

17th Congress of the International Association of Buddhist  
Studies

# Soteriological Transformation of the Mind-Body Complex in the “Samanta- mukha-parivarta” of the *Lotus Sūtra*

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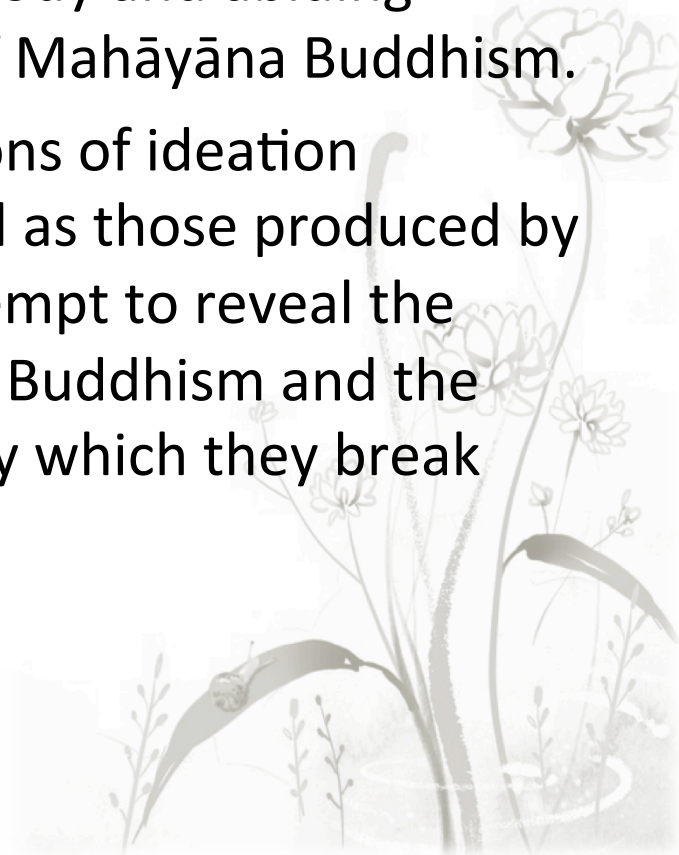


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# Abstract

- This paper employs the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” of the *Lotus Sūtra* as the main literary source to discuss, from a philosophical perspective, the “possible superlative” in unfolding the three concepts of mind, body and abiding-places in the practice and application of Mahāyāna Buddhism.
- This paper will first identify the limitations of ideation generated by the three concepts as well as those produced by attachments in practice. It will then attempt to reveal the creativity in the teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhism and the salient characteristics of the methods by which they break limitations and attachments.



# Abstract

This paper is divided into five sections:

- **Section 1.** offers a broad outline of this paper's argument and a breakdown of its individual sections.
- **Section 2.** summarizes the main thesis of the "Samanta-mukha-parivarta," and discusses the structure, title, and foundational ideas of the text to provide a context for the argument contained within this paper.
- **Section 3.** elucidates how the topics of mind, body and abiding-places systematically construct unfolding thinking and practice.

# Abstract

- **Section 4.** investigates the kinds of unfolding Bodhisattva practices exemplified by Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. This section also reflects on the scope of Bodhisattva practices from a philosophical perspective and questions the possibility of unfolding them to the greatest extent possible.
- **Section 5.** concludes and summarizes the main points of this paper.





## II. Main Points in the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta”

### 2.1. Structure of the Text

The structure of the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” centers around the excellent qualities and achievements of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. The reason for his title, why he roams this world, how he preaches to sentient beings, and the range of his skilful means all confirm his excellence.

### 2.2. Title of the Text

According to the extant Sanskrit version, the complete title is *samanta-mukha-parivarto nāmĀvalokiteśvara-vikurvaṇa-nirdeśaś catur-viṃśatimaḥ*, which means “the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter with the title of ‘samanta-mukha,’ and [the main theme] expounds the manifestations by [Bodhisattva] Avalokiteśvara.”

