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The Eight Maidens' Praise of Mañjuśrī, Lord of Speech

'jam dpal ngag gi dbang phyug la bu mo brgyad kyis bstod pa

· Toh 552 ·

Degé Kangyur vol. 89 (rgyud 'bum, pa), folios 15.b–16.a



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co.

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s.

SUMMARY

s.1 This scripture is a praise to the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. The eight maidens indicated by the title may be inferred as each speaking a different verse, together providing a range of perspectives.

ac.

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ac.1 Translated by David Mellins, Kaia Fischer, and Geshé Lobsang Dawa, with 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.

i.

INTRODUCTION

i.1

This scripture is a praise to the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. Each of the eight maidens indicated by the title may be inferred as each speaking a different verse, together providing a range of perspectives. These figures do not themselves appear in the body of the text, which lacks an introductory narrative. The first two verses are praises of Mañjuśrī's radiance. The third verse praises the glittering jewels of his uṣṇīṣa, the fourth his ambrosial voice, the fifth his purifying agency, the sixth his fearsome appearance and manner, the seventh his beatific visage, and the eighth verse concludes the encomium with a presentation of immense offerings. While the text is relatively straightforward in its description of Mañjuśrī's physical and metaphysical attributes, it has several striking turns of phrase that present his features as indicative of the teachings themselves, which serve to inform devotional practice.

i.2

This popular praise appears twice in the Tengyur in the works of Saṃvarabhadra. The opening verse appears in his *A Ritual for Offering a Maṇḍala* (*Maṇḍalavidhi*, Toh 2121), and the scripture in its entirety is found in his *A Sādhana of "Reciting the Names of Mañjuśrī"* (*Āryamañjuśrīnāmasaṅgītī-sādhana*, Toh 2108). The opening verse has also been cited by prominent masters from all the major schools of Tibetan Buddhism and continues to be found in prayer liturgies memorized and recited by monastics to this day.

i.3

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,¹ but before the flourishing of the scholar Butön Rinchen Drup (*bu ston rin chen grub*, 1290–1364), who listed its title in his *History of Buddhism*.² The Tibetan translation lacks both a Sanskrit title and a colophon, so we have no information regarding its origin, transmission history, or translation into Tibetan. It also appears that the text was never translated into Chinese.

i.4 This English translation is based on the Degé Kangyur version (Toh 552) in consultation with the variant readings recorded in the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*), with all major divergences recorded in the notes.³

**The Eight Maidens' Praise of Mañjuśrī, Lord of
Speech**

1.

The Translation

[F.15.b]

- 1.1 Possessor of youthful body,
Adorned by the lamp of wisdom
That removes the darkness of delusion from the world—
Homage to Mañjughoṣa.
- 1.2 Your flood of radiance
Outshines the full moon
And banishes ignorance—
Homage to Mañjuśrī.
- 1.3 Upon whose topknot, uncreated and vivid,
Rests a form glittering with gems,⁴ [F.16.a]
Whose body is a delight to all—
Homage to you, Mañjuśrī.
- 1.4 Like ambrosia, soft and deep,
The pleasing sound of your voice,
O holy one, trove of Dharma jewels⁵—
Homage and praise to you, Mañjuśrī.
- 1.5 Countless as drops of water in the Ganges
Are the stains of affliction
You dispel in every world—
Homage and praise to you, Mañjuśrī.
- 1.6 Terrifying is your body's manner
When, fangs bared in fearsome pose,
You shatter the Lord of Death's arrogance—
Homage and praise to you, Mañjuśrī.

- 1.7 You are beautified by a blue utpala
That is like your eyes in luster,
As you bear an alms bowl⁶ in your hand⁷—
Homage to you, Mañjuśrī.
- 1.8 With immense offerings and praise
To the buddhas dwelling in the ten directions
We pay homage to you, Mañjuśrī,
Teacher of the path to liberation.
- 1.9 *This concludes "The Eight Maidens' Praise."*

n.

NOTES

- n.1 The Denkarma catalog is usually dated to ca. 812 CE.
- n.2 Butön Rinchen Drup, *chos 'byung*, folio 172.a/p. 975.
- n.3 The text is not included in the Kangyur collections of the Thempangma line.
- n.4 Perhaps a reference to a buddha upon his crown.
- n.5 According to the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*), here the Yongle, Peking, Narthang, and Lhasa Kangyur versions read *dam pa'i chos kyi rin chen mdzod* ("O precious treasury of the holy Dharma").
- n.6 The possession of a begging bowl may indicate Mañjuśrī's emanation as a buddha, which is attested in scriptures such as *The Array of Virtues of Mañjuśrī's Buddha Realm* (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh59.html>) (*Mañjuśrī-buddhakṣetraguṇavyūha*, Toh 59), *The Sūtra for the Benefit of Aṅgulimāla* (*Aṅgulimāliyasūtra*, Toh 213), and *The Sūtra of the Great Parinirvāṇa* (Toh 119).
- n.7 In Saṃvarabhadra's *A Sādhana of "Reciting the Names of Mañjuśrī,"* where the present scripture is presented in its entirety, this line reads instead *shes rab ral gri mnga' gzhu 'dzin*, which might be glossed as, "We pay homage to you, O Mañjuśrī / Who has the sword of wisdom and bears a bow," an apparent reference to forms of Mañjuśrī bearing these hand implements, such as the figure identified as Tīkṣṇa-Mañjuśrī in Clark 1937, p. 264.

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 affliction

nyon mongs

ཉོན་མོངས།

kleśa

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The essentially pure nature of mind is obscured and afflicted by various psychological defilements, which destroy the mind's peace and composure and lead to unwholesome deeds of body, speech, and mind, acting as causes for continued existence in saṃsāra. Included among them are the primary afflictions of desire (*rāga*), anger (*dveṣa*), and ignorance (*avidyā*). It is said that there are eighty-four thousand of these negative mental qualities, for which the eighty-four thousand categories of the Buddha's teachings serve as the antidote.

Kleśa is also commonly translated as “negative emotions,” “disturbing emotions,” and so on. The Pāli *kilesa*, Middle Indic *kileśa*, and Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit *kleśa* all primarily mean “stain” or “defilement.” The translation “affliction” is a secondary development that derives from the more general (non-Buddhist) classical understanding of $\sqrt{kliś}$ (“to harm,” “to afflict”). Both meanings are noted by Buddhist commentators.

g.2 delusion

gti mug

གྲི་མུག་

moha

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

One of the three poisons (*dug gsum*) along with aversion, or hatred, and attachment, or desire, which perpetuate the sufferings of cyclic existence. It is the obfuscating mental state which obstructs an individual from generating knowledge or insight, and it is said to be the dominant characteristic of the animal world in general. Commonly rendered as confusion, delusion, and ignorance, or bewilderment.

g.3 Lord of Death

gshin rje

གཤིན་རྗེ།

yama

The lord of death in Indian mythology, he judges the dead and rules over the hells and the realm of the pretas.

g.4 Mañjughoṣa

'jam pa'i dbyangs

འཇམ་པའི་དབྱངས།

mañjughoṣa

An epithet of Mañjuśrī.

g.5 Mañjuśrī

'jam dpal

འཇམ་དབལ།

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. To his name, Mañjuśrī, meaning “Gentle and Glorious One,” is often added the epithet Kumārabhūta, “having a youthful form.” He is also called Mañjughoṣa, Mañjusvara, and Pañcaśikha.