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The Concept of a “Creator God” in Tantric Buddhism

by *Eva K. Dargyay*

I. Introduction

This contribution is provocative in that it attempts to modify some well established conceptions of the nature of Buddhist religion. To initiate a debate concerning the modes of our understanding the consummate reality (*śūnyatā*) so that it will incorporate, and eventually integrate, the tantric experience of pristine bliss (*mahāsukha*) would be truly rewarding. In order to raise doubts about the adequacy of our understanding of reality in the Buddhist sense I use a concept commonly negated in Buddhism, i.e., that of a “Creator God.”

Like many other terms in philosophy and religion the term “Creator God” is ambivalent and multi-faceted, although most people might affirm that they know what the term means. The myths of many tribal populations who live in an exclusively oral tradition tell us that a suprahuman being shaped the world and its sentient beings out of some molding matter (clay, dirt, etc.) at the inception of the universe. In this mythic context, God resembles a craftsman and God’s creation is similar to the act of manufacturing. In India some of the Munda tribes have preserved such myths.¹ Such mythic understandings of God as a craftsman bear on philosophical elaborations of God as creator of the universe, despite all the differences between the act of “molding” the world by using a given material and the *creatio ex nihilo*.

Such a modified concept of a mythic Creator God is well documented in later Hinduism, when the popular gods, such as Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Devī became predominant. But it seems to be difficult to trace such a concept at the time of the historical

Buddha. Regardless of this situation, the Buddhist texts argue against the inconsistency of such a mythic creator whose actual being was only superficially coordinated with the current philosophical streams. This attitude resulted in the assumption that the Buddhists deny God in general, without ever bothering to define the exceedingly ambiguous term "god." In the following paragraphs I shall survey this tendency.

Buddhist thinkers continued throughout history to point to the incompatibility of the vision of a mythic divine craftsman who manufactures the world and the philosophical claim that God is the totally other who, beyond the limitations of space and time, is the absolute source and origin for the universe, but not its causal beginning.

Kamaleswar Bhattacharya has pointed out that the Upaniṣadic *paramātmān* is not rejected in the Pāli texts, as they negate solely the popular idea of an unchanging, independent individual *ātman* imparted to the person.² Furthermore he comes to the conclusion that some texts in the Pāli canon identify *dhammakāya* with *brahmakāya*.³

The main part of this article will present a Buddhist text preserved in the Tibetan canon that uses theistic language when referring to the ultimate, which is seen as the Mind as the focal point of the entire universe. This text seems to be much indebted to Yogācāra thought. Some typical and informative quotations from this text might help us to redefine the current understanding of the Buddhist vision of the ultimate and whether or not we may label it "God."

II. Buddhism, a Non-theistic Religion

When Buddhism came to be known in the West, many scholars and philosophers were surprised to encounter for the first time a non-theistic religion, a phenomenon which seemed to entail a self-contradiction. A. Schopenhauer said:

Through the agreement of all genuine testimonies and original documents, it is put beyond all doubt that Buddhism, the religion that is the foremost on earth by virtue of the overwhelming number of its adherents, is absolutely and expressly atheistic.⁴

The earliest phase of Buddhist scripture is given in the Pāli Canon. Here the concept of God is presented and discussed exclusively from a late Upaniṣadic and Vedic background. God is understood as Brahmā, the ruler and creator of the world, yet incapable of promoting wisdom, gaining insight, or coping with the Buddhist wise men. One passage, taken from a *sutta* in the *Dīgha Nikāya*, will demonstrate the over-all character of that argumentation.

"And it was not long, Kevaddha, before the Great Brahmā appeared. The monk drew close and asked: 'Where, friend, do the four great elements—earth, water, fire, and air—cease, leaving no trace behind?' The Great Brahmā replied: 'I, monk, am Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Supreme, the Mighty, the All-seeing, the Ruler, the Lord of all, the Controller, the Creator, the Chief of all, appointing to each his place, the Ancient of days, the Father of all that is and will be.' Again the monk asked Brahmā: 'I did not query, friend, whether you are indeed Brahmā, the Great Brahmā, the Mighty . . . , but rather as to where the four elements earth, water, fire, and air, cease, leaving no trace behind.' Again Brahmā answered: 'I am Brahmā, the Great Brahmā' And a third time the monk addressed Brahmā: 'I did not query, friend, whether you are indeed Brahmā, . . . but rather as to where the four elements . . . cease, leaving no trace behind.' Then the Great Brahmā took that monk by the arm and led him aside, and said: 'These gods of the *brahmā*-world here, monk, hold that there is nothing I cannot see, nothing I do not know, and nothing that is not manifest to me. Therefore I did not answer you in their presence. I do not know, monk, where the four elements of earth, water, fire, and air cease without leaving a trace. You have acted wrong, you have done ill by ignoring the Exalted One and going elsewhere to find an answer to your question. Go now to the Exalted One, ask him your question, and accept his answer.'"⁵

