

A Social Psychology of Loving-kindness Carved in Stone

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Abstract

A social psychological perspective is elucidated while virtually touring the Borobudur, a Mahayana wonder from about the year 800 located between two twin volcanoes on Java-island. Its history is dealt with by commemorating the builders, Javanese Buddhism, and Dharmarakshita Suvarnavipa, Borobudur's premier proponent. It is surmised that the *stupa*-like pyramid served the function of devotion to glorify Buddhism and of ceremony to coronate the Sailendra kings as *Bodhisattvas*. Besides, this was a dynastic gift to the people: an educational centre. The Borobudur is instrumental to realize awakening in one lifetime by ascending to extinguish craving (*Nirvana*) in awakening motivation (*absolute bodhicitta*) and to liberate all beings from the cycle of psychological malaise (*Samasara*) by disseminating loving-kindness, once descended to the secular world (*relative bodhicitta*). Based on the *Gandavyuha Sutra* as depicted on reliefs of the Borobudur (exhorting that the world is an "empty bubble"), a practice-oriented view is presented which goes beyond the *Abhidharma* philosophical psychology by rendering a "Psychology of Relational Buddhism": meaning and happiness are derived from the *interpersonal* care in *intrapersonal* harmony. Accentuating the "languaging" dimension of the body/speech/mind karmic triad, postmodern Social Construction is embraced to illuminate the emptiness of "transcendental truth" and to elucidate "relational (inter-)being". Psychological studies and initiatives researching relationships' congealing properties are reviewed. In effect, the Borobudur's message is to realize the "in-between self" (non-individuality) through the interpersonal value/quality of loving-kindness and its ramifications: compassion, joy, friendliness, and impartial mentality.

Introduction

Born on the island of Java, I was exposed to Javanese Buddhism¹ in my childhood through my great-grandmother's *Samadhi* (absorption) meditation, studied it later in life, and found it thus intriguing that I like to share some of my understanding of it here. Although Javanese Buddhism is extinct for 10 centuries, and largely unknown, its spirit might live on as long as the Borobudur, the biggest Buddhist structure to date, exists as a Unesco protected heritage. Surfing on the flow of a revived Buddhist interest on the globe, there is increasing attention by "newborn" Buddhists for the Borobudur. However, many Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike question what this *mandala*-based pyramid in *stupa*-like form supposes to be.²

As can be seen on the picture below (the first one ever made of the Borobudur in 1873 by Isidore van Kinsbergen)³, the lava-stone building shows a tower, domes, Buddha statues, and (not well visible) circumambulating corridors of more than 5 km.⁴ with bas reliefs (2 by 1 m. each) of which roughly half of the circa 3000 panels refer to five books (the other half of the panels are embellishments) (Soekmono, 1976). It seems that we are looking at a huge comic book of Buddhist educational stories, according to the narrative tradition throughout

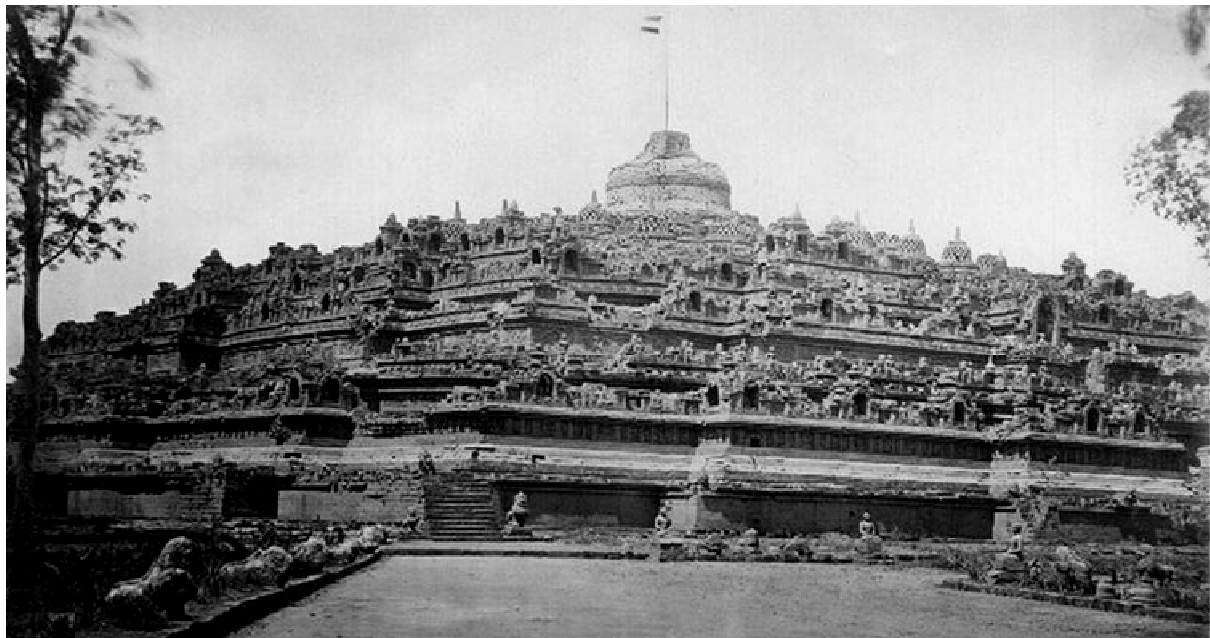
¹ It is noteworthy to mention that Buddhism entered Sumatra and Java as from the early 5th century in its Mahayana variant, while Brahmanism was already there, and that Theravada Pali Buddhism does not appear to have been on these islands, despite contrary speculations, and it is plausible that Mahayana came from ancient India (Kalinga and Bengal) and Cambodia, via the trade route to Sumatra and Java. A prince/guru from Kashmir, Gunavarman (367-431), was recorded in Chinese annals to have stayed and spread Buddhism on Sumatra/Java, perhaps for two decades, until 424 when he started his mission in China on imperial invitation (Zuercher, 1972).

