

Emptiness and Soteriological Transformation in Mahāyāna Buddhism

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Abstract

This paper employs the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” (Universal Gateway) chapter of the Lotus Sūtra as the main literary source to discuss the Buddhist soteriological transformation of mind, body, and abiding-places by a mechanism switching between foundational emptiness and worldly manifestations. The five sections of this paper are organized as follows. Section one offers a broad outline of this paper’s argument and a breakdown of its individual sections. Section two summarizes the main thesis of the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” chapter and discusses its structure, title, and key ideas to provide a context for the argument to be presented in this paper. Section three elucidates how the topics of mind, body, and abiding-places systematically build up deliberation and practices in an unfolding manner. Section four investigates the modes of unfolding bodhisattva practices exemplified by the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. Furthermore, this section also reflects on the scope of bodhisattva practices from a philosophical perspective and investigates the prospect of approaching the most advanced level. Section five concludes and summarizes the main points of this paper.

Key words: Emptiness, Soteriological Transformation, Mahāyāna Buddhism, *Avalokiteśvara, Samanta-mukha-parivarta*

Introduction

This paper employs the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta,” a chapter of the *Sad-dharma-pundarika-sūtra* (*Sūtra on the Lotus of the Sublime Dharma*; also known as the *Lotus Sūtra*), as the main literary source to discuss the Buddhist soteriological transformation of mind, body, and abiding-places by a mechanism switching between foundational emptiness and worldly manifestations. Buddhism insightfully regards emptiness as the foundation of the phenomenal world, including both macroscopic and microscopic points of view. Emptiness, however, is neither confined to the foundational level nor isolated from the phenomenal world. Compounded phenomena are empty of their own inherently existent entity because their existence is conditioned by related factors. Such a notion of emptiness can be used both to explain why compounded phenomena morphologically and substantially undergo drastic changes and to launch a soteriological transformation by providing sentient beings with a suitable means of dealing with and even moving beyond difficult situations.

Many Buddhist scriptures can be used to study the practical application of the notion of foundational emptiness to soteriological transformation. In order to limit the scope of the inquiry, the main source of this paper is the *Lotus Sūtra*, which is one of the most popular and influential Mahāyāna sūtras. In addition to various Sanskrit manuscripts, annotated versions and editions translated into other languages, there are three extant Chinese translations of the *Lotus Sūtra*.¹ Passages from the *Lotus Sūtra* analyzed in this paper are drawn primarily from the most popular Chinese translation by Kumārajīva, and also from Ueki Masatoshi’s *Comparative Edition* (2008).

Several crucial passages related to emptiness can be found in the *Lotus Sūtra*. For example:

Bhaiṣajya-rāja, what is the Dharma-seat of the Tathāgata? Bhaiṣajya-rāja, the Dharma-seat of the Tathāgata is the entering into the emptiness of all dharmas (or related factors); that is the pulpit on which a son of a good family has to sit in order to set forth this Dharma-gate to the four groups of learners.²

The excerpt above says that the entering into the emptiness of all dharmas constitutes the stand for the Tathāgata’s turning the wheel of the Dharma.

Since the most important task of the Tathāgata is to turn the Dharma wheel, the significance of the realization of the emptiness of all dharmas cannot be overemphasized. Here is another quote:

Furthermore, Mañjuśrī, a Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva surveys all dharmas (or related factors) as empty—established as they really are, remaining unerring, abiding in reality, not moving, not liable to be disturbed, not to be moved backward, not revolving, always abiding in reality, having the nature of space, cutting off from words and expressions, not born, not coming forth, not conditioned, not unconditioned, not existent, not nonexistent, not expressible in words, abiding in a state of non-obstruction, and becoming manifest owing to a perversion of conceptualization. Then, Mañjuśrī, a Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva constantly abides in surveying all dharmas in this way.³

Again, some common threads can be discerned from the above quote when compared with the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras* or other related sūtras. Above all, emptiness is not only recognized as the reality of all worldly appearances and dharmas, but also runs through a series of doctrinal and practical teachings, including non-dualistic middle path and the inexpressibility (or ineffability) of all related factors.

Although emptiness plays an important role in the *Lotus Sūtra*, this paper does not deal with the concept of emptiness per se. Rather, a major focus will be placed on the application of foundational emptiness to soteriological transformation. In other words, there is a shift of emphasis from theoretical to practical, which involves a drastic and far-reaching change in ways of deliberation and exertion concerning mind, body and abiding-places.

Components of the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta”

The components of the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” chapter (hereafter referred to as “this chapter”) can be delineated in terms of its structure, title, and key ideas.

