ཤེར་ཕྱིན་ལག་ན་རྡོ་རྗེ།

The Vajrapāṇi Perfection of Wisdom

Vajrapāṇiprajñāpāramitā

འཕགས་པ་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་ཕ་རོལ་ཏུ་ཕྱིན་པ་ལག་ན་རྡོ་རྗེའི་མདོ་ཐེག་པ་

ཆེན་པོ།

’phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa lag na rdo rje’i mdo theg pa chen po

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra “The Vajrapāṇi Perfection of Wisdom”

Āryaprajñāpāramitāvajrapāṇimahāyānasūtra

· Toh 29 ·

Degé Kangyur vol. 34 (shes rab sna tshogs, ka), folios 178.a–178.b
For referencing Tibetan sources, please see our Scholar’s Edition

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Contents

s.	**Summary**	**6**
ac.	**Acknowledgments**	**6**
i.	**Introduction**	**7**
tr.	**The Translation**	**9**
n.	**Notes**	**11**
b.	**Bibliography**	**12**
g.	**Glossary**	**13**

Summary

s.1 *The Vajrapāṇi Perfection of Wisdom* is the fourth in a group of five Prajñāpāramitā scriptures named for their bodhisattva interlocutors. In Rājagṛha, Vajrapāṇi asks the Buddha how bodhisattvas should train in the perfection of wisdom. The Buddha describes three ways in which bodhisattvas should train in the perfection of wisdom and then pronounces a mantra. The sūtra concludes with the Buddha describing the benefits of training in the perfection of wisdom in this way and those gathered rejoicing in the Buddha's teaching.

Acknowledgments

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. Lowell Cook produced the translation and wrote the introduction. Nathaniel Rich edited the translation and the introduction, and Linda Griffin copyedited the text. Martina Cotter was in charge of the digital publication process.

Introduction

i.1 *The Vajrapāṇi Perfection of Wisdom* is the fourth in a group of five Prajñāpāramitā scriptures (Toh 26–30) named for the bodhisattvas who are their interlocutors. In each of these five texts, the Buddha imparts instructions to bodhisattvas on how they should train in the perfection of wisdom. *The Vajrapāṇi Perfection of Wisdom* is set in Rājagṛha, presumably at Vulture Peak, the site of many of the Buddha's teachings on the Perfection of Wisdom.

i.2 Vajrapāṇi asks the Buddha how bodhisattvas should train in the perfection of wisdom. The Buddha describes three ways—or, perhaps more accurately, reasons why—bodhisattvas should train in the perfection of wisdom.[1] These three reasons encompass central themes of Prajñāpāramitā literature such as the emptiness, nonexistence, and nonapprehensibility of all phenomena. The Buddha then offers the means of training in the perfection of wisdom in the form of a mantra. Interestingly, the mantra given here is one commonly associated with the Buddha Śākyamuni himself.[2] The Buddha then describes the benefits of training in the perfection of wisdom in this way, which include remembering one's former lives, avoiding the unfree states, immeasurable merit, the constant company of the buddhas, and possession of the mind of awakening. The sūtra concludes with a formulaic praise of the Buddha's teaching.

i.3 There is little that can be said about the provenance of *The Vajrapāṇi Perfection of Wisdom* with any certainty. There is no surviving Sanskrit witness, and it does not appear that the sūtra was ever translated into Chinese. The Tibetan translation is bereft of a colophon that would otherwise inform us as to when and by whom it was translated into Tibetan. Furthermore, it is not found in either of the Tibetan imperial catalogs. Though there appear to be few, if any, references to or citations of the sūtra throughout the commentarial literature of Tibet, it does appear in *The Flow of the River Ganges: A Record of Transmissions Received* (*dam pa'i chos kyi gsan yig gang+gA'i chu rgyun*) of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Losang Gyatso (ngag dbang blo bzang rgya

mtsho, 1617–82). There, he describes the lineage of transmission through which this and the other "bodhisattva Prajñāpāramitā" texts came down to him, beginning with Jñānaśrī of Kashmir.[3] This would therefore suggest that the present work was introduced to Tibet no later than the eleventh century CE.

i.4 *The Vajrapāṇi Perfection of Wisdom* was translated into English, alongside other short Prajñāpāramitā sūtras, by Edward Conze, who assumes that it dates from the "Tantric period," that is, after 750 CE.[4] However, this is difficult to establish given the lack of a Sanskrit witness. A contemporary translation into Chinese has been published by the Kumarajiva Project.[5] The present translation is based on the version of the Tibetan translation found in the Degé Kangyur, with reference to the variants recorded in the Comparative Edition (Tib. *dpe bsdur ma*) and to the version found in the Stok Palace Kangyur.

