

## Relational Buddhism: A Psychology of Loving-kindness Carved in Stone at the Borobudur

Maurits G.T. Kwee

This essay discusses the history of The Borobudur and the psychological perspective which unfolds while virtually and actually touring this majestic *stupa*-like pyramidal construction. The Borobudur dates from about the year 800 and is located between two twin volcanoes on Java-island. Its significance is testified by the immense building itself which conveys Javanese Buddhism as revealed by its premier interpreter: Dharmarakshita Suvarnadivpa. It is surmised that the lava-stone “Mahayana wonder” served as a ceremonial place where the Sailendra kings were crowned as *Bodhisattvas* and also, as it does today, a place of pilgrimage for devotion to glorify Buddhism. Definitely, it was and still is an educational centre, an “open university”, and a royal gift to the people. Ascension of The Borobudur can be instrumental in realizing an awakening in one lifetime. Ascending it up to the pinnacle is said to extinguish craving (*Nirvāna*) and to awaken motivation (*absolute bodhicitta*). Descending back to the secular world (*relative bodhicitta*) is said to liberate all beings from the cycle of psychological malaise (*Samsāra*) as one learns to embody and exude loving-kindness in mindful speech. The *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* is carved on The Borobudur’s upper reliefs and apex, exhorting pilgrims to the realization that the formless world is an “empty bubble”. This is a practice-oriented view which goes beyond the *Abhidharma* philosophy in that it depicts a psychology of “Relational Buddhism” wherein meaning and happiness are derived from *interpersonal* care in *intrapersonal* balance. These depictions accentuate the “linguaging” dimension of the Body/Speech/Mind karmic triad, and in this sense they embrace a postmodern social constructionist vista of the Buddhist message, illuminating the emptiness of “Transcendental Truths” and elucidating “Relational-Interbeing in-Between-Non-Selves”. The Borobudur conveys a deep and lasting relational harmony which is achievable through imbibing the interpersonal values and qualities of loving kindness. Loving-kindness itself is

rendered as full of empathic compassion, sympathetic joy, and relational equanimity. This essay also reviews recent social psychological studies which corroborate some of the essence of The Borobudur's spirit.

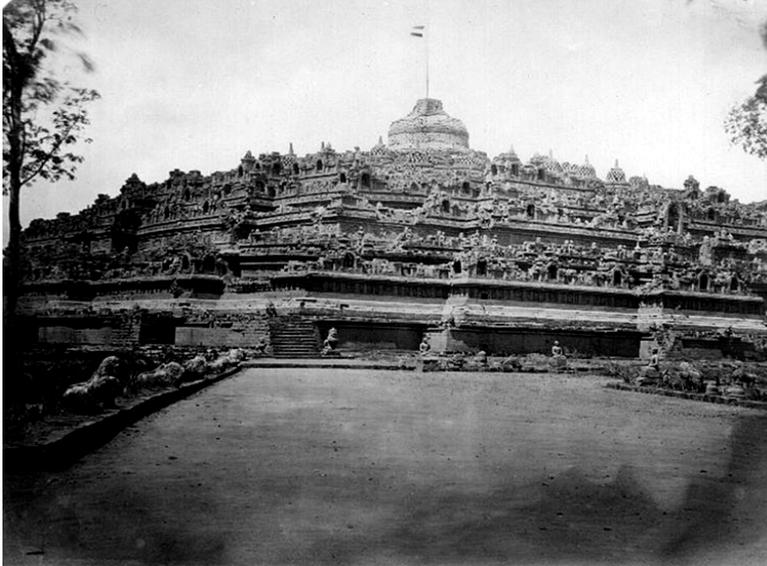
## INTRODUCTION

Javanese Buddhism is relatively unknown by Buddhists around the world because it has been relatively extinct for 10 centuries. Some villages in remote areas have remained Buddhist since the Mahayana heydays on Java island until now (Kustiani, 2010; pers. comm.). Its spirit may live on as long as The Borobudur, the biggest Buddhist structure to date, remains a UNESCO protected heritage. Surfing on the wave of a global revival of interest in Buddhism, there is increasing attention by “newborn” Buddhists in The Borobudur. However, many Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike question what this *mandala*-based pyramid in *stupa*-like form is actually all about.<sup>1</sup> This brings us to the function of this mysterious building which, although built in a *stupa* form, does not contain any relics. Based on the literature and my own research *in situ*, I surmise that the Borobudur was not only a ceremonial site for the dynasty's crowning, but was also a dynasty's gift to the people as an “open university” in the framework of a royal action on the rulers' wholesome Body/Speech/Mind Karma.

The Borobudur, a huge Mahayana Buddhist construction (c.55.000 cubic meters) located near Magelang in Central Java, stems from about the year 800 and was erected between two twin volcanoes: mounts Sundoro and Sumbing in the North West and mounts Merbabu and Merapi in the North East. To be exact, on its 10 floors the lava-stone structure has a tower, 72 *stupas* (domes), 504 Buddha-statues in lotus sitting posture (conspicuously, no reclining or standing statues), and 1460 bas relief story-telling panels. The name “Borobudur” is derived from the Sanskrit “*vihāra*”, meaning sanctuary and pronounced in Javanese as “*biara*” or “*boro*” located on the hill, “*bidur*” or “*budur*”, thus “*borobudur*” and its function has been traditionally designated by the local people as the “mountain of the Bodhisattva's 10 developmental phases”. These phases correspond with the 10 floors of The Borobudur. Thus, one climbs 10 floors corresponding to the 10 perfections of the *Bodhisattva* (Buddha-to-be) as narrated in the *Supreme Crown Sūtra*. On each floor there are relational scenarios of being generous, righteous, forbearing, endeavoring, meditative, wise, skillful, balanced, educated, and awakened. In effect, it emerges that the major function of The Borobudur is both to metaphorically house and to physically illustrate the *Supreme*

*Crown Sūtra*, so that it seems that this story is cast there in stone to educate visitors in emptiness and loving-kindness through experiencing it as they ascend and descend.