Its Structure

Both the extant Sanskrit manuscripts and the version translated by Kumārajīva show that there are two genres in the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” chapter: the prose discourse (*sūtra*) and verse discourse (*geya*). In terms of the structure, this chapter can be roughly divided into five sections. In the first section, the Bodhisattva Akṣayamati asks the Buddha for what reason (*kena kāraṇena*) the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara got his name.⁴ In section two, Bodhisattva Akṣayamati asks the Buddha how the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara makes progress in this Sahā world (*asyāṃ sabhāyāṃ loka-dhātāu pravācarati*), how he teaches the Dharma for the sake of sentient beings (*sattvānāṃ dharmāṃ deśayati*), as well as about the range of skill-in-means he obtains.⁵ Section three states that upon comprehending the profound and lofty qualities of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara’s achievements, the Bodhisattva Akṣayamati made an offering to the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. Section four reiterates the main thesis of the previous three section in verse form. After the verse, the Bodhisattva Dharaṇīdhara concludes with the title of this chapter in segment five and reveals the extraordinary virtuous roots someone obtains as a result of hearing this chapter.

In conclusion, the structure of the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” chapter centers on the excellent qualities and achievements of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. The reason for his title, why he roams about this world, how he preaches to sentient beings, and the range of his skillful means—all these prove his excellence.

Its Title

The major themes of the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” chapter include the all-encompassing wisdom-laden observations and manifestations of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” is in fact a shorthand version of its full title. According to the extant Sanskrit version, the full title is *Samanta-mukha-parivarta nāṃ Āvalokiteśvara-vikurvaṇa-nirdeśaś catur-viṃśatimah*, which means “The 24th chapter with the title of *Samanta-mukha*, and [the main theme] expounds the manifestations by [Bodhisattva] Avalokiteśvara.”⁶ In the last paragraphs, Bodhisattva Dharaṇīdhara confirms “The title is the chapter of *Samanta-mukha* which expounds the manifestations of Bodhisattva-

Mahāsattva Avalokiteśvara, [i.e.] the supernatural transformations and manifestations of the Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva Avalokiteśvara” (*Avalokiteśvarasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya vikurvā-nirdeśaṃ samanta-mukha-parivartaṃ nām Āvalokiteśvarasya bodhisattvasya vikurvaṇa-prātibhāyam*).⁷ Therefore, the title of this chapter, “Samanta-mukha-parivarta,” can also be referred to as “the *Samanta-mukha* that explicates the Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva Avalokiteśvara’s supernatural manifestations.”

The main purpose of this chapter is to build at least two pillars. The first is the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, who acts as the pillar to the agent under consideration, and *samanta-mukha* is the pillar in content. The ultimate exemplification of *samanta-mukha* entails supernatural transformations and manifestations. Here, it is necessary to explain the two notions of *samanta-mukha* and “supernatural transformations and manifestations” in order to comprehend the title and themes of the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” chapter as such.

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 of the 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.”

The “supernatural transformations and manifestations” therein connote the superlative ability developed to deal with and solve problems in all directions so as to metamorphose into numerous physical and facial appearances. In this context, such “supernatural power to manifest” can be comprehended as the ultimate demonstration of the “universal gateway.”

Its Key Ideas

At least five interconnected key ideas can be decoded from the diverse narratives elucidated in the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” chapter. The series of five key ideas—mental, ontological, practical, bodily, and reality-based—can be characterized roughly as follows:

First, mental foundation: the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara's actions are deeply rooted in a foundation of *karuṇā* (compassion), *kṛpā/ kṛpaṇa* (commiseration; sympathy), and *maitra/ maitrī* (kindness; benevolence), which comprises the idea of benevolence-compassion.⁸

Second, ontological foundation: From an ontological perspective of emptiness, one of the most inspiring threads among various sentient beings' countless predicaments is the idea of "the prospect of liberation." In Sanskrit, this idea is presented with *pari* in front of the optative mood of the verb that means to liberate, \sqrt{muc} .⁹ In other words, if it were not for the prospect of liberating sentient beings under any circumstances, then there would be no need for the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara to bring about a series of scenarios to appropriately help various sentient beings to be liberated from their predicaments.

Third, practical foundation: The "prospect of salvation" as the salvific foundation for practices is an everlasting issue in religion. If it were not possible for sentient beings to be rescued, then the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara would not be working hard methodically rescuing sentient beings, thus becoming the world savior or protector. In Sanskrit, this idea is presented by *trātṛ/ trātā/ trātāru* (savior; rescuer; protector), the agent of action of $\sqrt{trā}$, which means to save from, to rescue, or to protect.¹⁰

Fourth, bodily foundation: "Transformation" lies at the very heart of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara's appearing in many different forms and shapes to rescue sentient beings from suffering. It is a basic teaching of Buddhism that all factors in the world, including body, are illusions (*māyā*) or emanated constructions (*nirmita; nirmāṇa*). However, the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara does not only passively comprehend that body is merely an illusion. He actively manoeuvres illusory and multiple bodies to the highest degree in order to rescue sentient beings.