In the Pāli Canon it is only Brahmā as visualized by the late Upaniṣadic and Vedic Brahmins who is rejected. We would rarely find any passage rejecting the idea of a philosophical God, of a Creator as such.

The next prominent step in the development of Buddhist thought was the rise of Mahāyāna, which led to a loss in creativity in Hīnayāna thought. The *Abhidharmakośa* marks this phase of

transformation very well; its author, Vasubandhu, was first a follower of the Hinayāna tradition and later a follower and promoter of the Mahāyāna tradition. In the second chapter of his *Abhidharmakośa*, Vasubandhu discusses the *indriya*, i.e., the potentialities, a term which identifies in particular the sensuous fields and in general everything that exhibits the capacity to cause something. For this reason, the last passage within chapter II deals with causes and results. Within this context, Vasubandhu enters into a lengthy dialogue with the Hindu theists. Their claim that *īśvara*, the primordial God and Creator, is the only cause of the universe is rejected by Vasubandhu. His reasons are that if God were the first cause everything that results from this cause had to come into existence at once and not gradually. That means the universe had to be created in one step and not in the process of a long-lasting evolution, as was commonly accepted in ancient India. Given this viewpoint, Vasubandhu asks the Hindu theists what caused God to prevent everything from coming into existence at the same moment. They answer that He did not wish so, which leads Vasubandhu to speculate that this Creator is subject to something outside of Himself that makes His will changing, an assumption that contradicts the concept of a primordial God and Creator.⁶

Śāntideva, an 8th century Buddhist master, talks of God in the 9th chapter of his *Bodhicaryāvatāra* as follows:

‘God is the cause of the world.’ Tell me, who is God? The elements? Then why all the trouble about a mere word? (119) Besides the elements are manifold, impermanent, without intelligence or activity; without anything divine or venerable; impure. Also such elements as earth, etc., are not God.(120)

Neither is space God; space lacks activity, nor is *ātman*—that we have already excluded. Would you say that God is too great to conceive? An unthinkable creator is likewise unthinkable, so that nothing further can be said. (121)⁷

Here Śāntideva criticizes the shortcomings and failures of the adversaries’ definition of the concept of a Creator God. He, like Vasubandhu, is not interested in establishing a philosophy that might allow for a concept of a Creator God to be included into the Buddhist thought. However, the Buddhist philosophers did point out that the Hindu thinkers’ concept of God was inconsis-

tent and irrational and had therefore to be rejected.⁸ Thus far, I have summarized a viewpoint commonly accepted by the followers of Buddha's teaching as well as by modern critical scholars.

III. The Kun byed rgyal po'i mdo as a Theistic Buddhist Scripture

The *Kun byed rgyal po'i mdo* (hereafter KBG) has not so far been studied by any modern scholar. For this reason I want here to give a few data regarding the various editions of the text and outline the major events which characterize the transmitting of the text through the ages.

The KBG is a Buddhist canonical text and included in all Kanjur editions⁹ as well as in two collections of Tantras (*Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, hereafter NGB, and *Vairocana rgyud 'bum*, hereafter VGB)¹⁰ that were not unanimously accepted by all Buddhist traditions in Tibet.

In the Kanjur editions and in the NGB the complete title of the KBG is *Chos thams cad rdzogs pa chen po byang chub kyi sems kun byed rgyal po* which might be translated as *The All-Creating King, i.e., Bodhicitta, as the Great Perfection of All Phenomena*. In the VGB the title is somewhat different: *Byang chub kyi sems kun byed rgyal po lta ba nam mkha' ltar mtha' dbus med pa'i rgyud nam mkha'i snying po mchog gi don gsang ba mchog gi mdo lung brgyad cu rtsa bzhi pa: Bodhicitta, the All-Creating King, or: A Tantra Free from Segregations Like the Sky, a Scripture in 84 Chapters of Utmost Secrecy, the Essence of the Sky*. The texts preserved in the 5 Kanjur editions as well as that in the NGB are almost totally identical, but the text in the VGB lacks the first of the three parts of the KBG.

