

**The Relationship  
Between Form and Formlessness  
in *Maṇḍalas***

**Interpreting the Aesthetic Power of Buddhist *Maṇḍalas*  
on the basis of the philosophy of *vāk* in Trika Śaivism**

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**Sung Min Kim**

**School of Arts & Aesthetics**

**Jawaharlal Nehru University**

**New Delhi-110 067**

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## Introduction

The central question of the thesis is about the relation between visual forms and their inlaid meanings in a broad context. The research undertaken here is basically meant for exploring the metaphysical dimension of visuals with the question how the visible dimensions of forms are related to their invisible dimensions. The metaphysical dimensions of visual forms are experiential, and their vital presence unfolds in the process of creation or aesthetic relish. While we discuss about the inlaid meanings of visual forms, we are naturally confronted with the questions: what do we mean by the inlaid meanings? Are they symbolic meanings? Or, metaphoric meanings? From the preset, it should be discerned that there is a non-discursive meaning as well as discursive meanings that are charged in visual forms.<sup>1</sup> The non-discursive layer of visual forms may be illustrated by artists' inspirations that result in the creation of forms. Then, what are the relationships between the non-discursive layer and the discursive layers of visual forms? For the purpose of investigating into the nature of forms and their relationship to the formless source of the forms, the thesis focuses on Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, because they are profound and multi-layered in contents as much as they are elaborate and affluent in forms. The term *maṇḍala* designates different objects according to the context of references. It may refer to the system of bodily *cakras* where deities reside; or the secret ritual meeting of tantric initiates and *yoginīs* (*melaka*) where the participants usually form a circle; or the ritual *maṇḍala* seen during the initiation; or the one perceived in one's body in the process of tantric *yoga*. The *maṇḍala* considered in the thesis is limited to those visual objects permanently represented in the monastic complex and seen by the public during the worship.

### **The Question of the Relationship between Forms and the Formless**

In regard to the topic, the relationship between forms and the formless, let us consider some examples, before the problem of form and the inner contents of *maṇḍalas* is to be looked at. Somebody sees the contradiction in Buddhists' bowing down in front to the

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<sup>1</sup> Langer calls it 'essential import'. See Langer 1953: pp. 373-4.

Buddha images and says that the Buddha resides in one's own mind not in the images. However, it is not the physical form, but the spirit of the Buddha to which devotees bow down. The physical form of the Buddha is placed at the altar in order to remind people of the *bodhicitta* in their mind. Among the Buddhist community of East Asia, the portrait of Bodhidharma, who is the first patriarch of Zen tradition, is revered and believed to have a spiritual power. Thus, monk painters of the Zen tradition often draw his portraits. When they draw his portrait, it is not the beautiful face of Bodhidharma but the spirit imbued in his face that they challenge to draw. These two examples typify the true meaning of visual forms lying in the expression of what is formless. If we talk about the form in the context of Buddhism, first of all, we are reminded of the great affirmation: 'the *rūpa* (form) is the *śūnya* (void), and the *śūnya* is the *rūpa*'.<sup>2</sup> The Sanskrit word *maṇḍala*, meaning 'the circle' literally, is the combination of two words 'maṇḍa' (Tib.: *dkyil*) and 'la' (Tib.: *kor*), respectively denoting 'the chief divinity and the emanation'; or *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*.<sup>3</sup> Thus, we notice that the term itself contains the two counterparts of the formless Ultimate and multiple forms. The ritual of sand-*maṇḍala* explicitly demonstrates that the multiplicity of colourful forms return to the state of *śūnya* in the final dissolution of the *maṇḍala*. One may raise a question: How is the *śūnya* represented in the colourful forms of *maṇḍalas* which are not meant to be dissolved? The first question which is often raised in regard to Buddhist *maṇḍalas* is how the bodily figures and primary colours in *maṇḍalas* can be consistent with the prime concept of *śūnya* in Buddhism. There are *maṇḍalas* permanently painted on the walls of ancient monasteries in the Western Himalayas. While facing colourful *maṇḍalas* on the wall, we are in a difficult position to understand the non-dualism of forms and the formless affirmed in Buddhism. At first glance, *maṇḍalas* seem contrary to the *śūnya*. I, personally, had been struggling with the fact that Buddhist monasteries are filled with images, golden statues and colourful paintings, which, I felt, contradictory to the Buddhist teaching of 'śūnya'. Nevertheless, one thing was clear: if the employment of colourful forms were contradictory to the quest for the *śūnya*, these

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya-Sūtra*, trans. Müller 1894: pp. 147-8.

<sup>3</sup> The meaning has been explained in the *Dharmamaṇḍala Sūtra* of 8<sup>th</sup> cent. A.D. cf. DMS, trans. Lo Bue 1987: p. 796.

forms would not have become the perennial tradition. Thus, colourful forms are present in Buddhist monasteries as a self-evidence of the non-difference between forms and the formless. The thesis investigates the question about the colourful forms of *maṇḍalas* and their relation to the *śūnya*.

### **Reflection on the previous Researches on the *Maṇḍalas***

Tucci draws attention to the cosmic meanings inlaid in *maṇḍalas* and attempt to relate those meanings with the human psyche from the perspective of the modern psychology.<sup>4</sup> Though *maṇḍalas* are viewed in correspondence with the deepest level of the human consciousness, the relationship between their cosmic affiliation and their visual significance has been overlooked in his scope. Many attempts have been made to comprehend *maṇḍalas* primarily on the basis of their association with religious practices, because they accompany the rituals and spiritual practices. In the field of religious studies, their significance has been read as the representation of doctrinal expositions,<sup>5</sup> and their ritual process and ritualistic function have been unraveled.<sup>6</sup> In these approaches, the visuals of *maṇḍalas* have been viewed within the frame of traditional interpretations, chiefly as symbols with discursive meanings. But they are not questioned in their sheer visual aspect. The visual aspect of *maṇḍalas* has been the focus of art historical studies. In the field of art history, efforts have been made to trace their formal development.<sup>7</sup> The deities of *maṇḍalas* have been identified on the basis of the ancient manuals of the visualization,<sup>8</sup> and the empirical *maṇḍalas* are compared with possible textual sources.<sup>9</sup> The previous researches in art history, while focusing on the visuals, appear excluding their inner contents in its scope. Thus, we notice that most of the previous studies on *maṇḍalas* deal with either their religious and cosmic meanings, or their physical forms. The relation between the meanings and the forms in *maṇḍalas* has not been a topic of attention.

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<sup>4</sup> Tucci 1961.

<sup>5</sup> See Thurman & Leidy 1997; Khanna 1979.

<sup>6</sup> See Wayman 1992; Brauen 1997; Bühnemann 2003.

<sup>7</sup> See Malandra 1993; Leidy, in: Thurman & Leidy 1997; Luczanits 2005.

<sup>8</sup> See Chandra & Vira 1995; Snodgrass 1997; Mallman 1975.

<sup>9</sup> See Klimburg-Salter 1999.

Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, though used in religious practices, are not merely one of the religious paraphernalia. Yet, they are neither the same as ordinary works of arts that are free from religious allegories. Being defined to be the object of religious arts, their inner contents and visual forms should be perceived all together. In this respect, Jung's comprehension of *maṇḍalas* in the field of psychology is remarkable in unveiling the connection between forms and inner contents of *maṇḍalas*.<sup>10</sup> Modern understanding of *maṇḍalas* as the mirror of our psyche has to be attributed to Jung's research. His analysis of *maṇḍalas* created by his psychotic patients demonstrates the *maṇḍalas* as symbols constantly recurring in diverse cultures from the ancient to the contemporary. Jung observes that *maṇḍalas* appear in the process of individuation in case of his patients, in order for the self-healing, and he speculates that they spring from an instinctive impulse. He writes that many patients realize the reality of 'the collective unconscious' as an autonomous entity, and these *maṇḍalas* are governed by the same fundamental laws that are observed in the *maṇḍalas* from different parts of the world. He uses words such as 'instinctive impulse', 'transconscious disposition' or 'collective unconscious' to express the kernel of *maṇḍalas* as the archetype. Jung views the motif of *maṇḍala* as 'one of the best examples of the universal operation of an archetype'.<sup>11</sup> Jung's writings on *maṇḍalas* urge us to uncover that the *maṇḍalas* are primarily the archetypal space or the primeval space.

Although, Jung's researches on the *maṇḍalas* of psychotic patients unearth the fundamental meaning of *maṇḍalas* as the archetypal symbol, his psycho-analytical interpretations of their visual symbols have little scope of application in regard to Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, because the cultural background of symbols depicted in particular *maṇḍalas* have not been considered in his interpretations. The misapplication is exemplified by his interpretation of the burial ground as 'the horror' without the consideration of its tantric context. However, we need to pay attention to his retrospective comments after his research on the *maṇḍala* symbolism: "Knowledge of

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<sup>10</sup> Jung 1973.

<sup>11</sup> Jung 1972: p. 69. From the conclusion of his article 'A Study in the Process of Individuation', translated from "Zur Empirie des Individuationsprozesses", *Gestaltungen des Unbewussten*, (Psychologische Abhandlungen VII) Zürich 1950.

the common origin of these unconsciously preformed symbols has been totally lost to us. In order to recover it, we have to read old texts and investigate old cultures so as to gain an understanding of the things our patients bring us today in explanation of their psychic development.”<sup>12</sup> His comment confirms that the research of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* on the basis of the old texts may contribute to illuminate the common origin of the recurring archetype of *maṇḍala*. In Jung’s time, the translations of old texts into the Western languages had not been done as much as they are today. In the meanwhile, crucial tantras in relation to *maṇḍalas* have been translated into English, which I have been tremendously benefited in carrying out my research.

### **Problem of Forms and the Formless in Buddhist *maṇḍalas* in the context of the religious practice**

The religious meaning of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* conceived by modern researchers may be represented by the words of Snellgrove. In his words, two essential concepts of the *maṇḍala* are implied: the centre and its transformations.

“The *maṇḍala*, the primary function of which is to express the truth of emanation and return (*samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*) is the centre of the universe....Its core is Mt. Meru: it is the palace of the universal monarch, it is the royal *stūpa*; it is even the fire altar where one makes the sacrifice of oneself.”<sup>13</sup>

His words express the cosmic significance of *maṇḍalas*. However, not all *maṇḍalas* are charged with cosmic meanings. Depending on the main divinity represented in the centre, the purpose and the meaning of *maṇḍalas* vary. For example, the *maṇḍala* of the Eight Nāgas is for pacifying the venom of the snakes,<sup>14</sup> thus, the cosmic symbolism is hardly appropriate in this *maṇḍala*. Buddhaghya, in the commentary of the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, remarks that each *maṇḍala* is designed for different

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<sup>12</sup> Jung 1972: p. 100. The quotation is from the conclusion of the article ‘Concerning Mandala Symbolism’, first published, as “Über Mandalasymbolik”, in *Gestaltungen des Unbewussten* (Psychologische Abhandlungen, VII), Zürich, 1950.

<sup>13</sup> Snellgrove & Skorupski 1977, vol. I: p. 32, n.4.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. SDPT, introductory commentary by Buddhaghya, trans. Skorupski 1983: p. xxvii.

purposes.<sup>15</sup> Thus, we should be clear in the mind that the cosmic symbolism with the emphasis on the centre and its transformation is apt only when we deal with the *maṇḍalas* of divinities who represent the Absolute. For instance the *maṇḍalas* of Tabo and Alchi we are dealing with in the text are centred on Mahāvairocana who represents the Great Illumination of Enlightenment and the Absolute Body of the Dharma. Thus, these *maṇḍalas* are charged with cosmic significance, involving such concepts as the *dharmadhātu* (Ultimate Dharma), the *śūnya* (Void) or the *bodhicitta* (Awareness of Enlightenment).

Let us look at how the forms and the formless Ultimate are conceived by the religious practitioners. For monks who practice with *maṇḍala* images, the external *maṇḍalas* are not real *maṇḍalas*. They are merely reflective images (*pratibimba*). The real *maṇḍala*, which is the ‘Essence’,<sup>16</sup> has to be internally explored. During the interview I carried out in Ladakh in July 2007 in order to survey what actually *maṇḍalas* mean for the present Buddhist practitioners, Geshe Tsewang,<sup>17</sup> a practitioner of Heruka *maṇḍala*, said:

“When the external *maṇḍala* is successfully internalized, the way how to practice *maṇḍala* is revealed.”<sup>18</sup>

His statement confirms that the complicated external forms are not all about the *maṇḍala* and there is the deeper dimension to be explored. Unless the real *maṇḍala* is tasted, one would not know what the *maṇḍala* is, merely by looking at it. Geshe Tsewang actually used the expression of ‘tasting a *maṇḍala*’ indicating the inner sensual experience of a *maṇḍala*. It is remarkable that a religious practitioner used a terminology of Indian aesthetics in explaining his spiritual experience, having been unaware of what history the concept of ‘tasting (*rasa*)’ has gone through in Indian aesthetics. The use of the metaphor, ‘tasting a *maṇḍala*’ by a religious practitioner is

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> The *maṇḍala* is called in Tibetan, ‘*dKyilkor*’ (the center and the circle), and also ‘*sñiṅpo*’ which means the essence.

<sup>17</sup> Geshe Tsewang Dorje is the director of Ngari Institute of Buddhist Dialectics, in Leh in Ladakh.

<sup>18</sup> Personal interview, in Leh, Ladakh, on 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2007.

particularly significant in the present approach to Buddhist *maṇḍalas*.

*Maṇḍalas* are used in the practice of visualization. However, not all the Buddhists are eligible to practice the visualization of *maṇḍalas*. One should be first of all initiated. According to the spiritual ability, the practitioners are assigned with particular *maṇḍalas* that are categorized into four groups. These four categories of *maṇḍalas* correspond to the four categories of *tantras*: *Kriyā*, *Cārya*, *Yoga* and *Anuttarayoga*. Because the *Anuttarayoga Tantras* are the predominant stream of Tibetan Buddhism today, mainly the divinities of *Anuttarayoga Tantras* are taken up for the *maṇḍala* practices. Thus, only the spiritually advanced monks are said to be able to carry out the *maṇḍala* practice.