² A *mandala* is geometrical sacred form consisting of circles and squares and a *stupa* is usually a dome-like/mound-like structure containing a relic (Wayman, 1981).

³ Copyrights expired.

⁴ This allows *parikrama* devotional circumambulating meditation around the *mandala* centre symbolizing the mythical sacred Mt. Meru.

Asia, which adherents considered relevant to the extent that they should be carved in stone. One third of these panels is dedicated to the last of five books which is identified as the 39th (and last) volume of the *Avatamsaka* (flower adornment) *Sutra*, called the *Gandavyuha* (supreme crown) *Sutra*⁵, which is a tale about a young man called Sudhana, an allegorical name meaning “Good Wealth”, a prince. It seems that a main function of the Borobudur is to educate visitors in loving-kindness through stories cast in stone. To this end one climbs 10 floors corresponding to the 10 perfections of the *Bodhisattva* (Buddha-to-be): the relational scenarios of being generous, righteous, forbearing, endeavoring, meditative, wise, skillful, balanced, educative, and awakened. The practical guide to attain these psychological stages affecting the *karma*-domains of body/speech/mind are depicted in enchanting scenes on intentional action (*karma*), the Buddha as a *Bodhisattva*, Buddhists’ noteworthy deeds, Siddharta Gautama’s life, and the *Gandavyuha Sutra* on “Good Wealth’s” travels toward awakening guided by “Wisdom” (the cosmic *Bodhisattva* Manjushri) counselled by 52 teachers, particularly “Virtue” (the cosmic *Bodhisattva* Samantabhadra) and “Loving-kindness” (the cosmic *Bodhisattva* Maitreya) (Cleary, 1993).



Relating to contemporary psychology, “Good Wealth” learns to meditate to reach the highest goal, enacted by his entering the “Tower of Infinite Light”: Vairocana Buddha’s abode of emptiness. However, he could only step into it accompanied by “Loving-kindness” after a long and winding road of “self-therapy” and so attain a state free from clinging to self-illusions, free from grasping god-delusions, and free from craving greed and hatred. To this end ignorance – the root cause of emotional suffering – needs to be alleviated by understanding how the mind works leading to full emptiness. Thus, the student who ascends the Borobudur in the footsteps of “Good Wealth” learns to meditate via the pictorial instructions on the way up. Insight into “the empty” is not a goal in itself but a reset point and springboard for practice, in mindful equanimity (impartiality or even-mindedness), the interpersonal meditations that promulgate loving-kindness, empathic compassion, and shared joy. Once liberated, one starts a psychological mission to contribute to “inter-being” by disseminating these pro-social values in a descending journey back to the mundane world.

⁵ The *Avatamsaka Sutra* consists of 39 relatively separate books most probably written in the year 0 until the end of the 4th century and compiled in Central Asia.

Gandavyuha's Vairocana Tower is the delightful abode of meditative insights in the meaning of the “formless” (*dharmadhatu* or *arupadhatu*), i.e.: the (un)becoming of things in “dependent origination”, their ubiquitous pervasive emptiness (cf. *Mahasunnata Sutta*), and the non-obstructive-interpenetrating-interconnectedness of human beings (cf. *Ariya-pariyesana Sutta*), which very essence is the repudiation of the self and soul implying the message of non-individuality. The latter is translatable into the applied psychology of “Social Construction”, whose collaborative practice is poignantly captured in Gergen’s adage “I am linked, therefore I am” < http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth_J._Gergen >, implying that “to act” means “to inter-act” and that “to be” means “to be related” and “to inter-be”. The implication of these illuminating corresponding ideas for those who seek meaning and happiness through the wisdom of “loving-kindness” is highlighted in the remainder.

Reflecting body/speech/mind

The Mahayana Buddhist construction, located near Magelang in Central Java, stems from about the year 800 and was erected between two twin volcanoes. To be exact, on its 10 floors the magnificent andesite structure shows a tower, 72 domes, 504 Buddha-statues in lotus sitting posture (conspicuously, no reclining or standing statues), and 1460 bas relief story-telling panels. Magnificent parts of the building, panels, statues, and domes are robbed, damaged or partly damaged by vandals rather than by nature’s violence. It was probably abandoned and forgotten as from the 11th century due to Mt. Merapi’s volcanic eruptions, and uncovered in 1814.⁶ Missing parts can be found for instance in a museum in Leiden, Holland, as well as in Thailand: in 1896, King Chulalongkorn was given eight train wagon loads of the finest panels and statues, by the Dutch colonial government (Davisakd Puaksom, 2007).