The history of this text is still obscured by mysteries. According to Samten Karmay, Pho-brang Zhi-ba-'od, a member of the royal house of Guge (West Tibet) issued in 1032 a statement wherein he alleged that a text with the title *Kun byed* was forged by a man named Drang-nga Shag-tshul.¹¹ It is unclear whether this statement refers to the KBG as it is extant today.

In the voluminous history of Tibetan Buddhism, the *Blue Annals*, the KBG is mentioned only twice. In both cases the reference to the KBG is peripheral. First, it is said that the

Rnying ma master Zhig-po Bdud-rtsi (1149–1199) was an expert in the 24 Tantras of the Mind Section (*sems sde*) and that among them there were 10 texts of the *kun byed* cycle.¹² Second, the annals report that 'Gos Lo-tsā-ba Gzhon-nu-dpal (1392–1481), the author of the *Blue Annals*, was introduced to the KBG.¹³

In the modern Kanjur editions the KBG is part of the *Rnying rgyud* (Old Tantras) section, which contains those Tantras which were translated into Tibetan during the First Period of Dissemination of Buddhism (*snga dar*, 7th–9th centuries). But the *Gsar rgyud* (New Tantras) which were translated during the Second Period of Dissemination (*phyi dar*, 10th century and after) gained more authority and therefore constitute the main part of the canonical Tantras. The authenticity of the Old Tantras was doubted by several Buddhist masters who lived in Guge and Ladakh during the 11th and 12th centuries,¹⁴ and many modern scholars of the West followed their line.¹⁵

Bu-ston (1290–1364), who compiled one of the first editions of the Tibetan Tripitaka, did not include the Old Tantras in the Canon, although he explicitly stated that two of his teachers saw the Sanskrit originals of the Old Tantras in Bsam-yas and that therefore he had no reason to doubt the authenticity of these Tantras.¹⁶ We do not know what caused Bu-ston to exclude the Old Tantras from the Canon, although he was—according to his own words—aware that at least some of the Old Tantras were translated from Sanskrit texts.

Si-tu Dge-ba'i-blo-gros (alias Kun-dga'-rdo-rje), Bu-ston's contemporary, is said to have put together another version of the Tibetan Tripitaka, i.e., the *Tshal pa bka' 'gyur*, wherein he included the Old Tantras.¹⁷ Nevertheless the Old Tantras are an integral part of all present editions of the Tibetan Tripitaka. This is an important fact, in particular, when we regard the exceptional ideas formulated in one of the Old Tantras—the KBG.

In the colophons of the various editions of the KBG the Indian master Śrīsimhaprabha is said to have translated the text in cooperation with the Tibetan monk Vairocana. The latter is a well-known historical figure of the 8th century. At this time Padmasambhava integrated the pre-Buddhist local beliefs into the Buddhist system of thought and laid the foundation for the successful development of the typically Tibetan form of Buddhism. In this task he was supported by king Khri-srong-lde-

btsan (ruled from 755 until 797), who built the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet, where seven young Tibetans were ordained as the first Buddhist monks, Vairocana one of them.¹⁸ But the "Indian master Śrīsimhaprabha" cannot be traced as the translator of any other canonical text, nor is he mentioned in Dpa'-bogsug-lag's chapter on the Indian *paṇḍitas*.¹⁹

The KBG is divided into three parts, or "books." The first book, which comprises 57 chapters, explains the Dharma as "similar to heaven." The nature of the ultimate, addressed as All-Creating King, is explained therein. The second book, of 12 chapters, instructs on how to visualize the All-Creating King. The third book, of 15 chapters, deals mainly with Buddhist doctrine and practice. The entire KBG is arranged in 84 chapters, some only one page in length. For the present purpose the first book is the most informative one. In the first 45 chapters a kind of ontology of the All-Creating King is taught, while the remaining 12 chapters develop the conclusion that "there is nothing to be practised and nothing to be attained"—a common claim within the spiritual and mystical traditions of Buddhism.