*Maṇḍalas* are understood as the form of *śūnyatā*, its reflective image (*pratibimba*): the essence of *maṇḍalas* is the *śūnya*, and their forms are the reflective images of the *śūnya*. Realizing the *śūnya* of the self should precede the visualization of the *maṇḍala*. From *śūnya* of the self, the deity is generated as the self. In visualization, a self becomes a divinity through the *śūnya* and returns to the self through the *śūnya*; the deity of the *maṇḍala* appears in the *śūnya* and disappears into the *śūnya*. The practice of *śūnyatā*, *bodhicitta* and *karūṇa* should precede the practice of *maṇḍalas*, and the Buddhist practice of *maṇḍalas* are meant to strengthen the realization of the Truth, that is *śūnya*.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the *Hevajra Tantra*, an *Anuttarayoga Tantra* says,

“The *bodhicitta* which has both absolute and relative forms should be generated by means of the Maṇḍala Circle etc. (*maṇḍalacakrādi*) and by the process of Self-empowerment (*svādhiṣṭānakrama*)<sup>20</sup>”<sup>21</sup>

The tantra succinctly explains about the essence of the *maṇḍala*. It teaches that the

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<sup>19</sup> Geshe Tsewang of Ladakh mentioned emphatically in a personal interview (4. Aug. 2007) that the *maṇḍala* practice should be based on *śūnya*, *bodhicitta* and *karūṇa*.

<sup>20</sup> The commentary, *Yogaratnamālā* interpretes the term *svādhiṣṭānakrama* as the emanation of the Process of Perfection. Cf. Farrow & Menon 1992: p. 215.

<sup>21</sup> HT II. 4. 35, tans. Farrow & Menon 1992: p. 215. The *bodhicitta* has been translated by Farrow & Menon into ‘Enlightened Consciousness’, which I find inappropriate. I use the original term ‘*bodhicitta*’ un-translated.

*maṇḍala* is the essence having the nature of void (*kha*) and purifies the sense faculties, thus the *bodhicitta* is cultivated through the *maṇḍala*.<sup>22</sup> *Maṇḍalas* are said to be the abode (*puram*) of the essence of all the Buddhas (*sarvabuddhātmakam*)<sup>23</sup> and bears the great bliss (*mahat sukham*).<sup>24</sup> It is clearly noticed in the tantra that *maṇḍalas* are defined to be the Essence (*śāram*), or the *bodhicitta*.<sup>25</sup> At the same time they are the means to realize the Essence or the *bodhicitta*. Thus, we observe that in the religious practice the notions of the *śūnya* or *bodhicitta* are symbolically implied in the visual images of Buddhist *maṇḍalas*.

### **Buddhist *Maṇḍalas* as Works of Arts**

*Maṇḍalas* are regarded in the present thesis as works of arts, while their distinction from ordinary works of arts is also observed. One may question whether we can deal with *maṇḍalas* under the category of arts in spite that they are meant to serve the purpose in religious rituals. The question may be, at the first hand, argued back on the basis that the separation between the religion and arts is a modern invention, which accompanied the rise of individualism and the emancipation of arts in the West free from the power of the Christian churches. The isolation of arts from religion in the modern concept of arts should be discerned as the freedom from the religious authority, not the denial of religion as a source of artistic inspiration. Even today, the validity of religion as the source of artistic activities remains intact. Secondly, we should notice that *maṇḍalas* are created by artists or monk-artists, yet not by ordinary monks. Above all, it is revealing that the *maṇḍalas* have been permanently depicted on the walls in the monasteries in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. Especially when they are painted permanently on the wall, they should be considered in their visual dimensions because they are meant to be the focus to be looked at by ordinary devotees. Thus, they are placed in a different context from that of the initiation *maṇḍalas* of tantric rituals. The initiation

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. HT II. 3. 27. “The Circle (*cakra*) is an assembly (*nivaham*) and having the nature of the Space element (*khadhātu*), it is that which purifies (*viśodhanam*) the sense objects (*viśayā*) and other aggregates.” Trans. Farrow & Menon 1992: p. 191.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. HT II. 3. 25. Trans. Farrow & Menon 1992: p. 190.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. HT II. 3. 26. Trans. Farrow & Menon 1992: p. 190.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Ibid.

*maṇḍalas* are created temporarily to be the base of the internal visualization, which are to be dismantled after the rituals are over. One generalizes on the basis of the information about the initiation *maṇḍalas* that *maṇḍalas* are secret and esoteric. On the contrary to this generalization, the *maṇḍalas* permanently painted on the walls of monasteries are open and publicly exposed to be seen. Thus, our understanding of *maṇḍalas*, at least in case of those permanently represented on the walls, can be dealt with as works of arts, not restricted by their religious context.

### **Aesthetic Approach to Buddhist *Maṇḍalas***

In order to examine the relationship between the inner meanings and the visual forms of Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, the thesis takes up their aesthetic dimension for the exploration. For the aesthetic approach keeps us in the track of seeing both the inner contents and the external form in its scope. While I deal with the aesthetic dimension of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* in the thesis, they are essentially viewed in their aspect of being an archetype beyond their association with religious practice. Their being the archetype is determinant for our aesthetic appreciation of *maṇḍalas* beyond cultural, spatial or temporal boundaries.

I behold especially the fact that *maṇḍalas* are appreciated even away from their religious meanings. The fact should be emphasized that *maṇḍalas* can be aesthetically, or even spiritually appealing without getting their contents and meanings known. This fact speaks itself about the importance of visuals of *maṇḍalas*. Today artistically executed *maṇḍalas* are publicly displayed in exhibitions, and people appreciate them even without knowing their ritualistic context or symbolic indications. People are overwhelmed by the exquisite forms and bright colours. However, the appreciation of *maṇḍalas* is different from that of ordinary pictures of portrait, still life or landscape, etc., in that the exquisite forms of *maṇḍalas* lead one to feel something transcendental or awesome. One may have such experiences even without worshipping divinities delineated in the *maṇḍalas*. These experiences would be better described in terms of the reaction of the heart, which we may call ‘aesthetic rapture’. Such experiences

unambiguously indicate the inner meanings different from religious associations or discursive interpretations of symbols. The non-discursive meaning inbuilt in the visuals of *maṇḍalas* is proved by the present use of *maṇḍalas* as a psychotherapeutic method in the West. In this method, no meanings are instructed to patients. Patients are to copy the *maṇḍalas* given to them, which is quite opposite to Jung's method encouraging the active imagination of patients. And in primary schools, children are given with drawing of *maṇḍalas* and asked to fill the drawing with the colours they like. Though the contemporary applications of *maṇḍalas* in the West are doubtful in the matter of whether such regulated imitations could bring the desirable result, they mirror the idea that the heart spontaneously responds to the visuals of *maṇḍalas* and they influence in molding the structure of the mind, whether consciously or unconsciously. The main question of the thesis is, thus, phrased as such: 'How do the visuals of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* appeal to the heart of people even away from their religio-symbolic meanings?'

### **Scope of Empirical Research: *Maṇḍalas* of Tabo and Alchi in the Western Himalayas from the 11<sup>th</sup> cent. A.D.**

*Maṇḍalas* have been the perennial theme in the religious arts of India. Its symbolic meanings are intensified through elaborated artistic language especially within Hindu and Buddhist traditions. The forms of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* are traditionally laid down, on the basis of the vision attained at the state of the absorption into the non-conceptual world. The Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, in general, may be described in their geometric palace with clear indications of the four cardinal directions. The divinities, either represented in anthropomorphic forms or in symbolic forms, are arrayed in the hierarchical order around the centre within the geometric palace. Here, Buddhas and bodhisattvas are conceived as spatial manifestations from the centre. However, as we will see in the main text, the *maṇḍalas* of Tabo do not conform to our general image of Buddhist *maṇḍalas*. They are neither based on the geometric structure, nor are their centers conspicuous. The visual forms of *maṇḍalas* vary. Thus, it is necessary to narrow down the scope of the empirical examinations to particular examples.