Considering the books carved in stone on the immense building, it seems that one of the main functions of the Borobudur is to educate by climbing the ten floors and imbibing the carved teachings until reaching the summit.⁷ The practical guide to flourish toward these psychological values/qualities are depicted in enchanting scenes derived from the following books: (1) *Karmavibhanga Sutra* (on the working of *karma*), (2) *Jataka Stories* (on the Buddha’s lives as a Buddha-to-be), (3) *Avadana Stories* (on Buddhists’ noteworthy deeds), (4) *Lalitavistara Sutra* (on the unfolding play of the Buddha’s life until awakening), and (5) the *Gandavyuha Sutra* described above. Note that the four books are preludes leading to the last book and the Mahayana’s gimmick of the Buddha’s life story. It ends at the Tathagata’s setting the “wheel of teaching” in motion (cf. *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*) and continues by his narrating Sudhana’s quest. Like the Buddha, Sudhana is a wealthy young prince who, satiated by material luxuries, looks for life’s meaning and inner prosperity. Seemingly, this kind of seeking by affluent young men is an archetypical pattern in the Buddhist lore. It leaves no doubt that the last book was considered to be the most relevant by the constructors and principals, the ruling kings and queens who also aspired to be adorned as *Bodhisattvas*. This brings us to the function of this mysterious building which does not contain any relics although it was built in a *stupa* form. This author surmises that the Borobudur was not only a ceremonial site for the dynasty’s crowning, but was also the dynasty’s a gift to the people as an “open university” in the framework of acting on wholesome *karma*.

The carved books are adapted to the readers’ developmental phase. By analogy, the first two books are apt for an elementary level, the third and fourth book for an intermediate level, and the last book for an advanced level. This division corresponds with the three realms of the two lowest floors of body (craving/*kammadhatu*), the five middle floors of speech

⁶ Pointed at by locals, the Borobudur was “discovered” by Sir Thomas Raffles during British rule of Java (1811-1816). Inaccessible for c.700 years, it was freed from the jungle strangle in 45 days by 200 men..

⁷ Reading all Buddhist scriptures would take more than a lifetime and probably impossible as there was no book-printing (Mahayana scriptures plus inherent ancient commentaries are c.50 times the bible = c.62.000 pages).

(form/*rupadhatu*), and the three upper floors of domes wherein Buddha-statues (formless/*arupadhatu* or *dharmadhatu*). This threefold arrangement can be traced back to the Buddha's basic teaching on *karma*: the origin of unwholesome *karma* is greed, hatred, and ignorance (on the working of the mind), which manifest itself as the intentional action, i.e. cause and effect, in the domains of body/speech/mind: *kaya/vak/citta* (cf. *Kamma Nidana Sutta*).⁸ These happen to be the fields of study in 21st century science and practice of a "biopsychosocial" wholistic psychology. The body, particularly the connection between brain and behaviour, is the subject matter of neuropsychology, the connection of speech and interpersonal behaviour is attended in social psychology, and the connection of unwholesome thought-feeling and behaviour is accentuated in clinical psychology. The emphasis here is on Social Construction in relation to speech/"linguaging". This author strives to make links between *suttas* and *sutras* to evidence-based practice (Kwee, 1990, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d, and Kwee, Gergen, & Koshikawa, 2006).

Context and location

The Borobudur is aligned with three other relative small shrines (*candis*, an Indonesian term that might refer to any ancient construction) in one straight line to the East, connected by a road in the old days, as tradition has it. These four *candis* are located in the Kedu plain. Candi Ngawen is the furthest away from the Borobudur (8 km.), the next is Candi Mendut (3 km.), and Candi the closest is Pawon (2 km.). Ngawen (existence noted in 824) consists of five small shrines, a number which might well allude to the Mahayana "cosmology of five" (explained below), two of which has four guarding lion-shapes. It seems that this much destroyed little complex (one damaged *candi* left) was the gate to enter the "educational tour" up to Borobudur's summit and displays the donors of the *candi(s)* (Moens, 1951).

Mendut (probably already existed in c.750 as a Brahmin shrine), encapsulates three huge statues with in the middle the historical Buddha Shakyamuni seated on a chair (in a western way) with hands in the setting-the-wheel-of-teaching *mudra* (posture), flanked on his right hand by the cosmic *Bodhisattva* Avalokiteshvara (Compassion) and on his left hand the cosmic *Bodhisattva* Vajrapani (Joy). These figureheads augur five cosmic (*dhyani*) Buddhas as described in an ancient Javanese Mahayana *tantra* (text), the *Sang Hyang Kamahayanikan Mantrayana*⁹, which is written in Q & A form meant to inaugurate the neophyte. The only authority it cites is the champion of Buddhist logic and reason Dignaga (c.480-540, a student of the great Yogacara epistemologist Vasubandhu; c.320-380), who discerned inference and perception that he considered to be pure sensation (Eliot, 1921).¹⁰

Pawon is a stop on the way to the Borobudur, as indicated by the Javanese meaning of the word: kitchen. This function explains that there is only one square chamber inside which is devoid (of cooking equipment) and contains a square (washing) basin in the centre. The rectangular small windows were necessary for ventilation when preparing food. It is plausible that it was well used during (royal) ceremonies and other processions. The name of the village is Bajranalan; *bajra* is a corruption of *vajra* that might mean diamond, thunder or adamantite,

⁸ Note that the root metaphor of body/speech/mind transcends the Cartesian body-mind artefact; the inclusion of speech is a reminder that Buddhism strives at lifting the fictive boundaries created by the self illusion and the soul delusion to work toward the reality of non-individuality that accompanies the practice of loving-kindness.

⁹ This Javanese title refers to the "dedication of" (*Sang* or *semba*) "the unseen/formless" (*Hyang* or *hilang*) "as in the *Mahayanistic Mantrayana*"; Brandes (1913) listed other Javanese Buddhist works: the *Sutasoma*, *Vighnotsava*, *Kunjarakarna*, and *Buddhapamutus*, which do not differ from pre-tantric Mahayana as known in India. Neither the Borobudur, nor the *Kamahayanikan* convey the tantric use of "sexual images" for meditation suggesting that Javanese Buddhism stems from an early Vajrayana period, which in India was in c.600-700.

