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Mandala visualization and possession

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Introduction

Mandalas are used variously in Tantric rituals and practices. Tantrists often employ a mandala in order to give the initiation rite (*abhiśeka*) to their disciples. Lay followers perform worship services (*pūjā*) to a mandala or the deities depicted in the mandala. Sometimes mandalas are used as a kind of tool for meditation when Tantrists or yogins perform the practice of deity-visualization (*sādhana*). In this case, the mandala meditation or visualization may have a soteriological purpose: the practitioners of visualization, i.e., *sādhaka*, seek to obtain enlightenment through this kind of religious practice.

The Tantric practice of mandala visualization is to be basically carried out through the power of a particular kind of yoga. When a practitioner or Tantrist practices visualization, he intensifies his psychic energy. It is through the strengthened and sharpened psychic energy that the practitioner can succeed in visualizing the form of a deity in front of him as if the deity were real and alive.

Mandala visualization is not done in a moment; it is a religious practice which one should perform following a series of rigid steps in a certain span of time. Usually, the accomplishment of mandala visualization requires a number of years. It is well-known that yogins are to undergo a number of psycho-physiological changes over, several years, at least, until they reach a certain stage of the system of classical yoga. In a similar way, it has been said that various kinds of states accompanied by psycho-physiological changes will be observed until a practitioner succeeds in performing the visualization of a mandala.

What kind of psycho-physiological changes, however, are found in the mind and body of the practitioner who has just succeeded in visualizing the form of a deity? One should remember that the so-called psycho-physiological changes, if any, are not to be confused with the marks of obtaining final enlightenment. As mentioned before, mandala visualization may aim at the soteriological purpose of obtaining final enlightenment. At this point, however we are concerned rather with the preliminary stages of religious practice called “mandala visualization,” not with the state of the mind and body of the one who has obtained final spiritual beatitude.

Insofar as one of the most important functions of mandala is to furnish the tool for the practice of visualizing deities, we should not neglect the question of what kind of state occurs in the mind and body of the Tantrist trying to see the form of a deity in front of him. Hitherto the psycho-physiological aspect of the process of

mandala visualization has not been well studied. The function of mandala will be also clearer, if we could succeed in analyzing the process of visualization from the psycho-physiological viewpoint.

1. The Mandala in Bon Religion

1.1 Five Kinds of Bon Mandalas

Little about the theory and practice of Bon mandalas has been known to modern scholars. In 1999, a collection of Bon mandala paintings was completed in Kathmandu under the guidance of Lopön Tenzin Namdak, Tritan Norbutse (Khri-brtan nor-bu-rtse) Monastery, in Kathmandu. The collection of Bon mandalas, which is now kept in the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, has been published by the Museum as *Senri Ethnological Report* No. 12, in February 2000.

According to Lopön Tenzin Namdak, Bon mandalas may be classified into the following five groups:

- (1) The vehicle of Primordial Bon purifying activities (*bya ba gtsang spyod ye bon gi theg pa*),
- (2) the vehicle of miraculous power of many sorts (*rnam pa kun ldan mngon shes kyi theg pa*),
- (3) the vehicle of the playfulness of compassion producing real results (*dngos bskyed thugs rje rol pa'i theg pa*),
- (4) the vehicle of the completion endowed with supreme profits (*shin tu don ldan kun rdzogs kyi theg pa*), and
- (5) supplementary mandalas.

It would be safe to say that each of the first four groups roughly corresponds to each of the four Buddhist Tantras: kriyātantra, caryātantra, yogatantra, and anuttarayogatantra. At this point, however, we do not know how the tradition of Bon mandalas and that of Buddhist mandalas were historically interrelated. The members of Bon pantheon are almost totally different from those of Buddhist pantheon, although Bon deities often possess iconographic features similar to those of Buddhist deities. It is obvious that the tradition of Bon mandalas has inherited a great deal from Buddhist tradition.

1.2 The Mandala Eliminating Bad Destinies

The ninth mandala of the second vehicle (II-10a) [Plate 1, Figure 1] is named “[Mandala] purifying obstacles and removing darkness” (*sGrib sbyong mun sel sgron me*). This mandala is a Bon version of Buddhist Durgatipariśodhana Mandala (Elimination of Bad Destinies [in Transmigration]), which is frequently used on such occasions as funerals and ancestor worship. Accordingly, it is called “Mandala [eliminating] Bad Destinies in Transmigration” (*'Khor ba ngan song*

dkyil 'khor). The mandala is also called Tu tri su after the three letters symbolizing the main three deities appearing in the center of the mandala¹⁾. The Tu tri su Mandala is one of the most popular Bon mandalas. For instance, one can find this mandala painted on the ceiling of the entrance hall of the main temple of the Tritan Norbutse Monastery.

The ritual text of the Tu tri su Mandala is entitled “*The Book of Tu tri su Enabling the Elimination of Obstacles: The Lamp Removing the Darkness of the Absence of Knowledge, Uprooting Bad Destinations in Transmigration*” (*Tu tri su'i sgrib sbyong gi sgrub gzhung ma rig mun sel sgron me 'khor ba ngan song dong sprugs*)²⁾. Let us abbreviate the title of the text as *TGB*. The work was composed by Shes-rab dgongs-rgyal, the twenty-second abbot of Menri Monastery (sMan-ri).

The work explains the procedure of mandala visualization in terms of Self-manifestation (*bdag bskyed*) and Manifestation-in-front (*mdun bskyed*). The former is the preliminary step of mandala visualization, in which the deities of the mandala are imposed on each part of the body of the practitioner. In this way, the body of the practitioner is manifested as or transformed into a three-dimensional mandala. The latter is the second and final step of mandala visualization, in which the deities of a mandala are manifested in front of the practitioner. The process comprising of these two steps is well-known as one of the most orthodox ways of mandala visualization in Tibetan Buddhism.