Fifth, the foundation in reality: Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara's capacity to be a universal gateway lies in the idea of "thoroughly unimpeded." Rather than being limited to specialized or fragmented appearances, reality (*dharmatā; dharmāṇām dharmatā; tattva*) connotes the whole process of ever-changing causes and conditions. The foundation in reality can be unlocked by probing into the thorough depths of phenomena. What the universal gateway advocates is to transcend differences or segregations of time, direction, life form, sex, society, culture, or religion. The "Samanta-mukha-parivarta" chapter treats all

these factors as an equality principle, and puts such a principle into practice in salvation.

To sum up, the study of this chapter reveals at least one set of key ideas: the main mental foundation is benevolence-compassion; the main ontological foundation is the prospect of liberation; the main practical foundation is the prospect of salvation; the main bodily foundation is illusory transformation; and the main foundation in reality is the thoroughly unimpeded.

Unfolding of the Mind, Body and Abiding-Places

What the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” endeavors to express is an example of unfolding religious practices. In the same manner, the notions of mind, body, and abiding-places are also unfolded in terms of deliberation and practice. Therefore, a survey of this chapter not only provides an opportunity to learn how to think about these topics in an unfolding sense, but also can help us expand our vision of these topics. The three sub-sections here will elucidate how such topics as mind, body and abiding-places constitute archetypes of unfolding deliberation and practices.

Unfolding of the Mind

Mind can be understood as the totality of mental activities including perception, cognition, sentiment, and attitude. Mental activities can be classified into various types such as enclosed, ensnared, growing, and unfolding. An examination of the unfolding type of the mind from the perspective of the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” chapter can elucidate at least the following five subject-matters: horizon of cognition, locality of cognition, packaging of cognition, inclination of sentiments, and mode of attitude.

First, “horizon of cognition:” This chapter is not confined to the immediate situation, a specific item, or any particular characteristic in time. Rather, it is totally approachable and it observes a very long period of life experience and the vast world of life.

Second, “locality of cognition:” This chapter does not settle down to any confined locality of cognition. Cognition in such a manner is not egocentric, nor is it based on a view of self-concept. The worldview on which the cognition

is based does not rely on dichotomies such as “center vs. periphery,” “substructure vs. superstructure,” “subject vs. object,” or “self vs. other.”

Third, “encasing of cognition:” This chapter does not encase cognition by surrounding it with such conceptual constraints as *ātma-saṃjñā* (conceptualization of the self) or *para-saṃjñā* (conceptualization of the other). Rather, it unblocks and liberates the process of cognition by observing causes and conditions so as to search for proper ways out of suffering and misconceptions.

Fourth, “inclination of sentiments:” This chapter neither engenders agitated or attached sentiments from a self-centered point of view, nor sets up an exclusionary and divisive worldview to foster an indifferent or even hostile sentiment. It extends sentiments vastly, equally, thoroughly and eventually into a universal consolation and compassion. Regardless of the differences that may occur between sentient beings.

Fifth, “mode of attitude:” This chapter does not circumscribe itself in the narrow concerns of situations encouraging negative attitudes such as stinginess, grasping, feeling lost, inferiority complex, superiority complex, domination, or scolding. For example, *abhayaṃdada*, “bestower of fearlessness,” never worries to the point of being ensnared in the whirlpool of fear or terror. Rather, he helps those who are in agony of fear or terror get out of their dire situations by using whatever appropriate methods.¹¹ Furthermore, one will not be enslaved by such agitated sentiments as greed, anger, and delusion, nor will one be inclined to berate other sentient beings’ emotions. One can actually become a savior by employing whatever pertinent options to help sentient beings concerning with emotional disorders.¹²

To conclude, the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” chapter neither takes ordinary sentient beings’ provisional views for granted, nor advocates enclosed mental activities. The unfolding view of mind and mental practices exemplified by the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is exclusive of all dualistic divisions. Rather, it requires an equal and unimpeded cognition of life. In terms of content, studious mental practices entail indiscriminating and limitless benevolence and compassion. The Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara can not only stay attuned to the causes and conditions of the horror and defilements that vex sentient beings, but also arrange the tools and clues suitable to help sentient beings get out of mental quagmire. In other words, the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara exemplifies the practice of universal observation and therefore provides

sentient beings with ways to solve mental problems.

Unfolding of the Body

The unfolding view presented in the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” chapter neither acknowledges the body as a fixed entity ontologically separated from others, nor reckons the body in terms of a superficial shape or form, such as female/male, big/small, beautiful/ugly, or black/white, nor identifies the body 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. It neither identifies the body as the self, nor identifies the self as the body. Such conceptualizations and identifications impose tendencies of isolation, fixation, materialization, characterization, and superficiality on the body. These inclinations consequently construct an enclosed view of the body alienated from the reality of the vast and interconnected world of life.

