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Encountering the mandala: the mental and political architectures of dependency

Abstract

Extract:

From basic atomic and cellular structure to snowflakes, eyes, flowers, spider webs, tree rings to the solar system and spiral nebulae, mandalas abound in nature. The basic concept of the mandala, a circle and its centre, is also culturally abundant: though most notable within the Tibetan Mahayana tradition, mandalas are significant for the religious and secular lives of many peoples. They have for instance, long been identified in Native American art and medical practice (medicine wheels), particularly the sand mandalas of the Navajo.

Keywords

mandala, religious traditions

Encountering the Mandala: The Mental and Political Architectures of Dependency

by Maggie Grey¹

From basic atomic and cellular structure to snowflakes, eyes, flowers, spider webs, tree rings to the solar system and spiral nebulae, mandalas abound in nature. The basic concept of the mandala, a circle and its centre, is also culturally abundant: though most notable within the Tibetan Mahayana tradition, mandalas are significant for the religious and secular lives of many peoples. They have for instance, long been identified in Native American art and medical practice (medicine wheels), particularly the sand mandalas of the Navajo.

Among the Huichol tribes of California and Mexico, such a vision of circles, the *rierika*, is a prayer offering, a reflection of the face of god, and a means of realizing the most concentrated experience of the sacred, symbolized by the centre point.²

In Western cultural traditions, mandalas have their longest association, in architectural forms which mimicked the cosmos: in Stonehenge,³ in the Roman circus or amphitheatre,⁴ in the rose windows of medieval Gothic cathedrals,⁵ in Buckminster Fuller's geodesic dome,⁶ and in the architecture of many churches.

A mandala-like structure and a plan representing the world are shown, for example, by the cities of Jerusalem, Rome, Gur, the capital of the Sassanids, Baghdad, the capital of the Abassid Caliphate, and Ecbatana, the first capital of the Indo-European Medes, in the centre of which, on the testimony of Herodotus, stood the royal palace, behind seven circular walls, each of a different colour.⁷

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² The medical or psychotherapeutic goal of these medicine wheels, like that of the Tibetan mandalas, is the adaptive reintegration of the patient into the wider society or environment. Robert Adkinson, *Sacred Symbols: Mandalas*, Thames & Hudson, New York, 1995.

³ Arguelles, Jose & Miriam, *Mandala*, Shambhala, Berkeley, Ca., 1972, p. 34.

⁴ Charax of Pergamum claimed that "the hippodrome was built according to the organization of the cosmos." Emily Lyle, "The Circus as Cosmos" in *Archaic Cosmos: Polarity, Space & Time*, Polygon Press, Edinburgh, 1990, p. 35.

⁵ The windows of the cathedral at Lausanne, for instance, are rosettes of interpenetrating circles and petals, symbolizing the wholeness of creation (Rudiger Dahlke, *Mandalas of the World: A Meditating & Painting Guide*, Sterling Publishing, New York, 1992, p. 32).

⁶ "Buckminster Fuller's concept of synergy, applied to his principle of dymaxion construction, can also apply to the Mandala: a dynamic system in which the sum total of the parts does not necessarily define or predicate the behaviour of the whole" Arguelles 1972, p. 19.

⁷ Brauen, Martin, (trans. Martin Willson), "The Mandala: Sacred Circle" in *Tibetan Buddhism*, Shambhala, Boston, Mass., 1997, p. 31.

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Mandalas occur throughout the secular realm, as for instance in "the American social world centred on Washington, D.C. and its mandala of monuments and institutional structures"⁸ and in the Olympic stadium encircling an unquenchable flame.

In the Islamic world, mandalas are found in aesthetic profusion in the great design traditions of mosques and public and domestic architecture where precise geometric patterning is:

a means of relating multiplicity to Unity by means of mathematical forms which are seen, not as mental abstractions, but as reflections of the celestial archetypes within both the cosmos and the minds or souls of men.⁹

The famed Sufis of Konya who dance in hypnotic mandalas, parallel the planets in their motion round the sun; in pre-Islamic Sumer, the ancient ziggurats too were constructed as mandalas reflecting cosmic-human power relations.¹⁰ The form has also been important in Asian architectural traditions: the town plans of many Indian and Nepali temple-towns as well as the Chinese civilizational capitals of Mingtang and Chang'an (Xi'an) reveal a mandala form; the Jokhang Temple of Lhasa, "conceals within it a mandala structure".¹¹ Other civilizational examples of the mandala are found in the Aztec calendar and much Australian Aboriginal art and cultural practice¹². Beyond the specific uses made of mandalas by specific actors, there is also a wider absorption of what might be called a *mandala world view* throughout some societies. It is "a matter of imaginal world-patterning directly affecting inner structuring of physical and mental senses though actual brain organization".¹³

Despite geographical isolation, a unitary human purpose, design and meaning becomes apparent in the erection of cathedrals mosques and temples in the general period of the tenth through fifteenth centuries: Khajuraho in India; Borobudur in Java; Angkor Wat in Indo-China; Chartres in France; Cordoba in Islamic Spain; and Chichen Itza in Yucatan. The world view these edifices have in common is that each man is a cosmic unit and that the society in which he lives is a reflection of a map of the cosmos.¹⁴

⁸ Thurman, Robert A. F., "Mandala: The Architecture of Enlightenment" in Denise P. Leidy and Robert A. F. Thurman, *Mandala: The Architecture of Enlightenment*, Thames & Hudson, New York, 1997-8, p. 128.