The present thesis focuses on the *maṇḍalas* in the monasteries of Tabo and Alchi in the Western Himalayas, in order to approach the question of the relationship between the inner contents and the visual forms, more particularly about how the Buddhist *maṇḍalas* appeal to the heart of people even away from their religio-symbolic meanings. These examples have been chosen because they display rare refinement and sophistication in their forms as comparable with the classical arts and also because they are one of the earliest *maṇḍalas* extant in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. *Maṇḍalas* are not isolated paintings in Tabo and Alchi, but central in the whole iconographic program and vital in creating the visual effect of the space.

The monasteries of Tabo and Alchi belong to the period of the Second Diffusion of Buddhism (*phyi dar*) in the Tibetan history that was carried out by the patronage of Puran-Guge in the Western Himalayas.<sup>26</sup> As is also observed in other monasteries established under the same historical background, such as Nako, Duṅkar, Sumda and Mangyu, Mahāvairocana is the central theme of the iconographic program of the monasteries at this time. Consequently we encounter in these monasteries the *maṇḍalas* related to Mahāvairocana. His position as the central divinity characterizes the *Yoga Tantra* class, thus these *maṇḍalas* with the image of Mahāvairocana at the centre are justifiably viewed in association with what the *Yoga Tantras* say.

The *maṇḍalas* of the *dukhang* in Tabo are well preserved. So far as the present remains indicate, there were only two *maṇḍalas* represented in the *dukhang* in Tabo: the Vajradhātu-*maṇḍala* and Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara-*Maṇḍala*. The Vajradhātu-*maṇḍala* of Tabo made up of thirty-three clay sculptures is one of rare sculptural *maṇḍalas* set in the architectural space. Although the bibliography of Rin-chen-bzang-po (958-1055 A.D.) tells us that he founded the monastery of Tabo, the inscriptions reveal that the monastery was founded by Yeshe Ö, ca. 996 A.D.. The research on the inscription in the *dukhang* also reveals that the wall paintings as well as the sculptural *maṇḍala* of Tabo

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<sup>26</sup> Apart from Tabo and Alchi, these monasteries were established at this time.

may be assigned to ca. 1042 during the renovation of Jang Chup Ö.<sup>27</sup>

The oldest structure of Alchi monastery, that is, the *dukhang* is almost contemporary to the *dukhang* of Tabo, founded in the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century by Kelden Sherap, a follower of Rin-chen-bzang-po. The *sumtseg*, a three story structure, is assumed to have been founded in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century by a monk Tsultrim Sherap.<sup>28</sup> The *dukhang* is the Main Hall of the monastery in the nature of a congregational space, whereas the *sumtseg* is the three-story temple, more conducive for the personal worship and prayer. The *dukhang* of Alchi is completely filled with *maṇḍalas* on the walls. Six large *maṇḍalas* of over three metres in diameters and a small *maṇḍala* over the doorway create a remarkable visual effect with their prominent large circular frames. Among them, the Vajradhātu-*maṇḍala* and Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara-*Maṇḍala* seem essential as much as their variations occupy entire walls of the second and the third stories of the *sumtseg*. In addition, it should be also mentioned in the preset that the Goddess Prajñāpāramitā has a significant place in Alchi, featuring in two *maṇḍalas*: one in the *dukhang* and another in the *sumtseg*.

### **Methodology: Doctrine of *Vāk***

As Jung has realized, valuable accounts of *maṇḍalas* are found in the old texts, particularly in *tantras* in regard to Buddhist *maṇḍalas*. Buddhist *maṇḍalas* are explained in the context of tantric practices, which is called *mantrayāna* (the way of *mantras*). Though the aesthetic dimension of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* is the main concern of the thesis, the meanings of *maṇḍalas* given in the context of religious practices are indispensable in comprehending the nature of the Formless that is the implied meaning of visuals of Buddhist *maṇḍalas*. Especially, the references from the visualization practice provide us with a key to interpret the internal experience of *maṇḍalas*. By means of the visualization of a *maṇḍala*, the practitioner identifies the self with the various manifestations of the divinity and experiences the non-duality of the self and the

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Petech & Luczanits 1999. The iconographic program, dating from the restoration phase 1042, includes painting, sculptures, inscriptions and extensive wall texts. The evidence of the paint underneath the *maṇḍala* sculptures makes it evident that the *maṇḍala* sculptures belong to the restoration phase.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Snellgrove & Skorupski 1977.

divinity. Though there is a fundamental difference between the aesthetic seeing and the visualization in regard to the way the visuals are processed, the visualization practice of *maṇḍalas*, systematically laid out by the tradition, demonstrates convincingly the innate depth of *maṇḍalas*, which could be related to the aesthetic immersion to them. For the major question of the present research, the religious practice of visualization also gives invaluable references to ‘the sounds’ that make up for the gap between the ultimate state in the nature of *śūnya* and the manifested images of *pratibimba*.

The descriptions of visualization indicate that the levels in between the *śūnya* and multiple forms in *maṇḍalas* are conceived in the nature of sounds, which is consistent with the fact that the practice of *mantras* has been the essential soteriological means in realizing the formless Ultimate in the *Yoga Tantras*. The concept of subtle sound plays the central part in the tantric practices and holds a crucial key to interpret the tantric methods of salvation. The visuals of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* have been elaborated in association with the *mantrayāna* practice, and they are always combined with *mantras* and *mudrās* in tantric practices. Thus, the thesis looks into the notion of subtle sound that explains the conceptual basis of the *mantra* practice. Specifically its philosophy formulated in ‘the doctrine of *vāk*’ may be taken as the guideline in approaching the questions of forms and the formless in *maṇḍalas*.

The sound in spiritual traditions of India has been taken as the crucial factor in the descriptions of the cosmic revelation and the world manifestations. The term *vāk* is traced back as early as the *Ṛgveda*. *Vāk* has been speculated as the principle of the divine manifestations and the multiple creations in the world. Sophisticated philosophy of *vāk* is found in the Trika Śaivism of Kashmir. The doctrine of *vāk* in the Trika Śaivism is an achievement brought about by the synthesis of diverse streams of spiritual traditions: earlier Śaiva *tantras*, Bhartṛhari’s philosophy of sound (*śabda-brahman*), the Vijñānavadin’s philosophy of logic, and the non-dualistic vision represented in its *pratyabhijñā* (recognition) philosophy. The comprehensive philosophy of *vāk* in the Trika Śaivism demonstrates a systematic way to explain the non-dualism between all the phenomenal objects and the Supreme Divine, that is, Śiva. It renders elaborate

expositions about the nature of worldly manifestations and their relation to the Ultimate Origin. Thus, I take the texts of Trika Śaivism as the main source of understanding *vāk*. Since the doctrine of *vāk* mainly deals with the question regarding the relationship between the Un-manifest Source and multiple creations, it is expected that the comprehension of *vāk* would impart the framework through which we can explain what makes the visuals of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* appeal to the heart of people even away from their doctrinal associated meanings. Moreover, its wide scope that encompasses the field of aesthetics has been testified by the poetics of *dhvani* in the texts of *Dhvanyāloka* and its *Locana*.

