

༄༅། །ཚམ་པར་སྐྱད་མཛད་ཀྱི་སྣོད་པོའི་གཟུངས།

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**The Dhāraṇī “The Essence of Vairocana”**

འཕགས་པ་རྣམ་པར་སྤང་མཛད་ཀྱི་སྣོད་པོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་གཟུངས།

*'phags pa rnam par snang mdzad kyi snying po zhes bya ba'i gzungs*

The Noble Dhāraṇī “The Essence of Vairocana”

· Toh 534 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 88 (rgyud, na), folio 82.b (in *par phud* printings), 99.b (in later printings)



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co.

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## SUMMARY

- s.1 *The Dhāraṇī “The Essence of Vairocana”, which pays homage to the Three Jewels, the Buddha Vairocana, and the bodhisattva mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha, contains the dhāraṇī of Vairocana or Ākāśagarbha. It lists the following benefits for one who recites it: protection from weapons, fire, water, poison, poisoned food and drink, hostile magic, kings, thieves, epidemics, pain, contagions, and so forth, and the attainment of the samādhi called stainless light.*

ac.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ac.1 This publication was completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

ac.2 The text was translated, edited, and introduced by the 84000 translation team. Bruno Galasek-Hul produced the translation and wrote the introduction. Rory Lindsay edited the translation and the introduction, and Dawn Collins copyedited the text. Martina Cotter was in charge of the digital publication process.

## INTRODUCTION

i.

i.1 *The Dhāraṇī “The Essence of Vairocana”* is a short text contained in the Degé Kangyur in both the Tantra section (Toh 534) and in the Dhāraṇī section (Toh 861). It is further subcategorized as an Action tantra (*bya rgyud, kriyātantra*).

i.2 *The Dhāraṇī “The Essence of Vairocana”* lacks a narrative frame, as well as a location and interlocutors. It starts with formulaic homages to the Three Jewels, the Buddha Vairocana, and the bodhisattva mahāsattva Ākāśagarbha. These canonical expressions of reverence are followed by the dhāraṇī itself, which invokes the Buddha Vairocana. The text concludes with an enumeration of the benefits that accrue from reciting the dhāraṇī: the reciter will be protected from weapons, fire, water, poison, poisoned food and drink, kākḥordas, kings, thieves, epidemics, pain, contagions, and so forth, and will attain a particular samādhi called *stainless light*.

i.3 The dhāraṇī proper contains, besides many non-lexical phonemes, the perfectly intelligible Sanskrit phrase *vairocanaraśmi sañcodite āgaccha/ āryākāśagarbha*, “Come, ordered by Vairocana’s light rays, noble Ākāśagarbha (‘Essence of the Sky’)!” This exhortation to the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha suggests that this may be his dhāraṇī and not Vairocana’s. The bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha is closely associated with the Buddha Vairocana, and one of his most important roles is the purification of negative actions. This pair are especially prominent in East Asian esoteric traditions.<sup>1</sup>

i.4 *The Dhāraṇī “The Essence of Vairocana”* lacks a Tibetan and Sanskrit title at the beginning and a final translators’ colophon. We have no knowledge regarding who translated it and when. To our knowledge, no Sanskrit text of this dhāraṇī is extant and it does not appear to have been translated into Chinese. The catalog of the early imperial translations, the Denkarma (*lhan kar ma*, Herrmann-Pfandt 2008), does not list it. However, it is listed under its short title in the catalog of translated works in the Kangyur that is included

in Butön's monumental fourteenth-century *History of Buddhism*.<sup>2</sup> This gives us only a very wide time frame for its translation, namely, sometime between the ninth century and the first quarter of the fourteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

i.5 The present English translation was prepared based on the two Degé witnesses (Toh 534<sup>4</sup> and Toh 861<sup>5</sup>). We also consulted the versions contained in the Phukdrak Kangyur and Stok Palace Kangyur.



**The Noble  
Essence Dhāraṇī of Vairocana**

1.

## The Translation

[F.82.b] [F.99.b]

1.1 “Homage to the Three Jewels!