The Translation

1.

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra

The Vajrapāṇi Perfection of Wisdom

1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas.

1.2 Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was staying in Rājagṛha. At that time, the bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi was present in the gathering. He rose from his seat and asked the Blessed One, “Blessed One, how should bodhisattvas train in the perfection of wisdom?”

1.3 The Blessed One replied, “Vajrapāṇi, bodhisattvas should train in the perfection of wisdom in the following way. Bodhisattvas should train in the perfection of wisdom in keeping with the fact that all phenomena are birthless. Furthermore, bodhisattvas should train in the perfection of wisdom in keeping with the fact that all phenomena, such as form, lack an intrinsic nature, are without signs, are devoid of entities, and cannot be apprehended. On account of the emptiness of internal phenomena and the emptiness of nonentities, bodhisattvas should train in the perfection of wisdom.

1.4 “Vajrapāṇi, this perfection of wisdom is the mother of all the buddhas throughout the three times. These are the words of the mantra of great knowledge:

1.5 *tadyathā | oṁ muni muni mahāmunaye svāhā |*

1.6 “Whoever upholds this perfection of wisdom will uphold the teachings of the buddhas of the three times. They will remember their former births and avoid all unfree states. They will attain the limitless results of meritorious deeds. They will always be in the company of the blessed buddhas and possess the mind of awakening.”

1.7 When the Blessed One had said that, the bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi and the world with its devas, humans, asuras, and gandharvas rejoiced and praised what the Blessed One had taught.

1.8 *This concludes the noble Mahāyāna sūtra "The Vajrapāṇi Perfection of Wisdom."*

Notes

1. The language used here is reminiscent of the phrasing in *The Sūtra on Wisdom at the Hour of Death* (*Atyayajñānasūtra*, Toh 122), 1.4–1.8.

2. This mantra also appears elsewhere in the Kangyur, such as in Toh 22, Toh 485, and Toh 533.

3. Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Losang Gyatso 1970–71, folios 155.a–155.b.

4. Conze 1973, p. iv.

5. 聖般若波羅蜜多金剛幢大乘經 (*Āryaprajñāpāramitāvajrapāṇimahāyānasūtra*, Toh 29), *The Kumarajiva Project*.

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Glossary

asura

lha ma yin

ལྷ་མ་ཡིན།

asura

A type of nonhuman being whose precise status is subject to different views, but is included as one of the six classes of beings in the sixfold classification of realms of rebirth. In the Buddhist context, asuras are powerful beings said to be dominated by envy, ambition, and hostility. They are also known in the pre-Buddhist and pre-Vedic mythologies of India and Iran, and feature prominently in Vedic and post-Vedic Brahmanical mythology, as well as in the Buddhist tradition. In these traditions, asuras are often described as being engaged in interminable conflict with the devas (gods).

blessed one

bcom ldan ’das

བཅོམ་ལྡན་འདས།

bhagavat

In Buddhist literature, this is an epithet applied to buddhas, most often to Śākyamuni. The Sanskrit term generally means “possessing fortune,” but in specifically Buddhist contexts it implies that a buddha is in possession of six auspicious qualities (*bhaga*) associated with complete awakening. The Tibetan term—where *bcom* is said to refer to “subduing” the four māras, *ldan* to “possessing” the great qualities of buddhahood, and *’das* to “going beyond” saṃsāra and nirvāṇa—possibly reflects the commentarial tradition where the Sanskrit *bhagavat* is interpreted, in addition, as “one who destroys the four māras.” This is achieved either by reading *bhagavat* as *bhagnavat* (“one who broke”), or by tracing the word *bhaga* to the root √*bhañj* (“to break”).

