Part III

Aesthetic Power and Spirituality of the Visuals of Buddhist Maṇḍalas
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Part III
Aesthetic Power and Spirituality of the Visuals of Buddhist
Maṇḍalas

When we, ordinary viewers, look at maṇḍalas, we are overwhelmed not immediately by doctrinal meanings or their ritual significance, but by the harmonious dynamics of forms and colours that maṇḍalas present us. The fact that maṇḍalas are permanently painted on the wall affirms that maṇḍalas have the aesthetic purpose in addition to their ritualistic contents. In Part I, the question ‘why the maṇḍalas stir the heart of people emotionally’ has led us to the observation that the aesthetic response to Buddhist maṇḍalas can be answered from their relationship to śūnya, and subsequently raised another question of ‘how the external forms of Buddhist maṇḍalas resemble the qualities of śūnya’. In Part II the aesthetic scope of the doctrine of vāk has been looked up in relation to Buddhist maṇḍalas. Now in Part III, the external forms of maṇḍalas will be explored from the perspective of the vāk theory, in order to be able to answer, ‘how do the colourful forms of Buddhist maṇḍalas resemble the formless śūnya?’

1. Redefinition of Maṇḍalas from the perspective of the Vāk Theory

1.1. ‘What the maṇḍala is’ and ‘what is meant by the maṇḍala’: vācaka and vācyā

1.1.1. ‘What the maṇḍala is’: the vācaka aspect

The maṇḍalas on the walls of monasteries are most often viewed as the physical support from which the meditation proceeds. Yet, we should keep in mind that the assembly hall of a monastery is not only for monks, but also for ordinary people. It is

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1 The vācaka can be replaced by the terms ‘śabda’, ‘subject’ or ‘that which expresses’; and the vācyā by the terms ‘arthā’, ‘object’ or ‘that which is expressed’.
implausible to think that the *maṇḍalas* have been painted on the walls of monasteries only for the esoteric rituals. Because the *maṇḍala* for the esoteric ritual - either mediation or initiation - could not have been permanently painted on the wall in such a public space. Thus, we should postulate that *maṇḍalas* on the walls of monasteries had another purpose to serve, even if they could have been occasionally used in rituals as the support of the visualization. It should be presupposed that such *maṇḍalas* are there mainly for ordinary devotees in the same context in which the wall paintings of Ajanta Caves have been looked at. When the *maṇḍalas* are permanently painted on the wall, they are to be looked and appreciated by ordinary devotees who ardently wish for raising *bodhicitta*, yet cannot always remember its permeating nature while being involved in *samsāra*. Buddhist *maṇḍalas* are, thus, more the expression than the ritual instrument, standing for the inner vision of the non-dualistic ideal for the benefit of ordinary people with their dualistic mind. It should be emphatically noted that they are presented as the expression. However, they are also distinguished from narrative paintings on the walls of monasteries, which are to be read and which have the purpose of teaching particular didactic contents. In contrast, the visuals of *maṇḍalas* are not meant for discursive teachings. They are the visual language expressing the non-discursive Ultimate Dharma, for the reason of which they are called ‘Essence’. Then, the purpose of the *maṇḍalas* in Tabo and Alchi can be formulated as such: ‘They speak for the inner vision of ‘the Essence’ for ordinary devotees.’

1.1.2. ‘What is meant by the *maṇḍala*': the *vācyā* aspect

The visual forms of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* signify a meaning in their synthetic totality. Yet, the meaning of these visual forms is different from any denoted or associated meanings. The final object of these forms cannot be confined to any distinct object, but it is non-discursive. Something indistinct and unlimited should be postulated to be the object of these forms. In the earlier preliminary references, we have learnt that the perceptible *maṇḍala* is a mere image (*pratibimba*) of the *samādhi-maṇḍala* that is
grasped on a subtle mental level,\(^2\) and the true meaning of the \(\text{maṇḍala}\) is the Essence, because the perceptible \(\text{maṇḍala}\) originates from the Essence. The \(\text{maṇḍala}\) is referred to be the abode of the essence of all the Buddhas,\(^3\) because it contains the Essence. The essence what the \(\text{maṇḍala}\) signifies has been named variously, \(\text{bodhicitta}, \text{mahat sukham}\) (great bliss),\(^4\) \(\text{sūnya}\), or \(\text{dharmadhātu}\), etc..

### 1.2. Problem of the \(vācyā\) and the \(vācaka\) in \(\text{maṇḍalas}\)

In the above speculation on what the \(\text{maṇḍala}\) is and what is meant by the \(\text{maṇḍala}\), we encounter the problem of the word (\(\text{śabda}\)) and the meaning (\(\text{artha}\)). \(\text{Maṇḍalas}\) have two aspects: as the \(vācaka\) and as the \(vācyā\). The perceptible \(\text{maṇḍala}\) is the \(vācaka\) which expresses and which is the object of our eyes. And the \(\text{maṇḍala}\) as the Essence is the \(vācyā\) because it is the ultimate meaning of its form. We observe that the \(vācyā\) and the \(vācaka\) converge to each other in the scope of the presupposition that the external \(\text{maṇḍala}\) is to express the qualities of the Essence and the Essence is to be physically revealed in the physical form of \(\text{maṇḍala}\). If the \(vācyā\) and the \(vācaka\) are intended to converge in an expression, as is the case with the Buddhist \(\text{maṇḍalas}\), that expression is distinguished from ordinary objects. For such an expression has already transcended the limit of ordinary objects at the subtle level (\(sūkṣma\)) in its intention (\(\text{anusandhānam}\)). From the perspective of the philosophy of \(vāk\), ordinary speeches and distinct objects represent the state where the \(vācyā\) and the \(vācaka\) are differentiated, which is the product of \(\text{vaikharī vāk}\). Abhinavagupta traces the gross form (\(\text{sthūla}\)) of each level of \(vāk\) to its respective subtle form (\(sūkṣma\)), and the subtle form of each \(vāk\) is defined to be the intention of creating its respective gross form.\(^5\) Thus, the gross form of \(\text{vaikharī}\)

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3 Cf. HT II. 3. 25: Vajragarbha questions: "Why is the \(\text{Maṇḍala Circle} (\text{maṇḍalacakra})\) known as the abode (\(\text{purām}\)) of the essence of all the Buddhas (\(\text{sarvabuddhātmakam}\))?" (trans. Farrow & Menon 1992: p. 190).

4 Cf. HT II. 3. 26. "\(\text{Maṇḍala is said to be the essence (śāram), the Enlightened Consciousness (bodhicitta})\) and the great bliss (\(\text{mahat sukham}\)). \(\text{Maṇḍala is so called because it holds the Great Bliss, that is, bears it.}\)" (trans. Farrow & Menon 1992: p. 190).

5 Cf. TĀ III. 245b-247a (vol. II, p. 583).
springs from the intention of the *vaikhari* object, while the gross from of *paśyantī* springs from the intention of the *paśyantī* object. In other words, it is the intention to create the *vaikhari* or *paśyantī* objects that brings forth the *vaikhari* or *paśyantī* object.

Let us look at how the *vācya* and the *vācaka* converge in the *maṇḍala* meant for the visualization from the perspective of the theory of *vāk*. Starting with the physical support of *maṇḍala*, the visualization practice attempts to realize the Essence. Here, the physical form is intentionally meant for the mental reproduction during the meditation, and the physical forms of the *maṇḍala* do not serve their purpose if they are not meditated and revived in the meditative space. The meditative *maṇḍala*, being the subtle re-creation of the external *maṇḍala* in the meditative space, exists beyond the physical realm. Yet, it is not simple to define whether the mental image of the *maṇḍala* is still at the level of *vaikhari* or already at the level of *madhyama vāk*. It may be seen in both ways. It is still at the level of *vaikhari vāk* because all the differentiated details of the physical form are to be remembered and reproduced in the visualization, which means that the differentiating principle of *vaikhari vāk* still dominates in the mental representation. On the other hand, the mental image is certainly subtler and more conducive to the undifferentiated state than the physical image. Thus, we can say that it also exists at the domain of *madhyama vāk*. Probably we could place the mental image of *maṇḍala* at the transition between *vaikhari* and *madhyama*.

In case of the *maṇḍalas* meant for the visualization, their artistic standard could be secondary, because it is by means of one's meditative power that the *vācaka* aspect of the *maṇḍala* converges with its *vācya* aspect. And the physicality of the external form is transcended in the meditative space of the indistinctness. Here, it is in one's internal space that one leaves the border of physicality. Hence, it may be said in regard to the *maṇḍalas* meant for the visualization that visuals of *maṇḍalas* remain merely at the *vaikhari* level if they are not internalized in the meditation. Only when they are internalized and the central deity is identified with the self, they serve their purpose in leading one through the *madhyama* level and further to the *paśyantī* state where the Essence is realized. The visualization can be interpreted as the process of identifying the *vācaka* and the *vācya*, which is defined to be at the level of *paśyantī* or *Parāvāk*. In such
a context, the *maṇḍala* may be compared to a guide map or a diagram of the meditation process, while the experience of the Essence remains esoteric and invisible.

On the other hand, the *maṇḍala* for the ordinary people needs a different methodology to serve its purpose, because the Essence should be revealed even without involving the technique of visualization. While the meditation *maṇḍalas* seize the inner vision of the Essence within, those for the ordinary people as in Tabo and Alchi should unfold the Essence externally. If the nature of the Essence is not externally reflected on the external form, it remains concealed. If the Essence is untouched by the physical form of *maṇḍala*, the *vācyā* and the *vācaka* of the *maṇḍala* remain differentiated at the *vaikharī* level, in case of which the *maṇḍala* does not appeal to the heart of people. In regard to the *maṇḍalas* painted on the walls of the monasteries it may be said that the Essence should be externally reflected on the physical form, if the *maṇḍala* is to serve its purpose.

Let us ponder upon the state of ‘the Essence reflected on the external form of *maṇḍala*’. From the perspective of the theory of *vāk*, it is the state where the *vācyā* and the *vācaka* are in the direction of merging together to unite. This state may be related to the *madhyama* and also to the *paśyanti* in varying relationships between the *vācaka* and the *vācyā* explained in the doctrine of *vāk*. *Madhyama* *vāk* demarcates the initial stage of the identification where the reciprocal fusion between the *vācyā* and the *vācaka* takes place. In the *paśyanti* state, the fusion between the *vācyā* and the *vācaka* is led to the almost un-differentiated unity, which is close to the state of *Parāvāk*.

We cannot rigidly allocate *maṇḍalas* painted on the walls to a particular level of *vāk*, by discussing the relationship between their *vācyā* aspect and their *vācaka* aspect. However, the relationship between their *vācyā* and *vācaka* aspect can be rendered to be a criterion in judging the aesthetic level of *maṇḍalas*: depending on how successfully the physical forms (*vācaka*) reflect the qualities of the Essence (*vācyā*), a *maṇḍala* can be compared to *vaikharī*, *madhyama* or *paśyanti* *vāk*, and it is the standard of arts employed in a *maṇḍala* that determines the success of its expression. When a *maṇḍala* is a successful expression in resemblance to the qualities of the Essence, its *vācyā* and *vācaka* aspects are in union, and the Essence and its external forms are undifferentiated.

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When the ultimate meaning is unfolded in the external forms of a maṇḍala, that maṇḍala is worthwhile to be called ‘paśyantī vāk’, which is close to Parāvāk.

2. Maṇḍalas of Alchi interpreted as the Gross Form of Paśyantī vāk

It is the art that accomplishes the revelation of the Essence in the physical forms of maṇḍala. The high standard of arts as is demonstrated by the maṇḍalas of Tabo and Alchi enhances the physical forms from the vaikhatī level to the level of paśyantī. The present thesis proposes to look at the maṇḍalas of Alchi in comparison with the level of paśyantī vāk, and to draw the basis of their aesthetic power from their being on the level of sthūla paśyantī.

2.1. Nature of Paśyantī vāk

2.1.1. Essential characteristics of paśyantī vāk

First of all, it will be helpful to touch upon again about the essential characteristics of paśyantī vāk to discuss in what sense the maṇḍalas of Alchi could be seen as the form of paśyantī vāk.

i) Paśyantī vāk is characterized by parāmarśa (synthetic awareness) of the undivided whole. It is said to be awaken only by the penetrating act of bodha (enlightenment or awareness) (bodhasūtraṇamatraṇa).6

ii) In paśyantī stage, the subjectivity prevails. However, this subjectivity has the objectivity as the object of awareness (idambhāvarūpasatyapratyavamarśa).7

iii) There is neither the differentiation nor dualism between the vācya and the vācaka, or between the subject and the object.

iv) The unity of the whole predominates over the distinct parts.

v) Various distinct forms are fused into one another to the extent that there is non-existence of distinct forms. Therefore, forms and no-form exist together (parāparā).

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6 Cf. PTV p. 4.
2.1.2. Two ways of understanding paśyaṇṭī vāk

Paśyaṇṭī vāk is the stage very next to Parāvāk which is the pure trans-physical light (prakāśa) and pure awareness (vimarśa). Paśyaṇṭī is similar to Parāvāk in nature, though the sense of objectivity, or in other words, the dualism of the object and the subject, is in incipience. It is explicated as the subllest stage in the process of evolution and absorption at the microcosmic as well as at the macrocosmic level. It also represents the internal subtle synthesis of multiple forms of objects in the process of cognition.

However, four levels of vāk are not always explained in successive sequences. As we have dealt with in Part II, Abhinavagupta in his Tantrāloka explicates his perception of three levels of vāk (vaikharī, madhyamā and paśyaṇṭī) in their independent lines of development. In the discourse about the three forms of three vāks, each vāk originates from Parāvāk. In his explication, each of three levels of vāk has three manifestations (rūpa); sthūla, sūkṣma, parā. Here, paśyaṇṭī is not only a subtle state but also a gross form and an object of senses. And vaikharī is not only a gross manifestation but also a subtle will (anusandhāna) that desires the creation of such a manifestation. In consent to Abhinavagupta’s perception, the objects of our senses can be categorized into three levels of vāk.

In the context of comprehending maṇḍalas, both aspects of paśyaṇṭī are relevant:

i) paśyaṇṭī as the internal subtle stage of absorption and cognition
ii) paśyaṇṭī as the external object of sense-experience.

The former is related to our mental activity and could appropriately explain the transformation of forms that takes place at the final stage in the visualization of maṇḍalas. The latter is concerned with our physical activity, thus with our aesthetic appreciation of maṇḍalas. Evidently, the latter aspect of paśyaṇṭī is more significant for comprehending the aesthetic dimension of maṇḍalas. The gross forms of paśyaṇṭī

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8 Cf. TĀ III. 237b-245a.
explicated by Abhinavagupta opens a scope for recognizing the non-discursive dimension of the forms in *maṇḍalas*.

### 2.2. Speculation on the exposition of the *sthūla paśyantī*

#### 2.2.1. Analysis of the characteristics of the *sthūla paśyantī*

The gross form of *paśyantī* is often compared to ‘the murmuring sound of a stream’. In the *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivrtivimarśini*, *paśyantī* is described to be ‘such a subtle murmur’ (*sūkṣumasanjalpasvabhāva*). In the *Tantrāloka* the gross *paśyantī* is said to be ‘in the form of *nāda*’. In the *Netra Tantra* the *nāda* is compared to ‘the indistinct murmur of a brook’ (*avvucchinnadruṇādīghoṣa*). And Abhinavagupta describes *nāda* ‘as light and beautiful as a series of musical notes’ which are not divided.