Magnificent parts of the building, panels, statues, and domes have been robbed, damaged or partly damaged by vandals rather than by nature's violence. It was probably abandoned and forgotten around the time of Mt. Merapi's 11th century volcanic eruptions and remained covered until 1814. After locals pointed it out to Sir Thomas Raffles during the short British rule of Java (1811-1816), The Borobudur was freed from a jungle strangle in 45 days by 200 men. Missing parts of The Borobudur 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).



In the first photograph of The Borobudur, taken in 1873 by Isidore van Kinsbergen,<sup>2</sup> the antesite structure has, not only a tower, domes, and statues, although this is not as clearly visible, but also circumambulating corridors of more than 5 km long. These corridors are flanked on the left-hand and right-hand side by bas reliefs which are each one meter in height and two meters in width.<sup>3</sup> Roughly half of the approximately 3000 panels refer to five Buddhist books, while the other half are meant as embellishment (Soekmono, 1976). At the time of The Borobudur's construction, reading all Buddhist scriptures would have taken more than

a lifetime, if one could in fact read, and it would probably have been an impossible task in any case, as there was no book-printing.<sup>4</sup>

This practical guide, depicted in enchanting scenes, teaches how to nurture the psychological qualities attendant upon and growing out of loving-kindness. They are derived from the following books, considered relevant in Javanese Buddhism: (1) *Karmavibhaṅga Sūtra* (on the working of *kāma* and Karma), (2) *Jātaka Stories* (on the Buddha's lives as a *Bodhisattva*), (3) *Avadāna Stories* (on historical Buddhists' noteworthy deeds), (4) *Lalitavistara Sūtra* (on the unfolding play of the Siddharta's life until awakening), and (5) as alluded to above: the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*. The first four books are preludes which lead to the last book via a Mahayana "gimmick": instead of discoursing, the Buddha tells the story of Good Wealth. At the end of the *Lalitavistara* the Buddha set the "wheel of teaching" in motion (cf. *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*) by narrating Sudhana's quest. Like the Tathāgata, Sudhana is a wealthy young prince who, satiated by material luxuries, looks for life's meaning and inner wealth. Seemingly, this kind of seeking by affluent young men is an archetypal pattern in the Buddhist lore throughout Asia during those days. 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*. Thus it seems that we are actually looking at a huge comic book of Buddhist educational stories.

Story-telling is in line with the narrative tradition of Asia and apparently these stories were so appealing that they were considered worthy of being carved in stone. One third of the panels are dedicated to the last of five books, the *Gaṇḍavyūha* (supreme crown) *Sūtra*,<sup>5</sup> which is the 39th and final volume of the *Avataṃsaka* (flower adornment) *Sūtra* (Cleary, 1993). The *Supreme Crown Sūtra* is a tale about a young man by the name of Sudhana, an allegorical name meaning "Good Wealth", because he was a descendent of a wealthy noble family. Good Wealth started a quest of "kingliness without and sageliness within" which ended up in the pinnacle of the Buddhist experience: emptiness, to be filled and overflow by the nectar of loving-kindness.

## REFLECTING ON BODY/SPEECH/MIND

Practical and accessible guidance for attaining the psychological stages in the karmic domains of Body/Speech/Mind (*kāya/vāk/citta*) are depicted on successive panels, or "books", covering enchanting scenes displaying: (1) lust/pleasure and intentional (inter)action (*kāma* and *karma*), (2) the Buddha's previous lives as a *Bodhisattva*, (3) noteworthy

deeds of renowned Buddhists, (4) Siddharta Gautama's life until he attained Buddhahood (*bodhi*/awakening), and (5) the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* on Good Wealth's travels toward *Bodhi* guided by "Wisdom" (the cosmic *Bodhisattva* Mañjuśrī) and counseled by 52 other teachers, particularly "Virtue" (the cosmic *Bodhisattva* Samantabhadra) and "Lovingkindness" (the cosmic *Bodhisattva* Maitreya).

Good Wealth learned to meditate to reach the highest goal, which is depicted 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, his "admission ticket", which can only be earned after a long and winding road of self-purification, i.e. *karma* transformation (modifying intention/cognition and action/behaviour) or what we nowadays would call "psychotherapy". Thus, in Buddhist psychological terms, he attained a state free from clinging to illusions of self, free from grasping to delusions of god(s), and free from craving greed and hatred. To this end, ignorance of how the mind works, the ignorance which is the 4 root cause of emotional suffering, needed to be alleviated. Good Wealth went through a process of meeting 53 guru-friends, leading to "full emptiness".

Today, the student who ascends the Borobudur in the footsteps of Good Wealth learns to meditate via the pictorial instructions on the way up. According to the *Supreme Crown Sūtra*, insight into "the empty" is not a goal in itself but a reset point and springboard to improve the practice of the social meditations of loving-kindness, empathic compassion, sympathetic joy, and relational equanimity. Once "liberating emptiness" is understood, one starts on a humane mission to fulfill "*antara-ātman/antarātman*" a term stemming from Javanese Buddhism (Brandes, 1913),<sup>6</sup> which means "in-between-selves" and which is equivalent to what Thich Nhat Hanh calls "Interbeing" (Thich, 1998), by disseminating these pro-social values and qualities in a descending journey back to the mundane world "in the market place".