The key to an unfolding view of the body lies in the cognition that the body is an “apparition that is related to and interlinked with the world of life.” “Being related to” means the body and the world of life are not separate entities. Both are interwoven into a network of causes and conditions, or into a process of becoming, changing, and fading. Moreover, as an “apparition,” the body as well as the world of life lack substantive content or fixed shape and thus defy absolute assertions. Such a cognition underlines the understanding that the body can only be unfolded in a network of an interconnected world of life. In this way, the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” chapter exemplifies a non-essentialist view of the body which initiates transformation into seemingly different bodies as one of the tools conducive to saving sentient beings, a task for which the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is most famous.¹³ A well-known quote from the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” chapter best describes the “unfolding body function:”

santi kula-putra loka-dhātavo, yeṣu Avalokiteśvaro bodhisattvo mahāsattvo buddha-rūpeṇa sattvānāṃ dharmāṃ deśayati. santi loka-dhātavo, yeṣu Avalokiteśvaro bodhisattvo mahāsattvo bodhisattva-rūpeṇa sattvānāṃ dharmāṃ deśayati. keṣāṃ-cit pratyekabuddha-rūpeṇ Avalokiteśvaro bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ sattvānāṃ dharmāṃ deśayati. —śrāvaka-rūpeṇa—brahma-rūpeṇa—śakra-rūpeṇa—gandharva-rūpeṇa—. yakṣa-vaiṇeyānāṃ sattvānāṃ yakṣa-rūpeṇa

*dharmam deśayati. —īśvara-rūpeṇa—mabheśvara-rūpeṇa—cakra-varti-rāja-rūpeṇa—piśāca-rūpeṇa—vaiśravaṇa-rūpeṇa—senā-pati-rūpeṇa—brāhmaṇa-rūpeṇa—vajra-pāṇi-rūpeṇa—. evam a-cintya-guṇa-samanvāgataḥ kula-putra Avalokiteśvaro bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ.*¹⁴

This passage illuminates at least four types of unfolding: first, unfolding in time, i.e., not being limited to any short period of time; second, unfolding in space or direction, i.e., not being enclosed in any specific area; third, unfolding in shape, posture, or facial features, i.e., not being confined to any specific representation; fourth, unfolding in goal or purpose, i.e., not being restricted to any foreordained consequence.

How then is it possible that one unfolds one's body? After scrutinizing the "Samanta-mukha-parivarta" chapter, three points become salient: First, to avoid engaging in anything that is "anti-unfolding;" second, to enhance the ability of "transforming the body;" third, to direct the transformation of the body to save various kinds of sentient beings without discrimination.

Unfolding of Abiding-places

Abiding-places are not different from any other conditioned entities and thus also exhibit the process of arising and cessation, and are empty of abiding-places. To better understand how this is so, one first has to be critical of the view that binds specific sentient beings to specific places.

In order to formulate "unfolding views of abiding-places," it is necessary to comprehend that all abiding-places are *pratitya-samutpāda* (conditioned co-arising). On account of going through impermanent changes, abiding-places are *svabhāva-sūnya* (empty of own-being). As a result, they don't possess any self-existing distinctness. Since abiding-places are devoid of their own-being, they are in reality *a-dvaya* (non-dualistic). Furthermore, they can all be connected to each other through a network of arising and cessation. All abiding-places are founded on a process of conditioned co-arising and cessation. Such abiding-places are illusory manifestations, which can be variously transformed. In other words, the key to the unfolding of abiding-places lies in a luminous comprehension that their foundational basis is a series of conditioned co-arising and cessation, emptiness of own-being, non-duality, and illusion.

In this way, going throughout countries in the ten directions, the

Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara manifests everywhere.¹⁵ Focusing on saving various sentient beings, the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara comes into existence in divergent places with disparate appearances appropriate to the circumstances. Precisely due to the reality that any abiding-place can be the right 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, the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara exemplifies the unfolding view of mind, body and abiding-places. Advanced Bodhisattvas eliminate the “anti-unfolding view of abiding-places” and 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 a certain abiding-place. Instead, all abiding-places can be thoroughly used in saving sentient beings.

Philosophical Reflection on the Prospect of Approaching the Most Advanced Level

By advocating the “universal gateway,” the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” chapter sheds light on the various ways through which the topics of mind, body and abiding-places become unfolding. In light of this discovery, two closely related issues worth commending. First, what kind of unfolding Bodhisattva practices does Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara exhibit? Second, how does one reflect on such Bodhisattva practices?