⁹ There are striking parallels between the Buddhist and Islamic spiritual art traditions: "Islam's concentration on geometric patterns draws attention away from the representational world to one of pure forms, poised tensions and dynamic equilibrium, giving structural insight into the workings of the inner self and their reflection in the universe". Keith Critchlow, *Islamic Patterns: An Analytical & Cosmological Approach*, Schocken Books, New York, 1976, pp. 6-8.

¹⁰ The ziggurats were massive public buildings that served a range of functions: a priestly one, as temple; an astronomical one, as the site of heavenly observation and calculation; and a military-strategic one, again as observational post. Their architectural design was meant to imply a map of the universe or cosmogram (Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1957).

¹¹ Brauen 1997, p. 31.

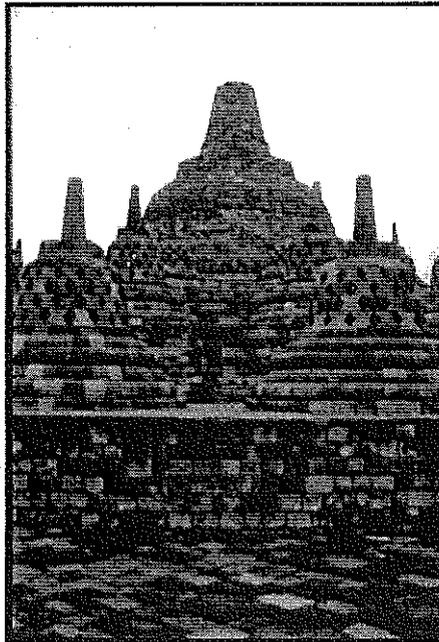
¹² Arguelles 1972, p. 38. A particular example of the Mandala is found in the Tjuringa, an Australian Aboriginal cultural artefact used to relate Dreamings and the singing of country.

¹³ Thurman 1997-8, p. 143.

¹⁴ Arguelles 1972, p. 44.

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The word mandala derives from the Sanskrit: *manda* meaning 'essence' and *la* meaning 'container', 'possessor' or 'signpost'.¹⁵ The term was also used in reference to a collection of verse hymns (*mantras*) in the Vedas.¹⁶ Claiming to express a universal essence, which the newer teachings of Buddhism were to deny, these mandalas were said to contain the sacred sounds that generated the universe and all sentient beings, "so there is already a clear sense of *mandala* as a world-model".¹⁷ Prior to the rise of Buddhism, Vedic sacrificial altars are known to have been constructed according to mandala proportions.¹⁸



*Borobudur: A Three Dimensional
Mandala in stone (Java)*¹⁹

A third meaning of mandala is circle, signifying completeness, wholeness, everything in the universe.²⁰

¹⁵ There is an interesting paradox here as Buddhism traditionally denies the existence of any essence. "Sabbe dharma anatman" or "All conditioned entities lack soul or essence", *Dharmapada* Ch XX, Verse 7, in Rahula, Walpola *What the Buddha Taught: A Collection of Illustrative Texts Translated from the Original Pali*, Grove Press, N.Y., 1974, p. 57. See section titled "Anatman".

¹⁶ The Vedas are the foundational texts of Hinduism. Their original oral form may date from c1500BCE, but the four books were not committed to writing until between 600 and 200 BCE (Camphausen, Rufus C. *The Divine Library: A Comprehensive Reference Guide to the Sacred Texts and Spiritual Literature of the World*. Inner Traditions, Vermont, USA, 1992, p. 42).

¹⁷ Robert Thurman, "Mandala: The Architecture of Enlightenment", in Denise P. Leidy and Robert A. F. Thurman, *Mandala: The Architecture of Enlightenment*, Thames & Hudson, New York, 1997-8, p. 130.

¹⁸ Patrick A. George, "Vedi: Vedic Altars" at *Scaffold: WWW Architectural Project* <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/george/scaffold.html>). According to Li Jicheng, 'mandala' also means rostrum: "In ancient India, the mandala was a round or square mud platform at a meditation site erected to ward off demons during meditation ... When a king ascended to the throne, or when a monk was ordained, the ceremony would take place on a mandala" (Li Jicheng, Researcher of World Religions at China Academy of Social Sciences, "Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism" at <http://omni.cc.purdue.edu/~wtv/tibet/tbuddha.html>).

¹⁹ Photography copyrights: © Rosita Dellios and R. James Ferguson 1996-1999.

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The centre exists continually, first as a seed, then as a stem, the trunk or the spine, and finally in the flower, where a new seed is produced.²¹

The mandala then is traditionally constructed as a site for the metaphoric realization of universal concepts, deemed necessary for the further development of human character.

