virtuous karma. They will lead to accomplishment at the time when the Buddha’s teaching has disappeared.”
- n.8 Alternatively, this could be a reference to the text’s title.

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 dhāraṇī

*gzungs*

གཟུངས།

*dhāraṇī**Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

The term *dhāraṇī* has the sense of something that “holds” or “retains,” and so it can refer to the special capacity of practitioners to memorize and recall detailed teachings. It can also refer to a verbal expression of the teachings—an incantation, spell, or mnemonic formula that distills and “holds” essential points of the Dharma and is used by practitioners to attain mundane and supramundane goals. The same term is also used to denote texts that contain such formulas.

g.2 five misdeeds with immediate retribution

*mtshams med pa lnga*

མཚམས་མེད་པ་ལྔ།

*pañcānantarya*

The five most negative actions. Upon death, those who have committed one or more of these immediately proceed to the hells without first experiencing the intermediate state. They are (1) killing an arhat, (2) killing one’s mother, (3) killing one’s father, (4) creating a schism in the saṅgha, and (5) maliciously drawing blood from a tathāgata’s body.

g.3 karmic obscuration

*las kyi sgrib*

ལས་ཀྱི་སྒྲིབ།

*karmāvaraṇa*

Obscurations or obstructions caused by past deeds that prevent progress on the path to awakening in the present.

g.4 Mañjuśrī

*'jam dpal*

འཇམ་དཔལ།

*mañjuśrī*

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

Mañjuśrī is one of the “eight close sons of the Buddha” and a bodhisattva who embodies wisdom. He is a major figure in the Mahāyāna sūtras, appearing often as an interlocutor of the Buddha. In his most well-known iconographic form, he is portrayed bearing the sword of wisdom in his right hand and a volume of the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* in his left. In addition to the epithet Kumārabhūta, which means “having a youthful form,” Mañjuśrī is also called Mañjughoṣa, Mañjusvara, and Pañcaśikha.

g.5 mantra



*sngags*

མཎྟལ་

*mantra*

*Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:*

A formula of words or syllables that are recited aloud or mentally in order to bring about a magical or soteriological effect or result. The term has been etymologized to mean “that which protects (*trā*) the mind (*man*)”.