¹⁰ Dignaga was the before last of the great Buddhist thinkers. No reference was made to the last great Buddhist thinker, the 7th century epistemologist and cognitivist Dharmakirti (c.600-660), who wrote extensively on (non)valid cognitions, as this could imply that Javanese Buddhism did not tap from this development.

like in Vajrayana, a vehicle practiced in the Himalayas, which makes use of a ritualistic teaching “tool of wisdom”, symbolically called *vajra*. The second part of the word, *analan*, means flame or passion for wisdom. Unlike in for instance Tibet, the use of the *vajra* is not particularly emphasized on Java. The walls of Pawon are decorated by the main *Bodhisattva*-gurus depicted later on the Borobudur, the guide Wisdom (Manjushri) and the acting teachers: Loving-kindness (Maitreya), and Virtue (Samantabhadra). Other decorations refer to males and females dressed as human *Bodhisattvas* who refer to the royalty who built the Borobudur.

The Borobudur was financed by the Sailendra dynasty (c.750-832), allegedly indigenous Javanese rulers. The name is derived from mountain (*caila*) and king (*Indra*). The Buddhist Sailendras co-existed peacefully with the Sanjayas of Mataram, who adhered to Brahmanism and whose King, Panangkaran (reigned in c.746-784), apparently authorized the building (under his aegis) of Buddhist sanctuaries, *candis*, and sculptures on the Kedu plain “in honour of Tara” who is revered in Brahmanism as well as in Buddhism.¹¹ Apparently due to a (Bengali) Buddhist teacher, highly venerated by Panangkaran, there was a constructing spree around 800 resulting in more than a dozen Buddhist *candis* in Central Java. The Sailendras were rice cultivators as well as seafaring merchants who shared their thalassocratic power with the Srivijaya dynasty from Sumatra. Together they dominated the maritime spice route between China and India, and traded and raided the Malay Peninsula, Cambodia, and SW Borneo. Their ties in matrimony and in faith with the Buddhist Srivijayas, are evidenced by for instance the similarity of the diadems in Mendut, Pawon, and Palembang, Sumatra. The Borobudur was finished under the reign of the Sailendra King Samaratunga, who reigned over Java until c.832 as well as over Sumatra as a Srivijaya King (c.792-835), because he was married to a Srivijaya princess, Dewi Tara. The Borobudur was probably used to crown them as *Bodhisattvas* and later to celebrate the marriage of their daughter with the Sanjaya Crown Prince, Rakai Pikatan, who toppled his father-in-law on Java and later defeated the Sailendra Prince Balaputra (c.856), who retreated to Sumatra and succeeded his father as a Srivijaya king. The Srivijaya Buddhist dynasty thrived as a great maritime and colonizing power up until the 14th century (Soekmono, 1973).

Javanese Buddhism

The construction workers of this majestic construction, held together like lego-blocks, were headed by architects lead in the beginning by master-mind Gunadharma. Despite his Sanskrit name, he was probably a Javanese as there are many older *candis* around built in the same style. If the Borobudur was built between c.770-840, three to four generations of constructors must have been working on it.¹²

Why was the Borobudur constructed in *stupa* form if there were no human remains whatsoever? Small spaces have been found at the centre on two levels reserved for boxes wherein noble metals, treasured seeds, and precious stones were kept, which in the Mahayana lore symbolize: body/speech/mind. In a centre-base pit, there was a box with metals and over the pit, in a small room with crowned statue in a stone superstructure, there was a second box with seeds. Most probably these “symbolic relics” served during the *Bodhisattva* coronation, whereby ritually the gems of loving-kindness descended from Vairocana’s empty tower into the boxes imbuing *Bodhisattva*-hood. Considering the royal history, this function was likely used once. The Buddhist-Brahmanism syncretism probably warranted the educational use of the Borobudur until its demise in the 11th century. Whatever function the Borobudur might

¹¹ While the Brahmin Tara represents a deity (wisdom star), the Buddhist Tara is a cosmic *Bodhisattva* who is a transformation of Avalokiteshvara’s tears of compassion: she is able to hear the cries of everybody who suffers and may appear in the five cosmic colours representing a variety of virtues and actions leading to liberation.

¹² According to experts, the Borobudur influenced Angkor Wat, built 300 years later; also one might want to bear in mind that the Borobudur was erected 300 years before the European cathedrals were built.

have served, central was/is the teaching it reveals, which can be denoted as Javanese Buddhism. The earlier mentioned principal text on Javanese Buddhism, “the devotion of the formless according to the Mantrayana of Mahayana”, explains that Shakyamuni transforms into Loving-kindness (Vairocana Buddha of the Centre), Avalokiteshvara transforms into Compassion (Amitabha Buddha of the West) and Friendliness (Amoghasiddhi Buddha of the North), and Vajrapani transforms into Joy (Akshobhya Buddha of the East) and Equanimity (Ratnasambhava Buddha of the South). This implies that the education is toward the cultivation of these five human values or personality qualities which bring about relatively lasting happiness: *Loving-kindness, Compassion, Friendliness, Joy, and Equanimity*. The Mahayana pantheon not only originated these psychological states or traits, but an extended “cosmology of five”, like hallowed syllables or *mantras*¹³, elements, colors, senses, *skandhas* (psychological modalities of body, mind, sensation, thought, affect), etc.

