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The Essence of Aparimitāyus



Toh 673a
Degé Kangyur, vol. 91 (rgyud, ba), folio 211.b.

Translated by Peter Alan Roberts and Emily Bower
under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha

First published 2021
Current version v 1.0.2 (2021)
Generated by 84000 Reading Room v2.5.2

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SUMMARY

- s.1 This extremely brief text provides a mantra of the Buddha Aparimitāyus, thus seeming to confirm its existence as a mantra on its own as well as being part of the dhāraṇī contained in the most widely used version of *The Aparimitāyurjñāna Sūtra*.

ac.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ac.1 This text was translated from the Tibetan by Peter Alan Roberts. Tulku Yeshe of the Sakya Monastery, Seattle, was the consulting lama who reviewed the translation, the project manager and editor was Emily Bower, and the proofreader was Ben Gleason. The introduction was compiled by the 84000 editorial team.

The translation was completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

i.

INTRODUCTION

- i.1 This is one of the shortest texts in the Kangyur. It has no introductory passage, conclusion, or colophon, and in the Kangyur source texts it does not even have a title; the title we have given it here is the one that appears in the catalog (*dkar chag*) of the Degé and other Kangyurs, and is drawn from the prose sentence that opens the text after the initial salutation mantra.¹ The text is not identified or numbered in the Tōhoku catalog of the Degé Kangyur, but appears in the Degé, Lhasa, Stok Palace, Shelkar, and Urga Kangyurs.²
- i.2 From the fact that this text is placed in the Kangyur directly before *The Aparimitāyurjñāna Sūtra* (1), Toh 674, and from the mantras it contains, the Tibetan *tshe dpag med* must be presumed to be translating Aparimitāyus rather than Amitāyus, which is also *tshe dpag med* in Tibetan, and to refer to the Buddha Aparimitāyurjñāna residing toward the zenith and associated with longevity, rather than to the Buddha Amitābha residing in his buddhafiield of Sukhāvatī in the western direction. The conflation of these names and the buddhas they denote—they are thought to have originally been distinct but were later conflated not only in Tibetan but also in East Asian traditions—is discussed in more detail in the introduction to *The Aparimitāyurjñāna Sūtra* (1), Toh 674.³
- i.3 The text begins with a salutation, in the form of a brief mantra, to Aparimitāyus under the name Vajra-āyuṣa (Vajra Life).⁴
- i.4 This is followed by one prose sentence and a mantra of Aparimitāyus. The prose sentence is not ascribed to any speaker, and could be taken either as a pronouncement by the Buddha, or as a practice instruction of the kind that one might expect to be included in a Tengyur text.
- i.5 The mantra, *oṃ puṇye puṇye mahāpuṇye aparimitāyuh-puṇya-jñāna-saṃbharopacite svāhā*, appears to have its most immediate origin in the longer *Aparimitāyurjñāna Sūtra* (1), Toh 674. The dhāraṇī of that text (repeated twenty-nine times within it) contains this mantra as its central portion,

roughly one third of the dhāraṇī.⁵ The dhāraṇī in the other version of the sūtra, however, *The Aparimitāyurjñāna Sūtra* (2), Toh 675,⁶ differs from the dhāraṇī of Toh 674 only in *not* containing this mantra—and indeed this difference of dhāraṇīs is the only really substantial difference between the two versions of the sūtra as a whole. It is also the reason why some catalogs and commentaries distinguish the two versions of the text as the “three *om*” and “two *om*” versions, respectively, and the Degé *karchak* goes further in referring to the shorter one (Toh 675) as the “two *om*, no *punye*” version. As explained more fully in the introductions to *The Aparimitāyurjñāna Sūtra* (1) and (2), Toh 674 and 675 respectively,⁷ it is likely that the latter represents a version translated in the early, imperial translation period of the late eighth or early ninth century, while the former is the version introduced to Tibet some three centuries later.

i.6 The existence of this text, containing the very dhāraṇī phrase that differentiates the two versions of the sūtra as a standalone mantra, is therefore intriguing, even if from the Kangyurs and their catalogs themselves we can glean no clearer explanation for its existence than the notion that it is simply one of several mantras or dhāraṇīs of Aparimitāyus which, as we can observe, is also found incorporated in longer alternatives.

i.7 Nevertheless, the mantra featured in this text is also to be found in one other place in the Kangyur, in the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*, a tantra of the Yoga class that is widely used in rituals for the dead. The tantra features a number of secondary maṇḍalas for specific purposes, and among these is one presided over by Aparimitāyus. There are two versions of the tantra in the Kangyur, Toh 483 and 485, translated (from slightly different Sanskrit manuscripts) in the eighth and thirteenth centuries, respectively. The mantra of the present text is found in the early translation version exactly as it is here, and in the later version with the addition of one word, *karaṇi*,⁸ before the final *svāhā*. In both texts, the mantra is described as the “essence” or “heart-mantra” (*hṛdaya, snying po*), just as it is in the brief introductory sentence of the present text. In the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana* it is introduced as the essence of all tathāgatas, but in the context of being the principal mantra of others accompanying it and clearly corresponding to the maṇḍala of Aparimitāyus, while here it is simply said to be the essence of Aparimitāyus.⁹

The Essence of Aparimitāyus

1.