Then, why is the murmuring sound of a brook compared to *nāda* and to *paśyantī*? The answer to this question seems crucial in understanding which objects in the physical realm could be designated to be *paśyantī vāk*, which is close to *Parāvāk*, the Highest (*anuttāra*) in Its creative, immanent, vibrant aspect. Let us scrutinize the physical characteristics of a ‘murmuring brook’. First of all, the murmuring sound of a brook is an undivided sound, continuously flowing without beginning or end. It appears that only a unit of sound is simply repeated. Such a perception is displayed in the fact that different languages transcribe the sound of a flowing brook into an onomatopoetic word, for example ‘*jol*’ in the Korean language, and repeat the word in order to indicate the flowing movement, for example ‘*jol-jol-jol-jol*……..’. We hear a clear oneness where the repetitive sound endlessly continues. Yet, another dimension of the sound comes into contact with our senses, when we are absorbed into the sound of murmur besides a brook. Within a harmonious unity of sound, we hear innumerable variations of sounds created by the water. The variety of tones, beats or even melodies starts touching our senses. These various sounds are perceived as if they appear and disappear continuously. Before

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9 Cf. IPVV I. 5. 13 (vol. 2, p. 190, line 18).
10 Cf. TĀ III. 237b.
12 Cf. TĀ III. 237b.
grasping a sound, another sound touches the senses, and the sound seems disappearing before it would be grasped. Within the unity of sound, multiple sounds are enfolded. It is the complete harmony and the union of multiple sounds – the connection of Oneness and manifoldness which is the characteristics of the Reality as such - that makes the murmuring sound of a brook compared to the nature of paśyanti vāk.

In the sound of a brook, the multiple sounds are distinct. However, we cannot say that these multiple sounds are distinct because they are completely superseded by a larger unit of harmonious sound. These sounds are indistinct in the sense that they are thoroughly fused with one another and they lose their distinct forms of separate units. These characteristics observed in the form of ‘the murmur of a brook’ are reminiscent of the parāparā aspect of paśyanti, which is described in the verse,

“All this appears in her (paśyanti) in a variety of discrete aspects or as forms fused into each other, or it may appear as having lost all form.”

Abhinavagupta refers to ‘a series of musical notes’ as an example of the gross form of paśyanti. If we now pay attention to the case of ‘a series of musical notes’, we observe that the characteristics of the murmur of a brook analogously occur in there. It is the co-existence of multiple forms and the indistinct whole that makes ‘a series of musical notes’ comparable to paśyanti. A harmonious series of musical notes with various tones and beats flow as comparable to ‘the murmur of a brook’. Its various distinct notes are intertwined with one another till they are melted in one musical flow. It can be compared to the well-known image of the relation between waves and the ocean. Each of various notes plays its role and has its meaning in relation to others. It is not distinct within the flowing sound although it retains its distinct form. At the moment of one’s absorption into the sound, one’s hearing is directed not to any particular sound of a particular note, but to the musical essence (rasa) created through those particular sounds. It is the dynamic fusion of various notes that is carried through the harmonious flow of sound, and it is that which endows distinct notes with musical life. When distinct notes

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fail to be mingled in harmony, they remain distinct in disharmony, which is fatal in the
traditional sense of music. ‘A series of notes’ whose life abides in its nature of ‘distinct
and indistinct’ (parāparā), indeed manifests paśyantī vāk in physical form.

2.2.2. Comparison between the sthūla paśyantī and the sthūla madhyamā

However, why has Abhinavagupta allocated ‘the sound of a drum’ not to the gross
form of paśyantī but to that of madhyamā, when its life abides also in the parāparā
nature?

The sound of a drum consists of a single note and the repetitive rhythm, which
literally express the undivided. In contrast, the sound of a string instrument consists of
multiple notes, which create the undivided oneness. Though both forms of sound,
directly or indirectly conveys the vision of the undivided, the difference lies in the
method through which ‘the undivided’ is conveyed. The sound of a drum represents ‘the
undivided’ by means of its mono-form, whereas the sound of a string instrument does
the same by means of its multi-forms. In case of the sound of a drum, ‘the undivided’
does not directly express the whole that enfolds all parts, whereas in case of the sound
of a string instrument, the non-duality of the whole and the parts is physically present.
Though the sthūla madhyamā physically conveys a picture of ‘the undivided form’, its
form, being technically simpler than the sthūla paśyantī, has a shortage in expressing
the vision of ‘the undivided encompassing all divisions’. Here, the multiplicity is
inferred to be innate in its undivided simple form only on the basis of the metaphysical
principle, ‘everything present in everything (viśvātmakatvam)’. On the other hand, in
the sthūla paśyantī, the multiplicity has its prominent place as much as the oneness.

Thus, the comparison of the sound of a drum with that of a string instrument
spotlights the significant characteristic of paśyantī vāk: ‘multiplicity in unity’. In
paśyantī vāk, the multiple varieties of forms are not only the constituents but also the
principle in constructing ‘the undivided’.

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2.3. Maṇḍalas and Nāda

The characteristics which we have observed in the murmur of a brook and a series of musical notes stand for the nature of nāda, which provide us with a valuable scope by means of which the aesthetic layers of maṇḍalas could be filtered. Now, having returned to the topic of maṇḍalas, it is to be noted that the above analyses about the murmur of a brook and a series of musical notes bring to light the parallel characteristics exhibited by the maṇḍalas of Alchi.

2.3.1. Sthūla paśyantī and sthūla madhyama in the field of visuals: Maṇḍalas in comparison with Zen drawings of a circle

The above comparison between the sound of a string instrument and that of a drum can be applied to the field of visuals. The distinctiveness of the multi-formed Buddhist maṇḍalas is accentuated when they are compared with the Zen drawing of a circle. (Pl. 57) The one-stroke drawing of a circle used in the Zen practice of East Asian tradition shows a stark contrast to the maṇḍalas of Indo-Tibetan tradition. The practice of drawing a circle is based on the belief that the circle in its simple form represents not only the emptiness of śūnyā, but at the same time the fullness and perfection. In Zen tradition, the circle represents the image of Enlightenment or true ‘I’. It is regarded as the archetype that expresses ‘the Complete’. Thus, the cosmos is expressed in the simple drawing of a circle, and the multiple forms that fill the cosmos are believed to be symbolically innate in the circle. The symbolic significance of a circle in the context of the spiritual practice is more or less identical with that of Indo-Tibetan maṇḍalas. These two different expressions ultimately represent the universe of the Perfection. However, in terms of the method of its expression they are contrary. Now, we come to a question: 'why has the maṇḍala with multiple colours and forms distinctly developed, if the meaning could have been, in a easier way, represented by a mere drawing of a circle?'

Seen from the perspective of the theory of vāk, the maṇḍalas executed by means of

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multiple forms and colours coincide with the characteristics of the *paśyantī vāk*, whereas the one-stroke drawings of a circle may be compared to the *sthūla madhyamā*. Being reminded of the characteristics of the sound of a drum,\(^\text{15}\) we find the visual correspondence of the *sthūla madhyamā* in the ink-drawing of a circle that consists of a single form without any colour or without any elaboration of distinct forms. The multiplicity is not expressed, but theoretically implied in the philosophy of the ink as well as of the circle. Whereas one of the prominent characteristics of the *paśyantī* is ‘the unity of multiplicity’ or ‘the multiplicity in unity’, the ink drawing of a circle is not concerned with ‘the multiplicity in unity’ or ‘the fusion of multiple forms’. The multiplicity is to be omitted and the white paper is left intact as to portray the *śūnya*. Here, the indistinct principle of *śūnya* is so prominent as not to give any place for colours and forms, which is none other than the result of the dualistic *vikalpa* that differentiates *śūnya* from the multiple forms. Although the indistinct principle makes its stance strong in the ink-drawing of a circle and consequently breaking the sheath of distinct forms apart, it does not realize the non-dualistic ideal in its physical form. It will be relevant at this point to refer to Abhinavagupta’s notes on the *nāda* in order to verify that a product of *vikalpa* is inappropriate to be said ‘*paśyantī*’ even if it affirms the non-dualistic ideal in theory. Abhinavagupta defines *nāda* as that,

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\text{“what is left of the experiencer’s synthetic self-awareness (svātmaparāmarṣaśeṣatā) when all differentiating thought (vikalpajñānadānā) disappears.”}^\text{16}
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Abhinavagupta’s definition of *nāda* helps us in extracting the *avikalpa* nature of *sthūla paśyantī*. The significance of the physical forms of Buddhist *manḍalas* should be highlighted in their being the realization of the non-dualism in their *paśyantī* nature devoid of *vikalpa*.

\(^{15}\) Cf. TĀ III. 242b-244a (vol. II, pp. 581-2).
57. Zen drawing of a circle, Seokjeong, 1980

58. Yantra of the goddess Chāmuṇḍā, Rajasthan, 19\textsuperscript{th} cent., Ink and colour on paper.
2.3.2. Notes on the \textit{nāda} nature of the \textit{maṇḍalas} of Alchi

The Buddhist \textit{maṇḍalas} are also distinguished from Hindu \textit{yantras} in terms of their aesthetic approach. Hindu \textit{yantras} consist of geometric shapes and \textit{bīja-mantras} without any bodily delineation of divinities. (Pl. 58) As a result there is neither a harmony nor a tension among distinct multiple forms, though their geometric structures give us a stark impression of 'the Principle', therefore raise a certain aesthetic emotion in us. Although the \textit{maṇḍalas} of Alchi are equally based on a geometric structure, their aesthetic approach is different in displaying multiple forms within the dynamic indistinctness. They indeed exemplify the \textit{nāda} nature of \textit{paśyanti}, creating various sounds in the harmonious whole by means of sensuous colours and forms. As like the sound of a brook that can be neither caught nor frozen in our sense perception, the various forms in the \textit{maṇḍalas} of Alchi continuously flow through the dynamic tension between the distinct and the indistinct, and between the sensuousness and the trans-sensuousness.

The following characteristics may be suggested to be the characteristics that place the \textit{maṇḍalas} of Alchi in parallel to \textit{nāda}, or \textit{sthūla paśyanti}:

i) Enfolding the viewer physically in their large formats
ii) Geometric layout
iii) Hierarchy of various deities set in the geometric structure
iv) Combination of the geometric basis in bodily forms of divinities and the curvilinear details
v) Elaborate details of decoration
vi) Synthetic harmony of five primary colours and their multiple tones

These features will be dealt with in details in the following section. Though the scope of analysis does not include the subjective experience of \textit{maṇḍalas}, I will dwell from time to time upon the inner response to these visual characteristics, because the act of seeing cannot be separated from the aesthetic process of internalization.

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3. Visual Elements of the Gross Paśyantī: How are Maṇḍalas of Alchi the Gross Form of Paśyantī?

Under the present section, I attempt to analyze the visual elements of the maṇḍalas which contribute to their paśyantī nature. The analyses will focus on the point how the distinct parts of a maṇḍala are integrated to the whole. These visuals manifesting both the multiplicity and the unity underline the parāparā nature of paśyantī vāk. The analyses that will be undertaken here are not only for the purpose of proposing the maṇḍalas as sthūla paśyantī, but also directly connected with the question, how the perceptual maṇḍalas resemble the qualities of śūnya. In Part II, Parāvāk has been looked into in its significance of śūnya and its parallel concepts of the Ultimate in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Paśyantī vāk is conceived very close to Parāvāk in nature. If the maṇḍalas are verified to be the gross form of paśyantī vāk, which is close to Parāvāk, we subsequently reach the conclusion that those maṇḍalas are very close to Parāvāk and they resemble the qualities of the Ultimate conceived in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

In the analyses, the maṇḍalas of Alchi are taken as the example of the sthūla paśyantī, yet those of Tabo are not included. Although they are based on the same concept and share some common features, they are a great deal distinguished from each other chiefly in two points. Firstly, the geometric palace is prominent in the examples of Alchi, but not in Tabo. Though the maṇḍalas of Tabo demonstrates an equally high standard of arts as like those of Alchi in the matter of the execution of figures, the horizontal arrangement of the figures certainly exerts a different visual impact from what the geometric layout does in Alchi. The visual effect of the geometric layout will be explained in details in relation to the concept of maṇḍalas. Secondly, in the matter of the range of the iconographic scheme, the maṇḍalas of these two sites are distinguished from each other. In Tabo, both maṇḍalas of Vajradhātu and Dharmadhātu-Vāgiśvara depict only the central group of the divinities, and the divinities at the periphery are not present. In Part I, we have seen that the iconographic depiction in the entrance room of the dukhang in Tabo may be considered to be the divinities allocated for the periphery of the Vajradhātu-maṇḍala, while the central group of the maṇḍala is depicted in the
assembly hall. However, the separate placement of the central group of divinities and those of the periphery creates a little coherence among the divinities of the manḍala.\textsuperscript{17}

On these reasons, the following analyses mainly refer to the manḍalas of Alchi.

3.1. Large scale of the manḍalas enfolding the viewer

Manḍalas have been painted in Alchi in large scales that include the viewer physically within their structure and encompass the sight of the viewer. When we look at a manḍala painting, generally its center is focused first. In case of manḍalas with large formats as in Alchi, a viewer is immediately included into the manḍala composition, when he or she stands in the middle of it and looks at its center. This design principle needs a careful attention, since it plays a crucial role in determining the relationship between the viewer and the manḍala.

3.1.1. Example of the Vajradhātu-manḍala in the dukhang of Alchi

Let us take up the example of the Vajradhātu-manḍala in the dukhang of Alchi. (Pl. 7) We enter the hall and bow to the Buddha Vairocana at the main altar. Being subdued in the atmosphere of sacredness, we take the ritual of the circumambulation. The circumambulation is analogous to the spiritual pilgrimage, and the manḍala of Sarvadurgatiparsodhana is painted at the beginning of the circumambulatory path in order for clearing all the evils that would obstruct the path to Enlightenment. Then we come to the Vajradhātu-manḍala, more precisely a variant form of Trilokavijaya-manḍala. We stand in the middle of the manḍala and see it, yet without discerning what each figure speaks for. However, the colours and forms displayed in front of our eyes are delightful, and hint that there is something profound. Thus, we keep standing in front of it and observe it. The pillars and the seat for the monks in the hall do not allow us to step back to have any entire view of the manḍala. Thus, our stance remains fairly close to the

\textsuperscript{17} In fact, when the Vajradhātu ritual was revived in 2004 after a long time in Tabo, monks had to make a new Vajradhātu-manḍala in the dukhang though the authentic Vajradhātu-manḍala is still vividly alive right there. When I interviewed Lama Urgyen of Tabo monastery in 2007 and asked about the reason of having made the new manḍala, he answered that it was necessary because the old manḍala does not show all the divinities required for the manḍala ritual.
mandala, which means that we are not in an optimal position of objectifying the object. The factor of the close view at the large mandala conduces us to place ourselves virtually within the object and to be involved in the object's space. Thus, we are included in the mandala, clearly demarcated by a large circle.

The white rim at the outermost periphery of the mandala is filled with drawings of vajra in prominent black. The stark contrast of black drawing on the white circular band at the outermost periphery establishes a clear delineation between the circular house of mandala and the outer zone. Its grandiose size of about 380 cm. in diameter generates 'the impact of enfolding' much easier than a small format. In this case, the sense of 'being enfolded within the mandala' is immediate. It is further parallel to the state of internalization in respect of the subjective involvement and absorption. Although what we see is a two-dimensional painting, the flat surface of two-dimensionality is transcended by the fusion of our body and the mandala, and the layers of immaterial space are set to open beyond the flat surface.

3.1.2. Intention of incorporating the viewer within the mandala: other examples

That the viewer is physically within a mandala means that he or she is integrated within the mandala ground. The large format of a mandala painting apparently results from the intention to physically incorporate the viewer into the mandala. Probably, it is the same intention that induced the three-dimensional mandala in the dukhang of Tabo. In the dukhang of Tabo, one's entrance to the hall immediately brings one's step into the inner zone of mandala.  