In the Indian tradition of Buddhist mandala visualization, however, one does not find a pair of concepts exactly corresponding to those of Self-manifestation and Manifestation-in-front. In Indian Buddhist Tantric tradition, the practice called *nyāsa* (the imposing of deities on parts of the yogin's body) plays a preliminary role. *Nyāsa* seems to correspond to Self-manifestation in Bon religion and Tibetan Buddhism as well.

After having treated Self-manifestation (the imposing deities on parts of the practitioner), Ses-rab dgongs-rgyal, the author of the *TGB*, goes on to explain the next step, i.e., Manifestation-in-front. The second step starts with meditation on the central part of the mandala. The *TGB* explains the process of Manifestation-in-front as follows:

There is a drop of Svāhā in the center of it [the palace], and the palace is contained in a tent of light. The practitioner should meditate on the majestic and beautiful throne of a lotus flower found on a moon disk, which is in turn on a sun disk contained in the tent of light. Then [he should think that] the letter A is released on the lotus flower on the moon disk which is put on the sun disk. From the letter A light is emitted, which removes obstacles of all people. The light gathers, melts into the letter A, and enters into the light itself.

Then, the practitioner should meditate upon the central deity Kun-tu bzang-po (Skt. Samantabhadra),

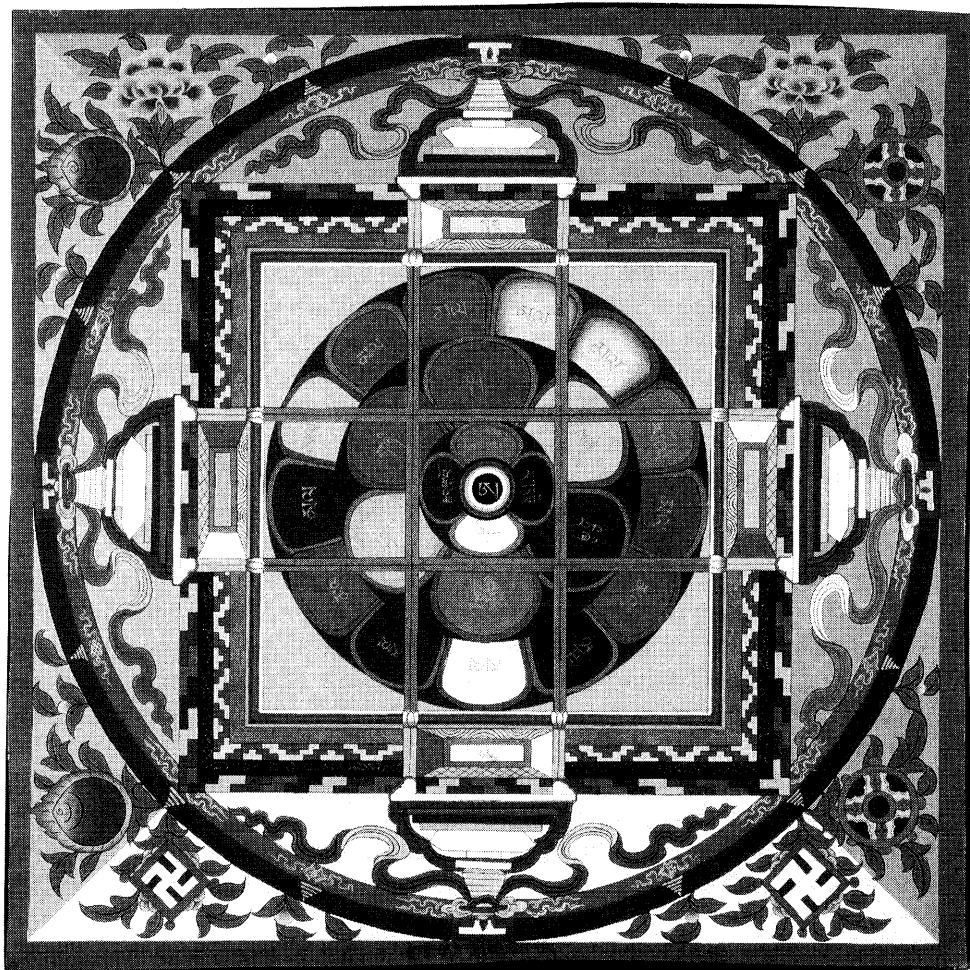


Plate 1 nGan song Mandala

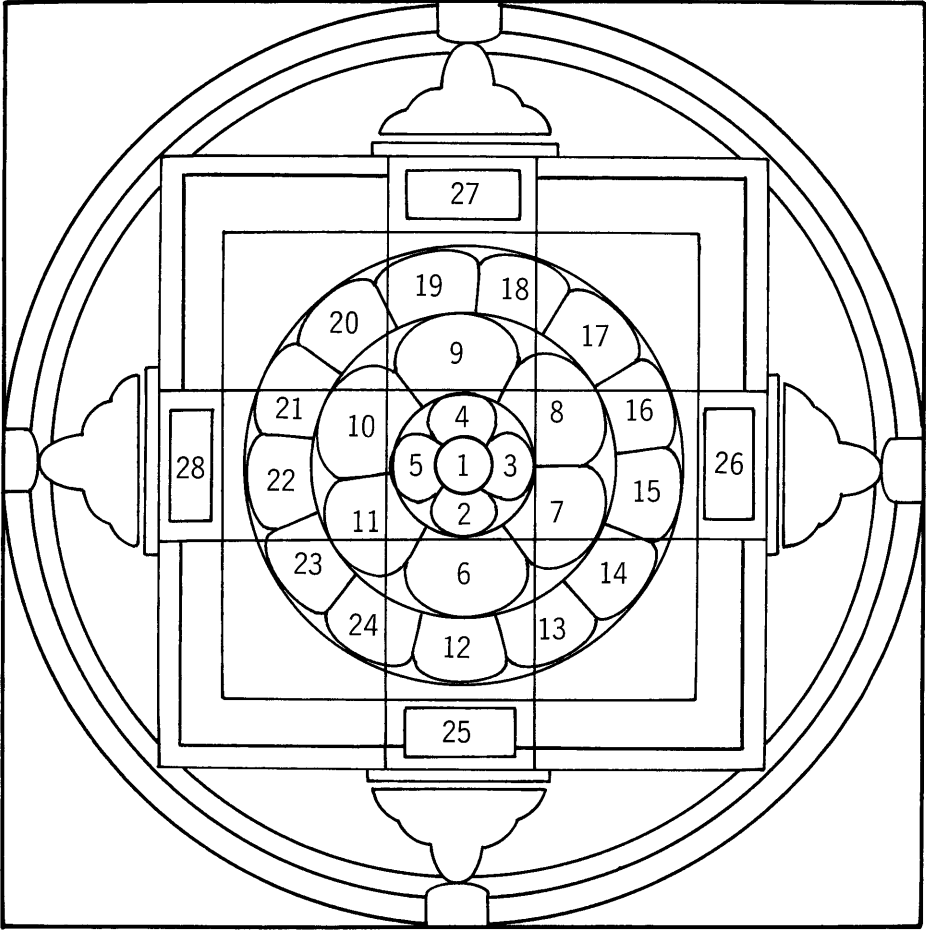


Figure 1 The deities of nGan song Mandala

- [1] who is one-faced, two-armed, naked without ornaments, and sitting with legs crossed (*vajraparyāṅka* posture).

Then light, having come out from the heart of the central deity, radiates and reaches each of the four petals situated at the four directions. The radiated light becomes [each of the following deities respectively]:

- [2] Yum-chen Sa-trig er-sangs at the east,
- [3] lHa-chen gShen-lha 'od-dkar at the north,
- [4] Srid-pa sangs-po 'bum-khri at the west, and
- [5] sTon-pa gShen-rab Mi-bo at the south.

They have, a mirror, a hook, a flag, and a clipboard emblem respectively. Then, again coming out from the heart of the central deity, light radiates and reaches outside [the above-mentioned four deities]. The light becomes [each of the following deities]:

- [6] gSang-ba ngang-ring, whose body is purple, possessing a flag marked with fire and water,
- [7] Mu-cho ldem-drug, whose body is white, possessing a pot filled with ambrosia.
- [8] Ti-sangs rang-zhi, whose body is green, possessing a jewel and a book,
- [9] gSang-ba 'dus-pa, whose body is yellow, possessing a golden drum and a golden bell
- [10] lCe-rgyal bar-ti, whose body is blue, possessing a sword,
- [11] Ye-gshen gtsug-phud, whose body is white, possessing a vina.

All of these [deities] are in the state of Completed Body (*rdzogs sku*), and the form of each deity is clearly manifested.

Furthermore, coming out from the heart of the central deity, light radiates and reaches further. The light becomes [each of the following deities]:

- [12] Ye-gshen Nam-kha'i ba-dan-can whose body is white, possessing a 'sky-banner',
