

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra

“The Maṇḍala of Eight”

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Aṣṭamāṇḍalaka

Imprint

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra “The Maṇḍala of Eight”

Aṣṭamaṇḍalaka

Toh 644

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Summary

s.1 *The Maṇḍala of Eight* contains a teaching by the Buddha Śakyāmuni on a maṇḍala dedicated to eight prominent bodhisattvas. In particular, the sūtra teaches the recitation of the essence mantras related to the Blessed One in the center and the eight great bodhisattvas that encircle him: Avalokiteśvara, Maitreya, Ākāśagarbha, Samantabhadra, Vajrapāṇi, Mañjuśrī, Sarvanīvaraṇaṇaviṣkambhin, and Kṣitigarbha. This is followed by a description of the vast benefits resulting from recitation of these mantras.

Acknowledgements

ac.1 This translation was undertaken by the Achi Translation Group under the guidance of Khenchen Nyima Gyaltsen. The sūtra was rendered into English by Claudia Jürgens (Yeshe Metog) with the support of Meghan Howard Masang as consultant for Chinese and Sanskrit and additional research, and Konchog Tenzin (Mark Riege) and Virginia Blum as reviewers.

ac.2 The translation was completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha. Bob Miller edited the translation and the introduction, and Dawn Collins copyedited the text. Sameer Dhingra was in charge of the digital publication process.

Introduction

i.1 *The Maṇḍala of Eight* presented here is a kriyātantra containing a ritual dedicated to the maṇḍala of eight prominent bodhisattvas. In this sūtra, the maṇḍala consists of the Buddha in the center, encircled by the eight great bodhisattvas, namely, Avalokiteśvara, Maitreya, Ākāśagarbha, Samantabhadra, Vajrapāṇi, Mañjuśrī, Sarvanīvaraṇaṇaviṣkambhin, and Kṣitigarbha. For each of these figures, the sūtra gives the essence mantra and a brief mention of the benefits of reciting these mantras.

i.2 While *The Maṇḍala of Eight* (Toh 644/822) is very concise, it is thematically related to another sūtra, known as *The Dharma Discourse “The Eight Maṇḍalas”* (Toh 105). This latter sūtra presents the same maṇḍala, although in a different context, and presents the benefits to be accrued through the practice of this rite.

i.3 Besides the versions of the sūtra in the Tibetan canons that we discuss below, there are three versions of the sutra that survive in Chinese canons. Two are imperially sanctioned Chinese translations: *The Sūtra of the Maṇḍala of the Eight Great Bodhisattvas* (T. 1167) translated by Amoghavajra (705-774), and *The Sūtra in which the Buddha Teaches the Mahāyāna Eight Great Maṇḍalas* (T. 1168a) translated by Faxian (d. 1001). Both Chinese translations follow a similar outline, but there are two key differences. The translation by

Amoghavajra includes a note after each mantra that describes the relevant bodhisattva's position in the maṇḍala and his iconography. This information is missing from Faxian's translation. Amoghavajra's translation also adds a praise to the eight bodhisattvas at the end of the sūtra that we do not find attached to Faxian's version. We have included both the iconographic details and the praise from Amoghavajra's translation in the notes.

i.4 In addition to these two translations that were transmitted in traditional canons, the modern Taishō canon includes a third text, *The Eight Mandalas Sūtra* (T. 1168b), in Sanskrit *siddham* script with interlinear Chinese glosses. This text has no Sanskrit title but is based on a copy of a scripture that was made by the Japanese master Kūkai 空海 (Kōbō Daishi 弘法大師, 774-835) during his visit to the Ximing monastery (西明寺) in China in 805. Because Kūkai's visit came only a few decades after Amoghavajra had been active at the same monastery, we could perhaps surmise that the Sanskrit text he copied may even have been the very source text consulted by Amoghavajra when he produced his translation. However, this leaves us with the question as to why Kūkai's *siddham* text (T. 1168b) matches Faxian's later translation (T. 1168a) more closely than Amoghavajra's translation (T. 1167). Additionally, scholars have not settled the question as to what these East Asian *siddham* texts represent. It is even possible that they were back-translations from Chinese into Sanskrit, made with the use of *siddham* dictionaries. Moreover, the text preserved in the Taishō canon is not complete and seems to have several passages that are not in order. More research is required before the precise nature of the *siddham* text can be determined. For this reason, while we have consulted the *siddham* text for our translation, we have not taken it as a definitive representative of a Sanskrit source text.