IV. *The Ontology of the Kun byed rgyal po'i mdo*

The All-Creating King and His Entourage

As a common practice, all Buddhist scriptures begin by describing the situation where and when the Buddha taught the doctrine and to whom. In the Pāli Canon we get precise information with regard to the ancient Indian geography and society, while in the Mahāyāna sūtras the environment and location is mainly mythical, although monks, nuns, and Bodhisattvas are listening to the Buddha's preaching.²⁰ The Tantras, however, introduce the reader into a world of complex symbolism. The *Hevajra Tantra*, for instance, starts:

Thus I have heard—at one time the Lord dwelt in bliss with the Vajrayoginī who is the Body, Speech, and Mind of all the Buddhas. There the Lord pronounced these words: . . .²¹

Another famous Tantra, the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, starts with almost identical words:

Thus I have heard: At one time the Exalted One dwelt in the womb of the female Diamond who is the Body, Speech, Mind, and Heart of all the Buddhas.²²

In most Tantras the Buddha enters a discourse either with his female consort or with Vajrasattva, who submits his questions to the Buddha. The KBG Tantra however starts in a different way:

At a place of No-Beneath (*'og min*), in the space of reality as such, in the sphere of facticity, at the centre of mind itself, in the mansion of undefiled wisdom, at a time when He gave that sermon there was His entourage revealing His nature, His identity, His compassion and wisdom:

An entourage [that revealed] His nature and that therefore was called "the entourage dharmakāya"; an entourage [that revealed] His identity and that therefore was called "the entourage sambhogakāya"; an entourage [that revealed] His identity and was called therefore "the entourage sambhogakāya [correlating to the element of] water"; an entourage [that revealed] His identity and was called therefore "the entourage sambhogakāya [correlating to the element of] fire"; an entourage [that revealed] His identity and was called therefore "the entourage sambhogakāya [correlating to the element of] wind"; an entourage [that revealed] His identity and was called therefore "the entourage sambhogakāya [correlating to the element of] space."

Furthermore, there are the entourages of his *nirmāṇakāya* revealing His compassion and wisdom: The entourage called "the creatures of the World of Desires"; the entourage called "the creatures of the World of Forms"; the entourage called "the creatures of the World of Formlessness."

Furthermore, there are His entourages visualizing His nature, i.e., the four aspects of Yoga: The entourage called *atīyoga*, the entourage called *pariyoga* [sic!], the entourage called *mahāyoga*, the entourage called "the Yoga of creatures." They are one, as His nature, His identity, and the character of His compassion are inseparable.

Furthermore, there are the entourages that understand His nature: The entourage residing in Him, i.e., the previous and now past Buddhas; the entourage realizing His intention, i.e., the now existent Buddhas; the entourage emerging from Him, i.e., the Buddhas to come in the future. They are one, as His nature is inseparable.

Then in order to bless the entire entourage with His nature, Bodhicitta, the All-Creating King absorbed the entire entourage into His mind itself. The spontaneous wisdom (*rang byung gi ye shes*) he let become shining clear. Then in order to endow [the entire entourage] with reality as such he condensed them all to a single great *bindu*, wherein they remained.²³

In this passage the All-Creating King's entourage consists in the three *kāyas*, i.e., the three levels of Buddha's being. The dharma-kāya, or the being in utmost reality, is just listed while the entourages constituting his sambhogakāya, a way of being that allows the Buddha to communicate in bliss and joy with other adequately experienced creatures, are correlated to four elements (water, fire, wind, and space). His nirmānakāya, or his existence in time and space, through which the Buddha manifests in the human world, consists in entourages which equal the three realms of the universe: the world of formlessness, the world of forms, the world of desires. In other words, the nature of the All-Creating King is manifested in the noetic as well as the physical structure of the world. Four other entourages represent the Four Yogas, which means that the All-Creating King is the Path (*mārga*, or *lam*) to Enlightenment, to Buddhahood. Finally, there are the entourages which are the Buddhas of all times, past, present, and future. According to the categorial system of Mahāyāna Buddhism nothing exists outside of the listed categories; thus, the All-Creating King's entourage is the universe, and this universe reflects and reveals His mystic nature.

All the various entourages disappear into the so-called *bindu* that is a luminous focal point symbolizing the very essence of His personality. Once again from the *bindu*, Vajrasattva originates, and he will put forward the questions and problems to be answered and discussed by the All-Creating King. If we sum up the introduction to the KBG, we may conclude that Vajrasattva is the entirety of the entourages which again reflect the All-Creating King's nature. Thus, the discussion between the All-Creating King and Vajrasattva is actually a self-dialogue. Consequently, the text assures that the entourage and the All-Creating king are one, as there is no difference with regard to their nature or identity.