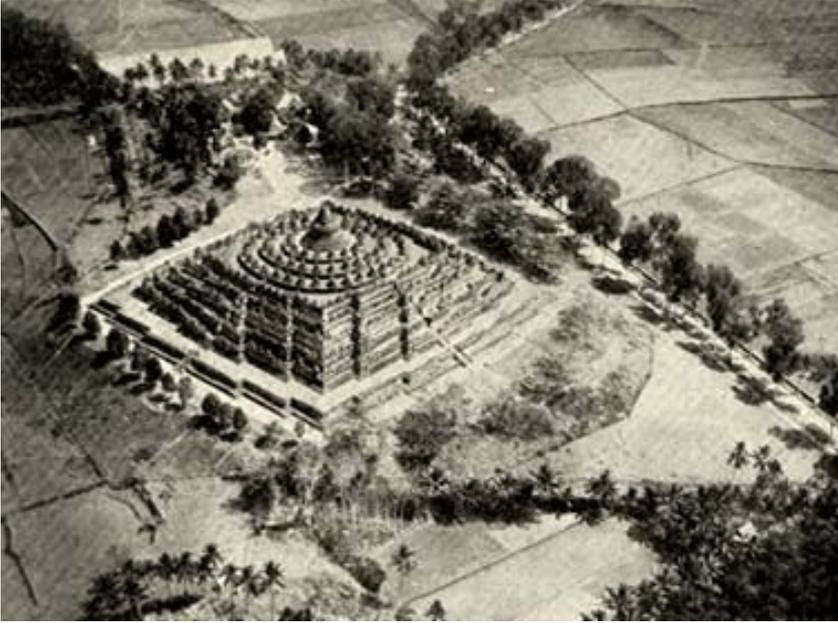
*Gaṇḍavyūha*'s Vairocana Tower is the delightful abode of meditative insights into the meaning of the "formless" (*dharmadhātu* or *arūpadhātu*), that is, in the (un)becoming of things in "Dependent Origination", in their ubiquitous and pervasive emptiness (cf. *Mahasūññatā Sutta*), and in the non-obstructive-interpenetrating-interconnectedness of the human race (cf. *Ariya-pariyesana Sutta*). The very essence of these texts repudiates the self and soul which implies a message of non-individuality, that is, that there is no self, there are only provisional selves in interrelatedness. This latter message is readily translatable into "Social Construction", a postmodern offshoot of

mainstream social psychology, whose collaborative practice is poignantly captured by Gergen in his adage "I am linked therefore I am" ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth\\_J.\\_Gergen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth_J._Gergen)) as an answer to Descartes' view "I think, therefore I am". In effect, *to act* means *to interact* and *to be* means *to be related* and *to inter-be*. The implication of these inspirational ideas will be highlighted below (Kwee, 1990, 2010ab, 2011ab, and Kwee, Gergen, & Koshikawa, 2006).

Each of the carved books adapts to the reader's developmental phase. Thus, the first two books are apt for an elementary level, the third and fourth book for an intermediate level, and the last book, leading up to the summit, for an advanced level. This division corresponds with the three realms of the two lowest floors of body (craving/*kāmadhātu*), the five middle floors of speech (form/*rūpadhātu*), and the three upper floors of domes wherein Buddha statues (formless/*arūpadhātu*) are placed. This threefold arrangement can be traced back to the Buddha's basic teaching on *karma*. The origin of unwholesome *karma* is threefold: greed, hatred, and ignorance (on how the mind works, the illusion of self, and the delusion of god/s). It manifests itself as the intentional/relational action emerging from Dependent Origination and impacting interpersonal relationships. It is a causality hypothesis which needs to be verified/falsified by oneself and which refers to cause and effect in the domains of Body/Speech/Mind (*Kamma Nidāna Sutta*).<sup>7</sup>As *karma*'s effect and cause start and end in and affect Body/Speech/Mind, The Borobudur must somehow reflect this tripartition. Note that the Buddha's tripartite root metaphor of Body/Speech/Mind transcends Descartes' dual mind- body artifact; 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.

## ROYAL CONTEXT AND LOCATION

Located on the Kedu plain, The Borobudur is aligned with three other relatively smaller shrines (*candis*, an Indonesian term that might refer to any ancient construction). They are placed on the same plain in one straight line to the East of The Borobudur. As tradition has it, they were connected by a road in the old days. Candi Ngawen is the furthest away from the Borobudur (8 km), the next is Candi Mendut (3 km), and the closest is Candi Pawon (2 km). Candi Ngawen, whose existence was noted in 824 AD, consists of five small shrines, a number which might well allude to the Mahayana "cosmology of five", which is explained below. As two of them have four guarding lion-shapes, it might be surmised that this much destroyed little complex (there is only one



damaged *candi* left) was a formal gate to enter the “educational tour” up to Borobudur’s top. It seems that the Ngawen shrines may have also functioned as a testimony of gratefulness to the donors as evidenced by their images being displayed on the walls (Moens, 1951).