i.5 The Tibetan version of *The Maṇḍala of Eight* was translated from Sanskrit in the late eighth to early ninth century by the Indian scholars Jinamitra and Dānaśila, and the Tibetan translator Yeshé Dé. The sūtra is also listed in the Denkarma imperial catalog dated to the early ninth century. In that catalog it is grouped with “various dhāraṇīs” and recorded as being twenty-two ślokas long. It is also mentioned in the Phangthangma catalog from the same time period, where it is grouped with “various dhāraṇīs in twenty ślokas” and recorded as twenty-one ślokas. Parts of the sūtra are preserved in the Pelliot collection of the Dunhuang Library Cave.

i.6 *The Maṇḍala of Eight* is included in most versions of the Tibetan Kangyur, including editions belonging to the Tshalpa (*tshal pa*), Thempangma (*them spangs ma*), and mixed groups, as well as in some Bhutanese and Mongolian Kangyurs. All collections of the Tshalpa group that we have consulted contain the sūtra two separate times. In the Degé canon, these are included in different sections: Toh 644 is found in the *kriyātantra* subsection of the tantra section (*rgyud*) and Toh. 822 belongs to the “Compendium of Dhāraṇīs” (

Dhāraṇīsaṃgraha) within the dhāraṇī section (*gzungs*). Nevertheless, aside from minor spelling variants, both texts are essentially the same.

i.7 The translation presented here is based primarily on the Degé edition of the Kangyur in consultation with the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*), the *Stok Palace* edition, Yaita's Sanskrit edition of Kūkai's *siddham* text, and the two canonical Chinese versions. The variations of the Tibetan text in the different Kangyur editions are only minor, and alternative spellings are noted where relevant. Noteworthy differences in the Chinese versions are also mentioned in the endnotes.

The Translation

1. The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra “The Maṇḍala of Eight”
 - 1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas. Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was residing on Mount Potalaka, the site of noble Avalokiteśvara, along with many hundreds of sextillions of bodhisattvas. Seated in the assembly of bodhisattvas that had gathered there was the bodhisattva great being Ratnagarbha Candrāvabhāsa. He rose from his seat, draped his upper robe over his shoulder, and placed his right knee on the ground. Then, with his palms joined together, he bowed to the Blessed One and addressed the Blessed One, “If the Blessed One would grant me the opportunity to request instruction, I have a few questions that I would like to bring before the thus-gone one, the worthy one, the perfectly and completely awakened one.”
 - 1.2 Thus entreated, the Blessed One replied to the bodhisattva great being Ratnagarbha Candrāvabhāsa, “Ratnagarbha Candrāvabhāsa, please ask whatever you wish. I will satisfy you with answers to your questions.”
 - 1.3 The bodhisattva great being Ratnagarbha Candrāvabhāsa then inquired of the Blessed One, “Blessed One, if a son or daughter of noble family wishes to create the maṇḍala of eight, how should it be done?”
 - 1.4 The Blessed One replied, “Son of noble family, it is good that you have such eloquence, son of noble family, because you seek to greatly benefit many beings, bring happiness to many beings, and accomplish incomparable wisdom for all beings born in the three times. Excellent, excellent! Son of noble family, therefore, listen to the essence mantras of the eight bodhisattvas—essence mantras the mere recitation of which leads to the purification of the five acts with immediate results and also to the attainment of all accomplishments!
 - 1.5 “om mahā hūṃ mahāvīra svāhā. With this essence mantra, offer to the Blessed One in the center.