deva

lha

ལྷ།

deva

In the most general sense the devas—the term is cognate with the English *divine*—are a class of celestial beings who frequently appear in Buddhist texts, often at the head of the assemblies of nonhuman beings who attend and celebrate the teachings of the Buddha Śākyamuni and other buddhas and bodhisattvas. In Buddhist cosmology the devas occupy the highest of the five or six "destinies" (*gati*) of saṃsāra among which beings take rebirth. The devas reside in the *devalokas*, "heavens" that traditionally number between twenty-six and twenty-eight and are divided between the desire realm (*kāmadhātu*), form realm (*rūpadhātu*), and formless realm (*ārūpyadhātu*). A being attains rebirth among the devas either through meritorious deeds (in the desire realm) or the attainment of subtle meditative states (in the form and formless realms). While rebirth among the devas is considered favorable, it is ultimately a transitory state from which beings will fall when the conditions that lead to rebirth there are exhausted. Thus, rebirth in the god realms is regarded as a diversion from the spiritual path.

emptiness of internal phenomena

nang stong pa nyid

ནང་སྟོང་པ་ཉིད།

adhyātmaśūnyatā

One of the eighteen aspects of emptiness.

emptiness of nonentities

dngos po med pa'i stong pa nyid

དངོས་པོ་མེད་པའི་སྟོང་པ་ཉིད།

abhāvaśūnyatā

One of the eighteen aspects of emptiness.

gandharva

dri za

དྲི་ཟ།

gandharva

A class of generally benevolent nonhuman beings who inhabit the skies, sometimes said to inhabit fantastic cities in the clouds, and more specifically to dwell on the eastern slopes of Mount Meru, where they are ruled by the Great King Dhṛtarāṣṭra. They are most renowned as celestial musicians who serve the gods. In the Abhidharma, the term is also used to refer to the mental body assumed by sentient beings during the intermediate state between death and rebirth. Gandharvas are said to live on fragrances (*gandha*) in the desire realm, hence the Tibetan translation *dri za*, meaning "scent eater."

mantra

sngags

སྔགས།

mantra

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 interpretively etymologized to mean "that which protects (*trā*) the mind (*man*)".

mind of awakening

byang chub kyi sems

བྱང་ཆུབ་ཀྱི་སེམས།

bodhicitta

In the general Mahāyāna teachings the mind of awakening (bodhicitta) is the intention to attain the complete awakening of a perfect buddha for the sake of all beings. On the level of absolute truth, the mind of awakening is the realization of the awakened state itself.

perfection of wisdom

shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa

ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་ཕ་རོལ་ཏུ་ཕྱིན་པ།

prajñāpāramitā

The sixth of the six perfections, it refers to the profound understanding of the emptiness of all phenomena, the realization of ultimate reality. It is often personified as a female deity, worshiped as the “Mother of All Buddhas” (*sarva-jinamātā*).

Rājagṛha

rgyal po’i khab

རྒྱལ་པོའི་ཁབ།

rājagṛha

The ancient capital of Magadha prior to its relocation to Pāṭaliputra during the Mauryan dynasty, Rājagṛha is one of the most important locations in Buddhist history. The literature tells us that the Buddha and his saṅgha spent a considerable amount of time in residence in and around Rājagṛha—in nearby places, such as the Vulture Peak Mountain (Gṛdhrakūṭaparvata), a major site of the Mahāyāna sūtras, and the Bamboo Grove (Veṇuvana)—enjoying the patronage of King Bimbisāra and then of his son King Ajātaśatru. Rājagṛha is also remembered as the location where the first Buddhist monastic council was held after the Buddha Śākyamuni passed into parinirvāṇa. Now known as Rajgir and located in the modern Indian state of Bihar.

unfree states

mi khom pa

མི་ཁོམ་པ།

akṣaṇa

The Sanskrit literally means “without leisure”; this refers to being born in a state in which one will not have the opportunity to meet with a buddha or their teachings. Eight situations are typically listed: (1) being born in a hell realm, (2) as an animal, (3) as a hungry ghost, (4) as a long-lived god, (5) in a borderland or non-Buddhist country, (6) having wrong views, (7) as someone with

impaired faculties who is unable to understand the teachings, or (8) in a time or place where no buddha has come.

Vajrapāṇi

lag na rdo rje

ལག་ན་རྡོ་རྗེ།

vajrapāṇi

Vajrapāṇi means “Wielder of the Vajra.” In the Pali canon, he appears as a yakṣa guardian in the retinue of the Buddha. In the Mahāyāna scriptures he is a bodhisattva and one of the “eight close sons of the Buddha.” In the tantras, he is also regarded as an important Buddhist deity and instrumental in the transmission of tantric scriptures.