

The Bodhisattva Spirit: Practising Self-Benefiting Altruism

Cheng, Fung-kei
The University of Hong Kong

Abstract

Myriads of scholarly sources have studied various aspects of being a bodhisattva; yet few of them look into the practicability of the bodhisattva path in the modern era. The present research discusses the notion of what a bodhisattva is, and investigates the Buddhist understanding of this concept and its praxis in a contemporary social context. This study has adopted primary data sources which were produced by means of a mixed method, including a canonical analysis of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra*, and qualitative fieldwork data, together with other first-hand data sources. Canonical analysis has provided the theoretical discourse from the Mahāyāna perspective, focusing on the idea of *prajñā*; while the qualitative data, which were derived from interviews, validate the applicability of the theoretical discourse, namely, *bodhisattva-mārga* (the bodhisattva path). The 46 interview sessions with individuals and focus groups involved Buddhist volunteers, helping service practitioners, beneficiaries, and Buddhist masters (totally 38 participants), who were recruited by cold calls, snowball effect, acquaintances, and electronic mailing. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for analysis through the paradigm of interpretative phenomenological analysis, in order to explore the informants' lived experiences. In addition, this study was

also supported by multiple sources, including visual art. Ensuring the research rigour, different forms of triangulation were employed, covering member checking and peer analysis at an inter-rater reliability of 92%. With the aid of ATLAS.ti 7, a computer-assisted software for qualitative data analysis which was used for both the canonical and the interview analyses, eight themes were grouped together, including bodhisattva, *bodhicitta*, *catvāri apramānāni*, roles, praxis, qualities, intensions, and causes of sickness, from which self-benefiting altruism (altruistic activities and other forms of help performed towards other people which result in benefit to oneself), representing what is referred to here as the bodhisattva spirit. This research further differentiates between self-benefiting altruism and reciprocal altruism, reflecting the philosophical disparities in diverse cultures. Therefore, it offers potential insight into Buddhist helping behaviour that contributes to the well-being of sentient individuals and the society.

Keywords: *bodhisattva-mārga*; *bodhicitta*; *catvāri apramānāni*; research method; *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra*

Introduction

The concept of bodhisattva (菩薩) is central to Mahāyāna¹, where these two terms are inter-related², so closely that the concepts of Mahāyāna and bodhisattva are equivalent³, particularly in Chinese Buddhism⁴. The spirit of Mahāyāna is the self-benefiting altruism⁵ that implements *bodhisattva-mārga* (the bodhisattva path 菩薩道), from which one passionately and impartially helps other people and gains benefit from their own altruistic behaviour.

Mahāyāna was developed starting in the first century B.C.⁶, and the appellation “bodhisattva” was originally designated for Śākyamuni (釋迦牟尼) before his becoming the Buddha⁷, which later shifted to generally depict Mahāyāna followers and achievers⁸. The notion of bodhisattva evolved around consideration of the Buddha’s care for the well-being of sentient beings, and is a hallmark that drives the Mahāyāna movement⁹ “to suppress evil, to stimulate the creation of good, and to work for the benefit of all sentient beings”¹⁰. Since then, the notion of a “celestial”¹¹ bodhisattva has gradually become secularised, and bodhisattva frequently denotes any sentient being who, whether *saṅgha* (monks 僧團) or lay devotee¹², follows the Buddha’s aspiration to unconditionally serve living beings. In this respect, bodhisattvahood assimilates itself into lay life¹³.

¹ Brinkman (2009:81); Whipps (2010:110); Durt (1991:1)

² Mitsuyoshi (1989:110)

³ Lu (2005:78)

⁴ Liao (2006:36); Soothill (1913:95)

⁵ Umehara (2008:58-59)

⁶ Hikata (1981a:17)

⁷ Hikata (1981b:22); Mizuno (2003:27); Basham (1981:19); Lancaster (1981:153); Rhi (1994:208)

⁸ Yin-Shun (1979:12)

⁹ Hikata (1981b:22)

¹⁰ Mizuno (2003:141)

¹¹ Conze (1967:47)

¹² Hikata (1981c:28)

¹³ Godfrey (2005:40)

The seminal work in 1926 by Professor Johannes Rahder, a Dutch scholar, pioneered bodhisattva studies in the West¹⁴. Dayal¹⁵ also undertook the same research topic supported by Buddhist sources, encapsulating a variety of subjects: the origin and development of the bodhisattva doctrine in Mahāyāna, its linguistic and doctrinal interpretation, interactions between this doctrine and other religions, *pāramitā* (the six perfections 六波羅蜜多), the chief will of a bodhisattva, and differences between arhats (阿羅漢) and bodhisattvas, that is, the two classes of “enlightened beings”¹⁶.

The distinction between arhats and bodhisattvas indicates the disparity of their vision although they have both been enlightened. A bodhisattva conceives the welfare of sentient beings as motivated by *bodhicitta* (enlightened mind 菩提心), while an arhat considers “self-pacification”¹⁷ and is therefore criticised as being inferior to a bodhisattva¹⁸. This embodies the compassionate teachings of Mahāyāna bodhisattva. Among infinite bodhisattvas, Samantabhadra (普賢菩薩), “the bodhisattva of enlightening activity”¹⁹; Mañjuśrī (文殊菩薩), “the bodhisattva of wisdom and insight”²⁰; Avalokiteśvara (觀音菩薩); and Kṣhitigarbha (地藏菩薩) are the most prevalent figures in Mahāyāna scriptures; within whom the latter two are the most worshipped archetypal bodhisattvas in Chinese Buddhism.

Blofeld²¹ studied Avalokiteśvara (觀音菩薩), a significant representation of a bodhisattva worshipped across Chinese- and Tibetan-Buddhism-influenced regions, covering North Asia, Mongolia, and Nepal; appreciating the compassionate determination for sentient

¹⁴ Kanbayashi (1984:9)

¹⁵ Dayal (1932/1999:249)

¹⁶ Wright (2009:9)

¹⁷ Katz (1982:270)

¹⁸ Katz (1982)

¹⁹ Leighton (1998:121)

²⁰ Yin-Shun (1979:93)

²¹ Blofeld (1988)

beings' happiness, and the capability of "absolute hearing"²², which is "the manifestation of that compassion"²³. His investigations of gender images of Avalokiteśvara in different regions unmask the religious art and cultural influences, while Tay²⁴ studies the iconographical transformation of Avalokiteśvara from male to female, symbolising her "maternal love and infinite compassion"²⁵, particularly in Chinese and Japanese Buddhism²⁶. These kaleidoscopic representations of Avalokiteśvara enrich folk religions related to Buddhism, especially in China. For instance, the Avalokiteśvara with one thousand hands and an eye on each hand stands for enormous wisdom and compassion²⁷, and is exalted in deification²⁸.

Kṣhitigarbha (地藏菩薩), "Lord of the Underworld"²⁹, whose career according to his great vow, is in striving to save all beings in hell before becoming a *buddha*, is idolised in Chinese popular religion. Rituals and ceremonies therefore are performed for the souls of the deceased who have transgressed, including the rite of flaming-mouths which is performed to feed hungry ghosts, thus characterising the sinicization of Buddhism³⁰. This folklorisation marks the transformation of Indian Buddhism and the adaptation of the Confucian culture of pacifying ancestors, indicating Chinese filial piety and continuing bonds across clan generations.

As a sort of an oriental Messiah, a bodhisattva, akin to Jesus Christ, and vice versa³¹, saves sentient beings³², although individual characteristics vary from bodhisattva to bodhisattva. A major difference is in the distinction that human beings are saved within the tension of the

²² Blofeld (1988:43)

²³ Lopez and Rockefeller (1987:29)

²⁴ Tay (1976)

²⁵ Tay (1976:151)

²⁶ Suzuki (1938/1981:117)

²⁷ Batchelor (2004:5)

²⁸ Tay (1976:171)

²⁹ Ng (2007:13)

³⁰ Ng (2007:7)

³¹ Brinkman (2009:85)

³² Thurman (1987:65)

final day of judgement in Christianity, whereas Buddhism emphasises *karma*; that is, personal responsibilities of thought and behaviour. This variation reflects the philosophical view that Christianity concerns an external force (that of being saved) but Buddhism focuses on internal forces (self saving). Hence, the mission of a bodhisattva is to enlighten sentient beings and relieve their distress.

A bodhisattva develops her/his own spiritual transcendence through “semi-human, semi-super-human”³³ stage to buddhahood, implying her/his humanised nature. This humanisation conveys a belief that freedom from suffering is possible for sentient beings as long as they take the bodhisattva vow; that is, “a compass, a guide for the heart”³⁴, to help themselves and other people, distancing the god-like image of a bodhisattva³⁵ from mythology. In this sense, a bodhisattva may be an enlightened ordinary person, and any ordinary person is a potential bodhisattva. Embodying this virtue, women have sacrificed their whole lives for their families in Asian traditions³⁶.

The bodhisattva vow is supported by the dynamic of wisdom and compassion³⁷ in order to realise the “ethics of abstention, ethics of virtue, and altruistic ethics”³⁸ through “establishing, confirming, and guaranteeing a sacred order”³⁹; namely, “the supreme aspiration”⁴⁰ of selflessness towards all living beings that complies with Confucian ethics⁴¹. Hence, Mahāyāna and the construct of bodhisattva, as the

³³ Thurman (1987:73)

³⁴ Kornfield (2001: 270)

³⁵ Gomez (1987:150-151)

³⁶ Brinkman (2009:98)

³⁷ Gomez (1987:167)

³⁸ Gomez (1987:172)

³⁹ Gomez (1987:176)

⁴⁰ Gomez (1987:177)

⁴¹ Chen (1999:336)

foundation of humanistic Buddhism⁴², converge in Confucian culture societies; in contrast to other cultures.

Despite a vast collection of scholarly literature researching the idea behind the term bodhisattva, a limited number of studies have examined how this concept is connected to the contemporary context, in either theory or practice. The current research analyses the Vimalakīrti teachings on the interpretations of bodhisattva and *bodhisattva-mārga* (the bodhisattva path 菩薩道) in order to explore the applicability and practicality of these notions in modern society. It also purposively looks into Mahāyāna altruism. The desire to fulfil these aims drives this study to conduct an inter-disciplinary inquiry, incorporating social science research methods into Buddhist Studies traditions.

Research Methods

The present research has adopted first-hand data collected through a mixed method of canonical analysis and qualitative study. The canonical analysis involves the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* (維摩詰所說經) (hereafter called the *Sūtra*), an important Mahāyāna canon⁴³, which was composed between the first and second century A.D⁴⁴. Among the available classical Chinese translations from Sanskrit⁴⁵, this study has utilised Kumārajīva's (鳩摩羅什) rendition, which was translated in the early fifth century, because of its prevalence and readability⁴⁶, together with English copies rendered by McRae⁴⁷ and Watson⁴⁸ as they are likewise based on Kumārajīva's version⁴⁹. The fieldwork data collection was carried out from March 2011 to October 2012 by vis-à-vis,

⁴² Fang (2002:6)

⁴³ Watson (1997:1)

⁴⁴ Lin (1997:147)

⁴⁵ Jiang (2004:11-1); Lamotte (1962/1976:XXV)

⁴⁶ Tu (2005:125-130); Lai and Gao (2010:2)

⁴⁷ McRae (2004)

⁴⁸ Watson (1997)

⁴⁹ Cheng (2013:56)

tele-communication, and correspondence interviews. This research design brought about two results: first, the canonical analysis supplied the primary data for this Buddhist-oriented study; and second, the qualitative data reported on the understanding of bodhisattva concept among Buddhists, as well as on the applicability of Buddhist teachings in practising the bodhisattva-mārga (the bodhisattva path 菩薩道) in the contemporary context. This reveals the ageless nature of Buddhist wisdom which has lasted for millennia.

A Canonical Analysis

The *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* consists of dialogues among the Buddha, bodhisattvas, the ten greatest disciples of the Buddha, and Vimalakīrti (維摩詰). The story focuses on Mañjuśrī's (文殊菩薩) visit to the ailing Vimalakīrti, who uses this chance to preach, specifying the five following traits. First, the central theme of the *Sūtra* enumerates the major Mahāyāna theories from the school of *prajñā* (wisdom 般若), including *pratītya-samutpāda* (the law of dependent origination 緣起法), *śūnyata* (voidness 空性), impermanence, non-dualism, seed of Tathāgata (suchness 如來種), and *buddhakṣetra* (*buddha* land 佛土), associated with Buddhist worldviews, life views, and views of human nature.

Next, the *Sūtra* particularly elaborates on the multiple dimensions of being a bodhisattva, such as the formation of a bodhisattva's pure land, *bodhisattva-mārga* (the bodhisattva path 菩薩道), and the *catvāri apramānāni*⁵⁰ (the four immeasurables 四無量心), through which it presents the relationship between a bodhisattva and sentient beings. Its emphasis on selfless altruism recognises a bodhisattva's sacrifice of attaining *nirvāṇa* (perfect stillness 涅槃) for the happiness of sentient beings.

⁵⁰ Sheng-Yen (2002)

Third, the *Sūtra* exemplifies the role model of Vimalakīrti, the main character, as a “household bodhisattva”⁵¹ in his dedication to the bodhisattva career⁵², exemplifying the Mahāyāna spirit⁵³. It signifies the contribution of lay Buddhists to the development of Buddhism, in that the *Sūtra* is unusual in being named after Vimalakīrti, a lay follower; and that Buddhist laymen have traditionally put forth much effort towards the revival of Buddhism in various dynasties⁵⁴.