1.6 *om hrīḥ hūṁ padmapriya svāhā* is the essence mantra of noble Avalokiteśvara.

1.7 *om maihārāṇa svāhā* is the essence mantra of Maitreya.

1.8 *om ākāśagarbhāya svāhā* is the essence mantra of Ākāśagarbha.

1.9 *om svā hrīr ājaya svāhā* is the essence mantra of Samantabhadra.

1.10 *om kuru bha na raha svāhā* is the essence mantra of Vajrapāṇi.

1.11 *om śrī amṛamṛga svāhā* is the essence mantra of Youthful Mañjuśrī.

1.12 *om nisvārambha svāhā* is the essence mantra of Sarvanīvaraṇaviṣkambhin.

1.13 *om kṣiti ha rāja svāhā* is the essence mantra of Kṣitigarbha.

1.14 “Now, as for these essence mantras of the eight bodhisattvas, together with that of the Thus-Gone One, if any son of noble family or daughter of noble family recites these mantras once in front of the maṇḍala, all their aims will be accomplished, and they will quickly awaken fully to unsurpassable, perfect, and complete awakening.”

1.15 After the Blessed One had spoken these words, the bodhisattvas, the great beings, rejoiced and praised what the Blessed One had proclaimed.

1.16 This concludes “The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra called The Maṇḍala of Eight.”

Notes to the Translation

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n.1. There is also a third sūtra in the Kangyur (Toh 277), which shares the title of the current sūtra (Toh 644/822), *The Maṇḍala of Eight*. However, Toh 277 is a substantially different and unrelated text. See Achi Translation Group, trans., *The Sūtra on The Maṇḍala of Eight, Aṣṭamāṇḍalakasūtra*, Toh 277 (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, forthcoming).

n.2. Amoghavajra’s translation is the Ba dapusa mantuluo jing 八大菩 曼荼 (T. 1167) or “The Sūtra of the Maṇḍala(s) of the Eight Great Bodhisattvas.” Faxian’s translation is the Fosuo dasheng ba damanaluo jing 佛 大乘八大曼 (T. 1168a) or “The Sūtra of the Eight Great Maṇḍalas of the Mahāyāna Taught by the Buddha.”

n.3. Further discussion of the two Chinese translations, as well as their relationship to the Chinese translation of the *The Sūtra of the Dharma Discourse on the Eight Maṇḍalas* (T. 486; Toh 105) can be found in Li Lin-kouang 1935, pp. 95-97.

n.4. Iconographic information can also be found in de Visser 1914, p. 16.

n.5. Ba mantuluo jing 八曼荼 (T. 1168b). An edited Roman transcription of the *siddham* script is available in Yaita 2005. See also Miyasaka's earlier studies (1983-84), with facsimiles of the Sanjū jō sasshi (see below).

n.6. Kūkai copied a number of scriptures, which are together known as the Sanjū jō sasshi 三十帖 子 (The Thirty Volumes).

n.7. See Yaita's discussion (2005).

n.8. See Toh 4364, folio 303.a2 ('phags pa dkyil 'khor brgyad pa/ shlo ka gnyis shu rtsa gnyis; gzungs che phra sna tshogs), and Yoshimura 1950, p. 153, no. 402.

n.9. See *dkar chag 'phang thang ma* 2003, p. 28 ('phags pa dkyil 'khor brgyad pa zhes bya ba'i gzungs, shu log nyi shu rtsa gcig, gzungs che phra sna tshogs, shu log nyi shu pa.)

n.10. Pelliot tibétain 81b consists of half of a single folio, meaning that every line is fragmentary, but we can see evidence corresponding to Toh 644, vol. 91, folio 128.a3-128.b4 (Note that the other parts of Pelliot tibétain 81 are different texts.). Pelliot tibétain 104 is a stitched concertina that is also incomplete, corresponding to Toh 644, vol. 91, folio 128.a6-129.a2, with a second text on the reverse side. See also Dalton, van Schaik 2006, p. 48. To our knowledge, no Chinese manuscripts of the sutra survive in Dunhuang. Both Tibetan manuscripts seem close to the canonical version of the sūtra. Pelliot tibétain 81b has a few variants. However, given the manuscript's poor shape, it is hard to know if these reflect an alternate recension of the sūtra or simply scribal errors. In fact, if they are copying mistakes, this may explain why the folio was cut in half and discarded.