Unfolding Bodhisattva Practices: Approaching the Most Advanced Level

The so-called “approaching the most advanced level” is equivalent to the “most advanced unfolding” and “limitless unfolding.” Linguistically, it is different from “initial unfolding,” “medium unfolding,” and “limited unfolding.” However, the term “approaching the most advanced level” should not connote internal or external opposing viewpoints. Furthermore, the unfolding Bodhisattva practices exemplified by the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara are not in past tense, nor present progressive tense, but an ongoing future progressive tense. In order to express the scope of this egalitarian, active, open, and continuous form, the term “approaching the most advanced level” is thus coined.

How Is “Approaching the Most Advanced Level” Possible?

Once the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara’s actions are comprehended as “approaching the most advanced level by Bodhisattva practices,” a philosophical reflection can be addressed: how is “approaching the most advanced level” possible?

Focusing on the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” chapter two strands, theoretical and practical, can be used to illuminate the investigation of the prospect of “approaching the most advanced level.”

First, the theoretical strand: From the perspective of *a-saṃskṛta-dharmatā* (unconditioned reality; unconditioned state of being the dharma), 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. Being conditioned as such, the dharma is thoroughly empty and non-dual. In other words, limitedness does not exist in its own-being, nor does there exist dividedness, opposition, centrality, or marginality, i.e. there does not exist any thorough form of limitedness.

Second, the practical strand: If bodhisattvas, by way of focusing on the bodhisattva practices of saving various sentient beings, are able to comprehend the idea of unconditioned state of being the Dharma and if, fundamentally, there does not exist any form of limitedness, then it is conceivable to put into practice the idea of non-limitedness. The principle of bodhisattva practices of non-limitedness can thus be actualized.

After comprehending the idea that wherever the practice is brought about, its state of being the dharma is as ever thoroughly devoid of limitedness in any form, then the unfolded bodhisattva practices can exemplify “approaching the most advanced level.” In other words, it is possible to unfold Bodhisattva practices to a superlative state along a chain of reasoning.

“Approaching the Most Advanced Level”: A Chain of Reasoning

As far as the ideas constituting Bodhisattva practices are concerned, it is not so magical that the Bodhisattvas can achieve whatever they aspire. Indeed, they need to construct and follow a chain of reasoning. That Bodhisattvas are capable of performing the deeds to be done is primarily dependent on two conditions: one, adherence to the mechanism of conditioned co-arising;

second, the skillfulness of transformation in salvation.

First, the reasoning for the mechanism of conditioned co-arising can be expressed as *asmin sati, idaṃ bhavaty; asyōtpādād, idaṃ utpadyate. asminn asati, idaṃ na bhavaty; asya nirodhād, idaṃ nirudhyate* (“When that exists [or is present], this comes to be; from the arising of that, this arises. When that does not exist [or is not present], this does not come to be; from the cessation of that, this ceases”).¹⁶ Regardless of what one does, going through birth, aging, sickness, and death, suffering in the cycle of birth and death, proceeding on the path of cultivation—looking for ways out of the cycle of birth and death, developing and enhancing the abilities of life, and committing to saving various sentient beings—all these deeds work along the mechanism of conditioned co-arising. In turn, conditioned co-arising manifests as relationships, aggregates, constructions, changes, distinctions, continuum, evolution, and unfolding, all of which can be fathomed through such reasoning. Once the reality of conditioned co-arising is observed, it is understood that the capacity for rescuing sentient beings is by no means almighty. By adjusting the methods and skills in salvation, bodhisattvas avail themselves to a whole spectrum of sentient beings’ circumstances, revealing to them the means by which to be free from the cycle of birth and death. In short, in order to be able to save sentient beings, bodhisattvas must comply with the mechanism of conditioned co-arising.

What bodhisattvas offer to sentient beings in need is help that either ameliorates immediate suffering or indicates ways out of dire situations. Bodhisattvas will not promise anything that violates the mechanism of conditioned co-arising, such as returning to the original situation, being fixed in the current situation, life without death, or an eternal life after death. This chapter repeatedly uses the optative mood of the verb *parimucyeraṃ* or *parimukto bhavet* (“might be liberated”). This shows that the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara alone cannot liberate sentient beings; that is, salvation cannot be achieved simply from without. Therefore, the so-called “Other-Power salvation (*tariki* salvation)” plays no part in the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” chapter.¹⁷

Second, skillfulness of transformation in salvation can be described as “being compliant with sentient beings that are receiving guidance in order to manifest the corresponding format to teach the Dharma to them.”