Additionally, innovative ideas are addressed in the *Sūtra*, such as “just eliminate the illness; do not eliminate dharmas”⁵⁵, “sentimental compassion”⁵⁶, “if a bodhisattva traverses the unacceptable paths, this is to penetrate the path of buddhahood”⁵⁷, and “all the afflictions constitute the seed of the Tathāgata”⁵⁸. This further displays the practice of Vimalakīrti’s teachings and *bodhisattva-mārga* (the bodhisattva path 菩薩道) to tackle challenges in both the path and in life itself.

Lastly, the radical teachings of the *Sūtra* have significantly affected other schools of Buddhism, such as Vajrayāna⁵⁹ (Tantric Buddhism 密宗), Chan⁶⁰ (Zen 禪宗), Tiantai⁶¹ (天臺宗), Huayan⁶² (華嚴宗), and Pure Land⁶³ (淨土宗) Buddhism. Its influence is not only evident in Chinese Buddhism, but also has also disseminated throughout much of Asia⁶⁴. Hence, there are abundant resources from ancient languages; for instance,

⁵¹ Lopez and Rockefeller (1987:28)

⁵² Suzuki (1938/1981:92)

⁵³ Xie and Pan (2011:148)

⁵⁴ Wright (1959:114)

⁵⁵ McRae (2004:111); 「但除其病，而不除法。」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a15

⁵⁶ McRae (2004:112); 「愛見悲。」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a26

⁵⁷ McRae (2004:133); 「若菩薩行於非道，是為通達佛道。」〈8 佛道品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0549a01

⁵⁸ McRae (2004:135); 「一切煩惱，為如來種。」〈8 佛道品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0549b07

⁵⁹ Tam (1995)

⁶⁰ Wu (2001:10); Suzuki (1938/1981); Sheng-yen (1988:10); Xing (2006:515)

⁶¹ You (1999)

⁶² Ng (1995:93-94)

⁶³ Xie and Pan (2011:148)

⁶⁴ Miller (1984)

Sogdian⁶⁵, Tangut⁶⁶, and Uighur⁶⁷. The *Sūtra* also demonstrates a positive impact on Chinese culture⁶⁸ and social classes, covering elites⁶⁹, the gentry⁷⁰, and common people⁷¹, reflected through Chinese philosophy⁷², literature⁷³, art⁷⁴, and folk religions⁷⁵. Even further, the *Sūtra* has drawn much attention from academic communities, for which it has been rendered into other than languages other than Chinese and English, including German⁷⁶, Spanish⁷⁷, and Vietnamese⁷⁸.

These five characteristics inspire an exploration into the application of *bodhisattva-mārga* (the bodhisattva path 菩薩道) in this era from the perspective of the *Sūtra*. A mentor was invited to work with the researcher in order to refine the reliability and validity of the understanding and interpretation of the Vimalakīrti teachings. The *Sūtra* was read multiple times before being analysed by the aid of the software package ATLAS.ti 7. Initial codes (n=116) were then grouped into focused codes (n=16) related to this study. Eight emergent themes⁷⁹ (bodhisattva, *bodhicitta*, *catvāri apramānāni*, roles, praxis, qualities, intensions, and causes of sickness) were finalised, which concluded one super-ordinate theme⁸⁰; namely, the bodhisattva spirit (refer to Figure 1 in the Discussion). Visualisations were created by the software, offering images of the analysis, including diagrams.

⁶⁵ Lamotte (1962/1976:XLIII)

⁶⁶ Sun (2007:244)

⁶⁷ Zhang (2012)

⁶⁸ Hashimoto (1977)

⁶⁹ Demiéville (1962/1988)

⁷⁰ Mather (1968)

⁷¹ He (2005b)

⁷² Shi (2002c)

⁷³ Wang (1992)

⁷⁴ He (2000)

⁷⁵ He (2005a)

⁷⁶ Fuchs (2005)

⁷⁷ Bellerin (2005)

⁷⁸ Lieu (2004)

⁷⁹ Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009:91)

⁸⁰ Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009:107)

A Qualitative Study

This qualitative research involved 38 participants, the demographic data for whom are included in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic Data of the 38 Participants

Demographic categories	Details
Gender	Female (n=25; 65.8%) Male (n=13; 34.2%)
Age groups	18-30 (n=3; 3.9%) 31-45 (n=12; 31.6%) 46-60 (n=20; 52.6%) >60 (n=3; 3.9%)
Spoken language	Cantonese (n=32; 84.3%) English (n=4; 10.5%) Putonghua (n=1; 2.6%) Tibetan (n=1; 2.6%)
Education background	Primary school (n=1; 2.6%) Secondary school (n=6; 15.8%) College or university (n=8; 21.1%) Postgraduate (n=15; 39.5%) Doctoral degree (n=8; 21.1%)
Stakeholders	Beneficiaries (n=9; 23.7%) Buddhist masters (n=11; 28.9%) Buddhist volunteers (n=6; 15.8%) Helping service practitioners (n=12; 31.6%)

Under the principle of “purposeful sampling”⁸¹ in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the informants’ experiences and feelings, the 38 informants, on a voluntary basis, were recruited through cold calls (n=15; 39.5%), referrals and snowball effects (n=6; 15.8%), acquaintances (n=10;

⁸¹ Patton (2002:46)

26.3%), electronic mails (n=7; 18.4%), and a facebook page (n=0; 0%). The inclusion criteria included the following: First, the beneficiaries (either Buddhists or non-Buddhists) were individuals who had experienced the use of Buddhist teachings in dealing with life difficulties. Second, the Buddhist masters and volunteers were officially ordained Buddhist followers, and the volunteers were community service regulars. Third, the helping service practitioners (either Buddhists or non-Buddhists), including psychiatrists, counsellors, clinical psychologists, and social workers, frequently applied Buddhist concepts in their services. Fourth, the interviewees were open in sharing their experiences, while the beneficiaries demonstrated that they were emotionally stable enough to ensure data authenticity. The interview process complied with the rules of research ethics.

A total of 46 semi-structured interview sessions (n=44 individuals, 96%; n=2 focus groups, 4%) were conducted, totalling 2,729 minutes. The two focus groups (with Buddhist volunteers) were used in the later part of the fieldwork data collection in order to reconcile the data gathered from individuals regarding the practice of Buddhist doctrines. The major common themes from the guiding questions include: What is a bodhisattva? What is the bodhisattva path? How can you help others, or practise the bodhisattva path? What do you gain from helping others, or from practising the bodhisattva path? Most of the oral interviews were conducted in Cantonese, a dialect spoken in Hong Kong, except for four in English, one in Tibetan with the help of an instantaneous interpreter, and one in Putonghua (Mandarin).

The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim in Chinese, except for the English sessions. Apart from the interview transcriptions, this multiple sources approach comprised pre-interview scripts supplied by participants, postscripts, a genogram⁸², an

⁸² McGoldrick, Gerson, and Petry (2008)

autobiographical timeline⁸³, artefacts, visual art, autobiographies, media and press interviews, an observation, and participatory observations. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was employed for fieldwork data analysis, with the assistance of ATLAS.ti 7, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis programme, for the sake of investigating lived experiences and life meaning⁸⁴, which aligns with the core purpose of this study.

Member-checking and peer analysis were used for triangulation to enhance the trustworthiness of the present study. First, attentive listening helped facilitate the instant paraphrasing of data during interviews to ensure the researcher's correct understanding of the narratives. Second, transcriptions were sent to the informants for proofreading to secure the accuracy of the transcriptions. No significant transcribing alterations were required. Third, the analyses of data from the beneficiaries were discussed with the interviewees in order to improve the data interpretation. In addition, a peer analyst was invited for co-analysis, which resulted in an average inter-rater reliability rate of 92%.

Selected quotations of 21 out of 38 informants (55.3%) were presented as in-text citations, covering 11 Buddhist monks and nuns (Sister Harmony, Rinpoche K*⁸⁵, Venerable Chi Yiu, Venerable Foo Chai, Venerable Sander, Venerable Sinh Nghiem, Venerable Thong Hong, Venerable Yu Chun, VHT*, VHU*, and VHY*), three helping service practitioners (Dr Li, HW*, and Polly), four beneficiaries (Che Wai, Chi Sim, Dun Li, and Esther), and three Buddhist volunteers (Simon, Wai Hing, and Wendy).

⁸³ Leung (2010)

⁸⁴ Bramley and Eatough (2005:225); Shinebourne and Smith (2009:164); Eatough and Smith (2006:485); Chapman and Smith (2002:126); Shinebourne (2011:17)

⁸⁵ Those with * are anonymous while the reminder are using either real or *dharma* names with their consent.

Findings and Analysis:

From *Bodhicitta* to Self-Benefiting Altruism

The construct of bodhisattva involves a diversity of facets, from which this study focuses on the attributes of a bodhisattva, *bodhicitta* (enlightened mind 菩提心), *catvāri apramānāni*⁸⁶ (the four immeasurables 四無量心), roles and qualities of a bodhisattva, a bodhisattva's sickness, and the bodhisattva path; and most importantly, their significance and interaction, thus concluding the research topic "the bodhisattva spirit", or in other words, self-benefiting altruism.

Bodhisattva and Attributes

Bodhisattva. In Sanskrit, "*bodhi*", from the root "*budh*"⁸⁷, refers to the "awakened mind"⁸⁸ (覺) or "enlightenment"⁸⁹; that is, the mind has been enlightened to *pratītya-samutpāda*⁹⁰ (the law of dependent origination 緣起法); from whence it can deeply see ultimate truth⁹¹, and "a thorough and complete understanding of the nature and meaning of life"⁹². "*Sattva*", which is derived from "*sant*"⁹³, carries a number of meanings⁹⁴, but is usually linked to sentient beings⁹⁵ (有情眾生). This "enlightenment-being"⁹⁶ or "great Being"⁹⁷, as a "spiritual helper"⁹⁸,

⁸⁶ *Catvāri apramānāni* is also translated as "four sublime subjects state" (Dayal 1932/1999:2).

⁸⁷ Chan (1996:114); Dayal (1932/1999:18)

⁸⁸ Glaser (2005:19); Yin-Shun (1949/2003:201)

⁸⁹ Dayal (1932/1999:4); Yin-Shun (1980/1994:170)

⁹⁰ Yamaguchi (1999/2006:4)

⁹¹ Wei (1993:154)

⁹² Conze (1967:59)

⁹³ Chan (1996:114)

⁹⁴ Dayal (1932/1999:4-9)

⁹⁵ Yao (2006, 191)

⁹⁶ Virtbauer (2010:96); Yin-Shun (1980/1994:170)

⁹⁷ Dayal (1932/1999:9)

⁹⁸ Leighton (1998:x)

makes “four innumerable vows”⁹⁹, and is devoted to improving the *loka*¹⁰⁰ (the secular world 世間) for the sake of all beings¹⁰¹ to free them from suffering¹⁰². The praxis of this altruistic determination¹⁰³ is the bodhisattva path.

A bodhisattva, as a “future *buddha*”¹⁰⁴, possesses three attributes, pertaining to self-perfection, generosity, and passion for the well-being of all beings. In theory¹⁰⁵, a bodhisattva is a perfect sentient being, who has removed the bondage of old age, illness, and death¹⁰⁶. That is, s/he has eradicated suffering, and is not bound by *kleśa* (defilement 煩惱); connoting that s/he is able to enter *nirvāṇa*¹⁰⁷ (perfect stillness 涅槃). Before being relieved from afflictions, s/he has undergone a painful process of transformation, in which s/he “is aware of suffering and able to hold her/his suffering, look deeply into it, and transform it. And s/he can help other people to transform their own suffering,” according to Venerable Sinh Nghiem’s understanding of self-perfection.

Also, a bodhisattva is so generous that s/he “gives all [s/he] possesses as a gift to others”¹⁰⁸, including “her/his health, and even her/his life,” Venerable Sander construes. This limitless sacrifice extends to all beings at all times¹⁰⁹ representing “a faculty of unbounded altruism, that is, living and acting for the interest of others”¹¹⁰; and because of such

⁹⁹ Bien (2006:16)

¹⁰⁰ Kyabgon (2008:156)

¹⁰¹ Chawla and Marlatt (2006:279)

¹⁰² Sogyal (2000:447-448)

¹⁰³ Cantor (2008:533)

¹⁰⁴ Snellgrove (2005:1076)

¹⁰⁵ A bodhisattva may get sick for certain reasons which will be explicated later.

¹⁰⁶ “Who has simultaneously eliminated old age, illness, and death” (McRae, 2004:111)
「如是兼除老病死者，菩薩之謂也。」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a18-19

¹⁰⁷ Wray et al. (1979:108)

¹⁰⁸ Watson (1997:59); 「一切所有施於彼者，是為菩薩。」〈4 菩薩品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0543b13

¹⁰⁹ Yao (2006:196)

¹¹⁰ Chan (1996:116)

generosity, a bodhisattva is capable of realising the mission of a bodhisattva, which will be discussed later.

Fulfilling this mission, a bodhisattva is dedicated to living and serving in the *loka*¹¹¹ (the secular world 世間) because “without sentient beings, there is no bodhisattva,” HW (a helping service practitioner) explained. Therefore, a bodhisattva chooses to remain in *samsāra* (cycle of birth and death 輪迴) although s/he has been able to attain *nirvāṇa*¹¹² (perfect stillness 涅槃), perfect stillness without defilement¹¹³. This compassionate attitude towards living beings demonstrates her/his mighty vow to shouldering the burden for sentient being¹¹⁴ and not give up on any sufferers. This sacred deed conveys great loving-kindness (*mahāmaitrī* in Sanskrit) and great compassion (*mahākarunā* in Sanskrit)¹¹⁵, the key qualities of a bodhisattva, and Venerable Sander emphasised “a great sense of sacrifice”.