- [13] Ye-gshen Khyung-gi ru-mtshon-can, whose body is red, possessing a banner marked with a Garuḍa bird,
- [14] Ye-gshen rGod-kyi-'phar 'dab-can, whose body is green, possessing a feather of a bald eagle,
- [15] Ye-gshen rMa-bya'i ldem-rgyang-can, whose body is blue, possessing a peacock's feather,
- [16] Ye-gshen Zo-bo war-shad-can, whose body is red, possessing a crow,
- [17] Ye-gshen dBal-so mdung-rtse-can, whose body is green, possessing the hilt of a sword,
- [18] Ye-gshen gSas-mda' dung-g-yug-can, whose body is red, possessing a stick with a conch attached,
- [19] Ye-gshen rNga stong-ri chem-pa-can, whose body is yellow, possessing a drum,
- [20] Ye-gshen gShang khri-lo gnam-grags-can, whose body is blue,

- possessing a bell,
 [21] Ye-gshen Dung 'phar-po 'phar-chung-can, whose body is white,
 possessing a kind of conch,
 [22] Ye-gshen Che-rgyal rgod-zhu-can, whose body is blue, possessing the
 letter A,
 [23] Ye-gshen Yang-rgyal 'brug-slag-can, whose body is white, possessing a
 rosary of pearls, and
 [24] Ye-gshen gCod-pa khra-slag-can, whose body is blue, possessing a pot
 filled with ambrosia.

All of these [deities], being one-faced and two-armed, are found in the state of Completed Body, and they are clearly manifested in each position [to be occupied in the mandala].

Moreover, coming out from the heart of the central deity, light radiates and reaches the four gates. The light becomes [each of the following deities]:

- [25] Zo-bo dbu-dgu at the eastern gate,
 [26] gZe-ma dbu-dgu at the northern gate,
 [27] Ru-cho sde-dgu at the western gate, and
 [28] Rum-po rtse-dgu at the southern gate.

All of their bodies are dark blue. They are nine-faced and eighteen-armed, and they possess various symbols.

Outside [these manifested deities] there are protective deities who have virtue and compassion. [Each of] the deities who have been thus manifested is respectively accompanied by his attendants. The deities have neither intrinsic nature nor tangibility. They have bodies made of light and the power of wisdom. One should carry out the visualization [of deities] thus.

From the heart of the [manifested] deities, light arises in immensity and enters into the origin (*dbyings*). The innumerable existences of the origin (*dbyings kyi sems dpa'*) are invoked. Then they [i.e., the innumerable existences of the origin], having been melted into manifested deities (*bskyed pa'i lha tshogs*), become the existence of non-dual act (*gnyis med las kyi sems dpa'*) and do beneficial acts for others³⁾.

Let us note that the text refers to the two concepts: the existence of the origin and the manifested deities. The two concepts correspond respectively to the existence of wisdom (*jñāna-sattva*) and the existence of promise (*samaya-sattva*) in the mandala meditation of later Buddhist Tantrism. The latter, i.e., the existence of promise, is an image of the deity whom the practitioner has chosen as the object of his visualization. The former, i.e., the existence of wisdom, is considered to have a form similar to the existence of promise and believed actually to exist outside and beyond the practitioner.