## II. Main Points in the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta”

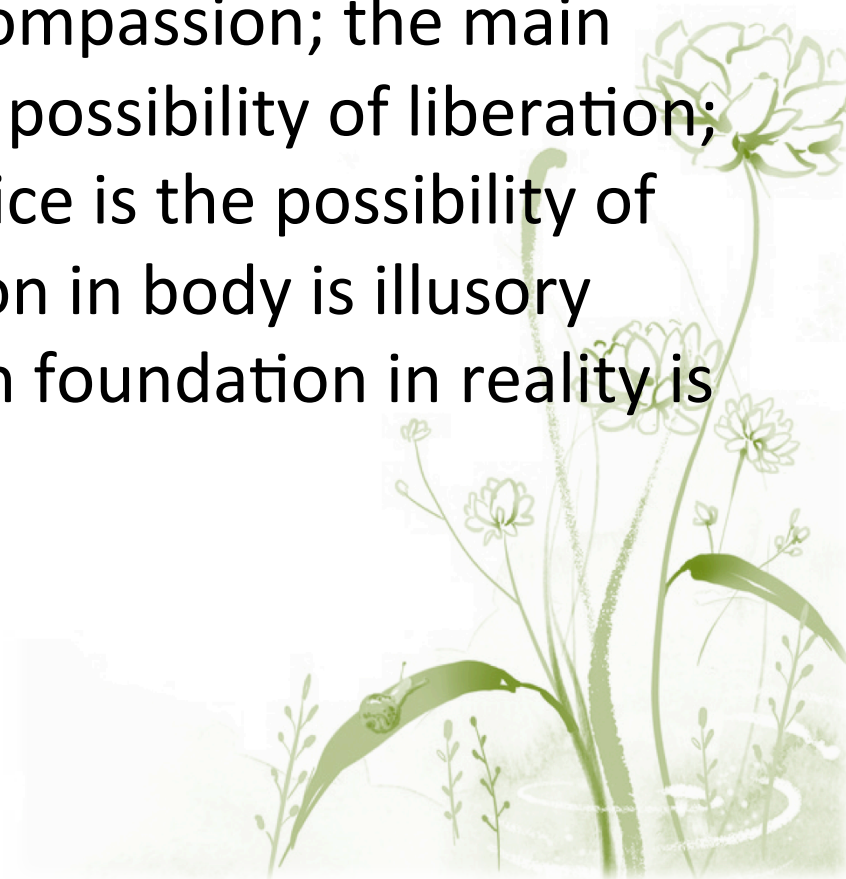
- The first word of this compound “*samanta-mukha*” can be further dissected into “*sam* (together; entire) + *anta* (end).” The literal meaning of this word is “universal,” “on all sides,” “in all directions,” “all,” or “entire.” The word “*mukha*” can mean mouth, face, facade, door, or entrance.
- When putting these two words together, there are four interconnected meanings in this compound, “*samanta-mukha*,” all-sided face(s), facing all directions, (becoming the) universal door or gateway (to something), and the gateway to every direction.
- In short, the compound “*samanta-mukha*” means “facing all directions,” and “the gateway universally leading to every direction.”



## II. Main Points in the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta”

### 2.3. Foundational Ideas

To sum up, the study of the text reveals at least one set of foundational ideas: the main mental foundation is benevolence-compassion; the main ontological foundation is the possibility of liberation; the main foundation in practice is the possibility of salvation; the main foundation in body is illusory transformation; and the main foundation in reality is the thoroughly unimpeded.