In general, the Buddha's entourage consists of beings who

are different from his own person as long as we stay in the realm of conventional truth. The KBG, however, places the action in the introduction in the realm of absolute or utmost reality, where everything coincides with Voidness (*sūnyatā*), which is the essence of the Buddha. In the discussion of utmost reality only two aspects are of concern. For this reason, the two most important allegorical figures in the text are Bodhicitta, the All-Creating King, and Vajrasattva, who asks the questions. Bodhicitta symbolizes the ontological ground of everything visible and invisible, while Vajrasattva comprises all aspects which want to emerge from the ontological ground and reveal their individuality, though it might be an ephemeral one.

Following the line of this introduction, the first great theme of the KBG is raised in the question of how the ontological ground, i.e., the All-Creating King, correlates to the aspects emanating from this ground. The subject is discussed mainly in the second chapter, though the 16th chapter also deals to some extent with the same problem. In answering the question concerning the correlation between the ontological ground and its emanating aspects the discussion slides from time to time into an explanation of evolution.

The World Emanating from the All-Creating King

With regard to the emanation of the world, the KBG states:

Then, with regard to His nature, His identity, His compassion, Bodhicitta, the All-Creating King established all phenomena in the following way:

Out of the sole great wisdom originating from Him spontaneously, the five great spontaneous wisdoms emanate. They are: the great spontaneous wisdom of hatred, the great spontaneous wisdom of passion, the great spontaneous wisdom of ignorance, . . . of jealousy, . . . of arrogance.

Out of these five great spontaneous wisdoms, the five great visible causes (*rgyan kyi rgyu chen po*) emanate. They constitute the three realms of the impermanent world.

If one summarizes the external appearance of the five visible causes, then it is as follows: There is the appearance called "earth," an appearance of visible causes; there is the appearance

called "water," an appearance of visible causes; there is the appearance called "fire," an appearance of visible causes; there is the appearance called "wind," an appearance of visible causes; there is the appearance called "space," an appearance of visible causes.

Condensed in a single appearance they will unfold into the various categories of the five wisdoms (*ye shes lnga*), i.e., the spontaneous wisdom of the category "hatred," . . . "passion," . . . "ignorance," . . . "jealousy," and . . . "arrogance." When the various categories of the five spontaneous wisdoms appear, the reality as such is established in correlation with the appearance of the visible causes.

After having established reality as such, i.e., His nature, Bodhicitta, the All-Creating King, dwells in that way.²⁴

This passage states that from the All-Creating King the four elements and the five spontaneous wisdoms, which are cognitive categories used in Tantric Buddhism in order to understand reality, emanate. In interpreting the passage from the KBG, the All-Creating King may be conceived as the ontological ground, while the five spontaneous wisdoms as well as the physical world (i.e., the four elements) are the phenomena emanating from it. In the primary nature of the ontological ground, i.e., the All-Creating King, rests the entirety of the phenomenal world. His nature is of spontaneous wisdom unfolding into the five aspects which are classified as defilements (*sgrib pa*) by the common Buddhist tradition: hatred, passion, ignorance, jealousy, and arrogance. However, these "defilements" provide the seed-bed for all forces of vitality. All facets of man's entangling encounter with life (*samsāra*) emanate from this ground. The external or physical world is established by the All-Creating King as well. The text emphasizes the various ways through which the great wisdom becomes manifest in the elements which constitute the three realms of the universe: the realm of passion (*kāmaloka*), the realm of form (*rūpaloka*), and the realm of formlessness (*arūpaloka*).

In the perspective of the KBG, the creation is an outflow of the primordial ground; it appears to be distinct from its origin, though it is not essentially different.

In the 6th chapter of the KBG, the emanation of the universe is explained in an alternative way:

Although My nature may not be revealed to you, yet My identity may be revealed to you. The three realms (i.e., *kāmaloka*, *rūpaloka*, *arūpaloka*) the five greatesses (*chen po lnga*), the six characters (*rgyud drug*) are the five [aspects of] *bodhicitta*, which reveal My nature. From there the five wisdoms emanate as their spontaneous essence. And the five wisdoms illuminate the five sensory objects. Thus the five desires and the five passions come into existence. The result, ripened by means of the five desires, manifests in the various realms of existence.

