



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

What is shared by bodhisattvas and their target audience? Second-person experience and transformative sociality in Chinese Yogācāra
Li, J.

Citation

Li, J. (2025). What is shared by bodhisattvas and their target audience? Second-person experience and transformative sociality in Chinese Yogācāra. *Journal Of Buddhist Philosophy*, 7, 29-52. doi:10.1353/jbp.2025.a974963

Version: Accepted Manuscript

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4283100>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

This is the postprint version of the article. The final version is published in the Journal of Buddhist Philosophy by the State University of New York (SUNY Press). <https://sunypress.edu/Journals/Journal-of-Buddhist-Philosophy/Journal-of-Buddhist-Philosophy-Volume-7-Issue-1-11-2025>

To cite this article, please kindly refer to the published version:

Li, J. (2025). What Is Shared by Bodhisattvas and Their Target Audience? Second-Person Experience and Transformative Sociality in Chinese Yogācāra. Journal of Buddhist Philosophy 7, 29-52. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jbp.2025.a974963>.

What is shared by bodhisattvas and their target audience? Second-person experience and transformative sociality in Chinese Yogācāra

Jingjing Li (Leiden University)

Abstract (150 words): In contemporary phenomenological discussions of sociality, shared experience has garnered much scholarly attention. The crux of this discussion concerns how to define shared experience given a plurality of subjects. Enriching this discussion, I suggest that it is more meaningful to consider the interdependency of the *I* and the *we*, rather than the primacy of the *I* or the *we*. To this end, I focus on the writings composed by a Chinese Yogācāra thinker, Kuiji (632-682). As I will argue, it is the second-person perspective that sustains the *I-we* interdependency, further making it possible to constitute, conserve, and transform a shared lifeworld in which a personal lifeworld is contextualized. Sociality, thus, is mutually constitutive and collaboratively transformative. The transformative aspect of sociality points to a possibility of reimagining how various types of injustice that have been perpetuated in communal history – sex discrimination, for instance – can be skillfully tackled and jointly corrected.

Keywords: *I-we* interdependency, second-person perspective, transformative sociality, lifeworlds, collaborative effort

In contemporary phenomenological discussions of sociality, shared experience has garnered much scholarly attention. Indeed, humans are social beings who can participate in joint actions to constitute a community and share experiences inside such a community. The crux of this discussion concerns how to define this shared experience given the plurality of subjects *qua* the *we*.¹ Most scholars agree that the *we*-experience does not presume the *we* to be a meta-ego where all the participants merge and lose their singularities in an “undifferentiated unity” (Brinck, Reddy & Zahavi, 2017: 133) or a “collective singular[ity]” (Schmid, 2018: 238). Nor is it “a mere summation or an aggregation of individual intentionality,” as if all separating subjects were just compiled (Zahavi, 2021: 3). Hans Bernhard Schmid delineates the sense of the *we* as the “plural pre-reflective self-awareness,” to which any mode of joint action alludes (Schmid, 2016: 67). In his terms, “the presumption of joint intention is a background awareness of plural selfhood” (Schmid, 2014: 18). Acknowledging the importance of such joint actions, others like Dan Zahavi raise doubts regarding Schmid’s characterization of the *we* as the primordial explanans prior to the singular *I* and *you* (Brinck, Reddy & Zahavi, 2017: 133; Zahavi, 2018: 64-67). According to Zahavi, the *we* does not have primacy over the *I* and the *you*, because the *we* is “an achievement that has a first-(and second-) singular perspective as its necessary precondition” (Zahavi, 2021: 18). In short, Zahavi contends that the *I* and the *you* come prior to the *we*.²

¹ In contemporary discussions of collective intentionality, scholars have defined collectivity in terms of either the content, the mode, or the subject of joint actions (Schweikard and Schmid, 2013). For instance, in the case of “a rock band playing their new music,” collectivity is defined by the mutually composed object *qua* their new music per the content-centered view, by the joint action of playing per the mode-centered view, and by the subjective plural *qua* the rock band per the subject-centered. In his analysis of Margret Gilbert, Schmid stresses that the mode-centered view has been widely accepted, by which the action is collectively shared but the plural subject remains distributive rather than collective (Schmid, 2014: 11).

² Brinck, Reddy, and Zahavi trace their disagreement with Schmid back to a debate in early phenomenology, since they consider Schmid’s articulation of the plural subject to be inspired by Max Scheler’s theory of sympathy and Martin Heidegger’s concept of being-with-others (Brinck, Reddy & Zahavi, 2017: 132). Coming from a Husserlian standpoint, Zahavi highlights the importance of the pure ego in his refutation of the primacy of the *we* (Zahavi, 2021: 10). Such an approach has been criticized by Jay Garfield as being individualistic (Garfield, 2019: 58), a point Zahavi acknowledges and aspires to maintain (Zahavi, 2021: 13).