Another notable example is the twin stūpa, located in front of the sumtseg in Alchi. (Pl. 59) Stūpas in general are believed to be a form of dharmadhātu, representing the citta aspect of the Buddha. They are fundamentally mandalas in the form of three-dimensional architecture. Especially, the twin stūpa standing in front of the sumtseg has

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18 One actually enters the assembly hall of the dukhang, Tabo from the east, as like the mandala is in general entered from the east in the visualization.
59. Small twin-ṣtūpa, in front of the sumtseg, Alchi

60. Inner stūpa, Small twin-stūpa, in front of the sumtseg, Alchi

61. Mahāvairocana chamber, Vajradhātu-maṇḍala, dukhang, Alchi
an elaborate plan to be a *manḍala*. The structure has two chambers with two towers. Each chamber demonstrates the concept of ‘*stūpa* within *stūpa*’, which expresses the Buddha both transcendental and immanent. Each chamber has the shape of a cross in the ground level, and it transforms to a square chamber in the upper level. A multi-angled superstructure of the inner *stūpa* is raised in the upper level. (Pl. 60) The interior is profusely painted, including *manḍalas* of *Parjñāpāramitā* and Avalokiteśvara. (Pl. 54) It is remarkable that one can actually enter the inner space of the *stūpa* in Alchi and stand right below another *stūpa* whereas *stūpas* are just to be turned around in most of cases. Each chamber of this twin *stūpa* has a passage which penetrates through the lower structure. Thus, two openings of a chamber connect the inner zone of the *stūpa* and the outer zone.

These *manḍala* paintings in large scales or architectural *manḍalas* are different from small-scaled *manḍala* paintings in terms of the relationship between the viewer and the viewed. A small-scaled *manḍala* painting is used for the individual meditation. It tends to be an object of the eyes, and a viewer is the subject who is differentiated from the object at the initial stage. If the viewer attempts to go beyond the subtle space of *manḍala* behind its flat surface, the physical distance between the subject and the object has to be overcome by means of meditation, that is the process of internalization. On the contrary, the *manḍalas* of Alchi created in considerably large scales include the viewer within their space at the preset, like architectural *manḍalas*. While the fusion of the viewing subject and the viewed object is generated by means of the internalization in case of small-scaled *manḍalas*, it is externalized in the large scale in the *manḍalas* of Alchi.

### 3.2. Geometric Layout

#### 3.2.1. Circular Format

#### 3.2.1.1. Difference between horizontal *manḍalas* and geometric *manḍalas*

‘*Manḍala*’ literally means ‘the center and the periphery’, that is, ‘a circle’.

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Maṇḍalas are based on the meditative vision that emerges at the state of absorption. The dynamism of maṇḍalas can be epitomized to be the simultaneous flows of centrifugal and centripetal forces. The four Buddhas at the four directions play the essential role in generating the dynamism of the centrifugal and the centripetal forces in the concept of maṇḍalas. In the conceptual setting, the four Buddhas represent four kulas, denoting the all-pervasive presence of Sarvatathāgata throughout time and space. They are not merely placed at the cardinal points, but their presence connects the centre with all directions as the sign of four jñānas. These four jñānas would be converged into the jñāna of dharmadhātu symbolized in the center.¹⁹ And the sixteen Bodhisattvas are the emission of the sixteen aspects of Sarvatathāgata in the samādhi of Mahāvairocana. Their iconographic role lies in extending the center to the periphery and withdrawing the periphery to the center.²⁰

It should be noted that in case of the horizontal maṇḍalas as we observe in Tabo, the dynamism of the maṇḍala is rather conceptual, whereas it is explicitly expressed in the maṇḍalas of geometric formats. In the horizontal maṇḍalas, the dynamism of centrifugal and centripetal forces is preconditioned by one's familiarity with the iconography. Here, they are called maṇḍalas, not because they are in the shape of a circle, but because they have the dynamics of a circle conceptually established by the divinities. For example, in the Vajradhātu-maṇḍala of Tabo, the four Buddhas are arranged not around the main statue of Mahāvairocana, but seated against the left and right walls of the main hall. Even if so, their places are understood in relation to Mahāvairocana and the other divinities by the devotee who would have the knowledge of who these divinities are. Even without any circular frame or any clear-cut geometric layout, the dynamic relationships among these divinities are established in the mental space of the devotee, while he or she walks through them during the ritual of circumambulation.

²⁰ The number thirty-six, which is the number of the main divinities in the maṇḍalas of Yogatantras, has been considered by Tucci in its symbolic context. Tucci calls our attention to the esoteric meaning of the number thirty-six. He points out that thirty-six is the number of the dḥātu (elementary categories) and also the number of the letters of the mantra (cf. Tucci 1988: pp. 54-5).
In the horizontal maṇḍalas, the concept of maṇḍala is established by means of one's knowledge about the divinities and about the relations among them. Subsequent to the understanding of these divinities, the dynamism of a circle is internally created. Yet, the circle in the mental conception is rather subtle and evasive, whereas the shape of circle externally displays the inner dynamism among these divinities.

3.2.1.2. Symbolism of the Circle and the Centre

The process of laying out the geometric abode for the maṇḍala divinities starts with the demarcation of the maṇḍala ground in the form of a circle. The symbolism of the circle is, in a broad extent, identical with that of maṇḍalas and the term 'maṇḍala' means 'the circle'. The circle is the symbolic form of Space and Time that is unborn and limitless. In drawing principle, a circle is obtained by connecting points in all directions that have equal distance to the centre. The drawing method of a circle betrays the symbolism of the fullness and the union of multiplicity. The Vāstuśūtra Upaniṣad, which provides us with a fundamental philosophy and symbolism of forms in Indian šilpa tradition, explains about the circle:

"The breath of life (prāṇa) is (contained) in its form, even as the mind is in Man (puruṣasya manah). The circle is Time, according to the Vāstuveda. The movement of the circle is restricted (by its circumference), like the fluctuation of the mind (cittavṛttiḥ)." 

The above verse shows the traditional conception of the circle in analogy to the Cosmic Man. The forms that arise in the circle are like the prāṇa of the Cosmic Man. The circle has been perceived in the Indian artistic tradition as the receptacle of the Cosmic Mind, which is concomitant to express the concept of maṇḍala, that is, bodhicitta, dharmadhițu, and śūnya.

If the circle symbolizes the Cosmic Man, the center of the circle signifies the place where the primeval Cosmic Consciousness resides. The Vāstuśūtra Upaniṣad states that

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22 Cf. VSU II. 7, comm., ibid.
the center (bindu) is like the soul (ātman) in Man. Without the center, a circle cannot be drawn. A perfect circle can be drawn only with a compass. Traditionally a compass is made of a wooden stick attached to a peg by means of a rope. Unless the peg is firmly fixed, any perfect circle cannot be obtained. When the peg is firmly fixed on the ground, it naturally creates a hole and makes the center in the nature of the hole. Thus, the innate nature of the center is hollow (vila or guha), which corresponds to kha or śūnya at the metaphysical level. The center of a circle in the form of a hollow, thus, innately expresses the śūnya at the center of the maṇḍala.

The symbolic significance of the center in the maṇḍala is emphasized in its aspect of bindu. The centre of a circle is called bindu, and the centre of a maṇḍala is the madhyabindu (or the marman) in the geometric layout. In Part II, the bindu has been examined in association with paśyantī vāk. We have observed that the bindu is not confined to be the graphic designation for 'a point' that is the beginning step of any forms, but it is a profound concept that encompasses the notion of knowledge (vedana) and pure light (prakāśa), denoting bodha (enlightenment). In the context of Buddhist maṇḍalas, the centre is the door to the dharmadhatu. In the commentary of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra, called Durgati-pariśodhanārtha-vyāñjana-vṛtti, explains Buddhaguhya,

"The centre is taken as a round palace which is the symbol standing for the dharmadhatu.... dharmadhatu is primordially pure; the nave is a symbol showing that.... The nave, which is the circular palace of the centre, is the Dharmakāya." 24

The bindu as the symbol of 'bodha' and 'dharmadhatu' is externally expressed by the hole in the center of the geometric layout of a maṇḍala, or by the anthropomorphic image of the Highest Divinity in a finished maṇḍala. In the maṇḍalas of Alchi and Tabo, Mahāvairocana signifies bindu. However, in the horizontal maṇḍalas of Tabo, the

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23 Cf. VSU II. 6, comm., ibid.
24 SDPT comm. by Buddhaguhya, trans. Wayman 1990 (1973): pp. 95-96. These verses are extracted from the commentary to the following verse from the SDPT (PTT. Vol. 5, 84-4, 5): "The casting of thread with diamond line is the casting of thread of the centre maṇḍala. Like the wheel of the law, it has sixteen spokes along with a nave."
conceptual bindu does not coincide with the physical bindu of the maṇḍala. In contrast, we see in the Vajradhātu-maṇḍalas of Alchi that the mudrā of the central divinity physically coincides with the madhyabindu of the maṇḍala.25 (Pl. 8, Ill. 8)

The association of the bindu with bodha and dharmadhātu explains convincingly why the circular format has been preferred in creating maṇḍalas in the tantric practice. We observe that the circle perceived as the receptacle of ‘the Universal Mind’ has been deeply rooted in the artistic tradition of India, and that the center of the circle stands for the access channel to realize ‘the Universal Mind’, which may correspond to dharmadhātu or śūnya in Buddhism. The symbolism of maṇḍalas seems basically indistinguishable from that of a circle. However, maṇḍalas involve much more complicated forms than a geometric circle. The achievement of maṇḍalas is to be certainly acknowledged in respect of their artistic stance in bringing forth the various forms to enliven the prāṇa of the Cosmic Man externally. In laying out the geometric structure of the maṇḍala, the first step of drawing a circle is followed by the process of networking life lines (prāṇa), which become the basis for the detailed execution of various forms further to come.

3.2.2. Geometric Divisions

3.2.2.1. Significance of pañjara in the silpa tradition of India

The geometric layout of the maṇḍala is here considered in the context of the principle of pañjara, which is essential in the Indian silpa tradition. Pañjara is the grids consisting of vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines, and it is usually referred to in the context of the image-making tradition of India. It is the basic geometric layout, on the basis of which the bodily form of a divinity is traced. Since the maṇḍala is also a bodily manifestation of a divinity at the cosmic level, the geometric palace of the maṇḍala is none other than the pañjara, and the various divinities in bodily forms in the maṇḍala

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25 The mudrā symbolizes citta in general. In the Vajradhātu-maṇḍalas of Alchi, the bodhyagarī mudrā of the central divinity is placed at the level of the heart, thus, here the madhyabindu conveys the symbol of citta more explicitly.
correspond to various parts of a divinity.

As much as any perfect circle cannot be drawn without the firm fixation of the center, perfect forms (surūpa) cannot be produced without tracing the pañjara lines. The Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad explains that the first circle should be divided in order to obtain the limbs of the image. The lines that divide the circle have the cosmic implication that is compared to the creator’s action of dividing the world. And these lines and the white powder used for drawing them are named ‘vajra’. These lines are the flow of cosmic order (ṛta). The principle of pañjara is a traditionally established means to trace the Unknown Essence on one hand and to bring forth this Unknown Essence to represented images on the other. Thus, the lines of the pañjara are also called tattvarekha:

“By depending on the essential lines (tattvarekha), the soul of form (rūpātma) is perceived also in the represented image (pratirūpa).”

As like various crops grow from the rain, various forms arise from the lines, thus they are compared to the sacrificial offerings. When the various forms (pratirūpa) are traced and determined on the basis of these lines, these forms become perfect and close to the essential form (tattvarūpa).

3.2.2.2. Innate dynamism of the geometric layout in the maṇḍala

The innate symbolism of the maṇḍala forms is also observed in the process of creating the geometric layout for a maṇḍala. (III. 5) The process reflects the symbolism of maṇḍalas in that the form is a projection of the formlessness. The following

27 Cf. VSU II. 9. comm., ibid., p. 57.
28 Cf. VSU II. 7. comm., ibid., p. 56.
29 Cf. VSU II. 4, comm., ibid., p. 55.
30 Cf. VSU II. 23. comm. (sā ṛtasya dhārā), ibid., p. 64.
31 VSU II. 22. comm. tattvarekhāvalambane rūpātmapratyakṣam bhavati pratirūpe ca
The sentence has been translated by Boner, Sarma & Bäumer (2000: p. 64) in a slightly different nuance: “By depending on the essential lines, the soul of form becomes manifest, and also that of the represented image”.
[Ill. 5] Drawing process of the geometric layout of the Guhyasamaja-manḍala

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[III. 5] Drawing process of the geometric layout of the Guhyasamaja-mañḍala
[III. 5] Drawing process of the geometric layout of the Guhyasamaja-mañḍala
[Ill. 5] Drawing process of the geometric layout of the Guhyasamaja-manḍala

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description is based on the drawing technique for the Guhyasamaja-maṇḍala explained by Rong-tha Blo-bzang-dam-chos-rgya-mtsho who is a Khampa master of Buddhist art and iconography in the 19th cent. Since I have not come across any sources which explain the drawing process of the maṇḍalas of Alchi, the information is substituted by the accounts of the Guhyasamaja-maṇḍala. Nevertheless, the structure of the Guhyasamaja-maṇḍala is akin to that of Vajradhātu-maṇḍalas, thus, in the matter of geometric layout, its accounts apparently render us the basis for the speculation.

1. The circle is drawn first. It is called the ‘Primary Circle’ in the following explanation of drawing principles of maṇḍalas. (Ill. 5-7)

2. The vertical line is drawn, penetrating two points of the periphery and the center. Then the horizontal line is drawn, cutting the vertical at the right angle. Thus, the four directions are created by these two lines, which meet at the center, ‘Madhyabindu’. The four directional lines composed by the vertical and the horizontal are the basis of projection of the Madhyabindu and the Primary Circle. (Ills. 5-7, 5-11)

3. The Madhyabindu projects itself in the form of four bindus on the four directional lines. On the basis of these four bindus, the Primary Circle emanates four larger circles. The ratio between the radius of the Primary Circle and that of the offspring is 2 to 3. (Ill. 5-11) Four offspring of the Primary Circle are called ‘Emanative Circle’ in the following explanation. Four peripheral points of these four Emanative Circles meet at the Madhyabindu. (Ill. 5-13)

4. Two lines are drawn which connect the Madhyabindu with four meeting points of four Emanative Circles. They are diagonal lines. (Ill. 5-19)

5. Lines are drawn at the meeting points of the four directional lines and the Primary Circle, which forms ‘the First Square’. The meeting points of two Emanative Circles adjacent to each other are joined with lines, which form ‘the

34 The descriptions and the speculations of the process given in the thesis are not based on the Rong-tha’s writings, but derived from my own conceptions. For example, the names such as ‘Primary Circle’ or ‘Emanative Circle’ are given by me for the sake of clarity in the description.
35 The numbers given after the ‘Ill. 5-’ in the illustrations of the thesis indicate the number as published in the Don-’grub-rDo-rje in Rong-tha Blo-bzang-dam-chos-rgya-mtsho 1971.

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Second Square'. The ratio between the First Square and the Second Square is 2 to 3. The Second Square unites the centers of the four Emanative Circles, and also each center with the meeting points of two Emanative Circles adjacent to each other. (Ill. 5-19)

6. Further, the lines are drawn that divide the circles and squares into the proportionate grid. (Ills. 5-23, 5-29)

7. The square band formed by the First Square and the Second Square is again divided into smaller sections. (Ill. 5-33) This portion forms the palace wall of the maṇḍala.

8. On the basis of the grid attained from the above process 6, the grid lines are drawn on the four directions outside the Second Square, yet inside the Emanative Circles. (Ill. 5-39)

9. The distinct shape of four gates is drawn on the basis of the grid lines. (Ills. 5-43, 5-47)

10. Three circular bands (for the rings of fire, vajra and lotus) are drawn above the four gates. The Outermost Circle meets with the periphery of the four Emanative Circles at the four directions. Therefore, the four Emanative Circles are again embraced within a greater circle. (Ills. 5-49, 5-53)

11. The Inner Circle is drawn on the basis of the grid within the Primary Circle. The Inner Circle has two bands for the radiance and vajra. It is dividend into nine sections. (Ill. 5-61)

The above process is summarized in the following order of drawing.