Although a bodhisattva represents an ideal model for Mahayanists, in a broad sense, anyone can be a bodhisattva as long as s/he is willing to serve others¹¹⁶, like Vimalakīrti, the main character in the *Sūtra*, regarding which Sister Harmony (a Buddhist nun) elaborated,

¹¹¹ Huang (2011:124)

¹¹² “neither exhaust the conditioned nor abide in the unconditioned [dharma]” (McRae, 2004:161) 「如菩薩者，不盡有為，不住無為。」〈11 菩薩行品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0554b03-04; “He appears to have entered *nirvāṇa*, yet never cuts himself off from the realm of birth and death.” (Watson 1997, p. 94) 「現於涅槃，而不斷生死。」〈8 佛道品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0549a11; “and while the *bodhisattva* is in the realm of birth and death he does not scorn their company” (Watson, 1997, p. 66) 「菩薩於生死而不捨。」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0544c07

¹¹³ Chan (1996:126); Pang (2007:382)

¹¹⁴ “to bear the burden of all [sentient beings] using the dharmas of birth” (McRae, 2004:163) 「以生法荷負一切。」〈11 菩薩行品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0554c05

¹¹⁵ “It is neither to transcend great sympathy nor to forsake great compassion.” (McRae, 2004:161) 「謂不離大慈，不捨大悲。」〈11 菩薩行品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0554b06

¹¹⁶ Conze (1953:128); Suzuki (1938/1981:61); Yamada (1998:137); Leighton (1998:1); Keown (2000:57)

“A bodhisattva is a being, a living being or great being who can help to relieve people from their pain and suffering. They’re people who have their own resources in order to help others. So the qualities of a bodhisattva are their great action, great compassion, and great wisdom, but they may look ordinary. And look around us, there are people who are bodhisattvas in the field of social work, nursing, education, health care. If we look into these people who volunteer their time and their energy in order to serve the community for a better society for everybody. This is the meaning of a bodhisattva.”

Moreover, “any person, no matter good or bad, can be a bodhisattva,” Venerable Thong Hong asserted. Venerable Yu Chun added, “all is just a moment of thought”, which may be either positive or negative. When having a positive thought, an individual will tend to behave positively and help others; and s/he is a bodhisattva at that point in time.

This point of view has been accepted by Mahayanists, who believe that it is even possible for an offender to become a bodhisattva. Venerable Sinh Nghiem explained,

“Can a criminal or offender be a bodhisattva? I think they can. If they’re able to touch and understand their own suffering, then they can really help others effectively, because they’ve gone through that problem. They’ve been able to go through their drug addiction, and have come out to help other people, because they can help themselves, they have first-hand experience. That’s a real bodhisattva.”

This was because:

“After they’re released from prison, they know the direction in life so that they can contribute their energy, their time in order to make up for what they did wrongly in the past, if possible.” (Sister Harmony, a Buddhist nun)

In brief, a bodhisattva is “any person [who has] the aim in mind to attain full enlightenment, that is being enlightened and also teaching others to attain likewise,” in accordance with Venerable Sander’s interpretation. Her or his vows to benefit all beings originated from *bodhicitta* (enlightened mind 菩提心), an awakening-mind and eagerness to serve others, which is essential to embarking on *bodhisattva-mārga*¹¹⁷ (the bodhisattva path 菩薩道).

Bodhicitta. *Bodhicitta*, combining “*bodhi*” with “*citta*”, is the enlightened mind (菩提心). The former means enlightenment, as elaborated upon previously; and “*citta*” refers to “heart, soul, mind”¹¹⁸; however, Dayal¹¹⁹ defines it as the “thought, idea”¹²⁰, by which a bodhisattva accomplishes *bodhisattva-mārga* (the bodhisattva path 菩薩道). “Whether or not [a person is] a bodhisattva depends on whether there is *bodhicitta* in her/him,” Rinpoche K emphasised. *Bodhicitta*, known otherwise by the full term “*anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*”¹²¹ (the highest wisdom of awakening 無上正等正覺), and also called “minds on the Great Vehicle”¹²², “original inspiration”¹²³, “unsurpassable enlightenment”¹²⁴, or “an aspiration for the unsurpassable way”¹²⁵, is

¹¹⁷ White (1955:29)

¹¹⁸ Dayal (1932/1999:59)

¹¹⁹ Dayal (1932/1999)

¹²⁰ Dayal (1932/1999:59)

¹²¹ Watson 1(1997:31); 「阿耨多羅三藐三菩提心。」〈1 佛國品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0538c29

¹²² Watson (1997:44); 「大乘心」〈3 弟子品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0540c26

¹²³ McRae (2004:91); 「本心」〈3 弟子品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0540c28

¹²⁴ McRae (2004:135-136); 「無上道心」〈8 佛道品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0549b19

¹²⁵ Watson (1997:96); 「無上道意」〈8 佛道品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0549b20

indispensable for a bodhisattva to achieve the pure land¹²⁶, indicating “altruistic intention”¹²⁷ for the welfare of all beings. Without “the mind of enlightenment”¹²⁸, it is impossible for a bodhisattva to practise the bodhisattva path and perfect her/his missions and vows. Hence, “a sentient being with *bodhicitta* aroused is a bodhisattva,” VHT (a Buddhist monk) affirmed.

Bodhicitta is an “awareness of the suffering of [oneself] and other living beings in the cycle of existence” (Venerable Sander) and “commitment” (Polly, a clinical psychologist) to “benefit and save sentient beings” (VHT). It involves two realms: “to pursue the path of becoming a *buddha* on one hand, and to teach sentient beings on the other” (Venerable Chi Yiu), implying that a bodhisattva “becomes enlightened for the benefit of sentient beings” (Rinpoche K) in order to embody *bodhicitta*.

Regardless of the argument of whether “our *citta* (mind) per se doesn’t contain *bodhicitta*, it’s pure without muck. ... *Bodhicitta* is not inborn, and it needs gradual cultivation” (Rinpoche K), or whether there exists an “inherent”¹²⁹ *bodhicitta* nature; certainly arising to the possession of *bodhicitta* is a hallmark of Mahāyāna practitioners¹³⁰. “When a bodhisattva activates *bodhicitta*, s/he practises *catvāri apramānāni* (the four immeasurables 四無量心),” Venerable Foo Chai proclaimed, and particularly the vow of *karuṇā* (compassion 悲)¹³¹.

¹²⁶ “The mind of *bodhi* (*bodhicitta*, i.e., the intention to achieve perfect enlightenment) is the bodhisattva’s pure land – when the bodhisattva achieves Buddhahood, sentient beings of the Mahāyāna come to be born in his country.” (McRae, 2004:76) 「菩提心是菩薩淨土，菩薩成佛時，大乘眾生來生其國。」〈1 佛國品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0538a30

¹²⁷ Gyatso (2011:103)

¹²⁸ Gyatso (2011:104)

¹²⁹ White (1955:30)

¹³⁰ Lan (2009:43)

¹³¹ Yin-Shun (2000:245)

Catvāri apramānāni

Catvāri apramānāni (the four immeasurables 四無量心), including *maitrī*¹³² (loving-kindness 慈), *karuṇā*¹³³ (compassion 悲), *muditā*¹³⁴ (empathetic joy 喜), and *upekṣa*¹³⁵ (equanimity 捨), refers to the qualities of a bodhisattva necessary to achieve the pure land¹³⁶, that is a “spiritual realm”¹³⁷; and “they are inborn,” Venerable Foo Chai believes. The *catvāri apramānāni*, realised through practice and implementation¹³⁸, are interactive for “developing of good wishes for ourselves and others,” Venerable Sander summarised.

Maitrī (loving-kindness 慈). *Maitrī*, in Sanskrit, refers to “friendliness”¹³⁹. Like “a form of house-cleaning”¹⁴⁰, it promotes loving-kindness¹⁴¹, bringing “contentment to all beings”¹⁴², pacifying them¹⁴³, and developing “the wish that we and others be happy” (Venerable Sander). This unconditional acceptance of oneself and others humanises living beings¹⁴⁴. As Venerable Chi Yiu depicted,

¹³² *Maitrī* is also translated as “benevolence” (Nagao 2000:1), “love” (Dayal 1932/1999:2), “pity” (Watson 1997:27) or “sympathy” (McRae 2004:100).

¹³³ *Karuṇā* is also translated as “mercy” (Dayal 1932/1999:45).

¹³⁴ *Mudita* is also translated as “joy” (Watson 1997:27) or “sympathetic joy” (Dayal 1932/1999:2).

¹³⁵ *Upekṣa* is also translated as “indifference” (Watson 1997:27).

¹³⁶ “A mind devoted to the four immeasurable qualities is the pure land of the *bodhisattva*. When he attains Buddhahood, beings perfect in the exercise of pity, compassion, joy, and indifference will be born in his country.” (Watson, 1997:27) 「四無量心是菩薩淨土，菩薩成佛時，成就慈悲喜捨眾生來生其國。」〈1 佛國品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0538a33-34

¹³⁷ Blofeld (1988:83)

¹³⁸ Zhou (2001:93)

¹³⁹ Dong (2007:172); Nakamura (1997:24)

¹⁴⁰ Bloom (2000:154)

¹⁴¹ Sealy (2013:1165)

¹⁴² Watson (1997:84); 「行菩薩慈，安眾生故。」〈7 觀眾生品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0547b16-17

¹⁴³ McRae (2004)

¹⁴⁴ Welwood (1983:49)

“For example, when you see other people happy, you don’t envy them but instead feel happy. It’s because your happiness results from the happiness of sentient beings. This is loving-kindness.”

Moreover, a bodhisattva is also “patient with somebody because you (a bodhisattva) understand they are going through difficulties. That is loving-kindness,” Venerable Sinh Nghiem commented, resulting in “[balancing] the excess negativity”¹⁴⁵.

Maitrī (loving-kindness 慈) is for overcoming self-centredness¹⁴⁶, indifference, anger, hatred¹⁴⁷, and cruelty¹⁴⁸. VHT (a Buddhist monk) expressed, “When you meet an enemy, you won’t wish him well, you won’t want him to be well. Practising *maitrī* is to tackle this [improper] mentality.” Therefore, a bodhisattva applies *maitrī* to everyone, including foes¹⁴⁹, which is referred to as the “great *maitrī* without discrimination” (VHY, a Buddhist nun).

Karuṇā (compassion 悲). Gomez (1987) acclaimed that “bodhisattva stands for compassion”¹⁵⁰, representing the idea that compassion is an inseparable feature of being a bodhisattva. Therefore, it rises to a supreme position of quality as one of the *catvāri apramānāni* (the four immeasurables 四無量心)¹⁵¹. *Karuṇā*, a universal quality of human beings across borders¹⁵², is realised “through saving living beings”¹⁵³, including both human and non-human beings¹⁵⁴. In Mahāyāna,

¹⁴⁵ Martini (2011:131)

¹⁴⁶ Wallace (2010:11)

¹⁴⁷ Sayadaw (2003:27)

¹⁴⁸ Salzberg (2010:31)

¹⁴⁹ “Sympathy is the place of enlightenment, because of the universal sameness of sentient beings.” (McRae, 2004:100) 「慈是道場，等眾生故。」〈4 菩薩品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0542c14

¹⁵⁰ Gomez (1987:142)

¹⁵¹ Shi (2013:128); Wang (2013:591)

¹⁵² Krieglstein (2002:217)

¹⁵³ Watson (1997:60); 「以救眾生，起大悲心。」〈4 菩薩品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0543c05-06

karuṇā outpaces “emotional compassion”¹⁵⁵, which is derived from pain; but instead allows sentient beings to experience the truth of suffering. A bodhisattva on one hand enriches and benefits living beings without seeking reward¹⁵⁶; while on the other hand, s/he shoulders the suffering of sentient beings¹⁵⁷. In this sense, compassion leads her/him to overcome distress¹⁵⁸; and a bodhisattva bears suffering in the *loka* (the secular world 世間); namely, “the great *karuṇā* that aims at freeing sentient beings from afflictions,” as denoted by Venerable Foo Chai. By practising compassion, a bodhisattva can “reduce weaknesses of cruelty and violence” (VHT, a Buddhist monk).

Karuṇā (compassion 悲) and *bodhicitta* (enlightened mind 菩提心) are interwoven¹⁵⁹, where the latter stems from the former. As VHT (a Buddhist monk) expounded,

“*Bodhicitta* is the cause and *karuṇā* is the root. The root is great compassion. Arising compassion, you raise *bodhicitta* to save them (sufferers). That I save them is because I practise the Buddha path for strengthening power to help them. This is *bodhicitta*, therefore, is based on the arising compassion.”

In practice, Venerable Sinh Nghiem admitted that helping may not always work. In such cases, showing care is important.

¹⁵⁴ Krieglstein (2002:49-101)

¹⁵⁵ Almaas (2000:84)

¹⁵⁶ “They must enrich and benefit living beings but look for no recompense.” (Watson, 1997:119) 「饒益眾生，而不望報。」〈10 香積佛品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0553a29

¹⁵⁷ “various sufferings in place of all sentient beings” (McRae, 2004:155) 「代一切眾生受諸苦惱。」〈10 香積佛品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0553a29-30

¹⁵⁸ “Compassion is the place of enlightenment, because of the forbearance of suffering.” (McRae, 2004:100) 「悲是道場，忍疲苦故。」〈4 菩薩品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0542c14

¹⁵⁹ Hsu (1979:216)

“Compassion towards somebody is, for instance, seeing how they suffer and you wish that they don’t have to suffer like that. Even though you’re not able to help them directly, or you might not be able to say something nice to make them feel better, you might be able to send good thoughts to them: ‘I know you’re going through a difficult time at the moment.’ In my head I may say: ‘you’re going with a difficult time, but may you be happy; may you be peaceful in body and mind; may you be safe and free from injury, and may you be free from mental afflictions, anger, jealousy; may you be liberate from whatever you are suffering from.’”