The non-dualistic philosophy of the Trika Śaivism is pronounced in profound stanzas in the *Śiva Sūtra* by Vasugupta. The logical arguments of its non-dualistic theology has been carried out by the Pratyabhijñā School, represented by Somānanda (c. 900-950) and his disciple, Utpaladeva (c. 925-975). Abhinavagupta (c. 975-1025), who represents the culminating point of the Indian aesthetics with his theory of *rasa* and *dhvani*, is the descendent of these philosophers of the Kashmir, and he is the one who accomplished and synthesized the different streams of tantric traditions on the basis of the non-dualistic philosophy established by the Pratyabhijñā School. These key personages of the Trika Śaivism in Kashmir are contemporary to the period when the region of Western Himalayas was in active interactions with Kashmir in terms of not only economy but also arts and religion.<sup>29</sup> Especially, Abhinavagupta is exactly contemporary to Rin-chen-bzang-po (958-1055) who translated a number of texts into Tibetan and motivated the foundation of monasteries along the Western Himalayas, including those of Tabo and Alchi.

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<sup>29</sup> The presence of Kashmir artists in Western Tibet has been discussed at length by Tucci in his *Transhimalaya* (1973). He mentions about the artistic influence of Kashmir on Western Himalaya (1973). He refers to the importance of Mangnang and its paintings being done by a number of painters from Kashmir summoned by Rin-chen-bzang-po (pp. 91-93). He exemplifies it with illustrations of a figure of a *sādhu* (Pl. 114) in affinity to the one depicted on terracottas from Harvan in Kashmir, figures of divinities (Pl. 122) and an ivory statue from western Tibet (Pl. 128). “Work such as this provides indisputable evidence of Kashmir influence in Tibet in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries and similar examples from a later period have been found at Alchi in Ladakh.” (p. 92) He adds examples from Tsaparang (Pl. 138), Tholing (Pl. 136) and Tabo (Pl. 129) as revealing their Kashmir origin.

Snellgove also states about the same point (1977: p. 16): “It may be taken for granted, and we think quite rightly, that the main source of artistic work in Western Tibet and Ladakh from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries was north-west India, and especially Kashmir, which was then still a Hind-Buddhist land, and which is often specifically mentioned in Tibetan sources.”

The Trika Śaivism, in its philosophical exegesis, makes up for the non-dualism between the Ultimate and the phenomena conceived by the Yogācāra Buddhists. Especially, the conviction of the Pratyabhijñā School that Śiva permeates everything and the ‘recognition’ (*pratyabhijñā*) of one’s own identity (*ātman*) as Śiva leads one to the salvation reminds us of the Yogācārin’s exposition of *Tathāgatagarbha*. Tucci has recognized the validity of the Trika Śaivism of Kashmir in understanding *maṇḍalas*. In his book on *maṇḍalas*, he expressed his view that the Hindu *yantras* are “the quintessential reduction of the identical idea which the Buddhist *maṇḍalas* are based on”.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, he draws upon the Hindu *tantras* even in interpreting the symbolic meanings of the Buddhist *maṇḍalas*. He interprets the five Buddha Families in parallel with the five aspects of Paramaśiva or the five *tattvas* in the absolute plane: *Śivatattva*, *Śaktitattva*, *Sadāśivatattva*, *Īśvaratattva*, *Sadvidyā*. And the five aspects of *Śakti* are also referred in relation to the five Buddha Families.<sup>31</sup> Most of all he pays attention to the concept of sound in understanding of *maṇḍalas*, and he introduces the third chapter of Abhinavagupta’s *Tantrasāra* to explain the symbolism of sound which lays the basis for the relation between the *mantra* and the emanation of images.<sup>32</sup> Tucci’s attention to the texts of Trika Śaivism encourages us to look up their philosophy in exploring the Buddhist *maṇḍalas*. The vast cosmic vision of the Trika Śaivism certainly renders parallel concepts that can be compared or applied to those of the Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, as Tucci displays. The relationship between Kashmir Śaivism and Tibetan Buddhism has drawn attention of eminent scholars, and has been explored in terms of the history<sup>33</sup>, the religious practice,<sup>34</sup> and arts. The cultural connection between Kashmir and the Western Himalayas during the 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> cent. A.D.<sup>35</sup> is particularly relevant in regard to the empirical research of the Buddhist *maṇḍalas* of Tabo and Alchi. The fact that the artists had been brought from Kashmir to embellish these monasteries<sup>36</sup> and their arts reflect

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<sup>30</sup> Tucci 1961: p. 47.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. : pp. 50, 55-7.

<sup>32</sup> Tucci 1961 : pp. 61-3.

<sup>33</sup> See Klimburg 1982.

<sup>34</sup> See the articles Bühnemann 1999; Ruegg 2001; Sanderson 1994, 2001.

<sup>35</sup> See Pal 1989.

<sup>36</sup> The presence of Kashmir artists in Western Tibet is especially well corroborated by Rin-chen-bzang-

the style of Kashmir arts in these monasteries<sup>37</sup> should not be ignored. However, it is not the intention of the thesis that Buddhist *maṇḍalas* are interpreted in terms of the philosophy of the Trika Śaivism at the level of symbolic or doctrinal meanings. The application of the philosophy of the Trika Śaivism to the symbolic meanings of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* is avoided, because the doctrinal or symbolic meanings have been consciously endowed in the context of particular religious practices, thus they should be interpreted within the context. It should be clarified that the doctrine of *vāk* is looked up in the thesis for the purpose of interpreting the aesthetic phenomena and structuring the different levels of meanings and manifestations of *maṇḍalas* from the aesthetic perspective. *Vāk*, primarily viewed as the principle or vehicle of transformation, is scrutinized in the thesis in its four aspects: *parāvāk*, *paśyantī*, *madhyamā* and *vaikharī*.

The doctrine of *vāk* has its validity also in regard to the common origin of *maṇḍalas* that Jung questions about. Let us briefly think of what is meant by ‘the origin’. From the religious perspective, the origin would be the Essence of the divinity, which is manifested in the *maṇḍalas*. In respect to the visual dimension of *maṇḍalas*, their origin is the artistic inspiration that gives birth to such forms. Probably Jung has not had

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po’s biography where the name of a Kashmir artist is mentioned. Bhidhaka, and thirty-two are said to be brought by him, as was requested by the King Yeshe Ö.