1. State of formlessness
2. the Madhyabindu
3. the Primary Circle
4. Four directional lines
5. Four Emanative Circles
6. Two diagonal lines
7. the First Square
8. the Second Square
9. Grid formed by the extension of four directional lines; expansion of principle of dynamics

10. Division of the square band for the formation of the palace walls

11. Extension of grid outside the Second Square for the formation of the gateways

12. Four gates and gateways

13. Three circular bands and the Outermost Circle that encompasses the Four Emanative Circles

14. The Inner Circle with two bands within the Primary Circle

15. Division of the Inner Circle into nine sections.

The process reveals the innate dynamism of the geometric structure that involves the expansion and the absorption. The dynamism of the expansion and the absorption is conspicuous when we observe how the circles are used here. Primarily the circle is a unifying principle, as is represented in its drawing method. In the layout, the Primary Circle results from the expansion of the Madhyabindu, and it is itself the basis for the further expansion into the Four Emanative Circles. These Four Emanative Circles are the principles for further form-projections, which remind us of the Four Kulas in the maṇḍala metaphysics. These Four Emanative Circles are again encompassed and unified by the greater circle at their peripheries. The Inner Circle is traced within the Primary Circle as if the latter steps inwards towards the Madhyabindu. Thus, what we see through the drawings of circles in the maṇḍala structure is the dynamism of the formless Essence that expands and again returns back. In the further execution of detailed images that will fill this geometric structure, the dynamics of the absorption turns to the expansion again, as the images are shaped from the center to the periphery.

We can also observe in the above process that the primary geometric shapes are divided into small sections in order for the further distinct forms. Gates and walls are drawn on the basis of the grid lines that divide the geometric shapes. The grid is formed by means of the multiplication of the two primary axes of the vertical and the horizontal. The primary vertical and horizontal lines meet at the Madhyabindu, and they establish the four directions. The establishment of four directions signifies the penetration of four
points at the periphery of the circle by the centrifugal force of the *Madhyabindu*. These primary vertical and horizontal are the four directional lines and serve as the primary orientations of the form-projections. The vertical has two opposite orientations: up and down. The horizontal also has two opposite orientations: right and left. The *Madhyabindu* is a real turning point that changes the upward orientation to the downward orientation, or vice versa. The orientation towards the right changes its direction 180 degree at the point of *Madhyabindu*. Two oppositional directions in each of the vertical and the horizontal lines lose their characteristics at the point of *Madhyabindu*. In other words, the four directions meet at the *Madhyabindu* where all their distinct characteristics of movement lose their meanings. The *Madhyabindu* is of zero value mathematically, and at the same time it implies everything serving the foundation of all form-manifestations with all the directional movements. Thus, the drawing method verifies that the *Madhyabindu* in the geometric layout perfectly stands for the *śūnya*.

3.2.3. Principle of order: proportion and act of measurement

The process of creating the geometric palace of a *maṇḍala* proves that the division of the *maṇḍala* space is not arbitrary, but based on a certain rule of proportion that involves the act of measuring. In this sense, the proportion resulted from the measurement is the principle of order that reveals the *tattvarūpa* in the *pratirūpa*. It is also the principle of harmony that integrates not only different distinct forms, but also the *tattvarūpa* with the *pratirūpa*.

Proportion involves the act of measuring, and it is based on the metrical divisions. The Sanskrit term for the measurement is ‘*māna*’, which derived etymologically from the root ‘*mā*’. *Mā* means ‘to make, produce, create’ and ‘to build according to the standard of measurements’. From the etymological context, we notice that the act of measurement itself implies the act of creation, and the act of measuring is indispensable in the creative process. In the spiritual context, the act of measurement is a means to bring the macrocosm to the microcosmic ground. In creating Vedic ritual ground, the

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measurement was executed on the basis of a standard, which is the length of a part of the human body.³⁷ It was the way to relate parts to parts, and parts to the whole.³⁸ By applying the size of a person to the ritual ground, the whole ritual ground becomes the body of the person that would become one with the macrocosmic body of the world through the ritual process. Dagens defines the significance of māna in succinct words: “A measurement whichever it is, is the expression of the relation between a known unit and the size of what is to be measured.”³⁹ The measurement is an approach to the unknown, invisible and inconceivable by means of the known.

In the Indo-Tibetan tradition, the element of proportion takes a prime importance in creating sacred images. The merits and demerits of artists as well as works are explained in terms of the proportion.⁴⁰ However, we should not categorize the standardized proportion with metrical specifications to be a rigid eternal rule. Gega Lama, a contemporary Tibetan monk-painter informs us:

“Traditionally it is said that standardized proportion exist to avoid degeneration in the arts....one who is qualified is free to improvise and to introduce his own innovations wherever the standard are incomplete or there is something not clearly delineated by tradition.”⁴¹

An accomplished artist is allowed to set up his or her proportion according to his or her conception of the tattvarūpa. Thus, the proportion is to be understood rather as the act of dividing space with symbolic and aesthetic values than the rule of numerical figures with absolute value.

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³⁷ In creating Vedic ritual ground, the standard of measurement is determined on the basis of the size of a yajamāna who is carrying out the ritual. In image-making, the digit (āṅgula: finger taken from the body) which is a common unit for the measurement, refers not to the finger of a śilpin but to that of the image.
³⁸ For example a silpa text, Mayamata says in XV. 28cd-29ab: “The breath of the pillar at its top, is what is called ‘module (daṇḍa)’; all the elements of the buildings are to be measured according to the value of the module.”: trans. Dagens 1992: p. 376.
⁴¹ Ibid., p. 75.
3.2.4. Geometric layout in the nature of *madhyamā vāk*

The process of building the geometric layout demonstrates the dynamism and the metaphysical implications inbuilt in the *maṇḍalas*. As consistent to the concept of *pañjara* in the *śilpa* tradition of India, the geometric layout of the *maṇḍala* serves as the channels between the *prāṇa* of the Universal Man and bodily forms of the phenomena on earth. It is the visual principle that is devised to contain the Essence (*tattvarūpa*) in the represented form (*pratirūpa*).

The drawing process of the geometric layout involves the act of measurement and the decision of proportion, which is comparable to the recitation of *mantras* in the sense that it makes the mind of the artist fully absorbed in tracing the *tattvarūpa*. Being both distinct and indistinct, the geometric layout is a means to bring forth the distinct forms, in resemble to the Essence, which is indistinct. On one hand, it is a way to reach from the *vaikharī* level of form to *Parāvāk*, on the other it is the way of *Parāvāk* to reveal Herself in the *vaikharī* form. The geometric layout traces the lifelines of the Essence.

The dynamism of the expansion and the absorption innate in the geometric layout visually represents the cosmic breath. The repetitive use of the geometric shape and lines create a rhythm. The rhythm is more vivacious when they are repeated in the enlarging or diminishing order. And the proportionate metrical divisions also enhance the rhythm in the *maṇḍala* space, which endows the *maṇḍala* a great deal with the quality of harmonious music. The geometric layout of *maṇḍalas*, or the *pañjara* in general, may be compared to the sound of a drum that is placed at the level of *madhyamā vāk*. Like the sound of a drum in the orchestra that supports the exploration of various sound while itself constantly repeating regular beats, the geometric layout produces the basic rhythm that supports the rise of various distinct forms. The *madhyamā* nature of the geometric layout is to be dissolved in *paśyantī vāk* in the complete *maṇḍala*, as the sound of a drum melts in the entire music of *paśyantī vāk*. 
[III. 6] Analysis of the basic compositional lines in the inner zone of the Vajradhātu-mandala, dukhang, Alchi
[III. 7] Analysis of the compositional lines in the inner zone of the Vajradhātu-manḍala based on the references from the Vajrāvalī
3.3. Geometric Basis of Figures

3.3.1. Position of divinities established in the energy networks of the *maṇḍala*

It is important to notice the fact that a *maṇḍala* is a space clearly organized to give room for the divinities. The geometric layout accommodates divinities in accordance with their hierarchy, with the highest divinity at the center. The hierarchical organization of a *maṇḍala* space expresses the network among the various categories of divinities. As the compositional lines of *panṭhara* is designed for tracing limbs of a divinity, the divinities of different categories are allocated in orderly divisions of the *maṇḍala*, denoting different limbs of the Cosmic Mind.

The dynamism of geometric shapes and lines is not only confined to the drawing process of the geometric palace, but also it is a determining principle in setting the divinities within the geometric layout. Apparently the visible divisions of nine chambers with nine circles within are the most dominant element in the composition of *maṇḍalas* of Alchi. Yet, apart from these visible geometric divisions, the grid lines are traced in terms of the position of divinities. They are the energy lines that flow through the figures of divinities and that gives coherence to the distinct limbs of the body of a divinity. Ill. 6 (Pl. 8) displays the grid lines that represent the principle in setting the various divinities in the Vajradhādu-*maṇḍala* in the *dukhang* of Alchi.

Here, the inner zone in the shape of a square is divided into nine sub-squares. The individual circles of five Buddhas are placed at the main axis lines of the vertical and the horizontal. The rest of the nine divisions at the intermediate directions are devoted to the circles of four Prajñā goddesses. This *maṇḍala* consists of forty-five divinities in the inner zone, instead of twenty-five\(^{42}\) as envisaged in the root *Tantra*. The root *Tantra* does not refer to the emanation of these Prajñā goddesses, but only mentions the emanation of four Mahāmudrās. If the four Prajñā goddesses are taken identical with the four Mahāmudrās, then they are represented twice in the *maṇḍala*: a group around the

\(^{42}\) The number twenty-five indicates the five Buddhas, sixteen Bodhisattvas and four Mahāmudrās. The eight Offering Goddesses and four Door-guardians are not counted in the number.
Mahāvairocana and another group in the circles at the four intermediate directions. If they are identical, the latter group may be seen as the projection of the former. What would have been the reason of representing Mahāmudrās twice? If this maṇḍala is compared with the same maṇḍala in the dukhang in Tabo, it is in Tabo that the Vajradhātu-maṇḍala is depicted in a more precise iconographic scheme faithful to the root tantra. On the contrary, in the maṇḍala of Alchi the deviation from the textual source to add four circles of Prajñā Goddesses epitomizes the priority of compositional significance over the iconographic conformity in setting the divinities. Another example of the Vajradhātu-maṇḍala may be helpful in understanding the compositional principle of the maṇḍala in Alchi. The illustration of the Vajradhātu-maṇḍala that accompanies the references to the Vajrāvalī, portrays five individual maṇḍalas for the five Buddhas in the inner zone.\footnote{Cf. Chandra & Vira 1999 (1995): p. 63.} Ill. 7 shows the compositional grid traced on the basis of the position of the divinities of the maṇḍala. When we compare it with that of the maṇḍala of Alchi, we see a much solid network of compositional lines in the maṇḍala of Alchi. (Ills. 6 & 7)

Though the addition of four circles of the Prajñā Goddesses in the maṇḍala of Alchi is not based on the text, it plays a significant role in creating a dynamic structure of composition. Having been placed at the intermediate directions, they enhance the thrust of the two basic diagonal lines in the inner zone. The diagonal lines are especially significant in the maṇḍala space because they add the dynamic movement to the tranquil axes of the vertical and the horizontal. While the position of four Prajñā Goddesses is crucial in laying the foundation for the dynamics of the composition, the composition of nine chambers is proved to have a visual potentiality that is conducive to create the solid flow of energy lines.

In the Vajradhātu-maṇḍala of Alchi the divinities of the inner zone of the maṇḍala are placed in diverse relations to one another, in contrast to the juxtaposition of divinities in the outer zone. They are based on the invisible compositional lines where a divinity is related to other divinities through the vertical, the horizontal and the diagonal lines. They
are set in the network of grid at the fatal points. For example, the bodhyagrīmudrā of Mahāvairocana in the centre precisely coincide with the Madhyabindu of the entire mandala, proved to be the centre of the life-breath in the entire composition. These compositional lines are in the varying degrees of the stress. Some lines are more primary in the composition than others. The degrees of the stress are to be considered while the compositional lines traced in Ill. 6 are explained as follows:

1. The vertical and horizontal axes lines (V, H) are the most prominent. These axial lines create the four divisions.
2. The inner zone is further divided into eight divisions by the two diagonal lines (D-R, D-L).
3. The grid lines connect the bindus of the nine concentric circles. (V-1, V-2, H-1, H-2)
4. The secondary diagonal lines are drawn in parallel to the primary ones penetrating through bindus. (D-R-1-4; D-L-1-4)
5. Further the grid becomes finer and finer when the images of the sixteen Bodhisattvas and their sixteen counterparts are related to one another.
6. The symbolic patterns at the intermediate directions are connected in diagonal lines and further create subtler dynamics in the composition.

As the compositional lines grow in number, the number of compositional divisions increases and the composition gains the wider range of the stress from the strong to the very subtle axes of relations. In other words, as the compositional grid is finer, the composition becomes more dynamic and at the same time harmonious. It is apparently from the compositional concern why the star-shaped symbolic pattern is used at every intermediate direction in the nine concentric circles. The repetitive representation of this pattern induces diagonal lines, and its visual importance is betrayed in the elaborate technique of emboss used in its expression.

44 The Viśtusūtra Upanīṣad compares the madhyabindu to be the life-breath of the earth (II. 14) and the Brahman (VI. 8, 11).
By tracing these compositional lines, we recognize that the vividness of the *maṇḍala* derives a great part from the position of divinities on the basis of the fine network of grids. The symbolic associations of the divinities take visible forms in their placements within the *maṇḍala*. The grid, being the *pañjara*, represents the energy network of the elements. The *Vāstuśūtra Upaniṣad* defines the vertical in the nature of fire, the horizontal in the nature of water, and the diagonal in the nature of wind. The nature of these three elements is the movement of flow. The crucial parts in the bodies of the divinities are positioned at the junctions of these flows. The interrelations of these divinities in various postures cause the innumerable energy lines in all directions. Yet, their major relations are established by the lines in parallel to the main axes of the vertical, the horizontal and the diagonal. In such a way, the dynamic relations of the divinities have been expressed in the orderly composition.

### 3.3.2. Movement of divinities

We have seen above that the positions of the divinities are established on the basis of the basic energy lines. These basic energy lines are further divided when the bodily forms of divinities are to be drawn. Diverse postures of divinities are to be represented on the basis of subtle lines elaborated from the basic grids. In the composition where a group of bodily images are represented as in the Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, the posture of each figure is not isolated, but all the figures in diverse postures together create a collective movement, as comparable to a group dance. Various movements of divinities placed in circular mandorlas in the *maṇḍala* exert invisible energy lines to diverse directions. We may take a close look at chambers in the inner zone. I present here two examples as the close-up view of the energy lines illustrated in Ill. 6.

The Ill. 8 shows the central chamber of the Vajradhātu-*maṇḍala* in the *dukhang* in Alchi. (P. 61) It consists of the main circle of Mahāvairocana in the centre and fours circles of Mahāmudrās at the four directions. The ratio of the diameters between the Vairocana circle and the Mahāmudrās’ circles is 2 to 1. Thus, the chamber has the basic

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[III. 8] Analysis of the compositional lines in the central chamber of the Vajradhātu-mandala in the dukhang, Alchi

[III. 9] Compositional lines added to the III. 8 in order to trace the proportional principle of the bodily form of Mahāvairocana
geometric form of a concentric circle with two divisions. These five circles are placed in the form of a cross, and the positions of four Mahāmudrās are established in the form of a rhombus within the large circular frame A. The madhyabindu of the central chamber, which coincides with the entire maṇḍala, is placed at the point where two hands of Mahāvairocana are jointed. The vertical and the horizontal axes, V and H, radiating from the madhyabindu join the four other bindus. The central circle of Mahāvairocana is double in diameter in relation to those of four Mahāmudrās. Each of these five circles is divided into three and traced in the form of a concentric circle with their diameters in the ratios of 1: 2: 3. The bodily parts of the divinities are orderly arranged in conformity to the three divisions of the circles. The upper body of the Mahāvairocana is traced in the inner circle A-3; his three heads and the low part of his body are arrayed within the middle circle A-2; and his head at the top and lotus seat with two lion vehicles are drawn in the outer circle A-1. The tranquil posture of Mahāvairocana is mainly based on the vertical and the horizontal axes: his lower body on H and his upper body and faces on V. Therefore, the potentiality of dynamics is not directly expressed, but lies dormant.