There are several peculiarities in Javanese Buddhism if compared to the Mahayana denominations known in the literature. Firstly, the self-originating and self-emanating primordial principle of the Adhi-Buddha or Nondual-Advaya is said to bring forth the three conquerors (*jinās*) of the three poisons greed (Avalokiteshvara), hatred (Vajrapani), and ignorance (Shakyamuni); these three bodies (*trikaya*)¹⁴ originate the five *dhyani* Buddhas. Secondly, it is peculiar to note that the five types of self (self/*atman*, low-self/*cetanatman*, higher-self/*paratman*, fluid-self/*niratman*, and between-self/*antaratman*). The latter refers to “inter-being” which is of particular interest for this article. Thirdly, out of Vairocana springs to the Zenith the creating force Brahma, to the Nadir the annihilating force Shiva, and to the centre on the same level as Vairocana: Vishnu, the maintaining force, in line with the Brahmin idea is that Shakyamuni is a reincarnation of Vishnu. A third peculiarity is that Buddhism and Brahmanism existed side-by-side on Java during many centuries and became mixed into a Buddhist-Brahmin syncretistic system as from the 11th century, probably as a reaction to the Islamic conquest of the island which took place gradually without blood-shed and which gained momentum as from c.1200. In c.1515 the Javanese Brahmin-Buddhist upper class fled to Bali where the syncretistic faith survived until today (Brandes, 1913).

Dharmarakshita Suvarnavipa

Discussing Javanese Buddhism is incomplete without going into its practice as disseminated by a widely celebrated 10/11th century eminent prince/guru: Dharmarakshita Suvarnavipa. Related to the Srivijaya dynasty, he was as much Javanese as Sumatran and, considering his teachings, had the Borobudur as his mainstay. He was a student and scholar at Odantapuri in Bihar¹⁵ and wrote on *karma* (intentional-choice/relational-action) as a boomerang, on heartfelt *bodhicitta* (awakened motivation), and originated the healing meditation of loving-kindness and compassion by “*terima*” (receiving) and “*kasih*” (offering), known in Tibetan as *tonglen*, which is the congealing contemplative practice of *antaratman* (the Javanese/Indonesian emphasized meaning of the Sanskrit *antara* is “between”, *atman* means “self”, thus: “in-between self”). This technique, a component of an extensive mind training toward karmic wholesomeness, is nowadays practiced daily world-wide along with the 14th Dalai Lama. Dharmarakshita is revered up until today in Tibet as the teacher of Dipankara Shrijnana, known as Atisha in Tibet (c.980-1054), a Bengali prince/guru, who, after studying with

¹³ Evidently, *mantras* are of great importance in a Mahayana variety called Mantrayana which emphasizes the use of *mantras* during meditation; the sacred sound of Java is “aah”.

¹⁴ *Kamahayanikan's trikaya* is reflected in the body/speech/mind triad: body-craving (*dharmakaya*), speech-form (*samboghakaya*), and mind-formless (*nirmanakaya*).

¹⁵ Odantapuri is the second oldest Buddhist educational centre (as from the 7th century) neighbouring the famous Nalanda, India. It could accommodate 1000 students among whom many Tibetans and many Vajrayana texts were composed by its scholars. Unfortunately it was destroyed by Muslim invaders in c.1198.

renowned Indian teachers, was eventually advised to go to the most outstanding teacher of his time in Palembang, where he arrived after a journey of a year. There he studied with Dharmarakshita (or Serlingpa, his Tibetan name) and visited the Borobudur. At the end of a 12 year stay (c.1012-1024) his teacher encouraged him to go to the land of snows, which he eventually did in 1039. In Tibet Atisha became a key figure in four (out of five) Tibetan schools, so that Dharmarakshita's teachings and reputation did not only survive, but continue to play a pivotal role 11 centuries later. Leaving Indonesia, his teacher gave him his scripts containing the teaching on *bodhicitta*.

As a scholar Dharmarakshita reviewed the literature on *bodhicitta* and made it easy to understand by his clear-cut interpretation of the writings of illustrious predecessors, from the Buddha to Shantideva. In fact, the main theme of the Borobudur is *bodhicitta*: the intrinsic motivation to awaken toward Nirvana (ascending the Borobudur) in order to benefit all beings who are trapped in the cycle of suffering (*Samsara*) (descending the Borobudur). The person whose activities are motivated by heartfelt *bodhicitta* is called a *Bodhisattva* whose path is conveyed/depicted on the 10 floors of the Borobudur. This is inherent in the full name (and this author's interpretation) of the pyramid: sanctuary (*boro* from *biara*, the Javanese pronunciation of the Sankrit *vihara*) on the mountain (*budur* from *bidur*) of the *Bodhisattva*'s 10 developmental stages (to realize sage-ness within and kingliness without). As depicted at the outer wall of Pawon, the *Bodhisattva*'s *bodhicitta* is linked to Samantabhadra (who formulates the vow of virtues or perfections), to Manjushri (who represents wisdom by carrying a sword that root out all craving), and to Maitreya (who represents loving-kindness, which is conditioned by compassion and joy). In short, the awakened mind of *bodhicitta* comprises the union of compassion and wisdom.