According to the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” chapter, it is crucial to realize that the object to be saved is an illusion, as are the savior and the act

of salvation. If any one of them is not illusory but perceived to be a fixed substance, then there is no need trying to save anyone because there is no room for salvation. For the sake of universal salvation, it is necessary to recognize various sentient beings' differences and what makes them different. It is then possible to offer suitable help to meet various needs. If one claims to be a savior and yet is not flexible, or can only embody limited appearances, then offering help to various sentient beings will be extremely problematic. When offering help, it is important to cultivate an approach of *x-vaineṅyānām sattvānām* (to those sentient beings who are to be guided (or instructed) by the form of x). The key word *vaineṅya* can be dissected into *vai* (prefix vi with a *ṛddhi* formation) + *neya* (the future passive participle of *√ni*). The literal meaning of the word is “should be guided individually” while it means “what should be directed, guided, instructed, or adjusted.” The emphasis is placed on the imperative phrase “should be guided” because bodhisattvas should not only focus on sentient beings' past, but also need to guide them into the future. As a result, sentient beings can learn, practice, develop capabilities, and cultivate abilities so as to find the ways that are suitable to their wishes or to advance realistically on the ways of practice.

Conclusion

In the “Samanta-mukha-parivarta” chapter, the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara embodies the unfolding view of mind and mental practices eliminating discriminatory cognition in order for the capacity for universal observation to surface. After diligent study and practice, the boundless benevolence and compassion equips bodhisattvas with the skill to understand the reason why sentient beings are vexed by horrors or afflictions and arrange the tools and means by which sentient beings may be free from all perplexities.

On the topic of the body, there are three major points: one should avoid engaging in anything that is “anti-unfolding;” one should enhance the ability of “transforming the body;” and one should direct the transformation of the body to save various kinds of sentient beings without discrimination.

All phenomena conform to the principle of conditioned co-arising and are therefore subject to transformation. Based on such understanding, the unfolding view of abiding-places does not associate identity, belonging, or

incidents such as birth, aging, sickness and death with a certain abiding-place. Ordinary sentient beings often turn abiding-places into enclosed or limited domains. From the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara's perspective, all abiding-places can be used as locations from which various sentient beings are to be rescued.

In sum, the unfolding bodhisattva practices exemplified by the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara can be comprehended as “approaching the most advanced level” 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. The bodhisattva practices thus unfolded will embody “approaching the most advanced level” in the “ideas constituting bodhisattva practices.” It is possible to unfold the principle of Bodhisattva practices to a superlative state with a chain of reasoning, notably, “reasoning for the mechanism of conditioned co-arising” and “reasoning for transformation in salvation.”

Notes

- 1 The extant three Chinese translation are as follows: *Zheng fabua jing* (T 263); *Miaofa lianhua jing* (T 262); and *Tianpin Miaofa lianhua jing* (T 264).
- 2 “*katamac ca bhaiṣajya-rāja tathāgatasya dharmāsanam? sarva-dharma-sūnyatā-praveśaḥ khalu punar bhaiṣajya-rāja tathāgatasya dharmāsanam. tatra tena kula-putreṇa niṣattavyam niṣadya cāyam dharma-paryāyas catasṛṇām paśadām samprakāśayitavyaḥ!*” (Ueki 2008, 2:18; my translation).
- 3 「藥王! 若有善男子、善女人, 如來滅後, 欲為四眾, 說是法華經者, 云何應說? 是善男子、善女人, 入如來室, 著如來衣, 坐如來座, 爾乃應為四眾, 廣說斯經。如來室者, 一切眾生中大慈悲心是; 如來衣者, 柔和忍辱心是; 如來座者, 一切法空是。安住是中, 然後以不懈怠心, 為諸菩薩及四眾, 廣說是法華經。」(T 262, 9.31c).
- 4 “*punar aparaṃ mañju-śrīr bodhisattvo mahāsattvoḥ sarva-dharmān sūnyān vyavalokayati, yathāvat pratiṣṭhitān dharmān aviparīta-sthāyino yathā-bhūta-sthitān acalān akampyān avivartyān aparivartān sadā yathā-bhūta-sthitān ākāśa-svabhāvān nirukti-vyavahāra-vivarjītān ajātān abhūtān na saṃskṛtān nāsaṃskṛtān na sato nāsato ’nabbilāpa-pravyāhṛtān asaṅga-sthāna-sthitān samjñā-viparyāsa-prādurbhūtān. evaṃ hi mañju-śrīr bodhisattvo mahāsattvo ’bhikṣaṇaṃ sarva-dharmān vyavalokayan viharati. anena vibhāreṇa viharan bodhisattvo mahāsattvo gocare sthito bhavati*” (Ueki 2008, 2:132; my translation).
「復次, 菩薩摩訶薩觀一切法空、如實相、不顛倒、不動、不退、不轉, 如虛空。無所有性, 一切語言道斷, 不生、不出、不起, 無名、無相、實無所有, 無量、無邊、無礙、無障, 但以因緣有, 從顛倒生。故說, 常樂觀如是法相。」(T 262, 9.37b).
- 5 “*kena kāraṇena bhagavann Avalokiteśvaro bodhisattvo mahāsattvo ’valokiteśvara ity ucyate?*” (Ueki 2008, 2:492).
「世尊! 觀世音菩薩以何因緣, 名觀世音?」(T 262, 9.56c.) “World Honored One, for what reason is the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara called ‘Avalokiteśvara?’”
- 6 “*kathaṃ bhagavann Avalokiteśvaro bodhisattvo mahāsattvo ’syāṃ saḥāyāṃ loka-dhātāu pravīcarati? kathaṃ sattvānāṃ dharmāṃ deśayati? kiṃśas c’Avalokiteśvarasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasyōpāya-kausalya-viśayah?*” (Ueki 2008, 2:500).
「世尊! 觀世音菩薩云何遊此娑婆世界? 云何而為眾生說法? 方便之力, 其事云何?」(T 262, 9.57a.) “World Honored One, how does the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara roam throughout this Saḥā world? How does he speak the Dharma for sentient beings? How does he carry out this work with the power of expedients?”
- 7 It is the 24th chapter of the Sanskrit edition, the 23rd chapter of *Zheng fabua jing*, the 25th chapter of *Miaofa lianhua jing*, and the 24th chapter of *Tianpin Miaofa lianhua jing*.
- 8 “*na te bhagavan sattvā avarakeṇa kuśala-mūlena samanvāgatā bhaviṣyanti, ye ’valokiteśvarasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasyēmaṃ dharma-paryāya-parivartam śroṣyanti Avalokiteśvarasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya vikurvā-nirdeśam samanta-mukha-parivartam nām’Avalokiteśvarasya bodhisattvasya vikurvaṇa-prātibhāyam.*” (Ueki 2008, 2:514).