As a rule a mandala (*dkyil 'khor*) is a strongly symmetrical diagram, concentrated about a centre and generally divided into four quadrants of equal size; it is built up of concentric circles (*'khor*) and squares possessing the same centre.²²



A chalk mandala drawn in the courtyard (bottom-right) of a Hindu temple (Malacca, Malaysia)

A meaning of mandala has also been elaborated for the political sphere:

The *mandala* is also a geopolitical expression to describe the conduct of relationships of power among ancient kingdoms in India and later in Hinduised Southeast Asia.²³

²⁰ The term for mandala in Tibetan is *dkyil khor* meaning 'centre-circumference', "which describes both the essential geometric structure and ritual significance of mandalas" (Patrick A George, *Mandala: Buddhist Tantric Diagrams Scaffold: WWW Architectural Project* at <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/george/scaffold.html>). The term *dkyil* has been translated by Thurman (p. 128) as meaning 'essence, centre, seat, or mind'. Peter Gold has elaborated the many similarities between Tibetan mandala and Navajo sand painting which both share the 'Circle of the Spirit'. "Both systems envision a special kind of circle. It consists of a small, inner circle connected to an outer, larger one by means of four lines creating four quadrants. It is a spiritual draftsman's diagram, a sacred shorthand for the ... universal principles of the spiritual path". "Excerpt from *Navajo & Tibetan Sacred Wisdom: The Circle of the Spirit*", in Denise P. Leidy and Robert A. F. Thurman, *Mandala: The Architecture of Enlightenment*, Thames & Hudson, New York, 1997-8, pp. 160-1.

²¹ Arguelles 1972, p. 13.

²² Brauen 1997, p. 11.

²³ Rosita Dellios, "China and India: New Mandalas of Power in 21st Century Geopolitics", Conference Paper, *Small and mid-Great Powers in Southern Hemisphere and their Relations with Northern Neighbours*, organised by The Centre for Migration & Development Studies, Department of Economics, University of Western Australia, in collaboration with International Institute for

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Kautilya's *Arthashastra* or *The Science of Means*,²⁴ a 3rd Century BCE Realist text, is concerned with the maintenance and enhancement of economic and political power.²⁵ In this text, Kautilya proposes a *raj mandala* or Secular Power Realm, a monarchical balance-of-power schema for the exploitation of regional power within and between states.

The conqueror, his friend, and his friend's friend are the three primary kings constituting a circle of states [*raj mandala*]. As each of these three kings possesses the five elements of sovereignty, such as the minister, the country, the fort, the treasury, and the army, a circle of states consists of eighteen elements.²⁶

More significantly for this article, the mandala of the Wheel of Dependent Origination, the first Buddhist example of the mandala model, was, according to tradition, given concrete form as an act of political reciprocity.²⁷ During the period of the Buddha's teaching, King Udrayana of Vatsa (6th C BCE),²⁸ presented an ally, King Bimbisara of Magadha (582-554 BCE),²⁹ with precious armour guaranteeing invincibility in battle.³⁰ Bimbisara felt obliged to reciprocate. At first the king believed he had nothing of equal value in his realm, but his Prime Minister reminded him that Gotama the Buddha was then residing in his kingdom³¹ and surely an appropriate gift for Udrayana would be a portrait of this great teacher. When Bimbisara sought a portrait from him, the Buddha suggested that, he himself would design and commission the gift for the king. Various artists were employed under the Buddha's direction, to construct a mandala: the Wheel of Dependent Origination.³²

In post-colonial relations of 21st Century states another mandala form is recognisable. Emmanuel Wallerstein's *world system theory* constructs a model of three concentric

Development Studies Australia and Observatoire Des Relations Internationales Dans L'Hemisphere Sud, Biviers, France, IIDS, Perth, 20-21 November 2000.

²⁴ The *Arthashastra* was composed for the 3rd Century BCE Mauryan King, Chandragupta. It deals with state controls, national economies and the conduct of war, and may have been of composite origin and times, though it is traditionally attributed to Kautilya, aka Chanakya, the brahmin minister of state who engineered the downfall of the Nanda dynasty and Chandragupta's subsequent rise to sovereignty over the kingdom of Magadha (A. L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, Fontana Ancient History, 1967, pp. 51 and 80).

²⁵ Alain Danielou, *Virtue, Success, Pleasure & Liberation: The Four Aims of Life in the Tradition of Ancient India*, Inner Traditions International, Vermont, USA, 1993, pp.102-3.

²⁶ Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, (trans. R. Shamasastri) Mysore Printing & Publishing, Mysore, 1967, Book 6, Ch 2, p. 293).

²⁷ Traditionally, it is said that the Buddha came to an understanding of Dependent Origination during the night of his enlightenment at Bodh Gaya.

²⁸ King Udrayana ruled Vatsa, a small kingdom in northern India, contemporaneous with Magadha; its capital was the city of Kausambi, known since the 2nd millennium BCE (Basham, pp. 26 & 39).

²⁹ Basham (p. 48) gives different dates and claims King Bimbisara died in 494 BCE.

³⁰ As, for instance, in 1956, France offered Israel the technological knowledge to develop a nuclear capacity: "For the first time in human history, one state had agreed to supply nuclear know-how to another without requirements for safeguards and inspections" (Dan Raviv & Yossi Melman, *Every Spy a Prince*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, Mass., 1991, p. 67).