Prima facie, it is quite commonsensical to perceive a community as a joint achievement of all its members. Nonetheless, it still begs the question regarding whether the ways in which the *I* and the *you* come to work together are habitually conditioned by the previous history of such a community. Historical conditioning does not appear in Zahavi's analysis when he argues that "I can be aware of myself (for instance, as an embodied agent) without being reflectively or pre-reflectively aware of myself as a member of a *we*" (Zahavi, 2021: 14).³ In contrast, the cultivation of habitual tendencies has been underscored by Alia Al-Saji in her study of Henri Bergson from the perspective of critical phenomenology. She unpacks how personal subjectivity is habitually grounded in the past, not just the past of a specific person but the past in general, given that being "unrepresented, yet differentially felt in its magnetizing effects and orienting force, the past is a structuring dimension according to which we perceive and live" (Al-Saji, 2019: 101). What has been historically constituted through the joint effort of previous community members (colonialism, for instance) does not vanish as a "bygone event" but cultivates how current community members anchor their subjectivity and accomplish their personal worldview (Al-Saji, 2019: 102).⁴ Despite its efficacy in conditioning habitual tendencies, the past remains incomplete and can be

³ Both Husserl and his contemporary interpreters, including Zahavi (2017: 132-139), are fully mindful of the historical aspect of human subjectivity. As Husserl details in the Vienna Lectures, "*Personales Leben ist, als Ich und Wir vergemeinschaftet in einem Gemeinschaftshorizont leben. Und zwar in Gemeinschaften verschiedener einfacher oder aufgestufter Gestalten, wie Familie, Nation, Übernation Übernation. Das Wort Leben hat hier nicht physiologischen Sinn, es bedeutet zwecktätiges, geistige Geblide leistendes Leben: in weitesten Sinn kulturschaffend in der Einheit einer Geschichtlichkeit*" (Personal life is, as the I and the We collectively live upon a community-horizon, and to be precise, in communities of a variety of simple or highly categorized forms such as family, nation, supranation. The word 'life' has here not so much of a psychological meaning; it entails a life that works toward a purpose and completes spiritual products: in the widest sense, culture-creating in the unity of historicity)" (Hua 6/314). Here, Husserl deliberates on how individual persons find their lives grounded upon, and continue to collaborate to sustain, the shared historical horizon of their communal culture at familial, national, and supranational levels.

⁴ This is where Al-Saji connects her analysis of Bergson's concept of *durée* with coloniality to unpack how various forms of injustice at the intersection of colonialism, sexism, and racism, continue to condition the subjectivity of the subordinated. And the past is not just what has happened before, but rather, it shows its everlasting power in conditioning how a certain perspective becomes naturalized as the mainstream viewpoint (Al-Saji, 2010: 885). This, thus, explains why, conditioned in the shared past, "the racialized subject feels herself coming *too late*, projected back to a perpetual past, in a linear timeline that begins with ancient Greece and where Eurocentric civilization constitutes modernity" (Al-Saji, 2019: 103).

reconfigured (Al-Saji, 2019: 103). Complementing Al-Saji's insight, I consider such reconfiguration to be a transformation through collaborative effort, which can be epitomized by the efforts of bodhisattvas and their target audience in the Buddhist context.⁵ As such, the question of how to define the *we* will become more meaningful, not as a question of the primacy of the *I* or the *we*, but as that of interdependency of the *I* and the *we*. And this is where the second-person perspective of experience needs to (re-)enter the picture.

The second-person perspective has been brought to the fore by Jay Garfield (2019: 58-59) in his intercultural reflection on Zahavi's approach to (inter)subjectivity, where Garfield does not follow Schmid to highlight the primordially of the first-person plural but rather pinpoints the constitutive role of the second-person perspective in both personal and interpersonal experiences. This perspective characterizes an experiential episode that is not yet a full-fledged third-person experience of an object but remains broader than a first-person, subjective experience, subsequently unveiling the *I-you* relationship in collaborative bodily performance (Reddy, 1996: 140-141). Garfield illustrates such collaborative bodily performance with infant-parent interactions, where infants neither merge into the first-person experience of their parents nor infer their parents' intention from a third-person perspective, but spontaneously perceive their parents from the second-person perspective, which makes such interpersonal interactions both dyadic and dialogical (Garfield, 2019: 45). Drawing upon and developing Garfield's analysis, I turn to the Yogācāra doctrine of consciousness-only as articulated by Kuiji (632-682), the disciple of Xuanzang (c. 602-664), to argue that this second-person perspective, with its quasi-transcendental feature,⁶ defines the *I-we*

⁵ In this article, I do not capitalize the term "bodhisattva" when I use it to refer to practitioners who awaken their compassionate mind and aspire to guide other sentient beings on the path. Thus, I only capitalize this term when it refers to a specific bodhisattva like Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī or when it is part of the Buddhist doctrines such as "the Bodhisattva ideal," or "the Bodhisattvas' practice," or "the Bodhisattvas' path." In contrast, I put the term "Buddha" in higher case due to the special status of this notion in the tradition of Buddhism.