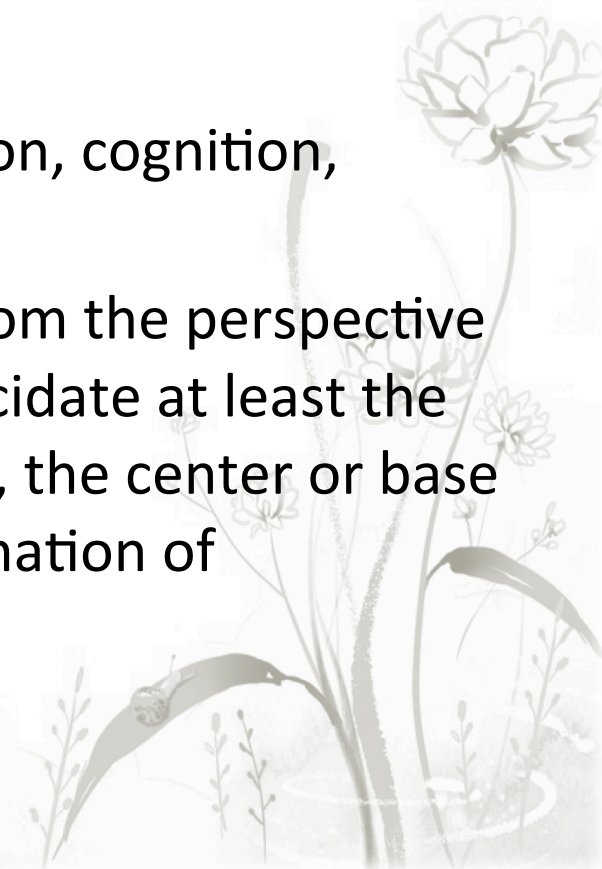


# III. Unfolding of the Mind, Body and Abiding-Places

- What the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” tries to express is the nature of unfolding religious practices. In the same manner, the concepts of mind, body and abiding-places are also unfolding in terms of thinking and practice.

## 3.1. Unfolding the Mind

- Mind is the totality of activities of perception, cognition, sentiment, and attitude.
- an examination of the unfolding of mind from the perspective of the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” can elucidate at least the following five topics: horizon of perception, the center or base of perception, packaging of cognition, inclination of sentiments, and evenness in attitude.



