

Relationship between Media and Buddhist Culture: The Case of Conch and its Colour

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The relationship between media and Buddhist culture are of the same nature, of cause and effect, and of the theory of interdependence. Like the conch and its colour, they are inseparable and cease to exist on their own.

Mgon po klu sgrub, the founder of Buddhist philosophy, while talking about the relationship between media and Buddhist culture, some 1900 years ago, had spelt out the following in his *Dbu ma rtsa ba shes rab*:

*rten cing 'brel 'byung ma gtogs pa//
chos 'ga' yod pa ma yin no//*

All comprehensible phenomena are based on the theory of cause and effect and summarized in the three kinds of understandings (the non-living ones composed of numerous atomic particles; the living possessing mind capable of comprehension; and the neutral, a buffer zone between living and non-living). Yet their origin is inter-dependent. They are not born out of emptiness and cannot exist on their own.

Of the different views, as perceived by different schools of Buddhism and the scientists and heretics, which are innumerable, I intend to bring to light an array of views based on the general outlook of Mahayana Buddhism concerning the relationship between media and Buddhist culture. These views are something that we cannot do without, for not only realizing our present welfare but also for our ultimate realization of enlightenment. Just like the conch and its colour, media and culture are two inseparable entities. Therefore, I will summarize the relationship between media and Buddhist culture.

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According to the nature of phenomenal changes, media can be categorized as *rang bzhin khams kyi stobs las 'byung ba'i brda brgyud* (self-born and ultimate media) and *kun rdzob rten 'brel rdzas sbyor gyi nus pa las 'byung ba'i brda rgyud* (conventional media born due to nano-technologies).

As regards the self-born and ultimate media, an excerpt from rGyal tshab byams pa mgon po, in *Rgyud bla ma*, says:

*rdzogs sangs sku ni 'phro phyir dang//
de bzhin nyid dbyer med phyir dang//
rigs yod phyir na lus can kun//
rtag tu sangs rgyas snying po can//*

From the tiniest of insects to Buddha *Amitabha* himself, all living creatures possess the seed of Buddha nature. All animals possess 32 marks of a great man and 80 physical perfections of Buddha. There is no difference in the Buddha nature of the divine beings residing in the Buddha land, and the ones who are cycling in the *samsara*. All animals residing in the six realms possess the seed of Buddha nature from times immemorial, and therefore, possess the potential of Buddhahood at all times.

Even, Lord Buddha himself was enlightened as *Dharma kaya* from primordial times. He, at all times, in his perfect abode of *Wogmin* or *Akanishta*. Through his perfect body, *sambokaya*, adorned with the 13 precious ornaments; the perfect entourage of disciples, who attained the ten stages of *bodhisattvas*; his perfect doctrine, the pure Vajrayana Buddhism; the perfect time, turning the wheel of Dharma at all times; and through the numerous and diverse manifestations, *Nirmanakaya*, he strives for the benefit of all sentient beings. This is what is called ultimate media.

The following lines from *Dbu ma* make it clear:

*slar yang mi gyo sku lnga khyod kyis srid gsum byon nas
sprul mams kyis//
gshegs pa dang ni bltams dang byang chub zhi ba'i 'khor lo
'ang ston par mdzad//*

The Buddha, by nature, is stable and unwavering from the Dharmakaya, yet, through the media of the three kinds of

magical and miraculous exhibitions, through his numerous physical manifestations, while in the southern realm of human beings as a prince of King Zeytsang (Sudhodana) and Queen Juma Lhazey (Maya Devi), he acts as a protector and a source of refuge for the people, at the same time, gaining enlightenment in the western realm, and turning the wheel of Dharma in the eastern realm. Like Brahma, the king of gods, on the throne he is stable and unwavering, where, through his miraculous media of body, every god sees him/her at all times.

Through his miraculous media of speech, he preaches his doctrine to multiple audiences of gods, demi-gods, spirits, human beings and all animals; each of them hearing in their own medium of language, making it easily comprehensible while, at the same time, turning the wheel of Dharma.

Through his miraculous media of mind, like the wish-fulfilling tree of the gods and the precious vase which fulfills the wishes of all, the Buddha also, due to his past prayers for mankind and the power of his compassionately awakened nature, disappoints none.