In such kind I teach you the appearances: The three aspects of My being (*sku gsum*) I teach you [to see them in] the six aspects of the soteriological path. Although I instruct you herein, you will be unable to see it [in such way], and yet each individual [phenomenon] is in some respect My nature, My identity, My person, My word, My mind. In the totality [of the universe] My identity is to be visualized in its individual aspects.

Further I shall teach you My nature. My identity in its utmost purity is *bodhicitta*. As I am the essence of a sphere free from any artificiality (*spros med dbyings*) and as I am the great origin of all the Buddhas, the three delightful realms [of the universe] and the six realms of existence emanate from Me.

Although virtuous and wrong deeds are different, they demonstrate My sincere, unflinching compassion. To those who adhere to a system of causality (*rgyu dang 'bras bu theg pa*) I do not reveal the teaching that I am the All-Creating One. Even if I would reveal this teaching to them definitively, they would still claim that virtuous and wrong deeds have their causes and results. Consequently, they would subject Me, the wholly pure, to their praise and blame and for a long time they would be unable to find Me, the wholly pure.

I am the teacher, the All-Creating One, Bodhicitta, and it is Bodhicitta that is the All-Creating King.²⁵

This passage explains well the fact that the ontological ground is immanent and transcendent at once. Although the primary One is reflected in the phenomenal world, it transcends the world of perception. Its general purity is never affected by ethical categories. In order to substantiate this claim, the text has to discard the doctrine of causality commonly thought to be one of the cornerstones of Buddhist philosophy.

Certainly in early Buddhism the concept of causality was conducive to the no-self theory and the soteriological path as

the traditional Buddhist conceived it. But when Nāgārjuna revised the entire problem of causality it became clear that the concept of a lineal causality is inconsistent in itself. He replaced the concept of a lineal causality with that of a situational causality. The KBG takes us one step further in abolishing the theory of causality in total. This move undermines the old objection that a pure and good primary principle cannot be the origin of all the misery and evil in the world. With the dissolving of the concept of causality, the power of this objection was eliminated. The last sentence of the translated passage is certainly one of the pearls of Buddhist scripture; a solemn proclamation of the All-Creating King's grandeur, its language of exaltation speaks for itself.

When Vajrasattva asks for the reason or necessity of emanation, the All-Creating King explains His relationship to the phenomena emanating from Him:

O Mahāsattva, the necessity is that beside Me, the Creator (*byed mkhan*) and All-Creating King, no other creator exists. Nobody beside Me created (*byed pa*) reality as it is (*chos nyid*). Nobody beside Me enthroned the Buddhas of the three [times]. Nobody beside Me established the various groups of entourage. Nobody beside Me established the nature of reality as it is.²⁶

The claim of a Creator God can hardly be more explicit than in this passage.

Bodhicitta—The All-Creating King's Nature

The KBG, however, is ambiguous in its description of the nature of the All-Creating King in so far as there are passages in which the term "creator" is used metaphorically:

I shall now reveal My nature to you, Vajrasattva! My nature is manifested in three ways: My nature is *bodhicitta* (*byang chub sems*). My sheer nature shows itself as "pure" (*byang*), as it is the three perfections, the pure reality. My nature shows itself as "perfect" (*chub*) as by means of the three necessities it covers all like space. My nature shows itself as "mind" (*sems*) as it is the infinite and absolute (*ma lus*) All-Creating King. Who else if not the Mind of

Pure Perfection (Tib.*byang chub sems*, Skr.*bodhicitta*) would create the entirety?²⁷

In this passage the term *bodhicitta*, which means, in its Tibetan translation, “mind of pure perfection” is not understood in terms of soteriological altruism but rather as the authentic nature of mind as such.²⁸ This specific meaning of the term *bodhicitta* is found throughout the Tantric literature of Buddhism. In this way, the KBG does not exhibit any peculiarity. When the Buddhist mystic experiences the nature of mind as such, he perceives a state of limpid luminosity which transcends every conceptualization and which is therefore said to equal Voidness, and yet is full of utmost bliss. Therefore the nature of mind as such, or the pure mind, is said to be inseparable and indistinguishable (*gnyis su med*) from reality as such (*chos nyid*).

On the other hand, it is only when the mind departs from its sheer nature and manifests itself in various activities that the world of sensuous perception can arise. For this reason, one might well say that from the individual’s viewpoint the mind is the creator of the world. This is a common concept of the Cit-tamātra School of Buddhist philosophy. In this regard, the KBG fits into the general framework of Mahāyāna and Tantric thought without any major difficulties.