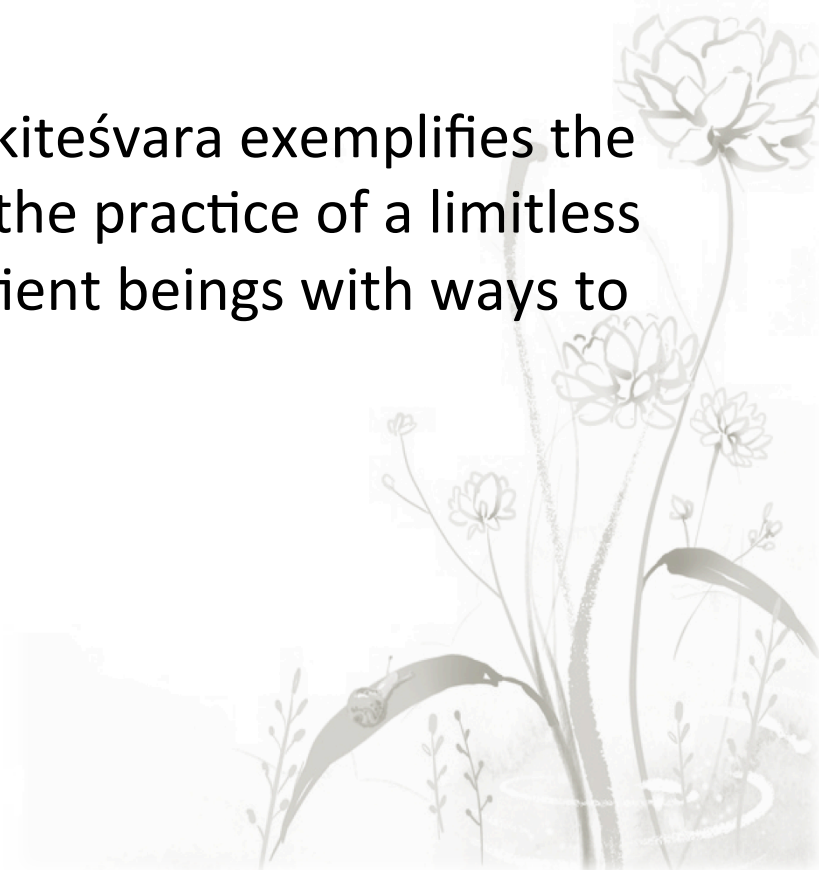


### III. Unfolding of the Mind, Body and Abiding-Places

- To conclude, the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” does not take average sentient beings’ narrow-minded views as granted, nor is it satisfied with mediocrity or the enclosed and opposing activities of the mind.
- The unfolding view of mind and mental practice exemplified by Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is on the one hand exclusive of all imaginary or illusory divisions.
- On the other hand, it is premised upon an equal and unimpeded perception and cognition of life, one that entails universal observation. In terms of content, studious mental practice entails indiscriminating and limitless benevolence and compassion.

### III. Unfolding of the Mind, Body and Abiding-Places

- Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara not only can be aware of the causes and conditions of the horror and defilements that vex sentient beings, but also can arrange the tools and clues by which to help sentient beings to get out of their mental quagmire.
- In other words, Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara exemplifies the practice of universal observation, the practice of a limitless mind, and therefore provides sentient beings with ways to solve their mental problems.





# III. Unfolding of the Mind, Body and Abiding-Places

## 3.2. Unfolding of Body

- The unfolding view of body presented in the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” neither recognizes a body as an entity that is to be differentiated from others; nor reckons the so-called body as a fixed or existent entity; nor perceives the body in terms of a superficial shape or form, such as female/male, big/small, beautiful/ugly, or black/white; nor identifies it with such states as healthy, sick, pleasurable, or suffering; nor conflates the body with its components such as head, eyes, heart, lungs, cells and neurons.
- The key to an unfolding view of body lies in the cognition that the so-called body is “a phantasma that is in relation and connected to the world of life.”

### III. Unfolding of the Mind, Body and Abiding-Places

- A well-known quote from the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” best describes the “unfolding body function:”

*“santi kula-putra loka-dhātavo, yeṣv Avalokiteśvaro bodhisattvo mahāsattvo buddha-rūpeṇa sattvānāṃ dharmāṃ deśayati. santi loka-dhātavo, yeṣv Avalokiteśvaro bodhisattvo mahāsattvo bodhisattva-rūpeṇa sattvānāṃ dharmāṃ deśayati. keṣāṃ-cit pratyekabuddha-rūpeṇa Avalokiteśvaro bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ sattvānāṃ dharmāṃ deśayati. --- śrāvaka-rūpeṇa --- brahma-rūpeṇa --- śakra-rūpeṇa --- gandharva-rūpeṇa --- yakṣa-vaiṇeyānāṃ sattvānāṃ yakṣa-rūpeṇa dharmāṃ deśayati. --- īśvara-rūpeṇa --- maheśvara-rūpeṇa --- cakravartī-rāja-rūpeṇa --- piśāca-rūpeṇa --- vaiśravaṇa-rūpeṇa --- senāpati-rūpeṇa --- brāhmaṇa-rūpeṇa --- vajra-pāṇi-rūpeṇa ---. evam acintya-guṇa-samanvāgataḥ kula-putra Avalokiteśvaro bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ.”*

### III. Unfolding of the Mind, Body and Abiding-Places

“Good man, if living beings in this land must be saved by means of someone in the body of a Buddha, Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara will manifest in the body of a Buddha and teach Dharma to them. If they must be saved by someone in the body of a Pratyekabuddha, he will manifest in the body of a Pratyekabuddha and teach Dharma to them..... Hearer..... Brahma King..... Shakra..... God of Sovereignty..... the Great God of Sovereignty..... a great heavenly general..... Vaishravana..... a minor king..... an Elder..... a layman..... a minister of state..... a Brahman..... a Bhikshu, Bhikshuni, Upasaka, or Upasika..... an Elder, of a layman, of a minister of state, or of a Brahman..... a pure youth or a pure maiden..... a heavenly being, a dragon, yaksha, gandharva, asura, garuda, kinnara, mahoraga, human, or nonhuman, and so forth..... a Vajra-wielding spirit..... Bodhisattva Mahâsattva Akshayamati! Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara has accomplished merit and virtue such as this and, in all manner of forms, roams throughout the land, saving and liberating living beings.”