V and H are divided into 16 parts to draw the basic grids of A. Four representations of symbols in the form of a diamond are found just fit in four squares (Ss) in the intermediate directions along the line of the rhombus Rh. The basic grid lines of A meet at the fatal points in the body of Mahāvairocana: the nose of the of the top face, the bindu at the forehead of the frontal face, the throat, the hands in the bodhyagrīmudrā, belly, the knees, and the feet of lion vehicles. We need finer grid lines in order for comprehending the proportion and the delineation of the body.

Ill. 9 traces subtler compositional grids that could have been the basis for delineating the body of Mahāvairocana. In Ill. 8, the circle A-1 has been divided into eight parts along both axes V and H. In Ill. 9 each of these eight parts is divided into three, thus twenty-four divisions are formed. Along these finer divisions are some significant parts of the body: the bindu of the top face, the head cakra of the frontal face, the pendent of the inverted triangle, sole of the feet; and the bottommost of the body. The vertical lines dividing the horizontal axis in twenty-four parts demarcate the width of faces and body in details. Further details of the geometric basis of the bodily form of Mahāvairocana will be dealt after we see the example of the Tārā chamber in Ill. 10.
62. Tārā chamber, Vajradhātu-manḍala, dukhang, Alchi
[III. 10] Analysis of the compositional lines in the Tārā circle, Vajradhātu-maṇḍala in the dukhang, Alchi

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Ill. 10 displays the compositional basis of the Tārā chamber in the same maṇḍala. (Pl. 62) It consists of five circles: the main one in the centre for Tārā and the rest of four are for the Bodhisattvas in feminine appearances. The basic geometric structure is identical with the central chamber of Mahāvairocana of Ill. 8: five circles are set in the concentric circle with two divisions in the ratio of 2 to 1 in diameters. As like the example of Ill. 8, it is helpful to understand the positions of limbs of divinities if each of five circles is divided into three parts. The arms of divinities in dynamic postures in resemblance to the swastika pattern are delineated within each of middle circles. The circle A may be divided into sixteen parts along the vertical and the horizontal in order for the proportional analysis. The symbols of diamond, like in the earlier example, are arrayed along the outline of the rhombus established by four circles of the Bodhisattvas.

In this chamber, the compositional centre does not coincide with any significant points of the body, such as the navel, the hand or the heart. The axis of the body is deviated from the central axes of V and H. The posture of Tārā is conspicuously asymmetrical, unlike other divinities in the centers of the nine chambers in the maṇḍala. In the upper body of Tārā, the axis of the movement flows in parallel to a line that divides the circle into sixteen digits, D-2. The line D-2-2, which is the main axis of the upper body, is obtained when a parallel line of D-2 is drawn from the point a, that is, the meeting point between A-2 and V. The axis of the low body, D-1-2, is obtained by drawing a parallel line of D-1 from the point a', another meeting point of A-2 and V. While lines derived from D-2 (D-2, D-2-1~4) actually determine the proportion of the upper body in width, those from D-1 (D-1, D-1~3) help in expressing the upward thrust of the body.

All divinities of the inner zone of the Vajradhātu-maṇḍala, except five divinities in the central chamber are delineated in the same posture in their lower bodies; their right legs are bend and the left legs are stretched. This posture of legs emphasizes the extended thrust in the lower bodies. In the image of Tārā, the line D-3 merely determines the outline of the right thigh, while the energetic posture of her lower body is primarily traced in parallel to D-4 (D-4-1~5). The lines derived from D-4 are also traced along the forearms in active movements (D-4-6~10). Because D-4 meets D-2 at the right angle, it
is at the same time the actual horizontal axis for the delineation of the body. In case of four Bodhisattvas, we observe that the major axes of their lower bodies are not parallel to D-4, but to the diagonal axes of D-R and D-L. Though the posture of their lower bodies resembles that of Tārā, there is a difference in detail due to the dynamic subtlety in the movement of Tārā. For instance, the left foot of Tārā is stretched lower than the right foot, therefore, the base of the image is at a slightly reclined angle, whereas the four Bodhisattvas are drawn on the even base.
[III.11] Compositional lines for the delineation of Mahāvairocana in the central chamber of the Vajradhātu-mandala, dukhang, Alchi

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3.3.3. Bodily forms of divinities based on the geometric shapes

The earlier analyses have been intended to demonstrate that the divinities of the Vajradhātu-manḍala in the dukhang, Alchi are based on the fine grids that render subtle axes for the movements. Now, the following analyses are to illustrate the delineation of their bodies on the basis of the geometric frames such as circles and triangles.

3.3.3.1. The form of Mahāvairocana in the Vajradhātu-manḍala in the dukhang, Alchi

In the compositional grids of the central chamber of the Vajradhātu-manḍala illustrated in Ill. 11, the lines of sixteen digits appear decisive in the delineation of the body of Mahāvairocana: D-1 & D-2, and D-3 & D-4. They serve as the support for deciding the angles of the limbs of the body. The line D-1-1 in pair with the line D-2-1 determines the lines of two side-faces. The meeting of these two lines in symmetry produces the form of a triangle with the inverted point that coincides with the navel. The line D-1-2 and the line D-2-2 decide the chest line and the width of the halo. These two lines meet at the point that indicates the place of the genital cakra. The line D-1-U and the line D-2-U pass through the outlines of the hands as well as the cheek lines of the frontal face. These two lines create two significant triangles. The upper triangle includes the frontal face and the triangular pendent, which emphasizes the inverted top of the triangle. Its top meets with the top of another triangle that includes the bodhyagrīmadrī of Vairocana. The line D-3-1 and the line D-4-1 meeting at the navel of the divinity run in parallel to the extended thighs, and form a triangle at the base. The line D-1-U-1 and the line D-2-U-1 meeting at the top of the top head apparently constitute the basic form of the image.

The postures of four Mahāmudras are more or less identical. They are seated upright with their faces slightly reclined in angles in parallel to D-1 and D-2. Their arms are extended to the range of middle circles in the angle of 90 degree, in parallel to the diagonals, D-R and D-L. Their arms in the form of a swastika pattern create the subtle movements in addition to the tranquil posture of Mahāvairocana.

In the above process, we observe that the body of Mahāvairocana is delineated with
[III. 12] Bodily form of Mahāvairocana consisting of triangles, Vajrāhātu-maṇḍala, chukhang, Alchi
[III. 13] Analysis of the body of Tārā, Vajradhātu-mañḍala, dukhang, Alchi
the support of the diagonal lines in parallel to the lines of sixteen digits, which conduce the form of the divinity consisting of triangles. Ill. 12 displays the distinct parts of Mahāvairocana are comparable to the geometric structure made up of triangles. Here it should be noticed that the bodily form has been created in remarkable conformity to the symbolic content of the object of the expression. The triangle, being the symbol of knowledge and fire, here has been used by means of the artistic intuition in the expression of the symbolic body of knowledge and light, that is, Mahāvairocana.

3.3.3.2. Tārā, Vajradhātu-maṇḍala in the dukhang, Alchi

Now we take a look at the example of Tārā where a number of circles constitute the body of the Goddess. (Ill. 13)

The delineation of the body of Tārā is supple, yet dynamic. The bodily representation of the Goddess is not based on the naturalistic anatomy but on the geometric structure. Ill.13 demonstrates the circular structure traced in the body and the movement of the Goddess. Within the frame of the circular mandorla, a number of circles in proportions are traced, and the form of the Goddess is interpreted as the assemblage of invisible circles. The mandorla, the circle A-1, is divided into three, and we get A-2 and A-3. Four circles (C-1-1~4) are traced in the proportion of 2 to 9 in relation to A-1. Their centers are located on main axial lines; the centre of C-1-1 on the vertical axis, V, those of C-1-2 and C-1-3 on the main diagonals, D-L and D-R, and that of C-1-4 on the D-3. Five circles (C-2-1~5) are traced in the proportion of 4 to 9 in relation to A-1. Thus, the ratio between C-1s and C-2s is 1 to 2 in diameters. The centers of the C-2s are also located on the main axial lines: the centre of the C-2-2 on D-L; that of C-2-3 on the point where D-2 and D-1-2 meet; that of C-2-4 on D-4; and that of C-2-5 on H. In the face of the Goddess, three circles (C-3) are traced in the same diameters along D-2-2, the axial line of the upper body. From the position of bindu at the forehead, a concentric circle is traced, C-3 and C-4.

Earlier I have mentioned in the context of the geometric layout that the repetitive use of a geometric form creates the rhythm in the composition. Here in the Ill. 13 we see

several circles in proportion to one another placed with their centers along the regular axial lines. Because the circle is the form of the movement, when the circles in grading size are repeated and overlapped, they create the enhanced effect of rhythm. The form of the Goddess Tara, delineated on the basis of the dynamic movements of the circles invokes the sense of harmonious vibrancy, which accords with the symbolism of Tārā, that is, the accomplished actions.

3.3.3.3. Geometric principles in the creative process

I do not claim that the compositional analyses I have presented above have been exactly what had been used in the manḍala, and the question will remain unsolved, whether the geometric grid had been actually used in delineating the divinities, or it had been more of an intuitive principle that the artist spontaneously conceived at the time of creation, yet remained unintentional. The above analyses are an attempt to assure the presence of the geometric principle in the bodily delineation of the divinities and to prove that the harmonious forms of divinities in the whole composition of the Alchi manḍalas are a great deal indebted to their geometric basis.

The rhythmic composition of circles or triangles endows the energy field of grids (panjara) with certain life, which lays the basis for the conception of concrete forms. The body delineated on the basis of the geometric principles demonstrates one of the perennial concepts of man in Indian traditions: the human body is permeated through by the cosmic principles. And the cosmic principles are symbolically revealed in geometric principles. Therefore, the human body drawn on the basis of geometric principles signifies the idealized body with the spirit of Cosmic Consciousness. Furthermore, the pragmatic aspect of the geometric principles observed in the drawing process reinforces their symbolic contents. The geometric lines and shapes help the artist, while drawing, to see the relations among different parts of the body and also to observe the distinct parts in various relationships to the whole. If an artist sees only distinct parts, the geometric lines are not required, because he or she would not be concerned about the 'relations'. In the above examples, even the decorations around the bodies of divinities are not without meaning in making up of the geometric structure. In Ill. 11, the pendent on the neck of Mahāvairocana is incorporated in the form of a triangle. And in Ill. 13, the bead hanging
down from the neck of Tārā to her lotus seat constitutes a part of the geometric composition that expresses her circular movements. In the drawing process, the geometric principles work at the pragmatic level to bring forth the compositional balance among parts and to unite different parts into the correlated whole. The geometric principles are the means to enliven the nature of the whole, while simultaneously highlighting the individual beauties of parts. Distinct parts can reveal the nature of the image, only when incorporated in the correlated whole. The geometric principles are the method to work out the ‘relations’.

3.4. Sensuousness of Distinct Parts

In the above sections 3.2. and 3.3., I have discussed about the geometric principles that lie behind the maṇḍala palace, the position and the bodily postures of the divinities. The geometric principles are certainly a decisive factor in the maṇḍalas of Alchi that infuses the sense of harmonious dynamics to the composition and restores the distinct parts to the indistinct whole. However, the aesthetic power of the maṇḍalas in Alchi does not solely depend on the geometric principles. The geometric principles or the iconographic completion is not the sole cause that brings forth the aesthetic power of maṇḍalas. For instance, the geometric structure of the maṇḍala in Mangyu is more elaborate than those of Alchi and its structure evokes a certain aesthetic power. (Pl. 63) Nevertheless, the crude repaint of the later period diminishes its aesthetic merit. The figures of the divinities that could avoid the repaint tell that the maṇḍala has been originally executed by the same group of artists who has accomplished the paintings in Alchi. Although the repaint has been done faithful to the original form, the standard of artistic skills in the execution of details is much less sophisticated than that in the original. Thus the example of Mangyu verifies the crucial role of the artistic executions in engendering the aesthetic power of maṇḍalas. If the geometric principle reveals the indistinct nature of the Cosmic Mind, the artistic skill revealed in the execution of the sensuous bodies, ornaments or decorations enlivens the distinct objects and speaks for the realm of phenomena. In the maṇḍalas of Alchi, the distinct parts are illuminated so much as much as the indistinct principle.
3.4.1. Sensuous execution of the body

The bodily forms of divinities in the maṇḍalas of Alchi, though based on the geometric forms and lines, are not overruled by the geometric principles. They draw a quite strong contrast to the depictions of divinities in the later period where the geometric principle supersedes the sensuous qualities of the body. (Pl. 64) For example, the image of Tārā, while firmly based on the geometric principles in her movement and bodily form, is equally overwhelming in its sensuous characteristics. (Pl. 62) Let us look at the drawing of the body line. The parts of the body that are exceedingly adjusted to the circular forms have been already shown in Ill. 13. Yet, not all the parts of the body are drawn in dependence of the geometric lines and circles. We observe the expressions that are considerably naturalistic as well. The line that flows from the abdomen to bell, or the waistline that turns round to the hip may be mentioned in this regard. The representation of the navel is based on the observation of the naturalistic form. The delicate curves in the fingers with wrinkles on the palms display the taste for the beautiful natural forms. The intention of a subtle movement of the face is betrayed in the delicate curvilinear forms of eyelids and eyebrows. The colours executed in softly grading tones additionally emphasize the nature of flesh in the body. The life-like characteristics of the image is enhanced by the delicate gradation of the red on the eyes. The care for the ornamentations and decorations on the body of the Goddess displays the artists’ obsession of technical details as well as the taste of people who would get delighted while seeing such objects. The dhoti beautifully designed with patterns wraps the body of the Goddess, and its folds flows in tune with the lively movement of the Goddess.

Further descriptions of the sensuous characteristics exhibited in the images of Alchi maṇḍalas would merely enlarge the text. They are already well recognized even among the non-specialists of arts, and they are the very cause that has turned the small village of Alchi to a booming tourist spot. In the context of the present discussion, it is important to notice that these sensuous features of images superbly represent the individual and distinct aspect of forms in contrast to the geometric principles. In the maṇḍalas of Alchi, which is said to be the reflective image of the Cosmic Consciousness or the dharmadhātu, worldly and transient forms are also illuminated.

64. Image painted over Sudhana’s Pilgrimage, *dukhang*, *gTsug-lag-khang*, Tabo

65. Central image of the *mandala* (M 6), right wall, second story, *sumtseg*, Alchi
3.4.2. Miscellaneous revealing the nature of the divinities

We have observed that the decorations on the dhotis of three colossal statues of Bodhisattvas in the sumtseg express the nature and the activities of the Bodhisattvas in the manner of narratives. Likewise in maṇḍalas, the decorations around the bodies of divinities are not only the element of sensuousness and attraction, but they contribute also to express the nature of the divinities.