⁶ I follow Lisa Guenther's definition of "quasi-transcendental" to highlight the second-person perspective's "constitutive role in shaping the meaning and manner of our experience" beyond its empirical efficacy (Guenther, 2019: 12).

interdependency in the formation and transformation of the shared lifeworlds of sentient beings. Here, I utilize the concept of lifeworld to capture a world that is not mind-independent but meaningfully lived and navigated by sentient beings at the personal, interpersonal, and collective levels, which can be considered to showcase the East Asian Yogācāra understanding of a plethora of concepts related to lived reality, such as *loka*, *sthāna*, and *kṣetra*.⁷ Due to such interdependency, both the *I* and the *we* are empty of intrinsic essence (*svabhāva*), further bespeaking the Buddhist notion of emptiness.

As such, this article aspires to embark on a twofold task of enriching the current (critical-)phenomenological discussion on sociality with Buddhist resources and exploring a Yogācāra theory of sociality through re-reading canonical texts and rediscovering previously marginalized materials in the East Asian context. I particularly want to invite readers to revisit the long-standing (neo)Confucian portrayal of Buddhism as selfish in its pursuit of awakening and self-centered in its lack of social ethics for mundane life (Tiwald, 2018: 129-154). Previous studies have elucidated how, in Chinese Yogācāra, this second-person perspective of experience enables sentient beings to perceive other minds (Jiang, 2006: 73-75; Li, 2019: 443-447). Furthering their argumentation, I foreground the quasi-transcendental

⁷ In his study of Vasubandhu, Sonam Kachru refrains from using “lifeworld,” because this phenomenological concept “is referred back to the norm-involving activity of subjects and is understood to involve a complex variety of semantic or attitude dependency” that goes beyond the basic sense of lifeform expressed in Buddhist texts (Kachru, 2021: 249). In the same vein, Kachru engages with Matthew MacKenzie’s enactivist approach, which attributes the “co-emergence of organism and environment” to *karmic* forces (MacKenzie, 2013:207). Here, I share Kachru’s concern that the enactivist reading may be too elusive, considering how Vasubandhu does not entertain the modern sense of “organism” (Kachru, 2021: 125). Nevertheless, I find it equally implausible to downplay the phenomenological aspect, particularly when the discussion is extended to Buddha-fields, through which the call for transforming ordinary sentient beings’ worlds yields a critique of what these sentient beings presume to be a normatively meaningful life. In unpacking transformative sociality, I aspire to find an alternative theory of Buddhist collectivity to Kachru’s notion of a cosmological individual *qua* the “metaphysical collectives of several (psychologically and forensically) distinct persons” (Kachru, 2021: 107). Just like Jessica Zu who defines sociality through intersubjectivity in her account of “sociality-cum-intersubjectivity” (Zu 2025, 82–7), I also thought that intersubjectivity in terms of the second-person perspective was enough for unpacking sociality in my earlier work (Li 2019; 2022). Nevertheless, after a close reading of Kuiji’s depiction of a pure land, I realize that sociality is not just about the interpersonal connections of individuals but also about what can be (re-)built by such connections where individual experience is contextualized. That is why the *I-we* interplay at the interpersonal and collective levels needs further elaboration, which is the task of this article.

feature of such a second-person perspective in the upcoming three sections, in order to expound on the payoff of self-other collaboration, not only in the situation where like-minded sentient beings throughout cosmic history have jointly conserved their sense of the *we* in their shared lifeworlds, but also in the scenario where sentient beings with different mindsets work to transform their sense of the *we* together with their shared lifeworlds. Such a collaborative effort, as epitomized by the joint performance of bodhisattvas and their target audience, commences with a playful critique of ignorance, continues with the shared consensus on being self-critical, and concludes with the joint achievement of the transformed *we*. Sociality, thus, is mutually constitutive and collaboratively transformative. The transformative aspect of sociality further allows for reimagining how various types of injustice (sex discrimination, for instance), which empower domination and marginalization throughout communal history, can be skillfully tackled and jointly corrected⁸. I will explore the possibility of this skillful combat against sexism in the conclusion.