### III. Unfolding of the Mind, Body and Abiding-Places

- This passage illuminates at least four types of unfolding. First, there is unfolding in time, that is, not being limited to any short period of time. Second, there is unfolding in space, direction, kingdom, and place, in other words, not being enclosed in any specific area. Third, there is unfolding in shape, posture, and facial features, not being confined to any particular or fixed representation. Fourth, there is unfolding in target, goal, aim, and purpose, not being restricted to any pre-determined outcome.
- How then is it possible that one unfolds one's body? After scrutinizing the "Samanta-mukha-parivarta," three arguments emerge. First, avoid engaging in anything that is "anti-unfolding." Second, practice the supreme ability of "transforming the body." Third, the purpose of transforming the body is to save various kinds of sentient beings or practitioners without discrimination.



# III. Unfolding of the Mind, Body and Abiding-Places

## 3.3. Unfolding Abiding-places

- Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara exemplifies the unfolding view of mind, body, mental practice, and body function, as well as the unfolding of abiding-places.
- With specific abiding places neither being identified with sentient beings nor serving as a platform for the events of the life process, *“Going throughout countries in the ten directions, he [Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara] manifests everywhere in all places.”*
- Focusing on saving various sentient beings, Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara emerges in various places of the world, depending on the situation of sentient beings, so as to manifest various appearances appropriate to the circumstances.

# III. Unfolding of the Mind, Body and Abiding-Places

## 3.3. Unfolding Abiding-places

- Precisely due to the reality that any abiding-place in the world can be the place to save sentient beings, there is no abiding-place that is not suitable for saving sentient beings. As a result, the unfolding function of abiding-places can be achieved.
- In sum, advanced Bodhisattvas eliminate the “anti-unfolding view of abiding-places,” and fully comprehend that an abiding-place is merely a process of conditioned co-arising and transformation. An unfolding view of abiding-places will not employ identity, belonging, or incidents such as birth, aging, sickness, and death to enclose or limit certain abiding-places in their function as abiding-places. Instead, all abiding-places can be thoroughly used in saving sentient beings.

## IV. Philosophical Reflection on the “Possible Superlative Unfolding”

- Two closely related issues are worthy of discussion: one is what kind of unfolding Bodhisattva deeds Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara exhibits, and the other is how one reflects on these Bodhisattva deeds.

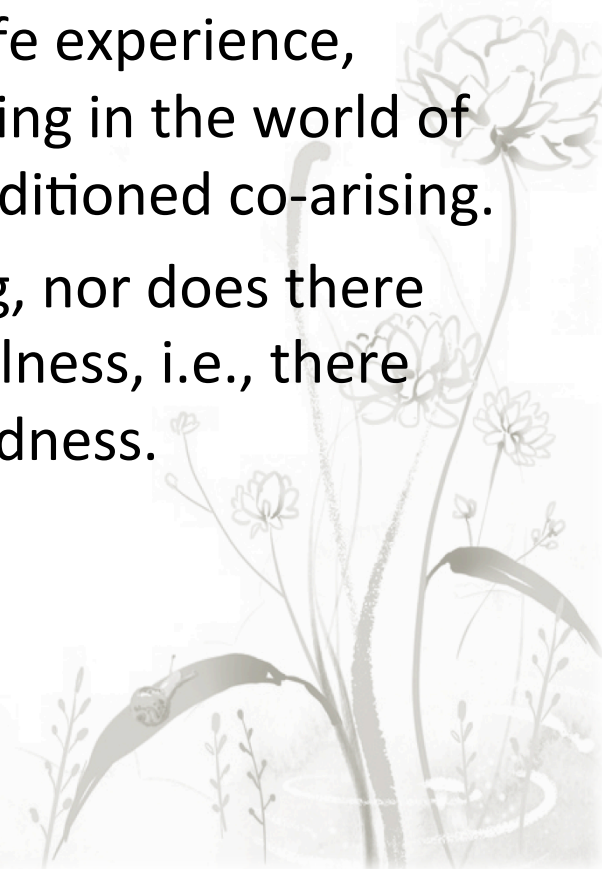
### 4.1. Unfolding Bodhisattva Deeds: “Possible Superlative Unfolding”

- The so-called “possible superlative unfolding” is equivalent to the “advanced unfolding,” and “limitless unfolding.” Linguistically, it is comparatively different from “initial unfolding,” “medium unfolding,” and “limited unfolding.”
- the unfolding Bodhisattva deeds exemplified by Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara are not in past tense, nor present progressive tense, but an ongoing future progressive tense.