The Translation

[F.211.b]

1.1

Om vajra-āyuse hūṃ a.

If someone continually repeats this essence of Ārya Aparimitāyus, or is empowered¹⁰ with water blessed by its mantra, their lifespan will be lengthened:

1.2

*om puṇye puṇye mahāpuṇye aparimitāyuh-puṇya¹¹-jñāna-saṃbharopacite¹²
svāhā.¹³*

n.

NOTES

n.1

The title is easily confused with that of Toh 676, *tshe dang ye shes dpag tu med pa'i snying po'i gzungs* (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh676.html>), and indeed in the catalog of the Narthang Kangyur the equivalent of the latter text is referred to as the *tshe dpag med kyi snying po*. In some Kangyur catalogs, an alternative title is given: *tshe dpag med kyi yang snying*.

n.2

It is not found in the Narthang Kangyur, despite the title appearing in the catalog (see n.1).

n.3

See Peter Alan Roberts and Emily Bower, trans. *The Aparimitāyurjñāna Sūtra* (1), Toh 674, Introduction at i.9 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh674.html#UT22084-091-072-14>).

n.4

Here, as in the main mantra, the Sanskrit rule of euphonic combination of final and initial vowels is ignored: one would have expected Vajrāyūṣa. The name appears in the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit vocative with the *-e* ending, which is common in mantras, although in classical Sanskrit this vocative ending was used for the female nouns only.

n.5

Note, however, that the equivalent phrase in the dhāraṇī of the “duplicate” of version (1) of the sūtra in the Compendium of Dhāraṇīs, Toh 849 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh849.html#UT22084-091-072-90>), is not quite the same as the mantra here and the phrase in Toh 674 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh674.html#UT22084-091-072-90>). In Toh 849, the phrase *mahāpuṇye aparimitāyuh-puṇya-jñāna-saṃbharopacite* becomes, instead, *mahāpuṇye aparimitapuṇye aparimitapuṇya-jñāna-saṃbharopacite*. As noted in note 53 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh674.html#end-note-UT22084-091-072-91>) of Toh 674 and note 53 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh849.html#end-note-UT22084-091-072-91>) of Toh 849, this difference is found across all Kangyurs that have a

Compendium of Dhāraṇīs, and it is the phrase as it reads in Toh 849 that is found in the most widely recited extra-canonical versions.

- n.6 See Peter Alan Roberts and Emily Bower, trans. *The Aparimitāyurjñāna Sūtra* (2) (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh675.html#UT22084-091-073-90>), Toh 675.
- n.7 See Roberts and Bower, *The Aparimitāyurjñāna Sūtra* (1), Toh 674, Introduction at i.21 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh674.html#UT22084-091-072-35>); and *The Aparimitāyurjñāna Sūtra* (2), Toh 675, Introduction at i.10 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh675.html#UT22084-091-073-35>).
- n.8 *kariṇi* in the Tibetan of the Degé version of Toh 485.
- n.9 The possible relationship of this mantra from the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana* to the dhāraṇī of *The Aparimitāyurjñāna Sūtra* is also discussed in the introduction to version (2) of the sūtra, Toh 675, at i.29–32 (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh675.html#UT22084-091-073-393>).
- n.10 The Tibetan *dbang bskur* is the usual translation of *abhiṣikta*, literally “besprinkled,” which is the term used for the consecration of a king at his enthronement with blessed water.
- n.11 The Stok Palace, Shey, Chizhi, and Gangteng Kangyurs (all manuscript Kangyurs that belong to the Themphangma group), in place of the word *punya* here, have only *nye*.
- n.12 In Toh 674 as well as the two versions of the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*, the second *a* in *saṃbharopacite* is long. In the Stok Palace Kangyur (F. 190.a), the spelling is *saṃbharocite*.
- n.13 “Om, Merit! Merit! Great merit! The one who has limitless life and has gathered the accumulations of merit and wisdom! Svāhā.”

b.

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tshe dang ye shes dpag tu med pa theg pa chen po'i mdo (*Aparimitāyurjñāna-nāma-mahāyānasūtra*) (2). Toh 675, Degé Kangyur, vol. 91 (rgyud 'bum, ba), folios 216.a–220.b. English translation in Peter Alan Roberts and Emily Bower (2021).

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g.

GLOSSARY

g.1

Aparimitāyus

tshe dpag tu med pa

ཚེ་དཔག་ཏུ་མེད་པ།

Aparimitāyus

“The One Who Has Immeasurable Longevity.” For more details on this buddha, see Peter Alan Roberts and Emily Bower, trans. *The*

Aparimitāyurjñāna Sūtra (1), Toh 674, Introduction at i.9

(<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh674.html#UT22084-091-072-14>).