Buddha, having known the grasping competence of different people through his clairvoyance, taught the *Hinayana* and *Mahayana* (as the two vehicles of Buddhism) options to people, to choose the best for them. To understand this miraculous nature of media is one of the guiding principles of Buddhist philosophy.

The Buddha and the Bodhisattvas (who have attained complete liberation from the cycle of sufferings) have abandoned the defilements of attachment, anger, ignorance, and the comparatively minute unidentifiable defilement of self-attachment and accomplished the knowledge of the past, present and the future as if in possession of the magic crystal ball.

These Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are born with the peculiarities of ultimate media, clairvoyance, and miraculous powers. These qualities are inborn in them. For example, the twelve activities demonstrated by Buddha Shakyamuni, for the benefit of all sentient beings, after his arrival in this *samsaric* world, are clearly mentioned in *Rgyud bla ma*:

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*Chos kyi sku las ma gyo bzhin//
Sprul pa'I rang bzhin sna tshogs kyis//
Skye ba mngon par mkhyen pa dang//
Dga' ldan gnas nas 'pho ba dang//
Lhums su bzhugs dang bltams pa dang//
Bzo ba'I gnas la mkhas pa dang//
Btsun mo'I 'khor gyi rol pa dang//
Nges byung dka' ba spyad pa dang//
Byang chub snying por gshegs pa dang//
Bdud sde bcom dang rdzogs sangs rgyas//
Mya ngan 'das par gshegs mdzad mams//
Yongs su ma dag zhing mams su//
Srid pa ji srid gnas par ston//*

Even though the basic nature of Buddha himself is immovable from the truth body (*Dharmakaya*), he, through his emanations of media skills or by exercising his divine power of sight, can foresee the sufferings of all kinds of living beings. Through his divine power of hearing, he can hear the sound of even the smallest insects and understand the different languages, both articulate and inarticulate, of all living beings. Through his knowledge of understanding others' mind, he understands the thoughts of all living beings. Through his miraculous knowledge, he knows the events of others' former lives and future possibilities of existence and also the circumstances under which he will die and be reborn. By exercising one's miraculous knowledge, it is possible to move one's body without being visible. He possesses the power of remembering the acts of one's former existence or lives. Exercising one's knowledge of decay and destruction, one can quickly attain the state of the omniscient by purifying oneself of all mental impurities. By exercising one's power of knowing all living beings, one can perceive the stages of one's moral perfection or culture.

Such an enlightened being, as Buddha, set foot on this earth. Using his miraculous power of ultimate media, for the

cause of the sentient beings, he firstly, had the noble thought of liberating all sentient beings. And to achieve this, he took rebirth in the form of noble kings, king of the different animals—the king of geese for instance—for five hundred generations. During these periods, he practiced and accumulated good merits through generosity, morality, patience, perseverance, and meditation. Through wisdom he accumulated the non-conceptual merits. He accumulated all the merits through three aeons. And from the joyful realms of the gods, in the form of an ash-coloured, six-tusked elephant, he entered the womb of Queen *sgyu ma lha mdzes*. After ten months the queen gave birth to Lord Buddha from her right ribs. No sooner was he born, he took seven steps in all four directions and then uttered the following line:

Nga ni 'jig rten 'di nang mchog yin no//

I am the most precious one in this world.

Henceforth, through his different deeds in the three realms, he demonstrated infinite miraculous emanations. They are all examples of ultimate media, devoid of its original nature, like magic and dreams. The Buddha himself said:

Nga ni ci yang ma gsungs par//

Sems can rnam la khyab brdal snang//

Neither was I born in this world nor had I attained enlightenment at Bodhgaya; I did not preach religion in true sense, but people heard a lot of teachings in their own capacities.