n.11. This text, Toh 882, and all those contained in this same volume (*gzungs, e*), are listed as being located in volume 100 of the Degé Kangyur by the Buddhist Digital Resource Center (BDRC). However, several other Kangyur databases -including the eKangyur that supplies the digital input version displayed by the 84000 Reading Room -list this work as being located in volume 101. This discrepancy is partly due to the fact that the two volumes of the *gzungs 'dus* section are an added supplement not mentioned in the original catalog, and also hinges on the fact that the compilers of the Tōhoku catalog placed another text -which forms a whole, very large volume -the *Vimala prabhā nāma kālacakra tantra tīkā* (*dus 'khor 'grel bshad dri med 'od*, Toh 845), before the volume 100 of the Degé Kangyur, numbering it as vol. 100, although it is almost certainly intended to come right at the end of the Degé Kangyur texts as volume 102; indeed its final fifth chapter is often carried over and wrapped in the same volume as the Kangyur *dkar chags* (catalog). Please note this discrepancy when using the eKangyur viewer in this translation.

n.11. Note that there is a discrepancy among various databases for cataloging the

Toh 882 version of this text within vol. 100 or 101 of the Degé Kangyur. See Toh 882, n.11, for details.

n.12. For a complete listing see Resources for Kanjur & Tenjur Studies: www.istb.univie.ac.at/kanjur/rktsneu/verif/verif2.php?id=638, accessed August 17, 2022.

n.13. In other Tshalpa canons, the *dhāraṇī* section is not specifically demarcated, with the result that the *sūtra* is just included twice in the tantra section. However, they share the basic structure that is found in the Degé Kangyur. The *sūtra*'s double appearance can be explained by its overlapping association with both *kriyātantras* and *dhāraṇīs*.

n.14. The Tibetan translation of the bodhisattva's name (*rin chen snying po zla ba snang ba*, Jewel Essence Moonlight) is a close translation of the Sanskrit name Ratnagarbha *Candrāvabhāsa*. In both Chinese translations, he is called Baozang Yueguang 藏月光 (Jewel Treasury Moonlight), which is also a close match. However, the Tibetan and Chinese translators differed in how to interpret *garbha*, which means both "embryo" and "womb" in Sanskrit. As is standard in most Tibetan translations, the Tibetan translators of Toh 644/882 rendered it as *snying po*, meaning "Jewel Essence Moonlight," while the Chinese used their standard translation *zang* 藏, meaning "Jewel Treasury Moonlight."

n.15. In T. 1167 the Buddha's statement encouraging Ratnagarbha *Candrāvabhāsa*'s questions is missing, whereas in T. 1168a the Chinese reads like the Tibetan.

n.16. In both Chinese translations, the bodhisattva asks for specific technical details. In T. 1167, he asks how to construct the *maṇḍala*, as well as what method will accumulate immeasurable merit allowing the cultivator to quickly realize awakening (675b1-3). T. 1168a is closer to the Tibetan, but here too the question asks specifically how a practitioner should uphold, respect, and make offerings to the *maṇḍala* (676b6-8).

n.17. Each of the two Chinese versions is somewhat different, though the general gist is the same. In both cases, the Buddha praises Ratnagarbha *Candrāvabhāsa*, lists the potential benefits to sentient beings that inspired his question, and then explains benefits accruing from constructing the eight *maṇḍalas* (T. 1167, 675b3-11) or from chanting the eight mantras (T. 1168a, 676b8-14).

n.18. In N and S the following variant is to be found: *om mune hūṁ mahāvīra svāhā*. The Chinese versions both reflect *om mahāvīra svāhā*, while the Sanskrit text preserved in the Chinese canon reads *om ā vīra svāhā*. *Mahāvīra* means "great hero."