Candi Mendut, which probably already existed in c.750 as a Brahmin shrine, contains three huge statues. In the middle, the historical Buddha Shakyamuni is seated on a chair (in a western way on a chair) with hands in the setting-the-wheel-of-teaching *mudra* (posture). He is flanked on his right hand by the cosmic *Bodhisattva* Avalokiteshvara (Compassion) and on his left hand the cosmic *Bodhisattva* Vajrapani (Joy/Power). These figureheads augur five cosmic (*dhyani*) Buddhas as described in an ancient Javanese Mahayana *tantra* (text), the *Sang Hyang Kamahayanikan Mantrayana*,<sup>8</sup> which was written in Q&A form and meant to inaugurate the neophyte. It renders The Borobudur’s wisdom. The latest authority it cites is the champion of Buddhist logic and reason Dinnāga (c.480-540, a student of the great Yogacara epistemologist Vasubandhu; c.320-380), who discerned that inference and perception are two different processes and that perception is pure sensation (Eliot, 1921).<sup>9</sup>

Candi Pawon, in the village Bajranalan, is a stop on the way to the Borobudur, as indicated by the Javanese meaning of the word *pawon*, meaning *kitchen*. This function explains why there is only one square

chamber inside which is void, or rather 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 ceremonies, royal or otherwise, and during other processions. The name of the village, Bajranalan, derives from the word *bajra* which is a corruption of the word *vajra* which might mean thunder, diamond, or adamantine, like in Vajrayana, a vehicle of Buddhism practiced nowadays in the Himalayas, which applies a ritualistic “five pronged teaching tool of wisdom” (known for its being used by the 8th century guru Padmasambhava to conquer the non-Buddhist deities of Tibet). The second part of the village’s word, *analan*, means *flame* or *passion for wisdom*. Unlike in Tibet, the *vajra* was known but not particularly emphasized on Java. The walls of the Pawon *candi* are decorated by the main *Bodhisattva* gurus depicted later on the Borobudur: the guide Wisdom (Mañjuśrī) and the acting teachers, Loving-kindness (Maitreya), and Virtue (Samantabhadra). Other decorations refer to males and females dressed as human *Bodhisattvas*, the royalty known to have built The Borobudur.

The Borobudur was financed by the Sailendra dynasty (c.750-832). The Sailendras were indigenous Javanese rulers. Their name is derived from “mountain” (*caila*) and “king” (*Indra*). The Sailendras, who were Buddhists, 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”, revered in Brahmanism as well as in Buddhism.<sup>10</sup> Apparently due to one 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-Kalimantan. Their ties in matrimony and in Buddhism with the Srivijayas, are evidenced by for instance the similarity of the diadems in Mendut, Pawon, and Palembang on Sumatra island. The Borobudur construction 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 eventually retreated to Sumatra

and succeeded his father as a Srivijaya king in Palembang. 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 *candi* which is held together like Lego blocks, were headed by architects led in the beginning by master-mind Gunadharma. Despite his Sanskrit name, he was probably a Javanese indigenous genius. There are many much older *candis* around built in the same peculiar style, so that the architectural skill, even if once imported from India, inevitably has become Javanese by the time The Borobudur was built. Assuming it was built between c.770-840, three to four generations of constructors must have worked on it after Gunadharma.<sup>11</sup>

The question: “why was The Borobudur constructed in *stupa* form if there were no human remains whatsoever”, lingers on. 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 respectively. In a centre-base pit, there was a box with metals and over the pit, in a small room with a crowned statue in a stone superstructure, there was a second box with seeds. Most probably these “symbolic relics” had been used during a *Bodhisattva* coronation, whereby ritually the gems of loving-kindness descended from the highest tower, Vairocana’s Tower, into the boxes imbuing *Bodhisattva*-hood. Considering the royal history, this function was likely to have been used once. Following this, the Buddhist-Brahmin syncretism probably warranted the educational use of the Borobudur until its demise in the 11th century. Whatever function the Borobudur might have served, central to its function 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 Benevolence (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*, *Joy*, *Equanimity*, and *Benevolence*. The Mahayana pantheon originated not only these psychological states or traits, but also an extended “cosmology of five”, like Buddhas, *Bodhisattvas*, elements,

colors, senses, hallowed syllables or *mantras*,<sup>12</sup> *skandhas* (psychological modalities of Body/Speech/Mind, sensation, perception, cognition, conation, emotion, and interaction), and so forth.

There are several peculiarities in Javanese Buddhism when it is compared to the Mahayana denominations known in the literature. One peculiarity is that the self-originating and self-emanating primordial principle of the Adhi-Buddha<sup>13</sup> or Nondual-Advaya is said to bring forth the three conquerors (*jinās*) of the three poisons: greed (conquered by Avalokiteshvara/compassion), hatred (by Vajrapani/joy-power), and ignorance (by Shakyamuni/loving-kindness). These three bodies (*trikāya*)<sup>14</sup> originate the five *dhyani* Buddhas. Secondly, in addition to the types of selves in Mahayana, there are five types of self in Javanese Buddhism. These are: self/*ātman*, low-self/*cetanātman*, higher-self/*parātman*, fluid-self/*nirātman*, and between-selves/*antarātman*. The Javanese Buddhists underscored the meaning of the Sanskrit word *antara* which is “between”, in relation to the word *atman* which means “self”. Thus we have in Javanese Buddhism the concept of “in-between-selves”. This directly highlights the concept of *Inter-being*, a social constructionist idea of particular interest today (Gergen, 2009a). Another peculiarity is that we find the typical Javanese mix of Buddhism and Brahmanism: out of Vairocana springs the Zenith the creating force, Brahma, to the Nadir the annihilating force Shiva, and to the Centre on the same level as Vairocana we meet Vishnu, the maintaining force. This is in line with the Brahmin idea that Shakyamuni is a reincarnation of Vishnu. In this way Buddhism and Brahmanism existed side-by-side on Java for many centuries and eventually became fused into a Buddhist-Brahmin syncretistic system as from the 11th century. Most probably this fusion was a reaction to the Islamic conquest of the island which took place gradually and incessantly, without blood-shed but which gained momentum as from c.1200. This resulted in that in c.1515 the Javanese Brahmin-Buddhist upper class fled to Bali where the syncretistic faith survives to this day (Brandes, 1913).