It may be worthwhile to dwell upon a remarkable visual effect created by the miscellaneous elements in the maṇḍalas of Alchi. The fluttering scarf that ubiquitously features around the bodies of divinities in Alchi exemplifies how a decorative element is restored to express the nature of the Divine. The drawing lines of the scarf viewed in relation to the compositional grids, prove that they play a supportive role in reinforcing the geometric structure. When we see Ills. 8 and 10, we find that they demarcate the middle circle A-2. However, they are not merely subordinate to the geometric composition. They enhance rhythmic flows of compositions, while their irregular curves break the hard shape of concentric circle. A careful observation on the lines of the scarf in the maṇḍalas of Alchi brings us the realization that these scarf have been always drawn with their two ends rising upwards. They flutter up not because of external forces of the air, but because of the inner energy of divinities thrusting up. In this sense, the rising scarf is a materialization of the abstract energy that springs forth from the divinities. The visual effect of the scarf is well displayed in the image of Mahāvairocana in the maṇḍala (M 6) on the right wall of the second story in the sumtseg. (Pl. 65) In the image, the scarf draws especially complicated curves, yet in symmetry.

Similarly, the folds of the dhotis over the bodies of the divinities are drawn in smooth curves. In the Plate 65, we see that the flowing lines of the scarf are integrated with the folds of the dhoti, and further connected with the hairs of the divine vehicle. The distinct parts are integrated by the artists' integral eye that sees through the relations

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The visual importance of the fluttering scarf is conspicuous in the statues of goddesses that surround three colossal statues of bodhisattvas in the sumtseg. The stucco statues of these goddesses are threedimensional and fixed on the wall by means of iron rods. In these statues, separate iron rods hold fluttering scarf that wrap around the body of the goddesses.
among distinct objects. Thus, each of scarf, *dhoti* and lion is not an independent object, but they exist in dependence to one another and move in relation to one another. When these objects are integrated in the form of abstract wave lines, though they are distinct objects, they are at the same time indistinct. The flowing curves thereby formed by these distinct parts result in the indistinct musical lines in the form of waves within the circular mandorla.

The integration of distinct parts of the scarf and the *dhoti* is not solely found in the above image of Plate 65, but it is a common feature that characterizes all the representations of the divinities in the *manḍalas* of Alchi. The wave lines ubiquitously feature also in the *manḍalas* of Tabo. In Tabo, they are combined with the spiral patterns and delineated in prominent lines making a strong contrast to the background of the mandorla in delicate creamy gradations. (Pl. 66) A similar pattern of wavy lines is also used in one of narrative panels of Sudhana’s Pilgrimage in Tabo where Sāradhvaja emanates the multiple manifestations by the power of meditation. In the panel, the body of Sāradhvaja is joined with various manifestations in circular composition through wavy lines and spirals. (Pl. 67) In Tabo, the delineation of wave lines is more distinct. In addition, the symbolic significance of the wave line is more perceptible in Tabo. As is clear in the narrative of Sāradhvaja, the wave lines express the vibrating powers that brings about the phenomenal manifestations from the state of *sūnya*. For the mandorla has been the space for the symbolic decorations representing the nature of the Dharma, the wave lines drawn on the mandorla may be understood as the form of ...
66. Wave lines and spiral patterns painted on the halo, Vajrahāsa, Vajradhātu-manḍala, south wall, dukhang, gTsug-lag-khang, Tabo

67. Panel of Sāradhvaja, Sudhana’s Pilgrimage, dukhang, gTsug-lag-khang, Tabo

68. Repainted image, central chamber of the manḍala (M 3), left wall, second story, sumtseg, Alchi
divine nature. In Tabo, these wave lines are distinct as independent visual elements. On the contrary, in Alchi they are suggested by the combination of distinct elements, such as scarf, ornaments, dhōtis and the bodies of divinities. The colouring scheme in the mandalas of Alchi emphasizes the prominence of the wave lines. The blue colour has been regularly applied, with just a few exceptions, in the halo and the rim of the mandorla as well as the scarf and the folds of the dhōti that are primary to constitute the wave lines. They create, in visual, lively flows of the blue band through the entire composition of the mandala. The vibrations of waves in blue feature at regular intervals within the space of mandala, which remind us of the traditional description of Consciousness in analogy to the vast ocean. The original state of the Consciousness is the un-stirred centre without any waves. But due to the power of the centre the phenomenal beings arise, as like the waves constantly arise in the ocean. The wave lines that wrap around the bodies of the divinities and rise up through the space in the mandalas speak for the nature of the Divine.

3.5. Five Primary Colours and Their Multiple Tones

We have noticed some principles in regard to colours in the mandalas of Alchi.

a) Mandalas are painted on the background of blue.

b) The Five Buddhas are in their regular colours of white, blue, yellow, red and dark green.

c) The mandorlas of the divinities are painted in red.

d) The halos are painted in blue. In case of the divinities with the blue on their bodies, the halo is in white or in dark green.

e) The scarf and the folds of the dhōtis are painted in blue. In case of the divinities with the blue on their bodies, they are painted in dark green.

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50 In case that the divinity is coloured in blue, the scarf and the folds of the dhōti are in dark green or black, and the halo is painted in white.

The colour schemes observed in the second and the third stories of the *sumtseg* may be explained on the basis of the symbolic context of colours. Five primary colours are consciously associated with five Kula Buddhas and five Knowledge (*jñānas*). The three colours of white, red and blue are in general associated respectively with *kāya*, *vāk* and *citta*. However, it should be confessed that the principle of the colour schemes in the *maṇḍalas* in Alchi could not be completely deciphered in the present thesis. For example, I could not read the principle of deciding the colours for the bodies of sixteen bodhisattvas allocated to the Four Buddhas of the directions, because the colours of the sixteen bodhisattvas vary from a *maṇḍala* to *maṇḍala*. It seems that the symbolism of colours should be read in a particular context in a limited way. Regardless of the problem, whether we could solve the riddle of the unitary principle under which the colours are applied, the fact remains that primary colours are used in balance in the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi. Here in this section, we ponder upon the significance of using all primary colours for the expression of the Universal Consciousness in *maṇḍalas*.

3.5.1. Five primary colours as the revelation of the *vaikharī śakti*

Using primary colours for the expression of the Ultimate is a distinctive method that conforms with the tantric soteriology. It is distinguished from the artistic method of the Far East where the quest for the Universal Principle led the exclusion of primary colours in the paintings. The one-stroke drawing of a circle which I have compared

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52 In the process of visualization explained by Lama Zopa, a contemporary spiritual master of Tibetan Buddhism, the symbolic association of colours with *kāya*, *vāk* and *citta* has been explicitly described. Three syllables are visualized on the form of the Buddha: *om* in white colour on his forehead, *ah* in red colour on his throat, *hum* in blue colour on his heart. They enter the body of a practitioner through his or her forehead, throat and heart. These three syllables signify the unsurpassable knowledge of a buddha’s *kāya*, *vāk* and *citta*. Entering of rays from the three syllables to the body of the practitioner means that the practitioner has received infinite knowledge of the Buddha’s *kāya*, *vāk* and *citta*. Cf. Lama Yeshe & Zopa Rinpoche 1994 (1982): pp. 74-7.

53 The landscape paintings have been developed during the Sung period in the 12th and 13th cent. A.D. in quest for the Universal Principle in accordance with the religious ideal of the New Confucianism. The Universal Principle has been conceived as the Absolute Spirit in transcendence of all the secular life. In Yuan period, the landscape paintings attains the ascetic characteristics more under the ambience of political seclusion. The use of colours, at this stage of development, became more and more despised in the painting practice, and the paintings with bright colours were regarded as the reflection of the worldly desire, which is vulgar.

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with *maṇḍalas* is also associated with such an artistic method that has been determined by the particular attitude towards the colours. The colours, in the methodology of these artistic expressions, are defined to be the *saṁsāra* and secular attractions that deprive us from the clear mind to see the Universal Principle. In the expression of the Highest Truth, the *saṁsāra* does not find any place, thus, the colours are triumphed by the black ink. In these paintings, colours are suppressed by the white empty space and the strokes of ink. We see something opposite in the *maṇḍalas* in terms of the attitude towards the colours, though both expressions aim ultimately at the same goal.

In the context of *maṇḍalas*, the colours are interpreted on the basis of a different logic: ‘without light the colours are not visible.’ In darkness, colours and forms are not distinct. Thus, the distinct colours indicate the presence of light. The speculation on the colour in the modern philosophy refreshes our understanding of colours, 54 by pronouncing the negation of the colours as the properties of objects and by denying the existence of colours. The philosophical conviction that sees colours as a mere illusion somewhat resembles the negation of the Madhyamika philosophers that denies any phenomenal objects as independent entities. However, we should keep in mind that they certainly exist at the empirical level, and that they are further explored in full extent in arts, as we see in *maṇḍalas*. In phenomena, we perceive them as a result of the interaction between the light and the objects. The subsequent wavelength created by the interaction between an object and the light appears in the form of a distinct colour. The distinct dispositions of an object react in a distinct way to the light. Because objects have various measures of reflectance and absorption towards the light, they appear in different colours and we perceive diverse colours. While the constructed nature of colours well demonstrates the illusory un-real nature of phenomenal objects, it discloses the ‘the power’ that projects such multiple colours in spite that objects do not physically have the colours in them. At the same time, it underlines the power of cognition that accompanies our sensory activities and makes us discern distinct colours. Thus, it may be proposed that ‘the power that projects and cognizes the multiplicity’ is revealed in distinct colours. The phenomenon of the multiple colours is the revelation of such power,

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and the power that functions at the sensory organs and produces the cognition of distinct objects or colours is the nature of *vaikharī vak* in the framework of *vāk* theory.

In regard to the colours of the *maṇḍala*, we may pose: the distinct primary colours of *maṇḍalas* are the revelation of the power that projects distinct colours and stimulates our senses to cognize distinct colours. As the five colours in the *maṇḍala* represent the five *kulas*, which are the five channels of evolution and manifestation, they signify the principle of manifestation. From the perspective of the theory of *vāk*, the evolution is characterized by the process of distinction and differentiation. It is the *vaikharī vāk* that functions as the power of differentiation and separation at the level of the *aparā śakti*. The fact that the five primary colours are present in *maṇḍalas* implies that the power which brings about the differentiation and distinction, that is, the *vaikharī vāk*, is vividly at work. And the fact that we perceive distinct primary colours in *maṇḍalas* denote that we are encountered with the presence of *vaikharī vāk* in artistic form.

### 3.5.2. Subtle execution of colours

The artistic technique of creating wide ranges in the chromatic value and the hue of the diverse colours in Alchi further enhances the principle of *vaikharī vāk*, which has successfully completed the distinct creations at full fledge. It is the technique of colouring, in fact, that endows the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi with the great quality of sensuousness. If we compare the repainted part with the original painting, we notice what role the colouring plays in generating the aesthetic power of Alchi *maṇḍalas*. In case of repainted parts, not only forms are crudely drawn, but also the colouring has been done in monotone, without delicate hues. Compare the Pl. 65 and Pl. 68) The crude execution at the stage of the repaint does not reveal any lively spirit, thus, the the colour powders pasted on the wall do not turn to become any *pratibimba* (reflected image). (Pl. 68) In contrast, the colours in the original state are applied in diverse ranges of tones and chromatic values. (Pl. 65) The delicate shading creates the sense of volume and flesh in the bodies of the divinities. In contrast to the flesh-like treatment on the bodies, the *dhotis* and the ornaments are without any shade. And the halos and the mandorlas are painted in stark monotone. These variety observed in the colour-treatment speaks for
the intention of the differentiation: the volume of the breast is different from that of the hand; the volume of flesh is different from that of cloth, and so on. Thus, we encounter the principle of distinctness and particularity, which is the characteristic of the realm of phenomena, having found the place in the picture of the Ultimate Dharma.

3.6. Summary and Conclusion: The Fusion of the Distinct and the Indistinct in the Manḍalas of Alchi

In section 3, I have looked into the visual elements that contribute to create the dynamic flows in the manḍalas of Alchi.

Firstly, I have paid attention to their large scale and its consequent effects in visual perception. It preconditions the relationship between the subject and the object in the act of seeing. When the large circle is exhibited in front of us, it encompasses our sight and conduces our subjective involvement. The large scale of the manḍalas in Alchi has been counted as a crucial element in setting forth the subtle fusion between the subject and the object in the act of aesthetic seeing, which is parallel to the identification between the subject and the object in the internal visualization.

Secondly their geometric principles have been traced broadly in terms of two constituents of manḍalas: i) the layout of the geometric palace, and ii) the position and the delineation of the bodily forms of the divinities. In the analyses the geometric principle has been primarily viewed as the means to incorporate the distinct forms with the indistinct whole. The intention to integrate distinct forms within the fold of the indistinct whole is betrayed in the different treatment of outlines. Especially in the Vajradhātu-manḍala in the dukhang, circles and squares constituting the basic structure are accentuated by black outlines, whereas the distinct figures of divinities are delicately delineated with thin lines of red or blue. While bodily figures are executed in subtle manner, the geometric palace of the manḍala is in bold expression. Circles and basic geometric lines build up the divine palace in order to accommodate distinct forms of divinities. The divinities are positioned in an orderly array according to their hierarchical
status. And the limbs of the divinities are arranged in conformity to the geometric principles.

The geometric principle, representing the cosmic principle, holds a key in the methodology of Alchi maṇḍalas that attempts to express the Essence through the bodily forms of the divinities. In the image-making tradition of India, the geometric principles are the means to make the Cosmic Mind permeate through the image of the human body. They are not merely symbolic, but in practice they are the compositional principle through which the distinct parts are restored to the harmonious whole. As an artistic principle, geometric forms have expressive quality and communicative powers due to their innate dynamism. Therefore, they evoke particular natures and emotions through which the Cosmic Mind is revealed in distinct forms, and through which the distinct forms resemble the Cosmic Mind. The nature and the emotion the geometric forms evoke are non-discursive and indistinct. Thus, depicting the bodily form on the basis of the geometric principles signifies the fusion between the distinct forms and the indistinct nature. Due to the emphatic orientation towards the indistinct, the geometric principles of the maṇḍalas have been categorized as the gross form of madhyamā vāk. Their indistinct nature and their simple forms are comparable to the sound of a drum, which has been referred to as the sthūla madhyamā in the Tantrāloka.

Next we have looked into the sensuous execution of bodies and other miscellaneous, such as scarf, dhotis, jewelleries, etc. The delicate curvilinear forms executed in details infuse the sensuousness to the body that has been structured on the geometric basis. These distinct parts of the bodies and the miscellaneous are described in varying degrees of subtlety in the maṇḍalas of Alchi. The incorporation of miscellaneous elements into a larger unit has been exemplified by the case of the scarf and the dhotis that create the wave-lines in the empty space of the mandorla as if revealing the nature of the Cosmic Mind in the form of vibrations, spanda.

We have pondered upon the significance of using primary colours in the expression of the Ultimate Dharma. The phenomenon of perceiving colours has been looked up as the power that make objects appear in distinct colours. The power adhere in both side the
perceived and the perceiver. Having reflected upon the phenomenon of distinct colours and our sense perception of distinct colours, I have connected the presence of primary colours in the maṇḍalas as the revelation of the vaikharī vāk. And the subtle executions of colours in the maṇḍalas that have achieved various ranges of hues and chromatic values stand for the accomplished act of the vaikharī vāk, the principle of differentiation.

The curvilinear body, detailed depiction of miscellaneous, such as patterns on the dhotis or ornaments, and additionally the full range of colours can be interpreted as the counterpart of the geometric principles. While the geometric principle, seen as madhyamā vāk, turns the artistic creations in the direction towards the indistinct whole, the execution of sensuous details are attributed to the differentiating principle of vaikharī vāk. Through vaikharī vāk, distinct forms are accomplished. And it is the accomplishment of these detailed forms and colours that endows the symbolic image of maṇḍala with vividness. On the other hand, it is the indistinct nature of madhyamā vāk that infuses the distinct creations with vibrations. Without any connection with the Essence, the distinct parts are lifeless. Thus, the analyses are epitomized that the form of maṇḍalas in Alchi are based on two equally prominent principles of vaikharī vāk and madhyamā vāk. Then, how do the above analyses support my thesis that the maṇḍalas of Alchi are the gross form of paśyantī vāk?