³¹ Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, was also living in the kingdom of Magadha during Bimbisara's reign. The king appears to have been unusually liberal in his accommodations with political and social philosophy. His son Ajatashatru, as we shall see, was of a very different disposition.

³² Tharchin, Sermey Geshe Lobsang *King Udrayana and the Wheel of Life*, Mahayana Sutra and Tantra Press, 1985.

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circles: an inner core of wealthy highly-skilled states, a semi-periphery of states with limited autonomy and production, and a massive periphery of states with "raw materials and extensive surplus extraction".³³ Speaking of national interests, Wallerstein claims:

Their usual location is internal to the state. But insofar as interests refer to shares in the distribution of profit, they must relate to the economic framework within which profit is distributed. And this framework in the modern world system is not a national one but that of the world-economy, which therefore means that the primary interest of a state is to obtain or retain an optimal position within this world-economy - to be in its core rather than its periphery or semiperiphery.³⁴

Exposing the artifice of such a model and stimulating interdependence is the task facing committed theorists and activists on behalf of developing state populations. "The mandala system is such that the fate of the rich and powerful nations is causally linked to the fate of the poor and weak ones".³⁵

A mandala then, is a multidimensional and interactive roadmap to realms other;³⁶ a visual representation of sacred space³⁷ and a metaphor of ideal or divine behaviour within that space.³⁸ It lays claim to being that place "where microcosm and

³³ John Baylis & Steve Smith, *The Globalization of World Politics*, Oxford Uni. Press, Oxford 1997, p. 131.

³⁴ Immanuel Wallerstein, *Africa & the Modern World*, Africa World Press Inc., New Jersey, 1986, p. 78.

³⁵ Rosita Dellios, "Mandalas of Security", *Culture Mandala*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1996, p. 19.

³⁶ A mandala "has to do with finding one's centre in an ideal but terrifyingly real world of ever shifting and changing actions, energies and thoughts ... [where] one must find equipoise and dynamic equilibrium in the immediate reality". Peter Gold, "Excerpt from *Navajo & Tibetan Sacred Wisdom: The Circle of the Spirit*", in Denise P. Leidy and Robert A. F. Thurman, *Mandala: The Architecture of Enlightenment*, Thames & Hudson, New York, 1997-8, pp. 160-1.

³⁷ "Mandalas are among the best known Buddhist icons in the world today, and their popularity is underscored by the use of the word *mandala* as a synonym for sacred space in Western scholarship and by its presence in English-language dictionaries and encyclopaedias", Denise P Leidy, "Place & Process: Mandala Imagery in the Buddhist Art of Asia", in D. P. Leidy & Robert A. F. Thurman, *Mandala: The Architecture of Enlightenment*, Thames & Hudson, New York, 1997, p. 17.

³⁸ According to Thurman (1997, p. 127), a mandala is "a matrix or model of a perfected universe, the nurturing environment of the perfected self in ecstatic interconnection with perfected others. It is a blueprint for buddhahood".

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macrocosm unite".³⁹ A mandala is a "mask of God through which eternity is to be experienced".⁴⁰

Mandalas are especially important in the Mahayana or Vajrayana Buddhist tradition as practised in Tibet, China, Mongolia, Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal, Korea and Japan,⁴¹ where they have been commissioned for both spiritual and secular purposes:⁴² as the focal point of initiations for both priestly and political classes, in honour of new religious buildings or incumbents, to speed the recovery of the ill and encourage psychotherapeutic reintegration of the mentally disturbed,⁴³ to background religious ceremonies, as a stimulus to contemplation and meditation, to gain merit through their donation, as thanks offerings, as an aid to the dying and deceased and as the refined aesthetic of an isolated and harsh environment.⁴⁴ In the 21st Century, a majority of *thangkas* are made for the art market rather than a traditional commission.⁴⁵

Mandalas are multi-media: as murals in temples, monasteries and religious buildings; as portable cloth paintings or *thangkas* (Tib. lit. rolled-up image);⁴⁶ as impermanent three-dimensional images of coloured sands, semi-precious gems, wood, clay, butter

³⁹ Miya Shimada, "Etymology of the Mandala", as part of an exhibition at the University of Michigan, 1996, at <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~miyash/mandalatheory.html> Psychologist Carl Gustav Jung (1885-1961) conceptualized the mandala as a microcosmic symbol of the universe and of collective or macro-consciousness: "...we see what it is in man that corresponds to the cosmos, and what kind of evolutionary process is compared with the creation of the world and the heavenly bodies: *it is the birth of the self*, the latter appearing as a microcosm. It is not the empirical man that forms the "correspondentia" to the world, as the mediaevalists thought, but rather the indescribable totality of the psychic or spiritual man, who cannot be described because he is compounded of consciousness as well as of the indeterminable extent of the unconscious" (*Mandala Symbolism*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Princeton Uni. Press, New Jersey, 1973, p. 24). According to Frank J. Korom, Curator of Asian & Middle Eastern Collections, Museum of International Folk Art, Mexico: "As with Tantric Hindu theories of the relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm, Tibetan Buddhism also posits an inviolable homology between the world and the human body", Book review of Martin Brauen's *The Mandala: Sacred Circle in Tibetan Buddhism* at <http://jbe.la.psu.edu/5/frankj.htm>.