Surprisingly, the KBG employs metaphorical anthropomorphism in identifying the ultimate. However, I am doubtful whether the word “metaphor” is appropriate, as the intention of the text is not clear. The question arises whether the ultimate, when revealing itself to the mystic in the blissful *unio mystica*, can be experienced only in a personal way. Or, is it more a matter of adopting the philosophical jargon flourishing at the time of the writing of the text? Or, did the Buddhists make use of the theistic terminology of Hinduism in order to attract some devotees of the great personal gods of ancient India, e.g., Shiva and Vishnu?

Nevertheless, the KBG is a sublime monument of Buddhist spirituality, using language of timeless beauty:

Then Bodhicitta, the All-Creating King, proclaimed: “I am the Creator of all phenomena in the past, Mahāsattva, pay attention to your ear, reflect on what you will hear now: I am the All-Creat-

ing King. I am the Mind of Pure Perfection (*byang chub sems*). If I were not pre-existent, phenomena would not have a point from where their existence could start. If I were not pre-existent, there would be no King who creates all phenomena. If I were not pre-existent, no Buddha would ever be. If I were not pre-existent, no Doctrine would ever be. If I were not pre-existent, no entourage would ever be.²⁹

Conclusion

Although only a few paragraphs of the KBG could be examined in this article, the study of this text stipulates revising our present understanding of “God” in the context of Buddhism. The term “God” is too vague to be dealt with in an academic study; therefore a precise definition has to precede any attempt to do so. If the term “God” is understood as the mythic craftsman “manufacturing” the world, then—we may conclude—the KBG does not corroborate such a notion. If we define “God” as the totally other, predating and preceding everything which is imparted to this world, then the term “God” may found to be suitable for that task. When the KBG uses the term *kun byed*, which I translated as “all creating” then we have to understand it within the context of Yogācāra philosophy: Mind operates like a mirror by which the objects are reflected, although the existence or non-existence of the objects themselves will never be disclosed to us. Thus, we may say, Mind functions like a “creator.” So, what’s new about the KBG, we may ask? The KBG is traditional enough to adopt a well-defined philosophical concept, that of Mind in the Yogācāra tradition, but it is innovative inasmuch it casts the philosophical concept into the symbolic image of a “creator,” thus using a theistic pattern to communicate the mystic experience to those who have not been exposed to it.

NOTES

1. “. . . Bhagavan first made the world and created all living creatures from dirt rubbed from his body . . .” (Verrier, Elwin *Tribal Myths of Orissa*.

Glasgow: Oxford University Press, 1954, 4); this is only one example to illustrate this kind of "Creator God," but there are many more myths of this type included in Elwin's book.

2. Kamaleswar Bhattacharya, *L'Âtman-Brahman dans le Bouddhisme ancien*, Publications de L'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient XC. Paris: Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient, 1973, 137.

3. Bhattacharya, *L'Âtman-Brahman*, 89: *dhammakāyo iti pi Brahmakāyo iti pi, dhammabhūto iti pi brahmabhūto iti pi*.

4. A. Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena, Short Philosophical Essays*, tr. from the German (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), vol. 1, 127.

5. H. von Glasenapp, *Buddhism—a Non-Theistic Religion*, tr. from the German (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970), 146.

6. L. de La Vallee Poussin (tr.), *L'Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu*, Melanges Chinois et Bouddhiques, Vol. XVI (Brussels: Institut Belge Des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1971), vol. 1, 311–13.

7. Vidhushekhara Bhattacharya (ed.), *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Bibliotheca Indica no. 280 (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1960) v. 119–22, p. 216–17.

8. For further information on this subject see George Chemparathy, "Two Early Buddhist Refutations of the Existence of Īsvara as the Creator of the Universe," *Beiträge zur Geistesgeschichte Indiens—Festschrift für Erich Frauwallner* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), 85–100.