We should now dwell on the actual visual experience. While we look at maṇḍalas, the distinct elements and the indistinct principles are not separate. Though madhyamā vāk and vaikharī vāk are separately extracted in the analyses, they are not isolated from each other in the maṇḍalas, and our perception of these two are inseparable. Hindu yantras or one-stroke drawings of a circle may be said the form of madhyamā vāk. However, the maṇḍalas with bodily form of divinities are neither madhyamā vāk, nor vaikharī vāk. In the maṇḍalas of Alchi, these two principles are equally powerful, and the harmony from the principle of madhyamā vāk and the contrast from that of vaikharī vāk contribute altogether to the dynamism of the visuals. In the analyses we have observed how the bodily parts are integrated on the geometric basis to the indistinct Essence and how the miscellaneous parts are connected together to express the nature of
the Essence. In fact, *madhyamā vāk* and *vaikharī vāk* brought forth by the analyses are the crucial principles of form-creation in the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi. When these two principles act successfully in visual expressions, they create together the flow of vision, where the various distinct forms are fused into the indistinct whole and their distinct natures find appropriate place in the whole. When we look at the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi, we are physically included in its large format of the *maṇḍala* in the preset. Though our eyes are naturally led to the center in the beginning, our vision is not frozen on the central figure, but the rhythmic visuals enter our sight. Layers of circles squares and triangles, both visible and invisible, constantly produce dynamic beats. And the figures firmly based on the geometric structure add the vibrant melody with their curvilinear details. Colours and forms are elaborated in various notes, meters and stresses. Forms are mixed and melted one another within the great circle of unity. The unity of the whole predominates over the distinct parts, and the distinct parts enliven the life of the whole. Thus, I would like to conclude the visuals of *maṇḍalas* in Alchi represent the dimension of *paśyantī vāk*: the distinct forms of *vaikharī vāk* are fused with one another and the dynamic flows created by virtue of the indistinct forms of the *madhyamā vāk* re-orientate the forms towards the formless Essence.

4. Aesthetic Power of the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi

4.1. Aesthetic power: *Sthūla paśyantī* in resemblance to the Divine Consciousness

The ‘aesthetic power’ (*mādhuryaṁ śaktirucyate*) of the gross forms of *paśyantī* is mentioned in the *Tantrāloka*. The discourse on the aesthetic power of the *stūla paśyantī* can be applied to the non-discursive dimension of forms in the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi, and considered in explaining how the *maṇḍalas* appeal to the heart of people beyond their doctrinal contents and associated meanings. Abhinavagupta states in the *Tantrāloka*, while explaining the gross form of *paśyantī* that the one who is immersed in the form of *nāda* instantly experiences the state of *tanmayībhūti* (identification) because

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55 TĀ III. 238b. (vol. II, p. 579): *avibhagaikarūpatvaṁ mādhuryaṁ śaktirucyate*
of its closeness to *saṃvid*. It is significant that the aesthetic quality of the *paśyanti* vāk has been explicated in terms of ‘*saṃvid*’. *Saṃvid*, meaning the Divine Consciousness, may be placed in parallel to other names, such as Mahāvairocana or Sarvavid, who is ultimately the ‘*dharmadhātu*’. When the discourse on the aesthetic power of *sthūla paśyanti* is applied to the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi, we come to the presupposition as such: when we are immersed in the *paśyanti* form of *maṇḍalas*, we experience the state of *tanmayībhūti* (identification) because the *maṇḍalas*' resemblance to the *saṃvid*. The presupposition that the aesthetic power of the *maṇḍalas* of Alchi originates from their closeness to *saṃvid* is consistent with the conclusion of the preliminary studies in Part I: *Maṇḍalas* appeal to the heart of people even without discursive knowledge because they resemble the Ultimate Dharma (*dharmadhātu*), and they are comprehended on a non-discursive level by the viewer.

4.2. Determinants of the Aesthetic Experience of the *Maṇḍalas*

4.2.1. *Maṇḍala* meant for the process of identification

*Maṇḍalas* are primarily designed to conduce the process of identification between the self and the Essence. Here lies the difference between the *maṇḍalas* and ordinary beautiful objects. Beautiful objects, if they encourage the attachment and feed our desires, obstruct the clarity of the mind, thus, taint the processing of sensual data. Attachment has the tendency of separating the subject from the object. Due to the separated condition of the subject and the object, the process of identification does not occur, and our perception is occupied by names, categories and judgments. On the contrary, *maṇḍalas* are intended for the practice of identification, which re-establishes the relationship between the subject and the object. In the religious practice, the *maṇḍala* leads the identification between the practitioner and the divinity to cause the Essence resumed and circulated within the body of the practitioner. In the aesthetic context, its *paśyanti* form accommodates the immersion of the viewer and leads to the state of

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56 TĀ III. 239b-240a. (vol. II, p. 579) 
_tadasyaṁ nādaraūpāyāṁ saṃvitsavidhavṛttiṁ ii 
śāyāntarma[ttanma]yībhūtir[jagityeva]pulabhyate _1

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tanmayībhūtī, the identification with the Essence. The Vāstuṣṭra Upaniṣad confirms the potentiality of the visual forms in leading to the union with the Divine in saying that that the harmonious form induces the mood of mediation, and by the state of absorption in mediation, man experiences the union with the Divine.\textsuperscript{57} Here, the reference to ‘the harmonious form’ is especially significant in the present context, because it is one of the primary characteristics of \textit{sthūla paśyantī}. Thus, the \textit{maṇḍala}, which has been devised to nurture the state of identification and immersion, is shaped in the harmonious form of \textit{sthūla paśyantī}.

4.2.2. Two factors that accomplish the aesthetic power of \textit{maṇḍalas}

The aesthetic experience of the \textit{paśyantī} form of \textit{maṇḍalas} depends on both the subject and the object of the experience.

If the visuals of \textit{maṇḍalas} are seen only through the physical eyes, and if their multiple colours and figures are not relished in a greater unity, they remain at the level of \textit{vaikharī}. Without the process of immersing the self into the visuals, the \textit{paśyantī} form of \textit{maṇḍalas} cannot be perceived, because the \textit{paśyantī} is characterized by the awareness of the unity that harmonize all distinct parts. Without the internal state of immersion, the synthetic insight cannot come into work. Therefore, when we say that the \textit{maṇḍala} is a gross form of \textit{paśyantī} \textit{vāk}, it refers to its visual potentiality, which would be accomplished in dependence to the viewer.

The experience of the \textit{paśyantī} form of \textit{maṇḍalas} depends not only on the viewer but also on the artistic standard of the \textit{maṇḍalas}. I would say that not all \textit{maṇḍalas} exemplify the gross form of \textit{paśyantī}; and the above discussion on the \textit{paśyantī} form of \textit{maṇḍalas} has focused on the examples of Alchi. It is comparable to the fact that not all

\textsuperscript{57} Cf. VSU II. 22. comm.: \textit{yathā hutilā vṛṣṭīrbhavati tathā rūpasubhadgād dhyanabhāvāh sampraśīṣaste \text{\textit{yathā parjanyādannaṁ sambhavati tathā dhīyanālīaya upajīyate \text{\textit{l} layānmamujā \textit{d}ivyā bhavantī \text{\textit{l} yathā- \text{\textit{n}nāt prānāḥ saṅcarati tathā layātadbhāvā manubhavantī, mano niścalan bhavatī}} \text{\textit{I}} As by sacrificial offerings rain is produced, thus by a harmonious form the mood of meditation is induced. As from food is produced thus from meditation arises absorption. By absorption men become divinised. As from food the life arises, thus from the state of absorption they experience union with That. The mind becomes steady.” (trans. Boner, Sarma & Bäumer 2000: p. 64, Sanskrit: p. 169).}
series of musical notes represent *sthūla paśyanti*. When a series of musical notes are not artistically performed, it cannot be said to be a gross form of *paśyanti* only because the composition has the potentiality to represent *paśyanti* vāk. Likewise, we observe that the *maṇḍalas* based on the same composition are variably executed. The artistic skill is an indispensable cause to bring forth the power and the subtle harmony of *sthūla paśyanti*. Here, the artists should be technically trained as much as they should be acquainted with what they express, that is, ‘the Essence’. If we compare the artistic requirement for the *maṇḍalas* with the case of the one-stroke drawing of a circle, the difference is clear. In the latter case, the artistic training is not necessary, whereas one should be spiritually trained to invoke the power in the drawing.

4.3. Spirituality of Aesthetic Seeing of *Maṇḍalas*

4.3.1. Aesthetic immersion to the *maṇḍalas* equivalent to *pratyakṣa*

The basic thesis which is defended here can be formulated as: Artistically executed *maṇḍalas* are the reflection of the Divine Consciousness, the Ultimate Dharma, or the Perfect Enlightenment. By taking the *paśyanti* form that resembles *saṃvid*, the *maṇḍalas* conduce the viewer to be melted in the visuals of Consciousness. The *maṇḍalas*, if successfully executed in the form of *paśyanti*, reveal externally the form of the formless Consciousness. The formless Consciousness takes a visible form by means of arts, whereas it is experienced and remains only internally in the religious practice of visualization.

The aesthetic dimension of the *maṇḍala* differs from the spiritual experience of the visualization in the matter of externalization of the Essence. In addition, their difference also lies in the processing of visuals. The process of visualizing a *maṇḍala* in the religious context involves the conceptual construction, and symbolic ideas are imposed on the figures. The religious practitioners should learn the associated meanings of the details. For them, the external *maṇḍala* is meaningless without studying each detail. In the process of visualization, the illusory images are deliberately constructed, and one is actively engaged in the visual imagination. On the contrary, when the *maṇḍala* is the
object of the aesthetic seeing, it is free from the doctrinal conceptions and the pure vision comes to our eyes. In that sense, the aesthetic seeing of the *maṇḍala* is related to the philosophy of *pratyakṣa*. The acceptance of the *pratyakṣa* as the primary means of the true knowledge may have contributed to the growing importance of visuals as the soteriological means in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Particularly with the development of tantric soteriology, it probably laid the philosophical foundation for elaborating the visual creations of *maṇḍala*.

*Pratyakṣa*, the direct intuitive perception, is free from thought construction (*vikalpa*). It means pure ‘seeing’ that brings us the true knowledge without any involvement of judgments or acts of naming. For the definition of *pratyakṣa*, the first chapter of the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* by Dignāga provides us with invaluable references. In the text, *pratyakṣa* is defined as “free from mental or conceptual construction (*kalpanā)*”, and *kalpanā* here means the act of associating (*yojanā*) the object with names, etc therefore bearing a verbal designation. And, it is more emphatically stated,

“That which is devoid of such conceptual construction is called *pratyakṣa*”.

In Dignāga’s definition of *pratyakṣa*, it is its *nirvikalpa* aspect that has been placed primary. The visualization, though it is said to lead one to the realization of the True Dharma, is distinguished from the method of *pratyakṣa* in dealing with our thought constructions (*kalpanās*). If the *pratyakṣa* is the method of ‘non-discursive seeing of *citta*’, the visualization takes the way to see the *citta* by means of discursive constructions on the basis of sense-*vijñānas* and *manas*. Seeing *maṇḍalas* without involving the discursive function of *manas* is none other than *pratyakṣa*.

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58 The *pratyakṣa* chapter of the text consists of the argument for the characteristics of *prakṣa* and the discussion on the nature of the two aspects of cognition, that is the subject and the object.
The direct perception of certain images that lead to the synthetic awareness has been recognized in the Buddhist tradition. It may be well exemplified by the legendary story about the first portrait of the Buddha. When Bimbisara sent the portrait of the Buddha to his dharma companion, Utrayana, “he merely glanced at this portrait and had an intuitive understanding of reality”.  

Another story related to the portrait of the Buddha also mentions that seeing the portrait of the Buddha caused a profound experience.  

More directly related to the manḍalas, Buddhaguhya refers that the visual form of manḍala leads the mind to be identified with the Divine Essence. Buddhaguhya’s reference seem particularly directing to the paśyantī nature of the external manḍalas:

"Your mind is grasped in the perceptual image of mandala, if it becomes one-pointed without shifting from that, then the mind is definitely contented, and you should know that the mind which has become contented in that manner is the abode of the mantras, that is, the heart."  

In the above reference it is implied that the pratibimba manḍala is not separated from the tattvarūpa or svabhāva manḍala, therefore, the absorption to the pratibimba makes the mind to be permeated by the Divine Essence. The statement of the immersion to the external manḍala causing the permeation of the Divine Essence in the mind verifies the association of the aesthetic seeing of manḍala with the pratyakṣa.

4.3.2. Link between the doctrine of vāk and the pratyakṣa

When the manḍala is defined to be sthūla paśyantī, the aesthetic immersion to the manḍala is more convincingly placed in parallel to pratyakṣa due to the paramarśa nature (synthetic awareness) of paśyantī vāk and due to its closeness to sanvid (Divine Consciousness or the Light nature of Reality). Here I draw attention to the relationship between the doctrine of vāk and the philosophy of pratyakṣa, in order to assure the spirituality of the visuals of manḍalas in the philosophical settings.

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63 Ibid.
4.3.2.1. Similarity and difference between the doctrine of vāk and the theory of pratyakṣa

We see the influence of the philosophy of pratyakṣa in the Abhinavagupta’s philosophy of ‘the cognition’, which is fundamental to the doctrine of the levels of vāk.65 As we have seen in the notions of śūnya, dharma-kāya, ālayavijñāna and tathagatagarbha in Part II, the Ultimate has been conceived in the nature of ‘nirvikalpa’ in Mahāyāna Buddhism. As the system of eight-vijñānas well demonstrates, the six sense-vijñānas construct dualistic discriminations (vikalpa) of objects, and these vikalpas obstruct the view of the Ultimate. As the philosophy of pratyakṣa is epitomized by the discussion on the relation between the nirvikalpa (without thought construction) and the savikalpa (with thought construction), the doctrine of vāk primarily deals with the relation between the non-discursive Whole and the discursive multiple forms. In a broad outset, the doctrine of vāk is reminiscent of the idea of attaining pratyakṣa free from vācyavācakabhāvanā in that the nirvikalpa awareness of Parāvāk is reached by means of overcoming the vācyavācakabhāvanā of vaikhari vāk. Parā vāk can be compared to pratyakṣa in its characteristics of ‘nirvikalpa cognition’. In both cases, the element of pure vision predominates and the distinct conception of an object is not existent. Nirvikalpa cognition is inexpressible in discursive words.66 The primary point that the true knowledge is defined to be ‘nirvikalpa’ free from the bondage of vācyavācaka is identical in both theories.

In between these two concepts, however, we observe differences in technical details, regarding i) the relation between nirvikalpa and savikalpa67; ii) the nature of the

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65 Padoux 1992: p. 180: “One knows that the thought of such authors as Abhinavagupta was strongly influenced by Buddhist logic. For Abhinavagupta, for instance, dualistic thought (vikalpa) is a mental construct which follows and is based upon an initial moment of thought devoid of all thought-construction (nirvikalpa), which is pure thought, direct perception (pratyakṣa) of the supreme reality.”

66 In the PS I. 5, it is given: “A thing possessing many properties cannot be cognized in all its aspects by the sense. The object of the sense is the form (rupam) which is to be cognized [simply] as it is (svasa’msvedya) and which is inexpressible (anirdesya’ms).” (PS I. 5, trans. Hattori 1968: p. 27).