⁴⁰ Joseph Campbell is here referring to "myth". Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Oriental Mythology*, Penguin Books, New York, 1976, p. 60.

⁴¹ Though not generally using mandala technology, Hinayana and Zen traditions acknowledge the significance of the Wheel of Life, and its teaching is an important aspect of their monastic traditions. In the 21st Century, enclaves of Western Buddhists in developed states are also instructed in mandalas.

⁴² Mandalas extend "from the sacred into the secular in royal coronation rituals and in the mental model of social reality internalized within any society". Thurman 1997-1998, p. 130.

⁴³ Conze, Edward (trans.) *Buddhist Texts through the Ages*, Shambala, Boston, USA, 1990, p. 245. Karl G. Jung (1885-1961), in bringing mandalas to the attention of Western psychotherapists in the early 20th Century, stressed their use as individual therapy to restore balance and harmony, and to site the individual in the greater whole.

⁴⁴ The art of Tibet has been called ornate and baroque, and contrasted with the stark chasteness of the Zen visual field (Yvonne Rand, "Zen priest and Teacher" in Vicki Mackenzie. *Why Buddhism: Westerners in Search of Wisdom*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2001, p. 279). In deity mandalas, the conceptualisation of deities is exceedingly romantic, perhaps in part as a reaction against the vast stretches of empty Tibetan landscape; in part as a reaction against the enforced celibacy of the monastic tradition; and in part as a compliment to Tibetan womanhood. Though Buddhism has frequently been called "life denying", Buddhist art works (*sku gsun thugs rten*), it should be acknowledged, abound both with life-enthusiasms and charnel grounds.

⁴⁵ Ian Alsop, "Modern Traditional Painting in Nepal", Symposium paper in *Asian Arts*, March 5, 1998 and at <http://www.asianart.com/waac/index.htm#figure01>.

⁴⁶ Thangkas are painted on cotton fabric, often stretched over a wooden frame; a ground layer of gesso (chalk or kaolin) having been first applied. The entire painting may be finally burnished with a stone to produce a lustrous appearance. Traditionally, monks would use these readily transportable teaching aids as they journeyed between villages and monasteries in their pastoral work.

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or threads constructed for specific ritual purposes;⁴⁷ as dramatic tableaux of music and dance, as small-scale sculptures or items of (ritual) jewellery, and as the ground plan for religious architecture as found for instance in the Jokhang at Lhasa, in the Great Stupa at Sanchi and at Borobudur in Indonesia. Many mandalas are of mixed media with a definite intention of 3-dimensionality in their construction⁴⁸ and *thangkas* invariably include mounts, dowels, veils and brocades.

Mandalas are self-consciously impermanent. Often, they are deliberately destroyed once their ritual purpose has been served. Those with greater longevity are nevertheless subject to the corruptions of time: temple and monastic murals are susceptible to damp, soot and the grease from burning butter lamps lit, in plenitude, at the base of the paintings; *thangkas* are susceptible to mechanical damage from rolling and unrolling, and wear and tear on the silk hangings.⁴⁹

In the painted form, mandalas are usually denoted as opaque watercolours, but Tibetan mandalas are more properly described as "glue tempera" or "distemper" as they use animal-skin glues to bind the pigments (usually powdered mineral pigments mixed with a gelatine binder). Artists, who may be either monks or trained lay specialists,⁵⁰ "usually rely on a rigorous system of proportion, the *thigse*, where a geometrical grid is laid out and the figures traced inside the geometric pattern."⁵¹ Sometimes a master drawing may be either copied directly, traced or pounced (lamp black or charcoal is sifted through a pierced drawing onto the canvas). In the 21st Century, commercial poster paints are used, but traditionally powdered mineral pigments and two vegetable pigments were used. The primary colours were white (clay), red (vermillion), orange-red (red lead), yellow (orpiment), orange-yellow (realgar), and green (malachite). Vegetable pigments include red lac (a dark red derived from a beetle) and indigo (a blue-black plant). Black was traditionally derived from lamp-black; gold also was used where affordable.⁵² The traditional materials are an early indication of international trade within the region:

Blue and green from crushed rock from Lhasa, yellow from Kham, gold from Nepal, vermillions from China; indigo from an Indian plant, and a yellow made from the utpala flower found near the Dalai Lama's Potala Palace.⁵³

A closely aligned Hindu cultural technology (*tantra*) and one possibly preceding the mandala, is the *yantra*, (Skt: *yam*, to sustain or support).⁵⁴ "The yantra is essentially a

⁴⁷ It is a Tibetan lamaist tradition that the Buddha first explained the *Pratitya Samutpada mandala* by outlining it with rice grains on the earth (Earle J. Stone, "The Tibetan Wheel of Life" in *Arts of Asia*, Vol. 10:4, July-Aug. 1980, p. 60).

⁴⁸ Brauen 1997, p.12.