n.19. The two Chinese versions are more elaborate than the Tibetan version. In

keeping with their respective emphases on the maṇḍala (T. 1167) and the mantra recitation (T. 1168a) noted in the previous passage, T. 1167 instructs the practitioner to visualize (想) the Buddha in the center of the maṇḍala, his body the color of pure gold, with thirty two marks, seated on a lotus pedestal. Meanwhile, T. 1168a identifies the mantra as “the great vidyā of the Buddha’s heart” (佛心大明) and instructs the practitioner to position [the maṇḍala or the mantra?] in the center and chant this great vidyā to present offerings to the Buddha.

- n.20. According to H, as well as the versions of Y and Q in the tantra section, this syllable reads *hrīḥ*. The siddham version records *hrīḥ* as well: *hrīḥ hāḥ padma prye (?) svāhā*. The Chinese versions reflect *hūm hrīḥ hāḥ patnam (?) śrīye svāhā* (T. 1167) and *om hrīḥ hāḥ patnam (?) śrīye svāhā* (T. 1168a). *Padmapriya* means “as dear as a lotus.”
- n.21. Continuing the pattern encountered above, throughout this section, T. 1168a gives the name of each bodhisattva related to the mantra, while T. 1167 is considerably more detailed, listing the respective bodhisattva’s position in the maṇḍala, the color and posture of his body, his hand emblems or mudrās, and crown. Here it reads: “In the center of the maṇḍala is holy Avalokiteśvara whose body is red, his left hand holding a lotus and his right hand granting boons. In the crown on his head is the Tathāgata of Immeasurable Life.” (即想曼荼 中。 自在赤色身。左手持 右手施 。 冠中有 量 如 , T. 1167, 675b17-18).
- n.22. T. 1167 reads: “Behind Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, think there is Maitreya Bodhisattva, gold-colored body, left hand grasping a kuṇḍa pitcher, right hand granting freedom from fear. In his crown there is a stūpa. He sits in half-lotus posture.” (於 自在菩 , 想慈氏菩 , 金色身, 左手 持, 右手施 畏, 冠中 有窣堵波, 半跏坐, 675b21-22).
- n.23. T. 1167 reads: “To the back of the Buddha, think there is Ākāśagarbha bodhisattva, left hand holding a jewel firmly above his heart, right hand gives forth a stream of countless jewels” (於佛背 想虛空藏菩 , 左手持 安於心上, 右手施流出 量 , 675b25-26).
- n.24. Here we follow Toh 882; Toh 644 reads *rāyajva*.
- n.25. T. 1167 reads: “To the left of Ākāśagarbha Bodhisattva, think there is Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, wearing a crown of five buddhas, golden body, right hand holding a sword, left hand granting boons, sitting in half lotus.” (虛空藏菩 左 , 想普 菩 , 戴五佛冠, 金色身, 右手持 , 左手施 , 跏而坐, 675b29-c1).
- n.26. Here we follow Toh 882; Toh 644 reads *bhan*.
- n.27. T. 1167 reads: “On the left side of the Tathāgata, think there is Vajrapāṇi

Bodhisattva, right hand grasping a vajra mallet, left hand fixed at his hip, wearing a five-buddha crown, body blue, seated in half-lotus.” (於如 左 , 想 金 手菩 , 右手 金 杵, 左手安於胯, 戴五佛冠, 身青色, 半跏而坐, 675c4-5).

n.28. T. 1167 reads: “In front of Vajrapāṇi Bodhisattva, think there is the Bodhisattva Youthful Mañjuśrī, with five locks of hair, in the form of a youth, his left hand grasping a blue lotus in which there is a five-pronged vajra mallet; his right hand making the boon-granting mudrā; his body gold and seated in half-lotus” (於金 手菩 前, 想曼殊室利童 菩 , 五髻, 童子形, 左手 青 花, 花中有五股金 杵, 右手作施 , 身金色, 半跏而坐, 675c8-10).