A bodhisattva shows unbiased acceptance and recognition of living beings, and is concerned with elevating sentient beings’ happiness, as being superior than her/his own self; that is, “genuine compassion”¹⁶⁰. Meanwhile, compassion and wisdom are dual cores of being a Mahāyāna bodhisattva¹⁶¹ which will be elaborated later.

Muditā (empathetic joy 喜). *Muditā* illustrates that a bodhisattva does not attach herself/himself to “one’s own pleasure yet celebrate the pleasure of others”¹⁶², resulting in liberation of mind¹⁶³ and reduction of jealousy, as VHT (a Buddhist monk) spells out the advantage, and freedom from “despondency, craving, ... insincerity and hostility”¹⁶⁴. Thus a bodhisattva is committed to “cheering, helping, achieving, appreciating and praising others”, Venerable Yu Chun added.

¹⁶⁰ Puri (2006:22)

¹⁶¹ Conze (1953:130); Wray (1986:167); Yin-Shun (1979:2); Nagao (2000:1); Cabezon (2000:147)

¹⁶² McRae (2004:161); 「不著己樂，慶於彼樂。」〈11 菩薩行品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0554b09

¹⁶³ Salzberg (1995:119)

¹⁶⁴ Dayal (1932/1999:229)

In this respect, *muditā* is also a means of realising *dharma* and becoming enlightened¹⁶⁵. It is because of this joy that a bodhisattva will “feel tireless no matter how you work. You will not feel bothered but happy. When all beings are happy, you are also happy. This is empathetic joy,” as Venerable Foo Chai clarified.

Upekṣa (equanimity¹⁶⁶ 捨). *Upekṣa*, resisting indifference¹⁶⁷, involves three components: generosity, impartiality, and indiscrimination, reflecting the detachment of a practitioner’s grasp through *upekṣa*¹⁶⁸.

In the first place, a bodhisattva “for sakes one’s various possessions”¹⁶⁹, and “shares all things with sentient beings. ... *Upekṣa* deals with greed, ... surrender one’s greed, hatred, ignorance, attachment, and defilement,” Venerable Chi Yiu explained. This aim at overcoming “feelings of possessiveness and miserly attachment”¹⁷⁰, as Venerable Foo Chai detailed,

“After doing, you needn’t attach [what you have done], not attach how many people you’ve helped. ... After serving, you don’t need to think too much. ... *Upekṣa* is not to attach achievements, not to attach the self who gives, the recipient who gain the gifts. There’s no giving at all. This is the law of interdependent origination of these three aspects.”

¹⁶⁵ “Joy is the place of enlightenment, because of taking pleasure in the *Dharma*,” (McRae, 2004:100)「喜是道場，悅樂法故。」〈4 菩薩品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0542c14

¹⁶⁶ “Equanimity” in English refers to two notions: first, “evenness of mind, calmness”; and second, “fairness, impartiality”. (Online Etymology Dictionary 2013)

¹⁶⁷ Kornfield (1988:24)

¹⁶⁸ “Equanimity is the place of enlightenment, because of the eradication of repugnance and affection.” (McRae, 2004:100)「捨是道場，憎愛斷故。」〈4 菩薩品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0542c14-15

¹⁶⁹ McRae (2004:162); 「捨諸所有。」〈11 菩薩行品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0554b09-10

¹⁷⁰ Gyatso (2011:127)

In the second place, the “principle of equanimity”¹⁷¹ exhibits egalitarianism, which treats all living beings equally¹⁷². In Mahāyāna, equality, otherwise known as “wise impartiality”¹⁷³, is central to *catvāri apramānāni* (the four immeasurables 四無量心); hence, Venerable Yu Chun and Venerable Thong Hong emphasised that “equanimity means discerning no differences.”

In the third place, the nature of non-discrimination inclusively adheres to no distinctions among “I”, “you”, and “others”¹⁷⁴. A bodhisattva must get rid of a discriminatory mind, a dualistic view of “I” and “others”¹⁷⁵, and of non-intimates and non-antagonists¹⁷⁶, in order “to benefit people regardless of whether they are enemies or family, and benefit them as though benefiting parents and brothers,” Venerable Yu Chun expounded. Equanimity also surrenders discrimination that has arisen due to dualism. VHT (a Buddhist monk) continued,

“When you see good, you don’t attach to it. When you see bad, you won’t generate a strong mind of disgust. That means, you won’t distinguish between beauty and ugliness, and reside in balance. This is the mind of equanimity.”

Regarding *upekṣa* in practice, Venerable Sinh Nghiem shared her experience as follows:

“Equanimity is to love without discrimination. As a monastic we try to love everyone without discrimination.

¹⁷¹ Watson (1997:40)

¹⁷² “the *Dharma* of universal sameness” (McRae, 2004:87) 「平等法」〈3 弟子品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0540a26

¹⁷³ Manne-Lewis (1986:137)

¹⁷⁴ “identical with living beings, free of distinctions with regard to things” (Watson, 1997:131) 「同眾生，於諸法無分別。」〈12 見阿闍佛品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0554c36-37

¹⁷⁵ Kornfield (1988:25)

¹⁷⁶ Nakamura (1997:27)

There're those who we feel an easy and instant connection, and others who we need more time to get to know and understand. For those who I don't have an easy connection with I try to spend some time with them, try to understand their happiness and suffering, and their aspirations. When I can understand them, it's easier to love them.”

Mahāmaitrī (great loving-kindness 大慈) and *mahākaruṇā* (great compassion 大悲), the essence of Mahāyāna¹⁷⁷, can only be practised without discrimination. As Venerable Yu Chun concluded,

“A bodhisattva retains *mahāmaitrī*, *mahākaruṇā*, *mahāmuditā*, and *mahāupekṣa*. It's because they don't bear a discriminative mind, no recipient, no receiving, no giving; then they can reach a mind without attachment.”

Without attachment, a bodhisattva can freely carry out her/his mission; otherwise, s/he may suffer from sentimental compassion, which will be highlighted later.

Roles of a Bodhisattva

In the *Sūtra*, Vimalakīrti, a layman bodhisattva¹⁷⁸, adopts the metaphor of the “inexhaustible lamp” to illustrate the holy capacity of a bodhisattva.

“The inexhaustible lamp is like a lamp that ignites a hundred thousand lamps, illuminating all darkness with an illumination that is never exhausted. ..., if a single bodhisattva guides a hundred thousand sentient beings, causing them to generate the intention to achieve

¹⁷⁷ Nakamura (1997:46)

¹⁷⁸ Durt (1991:9)

anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, that bodhisattva's intention to achieve enlightenment will also never be extinguished."¹⁷⁹

This metaphor restates that the ultimate goal of a bodhisattva is to “bring great benefit to all living beings”¹⁸⁰. In order to accomplish this capacity, a bodhisattva carries out two key roles; being a great guide, and being a physician/medicine king.

A bodhisattva is “the Great Guide of All”¹⁸¹, who coaches sentient beings¹⁸² in understanding the formation of the phenomenal world to “release people from their delusions”¹⁸³, resulting in her/his ability to “eliminate the doubts of sentient beings”¹⁸⁴. In this regard, a bodhisattva is deemed to be “a good spiritual mentor or friend to others”, as Venerable Sander related regarding the significance of a bodhisattva.

Meanwhile, a bodhisattva is also like “the physician king, healing the host of illnesses.”¹⁸⁵, “according to the [nature of each] illness [causing the medicine] to be taken”¹⁸⁶, referring to the bodhisattva as a healer to cure psychological wounds, by which “if one wishes to save sentient beings, the afflictions should be eradicated”¹⁸⁷. This liberation

¹⁷⁹ McRae (2004:103); 「無盡燈者，譬如一燈，燃百千燈，冥者皆明，明終不盡。如是，諸姊！夫一菩薩開導百千眾生，令發阿耨多羅三藐三菩提心，於其道意亦不減盡。」〈4 菩薩品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0543b16-17

¹⁸⁰ “guide living beings” (Watson, 1997:59) 「大饒益一切眾生。」〈4 菩薩品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0543b17

¹⁸¹ McRae (2004:74); 「大導師」〈1 佛國品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0537b59

¹⁸² “guiding living beings” (Watson, 1997:127) 「引導眾生。」〈11 菩薩行品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0554b14

¹⁸³ McRae (2004:139); 「因以解人惑。」〈8 佛道品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0549b73

¹⁸⁴ McRae (2004:162); 「斷眾生疑。」〈11 菩薩行品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0554b14

¹⁸⁵ McRae (2004:110); 「當作醫王，療治眾病。」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0544c20

¹⁸⁶ McRae (2004:70); 「為大醫王，善療眾病，應病與藥，令得服行。」〈1 佛國品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0537a15

¹⁸⁷ McRae (2004:126); 「欲度眾生，除其煩惱。」〈7 觀眾生品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0547c12

of sentient beings' suffering¹⁸⁸ utilises *upāya* (skilful means 方便) to flexibly care for their individual needs of sentient beings.

Qualities of a Bodhisattva

Being a coach and healer, a bodhisattva possesses certain specific qualities, including the embracement of all livings, a pure mind, and an indiscriminate mind. In order to serve all beings, especially sentient beings, a bodhisattva is willing to dwell in the *loka* (the secular world 世間), even though s/he is able to attain the *lokottara* (the supermundane world 出世間), that is, *nirvāṇa* (perfect stillness 涅槃). This is the only way a bodhisattva can empathically experience the suffering of sentient beings, and show her/his greatest caring¹⁸⁹. Furthermore, this exhibits her/his secular wisdom in understanding the actual needs of sentient beings; and denotes the greatest *maitrī* (loving-kindness 慈) and *karuṇā* (compassion 悲) of a bodhisattva¹⁹⁰, who implements “the doctrine of the exhaustible and the inexhaustible emancipation”¹⁹¹. Formed by “the exhaustible” to retain *mahā-maitrī-mahā-karuṇā*¹⁹² (great loving-kindness and great compassion 大慈大悲), and “the inexhaustible” to expunge

¹⁸⁸ Hsing-Yun (2006:119)

¹⁸⁹ “In order to understand the illnesses of sentient beings, one should not abide in the unconditioned; in order to extinguish the illnesses of sentient beings, one should not exhaust the conditioned.” (McRae, 2004:164) 「知眾生病故，不住無為；滅眾生病故，不盡有為。」〈11 菩薩行品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0554c16

¹⁹⁰ “In order to be complete in wisdom one should not exhaust the conditioned. In order to [achieve] great sympathy, one should not abide in the unconditioned.” (Watson, 1997:163) 「具智慧故，不盡有為。大慈悲故，不住無為。」〈11 菩薩行品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0554c15

¹⁹¹ Watson (1997:126); 「有盡無盡解脫法門。」〈11 菩薩行品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0554b03

¹⁹² “not setting aside great compassion, not renouncing great pity” (Watson, 1997:126) 「謂不離大慈，不捨大悲。」〈11 菩薩行品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0554b06

suffering from living beings¹⁹³, this doctrine emphasises a missionary career centred around societal well-being¹⁹⁴.

However, in such a chaotic *loka* (the secular world 世間), a bodhisattva does not become annoyed, because her/his “mind is at all times clear and pure”¹⁹⁵ without false perception, confusion, and attachment¹⁹⁶. In other words, the purity and mindfulness of a bodhisattva are not external factors, but an inner view and perception towards the external environment. Therefore, “when the mind is defiled, the living being will be defiled. When the mind is pure, the living being will be pure”¹⁹⁷. Only when a bodhisattva maintains a pure mind, can s/he accept and forgive the depravity of sentient beings.

¹⁹³ “It is worldly suffering without considering *samsāra* evil.” (McRae, 2004:163) 「觀世間苦，而不惡生死。」〈11 菩薩行品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0554c04

¹⁹⁴ “Furthermore, in order to be complete in merit one should not abide in the unconditioned; and in order to be complete in wisdom one should not exhaust the conditioned. In order to [achieve] great sympathy and compassion, one should not abide in the unconditioned; in order to fulfil one’s original vow, one should not exhaust the conditioned. In order to accumulate the medicines of the *Dharma*, one should not abide in the unconditioned; in order to bestow medicines according [to the needs of sentient beings], one should not exhaust the conditioned. In order to understand the illnesses of sentient beings, one should not abide in the unconditioned; in order to extinguish the illnesses of sentient beings, one should not exhaust the conditioned.” (McRae, 2004:163-164) 「又具福德故，不住無為；具智慧故，不盡有為。大慈悲故，不住無為；滿本願故，不盡有為。集法藥故，不住無為；隨授藥故，不盡有為。知眾生病故，不住無為；滅眾生病故，不盡有為。」〈11 菩薩行品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0554c

¹⁹⁵ Watson (1997:94); 「心常清淨。」〈8 佛道品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0549a06

¹⁹⁶ “To have false concepts is defilement; to be without false concepts is purity. Confusion is defilement, and the absence of confusion is purity. To grasp the self is defilement, and not to grasp the self is purity.” (McRae, 2004:93) 「妄想是垢，無妄想是淨；顛倒是垢，無顛倒是淨；取我是垢，不取我是淨。」〈3 弟子品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0541b15-16

¹⁹⁷ Watson (1997:47); 「心垢故眾生垢，心淨故眾生淨。」〈3 弟子品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0541b13

It is because of this pure mind, that a bodhisattva can treat all beings equally without discrimination¹⁹⁸. This is aligning with *dharma*¹⁹⁹, which transcends consciousness from the perspective of ordinary beings²⁰⁰, in accordance with Mahāyāna theory. This indiscrimination facilitates a bodhisattva to attain “the bodhisattva path for equally helping those who they are acquainted with or with whom they are angry” (VHU, a Buddhist nun), conveying great compassion in practice. Attaining this quality, a bodhisattva delivers the greatest care but does not receive anything in return²⁰¹.