Ascending the Borobudur *bodhicitta* is "absolute", i.e. the *Bodhisattva* strives at attaining emptiness (*sunyata*) or Nirvana (the extinction of craving) as in the *Prajnaparamita Sutra* (or its shortened version, the *Heart Sutra*), and descending the Borobudur *bodhicitta* is "relative", i.e. the *Bodhisattva*, who meanwhile became *antaratman* (in-between self), works at saving all beings who suffer due to existence itself (birth, aging, illness, and death) and to the poisons of greed, hatred, and ignorance (on how the mind works, the illusion of self, and the delusion of god/s). This suffering is mainly psychological and in particular interpersonal in its manifestation. The combination of relative and absolute *bodhicitta* is a middle way balancing the private and the social, displayed on a panel as rafting oneself and others to the other shore. Dharmarakshita emphasized heartfelt *bodhicitta* which is a non-manipulative helping by visualizing the people to be saved as one's mother: her past care is gratefully reciprocated. This is in line with the 10 *Bodhisattva* vows (*Bhadracari*), as depicted on the highest panel wall. Traditionally this boils down to practicing the cherished "4-Social Contemplations" to be immeasurably multiplied: loving-kindness, empathic compassion, shared joy, and equanimity (even-mindedness/impartiality).

***Karma*: relationally intended action**

Dharmarakshita (1981) did not only innovative the social contemplation of "*terima* and *kasih*"¹⁶, but also dealt with interpersonal or "relational *karma*". His poetic work "The sharp-blade wheel hitting the enemy's heart", explains how *karma* plays out in interpersonal life as cause and effect. Evidently, it is about Manjushri's razor sharp sword used to cut off the root of craving in a heart that breeds greed and hatred. By proliferating interactive feelings and thoughts of enmity and being ignorant about the working of relational mind and *karma* one is one's own enemy. In social psychological terms, what is thrown out in greed or hatred will cut oneself by the other's reciprocating action which is at bottom brought about by one's

¹⁶ Log on to www.taosinstitute.net/manuscripts-for-downloading

dumping. This “boomerang effect” is caused by one’s own unwholesome relational action, so that the advice is to be mindful of Maitreya’s loving-kindness and Avalokiteshvara’s compassion in order to prevent and abolish the inflammation and escalation of interpersonal pain and suffering, and to install Vajrapani’s reciprocal joy and happiness instead.

Working on decreasing suffering and increasing happiness amidst existential adversity is a matter of here-and-now wholesome intentional choice and interpersonal action rather than about earning merit for an individual ticket to an after-life paradise in the beyond. To recall, the Borobudur is on *karma*: cause and effect as manifest in body/speech/mind, areas studied in “biopsychosocial” science or more specifically in applied social-clinical-neuro-psychology. After the long and winding road explaining the building and builders, Javanese Buddhism and its exponent champion guru, at last this step to social psychology. For those who are unfamiliar with this specialization of psychology: it studies people’s relating by using the individual, the group, or the interpersonal interaction as the unit of analysis. Social psychology aims at explaining how thought, feeling and behavior are influenced, directly or indirectly, by people while minding culture. The research can be quantitative and in the laboratory or qualitative as collaborative action in the field and is typically focused on attitudes, social influence, social cognition, and social affect like greed and hatred. The social/cultural psychology endorsed here is Social Construction as championed by Gergen (2009a), which is a radical view that considers the mind not to be located inside the skin behind the eyeballs or within the skull in-between the ears, but as arising in “dependent origination”¹⁷ in-between people. The result is “relational being” (Gergen, 2009b) that corresponds with “inter-being” (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1998), as endorsed in the *Diamond Sutra*, and with the “in-between self” (*antaratman*) of Javanese Buddhism. These concepts view “Indra’s Jewel Net” of the *Gandavyuha Sutra* (depicted on the Borobudur reliefs) as a root metaphor that appropriately narrates how people are interrelated and interconnected as gems at each crossing of the net which mirror each other in infinite mutual interpenetration.

In what this author has coined “Relational Buddhism”, a paramount relational view is proposed when interpreting the *suttas* and *sutras* implying a meta-psychological roadmap to extinguish craving toward Nirvana. The way to extinction is mindfulness meditation (by *Samatha*/tranquilizing and *Vipassana*/insight-offering), which deals with the smallest unit of experience, scholastically called *dharma*¹⁸. The interpretation of “purely sensed *dharma*” during meditative sitting has changed during the 2600 years of Buddhist history. While the Buddha (6th century BCE) talked about *dharma* as “neither empty, nor not-empty”, Nagarjuna (2nd century) alludes to *dharma* as “empty of emptiness”, and Vasubadhu (4th century) pointed at *dharma* as “non-dual binaries”, *dharmas* can currently be viewed as “social constructions” (K.J. Gergen), a landmark revision in 17 centuries. Eventually, *there is nothing which can be perceived or thought of, conceived and imagined, that is not a social construction*.

Relational Buddhism

The “Psychology of Relational Buddhism” is an amalgam of the practices of Social Construction and Buddhism. It centres round the concept of *antaratman* or “relational inter-being”, a blending of “inter-being” and “relational being”, an insight and understanding emphasized when descending the Borobudur in relative *bodhicitta*. “Relational inter-being” is derived from the awareness that human beings are interconnected implying that the real, the reasonable, and the good are enshrined in socio-cultural process. All that we know is embedded, not in narrow individual minds, but in vast communal cultures. Thus, the

¹⁷ “Dependent origination” is the Buddha’s causality hypothesis that describes the arising and ceasing of *karma* triggered by craving and traversing through body-and-mind (sensing, feeling, thought, and affect) resulting in grasping and clinging (cf. *Paticca-samuppada Vibangha Sutta*).

¹⁸ With small case d as opposed to *Dharma* which means the way or practical teaching.

individual mind is an intersection of multiple relationships. Before we were born, i.e. before the individual mind is, the socio-cultural was. Thus, individual minds are socialized through participation in the culture one lives by, not the other way around, which would run against the current. The private mind inside the skull full of hidden meanings is not as intimate as one traditionally might assume. Social Construction proposes that meaning/meaningfulness does not exist in a solipsistic manner but in an acculturated way through the process of co-action. Apparently, what is considered to be separate in the private mind (thought, feeling, or affect) arises in interrelationships and is meaningless outside the context of collaborative practice. In effect, although carried out privately, self-talk is only intelligible, even for oneself, as socialized speech; and even dancing alone at home is a social performance.