<sup>37</sup> Pal, while illustrating stylistic variations and their chronological order of mural paintings of Alchi, states that “the style of the murals in the Dukhang and the Sumtsek is generally considered to derive from Kashmir which was undoubtedly the principal source for Western Tibetan artistic tradition at that time” (1982: p. 19). He presents paintings of Western Tibet rendered in Dukhang and Sumtsek as “the only surviving evidence for inferring what Kashmir paintings once looked like” (ibid), because no comparative paintings have survived from Kashmir. Luczanits states, “all the original paintings of Alchi and related monuments can be considered to have been made under the supervision of Kashmiri craftsmen, or at least the strong influence of a Kashmir school.” (1997: pp. 201-2)

In regard to the arts of Tabo, the style of Buddha figures in the west wall of Ambulatory corridor in the Main Temple of Tabo has been comparable with the metal sculptures attributed to 10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century Kashmir. One of the closest comparisons would be between the Maitreya Buddha in Tabo (Klimburg-Salter 1997: figs. 181, 182) and the standing Buddha in Cleveland Museum (Klimburg-Salter 1982: Pl. 27). Klimburg-Salter suggests two phases of artistic activity in Tabo main temple: original in 996, and renovation in 1042. The 2<sup>nd</sup> phase consists of four different stylistic groups. She attributes the Group A (paintings in the Ambulatory and clay sculptures of *maṇḍala* in the assembly hall) to the true Kashmir-derived style, and presumes that the Group A and B (all the narrative paintings and the protectress in the Assembly Hall) may have been undertaken by the Kashmir artists, as stated in Rin-chen-bzang-po’s biography (Klimburg-Salter 1997: p.51). She considers other groups of style derived from the Group A. Luczanits discerns that the style of thirty-three clay sculptures of the Vajradhātu-*maṇḍala* is only partly comparable to the contemporary Kashmiri style, while the sculptures of Alchi are recognized as the “direct influence of Kashmiri art” (Luczanits 1997: p. 202).

thought of the artistic inspiration when he mentioned the origin of *maṇḍalas* though it is possible he considered the origin in religious terms as well. From the psychological perspective of Jung, the origin of *maṇḍalas* would mean the spiritual origin that would give birth to the inner symbolic meanings. However, these concepts are not to be separated ultimately. If the meanings and the forms are interrelated, the devotional source, the spiritual source, and the artistic source would be also interconnected, or even converge. The quest for the common origin of *maṇḍalas* could bring altogether the divinity, the deepest consciousness (or collective unconscious in Jungian term), and the artistic inspiration. The doctrine of *vāk* portrays its highest level, *parāvāk*, to be the artistic inspiration (*pratibhā*) as well as the pure consciousness (*saṃvid*). And at the same time it is worshiped as ‘Devi (the Primeval Goddess)’. Thus, it certainly contains the crucial key in explaining the common origin of *maṇḍalas*.

### Primary Sources of the Research

The understandings of the doctrine of *vāk* in the thesis have been chiefly based on texts that represent the synthetic phase of the Trika Śaivism, such as Abhinavagupta’s *Tantrāloka* with Jayaratha’s commentary and his *Parātriśikā-Vivaraṇa*. The verses from the *Spandakārikā* with one of its commentaries by Rājānaka Rāma called *Spandavivṛti* have been also consulted. For the logical expositions of *vāk*, the invaluable sources are Utpaladeva’s *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā* with two commentaries of his own: a short one (*vṛtti*) and a long one (*vivṛti* or *īkā*), of which only fragments are available.<sup>38</sup> Abhinavagupta wrote a commentary on the *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā* (*Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarśinī*) and a much longer commentary on Utpaladeva’s *vivṛti* (*Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛtivimarśinī*). The texts of *Spandakārikā* with Rājānaka Rāma’s *vivṛti*, *Parātriśikā-Vivaraṇa*, *Īśvara-pratyabhijñākārikā* and *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarśinī* have been translated into English.<sup>39</sup> Apart from these English translations, the relevant verses on *vāk* are painstakingly translated into English by André Padoux in his

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<sup>38</sup> Torella 1988.

<sup>39</sup> SpK & SpV, trans. Dyczkowski 1994; PTV, trans. Singh 1988; ĪPK, trans. Torella 2002; ĪPV, trans. Pandey 1954.

book ‘*Vāc: The Concept of the Word In Selected Hindu Tantra*’,<sup>40</sup> which immensely benefits my research on *vāk*.

In regard to the Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, the thesis is based on the texts that belong to the *Yogatantra* class, due to the nature of the examples of Tabo and Alchi. Especially, the commentaries of the major *Yoga Tantras* by Buddhaguhya help us in comprehending cryptic words of tantras. And his own composition on the *maṇḍalas* presents us with the discourse on *maṇḍalas* integrated from different *Yoga Tantras*. Buddhaguhya lived in the 8<sup>th</sup> cent. A.D. Tāranātha mentions him as being very well acquainted with *Kriyā*, *Caryā* and *Yoga* tantras.<sup>41</sup> The primary texts on the Buddhist iconography such as the *Sādhanamālā*, *Vajrāvalī* or *Niṣpannayogāvalī*,<sup>42</sup> are consulted only occasionally in order to compare the data from empirical examples with the conventional rules. The major texts consulted in the present research are described below.

\* *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi Tantra*

In the Tibetan tradition, the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi Tantra* is classified as a *Carya Tantra*. Snellgrove mentions that it belongs to the early *Yoga Tantras*.<sup>43</sup> In the summarized commentary of the same *Tantra*, called the *Piṇḍārtha*, Buddhaguhya mentions only two classes of *tantras*, *Kriyā* and *Yoga*, which implies that the four divisions of *tantras* are a later denomination. Buddhaguhya classifies the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi Tantra* in the category of *ubhaya* (dual), which combines the orientations of both *Kriyā* and *Yoga Tantras*.<sup>44</sup> While the text provides us with a profound philosophy of Mahāvairocana and fundamental concepts of the *mantrayāna*,

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<sup>40</sup> Padoux 1992.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Skorupski. 1983: p. xxv, in the introduction to his translation of SDPT.

<sup>42</sup> “The *Niṣpannayogāvalī* (NSP) and *Vajrāvalī* (VV), two complementary works by Abhayākaragupta (1064-1125) were written around 1100 A.D.. Both texts describe in great detail twenty-six *maṇḍalas* from various Tantric traditions. NSP focuses on three-dimensional forms of these *maṇḍalas* for visualization (*bhāvyaṃmaṇḍala*) and describes in detail the iconography of deities. VV explains the construction and ritual use of two-dimensional *maṇḍalas*, which are to be drawn (*lekhyamaṇḍala*) on the ground.” (Bühnemann 2005: p. 5643). “According to Abhayākaragupta, the *Vajrāvalī*, a practical guide to all the preliminary rites preceding the initiation into the *maṇḍala*, is the main text while the *Niṣpannayogāvalī*, which deals with *maṇḍalas* in details, and the *Jyotirmañjarī*, which deals with the *homa* ritual exclusively, are supplementary.” (Bühnemann & Tachikawa 1991: p. xvi).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Snellgrove 1987: p. 196.

<sup>44</sup> *Piṇḍārtha* 4a, trans. Hodge 2003: p. 449.

we encounter invaluable materials that especially help in comprehending *maṇḍalas* of Mahāvairocana. The Tibetan text with Buddhaguhya's commentary has been translated by Stephan Hodge.<sup>45</sup> His translation entails the *Piṇḍārtha* as well.