1 Mutually-illuminating lamps in shared lifeworlds

The *I-we* interdependency in joint action is elaborated by Kuiji explicitly in the presentation of shared (life)worlds in the introductory chapter of his commentary on Xuanzang's translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* (henceforth, *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*).⁹ Through this

⁸ As I have argued elsewhere (Li, 2024: 428), the notion of transformative sociality, especially the version preserved in Chinese Yogācāra, has been rediscovered by proponents of humanistic Buddhism like Taixu in the call for building a pure land on Earth, even though Taixu does not draw from the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* and Kuiji's commentary of it.

⁹ In his *Commentary on the Vimalakīrti Sūtra* (說無垢稱經疏) (T1782), Kuiji not only foregrounds Xuanzang's translation of the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* as 說無垢稱經 (T476) against Kumārajīva's translation of the same text (cf. Lusthaus, 2002: 365), but also formulates his commentary from a Yogācāra perspective of three natures in contrast to that of Madhyamaka's twofold truth (T.38.1782.999b9-18). Hence, Kuiji interprets this *Sūtra* as the Yogācāra exemplar of the Bodhisattvas' practice that starts with a theory on transformative sociality, to be followed by a tripartite mechanics of the perceptual phenomena (*jing* 境), the performances (*xing* 行) and the result (*guo* 果) of the Bodhisattvas' path (T.38.1782.1033b16-17).

analysis, I hope to explore not just what makes such worlds shared lifeworlds, but also how each sentient being anchors their personal identity in these lifeworlds together with their sense of the *we*. As the answers to these questions unfold in this section and the next, readers will come to see the ways in which sociality, as defined through the *I-we* interdependency, is, in principle, constitutive and transformative.

To answer these questions, I need to stress that, in the Buddhist framework, the world is pictured not as a factual entity in a modern scientific sense but, rather, as part of cosmology. Aside from their presumption that there are a multiplicity of worlds (to be detailed in the next section), clerics generally differentiate the material world (*qishijian* 器世間, *bhājanaloka*) from the sentient world (*youqingshijian* 有情世間, *sattvaloka*) (T.38.1782.1023a29). The material world amounts to the physical world of mountains-and-waters that serves as the vessel and utensil for the sentient world, where sentient beings socially interact with one another (Kachru, 2021: 96). In unpacking the entanglement of these two worlds, Sonam Kachru draws upon Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* to clarify how these two worlds are sustained by *karmic* causality (Kachru, 2021: 117). Developing Vasubandhu's viewpoint, Kuiji follows his mentor, Xuanzang, to contextualize *karmic* causality in the mindsets of sentient beings. As such, the material and sentient worlds are not just karmically entangled, but also phenomenologically interlinked as aspects of a lifeworld shared by sentient beings (T.38.1782.1023a29-b9):

The ordinary lifeworld consists of two: the sentient world and the material world. The sage lifeworld consists of two: the bodhisattva [world] and the precious locale. The combination of these two types takes on the fictitious name of lifeworld (*tu ±, kṣetra*), because apart from sentient beings etc., there is nothing else as a lifeworld. Since sentient beings exist, their material world exists accordingly. When sentient beings become bodhisattvas, their material world becomes a precious locale, accordingly. Bodhisattvas' original intention is to transform the plurality of sentient beings and let them liberate themselves from the current lifeworld. Thus, as a skillful means, these bodhisattvas transform the polluted into a precious locale. At the core, their purpose is not about turning the material vessel into a pure land, because the material vessel is the branch [not the root]. Hence, the new translation [of Xuanzang] marks that the lifeworld of a plurality of sentient beings is the place of Bodhisattvas' practice for the respectful and pure Buddha-fields. The colloquial saying also states that the people are the root of a country and if the root is solid, the country is peaceful and stable. The idea is similar here. The old translation [of Kumārajīva] says that the categories of multiple lifeforms (i.e., sentient beings) are bodhisattvas' Buddha-fields. The meaning of these two translations is dissimilar. The respectful

and pure is to be achieved as the lifeworld of the Buddhas under the name of pure Buddha-field. It does not entail that these lifeworlds are already Buddha-fields at the time of bodhisattvas.¹⁰

Borrowing the philosophical binary of root (*ben* 本) and branch (*mo* 末), Kuiji places sentient beings at the center, figuratively comparing them to the root of its two branches *qua* the material and the sentient worlds. Far from being autonomous *karmic* entities, worlds are lifeworlds for sentient beings. Particularly referring to sentient beings in the plural (*zhu* 諸) form, Kuiji demarcates ordinary sentient beings' lifeworld from that of the bodhisattvas and that of the Buddhas. While the Buddhas are fully awakened from ignorance in realization of emptiness and selfless compassion, the bodhisattvas (*puti saduo* 菩提薩埵) are *sattvas* (*saduo* 薩埵, i.e., sentient beings) whose mindset becomes *bodhi qua* awake (*puti jueyi* 菩提覺意, i.e., initially acquiring the wisdom of emptiness and compassion), and who are willing to guide other ordinary sentient beings on the correct path (T.38.1782.1007b17-18). When bodhisattvas work with their target audience to transform all the minds, they realize that the Buddha-fields *qua* lifeworlds of Buddhas are devoid of ignorance and suffering. In this sense, an ideal world is “to be achieved” (*danglai* 當來) through a collaborative effort.