n.29. T. 1167 reads: “To the right of Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, think there is Sarvanīvaraṇaviṣkambhin Bodhisattva, his body gold in color, left hand holding a wish-fulfilling banner, right hand granting boons, sitting in half-lotus” (於曼殊室 菩 右, 想除 障菩 , 金色身, 左手持如意幢, 右手施 , 半跏而坐, 675c13-14).

n.30. Here we follow Toh 882; Toh 644 reads *harājvā*.

n.31. T. 1167 reads: “In front of the Tathāgata, think there is Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva, wearing a crown and necklace, his face bright and happy and peaceful, recalling all sentient beings with pity. His left hand fixes a begging bowl below his navel; his right hand covers the palm which faces downwards, his thumb touching the index finger, comforting all sentient beings” (於如 前 , 想地藏菩 , 冠 珞, 面貌熙怡寂 , 慰念一切有情, 左手安 下拓 , 右手覆 掌向下, 大指捻 指作安慰一切有情, 675c17-20).

n.32. The two Chinese versions differ a little among themselves and from the Tibetan. T. 1167 reads: “Think, this is the method for offering and contemplating the maṇḍala of the eight great bodhisattvas. If a son or daughter of good family upholds this eight maṇḍala sūtra, all karmic hindrances will be exhausted and they will quickly realize unsurpassed true and even bodhi” (想此八大菩 曼荼 供 行法 , 若善男子善女人受持此八曼荼 , 一切 障悉皆 , 速 上正等菩提, 675c20-22). T. 1168a reads: “In this way, the great *vidyās* [i.e., mantras] of the basic mind [= *ālayavijñāna*] of the eight great bodhisattvas create the Tathāgata’s maṇḍala. If there is a son or daughter of good family who relies on the ritual method of this maṇḍala, upholds the intention to memorize and chant the basic great *vidyā*, that person will quickly obtain accomplishment and *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*” (如是八大菩 根本心大明。作如 曼 。若有 善男子、善女人於此曼 依法、受持、志心持 根本大明, 彼人速得成就阿耨多 三藐三菩提, 676c7-10).

n.33. Bodhisattvas” and a note that the positions of the eight bodhisattvas were corrected in 1684 by the Japanese monk Jōgon () with reference to a

recitation manual for the Uṣṇīṣavijaya *dhāraṇī* (T. 972, Foding zunsheng tuoluoni niansong yogui fa 佛 尊 陀 尼念 法). It is not clear what changes Jōgon made. With the waters of great Affection (Skt. *maitrī*) as his heart, he can calm the fire of hatred -I bow my head to venerable Maitreya, who can cut the bowstring of desire. Ākāśagarbha's marvelous wisdom, venerable quiescence of space (Skt. *ākāśa*), liberator from the torrent of birth and death -I bow my head to the Buddha's heart son. He can pacify useless mind states, the afflictions of limitless sentient beings -I bow my head to Samantabhadra, chief of the Sugata's sons. Victorious over Mara's army, all the slaves of defilements -I bow my head to Vajrapāṇi who can teach all spells (Skt. *vidyās*). I bow my head to Mañjuśrī, who upholds the form of a Marvelous (Skt. *mañju*) youth and extends everywhere the wisdom lamp to drive away the darkness of the three realms. He Removes All Hindrances (Skt. Sarvanīvaraṇavīśkambhin), therefore, I bow my head to the venerable one of inexhaustible wisdom who can generate endless eloquence. Like the earth, all sentient beings rely on him alone unceasingly; treasury of firm wisdom compassion -to Kṣitigarbha I bow my head.

Colophon

c.1 This sūtra was translated and edited by the Indian preceptors Jinamitra and Dānaśīla, along with the principal editor-translator Bandé Yeshé Dé, and then, after being modified according to the revised terminology, it was finalized.

Abbreviations

D Degé Kangyur
H Lhasa (Zhol) Kangyur
N Narthang Kangyur
Q Peking Kangyur 1737 (Qianlong)
S Stok Palace MS Kangyur
Y Peking Yongle Kangyur

Glossary