\* *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha*

The text of *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha* gives more direct references to the Vajradhātu-maṇḍalas in Tabo and Alchi. Thirty-three clay sculptures in Tabo have been interpreted first by Tucci as the Vajradhātu-maṇḍala described in the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha*. Along with the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodh Tantra*, it is regarded as the central text in the tantric Buddhism of the East Asia. The Tibetan translation of the text *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha* by Śraddhākaravarma and Rinchen-bzang-po dates from the early eleventh century. There exist Tibetan translations of Sanskrit commentaries of the text by Śākyamitra and Ānandagarbha who were active in the eighth century. Its Chinese translation was done by Amoghavajra ca. 754 C.E. Its Sanskrit manuscript from the 10<sup>th</sup> cent. A.D. is extant and has been published.<sup>46</sup> The Sanskrit text consists of four major sections and a commentarial section. In the introduction of its Sanskrit publication, Snellgrove says that the text contains “teaching of invocations of sets of divinities with instructions in setting up their maṇḍalas and in the rites and benefits concerned with them”.<sup>47</sup> Snellgrove translated some parts of the Sanskrit text into English in the introduction of the Sanskrit publication and also in his another publication.<sup>48</sup> Giebel has translated Amoghavajra's Chinese text into English, which covers only the first part of the first major section, called '*Vajradhātumahāmaṇḍalavidhivistara*'. Amoghavajra's Chinese translation “tallies very closely with the corresponding portion of the Sanskrit text, the Tibetan translation, and Dānapāla's Chinese translation”.<sup>49</sup> Thus, Giebel's translation of the text of Amoghavajra can be used for examining the Indo-Tibetan *maṇḍalas* of Tabo and Alchi. I have been benefited a great deal from Giebel's English translations as well as from

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<sup>45</sup> MVT, trans. Hodge 2003.

<sup>46</sup> STTS, ed. Snellgrove & Chandra 1981.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.: p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> See Ibid.; Snellgrove 1987.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. STTS, trans. Giebel 2001: p. 7 (translator's introduction).

those by Snellgrove.

\* *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*

The first translation of this *Tantra* from Sanskrit into Tibetan was made sometime at the end of the eighth century A.D. and revised sometime before 863 A.D.<sup>50</sup> Some information is available from Tāranātha and Blue Annals, which refer to three Indian commentators: Buddhaguhya, Ānandagarbha (early 9<sup>th</sup> cent. A.D.) and his teacher Vajravarman<sup>51</sup>. Rin-chen-bzang-po (958-1055 A.D.) translated two works of this *Tantra*.

Skorupski's English translation of the *Tantra* is based on the Tibetan version which was translated from Sanskrit sometime during the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> cent. A.D. by *Lo tsa ba Chog, Chos rje dpal*. Chapter II of the *Tantra* is especially useful for the study of Buddhist iconography and *maṇḍalas*. However, the descriptions of the divinities are confined to their *mudrās* and locations, and colours, which are simple and unelaborated. Vajravarman's commentary gives detailed accounts on the basic *maṇḍala* of the *Tantra*<sup>52</sup> and the divinities of *maṇḍalas*.

\* *Dharmamaṇḍala Sūtra*

Its original Sanskrit text has been lost. Its authorship is attributed to Padmākara by Tucci, however, Lo Bue clarifies that it is attributed to Buddhaguhya<sup>53</sup> on the basis of the *Tanjur* (the second part of the Tibetan canon). It is a philosophical poem of 386 verses. Buddhaguhya states that he explains the *maṇḍala*'s divinities and their palace from the substance of all the great *tantras*. The text is divided into eight sections: substance; categories; literal definition (vv.51-4); structure (vv.55-177); faults; virtue; example and symbolism (vv.202-386). It lists and describes in great detail the essential constituents of the conventionalized fivefold scheme of *maṇḍala*. Lo Bue states that it

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<sup>50</sup> Skorupski 1983: p. xxiv, in the translator's introduction to the SDPT.

<sup>51</sup> "From a short colophon at the end of a work by Ānandagarbha -who was a renowned scholar of the yoga tantras- we learnt that Vajravarman came from Sinhala (Śri Lanka) and was Ānandagarbha's teacher." (Skorupski 1983: p. xxv).

<sup>52</sup> SDPT, trans. Skorupski 1983: pp. 311-312.

<sup>53</sup> Buddhaguhya was contemporary to the Tibetan King Khri-srong-lde-brtsan who ruled from 754 to c. 798. He is also contemporary to Padmasambhava and Śāntarakṣita. Cf. Lo Bue 1987: p. 788.

gives the earliest known account of the conventionalized *maṇḍala* as we know today.<sup>54</sup>

\* *Nāmasaṃgīti*

The *Nāmasaṃgīti* reflects the popularity of devotional practice in the 8<sup>th</sup> cent. It was still popular in north-east India in the early 11<sup>th</sup> cent. The text was translated into Tibetan during the first period of translation.<sup>55</sup> A commentary to the *Nāmasaṃgīti* that has been affiliated to the *Māyājāla Tantra* has laid the ritual of the *maṇḍala* of Dharmadhātu-Vāgīśvara, which is one of the main *maṇḍalas* in Tabo and Alchi. The text has been understood as the devotional hymns for Mañjuśrī, and the title has been translated into ‘Litany names of Mañjuśrī’. In contrast to the prevalent understanding of the text, Chandra draws a new understanding of the text, on the basis of the titles of Chinese, Tibetan, and Sanskrit manuscripts.<sup>56</sup> He argues that the *Nāmasaṃgīti* refers to litany names of *Advaya Paramārtha* (Mahāvairocana in the context of the *Yoga Tantra*) recited by Mañjuśrī.<sup>57</sup> The text is a crucial source which tells the nature of the Ultimate, as it had been understood in the period when the *maṇḍalas* of Tabo and Alchi were established.

## Overview

Part I of the thesis surveys the external forms and the symbolic meanings of Buddhist *maṇḍalas*. The physical dimensions of empirical examples are described with special reference to those in Tabo and Alchi, and the relevant textual accounts are briefly looked upon. The symbolic meanings of the divinities are comprehended one the basis of the root *tantra* of the *Yoga Tantras*. From the symbolic dimension of *maṇḍalas* in association with the Buddhist tripartite, the discussion of various levels of forms is conducted. The visualization of the *maṇḍala* is looked upon, as it demonstrates a way to discern the different levels of form. The descriptions of the visualization throw light on the key role of sound in the religious practice that connect the physical forms of the self

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. DMS, in the translator’s introduction, Lo Bue 1987: p. 790.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Davidson 1981, his introduction in the translation of the text NS. Also see Klimburg-Salter 1999: p. 317.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Chandra 1993.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Ibid. pp. 391-4.

to the inner forms of the divinity. The Buddhist affirmation of the non-dualism of *śūnya* and *rūpa* is reflected.

Part II looks upon the doctrine of *vāk* as the method of analyzing the non-dualistic proposition of the *rūpa* and the *śūnya* contained in Buddhist *maṇḍalas*. The concept of *vāk* adhering in the Buddhist practices of *mantras* and *maṇḍalas* is brought up into attention, and the elaboration of the concept is consulted in the fold of Trika Śaivism. The four levels of *vāk* are studied in their dimensions as the transforming power, which lays the conceptual basis of explaining the non-duality between the phenomena and the Ultimate. The doctrine is examined in respect to its validity to interpret the aesthetic phenomena of Buddhist *maṇḍalas*.

Part III redefines Buddhist *maṇḍalas* from the perspective of the *vāk* theory, and appraises their aesthetic values. By analyzing the examples of Alchi as the external form of *paśyantī vāk*, it is attempted to present the theoretical basis that explains the identification of the *rūpa* and the *śūnya* in Buddhist *maṇḍalas*. Further, the spirituality of the aesthetic seeing of *maṇḍalas* is reassured in association with the philosophy of ‘*pratyakṣa* (direct perception of the Reality)’.