Causes of a Bodhisattva’s Sickness

Sickness, that is, “bondage”²⁰², “defilement”²⁰³, “vexation”²⁰⁴, or “outflows”²⁰⁵ in the *Sūtra*, is a metaphor for afflictions. A bodhisattva gets sick for two reasons – for the sake of all beings or because of “sentimental compassion”²⁰⁶. The former is a manifestation of great compassion, a boundless and absolute compassion²⁰⁷; while the latter is produced by a bodhisattva’s improper perception of *dharma*.

¹⁹⁸ “In humanity and non-interference they are even-minded toward all sentient beings.” (McRae, 2004:155) 「等心眾生，謙下無礙。」〈10 香積佛品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0553a30

¹⁹⁹ “One must be without distinctions to be in accordance with the Law.” (Watson, 1997:87) 「若無所分別，是則如法。」〈7 觀眾生品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0547c29

²⁰⁰ “The *Dharma* is without discrimination because it transcends the consciousness.” (McRae, 2004:86) 「法無分別，離諸識故。」〈3 弟子品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0539c32

²⁰¹ “One exercises great compassion in equal measure without seeking reward or recompense” (Watson, 1997:63) 「無所分別，等於大悲，不求果報。」〈4 菩薩品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0544a06

²⁰² McRae (2004:112); 「縛」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a27

²⁰³ Watson (1997:70); 「煩惱」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a26

²⁰⁴ McRae (2004:83); 「惱」〈2 方便品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0539b12

²⁰⁵ Watson (1997:128); 「漏」〈11 菩薩行品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0554c05

²⁰⁶ McRae (2004:114); 「愛見悲」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a26

²⁰⁷ Akizuki (1990:99)

The major mission of a bodhisattva is to protect and bring benefit to sentient beings²⁰⁸ by teaching and converting them²⁰⁹, rescuing them²¹⁰, and accomplishing certain purposes²¹¹. A bodhisattva wishes sentient beings to attain to “a clean and pure land”²¹², “to set their minds on attaining *bodhi*”²¹³, that is, “to achieve enlightenment”²¹⁴, and finally “to eradicate all the illnesses of sentient beings”²¹⁵.

For the sake of living beings, a bodhisattva voluntarily falls into *samsāra* (the cycle of birth and death 輪迴) in order to empathise with sentient beings, especially with those who are sick (metaphoric suffering). S/he retains a little bit of suffering so that s/he can experience the suffering of sentient beings²¹⁶. The reasons that sentient beings get sick involve different aspects. Metaphoric sickness is a cluster of vexation and suffering²¹⁷ caused by “ignorance and feelings of attachment”²¹⁸, especially for one’s own body²¹⁹. However, the body is a phenomenal presentation that “arise[s] from the four elements (earth, water, fire, and wind)”²²⁰. This phenomenal representation changes without a fixed form. For instance, aging and getting sick present the unobservable changes that

²⁰⁸ “protected sentient beings ...to benefit sentient beings” (McRae, 2004:82) 「護諸眾生。…饒益眾生。」〈2 方便品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0539a20

²⁰⁹ “teach and convert living beings” (Watson, 1997:55) 「教化眾生。」〈4 菩薩品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0542c20

²¹⁰ “by rescuing living beings” (Watson, 1997:61) 「以度眾生。」〈4 菩薩品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0543c08

²¹¹ “accomplish [the salvation of] sentient beings” (McRae, 2004:112) 「成就眾生。」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a30

²¹² Watson (1997:135); 「願使一切眾生得清淨土。」〈12 見阿闍佛品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0555c17

²¹³ Watson (1997:102); 「令發菩提心。」〈8 佛道品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0549b96

²¹⁴ McRae (2004:141); 「後令發道心。」〈8 佛道品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0549b100

²¹⁵ McRae (2004:84); 「斷一切眾生病。」〈2 方便品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0539b33

²¹⁶ You (1999:198-201, 211-224)

²¹⁷ “Alternately suffering and vexatious, it accumulates a host of illnesses.” (McRae, 2004:83) 「為苦、為惱，眾病所集。」〈2 方便品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0539b12

²¹⁸ Watson (1997:65); 「從癡有愛。」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0544b20

²¹⁹ Watson (1997:86); 「身」〈7 觀眾生品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0547c17

²²⁰ Watson (1997:67); 「而眾生病，從四大起。」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0544c14

make sentient beings worry and be upset. Thus, from the Buddhist perspective, the body is one of the causes of sickness²²¹. This strong attachment to the body is caused by the “attachment of self”²²²; and is “desire and greed”²²³, a narcissistic greed.

Similarly, sentient beings feel pain because of “troublesome entanglements”²²⁴ whenever they are affected by external factors. This materialistic cause connotes that sentient beings neglect their inner resources but suffer from a feeling of emptiness. Without inner contentment, sentient beings fail to achieve well-being and tranquillity.

These ignorances, attachments, and entanglements originate from “a confused [view]”²²⁵, which leads sentient beings to mis-perceive the phenomenal world. Phenomenal reality is revealed when *hetu* (necessary cause 主因) and *pratyaya* (contributing cause 助緣) align properly and simultaneously; but these causes are ever-changing. Sentient beings suffer from “false and empty distinctions”²²⁶, trying to attach themselves to eternity and creating discrimination between self and others. This discrimination then worsens attachment to self, a metaphoric sickness.

The sickness of sentient beings affects a bodhisattva “because the bodhisattva for the sake of living beings enters the realm of birth and death, and because [s/]he is in the realm of birth and death [s/]he suffers illness. If living beings can gain release from illness, then the bodhisattva will no longer be ill”²²⁷. The bodhisattva gets sick simply because the sentient

²²¹ “This body is a disaster, vexed by a hundred and one illnesses.” (McRae, 2004:83)
「是身為災，百一病惱。」〈2 方便品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0539b16-17

²²² McRae (2004:110); 「又此病起，皆由著我。」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0544c28

²²³ Watson (1997:86); 「欲貪」〈7 觀眾生品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0547c17

²²⁴ Watson (1997:69); 「從有攀緣，則為病本。」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a16

²²⁵ McRae (2004:111); 「顛倒」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0544c30

²²⁶ Watson (1997:86); 「虛妄分別」〈7 觀眾生品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0547c18

²²⁷ Watson (1997:65); 「菩薩為眾生故入生死，有生死則有病；若眾生得離病者，則菩薩無復病。」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0544b21

beings are sick. The sentient beings are suffering from *samsāra* (the cycle of birth and death 輪迴), and thus the bodhisattva also suffers in order to live in their communities, experience their distress, and fulfil her/his vows to free them from woe. VHY (a Buddhist nun) expounded, “a bodhisattva has no sickness. S/he is sick because sentient beings are ill.”

This manifestation of a bodhisattva presents her/his empathy for what sentient beings are suffering; most importantly, s/he is upset about the travails of life of sentient beings, produced by ignorance, delusive thoughts, entanglements, and attachments, as explained earlier. This upset comes from her/his great compassion²²⁸, just as parents’ care greatly for their children²²⁹. When children are ill, parents also feel as sore as if they were ill themselves. In this sense, the sickness of sentient beings is that of a bodhisattva²³⁰; therefore, when the sickness of a sentient being is cured, a bodhisattva will recover. This great compassion²³¹ is one of the essentials that bridge the inseparable relationship between sentient beings and the bodhisattva.

In contrast, a bodhisattva otherwise falls ill due to “sentimental compassion”²³², which a “novice bodhisattva”²³³ experiences when

²²⁸ “Given the suffering of their bodies, they think of sentient beings in the evil destinations and generate great compassion.” (McRae, 2004:111) 「設身有苦，念惡趣眾生，起大悲心。」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a15

²²⁹ “It is like an elder whose only son becomes ill, and the parents become ill as well. If the son recovers from the illness, the parents also recover. Bodhisattvas are like this. They have affection for sentient beings as if for their own children. When sentient beings are ill the bodhisattvas are ill also, and when sentient beings recover from their illness the bodhisattvas recover also.” (McRae, 2004:108) 「譬如長者，唯有一子，其子得病，父母亦病。若子病愈，父母亦愈。菩薩如是，於諸眾生，愛之若子；眾生病則菩薩病，眾生病愈，菩薩亦愈。」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0544b21-23

²³⁰ “Since all sentient beings are ill, therefore I am ill.” (McRae, 2004:108) 「以一切眾生病，是故我病。」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0544b20

²³¹ “The illness of the *bodhisattva* arises from his great compassion.” (Watson, 1997:66) 「菩薩病者，以大悲起。」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0544b23

²³² McRae (2004:112); 「愛見大悲」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a25-26

practising compassion while still possessing defilements. S/he will compassionately attach to the suffering of sentient beings with an improper understanding of the phenomenal manifestation of sentient beings. Her/his attachment will mislead her/him to perceive a substantial existence of living beings, which wrongly guides her/him to be averse to *samsāra*²³⁴, and incorrectly perceive that there is substance that can either exist or vanish²³⁵. This aversion causes her/him to relinquish sentient beings and surrender the vow to serving living beings. Such a neophyte is referred to as an “ailing bodhisattva”²³⁶.

The root of sickness within an ailing bodhisattva lies in her/his misperception of the existence of sentient beings, from which s/he mistakenly perceives that sentient beings substantially exist. However, all beings are ever-changing in nature; and their physical existence is engendered by surrounding conditions and the aggregation of those conditions; that is *pratītya-samutpāda* (the law of dependent origination 緣起法). This existence is phenomenal; from the Buddhist perspective, it is delusive, in which the nature of all existence is *śūnyata* (voidness 空性). When an ailing bodhisattva realises the *śūnyata* of sentient beings, which supports the bodhisattva’s vow²³⁷, s/he is able to bequeath real compassion. S/he can transcend the delusive phenomena, and then cure this *śūnyata* illness, for which s/he has to attain *prajñā* (wisdom 般若) and *upāya* (skilful means 方便).

²³³ “those who have yet to learn” (Watson, 1997:113) 「未學」〈10 香積佛品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 552a22; 「新學菩薩」〈14 囑累品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 557a17

²³⁴ “If they have an affectionate view of compassion, they would thereby generate aversion toward *samsāra*.” (McRae, 2004:112) 「愛見悲者，則於生死有疲厭心。」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a26

²³⁵ “undertake the conception (or visualization) of the extinguished dharmas” (McRae, 2004:110) 「彼有疾菩薩為滅法想。」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0544c30

²³⁶ Watson (1997:68); 「有疾菩薩」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0544c17

²³⁷ Conze (1967:54)

Bodhisattva-mārga (The Bodhisattva Path)

Bodhisattva-mārga (the bodhisattva path 菩薩道), a crucial Mahāyāna theory and practice²³⁸, is a means of striving for the aspiration of buddhahood which arises through *bodhicitta*²³⁹. To assure the practice of *bodhisattva-mārga* (the bodhisattva path 菩薩道), a bodhisattva must possess *prajñā* (wisdom 般若) and *upāya* (skilful means 方便), respectively in terms of intelligent and behavioural dimensions. Both facets are interactive – the more wisdom is attained, the more skilful action is practised; and vice versa.

Prajñā (wisdom 般若). A novice bodhisattva learns to practise compassion combined with wisdom²⁴⁰ and to prevent “compassion fatigue”, as Venerable Sinh Nghiem and Venerable Sander elucidated. *Prajñā* involves a clear understanding of herself/himself and Buddhist teachings.

A novice bodhisattva should first learn the secular wisdom to look after herself/himself. As Venerable Sinh Nghiem related,

“If we don’t recharge our spirit and our ideals, like our desire to help, we don’t know how to nourish ourselves with the goodness, the joy and the happiness, the peace, then day after day, we’re exposed to people’s problems, we will feel awful. So, you have to learn how to protect yourself. You have to learn to take your care of the mind of love, or the desire to help other people.”

While looking after oneself, one is able to wisely assess her/his own limitations. “Yes, [we should] know about ourselves, know about our limitations,” Venerable Sinh Nghiem advised. Sister Harmony (a

²³⁸ Williams (2005:996)

²³⁹ Harvey (1990:91)

²⁴⁰ Slater (1981:27); Mosig (1989:11-12)

Buddhist nun) resonated, “if we work past our limit, we don’t have much to offer. It’s also very important that we prioritise what we should do.” This prioritisation, involving self-understanding to pursue personal growth²⁴¹, will integrate compassion into action as Polly (a clinical psychologist) discussed,

“This is a balance, in which s/he retains a compassionate mind and detached position. ... On one hand, s/he’s compassionate; on the other hand, s/he can have ways to help other people. At the same time, s/he can investigate herself or himself, and assess her or his own feelings.”