At the present time, it is not clear how Bon followers have adopted the method of uniting the existence of origin with manifested deities. Probably Bon religion took over the theoretical system of mandala visualization from Tantric Buddhism.

But at the same time, we should not forget that, from the ancient times, Bon followers have had the techniques of becoming possessed or of entering into a kind of shamanistic trance. Such techniques seem to have been connected with the Bon practice of mandala visualization.

The visualization of deities, however, seems to exceed both the domain of Buddhist Tantrism and that of Bon religion. That is to say, the practice of mandala visualization seems to have been rooted in the ancient psycho-physiological ground on which both Buddhist Tantrism and Bon religion have been based.

2. Mandala Visualization in Tibetan Buddhism of Today

How is mandala visualization practiced in Buddhist Tantrism at present? Since mandala visualization is usually carried out by a single person in a solitary or closed place, it is difficult for outsiders to observe the actual performance of the religious practice. I have never received any traditional training of the mandala visualization performed in Tibetan or Nepalese Buddhist monasteries. However, I have been trained to visualize deities under the guidance of a Japanese quasi-shaman for several years. Hopefully, my experience of these years will help me in understanding the psycho-physiological changes to be found in the process of mandala visualization.

There is a branch of Srad-rgyud Monastery in the north of Bodhnath, Kathmandu. Traditionally, the dGe-lugs School has had three monasteries for advanced studies of Tantrism. Srad-rgyud Monastery is one of them. The other two are rGyud-smad and rGyud-stod. The main Indian branch of Sed rgyud Monastery has been built in Calcutta.

When I visited the Kathmandu branch of Srad-rgyud Monastery in November of 1998, I had a chance to ask about the practice of mandala visualization had been practiced in the monastery. My question was as follows: “When the existence of wisdom (*ye shes sems dpa'*, Skt. *jñāna-sattva*) is united with the existence of promise (*dam tshig sems dpa'*, Skt. *samaya-sattva*), what happens to the practitioner who is trying to visualize the deities found in a mandala? How does he feel at that moment?”

Then I added: “In Japan there has survived a kind of mountain cult, which has a number of practitioners to whom deities descend. Some of those practitioners have been acting as healers in Japanese society. The cult is called Shugendou, which may be considered a synthesized form of Buddhism and Shintoism (indigenous religion in Japan). Shugendou followers do not want to be described as possessed when they are facing descended deities before them. In other words, Shugendou distinguishes possession from the descent of a deity.

There was a reason for I referring to Shugendou. I knew that Tibetan monks have had a strong tendency to distinguish their own visualization (*sgrub thabs*, Skt.

sādhana) from possession. Hence, there was a need to inform that I was aware of the distinction between visualization and possession.

Although Shugendou considers possession to be different from the descent of deities, it is difficult to find an exactly corresponding difference in Tibetan religion, for in Tibet, possession is usually considered as the descent of deities (*lha babs*). Here I cannot treat fully the distinction between so-called possession and the descent of deities. It will suffice to say that I wanted to inform the monks of my awareness of the distinction between possession and mandala visualization.

One of the two monks began by explaining how visualization was practiced in Srad-rgyud Monastery. "It is very rare to have the real unification of the existence of wisdom with the existence of promise. But it does happen on occasion. When the unification of the two existences is obtained, the Tantric monk practicing visualization will feel pain in several parts of his body, and cannot hold his body straight."

Then, I asked, "How long does it take to have such changes of the state of the mind and body of a practitioner?" The monk answered, "Usually it takes about ten minutes, but sometimes it takes a few days." As far as my observation in the Kathmandu Valley goes, about ten minutes is needed for Newari healers to become possessed. In the case of Japanese Shugendou also, it takes about ten to twenty minutes to bring on the descent or manifestation of deities.

The same monk continued: "In our monastery, a monk who was in trance happened to be unable to come back to his own normal state by himself. As soon as his teacher and colleagues saw the dangerous state of the monk, they began to press him strongly on the chest." The fact that such an accident happened implies that the practice of visualization does cause some unusual psycho-physiological changes in the mind and body of a practitioner.

I asked the two monks of Srad-rgyud Monastery whether or not they have ever heard a particular voice or sound coming forth from the throat of those who are practicing the visualization of deities. Then, in order to help the monks understand my question more clearly, I uttered a particular kind of voice, which sounded like a hiccup. For the past four or five years, such a voice has come from my throat whenever I tried to practice the visualization of a deity. That type of voice or sound seems to be rather common among healers or Tantric yogins; I have observed the utterance of such a voice among healers and yogins in Nepal, Taiwan, and Japan. To my question, both of the monks immediately replied, "Yes."

In November 1998, I had a chance to meet Rev. Trichen Chopkye, one of the most reknown leaders of the Sa-skya School at the present time, who was staying in Kathmandu at that time. In the same manner in which I asked the two monks of Srad-rgyud Monastery, I asked the Sa-skya master about the psycho-physiological changes which may be observed in the practice of visualization. Describing the moment when the existence of wisdom is united with the existence of promise, he told me that the situation similar to the descent of a deity (*lha babs*)

and that the practitioner of visualization (*sgrub thabs*) feels pain in many parts of the body.

Again in November 1998, at Bodhnath Stupa I met an old Tibetan priest, who was making a pilgrimage to the sacred places of Nepal from the Chamdo area of China. He was carrying out the austerity of body prostration. He was using two iron boards as 'the shoes of his hands'. When I saw him, he was surrounded by a large number of people. He was making predictions to those who asked about their future, business, and other anxieties. Having meditated for several seconds, he shook two dices. Looking at the two dice fallen on his left hand, he began to make a prediction.

I asked him about the practice of visualization. He understood my question immediately. He told me that thirty years ago, he succeeded in visualizing Goddess dPal-ldan lha-mo, one of the most terrifying female deities of Tibetan Buddhism, and that in the first couple of years he felt pain and unpleasantness in every part of his body. He added that in the course of time his mind and body became accustomed to the state, and that he has now become able to visualize the goddess within several seconds. I then understood that, he shook the dice having visualized the goddess.