## Conclusion

Buddhist *Maṇḍalas* have been designed for the exploration of the inner realm in the religious practice. The subtle forms of *maṇḍalas* re-created in the mind lead one to the kernel of the *maṇḍalas*. The inner dimension of *maṇḍalas* has been doctrinally laid out in the visualization method of tantric practices where the external figures of a *maṇḍala* are, one by one, recollected in the mind and those mental images gradually lead one to the realization of *bodhicitta*, *karūṇa*, and *śūnyatā*. However, the technique of visualization is not known to ordinary people. In spite of their unawareness of the visualization technique, non-practitioners respond to the visuals of *maṇḍalas*, especially if the *maṇḍalas* are accomplished by the high standard of arts. The response of non-practitioners cannot be simply named the realization of *bodhicitta*, *karūṇa*, and *śūnyatā*, as is formulated for the practitioners of visualization. Non-practitioners would not interpret their own experiences in such doctrinal terms, when the *maṇḍalas* are spontaneously re-created in the mind. These internal images of *maṇḍalas* leave the impression of ‘spiritual enhancement’ in the mind, which I define aesthetic. The thesis has questioned about the phenomenon of their aesthetic experiences.

In the first part, I have looked through the features and the textual references of *maṇḍalas* and come to the presupposition that the *maṇḍalas* are the reflective image of the Ultimate Dharma, which may be named *dharmadhātu*, *śūnya* or *bodhicitta* within the frame of the symbolic language of Buddhism. The Ultimate Dharma is placed to be the cause of the external *maṇḍalas*. The main task of the thesis was to explain in what way the external forms of *maṇḍalas* resemble the formless *dharmadhātu*. On the basis of the observation that the subtle levels of forms have been presupposed in the nature of sound in between the formless *śūnya* and the *rūpa* of multiple forms, the philosophy of *vāk* has been taken up as the method to look at the questions regarding the aesthetic experience of *maṇḍalas*. The study of the four levels of *vāk* has brought about the paradigm of transformation that confers how the phenomenal objects are none other than the form of the Ultimate. As a result, the *maṇḍalas* are viewed as the physical form

of *paśyantī vāk*, and the *paśyantī* representation of *maṇḍalas* have been rendered as the basis to explain how the *maṇḍalas* resemble the Ultimate Dharma. While the *maṇḍalas* are conceived to be in the form of *sthūla paśyantī*, their resemblance to *dharmadhātu* is concurrently ascertained on the basis of the closeness of *paśyantī vāk* to *saṃvid*, or to *Parāvāk*.

I have attempted to prove the *paśyantī* form of *maṇḍalas* by analyzing the visual principles. Although I have put forward certain elements as the factors that constitute the *paśyantī* form of *maṇḍala*, it should be confessed that the flowing music of *paśyantī vāk* is not the total sum of these visual characteristics. This retrospection may remind one of the discussions in Indian aesthetics about the relationship between *rasa* and its constituents. As for the question, ‘what brings forth the *paśyantī* form of *maṇḍalas*, then?’, we need to turn our attention to the adherence of the varied levels of *vāk* to *Parāvāk*. *Parāvāk*, comparable to the ‘Ultimate Dharma’ in Mahāyāna Buddhism to some extent, is *pratibhā*, the incessant source of inspiration for the artistic creations. Those *maṇḍalas* that merely imitate the visual codes without tracing back to the vibrating inspiration of the *Parāvāk*, do not have the power to appeal to the heart. It can be compared to the case that *mantras* do not have any effect, if they are not charged with *cit*. Thus, the visual elements that have been extracted by means of analyses should be viewed in their relations to the ‘Essence’ in explaining the *paśyantī* form of *maṇḍalas*.

The Buddhist texts describe and attempt to prove the real nature of the Ultimate Dharma in the logical language. The logical language appeals to the human brain and helps to have the right understandings about the Ultimate Dharma. However, does the logical language help us in experiencing it? As is asserted in the *Tantrāloka*, the utter harshness of the ordinary language does not conduce us to identify ourselves with the object of speech. The Ultimate Dharma exposed in the logical language remains in the realm of object, unless it is relished. The meditation overcomes the separation of the subject and the object, and demonstrates a way in which the Ultimate Dharma is experienced. The visualization with *maṇḍalas* certainly represents a way of

experiencing the Essence. Yet it is not 'THE' only way to experience the Ultimate Dharma through the visuals of *maṇḍalas*. Whereas the Ultimate Dharma remains in the internal space in the visualization, the formless 'Essence' is revealed in the external form of *maṇḍalas*. Thus, we need to recognize the exploration of the visuals of *maṇḍalas* as another way of approaching the Ultimate Dharma, distinguished from the visualization. And the spiritual value of *maṇḍalas* should be assured even apart from their religious context.

We have observed in the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi that the arts employing various postures, symbolic attributes and multiple colours in diverse renditions have been required to create the visual *dhvani* that invokes the Ultimate Dharma. The *paśyantī* nature of the *maṇḍala*, in its resemblance with *nāda* or the murmur of a brook, instantly touches the heart of the viewer, stirs emotionally, and absorbs him or her into the realm of otherworldliness. The visual principles we observe in the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi may be compared to the channel through which the Ultimate Dharma is revealed, and through which one's vision is led to the Ultimate Dharma. The Ultimate Dharma is what the *maṇḍala* expresses, and its visual forms are the sound calling upon the Ultimate Dharma. In the *paśyantī* manifestation, the ultimate meaning of the *maṇḍala* is identified with its external form. Through arts that create the *paśyantī* form of *maṇḍalas*, the ultimate meaning is experienced in the form, and the meaning and the forms melt together to become the indistinct Whole. The un-differentiation between the meaning and the forms in *paśyantī vāk* of *maṇḍala* explains why *maṇḍalas* are distinguished from ordinary visuals and why they are used in the religious practices in attempt to identify oneself with the Ultimate Dharma.

We often come across the prejudice of the modern scholars who views the ancient religious art without any space for individuality or creativity. They stress on the precise rules that had to be observed in the creation of divine images. The exclusion of the individual creativity in ancient arts has been indeed preconditioned by the modern assumption that the individual creativity always clashes with the tradition and that following the tradition denotes the suppression of the individual creativity. However, we

often experience that the same format of *maṇḍala* paintings varies in regard to their aesthetic powers. The difference of our aesthetic responses has to be perceived more than the difference in personal liking or disliking. There is certainly a factor of individuality in the process of creation that decides varied ranges of the aesthetic standards. We should examine whether our concept of creativity is not confined to the matter of 'new shape or new composition'. The *maṇḍalas* of Alchi demonstrates another perspective to see the creativity: creativity is the ability to directly communicate with the creative source, which is in terms of Trika Śaivism identical with *Pratibhā*, 'Parāvāk', *Citi*, *Śakti*, *Vimarśa* symbolized as the Feminine Absolute (Devi). Therefore, creativity is to manifest this Source through the enlivening energy of the Source. They demonstrate the successful arts that re-present the deepest level of the Universal Mind in external forms. It is the artist's creativity that brings the subtle *paśyantī vāk* unfolded in the physical form of *maṇḍalas*, and at the same time the artist's creativity is a form of the dynamics of *Vāk*, which is the essence (*sāra*) of everything. Here, the artist's creativity is testified in its ability to evoke the presence of the divinity and generate the power through the visual image rather than superficially introducing new shapes. Thus, not only the *paśyantī* form of *maṇḍalas* resembles the Universal Mind, but also the arts of bringing forth such form mirrors the Universal Mind.