⁴⁹ Blyth-Hill, Victoria, "A History of Thangka Conservation in Western Collections", Symposium paper in *Asian Arts*, March 5, 1998 and at <http://www.asianart.com/waac/index.htm#figure01>. Janice Leosho, "The History of the Art History of Tibetan Art", in *Asian Arts*, March 5, 1998; Julie Goldman, "Akshobya Buddha in his Abhirati Heaven: Treatment Report", in *Asian Arts* March 5, 1998 and at <http://www.asianart.com/waac/index.htm#figure01>.

⁵⁰ All Tibetan Buddhist monks receive some training in mandala construction, memorizing texts associated with specific mandalas as well as learning to apply the colours. At the Namgyal Monastery, associated with the Dalai Lama, the training period for monks who are to specialise in this art form, is three years.

⁵¹ Alsop 1998.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Earle J. Stone, "The Tibetan Wheel of Life", in *Arts of Asia*, Vol. 10:4, July-Aug. 1980.

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geometric composition; but to understand its true nature our notions of geometry must yield to those of dynamics".⁵⁵ Originally, a yantra was any technology or mechanical device which could be "harnessed to aid an enterprise" whether it be in architecture, warfare or recreation.⁵⁶ Some *yantras* were designed as visual aids to meditation and took a similar form to mandalas: "lotus flower circle, square area with four gates, orientation towards a centre".⁵⁷ The primary conceit of the *yantra* is that the material universe, represented in the diagrams, is an illusion: a self-projection in interdependence with further collective projections.⁵⁸ They differ from mandalas in that *yantras* are often (black and white) line-drawings only, frequently containing 'seed-syllables' (*mantras*) such as 'OM' or short injunctions. *Yantras* are not destroyed after their specific ritual use but usually enclosed as a talisman in an item of jewellery or clothing, or even eaten or buried.⁵⁹

While at least one historian has claimed mandalas in north Asia as a "megalithic legacy",⁶⁰ most agree that relatively primitive *mandalas* probably arrived in Tibet with the first transmission of Buddhism from India in the mid-7th century.⁶¹ Mirrors of the Chinese Han period (209-2 BCE, 25-220CE) evidence markings of the "T-shaped entrances of a mandala-palace",⁶² while caves in Yulin, Gansu Province, China display mandalas dating from 8th-9th century, a period of Tibetan rule in this region.⁶³ More significance is placed on the second transmission from India (1032-1227) when the Pala and Sena dynasties of Bihar and Bengal sent most texts and prototypes for painting and sculpture, to Tibet.⁶⁴

According to H. H. The Dalai Lama, there are three broad models of Buddhist mandala construction: "those which represent the outer universe, those which refer to a meditative view of the human body, and those visualized in the practice of deity yoga".⁶⁵

⁵⁴ In fact, the earliest surviving complete texts are Buddhist, and date to about AD 600; Jaina and Muslim tantras also survive. There are however references to tantras as *Artharva Veda*, indicating their early Hindu legitimacy (Philip Rawson, *The Art of Tantra*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1978, p. 178).

⁵⁵ Ajit Mookerjee, Foreword to *Yantra: The Tantric Symbol of Cosmic Unity*, Thames & Hudson, 1997, p. 6.

⁵⁶ Madhu Khanna, *Yantra: The Tantric Symbol of Cosmic Unity*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1997, p. 11.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Philip Rawson, *Tantra: The Indian Cult of Ecstasy*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1979, p. 116.

⁵⁹ Brauen 1997, p. 13.

⁶⁰ Siegbert Hummerl, cited in Brauen 1997, p. 121.

⁶¹ N. Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, Collins/Fontana, London, 1969, p. 146.

⁶² Brauen 1997, p. 121. It is known however that Buddhist monks and laymen were living in China as early as 65 CE (Smart 1969, p. 220).

⁶³ Denise P. Leidy, "Place and Process: Mandala Imagery in the Buddhist Art of Asia", in D. P. Leidy and Robert A. F. Thurman, *Mandala: The Architecture of Enlightenment*, Thames & Hudson, New York, 1997-8, p. 36.

⁶⁴ These early Chinese mandalas are notable for their 'no-nonsense' representation of the mundane in correspondence with the transcendent, grounding "the mandala deities in the everyday world and [making] the accessibility of enlightenment unmistakable". Leidy 1997-8, pp. 18, 33, and 37-8.

⁶⁵ H. H. The Dalai Lama in the Foreword to Brauen, 1997, p. 7. M. & J. Arguelles (1972, pp. 89-94) speak of "two fundamental genres" of mandalas: the Mandala as Cosmic Fortress, and the Mandala as the Recognition and Transmutation of Demonic Forces; they site The Wheel of Dependent Origination in the latter genre.

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The cosmic model, popularly known as 'palace architecture', presents the practitioner with a complex visual maze of gods and philosophic ideals embodied diagrammatically in 'cosmograms' or 'maps of the universe'⁶⁶. These mandalas are generally conceived as "a multilevel square palace with openings at the four cardinal points. The palace is placed in a multi-tiered circle. Additional figures are generally found outside this large circle".⁶⁷ The centre of such cosmograms is the site of "absolute truth",⁶⁸ and normally signified by a void, the residence of a god,⁶⁹ the site of Mount Meru,⁷⁰ or a specific form of the self, such as the king, in Kautilya's *Raj Mandala*.⁷¹

Though traditionally regarded as guides to enlightened individual behaviour, Dellios has written extensively of the potential use of palace architecture mandalas in generating positive models of interstate behaviour.