In the aforementioned excerpt, Kuiji maintains Xuanzang's translation of sentient being (*saduo* 薩埵, *sattva*) as *youqing* 有情 to underscore how “a being with consciousness is named sentient” (*youshi mingqing* 有識名情) (T.38.1782.1002b22). Thus, I utilize the concept of “I” to refer to a sentient being in the singular sense, as the I (*wo* 我) which, according to Kuiji, can be “misperceived as the unchanging self” (*wangsuozhi wo* 妄所執我) and “postulated as an I” (*jiashishe wo* 假施設我) to end nihilistic views of personhood;

¹⁰凡土有二，一有情世間，二器世間。聖土有二，一菩薩，二寶方。合此二種，假名為土，離有情等，無別土故。由有有情，方有器界，有情成菩薩，器界及寶方。菩薩本欲化諸有情，令得出世，方便變穢而為寶方，根本不為變器成淨土。器是未故，所以今標，諸有情土，是為菩薩修行所嚴清淨佛土。故俗亦言：“人為邦本，本固邦寧。”即同於此。舊云：“眾生之類，是菩薩佛土。”文義不同，嚴淨，當來成佛之土，名淨佛土，非菩薩時，已名佛土。

however, it can also be used by a bodhisattva to “refer to themselves” (*zizhi* 自指) as the “worldly teaching I” (*shiliubu wo* 世流布我) who passes the teaching of emptiness on to others (T.38.1782.1004a5-10). Then, in portraying the lifeworld of sentient beings, Kuiji speaks of them as the collective of *zhuyouqing* (諸有情, plurality of sentient beings) or *zhongsheng* (眾生, multiple lifeforms), which denotes a sense of *we*. To unpack the *I-we* interdependency, I find it helpful to re-read the *Cheng Weishi Lun* (成唯識論, Treatise on Perfecting the Doctrine of Consciousness-only, henceforth CWSL), which is attributed to Xuanzang, together with Kuiji’s commentary.

The CWSL characterizes a sentient being with a mind of eight types of consciousness. Aside from the five senses and a conceptually active sixth consciousness that can unify sense data into objective representation, the CWSL presents the Yogācāra notions of *manas*, as the seventh consciousness that habitually underpins self-identity (T.31.1585.19b8-9), and of *ālayavijñāna*, as the eighth consciousness that undergirds other consciousnesses and underlies *saṃsāra* (T.31.1585.7c16-19).¹¹ Since everything depends on consciousness to appear, the doctrine of consciousness-only expresses subject-object interdependency to epitomize how everything is empty of a self-determined intrinsic essence *qua svabhāva* (T.31.1585.38c16-17). In particular, the eighth consciousness *ālayavijñāna* gives rise to three phenomena in the experience of a sentient being: the corporeal body (*yougenshen* 有根身, *śendriyaḥ kāya*), the material world, and the seeds (*zhongzi* 種子, *bīja*) (T.31.1585.10a11-14). Instead of surmising the corporeal body and the material world as entities produced by consciousness, I proffer to read them as what sentient beings live through and find meaningful in their experience, namely, as lived phenomena. Hereby, the mind, as a

¹¹ This is a brief synopsis of consciousness, the open possibility between ignorance and awakening, and seeds. Since these topics are not the focus of this article, I have detailed them elsewhere (Li, 2022: 67-84).

continuum of eight consciousnesses, enables sentient beings to perform their body as the lived body in navigating the world as a lived reality. At the personal level, the functionality of consciousness enables a sentient being to either misperceive things as *svabhāva* or see things as empty. For ordinary sentient beings, they are prone to misperceive the self and the world as *svabhāvic* entities, which is gradually internalized as their egoistic habit of ignorance. To capture such habitualizations, the CWSL evokes the concept of seeds. Reworking *karmic* force into the interplay of seeds and their matured fruits, Yogācārins unpack how a previous perception or action casts its enduring influence on the mind and cultivates the habitual tendencies of mental activities as the seeds that will become matured and actualized into perceptions and actions. A parallel can, thus, be discerned between the Yogācāra notion of seeds and what Al-Saji describes as habitual tendencies with an “affective weight” of the past (Al-Saji, 2019: 102). Due to the force of seeds polluted by misperceptions, a sentient being habitualizes an ignorant way of performing their lived body in navigating their personal lifeworld, a lifestyle that becomes internalized as the natural and the normal.

