སྒྲོལ་མའི་གཟུངས།

The Dhāraṇī of Tārā

Tārādhāraṇī

འཕགས་མ་སྒྲོལ་མའི་གཟུངས།

’phags ma sgrol ma’i gzungs

The Noble Dhāraṇī of Tārā

Āryatārādhāraṇī

· Toh 729 ·

Degé Kangyur, vol. 94 (rgyud ’bum, tsha), folio 222.a
For referencing Tibetan sources, please see our Scholar’s Edition

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Summary

s.1 *The Dhāraṇī of Tārā* is a short dhāraṇī that invokes the goddess Tārā, seeking her intervention in the face of obstacles and negative forces.

Acknowledgments

ac.1 Translated by Samye Translations under the guidance of Phakchok Rinpoche. The translation and introduction were produced by Stefan Mang and reviewed and edited by Ryan Conlon.

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Introduction

i.1 *The Dhāraṇī of Tārā* is a short recitation formula that invokes the deity Tārā for the purpose of dispelling obstacles and pacifying negative forces. As suggested by her name, which can be translated as "Savior,"[1] Tārā is revered as a deity who quickly responds in the face of worldly and spiritual dangers, and she is commonly invoked for this purpose by diverse communities of Buddhists.

i.2 The worship of Tārā in India can be traced back to at least the sixth century, and since that time the goddess has gained increasingly important status in the Buddhist pantheon.[2] Tibetan histories recount that the worship and practice of Tārā was introduced to Tibet as early as the seventh century via a sandalwood statue brought by the Nepalese princess Bhṛkutī as dowry for her marriage to the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo.[3] While a few texts dedicated to Tārā were translated in the following centuries,[4] it is believed that the worship of Tārā did not take firm root in Tibet until the eleventh century, when it was actively promoted by Atiśa.[5]

i.3 *The Dhāraṇī of Tārā* begins with an homage to the Three Jewels and Avalokiteśvara. This is followed by the main dhāraṇī, which was not translated into Tibetan but preserved in transliterated Sanskrit. The Tibetan text lacks a colophon, so the Tibetan translators and editors of the dhāraṇī remain unidentified.

i.4 As cataloged in the Degé Kangyur,[6] this dhāraṇī is part of a cycle of eight Kriyātantra (*bya rgyud*) texts (Toh 724–731) dedicated to Tārā. The same formula recorded in *The Dhāraṇī of Tārā* is also included in *Tārā Who Protects from the Eight Dangers*,[7] a number of Tengyur texts dedicated to Tārā,[8] and Butön Rinchen Drup's (*bu ston rin chen grub*, 1290–1364) *Dhāraṇī Collection* (*gzungs bsdus*) from his *Collected Works* (*gsung 'bum*).[9] The dhāraṇī appears to be the main dhāraṇī of the form of Tārā known as Vajratārā, as confirmed by its use in sādhanas dedicated to Vajratārā preserved in the Tengyur[10] and the

Sādhanamālā.[11] It is not known if the dhāraṇī circulated independently, or if it was extracted and preserved separately as *The Dhāraṇī of Tārā* because of its prestige and widespread incorporation into other texts and practice manuals.

i.5 The transcription and translation of the dhāraṇī below takes the Degé Kangyur as the primary witness, which was compared with versions recorded in other Kangyur collections, as well as the above-mentioned Tibetan and Sanskrit sources.

The Translation

1.

The Noble

Dhāraṇī of Tārā

1.1 Homage to the Three Jewels!

1.2 *namo ratnatrayāya | nama āryāvalokiteśvarāya bodhisattvāya mahā sattvāya mahākāruṇikāya |*[12]

1.3 *tad yathā | oṁ tāre tuttāre*[13] *ture sarvaduṣṭapraduṣṭān mama kṛte jambhaya stambhaya mohaya bandhaya hūṁ hūṁ hūṁ phaṭ phaṭ phaṭ sarvaduṣṭa stambhani tāre svāhā |* [14]

1.4 *This concludes "The Noble Dhāraṇī of Tārā."*

Notes

1. Tārā's name is a causative derivation from the Sanskrit root √*tṝ* ("to cross"), meaning "to cause to cross," i.e., "to rescue."

2. In her PhD dissertation, Rachael Stevens (2010) provides a comprehensive introduction to the goddess Tārā via a literary review (pp. 11–21) and an exploration of the history of Tārā worship (pp. 20–45), the Tārā pantheon (pp. 46–56) and key Buddhist texts relating to Tārā (pp. 57–62).

3. Beyer 1978, pp. 5–6. We find this episode in Butön Rinchen Drup's *History of Buddhism* (Obermiller 1932, vol. 2, p. 184) and dramatized in Sonam Gyaltsen's *The Clear Mirror* (Sonam Gyaltsen 1996, pp. 124–27).