67 In Śāntarakṣita’s definition, kalpanā is the ‘apprehension’ associated with an expression (abhiśāpini prātiṣṭhit; cf. TS 1213, trans. Funayama 1992: p. 61. Being free from kalpanā, the pratyakṣa is “essentially not a cause of verbal expression, etc. (kāśyeta prātiṣṭhitāna na tu)” (TS 1213, trans. Funayama 1992: p. 62) Here, we find a description of the nirvikalpa state contrary to what is explained in the doctrine of vāk. In the doctrine of vāk, the nirvikalpa state is the existential basis for the savikalpa states. The problem
vācyavācacakabhāvanā⁶⁸, and iii) the evaluation of vācyavācacakabhāvanā⁶⁹. Since it will be deviating to deal with these points in details, I will curtail the discussion by ascribing the differences to the fact that pratyakṣa denotes the direct perception, which is an act or a means to the supreme knowledge, whereas the Parāvāk indicates the supreme state of pure consciousness. The theory of pratyakṣa describes the nirvikalpa of the pure cognition, whereas the theory of vak describes the nirvikalpa of the Parāvāk state. Therefore, it will be more reasonable to place pratyakṣa in parallel to pratyavamāra (or vimarśa), which is the non-discursive cognition of the Parāvāk rather than to Parāvāk itself.

4.3.2.2. Sounding forth (śabdana) in pratyakṣa

Pratyavamarśa, described in the Iśvara-pratyabhijñāvimarśinī is analogous to the pratyakṣa:

whether the nirvikalpa state is the basis of the act of kalpanā or separated from it is related to the discussion whether the conception occurs simultaneously with the sense perception (indriyavijñāna) or successively. The logicians of Vījñānavāda Buddhism argue for the simultaneous occurrences of sense perception and conception: "[Sense cognition] is thus directly experienced in coexistence with a conceptual mental cognition (vikalpakamanojñāna). Therefore, it is evident that sense-perception is devoid of conception." (TS 1245, trans. Funayama 1992: p. 97) The simultaneity of indriyavijñāna and manovijñāna is the logical basis why the former is devoid of the latter, therefore fulfills the condition to be pratyakṣa. That they occur successively means that the former contains the element of the latter, therefore, cannot be pratyakṣa. In the concept of pratyakṣa, nirvikalpa occurs simultaneously with savikalpa, therefore not associated by the latter; while the former lead one to the right knowledge and pleasure, the latter is the cause of ignorance and pain.

In contrast, the doctrine of vak emphasizes that the principle that relates the vācyā and the vācaka exists also in Parāvāk, though in hidden form (samhṛtarāpa). In the pratyabhijñā philosophy of the Trika system, the difference between nirvikalpa and savikalpa is merely based on the matter of which form the principle of expression (śabdabhiṣāna) takes. (cf. IPK I. 5. 19; IPV vol. II, pp. 239-40; Torella 2001, p. 872).

They share the view that the vācyavācacakabhāvanā is the cause of bond. However, the question on the essential nature of the vācyavācacakabhāvanā is interpreted in different ways in these two concepts, in dependence to their views on the relation between the nirvikalpa and the savikalpa. In the doctrine of vak, the vācyavācacakabhāvanā is, though functioning at the vaikharī level, in its essence the manifestation of the Ultimate. And it inheres in Parāvāk. On the contrary, in the theory of pratyakṣa, the vācyavācacakabhāvanā is not at all associated with nirvikalpa, and it inheres solely in the field of savikalpa.

The problem of how the vācyavācacakabhāvanā is dealt with is also preset by their understanding of the relationship between the nirvikalpa and the savikalpa. In the doctrine of vak, both the vācyā and the vācaka would be re-absorbed to the original state of Parāvāk through the parāparā (or nirvikalpa-savikalpa) levels of madhyamā and pāiyāni, whereas the vācyavācacakabhāvanā is declared to be false in the theory of pratyakṣa. We see in the philosophy of pratyakṣa the rejection of the validity of vācyavācacakabhāvanā in attaining the right knowledge: "Hence, it is maintained that a signifier-signal relation (vācyavācaka) is only a falsely imputed thing." (TS 1261, trans. Funayama 1992: p. 110).

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"Pratyavamarśa is ‘sounding forth’ by nature that expresses internally (antarabhīlīpīmaiśaśabdanāsvabhāvah). This śabdana (sounding forth) indeed has nothing to do with the ‘conventional’ (sānketaṇīrapekaśam). The uninterrupted camatkāra (avicchinna-camatkārātma) that is seen as an internal nod of the head gives life to the letters a etc. that is the conventional sound on the plane of māyā (akāraṇāāyīyaśāṃkētikāśabda). She is the basis of the awareness of fragmented objects (adipratyavamarśāntaraḥbhitti-bhūtatvāt)."\(^{70}\)

**Pratyavamarśa** is here discerned as ‘not associated with any conventional’, which reminds us of *pratyakṣa* that is defined as pure cognition separated from the conventional language.\(^{71}\) It is the camatkāra aspect of Parāvāk that corresponds with the conventional. The *pratyavamarśa* aspect of Parāvāk, though being the origin of all the cognition, transcends all the fragmented cognition that is based on conventions. In the Īśvarapratyabhijñākārika, Utpaladeva may have had *pratyakṣa* in his mind when he wrote,

> "Even at the moment of the direct perception (sāṭṣāṭkārakṣaṇe ‘pi) there is a reflective awareness (vimaraśāḥ)"\(^{72}\)

While Utpaladeva has repudiated the Buddhist argument for the nirvikalpa nature of *pratyakṣa* in the actual context, he indicates *vimāraṇa* nature of *pratyakṣa*. And, the *vimāraṇa* here, as the author’s *vṛtti* clarifies, is ‘the *pratyavamarśa* of the object (artha-pratyavamarśaḥ) in a subtle form’.\(^{73}\)

If *pratyakṣa* can be compared to *pratyavamarśa* or *vimāraṇa*, the *śabdhana* nature of the latter may be also found in the former. Ascribing the *śabdhana*, which is the principle of expression or the nature of ‘sounding forth’ to the *pratyakṣa* is not

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\(^{70}\) IPV I, 5, 13 (vol. I. pp. 252-4). The above translation has been slightly modified from Padoux 1992, pp. 175-6.

\(^{71}\) "The object free from verbal convention is not connected with a word (śabdena yojyate) and there is no conception (vikalpa) which is beyond the connection with a word (śabdāyojana)". It is so because the word involves the fault of over-extension (atiprasānga) (Cf. TS 1260. Kamalaśīla’s comm.. trans. Funayama 1992 : p. 111. Śabdāyojana means ‘nāmajātyādiyojana’, which is the definition of conception by Dignāga.). Also cf. TS 1257-8, trans. Funayama 1992: p. 108.


\(^{73}\) Cf. ibid.

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contradictory to the theory of pratyakṣa. When it is stated that there is no cognition of an object in pratyakṣa, the ‘object’ here means “a causal basis (nibandhana) that is qualified by qualifiers (viśeṣānavaśīṣṭārthagrahaṇāḥ) for ascertaining a conceptuality (savikalpakaḥbhāva)”\(^{74}\). ‘No cognition of an object’ in pratyakṣa clearly indicates the absence of any base that causes the discursive thoughts or distinct forms. Abhinavagupta explains about śabdhana in respect to the nirvikalpa state. He says in the Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛtivimārṣini that śabdabhāvanā (principle of expression) subsists within the nirvikalpa state in a contracted form, and it expands in the savikalpa state.\(^{75}\)

The śabdhana nature of pratyakṣa is implied in Ānandavardhana’s statement in the Dhvanyāloka where the dhvani has been compared to pratyakṣa:

“We may let our definition of dhvani stand just as the definition of pratyakṣa stands in Buddhist doctrine.”\(^{76}\)

The dhvani in the Dhvanyāloka denotes more than ‘a sound’ or ‘the primeval sound’. It signifies the true Subject (ātma) of the poetry that invokes the Essence with the suggestive power (vyañjakatva). The reference to the Buddhist pratyakṣa in relation to dhavani, on one hand, confirms the analogous relationship between pratyakṣa and pratyavamāraśa (the non-discursive cognition of Parāvāk), and on the other hand uncovers the śabdana nature of pratyakṣa. Above all we have observed earlier in the quotation from the Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi Tantra (VI. 19-20) that Vairocana’s state of samādhi sounded forth the primeval sound, from which the four modes of A and further conventional sounds - that make things known - successively arose. Vairocana’s deep samādhi would not but be in the state of nirvikalpa and not different from pratyakṣa, as the yogic insight is also counted as pratyakṣa. The Ultimate Dharma conceived in the form of sound, as we have referred to in Part II. 1, reassures the śabdana nature of the pratyakṣa. Furthermore, pratyakṣa, being the cognition of prajñā

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\(^{75}\) Cf. IPYV 1.5.19, p. 240: saṃvyṛtā hi śabdabhāvanā prasāritām śabdabhāvanāṃ-vividhakalpanārūpaṁ apekṣyā tathābhūtāvaiṣṭādhyakaplanāvaiṣṭākalyāñ nirvikalpete ucyate. See Torella 2001: p. 872. The term śabdabhāvanā is a penetrating principle also in the philosophy of Bharṭṭhari, which seem to have developed to the concept of parāvāk by the Pratyabhijñā philosophers.

\(^{76}\) DhĀ III. 47, author’s vṛtti, trans. Ingalls, Masson & Patwardhan 1990: p. 672.
or the cognitive state of prajñā, which is beyond rational discursive level of knowledge, is more reasonably thought of having the śabdana (the germ of activity or expression) within, when prajñā is considered in its inspirational aspect that spontaneously brings forth the expressions and actions.77

4.3.2.3. pratyakṣa and pasyantu vāk

Though the term ‘pratyakṣa’ certainly emphasizes the role of senses, there are other types of pratyakṣa than the perception based on our sense organs. Dignāga refers to a mental perception (manaśaṃ samviti) as pratyakṣa; though it is not dependent on any sense-organ, since it is free from kalpanā, it is taken to be a pratyakṣa.78 Two kinds of mental perceptions are given; that of external objects and self-awareness (svasamvitti) of internal state.79 While the conceptual construction is a kalpanā, the non-conceptual awareness (svasamvid), or pure perception of conceptual construction (kalpanā-jñāna) is a pratyakṣa. In addition, the “yogin’s intuition, which is not associated (avyavakirṇa) with any conceptual construction of the āgama and apprehends only a thing in itself” also exemplifies pratyakṣa.80 From the fact that there are types of pratyakṣa which are not based on the sense organs, it is assured that pratyakṣa should not be confined to the immediate sense perception. The pratyakṣa is primarily the direct perception of the reality in the nature of nirvikalpa, which is non-discursive and indistinct. The English translation of the term as ‘direct sense perception’ can cause misunderstandings because the sense perception is, in the ordinary sense, characterized by its tendency towards discriminations and distinctions, which is opposite to pratyakṣa. The essential discourse

77 In Abhinavagupta’s definition of pratibhā, we see a direct association of prajñā with the creative inspiration: “Pratibhā is a prajñā capable of creating new things” (DhĀL I. 6, trans. Ingalls, Masson & Patwardhan 1990: p. 120). Prajñā is inseparable from the karuṇa, which spontaneously produces the expressions or the actions.
78 Cf. PS I. 6.
79 Cf. PS I. 6. According to the vṛtti, the former means the inner perception that cognizes the sense perception free from conceptual construction, and the latter means the inner perception of internal state such as desire, anger, pleasure or pain, etc. The vṛtti of PS I. 6 says, “the mental perception which, taking a thing of colour, etc., for its object occurs in the form of immediate experience (anubhava) is also free from conceptual construction. The self-awareness (svasamvedana) of desire, anger, ignorance, pleasure, pain, etc., is [also recognized as] mental perception because it is not dependent on any sense-organ.” (trans. Hattori 1968: p. 27).
of the theory of *pratyākṣa* lies not in ‘the senses’ but in the ‘pure sight’, as consistent to the penetrating concept of ‘daśāna’ in Indian traditions. The verbal root of the term daśāna (√ drs) is identical in its meaning ‘to see’ with the root √paś, from which the term paśyantī has derived. Thus, the notions of *pratyākṣa* and paśyantī conjoin within the Indian tradition of daśāna. The paśyantī in its meaning of ‘visionary’ is the level of cognition in which the seers comprehend the reality and ‘the Real’ with their intuitive vision. And the same emphasis on the direct vision of the reality is essential in the philosophy of *pratyākṣa*.

Furthermore, the etymology of *pratyākṣa* given by Dignāga unfolds another important facet of *pratyākṣa* that coincides with paśyantī vāk:

> “Because akṣa (the sense-organ) is the specific cause (asādhāraṇa-hetu), it is called ‘*pratyākṣa*’ (literally ‘belonging to each sense-organ’), not ‘pratīvīṣaya’ (literally ‘belonging to each object’).”81

Here, it is significant that the opposite term of akṣa has been given ‘viṣaya (the object of the sense). If ‘the object’ has been used as the antonym of the akṣa, the akṣa implies ‘the subject’. The akṣa has been translated in the above passage into ‘the sense organ’, and *pratyākṣa* into ‘belonging to each sense-organ’. Yet, akṣa is translated also into ‘sensual perception’, and the *pratyākṣa* into ‘before the eyes’, ‘direct’ or ‘visible’.82 With the alternative translations and the consideration of the different types of *pratyākṣa*, *pratyākṣa* more evidently indicates the pure sight and its adherence to the subjectivity is underlined. These two characteristics of the pure sight and the prominent subjectivity remind us of the etymological description of paśyantī vāk which has been given in the Jayaratha’s commentary to the *Tantrāloka*. It is called paśyantī (seeing or visionary), “since she is a form of the Subject who sees (draśṭr)”83. The prevalence of the light of cit and the absence of the vācyavācakakrama in paśyantī vāk also coincide with the

82 Cf. Monier-Williams 1872: p. 3.
nature of *pratyakṣa*.

### 4.4. Conclusion: Spirituality of Aesthetic Perception of *Maṇḍalas*

Buddhist *maṇḍalas* of Alchi have been formulated according to certain visual principles through which they attain the harmonious sound of *paśyantī vāk*. However, the application of such visual principles does not promise the achievement of the *paśyantī* form. Without the artists' heart and skill, the visual principles remain merely potential, and without the immersion from the side of the viewer, even successfully executed *maṇḍalas* cannot convey the subtle sound of *paśyantī*. The visual principles observed in the *paśyantī* form of *maṇḍalas* are the channel through which the Ultimate Dharma is revealed, and through which one's vision is led to the Ultimate Dharma. When the external *maṇḍala* convincingly imparts the form of the Ultimate Dharma through its *paśyantī* form, the *vācyā* aspect and the *vācaka* aspect of the *maṇḍala* are identified, then the *maṇḍala* is the abode of the Ultimate Dharma as the *tantras* state.

*Maṇḍalas* are not merely the support of the visualization practice. The philosophy of *pratyakṣa* urges us to recognize the visuals of *maṇḍala* in their own right and to evaluate the aesthetic immersion to their forms in respect of the spiritual dimension. Abhinavagupta has established the aesthetic tasting (*rasanā, carvanā, āsvāda, bhoga*) as one of the perceptions (*pratīti*)

84 and pronounced that the aesthetic perception is different from cognizing the denotation or associated meanings. 85 Thus, it may be said that the aesthetic seeing of the visuals of *maṇḍalas* has a spiritual implication even without involving their doctrinal meanings. They are themselves of significant forms, and the aesthetic immersion to these forms corresponds to *pratyakṣa*. The parallelism between the aesthetic immersion to the *maṇḍalas* and *pratyakṣa* throws light on the innate spirituality of visuals in *maṇḍalas*.

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84 Traditional categories of perceptions counted by Abhinavagupta in the DhĀL II. 4 are sensory (*prātyakṣikā*), inferential (*ānumānikā*), verbal (*āgamotthā*), intuitional (*pratibhānakṛtiā*) and yogic (*yogiprātyakṣikā*) perception.