Homage to the thus-gone, worthy, perfect buddha, noble Vairocana, the king of light!

Homage to the bodhisattva mahāsattva<sup>6</sup> Ākāśagarbha!

1.2 *tadyathā/ kala kala/ kili kili/ viri viri/ huru huru/ vairocanaśmisañcodite āgaccha/  
āryākāśagarbha mahākāruṇikā pūraya hasāna/ dhāraya buddhe viścayana/ cara cara/  
ciri ciri svāhā<sup>7</sup>*

1.3 By reciting it, this will be accomplished: weapons, fire, water, poison, poisoned food and drink, or kākhordas will not hurt one. One will not be harmed by a king, thieves, and so forth. Wherever this is written down and stored, epidemics,<sup>8</sup> harm, and contagions will not arise.<sup>9</sup> What is more, one will attain the samādhi called *stainless light*.”

1.4 *The Noble Dhāraṇī “The Essence of Vairocana” is complete.*

ab.

## ABBREVIATIONS

*F* Phukdrak Kangyur

*N* Narthang Kangyur

*S* Stok Palace Kangyur

n.

## NOTES

- n.1 For details, see *The Ākāśagarbha Sūtra (Ākāśagarbhasūtra, Toh 260)*, i.1.
- n.2 Butön Rinchen Drup, folio 174.b/979: *shAkya thub pa'i snying po*.
- n.3 Most scholars consider the Denkarma to have been completed sometime in the first half of the ninth century (for a discussion of the different possible dates, see Herrmann-Pfandt 2008, xvii–xxii). Bu ston completed his *History of Buddhism* sometime before the year 1326 (for a detailed discussion, see van der Kuijp 2016, pp. 227–35).
- n.4 Two sets of folio references have been included in this translation due to a discrepancy in volume 88 (*rgyud, na*) of the Degé Kangyur between the 1737 *par phud* printings and the late (post *par phud*) printings. In the latter case, an extra work, *Bodhimaṇḍasyālamkāralakṣadhāraṇī* (Toh 508, *byang chub snying po'i rgyan 'bum gyi gzungs*), was added as the second text in the volume, thereby displacing the pagination of all the following texts in the same volume by 17 folios. Since the eKangyur follows the later printing, both references have been provided, with the highlighted one linking to the eKangyur viewer.
- n.5 Note that there is a discrepancy among various databases for cataloging the Toh 861 version of this text within vol. 100 or 101 of the Degé Kangyur. See Toh 861, n.5 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh861.html#UT22084-088-028-102>), for details.
- n.6 F here adds *thugs rje chen po dang ldan pa* “who is endowed with great compassion.”
- n.7 The phrase *vairocanaśmi sañcodite āgaccha/ āryākāśagarbha* “Come, ordered by Vairocana’s light rays! Noble Ākāśagarbha (“Essence of the Sky”)” in the *dhāraṇī* rather seems to suggest that this is the *dhāraṇī* of the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha.

n.8 F here omits *yams kyi nad* “epidemics.”

n.9 A similar passage can be found in *The Nectar of Speech* (*Amṛtaṅgāharṇa*, Toh 197), 1.12.

b.

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## GLOSSARY

· Types of attestation for names and terms of the corresponding ·  
source language

AS	<i>Attested in source text</i> This term is attested in a manuscript used as a source for this translation.
AO	<i>Attested in other text</i> This term is attested in other manuscripts with a parallel or similar context.
AD	<i>Attested in dictionary</i> This term is attested in dictionaries matching Tibetan to the corresponding language.
AA	<i>Approximate attestation</i> The attestation of this name is approximate. It is based on other names where the relationship between the Tibetan and source language 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 Ākāśagarbha

*nam mkha'i snying po*

ནམ་མཁའི་སྤྱིང་པོ།

*ākāśagarbha*<sup>AD</sup>

An important bodhisattva whose name means “essence of space.” He is one of the “eight great close sons” (*aṣṭamahopaputra, nye ba'i sras chen brgyad*).