## **DHARMARAKSHITA SUVARNADVIPA**

Any discussion of Javanese Buddhism is incomplete without going into its practice as disseminated by a widely celebrated 10/11th century eminent prince/guru: Dharmarakshita Suvarnavdipa (an ancient name which means “from Sumatra Island”). Related to the Srivijaya dynasty, he was as much Javanese as Sumatranese, and considering his *bodhicitta* and *karma* teaching, he had the Borobudur that reveres *bodhicitta* (awakened motivation) as his intellectual mainstay. He was a student and scholar at Odantapuri in Bihar, India,<sup>15</sup> who wrote on *karma* (relational

intention/interpersonal action) as a boomerang and on heartfelt *bodhicitta*. Dharmarakshita originated the healing meditation of loving-kindness and compassion by “*terima*” (receiving) and “*kasih*” (offering), known in Tibetan as *tonglen*, which is the contemplative congenial/gluing practice of *antarātman*. This technique, a component of an extensive, seven point mind training toward karmic wholesomeness, is nowadays due to the Tibetan diaspora practised daily world-wide along with the 14th Dalai Lama. Dharmarakshita has been revered up until today in Tibet, where he is called Serlingpa, as the teacher of Dipankara Shrijnana, known as Atisha in Tibet (c.980-1054), who was a Bengali prince/guru. After studying with renowned Indian teachers, Atisha 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 and allegedly must also have visited The Borobudur, the pinnacle of *bodhicitta* teaching. At the end of a 12 year stay with his teacher (c.1012-1024), he was encouraged to go to the “land of snows”, which he eventually did in 1039. In Tibet, Atisha became a key figure in four out of the five Tibetan schools, so that Dharmarakshita’s teachings and reputation not only survived, but continued to play a pivotal role for eleven centuries up to this day. Leaving the archipelago, Dharmarakshita gave Dipankara scripts containing the revered teaching on *bodhicitta* with the cardinal message that it should come from deep within the heart.

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 when ascending the Borobudur in order to benefit all beings who are trapped in the cycle of suffering (*Samsāra*). This benefitting is done during the descent of 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. As depicted on the outer wall of Pawon, the *Bodhisattva*’s *bodhicitta* is linked to Samantabhadra (who formulates the vow of the virtues/perfections), to Mañjuśrī (who represents wisdom by carrying a sword to root out craving), and to Maitreya (who represents loving-kindness which is conditioned by compassion and joy). In effect, the awakened mind of *bodhicitta* comprises the union of compassion and wisdom, which can be discovered whilst ascending and descending this sanctuary on the mountain.

Ascending the Borobudur, *bodhicitta* is “absolute”; that is, the *Bodhisattva* strives at attaining Nirvana, the extinction of craving, and

the highest of wisdom: emptiness (*śūnyata*) as elucidated in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (“Perfection of Wisdom *Sūtras*“ or its shortened versions: the *Diamond Sūtra* and the *Heart Sūtra*), which was commented on by Nagarjuna in the 2nd century. Descending the Borobudur, *bodhicitta* is “relative”; that is, the *Bodhisattva*, who has realized *antarātman*, loving-kindness in-between-selves, works at saving all beings who suffer due to existence itself (birth, aging, illness, and death) and due to the poisons of greed, hatred, and ignorance. This suffering is by nature psychological and throughout relational/interpersonal in its emanation and manifestation. The combination of relative and absolute *bodhicitta* is a Middle Way, balancing the individual in the context of the social, displayed on one 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 walls. Traditionally this boils down to practicing the cherished “Four Social Meditations” the pursuit of which is to immeasurably multiply kindness, compassion, joy, and relational equanimity. These are four divine qualities of experiencing as denoted by its name, the *Brahmaviharas* (where the “gods” dwell), that make the *Bodhisattva* feel “godly” which is different from being or becoming a god: after all Buddhism is non-theistic.

## **KARMA AS RELATIONALLY INTENDED ACTION**

Dharmarakshita (1981) innovated not only the social contemplation of “*terima* and *kasih*”,<sup>16</sup> 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 Mañjuśrī’s razor sharp sword used to cut off the root of craving in a heart that breeds greed and hatred toward others. 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 effect, what is thrown out in greed or hatred, for example, dumping emotional garbage on the other person, will cut oneself by the other’s reciprocating action. This “boomerang effect” is caused by one’s own unwholesome action, so that the advice is to be mindful of Maitreya’s loving-kindness and Avalokiteshvara’s empathic compassion in order to prevent and abolish the inflammation and escalation of interpersonal pain and suffering, and to instead powerfully install Vajrapani’s reciprocal joy, thus eventually dwelling in happiness. To be sure, the Borobudur is on *karma*: cause and effect as emerging out of and as manifesting qua outcome in Body/Speech/Mind which is embedded in

a network of relationships and thus social psychology has some relevance.

Social psychology aims at explaining how thought, feeling and behaviour are influenced, directly or indirectly, by people within their culture. Research can be quantitative 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 stance taken here is that the results of quantitative and qualitative studies complement each other. However, rather than viewing language as a mirror of reality, the quantitative project, the present bias from which to view language as a game in the Wittgensteinian sense, i.e. as a form of life. 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 far-reaching. It requires re-thinking of virtually everything that has been taken for granted. If reality is socially constructed, (including Buddhism and Social Construction itself) then nothing can be real in, by and of itself. This reasoning corresponds with the Buddhist practice of mindfulness meditation leading to the insight on the nonexistence of inherent existence or self-nature of things (*svabhāva*), which is represented in the *summum bonum* of the Borobudur, the summit of Buddhist wisdom: the baffling emptiness experience of Vairocana’s Tower. In Buddhism, working on decreasing suffering and increasing happiness amidst existential adversity is not a matter of earning merit for an individual ticket to an after-life paradise in the beyond. Instead, and thankfully, it is a matter of making “here now” wholesome choices and engaging in intentional actions which emerge in the context of and within relational meaning which can be designated as karmic.