Wisdom, from this aspect, is to wisely discern what we should or should not do. Che Wai (a beneficiary) is inspired during self reflection, stating,

“Wisdom is knowledge of choices. When you know how to choose, ... A wise person is to choose the right things. It’s a choice. When you know how to make choices, you’re wise.”

As for novice bodhisattvas, they equip themselves; without energy, they are incapable of saving living beings. VHT (a Buddhist monk) ascertained,

“Before helping others, a bodhisattva has to be well-prepared and train herself/himself. ... For instance, a secular bodhisattva gets sick. S/he should cure the illness first. After healing, ... s/he can help other people. Otherwise, the sufferer is painful; and s/he’s also painful. Then all of them get sick. ... How can such a bodhisattva help others?

²⁴¹ Feldman (1988:20)

Firstly, s/he should recover from illness before helping others.”

As a result, a bodhisattva can be freed from compassion fatigue while serving sufferers. Venerable Sinh Nghiem proclaimed,

“Going together, I help myself and I help other people. In that way I find that I don’t have compassion fatigue. I don’t suffer from fatigue because I learn to give myself compassion. And in that same process, I give other people compassion too.”

In summary, *prajñā* (wisdom 般若) means to deal with “beginningless ignorance”²⁴² and to cultivate mindfulness in order to monitor thoughts flowing through the mind. HW (a helping service practitioner) asserted the following,

“Why do we develop wisdom? It’s for eradicating ignorance. ... We’re able to enhance mindfulness and right knowledge. In the end, we can observe ourselves.”

Wisdom, apart from the secular aspect, refers mainly to *prajñā* (wisdom 般若), and is the highest priority in Mahāyāna. “Seeing things the way they really are”²⁴³ is important as a mother to her family²⁴⁴, for “wisdom is the place of practice, because it sees all things as they are”²⁴⁵. As Venerable Yu Chun taught,

²⁴² Williams (1998:105)

²⁴³ Williams (1998:29)

²⁴⁴ “The perfection of wisdom is the bodhisattva’s mother.” (McRae, 2004:136) 「智度菩薩母。」〈8 佛道品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0549b30

²⁴⁵ Watson (1997:55); 「智慧是道場，現見諸法故。」〈4 菩薩品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0542c14

“*Prajñā* is wisdom of *sūnyata*. That is, in the secular world, [everything] is non-autonomous and impermanent. You’re incapable of controlling it. [Everything] is conditioned. Your success is the outcome of well-matching of conditions. Your failure is due to deficiency of some parts of conditions. This is *pratītya-samutpāda*.”

Through *prajñā* (wisdom 般若), a bodhisattva is able to understand and experience *pratītya-samutpāda* (the law of dependent origination 緣起法), the most fundamental theory of Buddhism; and in this way s/he is able to break through dualism and practise *madhyamā-pratipad*²⁴⁶ (the middle way 中道), reaching the realm of either getting rid of defilements or keeping defilements²⁴⁷ because the existence of defilements has no effect on her/him. Defilement per se is ever-changing, non-substantial, and delusive. Realising this nature is to thoroughly understand *pratītya-samutpāda*, from which a bodhisattva is relieved from attachment and distress, and enters *nirvāṇa* (perfect stillness 涅槃). HW (a helping service practitioner) supplemented this thought with the following,

“In Mahāyāna, especially in *madhyamaka* (the Middle School 中觀), or the concept of *sūnyata*, ... You won’t fall into the trap of attachment.”

This achievement enables a bodhisattva to practise the path of a bodhisattva with no obstructions²⁴⁸, through understanding the inner world

²⁴⁶ “profoundly entered into conditioned generation to eliminate the false views; were without any residual influence of the two extremes of being and non-being; ...comprehend the profound and wondrous meanings of the Dharmas” (McRae, 2004:70) 「深入緣起，斷諸邪見，有無二邊，無復餘習；了達諸法深妙之義。」〈1 佛國品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0537a12-14

²⁴⁷ “neither possess earthly desires nor is separated from earthly desires” (Watson, 1997:41) 「非有煩惱，非離煩惱。」〈3 弟子品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0540a29-30

²⁴⁸ “You have mastered the mars of all phenomena, no blocks or hindrances.” (Watson, 1997:25) 「達諸法相無罣礙。」〈1 佛國品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0537b64

of sentient beings²⁴⁹, resulting in the achievement of pure wisdom and a pure mind²⁵⁰. By attaining a pure mind, a bodhisattva understands the causes behind suffering and what to do for the welfare of sentient beings. Equally vital is how to care for their welfare²⁵¹. Eventually, a bodhisattva is intelligently capable of clearly seeing the truth, managing changes among the phenomena, and making balanced decisions²⁵². Also, *prajñā* (wisdom 般若) and *upāya* (skilful means 方便) brighten the *bodhicitta*²⁵³ (enlightened mind 菩提心).

Upāya (skilful means 方便). *Prajñā* (wisdom 般若) is closely intertwined with *upāya* in practising the *bodhisattva-mārga* (the bodhisattva path 菩薩道). The former is regarded as the intellectual domain, while the latter as the practice dimension; as in the role of a father in a family²⁵⁴, in preaching, teaching, and serving others²⁵⁵. *Upāya*, for a bodhisattva, means to develop the needed skills to help sentient beings²⁵⁶ through flexible methods and techniques²⁵⁷ in various contexts, including both strategy and tactics, helping them to realise that there is no absolute truth²⁵⁸ in light of *sūnyata* (voidness 空性). Being sick, Vimalakīrti takes this chance, by showing the changes of this body, to illustrate the

²⁴⁹ “Understanding is *bodhi*, because of the comprehension of the mental processes of sentient beings.” (McRae, 2004:98) 「知是菩提，了眾生心行故。」〈4 菩薩品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0542a40

²⁵⁰ “Because his wisdom is pure, his mind is pure.” (Watson, 1997:29) 「隨智慧淨，則其心淨。」〈1 佛國品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0538b28

²⁵¹ Dayal (1932/1999:176)

²⁵² Kristeller and Jones (2006:100)

²⁵³ Gyatso (2011:108)

²⁵⁴ “Skilful means is his father.” (McRae, 2004:136) 「方便以為父。」〈8 佛道品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0549b30

²⁵⁵ Mair (1994:713)

²⁵⁶ “Skilful means are the place of enlightenment, because of the salvation of sentient beings.” (McRae, 2004:100) 「方便是道場，教化眾生故。」〈4 菩薩品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0542c15

²⁵⁷ Schroeder (2001:3)

²⁵⁸ Ray (1986:25)

impermanence and non-substantiality of the phenomenal world²⁵⁹. This is *upāya*²⁶⁰, using illness as an example in preaching *sūnyata*²⁶¹.

Strategically, a bodhisattva utilises a variety of methods to maintain a strong appeal to sentient beings, metaphorically hooking them in order to attract their attention and lower their resistance²⁶². With less defiance, sentient beings will accept teachings more easily when skilful actions are combined with “compassion, tranquillity, joyfulness, and clarity”²⁶³.

Tactically, a bodhisattva is able to distinguish between the capacities, characteristics, and demerits of individual sentient beings²⁶⁴, contributing to the identification of their individual needs²⁶⁵ and the proper observation of their responses²⁶⁶. Understandably, “different people will respond differently. ... [and] perform the best role in different positions, from different angles”, according to Chi Sim’s (a beneficiary) experience. This indicates that a bodhisattva recognises individual needs and adjusts for individual capabilities, rather than imposing her/his demands on sentient beings from a superior position²⁶⁷. Dr Li (a psychiatrist) applies this skill to his work, stating the following,

²⁵⁹ Schroeder (2001:75)

²⁶⁰ Pye (2003:91)

²⁶¹ Hamlin (1988:102)

²⁶² “First enticing them with desire, and later causing them to enter the wisdom of the Buddha.” (McRae, 2004:140) 「先以欲鉤牽，後令入佛道。」〈8 佛道品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0549b97

²⁶³ Wray (1986:166)

²⁶⁴ “You should take into account that some living beings are keen in capacity while others are dull.” (Watson, 1997:39) 「當了眾生根有利鈍。」〈3 弟子品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0539c36

²⁶⁵ “In accordance with the needs of others, he causes them to enter into the path of buddhahood. Using the power of good skilful means, he provides sufficiency to all.” (McRae, 2004:141) 「隨彼之所須，得入於佛道，以善方便力，皆能給足之。」〈8 佛道品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0549b110-111

²⁶⁶ “in accordance with the responses of [sentient beings]” (McRae, 2004:161) 「隨其所應。」〈11 菩薩行品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0554a29

²⁶⁷ “Bodhisattvas acquire the *buddha* lands according to the sentient beings they convert. They acquire the *buddha* lands according to the sentient beings they discipline. They acquire the *buddha* lands according to what country sentient beings need to enter into *buddha* wisdom. They acquire the *buddha* lands

“This is the wisdom of skilful means, by which we need to match the responses. The wisdom of skilful means is to apprehend the uniqueness of every individual. Then, a *bodhisattva* can accommodate them, accommodate the patients, but not vice versa.”

These strategies and tactics, “guided by wisdom” (as emphasised by VHU, a Buddhist nun), present the practice of *upāya* (skilful means 方便). In order to free sentient beings from defilements and afflictions²⁶⁸, “a bodhisattva continuously learns from sentient beings, and learns how to use skilful means,” as Polly (a clinical psychologist) reminded us, so that s/he can be equipped with various skills to cater to the diverse dispositions of sentient beings²⁶⁹.

Practising bodhisattva-mārga (the bodhisattva path 菩薩道). The praxis of *bodhisattva-mārga* is to take on the roles of a bodhisattva, like an inexhaustible lamp, to guide sentient beings to properly understand the phenomenal reality and alleviate their suffering, dedicating oneself to the happiness of sentient beings²⁷⁰. Working towards this mission, a bodhisattva retains and embodies the *catvāri apramānāni* (the four immeasurables 四無量心) on both mental and practical levels. This embodiment is the product of *prajñā* (wisdom 般若) and *upāya*²⁷¹ (skilful means 方便), extends to veteran and novice bodhisattvas. Referring again to the earlier illustration of the embracement of all beings, a

according to what country sentient beings need to generate the roots [for becoming] bodhisattvas.” (McRae, 2004:75) 「菩薩隨所化眾生而取佛土，隨所調伏眾生而取佛土，隨諸眾生應以何國入佛智慧而取佛土，隨諸眾生應以何國起菩薩根而取佛土。」〈1 佛國品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0538a21-22

²⁶⁸ “Skilful means are the bodhisattva’s pure land – when the bodhisattva achieves buddhahood, sentient beings whose skilful means are without hindrance regarding all the dharmas come to be born in his country.” (McRae, 2004:77) 「方便是菩薩淨土，菩薩成佛時，於一切法方便無礙眾生來生其國。」〈1 佛國品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0538a34-35

²⁶⁹ Hamlin (1988:90)

²⁷⁰ Zopa (2012:103)

²⁷¹ Schroeder (2001:3)

bodhisattva aspires to live in the *loka* (the secular world 世間) to connect with sentient beings²⁷², while s/he has achieved the highest wisdom and self transcendence, by which s/he has been freed from the bondage of defilements and afflictions. Based on this quality, s/he practises *maitrī* (loving-kindness 慈), *karuṇā* (compassion 悲), *muditā* (empathetic joy 喜), and *upekṣa* (equanimity 捨), and perfects *bodhicitta* (enlightened mind 菩提心), thus fulfilling the greatest vow, that of alleviating sentient beings' distress and enlightening them.

However, in order to honour this pledge, a bodhisattva endures and employs aberrant ways to perform this arduous task²⁷³ due to the elimination of “soteriological ‘marks’, ‘signs’, and fixed doctrines”²⁷⁴. S/he may be present anywhere, such as standing at crossroads to dole alms out to the poor as Vimalakīrti did²⁷⁵, or unhesitatingly visiting vulgar places to save people there, such as when Vimalakīrti wandered around to gambling houses²⁷⁶ and wine shops²⁷⁷. Worse than that even, s/he may

²⁷² “What is it not to exhaust the conditioned? It is neither to transcend great sympathy nor to forsake great compassion, to profoundly generate the aspiration to achieve omniscience and never forget it even momentarily. ... In order to accumulate the medicines of the *Dharma*, one should not abide in the unconditioned, in order to bestow medicines according [to the needs of sentient beings], one should not exhaust the conditioned. In order to understand the illnesses of sentient beings, one should not abide in the unconditioned; in order to extinguish the illnesses of sentient beings, one should not exhaust the conditioned.” (McRae, 2004:161-164)

「何謂不盡有為？謂不離大慈，不捨大悲；深發一切智心，而不忽忘；教化眾生，終不厭倦；…集法藥故，不住無為；隨授藥故，不盡有為。知眾生病故，不住無為；滅眾生病故，不盡有為。」〈11 菩薩行品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0554b06-16

²⁷³ “If a bodhisattva traverses the unacceptable paths, this is to penetrate the path of buddahood.” (McRae, 2004:133) 「若菩薩行於非道，是為通達佛道。」〈8 佛道品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0549a01

²⁷⁴ Schroeder (2001:155)

²⁷⁵ “He frequented the busy crossroads in order to bring benefit to others.” (Watson, 1997:33) 「遊諸四衢，饒益眾生。」〈2 方便品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0539a

²⁷⁶ “If he visited the gambling parlours, it was solely to bring enlightenment to those there.” (Watson, 1997:33) 「若至博弈戲處，輒以度人。」〈2 方便品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0539a14

²⁷⁷ “entered wine shops in order to encourage those with a will to quit them” (Watson, 1997:33) 「入諸酒肆，能立其志。」〈2 方便品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0539a16

behave deplorably, akin to Vimalakīrti's entering brothels²⁷⁸, for correcting human follies. Despite these peculiarities, a bodhisattva clearly knows her/his purpose for doing such anomalous behaviour for the sake of transgressed beings²⁷⁹.