## IV. Philosophical Reflection on the “Possible Superlative Unfolding”

### 4.2. How Is the “Possible Superlative Unfolding” Possible?

- When taking the perspective of *a-saṃskṛta-dharmatā* (unconditioned reality/ unconditioned state of being the dharma), then all who are floating in the life experience, cultivating practices arduously, and unfolding in the world of life are nothing but representations of conditioned co-arising.
- Limitedness does not exist in its own-being, nor does there exist dividedness, opposition, or peripheralness, i.e., there does not exist any thorough form of limitedness.



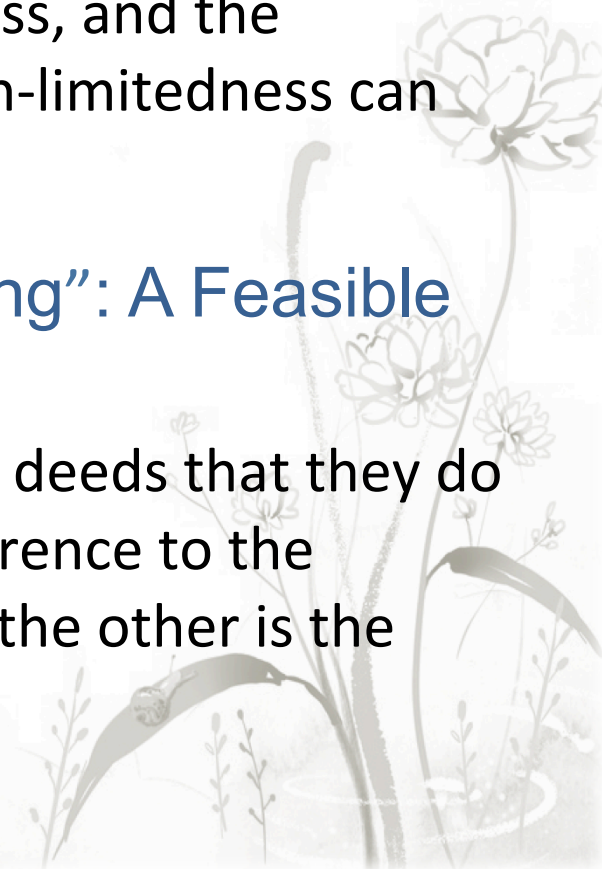


## IV. Philosophical Reflection on the “Possible Superlative Unfolding”

- Focusing on the Bodhisattva deeds of saving various sentient beings, if Bodhisattvas can comprehend the idea of non-conditioned state of dharma and if, fundamentally, there does not exist any form of limitedness, then it is possible to put into practice the idea of non-limitedness, and the principle of the Bodhisattva practice of non-limitedness can thus be acted out.