And each sentient being is not alone in this process throughout the *saṃsāric* succession of death and rebirth. That is why the CWSL underscores that “the retribution consciousness [i.e., *ālayavijñāna*], by force of the maturation of the shared seeds, gives rise to the phenomena of form etc., and manifests the image of the material world... Although sentient beings’ *ālayavijñāna* functions respectively, their characteristics are similar, and their sites (*chu* 處, *sthāna*) are not different” (T.31.1583.10c14-15).¹² Here, the CWSL suggests that material worlds lived by each singular sentient being are interconnected as integral parts of a larger lifeworld shared intergenerationally by a plurality of sentient beings who have shared seeds (*gongxiangzhong* 共相種, *sādhāraṇabīja*) in their *ālayavijñāna*. At

¹²異熟識，由共相種成熟力故，變似色等，器世間相... 雖諸有情，所變各別。而相相似，處所無異。

the personal level, seeds are indeed private and unshared, directly causing actions and perceptions. Nevertheless, the mind of a sentient being is not a closure. Elsewhere, I have detailed Xuanzang and Kuiji's approach to other minds (Li, 2022: 76-80). To recapitulate the main argument, I interpret the experience of other minds, which has been explicated by East Asian Yogācārins as a perception of remote *ālambana*, as that from the second-person perspective, through which a sentient being goes beyond subjective experience to perform bodily interaction with others in constituting the shared lived reality of a material world. Thus, at the interpersonal level, such a second-person perspective ensures the possibility for sentient beings to work together throughout cosmic history; and their joint actions cultivate shared seeds in the minds of sentient beings. When these shared seeds mature, the phenomenon of a common material world appears as a crucial dimension of the lifeworld mutually constituted and jointly conserved by sentient beings, generation after generation.¹³ Hence, a shared lifeworld, as a "collective contribution" in Bhikkhu KL Dhammajoti's terms, is a *karmic* result of the prevalent (*adhipati*) power of collaborative minds (Dhammajoti, 2017:58-59).

When Kuiji compares sentient beings as the roots of their lifeworld, he seeks to communicate how, by virtue of the second-person perspective of experience, sentient beings interact with each other through their lived bodies to mutually constitute and conserve a lived reality as their shared lifeworld with interlinked aspects *qua* the sentient and material worlds. The salient feature of the shared lifeworld is sociality. Moreover, the mode of joint actions points back to a group of like-minded sentient beings as the plural subject: the *we*. Such a sense of the *we* accommodates the sense of the *I* through the constant, intergenerational

¹³ The concept of a shared material world (or sensory world, in his terms) has also been investigated by Ernest Brewster to examine how this concept triggered a debate between Yogācāra and Huayan masters in the late Ming dynasty (Brewster, 2018: 121-137). However, it remains unanswered how collectivity and transformability of these worlds are defined. These unfinished tasks constitute the starting point of my article.

interplay between actualized joint *karma* (*gongye* 共業, *sādhāraṇakarman*) and unactualized shared seeds. In this manner, what is shared is not only the constituted phenomenon *qua* a shared lifeworld, nor simply the joint performance in its actualized form as joint *karma* or an unactualized form as shared seeds. It is also a sense of being the subjects (in the plural sense) with similar mindsets. Thus, when a singular sentient being is born into the shared lifeworld where they habitually perform their lived body to develop a personal lifeworld, they also participate in joint interactions to sustain this shared lifeworld, as a participation that makes their personal lifeworld cohered into communal history.

Such *I-we* interdependency is encapsulated in the lamp analogy in the CWSL after the depiction of a shared material world: sentient beings are compared to the lamps that shine both individually, mutually, and collectively, “as if [they were] one” (*siyi* 似一) (T.31.1583.10c16). Zooming in on the analogy of mutually-illuminating lamps, Kuiji details, in his commentary on the CWSL, how the sense of the *we qua* the plural sense of like-minded sentient beings does not cancel the particularity of each singular mind. If the sense of the *we* alluded to an undifferentiated unity (to borrow Zahavi’s term) of sentient beings, then the disappearance of one sentient being would make the common material world collapse in the same way that “the extinguishment of one lamp will weaken the overall luminosity in a room” (將一燈去已, 餘明不遍) (T.43.1830.321c20). Nevertheless, it is also not the case that sentient beings are mutually exclusive to one another, since they are “reciprocally interpenetrating without hindering one another” (相涉入, 不相隔礙), which explains why the shared lifeworld looks as if it were one (T.43.1830.321c20). As such, sentient beings can enact a joint action to constitute and conserve their shared lifeworld intergenerationally, all the while consolidating their shared mindset. If sociality is about joint action in community building, Kuiji’s depiction of shared lifeworlds expresses a broader sense of sociality that comes with communal history.