Such a view of emptiness is in accord with the social psychology of Social Construction as championed by Gergen (2009b) who offers a radical picture of the mind and the human condition which surprisingly coincides with the Buddhist vision as offered by The Borobudur. The mind is “inter-mind”, not located inside the skin behind the eyeballs within the skull in-between the ears, but arising in Dependent Origination<sup>17</sup> in-between people. The result is “Relational Being” (Gergen, 2009a) which corresponds with *antarātman* of Javanese Buddhism as depicted on the Borobudur. Both views appreciate the experience of “Interbeing” as depicted in *Gaṇḍavyūha*’s “Indra’s Jewel Net” as a root metaphor that narrates how people are interrelated and interconnected as gems at each crossing of the net which mirror each

other in infinite mutual interpenetration, thereby merging subject and object in non-duality, which is a 4th century Mahayana practice of the Yogacāra denomination (based on the “Buddha Womb *Sūtras*” that emphasize a *Brahmavihara* filling in of the emptiness expounded in the “Perfection of Wisdom *Sūtras*“ which have left many Buddhist adherents in a *horror vacuum*).

## RELATIONAL BUDDHISM

“Relational Buddhism”, the central viewpoint from which the *suttas* and *Sūtras* are interpreted here, is grounded in the axiom that *there is nothing which can be perceived or thought of, conceived and imagined that is not socially constructed*. Relational Buddhism is an amalgam of the practices of Social Construction and Buddhism which share the basic idea that “we can’t share brain, but we can’t but share mind”. It centres round the meta-composite term “Relational Interbeing”, a concept which denotes loving-kindness “in-between-non-selves”, is an advanced state of being that understands the wisdom of emptiness and the futility of “Transcendental Truths” and that is ready to start a journey of descending the Borobudur toward the market place. Derived from the awareness that human beings are interconnected this state suggests that the real, the reasonable, and the good are enshrined in socio-cultural process. All that we know is embedded, not in the bounded mind of the individual, but inter-between vast communal cultures. Mind conceived as “inter-mind” is an intersection of multiple relationships. Before we were born, the socio-cultural was. Thus, individual minds are socialized through participation in the culture one lives by, not the other way around. Thus, the private mind inside the skull full of hidden meanings is not as intimate as one traditionally might assume.

Relational Buddhism proposes that meaning and meaningfulness do not exist in a solipsistic manner but in an acculturated way through a process of co-action. Apparently, what is considered to be separate in the private mind (perception, thought, and 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. This same is true for action: even dancing alone is a social performance. In the same vein one might consider the five hand postures (*mudras*) of “meditation”, “fear-not”, “generosity”, “grounding”, and “teaching” as displayed by the 504 *dhyāni* Buddhas of the Borobudur as making the relational, which inhere in these qualities, explicit in their depiction. As the Borobudur is traversed, one questions the affective states inside the individual heads and bodies and one asks what can be done to overcome greed and hatred. Having located the

origin of meaning in interpersonal exchange, one discovers that emotions are not solely bodily reactions belonging to the private domain but instead are components of the relational. This implies a shift in experiencing “my” act of kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity into “our” activity for the betterment of us all. The understanding and transformation of greed or hatred is enlarged, when the view from a “natural given” of these affective states is translated into scenarios of interpersonal interaction. Sudhana’s quest, which comprises meetings with 53 guru-friends, is basically a narrative of such transformative relationships and of dialogues that deliver.

Speech is the third Buddhist assignment in the “8-Fold Balancing Practice”, a practice that walks the talk toward balanced views, intentions, *speech*, actions, living, effort, awareness, and attention. Taking into consideration the striking correspondence of Social Construction and Buddhism, the rendering of Relational Buddhism is obvious and not farfetched. By discarding “Transcendental Truths”, Relational Buddhism is not a belief system whatsoever, but an invitation to dialogue ways of understanding which coincides with the Buddhist charter of free inquiry as delineated in the *Kālama Sutta*.

### **THE SPIRIT OF FREE INQUIRY**

Relational Buddhism includes evidence-based psychological research which informs practice. Interestingly, some of the concepts, values and qualities highlighted on The Borobudur’s depictions are recently the subject of social psychological research. Illustrative is that “intentional activity” was re-discovered in “Positive Psychology” (Lyubomirsky, 2008), apparently without being aware of the Buddhist meaning 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 data (age, health, education, money, country, religion, and marital status).

Two studies have been conducted specifically on loving-kindness. The first study (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008) was a

longitudinal field experiment with working adults (n=139) randomly assigned to either a wait-list control condition or to beg in an hour or so a week of loving-kindness meditation which cultivates warmth and caring for self and others. Evidently, this meditation practice had a gradual and cumulative positive effect on people's experiencing of positive emotions. This resulted in building on a wide range of personal resources (e.g. increased mindfulness and awareness, stronger sense of purpose in life, increased positive relations with other people, and decreased illness symptoms). These increments predicted increased life satisfaction and reduction in depression. A second study on loving-kindness examined whether the fundamental human motive of social connection could be engendered toward strangers in a controlled laboratory setting (Hutcherson, Seppala, & Gross 2008). A few minutes of self-engendered loving-kindness increased feelings of social connectivity/positivity toward unknown people. These studies show that brief practice of an easily implemented meditation is helpful for increasing positive social affect and for decreasing irrational feelings of isolation.