The language and signification of *mandala*, drawn from Indian political tradition (the *raj-mandala* of Kautilya) as well as Chinese *mandala* formations during the Middle Kingdom's height of power in dynastic times, is a fitting device for providing a culturally regional perspective ... for 21st century geostrategic conditions.⁷²

The second model, concerned with the body as the focus of meditation, takes several forms. One concerns the actual physiology of the eye, itself a mandala, and the significance of this for consciousness.

The Mandala is fundamentally a visual construct which is easily grasped by the eye, for it corresponds to the primary visual experience as well as to the structure of the organ of sight. ... The eye receives light and projects its images outward through the form of the pupil, that is, through the centre of an elementary circle.⁷³

Western psychotherapists were particularly interested in this aspect of mandalas during the early emergence of popular drug culture in the 1960s.

[The] mechanism of the mandala can also be understood in terms of the neurophysiology of the eye ... [as] the mandala is a depiction of the structure of the eye, the centre of the mandala corresponds to the foveal "blind spot". Since the "blind spot" is the exit from the eye to the visual system of the brain, by going "out" through the centre, you are going *in* to the brain. The Yogin finds the mandala in his own body. The mandala is an instrument for transcending the world of visually perceived phenomena by first centring them and turning them inward.⁷⁴

⁶⁶ Tibetan geography was not a well-informed discipline and until the 20th Century; 'the world' was a very abstract concept when used in Tibet. Though the word cosmos is frequently used, very often the word 'world' seems a more fitting translation.

⁶⁷ Leidy 1997, p. 17.

⁶⁸ Conze 1990, p. 248.

⁶⁹ An icon of divinity representing idealized human characteristics.

⁷⁰ Mount Meru was the mythical centre of the Indian universe.

⁷¹ See quote from *Arthashastra*, page 4.

⁷² Rosita Dellios, 'China and India: New Mandalas of Power in 21st Century Geopolitics', 2000.

⁷³ Arguelles 1972, p. 23.

⁷⁴ Ralph Metzner & Timothy Leary, "On Programming Psychedelic Experiences", in *Psychedelic Review*, No. 9, 1967, pp. 4-19.

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This particular focus has relevance for the Wheel of Dependent Origination as the role of the eye and other senses in the psychological conditioning of the individual, is but one aspect of the Wheel's outer rim.

The most fully elaborated tantra, focusing on the body, is the Hindu system of *Chakra* meditations which also has a tradition within Tantric Buddhism. These chakra mandalas allow practitioners to internalize and store psychic information (in mandala coding) within the core organ systems and the central and autonomic nervous systems of the body.

A third related tantra of the body is Yoga, enumerated by Patanjali about 400 BCE and enabling greater degrees of psychophysical coordination and harmony.⁷⁵ The range of already-globalized Asian martial arts and physical disciplines, from T'ai Chi to Tae Kwon Do and the anathematized Falung Gung, owe a great deal to these earlier Hindu, Buddhist and even Jaina theoretical explorations of the mind-body continuum.

The third model, deity mandalas, is concerned with elevating mundane perceptions through the agency of 'divine' inspiration.

There is one leading pattern which coordinates all the many possible mandalas of [Vajrayana] Buddhism ... it is that of the peaceful or Dhyani Buddhas, supplemented by matching mandalas of 'Knowledge Holders' and 'Wrathful' devatas.⁷⁶

Against varied backdrops of scenery and palace architecture, from one to an infinite number of transcendent beings may be contemplated and identified with or 'embodied'. All deity manifestations are to be understood ultimately by the practitioner as the expression of their own human potential. "The limitless number of peaceful and wrathful deities and their host of retinues correspond to the multiplicity of the methods necessary to transform beings".⁷⁷

All three models have significance for the antagonistic realm of international relations. Models that site ideals at the centre of the universe contrast dramatically with "our technologically-oriented and consumerist world, and the attitude that the universe - with man as the centre - belongs only to us and is our rightful property".⁷⁸ The intellectual tradition that assumes man as the acme of divine creation is logically bound to "the arrogant notion that evolution has a predictable direction leading toward human life".⁷⁹ The ultimate evolute is bound by the same needs for fresh air, water, nutrition and physical security as are whales, worms and wombats; all species are both ancestrally linked and contemporaneously interdependent. An authentic 'world

⁷⁵ Though Patanjali is thought to have based his text, *The Yoga Sutra*, on a tradition dating to circa 800 BCE, the most popular dating of his text is circa 150 BCE. "The work also shows influences from Mahayana Buddhism ..." (*The Divine Library* 1992, pp. 58-60).

⁷⁶ The Dhyani Buddhas: Vairocana, Ratnasambhava, Aksobhya, Amoghasiddhi and Amitabha, are primary manifestations of enlightenment. They also manifest as the primary emotional and sensory hindrances to enlightenment. Each Buddha also has a wrathful guardian figure (Rawson 1978, p. 178).