「世尊! 若有眾生, 聞是〈觀世音菩薩品. 自在之業. 普門示現神通力〉者, 當知是人功德不少。」(T 262, 9.58b.) “World Honored One, if there are those who hear this chapter on Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, who learn about the self-mastery of his deeds and the power of his spiritual penetrations as shown in this Universal Gateway, you should know that the merit and virtue of such people will not be small.”

9 Example 1, “*śubha-locana maitra-locanā prajñā-jñāna-viśiṣṭa-locanā | kṛpa-locana śuddha-locanā premaṇīyā su-mukhā su-locanā*” (Ueki 2008, 2:510).

「真觀、清淨觀, 廣大智慧觀, 悲觀及慈觀, 常願、常瞻仰。」(T 262, 9.58a.) “True Contemplator, Pure Contemplator, Contemplator with Vast, Great Wisdom, Compassionate Contemplator, Kind Contemplator, may we constantly behold you with reverence!”

Example 2, “*kṛpa-sadguṇa-maitra-garjitā śubha-guṇa maitra-manā-mahā-ghanā | kleśāgnīśamesi prāṇinām dharma-varṣaṃ amṛtaṃ pravaraṣasi*” (Ueki 2008, 2:510).

「悲體戒、雷震, 慈意妙大雲, 澍甘露法雨, 滅除煩惱焰。」(T 262, 9.58a.) “Compassionate substance: the thunder of precepts. Kind intent: a wondrous great cloud. He rains down sweet dew and Dharma rain, which extinguish the flames of affliction.”

10 For example, “*iba kula-putra yāvanti sattva-koṭī-nayuta-śata-sahasrāṇi yāni duḥkhāni pratyannubhavanti, tāni saced Avalokiteśvarasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya nāmadbeyaṃ śṛṇuyus, te sarve tasmād duḥkha-skandhāt parimucyeran.*” (Ueki 2008, 2:492).

「善男子! 若有無量百千萬億眾生受諸苦惱, 聞是觀世音菩薩, 一心稱名, 觀世音菩薩即時觀其音聲, 皆得解脫。」(T 262, 9.56c.) “Good man, if any of the limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads of *koṭis* of sentient beings who are undergoing all kinds of suffering hear of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara and recite his name single-mindedly, the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara will immediately hear their voices and rescue them.”

11 For example, “*bahu-duḥkha-śatair upa-drutān sattva dṛṣṭvā bahu-duḥkha-pīditān | śubha-jñāna-balo vi-lokiyā tena trātāru jage sa-devake*” (Ueki 2008, 2:510).

「眾生被困厄, 無量苦逼身, 觀音妙智力, 能救世間苦。」(T 262, 9.58a.) “Sentient beings are beset with hardships, and oppressed by limitless sufferings. The power of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara’s wondrous wisdom can rescue the world from suffering.”

12 Example 1: “*eṣa kula-putra Avalokiteśvaro bodhisattvo mahāsattvo bhītānām sattvānām a-bhayaṃ dadāti. anena kāraṇenā-bhayaṃ-dada iti saṃjñāyata iba sabhāyāṃ loka-dhātāu*” (Ueki 2008, 2:502).