2 Circularity of lifeworlds?

At this point, a problem of circularity seems to present itself in the Yogācāra depiction of a shared lifeworld. In another context, Schmid also raises the issue of circularity *qua* the threat of infinite regress: “for every plural subject, there has to be another plural subject that is the subject of the attitude by which the former is created” (Schmid, 2014: 11). In answering these questions, I find it necessary to delve deeper into the *I-we* interdependency to delineate the constitutive and transformative feature of sociality.

The quoted passage from Kuiji’s *Commentary on the Vimalakīrti Sūtra* lays out three types of lifeworlds: that of ordinary sentient beings, that of bodhisattvas, and that of Buddhas. Kuiji further stresses that sentient beings can make a collaborative effort to transform their worlds into the Buddha-fields. In Buddhist cosmology, the lifeworlds of ordinary sentient beings come with considerable variety. As recapitulated by Wang Enyang (1897-1964), a world with its own universe, including a sun and a moon, counts as one of a thousand units in a mini-verse (*xiaoqian shijie* 小千世界); one thousand mini-verses yield a mid-verse (*zhongqian shijie* 中千世界); and one thousand mid-verses further amount to a mega-verse (*daqian shijie* 大千世界) (Wang, 1940: 6). In this way, a Buddhist cosmos entails a synergy between these mini-verses, mid-verses, and mega-verses. Since there are many Buddhas, there are also countless sets of mini-verses, mid-verses, and mega-verses (Wang, 1940: 6). Following the line of reasoning in terms of consciousness-only, I proffer that such a Buddhist version of multiverses is far from mind-independent but needs to be contextualized in the mindsets of sentient beings as lived realities. How would Yogācārins interpret such a multiplicity of lifeworlds in terms of the *I-we* interdependency, which can further dispel Schmid’s issue of circularity? Here, I shall derive my argument from a question preserved in

the CWSL: “whose retribution consciousness [i.e., *ālayavijñāna*] transforms into this image part [of the material world]?” (誰異熟識, 變為此相)? (T.31.1585.10c16).

In elaborating on the three answers to this question, Kuiji first scrutinizes the proposal that the material world in the current universe “arises collectively from the prevalent power of the activity of all sentient beings” (一切有情業增上力共所起) (T.31.1585.10c17-18).

Kuiji problematizes this proposal because it overlooks the diversity of sentient beings and their shared lifeworlds. As previously mentioned, the lifeworlds of ordinary sentient beings, bodhisattvas, and Buddhas, are qualitatively different, although ordinary sentient beings can aspire to transform their mindsets in order to turn their lifeworlds into Buddha-fields. The stress on a qualitative difference of lifeworlds features again in Kuiji’s critique of the first proposal: Buddhas and bodhisattvas mainly have seeds purified from ignorance and egoism in their *ālayavijñāna*, which means by virtue of their consciousness, it is impossible for them to factually constitute a shared lifeworld of ignorance (T.43.1830.322a21-22). Similarly, for ordinary sentient beings throughout the multiverses, if they maintain their current egoistic mindset of ignorance, they cannot mutually constitute the lifeworld of Buddhas and bodhisattvas (T.43.1830.322b1).

Turning to the second proposal, which attributes the constitution of the shared material world to the joint effort of the minds of “those who currently reside or will be born [into this material world]” (現居及當生者) (T.31.1585.10c21-22), Kuiji discerns how this proposal makes a shared lifeworld a complete and immutable product. In his terms, such determinism commits “the mistake that a material world about to cease to exist cannot be constituted” (有壞器不變之過) (T.43.1830.322b29), insofar as a material world as such would no longer have any inhabitant but could continue to exist before its full collapse.

That is why the last – and correct – proposal, according to Kuiji, ascribes the appearance of a shared material world to the joint effort of “all sentient beings at the same

stage” (當地一切有情), as “a stage that refers to a place for supporting [sentient beings with similar mindsets whose] lived bodies reside here and in other sites of the multiverses” (同現居身他三千界所依之處說名當地) (T.43.1830.322c17-18). Across a multiplicity of universes, even though like-minded sentient beings do not factually reside in the same spatiotemporal site in terms of Buddhist cosmology, they are connected by their similar mindsets and can, in principle, work together to constitute and conserve their shared material world. To be more specific, the second-person perspective, which features their collaborative bodily performance, serves as a quasi-transcendental condition for the possibility of a joint effort of a plurality of like-minded sentient beings to conserve the *we* through maintaining their shared material world intergenerationally, across multiverses.