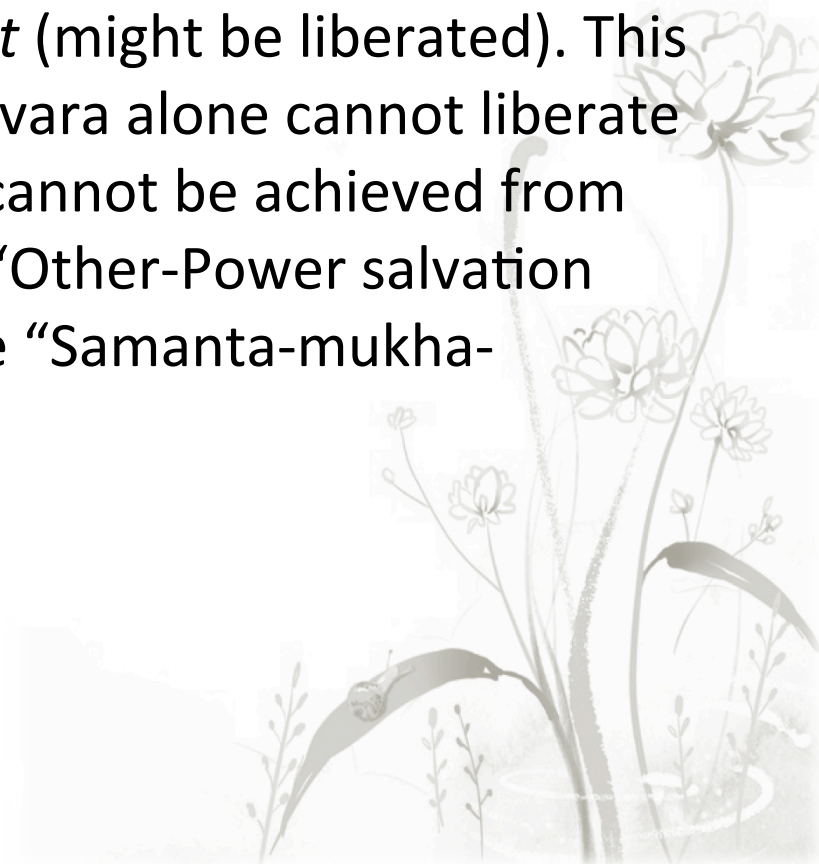
### 4.3. The “Possible Superlative Unfolding”: A Feasible Chain of Reasoning

- That Bodhisattvas are able to perform the deeds that they do is largely dependent on two reasons: adherence to the mechanism of conditioned co-arising, and the other is the skilfulness of transformation in salvation.



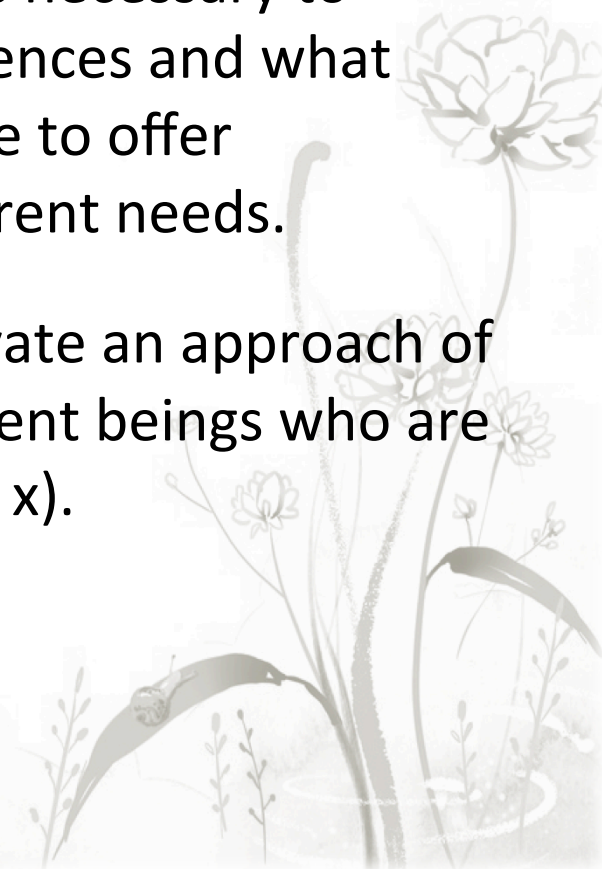
## IV. Philosophical Reflection on the “Possible Superlative Unfolding”

- In short, in order to be able to save sentient beings, Bodhisattvas must comply with the mechanism of conditioned co-arising.
- The text repeatedly uses the optative mood of the verb *parimucyeraṃ* or *parimukto bhavet* (might be liberated). This shows that Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara alone cannot liberate sentient beings; that is, salvation cannot be achieved from without. Therefore, the so-called “Other-Power salvation (*tarikī* salvation)” is not part of the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta.”