⁷⁷ Ricard, Matthieu "Introduction to the Purpose and Symbolism of the Mandala in Tibetan Buddhism", in Denise P. Leidy and Robert A. F. Thurman, *Mandala: The Architecture of Enlightenment*, Thames & Hudson, New York, 1997-8, pp.159.

⁷⁸ Brauen 1997, p. 124.

⁷⁹ Gould, Stephen J. (ed.), *The Book of Life*, Random House, Sydney, 1993, p. 10.

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order' must represent all phylogenetic orders - from red-necked primates to butterflies and intestinal parasites;⁸⁰ towards that end, ideals are the only possible means.

The Wheel of Life mandala⁸¹ both satisfies and fails the criteria of these three forms: with its focus on mortality, it belongs to the cosmic or global order; with its core representation of psychophysical 'poisons' (delusion, desire and aggression) it makes a significant statement about the human body as well as the responsibilities and consequences of 6.2 billion co-existing human bodies; and with its domination by the deity of Death, it invites identification with the destructive forces within both the individual, and as is so manifest in this century, the collective national capacity, for destruction.

On the other hand, the Wheel of Life is hardly a cosmogram of Utopia. With its outer wheel presenting 'twelve steps to Dystopia', it is the road map to Hell, a 'Lonely Planet Guide' into an alien realm inhabited not by gods, but monsters. It is a warning, not a promise. But it is also a Buddhist teaching, and Buddhist teachings are, by tradition, replete with the apparatus of Ideal conclusions and recommendations.

Though traditionally viewed as a model pertaining to the individual, the early political associations of the Wheel of Dependent Origination, Dellios' application of mandalas to Asian political architecture, and the capacity of this particular mandala to generate a new global-historical model, should encourage a wider reading of the 'Wheel'.

As Buddhism developed its monastic and lay institutions, it was dependent upon the goodwill of kings and elites, and difficult compromises had to be made between spiritual goals and secular necessities. "I prescribe monks, that you meet kings' wishes", was the Buddha's public comment on King Bimbisara's request for a postponement of the monsoon retreat, and seems to have been an injunction widely applied.⁸²

From the time of Asoka on, noble patronage provided a vital support for many Buddhist institutions. But such largesse has often carried a high price. Worldly status, wealth, and political power often undermined the spiritual vitality of the Buddhist community, distracting its leaders from their religious objectives and attracting those more concerned with worldly rewards than spiritual pursuits.⁸³

As the *Arthashastra* reveals, kings of early northern India as elsewhere, established their mandalas of power through the use of coercive measures. The Buddhist monastic institution of the Sangha, was bound by its renunciant claims, to abjure the political realm; the *Digha Nikaya* (1, 7) lists things monks and nuns were forbidden from: "talk

⁸⁰ Though any two species would serve this short list, I have chosen butterflies because of the well-known aphorism about a butterfly's wing in an Amazonian rainforest setting in train environmental catastrophes elsewhere around the globe; and intestinal parasites because, despite their devastating effects in tropical areas, research into their treatment is precluded due to their absence from developed states.

⁸¹ An image of the Wheel of Life Mandala, sometimes called the Wheel of Rebirth, can be found on the Web at <http://www.iol.ie/~taeger/thkas/wgr.html>

⁸² *Vinaya I:138* Cited in R. F. Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1988, p. 116.

⁸³ Coleman, James William *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of An Ancient Tradition*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, p. 54.

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of kings, of robbers, of ministers of state; of war, of terrors, of battles".⁸⁴ Buddhist individuals, however, were enjoined at all times to think critically, and to observe the social world from a detached perspective. Buddhist mandalas then, have political legitimacy for those who tread the samsaric paths beyond the monastic walls.

According to tradition, the following stanzas were composed by the Buddha to be inscribed with the mandala of Dependent Origination, wherever it was drawn.⁸⁵

Undertaking this and leaving that,
Enter into the teaching of the Buddha.
Like an elephant in a thatch house,
Destroy the forces of the Lord of Death.

Those who with thorough conscientiousness
Practice this disciplinary doctrine
Will forsake the wheel of birth,
Bringing suffering to an end.

Suffering is not just an individual experience. As the term 'structural violence' implies, it is also an institutionalised social construct.⁸⁶ Mandalas as models of psychological conditioning and mental dependency point to the links that bind and link societies, states and institutions through diverse layers of interdependency. Mandalas therefore are not just tools to heighten religious awareness, but also serve as insights into the way the 'International System' is cognitively constructed with elements of structural violence, order and chaos, largely dependent on the nature of their dominant, central focus (in this case, the three poisons of ignorance, desire and aggression). In the 21st century the international community might well remember that its very ideals, based on particular definitions of knowledge, wealth and history, run the risk of excluding others who become its demons.

⁸⁴ Gombrich 1988, p. 81.

⁸⁵ H.H. The Dalai Lama, in discourse on The Meaning of Life and Dependent Origination, at <http://www.infinite.org/bodhiline/wheel.html>.

⁸⁶ For a brief exposition of the concept of 'structural violence', see Robert Gilman, "Structural Violence", *In Context, A Quarterly of Humane Sustainable Culture*, Autumn, 1983, p. 3.