Judging from my observation and interviews in Kathmandu, it would be safe to guess that there are some Tibetan monks practicing visualization (*sgrub thabs*) even nowadays. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the way the Tibetan monks of Srad-rgyud Monastery or other monasteries are practicing visualization sounds strikingly similar to the way Shugendou practitioners wait for the descent of a deity. In Japan I have heard that some Shugendou practitioners who had entered trance were unable thereafter to come back to their normal state.

3. Mandala Visualization in Newar Buddhism Today

The tradition of mandala visualization seems almost to have disappeared among Newar Buddhists, who have lived in the Kathmandu Valley for fifteen centuries. I asked a large number of Newar Buddhist priests about the situation of mandala visualization in Kathmandu at present. I have, however, been unsuccessful in obtaining a satisfactory answer.

Several Newar Buddhist priests mentioned the name of Dharmajee, who expired about ten years ago. They said that he was one of those who were able to perform visualization. Mr. Gautam R. Bajracharya, who was born in a traditional house of Newar Tantric scholars, has observed Dharmajee visualizing the Deity Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa, who is a terrifying Buddhist male deity. According to Mr. Gautam R. Bajracharya, Dharmajee in trance was terrifying just like Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa.

In April 1998, I met Mrs. Kusumamaya, who was the wife of Dharmajee, and

who expired in the summer of 1998. After the death of her husband, she became a disciple of Mrs. Tejomaya, the famous Dyoma (Newar healer of supernatural power) living at the top of Svayambhunath Hill. Under the guidance of Mrs. Tejomaya, Mrs. Kusumamaya obtained the ability of invoking Goddess Harītī. After that, she acted as a healer. Clients often visited her house near Svayambhunath Hill. When I visited her, she made a prediction for one of her clients after having been possessed by Goddess Harītī [Plate 2].

I requested Mrs. Kusumamaya to describe the state of the mind and body of Dharmajee when he was in trance. But the answers she gave to me were rather irrelevant to my question. She allowed me to take a copy of the photo showing Dharmajee dancing in trance [Plate 3]. Here I should add that the tradition of Tantric dance called Caryāṅṛtya has survived among Newar Buddhists. The Caryāṅṛtya may be considered the ritual dance of a Tantrist who is in trance. Dharmajee seems to have inherited the tradition of the Tantric dance.

Ratnakajee Bajracharya, who expired in October of 1999, was also one of the most important Newar Buddhist scholars (pandit). With him also I raised questions about the practice of visualization. He said, “Visualization is very difficult to practice. One could succeed in performing it only about twice out of five hundred times.” To the present I have had no chance to observe the state of a Newar priest who has succeeded in performing visualization.

4. Mandala Visualization Explained in Literature

4.1 Mandala Visualization Explained in the *Tattvasaṃgraha*

One of the most important yogatantras, i.e., the third of the Four Buddhist Tantra groups, is the *Tattvasaṃgraha*, which was probably compiled towards the end of the seventh century. This Tantra explains the process of the visualization of the Vajradhātu Mandala, which is one of the most basic Buddhist mandalas. Here, because of lack of space, it is impossible to deal with the full procedure of visualizing all the deities appearing in the Vajradhātu Mandala. Let us consider only the case of visualizing the deity named Vajrarāja, who is one of the Sixteen Bodhisattvas surrounding the Five Buddhas found in the Vajradhātu Mandala.

In the mandala visualization explained in the *Tattvasaṃgraha* the symbol of each deity plays a crucial role. The symbol of Bodhisattva Vajrarāja is a hook (*aṅkuśa*). According to the beginning part of the first chapter of the *Tattvasaṃgraha*, the procedure of meditating upon Vajrarāja is as follows:

First, all the hooks in the world gather in the heart of Tathagata Vairocana, who is nothing but the sanctified form of the practitioner [Figure 2]. Then, those hooks, having reached the heart of Vairocana, are transformed into one large hook [Figure 3]. Next, the image of the hook becomes so dense that the practitioner should feel that the hook in his hand is a real solid substance. Then, the practitioner



Plate 2 Mrs. Kusumamaya in trance. April, 1998.



Plate 3 Rev. Dharmajee dancing in trance.

Meditation of Deities described in the *Tattvasaṃgraha*

(A hook is the symbol of Dharmarāja)



Figure 2 All the hooks are coming to the heart of Vairocana, i.e., a yogin.



Figure 3 Those hooks become a large hook in the heart of the yogin.



Figure 4 The yogin condenses his psychic energy to the extent that the hook in his hand is real.



Figure 5 The yogin offers the hook to Sarvatathāgatas, then the deity whose symbol is a hook, i.e., Dharmarāja, appears in front of the yogin, and has his seat in the Vajradhātu Mandala.

holds the hook in his hand [Figure 4]. Finally, he offers it to Sarvatathagātas (i.e., the four Buddhas such as Akṣobhya) standing in front of him. The practitioner sees that Vajrarāja holding the symbol of a hook in his hand stands in front of him [Figure 5]⁴⁾.

We should not forget that the unification of the existence of wisdom with the existence of promise is missing not only in the above-mentioned part but also in the other parts of the *Tattvasaṃgraha*. This is probably because the procedure of mandala visualization explained in the *Tattvasaṃgraha* belongs to a form of mandala visualization earlier than that of the unification of the two kinds of existences.

There is little difficulty in understanding the literal meaning of the above-mentioned explanation given in the *Tattvasaṃgraha*. Yet my question remains unsolved. The Tantra says that the practitioner should consider the imagined hook as a real one (Horiuchi 1984: 41). There must have been a particular kind of technique used to imagine the symbol of each deity in such a way. At present we do not know what kind of technique was used at that time. Furthermore, how was it possible to verify whether or not the practitioner was successful in consolidating the image of the symbol of each deity? At least, it appears safe to say that the procedure of mandala visualization explained in the *Tattvasaṃgraha* shows little in common with possession.