## IV. Philosophical Reflection on the “Possible Superlative Unfolding”

- According to the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta,”
  - (a) it is necessary to recognize that the object being saved is an illusion, as are the saviour and the act of salvation.
  - (b) For the sake of universal salvation, it is necessary to perceive various sentient beings’ differences and what makes them different. It is then possible to offer appropriate help best suited to all different needs.
- When offering help it is important to cultivate an approach of “*x-vaineyānāṃ sattvānām*” (to those sentient beings who are to be guided (or instructed) by the form of x).



## IV. Philosophical Reflection on the “Possible Superlative Unfolding”

- The key word “*vaineya*” can be dissected into “*vai*” (prefix *vi* with a *vrddhi* formation) + “*neya*” (the future passive participle of *vnī*).
- The literal meaning of the word is “to be guided individually or should be guided individually” while it means “what should be directed, guided, instructed, or adjusted.”
- Emphasis is placed on the imperative phrase “should be guided” because Bodhisattvas should not only focus on the past of sentient beings, but also need to guide them into their own appropriate future.
- As a result, sentient beings can learn, practice, develop capabilities, and cultivate abilities so as to find the ways that are suitable to them or to advance realistically on the ways of practice.

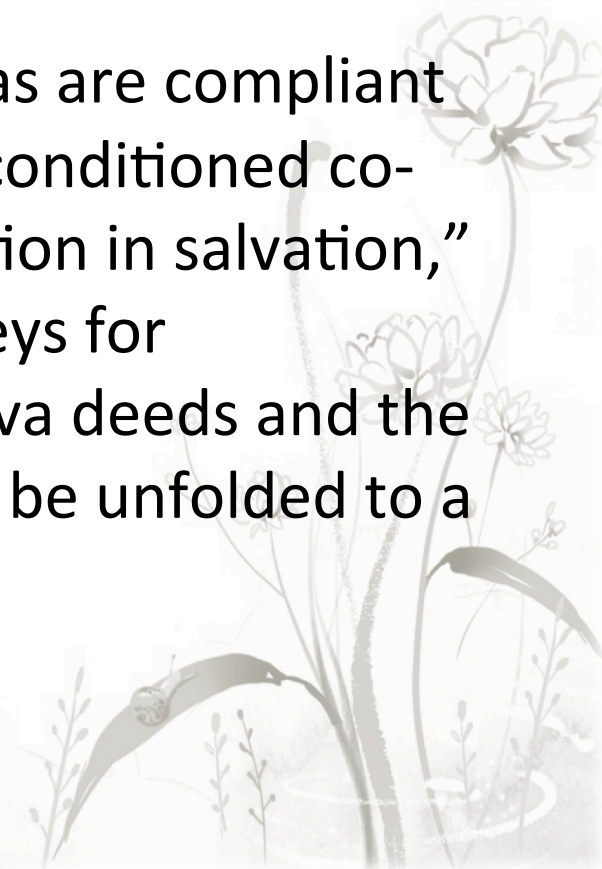


## V. Conclusion

- In sum, the unfolding Bodhisattva deeds exemplified by Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara can be comprehended as “possible superlative unfolding” in scope and style.
- In theory, there does not exist any form of limitedness in reality. In practice, none of the actions exhibits any form of limitedness in their unconditioned state of being the dharma, either.
- The Bodhisattva deeds unfolded will embody the “possible superlative unfolding” in the “ideas constituting Bodhisattva deeds.”

## V. Conclusion

- In other words, it is possible to unfold the principle of Bodhisattva deeds with a feasible chain of reasoning to a superlative state.
- In view of the teaching that Bodhisattvas are compliant with “reasoning for the mechanism of conditioned co-arising” and “reasoning for transformation in salvation,” these two paths of reasoning are the keys for determining the feasibility of Bodhisattva deeds and the means by which Bodhisattva deeds can be unfolded to a superlative state.





*Thank you*