A number of recent studies touch upon the human interdependence and unconditional happiness aspects of the Buddhist experience. In one study (Jaremka, Gabriel, & Cavallo, 2010) compelling evidence was found 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, the award, or the completion of a task, which marks life's ups or downs. People feel best in sharing success and feel worst when failing in the presence of others. Evidently, social networks shape lives and lifestyles, whether obesity or smoking. Moreover: happiness is contagious. Another study (Christakis & Fowler, 2009) reported that each happy friend increases the likelihood of happiness by 9% and each unhappy friend decreases it by 7%. Finally, Kahneman and Deaton (2010) analyzed the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index (GHWBI) reports from 450,000 US residents to discover that money buys happiness only to a certain degree. Happiness or emotional well-being refers to experiences of joy, fascination, anxiety, sadness, anger, stress, worry, and affection that make life un/pleasant. In effect, more money does not necessarily buy more happiness, but less money is associated with emotional suffering. The happiness threshold in 2008 was \$75,000, \$3,500 more than the median household income. Above this, income no longer improves one's ability to do what matters most to happiness, that is, spend time with people one likes, avoid pain and disease, and enjoy leisure.



## IN CLOSING

The Buddhist way of life as modeled in the Buddha's life story and as narrated in the Borobudur's allegory of Good Wealth, provides us with an archetypal template illustrating that leading an affluent life paves the way to entering a quest for life's meaning. Living in relative comfort, or even perhaps in "princely" circumstances, middle class people all over the world are in principle ready to seek and learn what life is about and to start on a profound inner journey of discovery. Travelling the Borobudur might be helpful for Buddhists, and for everyone, to comprehensively find what they seek, as the record expectantly shows in this article. It has been a long journey up and down The Borobudur from ascending in the awe of accumulating wonderful AHA-insights, reaching a reset point of emptiness, and descending in the contentment of HAHA-joyfulness while acquiring *bodhicitta*, a specialty of Javanese Buddhism. All of these provide a springboard to leap onto Relational Buddhism. Eventually, the journey has been one of discovery via postmodern Social Construction and social psychological research. In effect it is an attempt to narrow a gap of the Buddhist approach to human experience lasting some 1200 years during which no-one has a claim or mandate on "Transcendental Truths" and emptiness is still considered to be the highest wisdom, a reset point, and starting block to disseminate loving-kindness from deep inside. Adhering to the message of The Borobudur,

Relational Buddhism submits that sustainable happiness amidst adversity is largely an interpersonal equilibrating experience “within” and an epiphenomenon of harmonious relationships “without”.

Buddhist wisdom, savvy, and sagacity necessitate us to adhere to the relational scenarios of being genuinely kind, compassionate, and joyful in a mutually balanced togetherness. In effect, this is realizing harmony “in-between-selves” in the pursuit of gluing relationships. Individuals do not exist independently from one another, but instead rely on interconnectedness and interdependence for their very survival.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Heartfelt thanks are due to Ruth Tiffany Naylor for being a sparring partner towards finalizing this article.

### **SCRIPTURES**

[www.metta.lk](http://www.metta.lk) (*suttas*) and [www.e-sangha.com](http://www.e-sangha.com) (*Sūtras*).

## REFERENCES

- Brandes, J.L.A. (1913). *Oud-Javaanscheoorkonden: Nagelaten transscripties van wijlen J.L.A. Brandes, uitgegeven door N.J. Krom*. Batavia, Nederlandsch Indië: Albrecht.
- Cleary, T. (1993). *The flower ornament scripture*. Boston, MA: Shambala
- Christakis, N.A., & Fowler, J.H. (2009). *Connected: The surprising power of our social networks and how they shape our lives*. New York: Little Brown.
- Davisakd Puaksom (2007). *The pursuit of Java: Thai panji stories, melayu lingua franca and the question of translation* (PhD-thesis). National University of Singapore
- Dharmarakshita (1981). *The wheel of sharp weapons*. Dharamsala, India: Library of Tibetan Works & Archives. New Delhi: Paljor Publications Pvt. Ltd
- Eliot, C. (1921). *Hinduism and Buddhism: An historical sketch* (Vol. III). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Fredrickson, B.L., Cohn, M.A., Coffey, K.A., Pek, J., & Finkel, S.M. (2008). Open hearts build lives: Positive emotions, induced through loving-kindness meditation, build consequential personal resources. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 95, 1045-1062.
- Gergen, K.J. (2009a). *Relational Being: Beyond the individual and community*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gergen, K.J. (2009b). *An invitation to Social Construction* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Gergen, K.J. (2010). *The acculturated brain*. Taos Institute: Unpublished manuscript.
- Hutcherson, C.A., Seppala, J.M., & Gross, J.J. (2008). Loving-kindness meditation increases social connectedness. *Emotion*, 8, 720-724.
- Jaremka, L. M., Gabriel, S. & Carvallo, M. (2010). What makes us feel the best also makes us feel the worst: The emotional impact of independent and interdependent experiences. *Self & Identity*, in press.
- Krom, N.J. (1931). *Hindoe-Javaansche geschiedenis* (2e druk). Den Haag: Nijhoff.
- Kwee, M.G.T. (1990). *Psychotherapy, meditation & health*. London: East West Publications.
- Kwee, M.G.T. (2010a). Buddhist Psychology. In N.P. Azari (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Sciences and Religions*. Heidelberg: Springer Verlag.