In fact, a bodhisattva, through these non-customary activities, effaces dichotomy and experiences the truth of non-dualism for the welfare of sentient beings²⁸⁰. This is the practice of *madhyamā-pratipad*²⁸¹ (the middle way 中道), having conquered the traps of relativity and discrimination. Thus, a bodhisattva who retains a pure mind without defilements can prevail over the demarcation of good and evil, resulting from the combination of *prajñā* (wisdom 般若) and *upāya* (skilful means 方便).

Supported by the practice of *madhyamā-pratipad* (the middle way 中道), a bodhisattva further comprehends *pratītya-samutpāda* (law of dependent origination 緣起法), and vice versa. S/he, with the aid of this comprehension, realises the phenomenal existence of beings, and

²⁷⁸ “In entering the brothels, he revealed the transgressions [that arise from] desire.” (McRae, 2004:82) 「入諸婬舍，示欲之過。」〈2 方便品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0539a16

²⁷⁹ “If the bodhisattva goes to the region of the five sins that lead to the hell of incessant suffering, he shows no anguish or anger. He arrives in hell, but is free of offense or defilement. ... Though appearing to employ unorthodox methods of salvation, he follows the correct teaching in saving living beings. He appears to enter all the different paths of existence, yet cuts himself off from their influence. He appears to have entered *nirvāṇa*, yet never cuts himself off from the realm of birth and death.” (Watson, 1997:93-94) 「若菩薩行五無間，而無惱恚；至于地獄，無諸罪垢；…示入邪濟，而以正濟，度諸眾生；現遍入諸道，而斷其因緣；現於涅槃，而不斷生死。」〈8 佛道品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0549a02-11

²⁸⁰ “Therefore the bodhisattva should dwell neither in regulation nor in nonregulation of the mind. To remove himself from such dualisms is the practice of the bodhisattva. To be in the realm of birth and death without following its tainted ways, to dwell in *nirvāṇa* while not seeking eternal extinction – such is the practice of the bodhisattva. ... Though attains Buddhahood, turns the wheel of the Law, and enters *nirvāṇa*, in fact he never forsakes the bodhisattva way – such is the practice of the bodhisattva.” (Watson, 1997:70-74) 「是故菩薩不當住於調伏、不調伏心，離此二法，是菩薩行。在於生死，不為污行；住於涅槃，不永滅度，是菩薩行；……雖得佛道轉於法輪，入於涅槃，而不捨於菩薩之道，是菩薩行。」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0545b24-37

²⁸¹ Wang (2009:124-125)

compassionately understands the suffering of other people. This “boundless”²⁸² and great compassion drives the bodhisattva to selflessly serve others, and completes the loop of self-benefit and altruism.

The Bodhisattva Spirit

Practising *bodhisattva-mārga* (the bodhisattva path 菩薩道) also demonstrated by the “contemporary bodhisattva in action”²⁸³, is an amalgamation of an increasing *bodhicitta* (enlightened mind 菩提心); possessing the attributes, roles, and qualities of a bodhisattva; applying the *catvāri apramānāni* (the four immeasurables 四無量心); and integrating *prajñā* (wisdom 般若) and *upāya* (skilful means 方便). The recent Buddhist masters Venerable Cheng Yen, Venerable Kwangou, and Pang Kwihi are great examples of this. This practice achieves a mutual and interactive benefit between a bodhisattva and the recipients of their service, which is self-benefiting altruism, equivalent to the bodhisattva spirit.

Self benefiting. A bodhisattva, an enlightened sentient being, differs from other sentient beings in “conquering and subduing the host of devils”²⁸⁴, where “*devils*” refers to the obstacles creating distress for sentient beings. Hence, s/he has been “demolishing the bandits of the afflictions”²⁸⁵ – self-enlightened to enlighten others²⁸⁶. By practising *bodhisattva-mārga* (the bodhisattva path 菩薩道), s/he has not only benefited others, but also achieved personal growth; as s/he also learns from others²⁸⁷. As Venerable Chi Yiu commented, “to pursue the path of becoming a *buddha* is to enrich oneself.”

²⁸² Conze (1967:56)

²⁸³ Batchelor (2004:39)

²⁸⁴ Watson (1997:48); 「降伏眾魔。」〈3 弟子品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0541c11

²⁸⁵ McRae (2004:137); 「摧滅煩惱賊。」〈8 佛道品〉, T14, no. 0475, p. 0549b52

²⁸⁶ Hsing-Yun (2006:119)

²⁸⁷ Hsing-Yun (2006:119-120)

Altruism. Supported by the belief that sentient beings have the potential to be enlightened²⁸⁸, the missionary task of a bodhisattva is to facilitate them in understanding Buddhist teachings²⁸⁹, particularly *pratītya-samutpāda* (the law of dependent origination 緣起法), regarding the truth of the phenomenal world. Only when sentient beings realise the temporality of what they possess, can they detach themselves from narcissism, let go of their belongings, and thus relieve their misery.

In addition, a bodhisattva is perfectly willing to take on the mental and physical torments of sentient beings²⁹⁰, even to the point of sacrificing her/his own self²⁹¹, and to also share all of her/his accomplishments with all beings²⁹². This unconditional giving with no expectation of return²⁹³ is the practice of *maitrī* (loving-kindness 慈) and *karuṇā* (compassion 悲)²⁹⁴, and is well accepted by Buddhists. Esther (a beneficiary) disclosed her enthusiasm towards giving, from which she gains inner contentment, when implementing altruism²⁹⁵.

“I believe I need to give, do good to others; indeed, other people will treat you well too. But if other people treat you not as well as you expect, I feel it isn’t a big deal. I only give, and at that time I make him happy. It’s good enough.”

²⁸⁸ “[thinking] ‘I have already controlled [my suffering] and I should also control [the suffering] of all sentient beings.’” (McRae, 2004:111) 「我既調伏，亦當調伏一切眾生。」〈5 文殊師利問疾品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a15

²⁸⁹ “make all sentient beings attain fulfilment of their vows in the *Dharma*” (McRae, 2004:103) 「令一切眾生得法願具足。」〈4 菩薩品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0543b14

²⁹⁰ Derris (2005:1084)

²⁹¹ Shi (1998:46)

²⁹² “They must take upon themselves the sufferings of all living beings, and what merit they acquire thereby shall all be a gift to those beings.” (Watson, 1997:119) 「代一切眾生受諸苦惱，所作功德盡以施之。」〈10 香積佛品〉，T14, no. 0475, p. 0553a29-30

²⁹³ Yin-Shun (2000:274-275)

²⁹⁴ Ding (2009:4)

²⁹⁵ The term “altruism” was coined by Comte (1854:18).

Self-benefiting altruism. As interpreted by VHU (a Buddhist nun), “this behaviour of self-benefiting and benefiting others is what it means to be a bodhisattva.” The former is driven by the latter because “self-benefiting is instrumental and altruism is the purpose,” VHT (a Buddhist monk) explained. And yet, a helper always gains satisfaction and advantage from altruistic behaviour²⁹⁶, not expecting anything in return²⁹⁷, mirroring the attainment “accomplishing altruism is to actualise self-benefit,” as VHU (a Buddhist nun) emphasised. In practice, Buddhists often share experiences with others, such as what Simon (a Buddhist volunteer) admitted,

“During (voluntary) service, I feel I learn a lot. Perhaps, I gain more insights from patients than from myself to patients.”

Wai Hing (a Buddhist volunteer) agreed,

“Sometimes, I meet patients who make me feel their pains. I’m really upset. At that time, I was upset. But when I’m upset, I know this is ... Life is like this. Life is like this, so helpless, impermanent. In this process, from time to time, it enables me to feel that there are a lot of things to learn. Many things can be learned, such as learning to be brave, to be resilient, to let go of attached. If I’m still attached, only do I visit a few rounds, when I come back, I will know: your attached, when will you let go of those attached? When will you open your attached? Why? You have a healthy body, what do you want to attach? I ask myself. I sometimes cry for myself, for my ignorance and attached.”

²⁹⁶ Zopa (2012, 112); Riessman (1965:31)

²⁹⁷ Shi (2002b:630-631)

Through altruistic activities, personal reflection is also a form of learning. Wendy (a Buddhist volunteer) shared her views, stating

“[I] have many reflections, many gains, much stimulation in thoughts. ... It’s a manifestation to let me see: life is impermanent, the more you get attached to, the more you refuse to give up, the more you feel painful. After I understand this through observation, I don’t feel scare. I understand that I have to learn letting go. I don’t attach. That means, what you need to do, what you can do, you have to do. If you’re unable to do, you accept it and let go. Then, this is a great insight for me. That is, I change from fearing to understand the conditions of meeting him (a patient). He, in fact, gives me insight – an insight of letting go. This is great stimulation for me. And I’m grateful that I can transform this stimulation positively. Strikingly, don’t be inflexible when see things. Thus, [I] indeed gain a lot of benefits.”

Reflecting deeply, helpers are more powerful to serve others, as Venerable Sinh Nghiem mentioned in her teaching,

“One of the best ways to heal is to make a vow to help those who have suffered in the same way that you’ve suffered. In order to help somebody, you have to learn how to help yourself first. When you’re able to help yourself successfully, you’ve healed from your own pain and suffering, then you can understand how other people feel, and you can help them successfully go through their pain and suffering.”

Simultaneously, helpers attain better self development during this interactive process. Che Wai (a beneficiary) concurred,

“In fact, the helper gains more than the helped in any voluntary services. You understand yourself in your mind. Will you generate emotions in counselling? Certainly, you will. During counselling, the most important is that you know your own problem from knowing problems of other people, but not helping others.”

Venerable Thong Hong concluded with, “I want to help him when I do it. At the same time, his growth is also my personal growth.”

The bodhisattva spirit is self-benefiting altruism, involving benefits for both the bodhisattva and sentient beings, representing the Mahāyāna spirit²⁹⁸ with an emphasis on altruism²⁹⁹. Most imperatively, for the sake of the sentient beings, a bodhisattva becomes more enlightened, attaining *prajñā* (wisdom 般若) with *upāya* (skilful means 方便), in order to enlighten sentient beings. Through the dynamic of mutual benefit, a bodhisattva can perfect herself/himself and guide others to awaken. HW (a helping service practitioner) expressed in a comprehensive note,

“A bodhisattva is a sentient being with an awakened mind, the awakening of enlightenment. The enlightened sentient being does not awake to others but to [herself/]himself. Therefore, [s/]he’s able to benefit oneself and others, and they perfectly practise enlightenment. ... [S/]he retains not only the awakened mind, but also the mind of practising the enlightenment; then perfects the fruition of the Buddha.”

²⁹⁸ Li (1989:61)

²⁹⁹ Umehara (2008:58)

Discussion

A bodhisattva, who is a “Buddha-to-be”³⁰⁰, “aims at the highest Good for [herself/]himself and also for others”³⁰¹. This “altruistic aspiration”³⁰² drives her/his renunciation of entering *nirvāṇa* (perfect stillness 涅槃), and her/his dwelling among sentient beings³⁰³. In this respect, her/his rebirth has been decoupled from *karma*³⁰⁴ (業), but takes on sentient beings’ suffering in the *loka* (the secular world 世間). This realises the unification of a bodhisattva with sentient beings: where there are no sentient beings, there is no bodhisattva³⁰⁵.