4.2 Visualization Explained in the *Sādhnamālā*

Sometimes Sanskrit texts of visualization (*sādhana*) refer to psycho-physiological changes in the practitioner. There is a collection of Sanskrit texts for visualization entitled the *Sādhnamālā*, which seems to have been compiled from the eleventh to twelfth century. Text No. 36 of the *Sādhnamālā*, which is a manual for Avalokiteśvara visualization, states:

A yogin roars like an elephant and ‘plays with five kinds of colors’ (i.e., feels dizzy?) like a man intoxicated with liquor....If he does not ‘play with five kinds of colors’, there will be no shaking, trembling, possession and the like in his body⁵⁾.

The text has been ascribed to Saraha, who was a famous Indian Buddhist yogin in the tenth or eleventh century. Let us note that the term “possession” (*āveśana*) has been employed here in the text. Text No. 35 of the *Sādhnamālā* also refers to the shaking or trembling of the body of a practitioner⁶⁾.

Indeed, it is rare that the *Sādhnamālā* refers to psycho-physiological changes, but this does not mean that unusual psycho-physiological states are exceptional. Here, let us remember that visualization in late Indian Tantric Buddhism was somehow connected with the phenomenon of possession.

4.3 Tsong-kha-pa's Visualization as explained in the *Shel gyi me long*

In 1801, Thu'u-bkwan BLo-bzang chos-kyi nyi-ma (1737-1802), a scholar belonging to the dGe-lugs School, wrote an introduction to the history and doctrines of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism entitled *Shel gyi me long* (*Crystal Mirror*). The first half of the dGe-lugs pa chapter of the work is a biography of Tsong-kha-pa, the founder of the dGe-lugs School. In that chapter Thu'u-bkwan has quoted a number of passages from the two biographies of Tsong-kha-pa written by his disciple mKhas-grub dGe-legs dpal-bzang-po⁷⁾.

Among a large number of teachers of Tsong-kha-pa, Bla-ma dBu-ma-pa was one of the most important teachers who taught Tsong-kha-pa Tantric practices and theories. This teacher was famous for his ability of seeing Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī in front of himself.

With a focus on the special ability of Bla-ma dBu-ma-pa, the author of the *Shel gyi me long* has written as follows:

Later [Tsong-kha-pa], having met Bla-ma dBu-ma-pa again at Rong Monastery, listened to the teachings of Mañjuśrī. While Bla-ma dBu-ma-pa was translating (*lo tsā mdzad nas*) [what Mañjuśrī had told], Tsong-kha-pa raised a number of questions about the teachings of Mañjuśrī. At that time Mañjuśrī recommended to Tsong-kha-pa that he perform the practice of visualization. Therefore, having listened to Tantric doctrines and performed preliminary rites of purification, [Tsong-kha-pa] made up his mind to practice visualization⁸⁾.

Let us note the passage, "While Bla-ma dBu-ma-pa was translating [what Mañjuśrī told]." What does the term "translated" mean? One may conjecture that Bla-ma dBu-ma-pa was in a kind of trance, and that he was communicating with the deity in a special way to which Tsong-kha-pa had no access. Probably Bla-ma dBu-ma-pa was in a state similar to possession. The same kind of translation may be observed in Shugendou. In Shugendou also, only the practitioner to whom a deity has manifested himself is able and allowed to communicate with the deity; his clients sitting near the practitioner have him translate their questions, which are originally directed to the deity. The Shugendou practitioner thus acts as a medium.

Thu'u-bkwan's *Shel gyi me long* continues:

At that time, Tsong-kha-pa inclined toward founding a new school. He was anxious about which disciples should be taken with him in the case of the foundation of the new school. When [Tsong-kha-pa] asked Mañjuśrī about the disciples to be taken, Mañjuśrī told him that the so-called Eight Pure Disciples should accompany him. Up to that time, Bla-ma dBu-ma-pa translated Tsong-kha-pa's questions, which has been originally directed to Mañjuśrī, while Tsong-kha-pa could not meet Mañjuśrī directly. At that moment, however, Great Master [Tsong-kha-pa], having obtained direct accomplishment, saw Arapacana Mañjuśrī in the center of the ring of a rainbow. From then on

[Tsong-kha-pa] could see [or visualize] Mañjuśrī whenever wished⁹⁾.

Thu'u-bkwan thus paid much attention to Tsong-kha-pa's practice of visualization. We should be careful in defining the psycho-physiological state of Tsong-kha-pa at the time he was practicing visualization. Are we allowed to call it possession? If it is not possession, then what is it? At the present stage of our analysis, it must suffice to say that Tsong-kha-pa practiced visualization with the result that he believed himself able to communicate with Mañjuśrī in some unusual way.

The biography of Tsong-kha-pa written by Blo-bzang tshul-khrims (1740~1810), entitled the *bDe legs kun gyi 'byung gnas*, also tells us that Tsong-kha-pa was deeply concerned with the practice of visualization (Kaschewsky 1971: 102). According to the biographical work, he often visualized not only Mañjuśrī but also Sarasvatī, Mahākāla, Vaiśravaṇa and other deities, especially for several years immediately after the foundation of the dGe-lugs School.

Tibet has been known as a country of mystery where priests and ascetics possessing supernatural power have played an active part. For the past several centuries, the sGe-lugs School has been the most dominant among Tibetan Buddhist Schools. Tsong-kha-pa, who founded the dGe-lugs School, was deeply concerned with the visualization of deities, although the mandala visualization of Tsong-kha-pa or other dGe-lugs masters has been rather neglected by modern scholars.

4.4 Dark Retreat in Bon Religion

There has been published a book entitled "*The Instructions of Shardza Rinpoche from the Practice of Vision and the Dark Retreat*," which has been taken from the *rDzogs chen sku gsum rang shar* and commented on by Lopön Tenzin Namdak¹⁰⁾. It gives an explicit explanation of the visualization developed in the tradition of Bon religion.