- Kwee, M.G.T. (Ed.).(2010b). *New Horizons in Buddhist Psychology: Relational Buddhism for Collaborative Practitioners*. Taos Institute Publications (490 pages).
- Kwee, M.G.T. (2011a). Relational Buddhism: A psychological quest for meaning and sustainable happiness. In P.T.P. Wong (Ed.), *The human quest for meaning: A handbook of psychological research and clinical applications* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Kwee, M.G.T. (2011b). Relational Buddhism: An integrative psychology of happiness amidst existential suffering. In I. Boniwell, & S. Davis (Eds.). *Oxford handbook of happiness* (in press). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kwee, M.G.T., Gergen, K.J., & Koshikawa, F. (Eds.).(2006). *Horizons in Buddhist Psychology: Practice, research & theory*. Taos Institute Publications (522 pages).
- Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). *The how of happiness: A scientific approach to getting the life you want*. New York: Penguin.
- Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K. M., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology*, 9, 111-131.
- Moen, J.L. (1951). Barabudur, Mendut en Pawon en hunonderlingesamenhang (Barabudur, Mendut and Pawon and their mutual relationship). *Tijdschrift voor de Indische Taal, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 326-286 (uitgave van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen).
- Soekmono, R. (1976). *Candi Borobudur: A monument of mankind*. Paris: UNESCO Press.
- Soekmono, R. (1988). *Pengantar sejarah kebudayaan Indonesia* (2nd ed.). Yogyakarta: Penerbit Kanisius
- Thich, N.H. (1998). *Interbeing: Fourteen guidelines for engaged Buddhism*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press.
- Voûte, C., & Long, M. (2008). *Borobudur: Pyramid of the Cosmic Buddha*. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld Ltd.
- Wayman, A. (1981). Reflections on the theory of Barabudur as a mandala. In L.O. Gomez & H. W. Woodward (Eds.), *Barabudur: History and significance of a Buddhist Monument*. Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press.
- Zürcher, E. (1972). *The Buddhist conquest of China*. Leiden, NL: Brill.

## NOTES

- 
- <sup>1</sup> A *mandala* is geometrical sacred form consisting of circles and squares and a *stupa* is usually a dome- or mound-like structure containing a relic (Wayman, 1981). The first two floors (the foot, hidden for constructional purposes) represent the sphere of lust (*kāmadātu*), the next four floors, square platforms, represent the sphere of form (*rūpadhātu*), and the last four floors, three circular platforms plus the main dome, represent the sphere of the formless (*arūpadhātu*).
- <sup>2</sup> Copyrights of the three photographs in this essay are expired.
- <sup>3</sup> This allows *parikrama* devotional circumambulating meditation around the centre of the *maṇḍala* which symbolizes the mythical Mt. Meru.
- <sup>4</sup> Mahayana scriptures plus the associated ancient commentaries are about 50 times the Bible in length, being approximately 62,000 pages.
- <sup>5</sup> The *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* 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 where Gandhāra sculptural art flourished.
- <sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy to mention that a Mahayana variant of Buddhism entered Sumatra and Java as from the early 5th century, while Brahmanism was already there for two centuries. Despite contrary speculation, there is no evidence that Theravada Buddhism had a strong presence on these islands. Furthermore, 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 and Java, perhaps for two decades, until 424 when he started a mission to China on imperial invitation (Zürcher, 1972).
- <sup>7</sup> These happen to be the subjects of study in 21st century “biopsychosocial” science and practice. The body, particularly the connection between brain and behaviour, is the subject matter of neuropsychology. The connection of unwholesome perception/thought/feeling/interaction and behaviour is accentuated in clinical psychology, while the connection of speech and interpersonal behaviour is attended to in social psychology and its exponent: Social Construction.
- <sup>8</sup> This Javanese title refers to the “dedication of” (*Sang* or *semba*) “the unseen/formless” (*Hyangor 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* conveys 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.

- <sup>9</sup> Dignaga was the before last of the great Buddhist thinkers. No reference was made to the last great Buddhist thinker, the 7th century epistemologist/cognitivist Dharmakirti (c.600-660), who wrote extensively on valid/non-valid (*de facto*: rational/irrational) cognitions. This seems to imply that Javanese Buddhism did not tap from this latest development.
- <sup>10</sup> 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 she may appear in the five cosmic colours representing a variety of virtues and actions leading to liberation.
- <sup>11</sup> 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.
- <sup>12</sup> 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”.
- <sup>13</sup> To adhere to Indonesian constitution that warrants freedom of religion, present-day Buddhists in Indonesia, among whom indigenous adherents who for centuries (or maybe for about a millennium) live in several Buddhist villages on Java, elevate the Adhi-Buddha as their creator-god (Kustiani, 2010; pers. comm.).
- <sup>14</sup> *Kamahayanikan*’*strikāya* is reflected in the Body/Speech/Mind triad: body-craving (*dharmakāya*), speech form (*sambhogakāya*), and mind-formless (*nirmānakāya*).
- <sup>15</sup> Odantapuri is the second oldest Buddhist educational centre (as from the 7th century) neighbouring the famous Nalanda on the Indian subcontinent. It could accommodate 1000 students among whom many Tibetan scholars. Many Vajrayana texts were composed there. Unfortunately it was destroyed by Muslim invaders in c.1193.
- <sup>16</sup> Log on to [www.taosinstitute.net/manuscripts-for-downloading](http://www.taosinstitute.net/manuscripts-for-downloading)
- <sup>17</sup> Dependent Origination is the Buddha’s causality hypothesis that describes the arising and ceasing of Karma triggered by craving and traversing through Body/Speech/Mind (by sensing/feeling, thinking, conating, emoting, and interacting) resulting in grasping and clinging (cf. *Paṭicca-samuppāda Vibhaṅga Sutta*).