Self-Benefiting Altruism versus Reciprocal Altruism

In *accomplishing* the missionary vow, a bodhisattva, activating *bodhicitta*, attains and implements the *catvāri apramānāni* (the four immeasurables 四無量心), which is not only a theory but also a praxis within which the four components function interactively³⁰⁶ and are mutually complementary³⁰⁷: *maitrī* (loving-kindness 慈) and *karuṇā* (compassion 悲) strengthen *muditā* (empathetic joy 喜) and *upekṣa* (equanimity 捨), and vice versa³⁰⁸. Based on these, a bodhisattva exhibits her/his qualities, intensions, roles, praxis, and vexations. These constituents form a network among them (refer to Figure 1). For example, *upekṣa* (equanimity 捨) contains generosity and an indiscriminative mind, where the former is also an element of intensions and the latter is part of bodhisattva qualities as well. *Karuṇā* (compassion 悲) is the equivalent

³⁰⁰ Wray et al. (1979:15); Conze (1953:125); Williams (2005:996)

³⁰¹ Dayal (1932/1999:17)

³⁰² Gyatso (2011:109)

³⁰³ Harvey (1990:103-104)

³⁰⁴ Dayal (1932/1999:292)

³⁰⁵ Sheng-yen (1988:80)

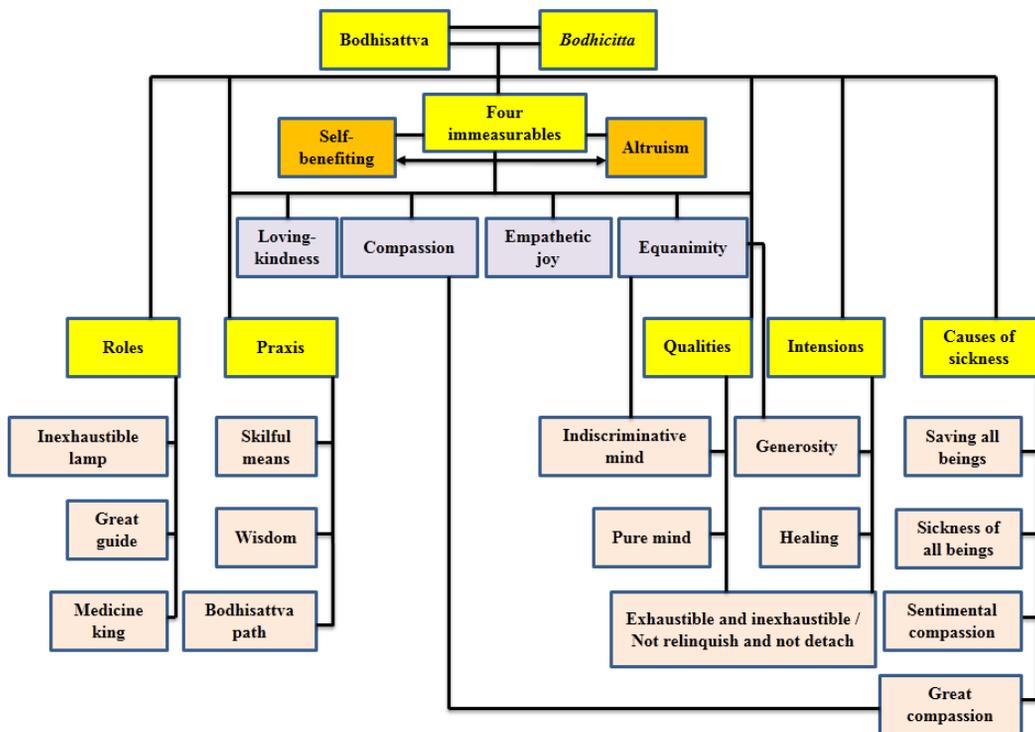
³⁰⁶ Wallace (1999:127 and 150)

³⁰⁷ Zhou (2001:110-111)

³⁰⁸ Sheng-yen (1988:184); Sheng-Yen (2002:11)

of *bodhicitta*³⁰⁹, which motivates altruism. As such, *upekṣa* and *karuṇā* support each other: Without *upekṣa*, *karuṇā* is not true compassion, and vice versa. On the other hand, a bodhisattva gets metaphorically sick due to *karuṇā*, by which s/he is ill for the sake of sentient beings, and because of compassion fatigue. Moreover, *prajñā* (wisdom 般若) and *upāya* (skilful means 方便) act as guidance when practising *karuṇā* on *bodhisattva-mārga* (the bodhisattva path 菩薩道), whilst the goal of the path is to achieve the purposes of self-benefit and altruism. The purposes are collectively recognised as the bodhisattva spirit, the “highest synthesis”³¹⁰ by which to carry out the sacred mission.

Figure 1 The Constituents Embedded in the Bodhisattva Spirit



The bodhisattva spirit, in Mahāyāna, is simultaneously composed of self-benefit and altruism. As for the former, a bodhisattva perfects

³⁰⁹ Hsu (1979:216)

³¹⁰ Dayal (1932/1999:181)

herself/himself and pursues buddhahood³¹¹ from the epistemological domain³¹². As for the latter, s/he enlightens sentient beings so that they can alleviate their afflictions³¹³ from the ethical domain³¹⁴. Unlike reciprocal altruism, a bodhisattva attains self-benefit first in order to be strong enough ultimately for the benefit of others³¹⁵.

Reciprocal altruism³¹⁶ is grounded in the ecology of animals and birds³¹⁷, and is seen as necessary for a reduction of risk and an increase in reproduction and survival³¹⁸. It focuses on transactions and exchange³¹⁹, leading to an equilibrium of costs and benefits³²⁰. This “asocial strategy”³²¹ of helping behaviour concerns an assessment of degree of justifiability³²² in order to achieve “instrumental goals”³²³ fundamentally for self interest³²⁴.

Reciprocal altruism does not deny sharing³²⁵, and cooperation among non-kin relationships³²⁶ referred to as “prosociality”³²⁷. Its assumption of more generous social support³²⁸ engenders “symbiosis”³²⁹, resulting from “synergy”³³⁰. Although reciprocal altruism appears to be a

³¹¹ Boucher (2008:23 and 25); Yin-Shun (2000:260); 上求佛道

³¹² Yang (2009:228)

³¹³ Yin-Shun (2000:260); 下化眾生

³¹⁴ Yang (2009:228)

³¹⁵ Shi (2002a:548)

³¹⁶ The term reciprocal altruism was coined by Trivers (1971:35).

³¹⁷ Koenig (1988); Hattori, Kuroshima, and Fujita (2005); Humphrey (1997); Russell and Wright (2008); Denault and McFarlane (1995)

³¹⁸ de Vos and Zeggelink (1997:263)

³¹⁹ Brosnan and de Waal (2002:132)

³²⁰ de Vos and Zeggelink (1997:262); Palmatier (2002:291-292)

³²¹ de Vos and Zeggelink (1997:264)

³²² Rutte and Pfeiffer (2009:1574)

³²³ de Vos and Zeggelink (1997:262)

³²⁴ Lipkin (1984:113); Landry (2006:958)

³²⁵ Gurven (2004:375)

³²⁶ Killingback and Doebeli (2002:435)

³²⁷ Gintis et al. (2003:169)

³²⁸ Allen-Arave, Gurven, and Hill (2008:315)

³²⁹ Fletcher and Zwick (2006:259)

³³⁰ Fletcher and Zwick (2006:260)

win-win strategy³³¹, its latent tactics involve “tit-for-tat”³³² responses, evoking dualistic reactions; for example, forgiveness and revenge³³³. This altruism is antithetical to unconditional giving.

Self-benefiting altruism views matters differently. When altruism is a “social behaviour”³³⁴, indicating “an actor’s psychological ‘intention’ to act selflessly”³³⁵ for the sake of “another party at a cost to the actor greater than any benefit the actor may receive”³³⁶, it adheres to rewards, even though it claims to exhibit compassionate³³⁷. In contrast, the metaphor “the one who delivers flowers to others is to smell the fragrance” was expressed twice by Simon (a Buddhist volunteer) and Dun Li (a beneficiary) in the interviews, in reporting that this “passive self benefit”³³⁸ is part of the process and a by-product, and therefore is not a return. Rather, self-benefiting altruism, that is, Mahāyāna altruism, is founded on the *catvāri apramānāni* (the four immeasurables 四無量心) of a bodhisattva, who neither attaches her/himself to the *lokottara* (the supermundane world 出世間) nor gives up the *loka* (the secular world 世間). When practising the four constituents of *catvāri apramānāni*, a bodhisattva is capable of shifting from egoistic altruism to “perfect altruism”³³⁹. It seems that inconsistency within the constructs of *muditā* (empathetic joy 喜) and *upekṣa* (equanimity 捨) in the West³⁴⁰ may create cultural barriers in understanding self-benefiting altruism.

A bodhisattva equips herself/himself with *prajñā* (wisdom 般若) and *upāya* (skilful means 方便), supported by *bodhicitta* (enlightened mind 菩提心) and the *catvāri apramānāni* (the four immeasurables 四無

³³¹ Munro (2002:140)

³³² Trivers (2006:69)

³³³ Trivers (2006, 81-82)

³³⁴ West, Andy, and Griffin (2006:482)

³³⁵ Foster (2008:154)

³³⁶ Munro (2002:132)

³³⁷ Ekman (2008:178)

³³⁸ Li (1989:63)

³³⁹ Williams (1998:29)

³⁴⁰ Kraus and Sears (2009:178)

量心), to benefit living beings. “[S/]he learns to feel the joys and sorrows that of others like [her/]his own and does not prefer [her/]his own happiness to that of others”³⁴¹. A bodhisattva attains personal development through altruism. Her/his intention is towards the service recipients, but never vice versa³⁴², fulfilling “charitable credit”³⁴³ selflessly. Indeed, self-benefit and altruism co-exist, like the two sides of a coin³⁴⁴, exhibiting both the individual ideal of the arhat and the societal of the bodhisattva. This is the ultimate aim of Mahayanists, who unreservedly take on social responsibilities, and this is reflected in the *Sūtra* as well as the personal experiences of the informants in the current study.

Mahāyāna aims to practise detachment, and to let go of possessions, desires, prejudices, and self-centredness³⁴⁵, instead realising the “extended self”³⁴⁶ in an expanded social boundary, in which altruism is a learning process. When a bodhisattva is generous to others, s/he learns to be detached and increase self-awareness³⁴⁷. As a result, s/he gets rid of the dichotomy between “I” and “other”, and “mine” and “yours”³⁴⁸. Realising *pratītya-samutpāda* (the law of dependent origination 緣起法), a bodhisattva understands the nature of existence, including that there exists no differentiation of self as “I” or “other”; therefore no such “‘duality’ exists between themselves and others, donors and recipients”³⁴⁹, presenting the greatest generosity in “compassion without reference”³⁵⁰. In this sense, there is no such issue as existence nor non-existence³⁵¹, no self-benefit (because there is no “substantial I”) nor altruism (because

³⁴¹ Dayal (1932/1999:179)

³⁴² Conze (1967:57)

³⁴³ Lin-Healy and Small (2012:269)

³⁴⁴ Li (1989:72)

³⁴⁵ Harvey (1990:121)

³⁴⁶ Rachlin and Locey (2011:27)

³⁴⁷ Kajiyama (1989:23)

³⁴⁸ Dayal (1932/1999:179); Kornfield (1988:25)

³⁴⁹ Wright (2009:26)

³⁵⁰ Tong (2012:28)

³⁵¹ Nagao (1981:68)

there is no “substantial other”); but paradoxically, “I” and “other” unite, and unify³⁵² transcending the “I-Thou”³⁵³ relationship, because both “I” and “other” are no differences per se. After dualism is removed, a bodhisattva retains the mind of the *lokottara* (the supermundane world 出世間) whilst perfecting the career in the *loka*³⁵⁴ (the secular world 世間). Mahayanists, whether *saṅgha* (monks 僧團) or laymen, strive for this aim, by which ordinary followers become bodhisattvas when they contribute to the benefit of other people. Therefore, self-benefiting altruism is the innate aspiration of Mahāyāna followers, and this is validated by the lived experiences of interviewees in this study. This brings out the essence of Mahāyāna in overcoming tribulation among their selves and others³⁵⁵.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although the present research has covered real life experiences supplied by a spectrum of stakeholders, it bypassed non-Buddhist clients who received services from Buddhist volunteers. Future research may explore the aspect of non-Buddhist service recipients, regarding what they gain from and feel about Buddhist community services. Moreover, the interviewees admitted certain difficulties in practising the bodhisattva path, but they provided only limited information about it. Future studies on their difficulties may extend the body of knowledge on Buddhist helping behaviour that may apply to other spheres, such as organ donation, and body donation for medical education.

Conclusion

Self-benefiting altruism differs from reciprocal altruism: While the former, representing the values of Mahāyāna, is a pull strategy directed by care for sentient beings, from which personal growth is achieved; the latter

³⁵² Shi (2002a:550-551)

³⁵³ Buber (1923/1937:3)

³⁵⁴ Hsing-Yun (1999:127)

³⁵⁵ Kajiyama (1989:44)

is a push strategy driven by survival instincts, and is centred around self-interests and pragmatism. This presents an extended view of helping behaviour.

Having embodied self-benefiting altruism, being a bodhisattva involves individual (including the bodhisattva herself/himself) and social caring – the doctrine of the exhaustible and the inexhaustible emancipation. S/he retains and carries out *catvāri apramānāni* (the four immeasurables 四無量心), which weave mental and behavioural passion towards sentient beings. Thus, the confluence of bodhisattva and sentient beings characterises the equality across sentient beings, including the nature of existence and the potentiality of being a *budhha*, and authenticates in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* and the encounter of the participants in the present research, which is not scientific doctrine but definitely concerned with practicability in real life.

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菩薩精神：實踐自利利他

鄭鳳姬

香港大學

摘要

關於菩薩方方面面的學術著作多不勝數，但探討如何在現代社會實踐菩薩道的研究卻寥寥無幾。本文根據「維摩詰所說經」闡釋何謂菩薩，並探索佛教徒怎樣理解這個概念，又如何在當今的社會處境中實踐自利利他的菩薩精神。本研究採用原始資料為主的混合式方法，既分析「維摩詰所說經」中菩薩道的義理，又進行質性訪談，並配合其他第一手資料，豐富本文的內容。經文分析是從大乘般若思想的視角論述菩薩，質性研究則印證理論的應用性，即實踐菩薩道。經電話直衝招募、滾雪球效果、相知和電子郵件等途徑邀請三十八位受訪者參與訪談，包括佛教徒義工（志工、自願者）、助人專業工作者、受患者和法師，完成了四十六節單獨和焦點小組訪談。訪問內容錄音後謄寫作分析原材料，以現象詮釋分析法剖析受訪者的生活經驗和心路歷程；另外，還用多元資源，例如受訪者製作的視覺創作品。為了加強學術研究的嚴謹，本文運用多種的三角測量法，包括受訪者的檢查與同儕分析，後者的互參信度達百分之九十二。經文和訪談分析均借助 ATLAS.ti 7 軟件進行，歸類出八項主題：菩薩、菩提心、四無量心、菩薩的內涵、質素、角色、實踐、病因，從而歸納為自利利他的菩薩精神；之後，辨別自利利他和互惠利他博弈的分野，反映不同文化的哲學理念的異同。研究結果洞悉佛教普渡眾生，為社會謀幸福的助人志業。

關鍵詞：四無量心、研究方法、菩提心、菩薩道、維摩詰所說經