According to the book, four stages are usually counted in the development of vision (*snang ba*). The four stages are as follows:

- (1) The visible manifestation of Reality (*bon nyid mngon sum*). That is to say, the appearance of drops (*thig le*, i.e., the core out of which vision develops), the chains of awareness, and so on.
- (2) The developing of experiences (*nyams gong 'phel*). Inside those drops the practitioner sees the faces or the upper halves of the bodies of deities.
- (3) The increasing in the measure of awareness (*rig pa tshad phebs*). At this stage the practitioner visualizes the complete forms of the deities inside the drops, and
- (4) The consummation of Reality (*bon nyid zad pa*). At this stage all visions are exhausted and dissolve into the natural state of Bon (*ibid.*, p.18).

The four stages may actually be considered three: the first two, the third, and the fourth, as commented on by Lopön Tenzin Namdak in the book (*ibid.*, p.18). The procedure of the three stages shows the same kind of development as found in the Three Meditations (*trisaṃādhi*) of Buddhist Tantrism (Beyer 1978: 117-118).

The book, which is a manual of Dark Retreat (*mun mtshams*), gives examples of the visions which the practitioners would have during seven weeks, i.e. the period of retreat. The book states:

In the practice of the Dark Retreat, the signs will also appear. For example, we may see signs like smoke or like lightning. Or suddenly, the dark room becomes very clear to our vision, as if the full moon were shining, and we can see everything in the room.... We may have such visions as an arrow flying or a bird flying in the sky. Bees may come and go to the flowers, taking the nectar. There may be visions of chains, lightning, birds flying in the sky, animals leaping about on the mountain like a musk deer, and so on¹¹⁾.

We should not forget that the practice called Dark Retreat is a part of the practice of Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*). According to Lopön Tenzin Namdak, the purpose of the practice of Great Perfection is to obtain enlightenment that is nothing but Emptiness (*stong pa nyid*), and that of the invocation of deities is rather to have attain secular power. Indeed, the practice of invoking or visualizing deities does not lead directly to the obtainment of enlightenment, but it has often been incorporated into the practice system of Bon religion or Buddhist Tantrism as preliminary means for obtaining the final soteriological purpose. Dark Retreat is an example of it.

Conclusion

Yoga is usually controlled by the free will of a yogin. But in a few cases, such as the state named Encounter with Extinction (*nirodha-samāpatti*), the yogin or practitioner cannot control his mental state after he has entered into a trance. It has been said that the yogin who has entered into Encounter with Extinction needs some physical stimuli, such as massage, in order to come back to his normal original state. Such a psycho-physiological change may be found also in non-Tantric yoga.

Generally speaking, there are two types of yoga: classical and Tantric. In the former, the mental activities of the yogin cease (*nivṛtti*); in the latter, they should be more activated (*pravṛtti*).

Possession is also of two types: controlled and uncontrolled (Rex 1976: 4-5). In the former, the practitioner is able to control his own psycho-physiological states and usually has self-consciousness. In the latter, however, in almost all cases the practitioner has no self-consciousness.

The tradition of mandala visualization has a history of more than one thousand

years. Obviously, in different periods its procedure and method have changed a great deal. At the present it is not clear what kind of psycho-physiological changes occur in a practitioner of mandala visualization. But one may safely conjecture that possession is a clue to the understanding of mandala visualization in the later development of Tantrism, although the two kinds of practices should be clearly distinguished (Samuel 1993: 238-239).

It seems there has been a tendency to have more elements of possession with the passage of time. For example, the *Vairocana Sūtra* compiled in the seventh century is almost totally free of possession. The *Tattvasaṃgraha*, which was compiled shortly after the *Vairocana Sūtra*, does not contain a large number of elements of possession, but such elements are found in it to a slight degree. The anuttarayoga-tantras, i.e., the fourth and last group of the Four Buddhist Tantras, such as the *Hevajra* and the *Samvarodaya*, include many elements of possession.

The practice and theory of mandala visualization is still not clear to us. The mechanism of possession is not clear, either. We have seen that the practice of mandala visualization is not a simple act. Similarly, possession is not a simple phenomenon: it has a number of varieties. However, I would hypothesize that mandala visualization was connected with the technique of possession at some point of the histories of Bon religion and Buddhism.

Notes

- 1) Tu is the symbol letter of the deity No. 2 indicated in Figure 1; Tri, of the deity No. 3; and Su, of the deity No. 4.
- 2) I would like to express my gratitude to Lopön Tenzin Namdak who allowed me to take a copy of the text and answered to my questions. I also wish to thank Lopön Tenpa Yundung, Tritan Norbutse Monastery, Kathmandu, who helped me translate the text.
- 3) TGB (*Tu dri su'i sgrib sbyong gi sgrub gzhung ma rig mun sel sgron me 'khor ba ngan song dong sprug*), pp.23-28: [23] *de'i dbus su g-yun drung thig le 'od gur khang nang / nang du nyi zla padma'i gdan brjid cing mdzes par bsam/ yang bdag gi thugs las a dkar po cig nyi zla padma'i gdan thog tu 'phros/ a de las 'od zer phar 'phros sems can thams cad kyi sgrib pa sbyangs/ 'od zer rnams tshur 'dus a la thim ste 'od du zhu ba las /*
 - [1] *kun tu bzang po rgyan med gcer bu zhal gcig phyag gnyis mnyam bzahag skyil krung tu bzhugs pa zhig tu gyur par bsam/ gtso bo'i thugs las 'od zer phyogs bzhir 'dab bzhi'i steng du 'phros pas*
 - [2] *shar du yum chen sa trig er sangs/*
 - [3] *byang du lha chen gshen lha 'od dkar/*
 - [4] *nub tu srid pa sangs po 'bum khri/*
 - [5] *lho ru ston [24] pa gshen rab mi bo/ phyag mtshan me long lcags kyu rgyal mtshan chag shing bsname pa/ zhi rgyan bcu gsum gyis brgyan pa re re gsal bar gyur/ yang gtso bo'i thugs las 'od zer de'i phyi rim du 'phros pas/*
 - [6] *gsang ba ngang ring sku mdog sngo dmar me chu'i gyal mtshan bsname pa/*