In Rgyud bla ma,

Bde bzhin gshegs pa mkha' bzhin dam pa yi//

Dbang po drug don nyams su myong ba'I rgyu//

Originally, the Buddha's nature is like an empty sky and his activities like clouds and rain. Likewise, whatever we see are the functions of six objects (form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and invisibility) and six subjects (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind). These are demonstrations of the miraculous form of media used by the Buddha. For instance, in *Mkhas 'jug by 'jam mgon mi pham rin po che*:

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*Sangs rgyas phrin las rtag khyab lhun grub ste//
Rnam par mi rtog bzhin du 'gog med snang//
Gang zhig brgya byin mnga dang sprin bzhin dang//
Tshangs nyid yid bzhin rin chen nor rgyal bzhin//*

And, in Dbu ma rtsa ba shes rab:

*Bdag las ma yin gzhan las min//
Gnyis las ma yin rgyu med min//
Dngos po gang dag gang na yang//
Skye ba nam yang yod ma yin//*

Neither from oneself nor from another object,
Nor from both, nor without any cause,
Does anything whatever,
Anywhere arise.

These are not originally conceived, but perceived by our senses. For instance, Brahma, the king of gods, can alone manifest into thousands of similar forms and through the big drum of dharma of the Gods, the gods can hear the teachings of their own choice through melodic sound, even though, it is no different emanating from the same drum. This is how I understand ultimate media.

I shall now talk about the conventional media. It is, of course, based on the Buddhist perceptions. In *Spyod 'jug* by *rgyal sras zhi ba lha*:

*Ji srid rkyen rnam 'tshogs gyur pa//
De srid sgyu ma'ang 'byung bar 'gyur//*

All inner and outer phenomena are based on the theoretical media of cause and effect and the result is the information that is passed on. It is all interdependent. Hence, in the Buddhist perspective, interdependence is the ruling factor, which is also clearly mentioned in the teachings of Buddha and also in many renowned scriptures which ensued after the teachings of Buddha. All inner and outer phenomena originate due to interdependence. Had it not been for these cause and conditions, it has no entity of its own. It is not as if it suddenly falls from the sky and begins to exist

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on its own. According to *Mkhas 'jug by 'jam mgon mi pham rin po che*, all inner phenomena originate from the 12 causes and 6 conditions.

The 12 causes are:

Ignorance;
Compositional factor;
Consciousness;
Name and body;
Six sense-organs;
Contact;
Feelings;
Desire;
Sensual enthrallment;
Procreation;
Birth;
Old age and death.

The six conditions are:

Earth;
Water ;
Fire;
Wind;
Sky;
Consciousness.

The seven causes of the outer phenomena are:

Seed;
Seedling;
Leaves;
Plant;
Trunk;
Flower;
Fruit.

The six conditions are:

Earth;
Water;
Fire;
Wind;
Sky;
Season.

To grow and develop from the seed to the fruits, the six conditions must work together. Only because of the presence of these media of cause and conditions and their dual efforts, does the seed grow and develop to a plant, grow flowers, and gradually bear fruits. The *Mngon pa* and *Mkhas 'jug* cite six objects, six organs and the six consciousness constituting the 18 elements, the presence of which results in the flow and communication of information.

For example, when we see the outer object as a beautiful form, the inner sense of sight perceives it as a beautiful form and the eyes see it so and we know what we see is a beautiful form. Conversely, if what we see is not something pleasant to look at, a similar message is conveyed and we don't appreciate what we see. Of course, what is beautiful and what is not lies in the eyes of the beholder. Similarly, if the object we see is neutral (neither good nor bad) our feelings also remain neutral. It is only the combination of object, organ and consciousness that gives rise to the flow of information and communication through the media mentioned above and the ones following hereafter.

Likewise, if we hear an external sound, the inner hearing perceives it as either pleasant or not, and the external organ (ear) hears it so. If the sound is pleasant we get a feeling of comfort and if otherwise, the feeling also reverses. Similarly, if the outer object is a smell, the inner sense of smell perceives it and the external organ (nose) smells it as either pleasantness or foulness. The feeling you derive again depends on whether the smell is foul or pleasant.

Similarly, if the outer object is the taste of any food or snacks, the inner sense of taste takes control and the organ of taste (tongue) feels the taste. The feeling you derive again

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depends on your choice and experience. If the outer object is touch, the inner sense of touch perceives and conveys the message to the external organ (skin) which comes in contact with the outer object.

Therefore, all the outer objects, inner sense and the sense organs must work together in a coordinated manner for the message to be passed. They are all interdependent on each other. Were they to exist on their own, they carry no functions yet when all of these work together, they become the integral part of our lives.