In the same vein one might reconsider loving-kindness, compassion, joy, friendliness, and equanimity as depicted by the 504 *dhyani* Buddhas of the Borobudur by making the relational, already inherent in these qualities, explicit. Are affective states inside the individual heads and bodies and is there nothing that one can do to overcome greed and hatred? Are these feelings innate to the human race and belong to the domain of neuropsychology, clinical psychology, or do they primarily have a relational meaning within ongoing relationships? Take for example the kiss: is this a matter of a neurobiochemical excretion and saliva exchange, an expression of Judas conspiracy of some unfortunate paranoid client, or is it a relational scenario of an unfolding loving relationship? It seems that depending on the Wittgensteinian language game within which rules one speaks, each interpretation can be “true”. This consideration discards the common sense view adopted by mainstream science that language pictures reality. Adhering to the idea that what something “is” depends on one’s approach and to which social group one belongs, reality is constructed together in ongoing dialogues, negotiations, agreements, comparisons, and so on. Although this premise is simple and straightforward, its impact is mind-blowing and far-reaching. It requires re-thinking of virtually everything that has been taken for granted. If reality is a socially construction (including Social Construction itself), then nothing can be real in itself. In effect, this corresponds with the Buddhist practice of deconstruction during mindfulness leading to the insight on the non-existence of inherent existence or self-nature of things (*svabhava*) and the baffling emptiness experience of Vairocana’s Tower.

Having located the origin of meaning in interpersonal exchange, emotions are not solely bodily reactions which belong to the private domain owned by the individual, but a component of interpersonal exchange. This implies a shift in experiencing “my” act of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, friendliness, and equanimity into “our” activity (to improve the world). The understanding and transformation of greed or hatred is enlarged, when the view from a “natural given” of these affective states is transformed into scenarios of interpersonal interaction. Communication training, assertiveness coaching, and/or family therapy could be helpful in directing a drama (or comedy) of well-being and a better world as they engender transformed relationships. Sudhana’s quest comprises scenarios of his meeting with 53 minds.

Social psychology: research

This article, that started with the Buddhist tripartite view of body/speech/mind and alluded to its corresponding fields of “social-clinical-neuro-psychology”, cannot delve into clinical psychology and neuropsychology due to space constraints (the reader is referred to: Kwee, 2010d). Hence, the emphasis is on Social Construction and speech (the third Buddhist assignment in the “8-Fold Practice” that works at balancing views, intentions, *speech*, actions, living, effort, awareness, and attention). Taking into consideration the striking correspondence of Social Construction with Buddhism, the rendering of Relational Buddhism is not far-fetched or very surprising. As might be induced from the above, Social Construction is not a

belief system, neither is it a candidate for “transcendental truth”. The constructionist premise is an invitation to dialogue ways of understanding.

This includes criticism that will always be uttered from a certain standpoint which from a social constructional perspective is not more foundational than any other viewpoint. Thus, it is a form of speech which, if adhered to, transforms into action and creates new ways of (relational) being. Although Social Construction questions the foundations of empirical research and prefers qualitative rather than quantitative studies, it does not jettison the baby with the bathwater as quantification enables indexation and standardization. Illustrative is the recent study which found compelling evidence that people’s best and worst moments occur within relationships. It is the interaction with other people and the fulfillment of social connection rather than the individual accomplishment per se, the award, or the completion of a task, which marks life’s tops or downs (Jaremka, Gabriel, & Cavallo, 2010). We feel best in sharing success and feel worst when failing in the presence of others. Evidently, social networks shape lives/lifestyles like obesity or smoking, and happiness is contagious. Each happy friend increases the likelihood of happiness by 9% and each unhappy friend decreases it by 7% (Christakis & Fowler, 2009). Moreover, similar to herd instinct: cooperative behaviour cascades in human social networks < www.pnas.org >.

Psychological studies specifically on loving-kindness, compassion, joy, friendliness, and equanimity are scarce. Recently two studies have been conducted specifically on loving-kindness (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008; Hutcherson, Seppala, & Gross, 2008). The first study is a field experiment with working adults (n=139), half of them was randomly assigned to begin loving-kindness meditation, a Theravada technique cultivating warmth and caring for self and others (Salzberg, 1995). Evidently, this practice increased daily experiencing of positive emotions, which resulted in a wide range of personal resources (e.g., increased mindfulness, purpose in life, social support, and decreased illness symptoms). These increments predicted increased life satisfaction and reduced depression. The second study also applied loving-kindness meditation and examined whether the fundamental human motive of social connection could be engendered toward strangers in a controlled laboratory setting. A few minutes of self-engendered loving-kindness increased feelings of social connectivity/positivity toward unknown people. These results show that the brief and easily implemented meditation is helpful to increase positive social affect and decrease isolation.

Interestingly, the concept of intentional activity was recently discovered in “Positive Psychology” (Lyubomirsky, 2008), apparently without being aware of the Buddhist definition of *karma*. Evidence was found that sustainable happiness is determined by a genetic set-point (50%), circumstantial factors (10%), and intentional activity (40%) (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). Human beings are equipped by an idiosyncratic genetic set-point like for weight or length, which is hardly modifiable. People with high set-points will find it easier to be happy; people with low set-points will have to work harder to achieve or maintain happiness under similar conditions. Happy people do not just sit around being happy but make things happen. This activity spins off a by-product which is happiness over and above the genetic set range and life circumstances. Long term overall circumstances include demographic correlations (age, health, education, money, country, religion, and marital status). While a factor like money does matter, it determines a small percentage to happiness.