- [7] *mu cho ldem drug sku mdog dkar po phyag mtshan bdud brtsi'i rkyal bu bsna[m]s pa/*
- [8] *ti sangs rang zhi sku mdog ljang khu rin chen glegs bam bsname/*
- [9] *gsang ba 'dus pa sku mdog ser po gser gyi rnga gshang bsname pa/*
- [10] *lce rgyal bar ti sku mdog sngon po dbal gyi shang lang bsname pa/*
- [11] *ye gshen gtsug phud sku mdog dkar po pi wang po ti snams pa/ kun kyang rdzogs sku'i cha [25] lugs can du bzhengs pa re rer gsal bar gyur/ yan gtso bo'i thugs las 'od zer de'i phyi rim du 'phros pas/*
- [12] *ye gshen nam mkha'i ba dan chen sku mdog dkar po nam mkha'i ba dan 'dzin pa/*
- [13] *ye gshen khyung gi ru mtshon sku mdog dmar po kyung gi ru mtshon 'dzin pa/*
- [14] *ye gshen rgod kyi 'phar 'dab can sku mdog ljang khu rgod kyi 'phar 'dab 'dzin pa/*
- [15] *ye gshen rma bya'i ldem rgyang can sku mdog sngon po rma bya'i ldem rgyang 'dzin pa/*
- [16] *ye gshen zo bo war shad can sku mdog dmar po zo bo war shad 'dzin pa/*
- [17] *ye gshen dbal so mdung rce can sku mdog ljang khu dbal so mdung rce 'dzin pa/*
- [18] *ye gshen gsas mda' dung g-yug can sku mdog dmar po dung g-yug 'dzin pa/*
- [19] *ye gshen rnga strong ri chem [26] pa can sku mdog ser po rnga strong ri chem pa 'dzin pa/*
- [20] *ye gshen gshang khri lo gnam grags can sku mdog sngon po khri lo gnam grags 'dzin pa/*
- [21] *ye gshen dung 'phar po 'phar chung can sku mdog dkar (mss.dgor)po 'phar po 'phar chung 'dzin pa/*
- [22] *ye gshen che rgyal rgod zhu can sku mdog sngon po yi ge a dkar 'dzin pa/*
- [23] *ye gshen yang rgyal 'brug slag can sku mdog dkar po mu tig bgrang phreng 'dzin pa/*
- [24] *ye gshen gcod pa khra slag can sku mdog sngon po bdud rtsi'i bum pa 'dzin pa/ de dag thams cad zhal gcig phyag gnyis rdzogs sku'i cha lugs can bzhengs te bzhugs pa re rer gsal bar gyur/ yang gtso bo'i thugs las 'od zer sgo bzhi ru 'phros pas/*
- [25] *shar sgo ru zo bo dbu dgu/*
- [26] *byang sgo [27] la gze ma dbu dgu/*
- [27] *nub sgo ru ru co sde dgu/*
- [28] *lho sgo la rum po rce dgu/ kun kyang sku mdog mthing nag dbu dgu phyag bco brgyad pa/ phyag mtshan mtshon cha sna tshogs bsname pa/ phyi rol yon tan lan chags snying rje'i mgron rigs rname gnas pa/ de ltar bskyed pa'i lha tshogs rang rang 'khor dang bcas pa de rname kyang snang la rang bzhin med pa/ sgrib med 'od snang gi sku ru gsal ba/ mkhyen brtse ye shes kyi stobs dang ldan pa ru gyur par bsam/ de name gyi thugs las 'od zer (mss. re) grangs med pa ru dbyings su yar 'phros pa dbyings kyi sems dpa' grangs med pa spyang drangs nas bskyed pa'i lha tshogs rname la thim pas/ gnyis med las kyi sems dpa' ru gyur nas 'gro don rgya [28] lag phyad par gyur//*
- 4) Cf. Horiuchi 1984: 30-42, and Tachikawa 1997: 319-336.
- 5) *Sādhanaṁālā* (ed. by B. Bhattacharya), Part 1, G.O.S., vol.26, 1968, p.30. I would like to thank Miss Ruriko Sakuma who informed me of the existence of the passage in the

- Sādhana*mālā.
- 6) Ibid., p.31.
 - 7) The two biographies are the *Dad pa'i 'jug ngogs* (Tohoku Catalogue No. 5259) and the *gSang ba'i rnam thar* (Tohoku Catalogue No. 5260).
 - 8) *Thu'u bkwan grub mtha'* (1984), p.262: *phyis su rong chos lung du slar yang dbu ma pa dang mjal nas 'jam dbyangs chos skor gsan/ bla ma dbu ma pas lo tsā mdzad nas rje btsun 'jam dbyangs la 'og nas 'byung ba ltar gyi chos kyi dri ba mang du zhus/ de dus 'jam dbyangs kyi sgrub pa la bskul bar brten/ sngags kyi gsan sbyong tshar nas sgrub pa la 'byon par thugs thag bcad/*
 - 9) Ibid., pp.262-263: *'khor ba ji ltar khrid zhus pa la dag pa rnam brgyad du grags pa rnams khrid gsungs/ 'di yan chad du rje bla mas 'jam dbyangs dang dngos su ma mjal ba'i tshul gyis bla ma dbu ma pas lo tsa byas nas dri ba sogs zhu bar mdzad la/ 'di dus rje rang gis 'jam dbyangs kyi brnyen sgrub mdzad par brten/ 'ja' gur gyi dbus na bzhus pa'i 'jam dbyangs a ra pa tsa'i zhal dngos su gzigs/ de nas bzung ste nam 'dod du gzigs nas mdo .../*
 - 10) Translated and edited by Vajranatha, Bonpo Translation Project, Freehold and Amsterdam, 1992.
 - 11) *The Instructions of Shardza Rinpoche for the Practice of Vision and the Dark Retreat*, p.20.

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