「是觀世音菩薩摩訶薩於怖畏急難之中, 能施無畏; 是故, 此娑婆世界皆號之為施無畏者。」(T 262, 9.57b.) “The Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva Avalokiteśvara can, in the midst of fear, crisis, and hardship, bestow fearlessness. That is why in this *Sahā* world all call him the ‘Bestower of Fearlessness’.”

Example 2: “*namo namas tasmā a-bhayaṃ-dadāyāvalokiteśvarāya bodhisattvāya mahāsattvāyēti*” (Ueki 2008, 2:496).

「『南無觀世音菩薩!』」(T 262, 9.56c.) ‘*Namo Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara!*’

13 “*ye kula-putra rāga-caritāḥ sattvāḥ, te ’valokiteśvarasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya namas-kāraṃ kṛtvā, vigata-rāgā bhavanti. ye dveṣa-caritāḥ sattvāḥ, te ’valokiteśvarasya*

bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya namas-kāraṃ kṛtvā, vigata-dveṣā bhavanti. ye moha-caritāḥ sattvāḥ, te 'valokiteśvarasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya namas-kāraṃ kṛtvā, vigata-mohā bhavanti." (Ueki 2008, 2:496).

「若有眾生，多於婬欲，常念恭敬觀世音菩薩，便得離欲；若多瞋恚，常念恭敬觀世音菩薩，便得離瞋；若多愚癡，常念恭敬觀世音菩薩，便得離癡。」(T 262, 9.57a). "If sentient beings who have much desire constantly and reverently recite the name of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, they will be separated from desire. If those who have much hatred constantly and reverently recite the name of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, they will be separated from hatred. If those who are very stupid constantly and reverently recite the name of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, they will be separated from delusion."

- 14 「眾生被困厄，無量苦逼身，觀世妙智力，能救世間苦。具足神通力，廣修智、方便，十方諸國土，無刹不現身。」(T 262, 9.58a). "Sentient beings are beset with hardships, and oppressed by limitless sufferings. The power of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara's wondrous wisdom can rescue the world from suffering."

- 15 Ueki (2008, 500–502).

「善男子！若有國土眾生，應以佛身得度者，觀世音菩薩即現佛身，而為說法；應以辟支佛身得度者，即現辟支佛身，而為說法；……聲聞身……梵王身……帝釋身……自在天身……大自在天身……天大將軍身……毘沙門身……小王身……長者身……居士身……宰官身……婆羅門身……比丘、比丘尼、優婆塞、優婆夷身……長者、居士、宰官、婆羅門婦女身……童男、童女身……天、龍、夜叉、乾闥婆、阿修羅、迦樓羅、緊那羅、摩睺羅伽、人、非人等身……執金剛身……無盡意！是觀世音菩薩成就如是功德，以種種形，遊諸國土，度脫眾生。」(T 262, 9.57a–b). "Good man, if sentient 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 Mahāsattva Akshayamati! Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara has accomplished merit and virtue such as this and, in all manner of forms, roams throughout the land, saving and liberating sentient beings."

- 16 For example, 「若有國土眾生，應以佛身得度者，觀世音菩薩即現佛身，而為說法；……是觀世音菩薩成就如是功德，以種種形，遊諸國土，度脫眾生。」(T 262, 9.57a–b). "[I]f sentient beings in this land must be saved by means of someone in the body of a Buddha, the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara will manifest in the body of a Buddha and speak Dharma for them. The Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara has accomplished merit and virtue such as this and, in all manner of forms, roams throughout the land, saving and liberating sentient

beings.”

- 17 「此有故彼有，此生故彼生；此無故彼無，此滅故彼滅。」 In Pali, *imasmiṃ sati, idaṃ hoti; imass’ uppādā, idaṃ uppajjati. imasmim asati, idaṃ na hoti; imassa nirodhā, idaṃ nirujjhati. On the reasoning for the mechanism of conditioned co-arising, see Vaidya 1958, 221; Tsai 2006; and Tsai 2010.*
- 18 The issue of Self-Power salvation vs. Other-Power salvation is raised by an oversimplified artificial dichotomy and later generations’ taking it for granted. Furthermore, the “key condition to provide salvation,” and “unilateral condition to achieve salvation” seriously confound it even further. Even though the resulted labels are convenient, they usually contribute to preconceived prejudices and are of no use when trying to comprehend the texts. See Tanabe (1990, 275); Soga (2004, 16–17); Yandell and Netland (2009, 51).

Abbreviation

T *Taishō Shinsū Daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, ed. Junjirō Takakusu 高楠順次郎, Kaikyoku Watanabe 渡邊海旭 *et al.*, 100 vols., Tokyo 1924~1934: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai.

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- Tianpin miaofa lianhua jing* 添品妙法蓮華經, 7 rolls, trans. Jñānagupta (闍那崛多 Dunajueduo) and Dharmagupta (笈多 Jiduo) in 601–602. T 264, 9.134c–196a.
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