9. *Cone Kanjur* (Washington: Library of Congress), vol. Dza, fol. 1b.1–92a.1; *Narhang Kanjur*, vol. Dza, fol. 1b.1–120b.1; *Lhasa Kanjur*, vol. Dza, fol. 1b.1–123a.6; *Peking Kanjur*, vol. 9, *Rgyud* xx (Dza), no. 451: p. 93, fol. 1.1–p. 126, fol. 5.2; *Derge Kanjur*, vol. 97, *Rnying rgyud* no. 1, fol. 1–171; further see Hakuju Ui, Munetada Suzuki, Yensho Kanakura, Tokan Tada (eds.), *A Complete Catalogue of the Tibetan Buddhist Canons (Bkaḥ-hgyur and Bstan-hgyur)* (Sendai, Japan: Tohoku Imperial University, 1934), 138a, no. 828.

10. *Rnying ma'i Rgyud 'Bum. A Collection of Treasured Tantras Translated during the Period of First Propagation of Buddhism in Tibet*, ed. by Dingo Khyentse Rimpoche (Thimpu, Bhutan: n.p., 1973), vol. 1, fol. 1–220; *Vairocana Rgyud 'Bum. A Collection of Ancient Tantras and Esoteric Instructions Compiled and Translated by the 8th Century Tibetan Master* (Leh, India: Tashi Y. Tashigangpa, 1971), vol. 1, fol. 383.1–435.6.

11. S. Karmay, "The Doctrinal Position of rDzogs chen." *Journal Asiaticque* (1975), 152, and by the same author "An Open Letter by Pho-brang Zhi-ba-'od to the Buddhists in Tibet." *The Tibet Journal* (1980) vol. 5, no. 3, p. 16.

12. G. Roerich (tr.), *Blue Annals* (1949, rpt. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), 133, 137.

13. *Blue Annals*, 172.

14. Bu-ston Rin-chen-grub. *Bde bar gshegs pa'i bstan pa'i gsal byed/ chos kyi 'byung gnas gsung rab rin po che'i mdzod*, in Lokesh Chandra (ed.), *The Collected Works of Bu-ston*, Śāta-Piṭaka Series vo. 64 (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1965–71), pt. 24, vol. Ya (1971), 990.2; hereafter *Chos 'byung chen mo*.

15. G. Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (Rome: La Libreria Dello Stato, 1949), vol. 1, 88.

16. *Chos 'byung chen mo*, 990.3–4.

17. 'Jigs-med-gling-pa, *Snga 'gyur rgyud 'bum rin po che'i rtogs pa brjod pa 'jam gling mtha'i gru khyab pa'i rgyan*, ed. in NGB, vol. 34, 175.5. New information on the Tshal-pa Kanjur is presented by Yoshiro Imaeda in his *Catalogue du Kanjur Tibetain de l'Édition de 'Jang Sa-tham* (Bibliographia Philologica Buddhica, Series Maior IIa). Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1982. Unfortunately I learnt about this publication after the present article had been submitted for publication.

18. David Snellgrove (ed. and tr.), *Hevajra-Tantra* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), vol. II, p. vii; G. Tucci (ed.), *Minor Buddhist Texts* (Rome: IsMEO, 1958), vol. II, 16.

19. Lokesh Chandra (ed.), *Mkhas paḥi dgaḥ ston of Dpaḥ-bo-gtsug-lag*, Śata-Pitaka vol. 9 (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1959), pt. I, 155ff.

20. D.T. Suzuki (tr.), *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 3.

21. Snellgrove, *Hevajra Tantra* vol. I, 47.

22. *Evam mayā śrutam / ekasmin samaye bhagavān sarvatathāgata-kāyavāk-citta-hṛdayavajrayosidbhageṣu vijahāra* / Benoytosh Bhattacharya (ed.), *Guhyasamāja Tantra or Tathāgataguhyaka*, Gaekwad's Oriental Series No. 53 (Baroda, India: Oriental Institute, 1967), 1.

23. KBG fol.2.3–5.2, in NGB vol. I.

24. KBG fol. 7.1–7.7, in NGB vol. I.

25. KBG fol. 17.3–18.2, in NGB vol. I.

26. KBG fol. 8.3–8.4, in NGB vol. I.

27. KBG fol. 8.4–8.7, in NGB vol. I. This Tibetan "definition" of the term *byang chub sems dpa'* does not correspond with the Skr. *bodhisattva*.

28. H.V. Guenther examines the meaning of *bodhicitta* and *Bodhisattva* within the context of several Buddhist traditions of Tibet in his article "*Bodhisattva—the Ethical Phase in Evolution*," in L.S. Kawamura (ed.), *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhism*, SR supplements: 10 (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1981), 111–124.

29. KBG fol. 8.7–9.3, in NGB vol. I.