Lord Buddha said:

Chos mams thams cad rgyu las byung//

De rgyu de bzhin gshegs pas gsungs//

When all the causes and conditions of media are fulfilled, we are able to see with our eyes, hear with our ears, and feel with our hands. Today, with the help of television, radio, telephone, mobile, and magazines, among many, we are able to see different places at the click of remote controls, which are thousands of miles away beyond seas and oceans, with our eyes. We can have breakfast in New Delhi, lunch in Rome, evening tea in Europe, and dinner at New York in America. A wife in Thimphu can easily talk to her husband in Washington, and we can of course watch the World Cup football match in our sitting and bedrooms. In a way, these are all manifestations of the feats achieved by Lord Buddha some thousands of years ago.

What was thought to be impossible yesterday are possible today and what we perceive to be impossible today will one day become possible in the near future. Lord Buddha himself said;

Ma 'ongs dus kyi mtha' ma//

Nga ni yi ge gzugs su byon//

In the years to come,

I shall come to the world in the form of alphabets.

And as mentioned in *Mkhas 'jug*; the Buddha himself had promised of this unchangeable Vajra speech.

Tshe dang dus dang nyon mongs dang//

Lta dang sems can snyigs lng'o//

In the future, amidst change and development, the Buddha will take the form of words and pictures (what we today call television, newspapers, and magazines) in order to teach the sentient beings about the media propounded by Buddha himself. I feel that I may not have to go in much detail to explain this. Citing an example from the times of Buddha himself, Buddha was once requested by one of his principal supporters; King *gzugs can snying po*, to be allowed to make a life-like portrait of the Buddha. Buddha immediately consented and the best of all painters were summoned and involved in this noble venture. However, as experienced as these painters were, they were not able to get the correct measurements of Buddha's body features. It seemed to be growing on some days and shrinking on some other days. The Buddha then made a reflection of his body on the water and then asked the painters to draw based on the reflection. The images that we see today are a result of this media. The cause is Buddha's prayers, the condition the pool and the king's devotion.

Similarly, all these technological inventions which have become indispensable aspects of our daily lives are a result of the five hundred great prayers by Buddha when he was a bodhisattva in the service of sentient beings as mentioned in *Bzang spyod smon lam*. Of course, we find it difficult to believe and find explanations on many occasions. This is also evident in *Spyod 'jug*. How skillful and flexible a person may be, he can never climb on his own shoulder. We can see the outer world with our eyes but it cannot see itself.

Different mechanisms of media are inbuilt in human body. Therefore, Lord Buddha and his disciples *slob dpon phyogs glang* and *chos grags* stated in their valid cognizable treatise that what can be objectively visible is *mngon sum tshad ma*, what is invisible but can be conjectured through mental visualization is *rjes pa tshad ma*, and what cannot be

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conjectured but can be understood is *lung tshad ma* (through scripture). These three *tshad ma* help to communicate the phenomena of nature; whether they are what they are or not. *Tshad ma rnam 'grel* mentions the following, with regard to the above three:

Tshad mar gyur pa 'gro la phan bzhed pa//
Ston pa dbe gshegs skyob la phyag 'tshal lo//

The four valid reasons support that Lord Buddha is the most supreme and perfect source of all logic. They include his awakening mind that strives to benefit sentient beings; teacher of all sentient beings; attainment of final realizations; and the supreme protector of all sentient beings. For instance, the presence of water birds indicates the presence of water; the smoke indicates the presence of fire. Such kind of media follows the right path that is vital for all people to tread.

Therefore, like the conch and its color, every phenomenon is interdependent and the moment they are separated, they cease to exist on their own. Today we notice a lot of new technological inventions. Just as the sun cannot be covered with our palms, we cannot stop these inventions. What is important is that these inventions be put to correct and useful purposes.

Chos rje rtsang pa rgya ras said:

Legs pa'I phyogs su rten 'brel bzang po bsgrigs//
Phun sum tshogs pa rang gis byas pas chog//

To create right conditions for excellence,

Its good enough to do our best.

We do not have to go beyond ourselves to look for new ideas and inventions, it is all within ourselves. It is all a matter of discovering things within ourselves. If we work according to situations, all our efforts will bear fruits of success and accomplishment.

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