4. The Denkarma (*ldan dkar ma*) catalog of early translations, for example, lists only two works dedicated to Tārā that were translated during this time. Following Herrmann-Pfandt's edition (2008), these are no. 439: *'phags pa lha mo sgrol ma'i mtshan brgya rtsa brgyad pa* (*Tāradevīnāmāṣṭaśataka*, Toh 728) and no. 454: *'phags pa lha mo sgrol ma 'jigs pa thams cad las sgrol bar bstod pa* (according to Herrmann-Pfandt, the identification of this title remains uncertain). One could further include no. 388: *'phags pa spyan ras gzigs kyi yum* (*Avalokiteśvaramātādhāraṇī, The Dhāraṇī "The Mother of Avalokiteśvara"*), which does not mention the goddess Tārā but was nevertheless included within the Degé Kangyur section of Tārā-related scriptures (Toh 724–731) as Toh 725.

5. Beyer 1978, pp. 5–13; Landesman 2008, p. 59; Stevens 2010, pp. 36–37.

6. Note that there is a discrepancy among various databases for cataloging the Toh 1001 version of this text within vol. 101 or 102 of the Degé Kangyur. See Toh 1001, n.6, for details.

7. Toh 731, *'phags ma sgrol ma 'jigs pa brgyad las skyob pa'i mdo*. See translation in Samye Translations, *Tārā Who Protects from the Eight Dangers,* 2020.

8. E.g., Toh 1686, 1688, 1697, and 1705.

9. Butön Rinchen Drup, *gsung 'bum*, folio 218.b.6–7; Beyer 1978, pp. 280–81.

10. E.g., Toh 1324, 1325, 1326, 1327, etc.

11. No. 93, Bhattacharyya 1925, pp. 178–83.

12. This can be translated as "Homage to the Three Jewels! Homage to Noble Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva mahāsattva, the great compassionate one!"

13. As noted above, *tārā* is a causative derivation from the Skt. root √*tṝ*, "to cross," thus meaning "to cause to cross," that is, "to deliver" or "rescue." It can be argued that the term *tuttāre* consists of *tārā* prefixed with *ud* (*ud* + √*tṝ* = *uttārā*), which is then further prefixed with the consonant *t-* to avoid a morphological fusion of final vowel of *tāre* and the initial vowel in *uttārā*. The addition of the prefix *ud* conveys a sense of "pulling up," and thus "saving." In the translation below, the vocative forms *tāre* and *tuttāre* are respectively translated as "deliverer" and "savior."

14. This can be tentatively translated as "*Oṁ!* Deliverer! Savior! Swift One! Crush, paralyze, confound, restrain all wicked and evil beings for me! *hūṁ hūṁ hūṁ phaṭ phaṭ phaṭ!* Homage to Tārā, the suppressor of all evil beings!"

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Glossary

Atiśa

a ti sha

ཨ་ཏི་ཤ།

atiśa

The Indian master Atiśa Dīpaṅkaraśrījñāna (982–1054) is renowned in the history of Tibetan Buddhism for coming to Tibet and revitalizing Buddhism there during the early eleventh century.

Avalokiteśvara

spyan ras gzigs

སྤྱན་རས་གཟིགས།

avalokiteśvara

One of the “eight close sons of the Buddha,” he is also known as the bodhisattva who embodies compassion. In certain tantras, he is also the lord of the three families, where he embodies the compassion of the buddhas. In Tibet, he attained great significance as a special protector of Tibet, and in China, in female form, as Guanyin, the most important bodhisattva in all of East Asia.

Bhṛkutī

khro gnyer can

ཁྲོ་གཉེར་ཅན།

bhṛkutī

According to Tibetan historical sources, the Nepalese princess who married the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo. She is believed to have arrived in Tibet in either 632 or 634.

dhāraṇī

gzungs

གཟུངས།

dhāraṇī

The term *dhāraṇī* has the sense of something that “holds” or “retains,” and as such 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 formulae.

Songtsen Gampo

srong btsan sgam po

སྲོང་བཙན་སྒམ་པོ།

617–650; a famous king from Tibet’s Imperial Period.

Tārā

sgrol ma

སྒྲོལ་མ།

tārā

A goddess whose name can be translated as “Savior.” She is known for giving protection and is variously presented in Buddhist literature as a great bodhisattva or a fully awakened buddha.

Vajratārā

rdo rje sgrol ma

རྡོ་རྗེ་སྒྲོལ་མ།

vajratārā

A form of Tārā, the Buddhist goddess of compassion, commonly depicted as golden yellow in color, with four faces and eight arms.