In closing

Due to “hedonic adaptation”, it is a misguided hope that money will impact long-lasting happiness. Rapidly accustomed to sensory or physiologic changes, it delivers short-lived boosts of happiness. The Buddhist way of life as modeled by the Buddha himself and as narrated in the Borobudur’s vicissitudes and the featured gurus, characterized by their royalty, are cases in point. Seemingly archetypical, a good many ancient Buddhist figures had an

affluent life when they began to seek inner comfort and live on alms. Nowadays, many people in industrialized countries, and increasingly in the emerging world, lead in a way “princely” lives. Although the Buddhist way of life is not about grasping money but about studying, meditating, and teaching, openly living on shared food and shelter, resembling begging, is neither appropriate nor necessary in prosperous countries where everybody without income receives money from the government.

In reference to this subject, it is interesting to mention a recent study substantiating that high income improves evaluation of life but not happiness (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010; < www.pnas.org >). Money buys happiness only to a certain degree according to data gathered in 2008/2009 using the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index (GHWBI) of 450000 US residents. Happiness or emotional well-being refers to experiences of joy, fascination, anxiety, sadness, anger, stress, worry, and affection that make life pleasant or unpleasant and life evaluation refers to thoughts about life. The result is that more money does not necessarily buy more happiness, but less money associates with emotional suffering. The threshold is \$75000 beyond which further income increase no longer improves one’s ability to do what matters most to happiness, e.g. spending time with people one likes, avoiding pain and disease, and enjoying leisure. Considering that the 2008 mean (median) US household income was \$71500 (\$52000) and that a third of households scores above the \$75000 threshold, it seems there is a potential of people who might want to benefit from Buddhism.

To close, two initiatives (with involvement of the Dalai Lama) are worth mentioning: the Cultivating Emotional Balance project < www.cultivatingemotionalbalance.org > and the Project Compassion < <http://ccare.stanford.edu> >. The first project is an outcome study; an experimental trial to determine the outcome of integrated clinical group training over a 6-month follow-up. During 8 weeks ambulatory subjects are trained in attention (concentration), awareness (mindfulness), understanding emotions (in self and others), skills in handling emotional conflict, empathy, and compassion. The aim is to reduce destructive affect like hostility, contempt, and denigration, and self-destructive experiences like shame, depression, and anxiety. It also aims at promoting empathy and compassion towards others, and promoting health as assessed by changes in autonomic nervous system, neuro-endocrine hormone levels, and immune function. The second project is a series of six (planned) studies on (1) the neural correlates of compassion in adepts and novices,¹⁹ (2) the neuro-economics of giving/receiving, (3) the psychology of increasing compassion by meditation, (4) the behavioural and neural mechanisms of compassion training, (5) the convergences between

¹⁹ Given an observed shift toward a cortical explanation for interpersonal practices based on the presumption that psychological functioning originates in the brain, here is a caveat on emphasizing neural determinants of behavior (Gergen, 2010). Is brain-based “evidence” for loving-kindness or compassion more than yet another speculation? Suppose it is possible to stimulate specific brain regions or implant a chip to increase compassion, is that what Buddhists want and wait for? Aren’t meaning, insight, and understanding integers of our cultural/Buddhist tradition(s)? From a relational perspective brain change is an epiphenomenon of (Buddhist) cultural process, i.e. speech, practice, and meaning creation. Instead of overweighing neuropsychology, a balancing view is espoused which submits the axiom that the brain is instrumental for pursuing culturally creative purposes. Apparently, the cortex does not determine culture, but enclave interpretations (e.g., social, clinical, or neural) and pet theories determine the relevance and the very nature of cortical functioning. Scans do not tell the story, people elucidate and explicate, and do so by projecting in their peculiar jargon and idiom. From a social constructional Buddhist stance it seems that the brain is a “conduit” carrying the (sub)culture. To stress internal/brain attribution to the detriment of external/social attribution of our “in-between selves” or minds is to disregard the explanatory primacy of culture, which was before the private brain was born. In effect, brain is the product of acculturation. This is not to dismiss brain-behaviour research but to humbly admonish that human action is unintelligible in terms of neurons and that the brain essentially functions in the service of socio-cultural process. No doubt, the cortex facilitates the vagaries of human conduct, but its unlimited gamut depends on cultural meaning as its progenitor. For a societal practice to end existential malaise, it is more promising to consider the brain as an instrument to accomplish human values/qualities from a Buddhist perspective.

heroism, compassion, and altruism, and (6) the neural networks of social compassion and nurturing. This is to give an idea what Buddhist research has in the offing. Adhering the heartening adage that “individuals do not exist independently from one another, but rather rely on this interconnectedness and interdependence for their very survival”, these studies are fully in line with the Borobudur’s message.

Finally, it has been a long journey from the Borobudur to the Psychology of Relational Buddhism via postmodern Social Construction and social psychological research while expounding all the way that no discipline and no-one have a mandate to “transcendental truth” and that “emptiness” (non-individuality) is a springboard to mutual loving-kindness. If sustainable happiness amidst adversity is largely an interpersonal equilibrating experience and an epiphenomenon of harmonious relationships, wisdom, savvy, and sagacity necessitate us to adhere to the relational scenarios of being genuinely kind, compassionate, and joyful in shared balance of togetherness.

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