g.2 bodhisattva

*byang chub sems dpa'*

བྱང་ལྷན་སེམས་དཔལ།

*bodhisattva* <sup>AD</sup>

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A being who is dedicated to the cultivation and fulfilment of the altruistic intention to attain perfect buddhahood, traversing the ten bodhisattva levels (*daśabhūmi, sa bcu*). Bodhisattvas purposely opt to remain within cyclic existence in order to liberate all sentient beings, instead of simply seeking personal freedom from suffering. In terms of the view, they realize both the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena.

g.3 contagion

*'go ba'i nad*

འགོ་བའི་ནད།

*upasarga* <sup>AD</sup>

General name for transmittable diseases.

g.4 dhāraṇī

*gzungs*

གཟུངས།

*dhāraṇī* <sup>AD</sup>

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.5 epidemic

*yams kyi nad*

ཡམས་ཀྱི་ནད།

*īti* <sup>AD</sup>

An epidemic disease.

g.6 hostile magic

*byad stems*

བྱད་སྤྲེམ་ས།

*kākhorda* <sup>AD</sup>

See *kākhorda*.

g.7 *kākhorda*

*byad stems*

བྱད་སྤྲེམ་ས།

*kākhorda* <sup>AD</sup>

A term used in hostile magical rites that can alternatively refer to a class of nonhuman being or type of magical device employed against the target of the rite.

g.8 mahāsattva

*sems dpa' chen po*

སེམས་དཔའ་ཆེན་པོ།

*mahāsattva* <sup>AD</sup>

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The term can be understood to mean “great courageous one” or “great hero,” or (from the Sanskrit) simply “great being,” and is almost always found as an epithet of “bodhisattva.” The qualification “great” in this term, according to the majority of canonical definitions, focuses on the generic greatness common to all bodhisattvas, i.e., the greatness implicit in the bodhisattva vow itself in terms of outlook, aspiration, number of beings to be benefited, potential or eventual accomplishments, and so forth. In this sense the *mahā-* (“great”) is close in its connotations to the *mahā-* in “Mahāyāna.” While individual bodhisattvas described as *mahāsattva* may in many cases also be “great” in terms of their level of realization, this is largely coincidental, and in the canonical texts the epithet is not restricted to bodhisattvas at any particular point in their career. Indeed, in a few cases even bodhisattvas whose path has taken a wrong direction are still described as *bodhisattva mahāsattva*.

Later commentarial writings do nevertheless define the term—variably—in terms of bodhisattvas having attained a particular level (*bhūmi*) or realization. The most common qualifying criteria mentioned are attaining the path of

seeing, attaining irreversibility (according to its various definitions), or attaining the seventh bhūmi.

g.9 samādhi

*ting nge 'dzin*

ཉིང་ངེ་འཛིན།

*samādhi* <sup>AD</sup>

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

In a general sense, *samādhi* can describe a number of different meditative states. In the Mahāyāna literature, in particular in the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras, we find extensive lists of different samādhis, numbering over one hundred.

In a more restricted sense, and when understood as a mental state, *samādhi* is defined as the one-pointedness of the mind (*cittaikāgratā*), the ability to remain on the same object over long periods of time. The *Draḥor Bamponyipa* (*sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa*) commentary on the *Mahāvīyūtpatti* explains the term *samādhi* as referring to the instrument through which mind and mental states “get collected,” i.e., it is by the force of samādhi that the continuum of mind and mental states becomes collected on a single point of reference without getting distracted.

g.10 Three Jewels

*dkon mchog gsum*

དཀོན་མཚོག་གསུམ།

*triratna* <sup>AD</sup>

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha—the three objects of Buddhist refuge. In the Tibetan rendering, “the three rare and supreme ones.”

g.11 Vairocana

*rnam par snang mdzad*

རྣམ་པར་སྣང་མཛད།

*vairocana* <sup>AD</sup>

The name Vairocana, literally, “solar,” is used in some important Mahāyāna sūtras such as *The Stem Array* (g.1377) and *The Ten Bhūmis* (g.209) as an epithet for the Buddha Śākyamuni. As a distinct tathāgata, Vairocana presides over the tathāgata family among the five buddha families.