As such, the problem of circularity can be resolved, because the sense of the *we* in a shared lifeworld does not require a more primal *we* as its reference but is, rather, characterized by the similar mindset of its members who mutually constitute and intergenerationally conserve their shared lifeworld throughout multiversal history. However, the *we* is far from predetermined. It echoes Kuiji’s earlier gloss that bodhisattvas take it as a skillful means to transform the lifeworld of ordinary sentient beings into a precious locale, not out of an interest in their material world, but because they want to change the mindsets of sentient beings. Now that I have explicated the constitutive nature of the shared lifeworld, I will move-on to expound on how this lifeworld together with the sense of the *we* can be collaboratively transformed by bodhisattvas and their target audience.

3 Collaborative transformation of shared lifeworlds

Kuiji speaks of bodhisattvas as sentient beings with an awakened mindset. More specifically, they are “sentient beings who aspire to attain the great *bodhi* (求大菩提之有情),” who have

removed ignorance to acquire the wisdom of emptiness and returned to the *samsāric* reality to guide other sentient beings (T.38.1782.1007b22). Instead of understanding the bodhisattvas' return as a miraculous or hagiographical occurrence, I propose to see it more generally as a case whereby someone, who has embodied emptiness and selfless compassion, is motivated to engage with those in a dissimilar worldview. Drawing upon their wisdom, these bodhisattvas skillfully work with their audience to constitute a lived situation that is compared by Kuiji as building the material world into a precious locale. In this section, I will detail how bodhisattvas make the best of their encounter with ordinary sentient beings to jointly evolve the shared lifeworld and transform the sense of the *we* accordingly. Therefore, the sense of the *we*, which has been pre-reflectively inherited, can be mindfully changed as well. Upon outlining this reciprocal transformation, I continue to explore how such transformation allows for reimagining the end of domination, as illustrated by a Buddhist story on joint combat against sex discrimination in the concluding section.

First and foremost, readers might ask why two sentient beings with qualitatively different mindsets and lived realities can collaborate productively. This is where I shall turn to Kuiji's explication of "perfuming through hearing" (*wenxun* 聞薰, *śrutavāsanā*) in his *Commentary on the Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, a perfuming that cultivates pure seeds *qua* habitual tendencies of seeing things as empty and non-*svabhāvic* (T.38.1782.1004b7). According to Kuiji, such perfuming unfolds between the Buddhas, who exert "the power of the compassionate original vow" (慈悲本願緣力) to transmit the teaching of emptiness, and the ordinary sentient beings, who "reciprocally generate the characteristics of textual meaning upon consciousness" (識上文意相生) (T.38.1782.1004b11). More specifically, relying upon Buddhas' compassionate actions as the "strong condition" (*qiangyuan* 強緣), ordinary sentient beings comprehend the Buddha's teaching with the support of the sense-root of ears and by virtue of their sixth consciousness to purify their habitual tendencies of ignorance *qua*

polluted seeds (T.38.1782.1004b12-13). Aside from the Buddhas, bodhisattvas also acquire this capacity of guiding and teaching ordinary sentient beings (T.38.1782.1004b15).

Kuiji seems to present linguistic communication as *the* answer to the possibility of productive interactions between bodhisattvas and their audience. However, a discursive space does not exist in a vacuum but, rather, finds its grounds in lived experiences that make language meaningful. That is why, for ordinary sentient beings to comprehend conceptually the teachings from Buddhas and bodhisattvas, they need the support of their sense-root of ears, which, in the CWSL framework, pertains to the lived body constituted by the eighth consciousness. Similarly, bodhisattvas cannot remain solitary in their meditative state but need to performatively reengage with those they intend to help. If this line of reasoning is tenable, I contend that efficacious linguistic-communication reveals a more profound quasi-transcendental condition *qua* the second-person perspective of lived experience, through which bodhisattvas and their audience can serve as the “mutually reciprocal prevalent condition” (互為增上緣) for each other (T.38.1782.1004b24), to make the purification of seeds possible.

The implicit stress on lived experience can explicate why Kuiji foregrounds both “lived body as skillful means” (*shenfangbian* 身方便) and “language as skillful means” (*yufangbian* 語方便) in bodhisattvas engagement with their audience (T.38.1782.1034b28-29). And any proper utilization of skillful means (方便, *upāya*) shall be “on the basis of the acquired wisdom” (後得智為體) (T.38.1782.1034b25-27). Indeed, in his earlier discussion on perfuming through hearing, Kuiji relays that Buddhas and bodhisattvas realize emptiness beyond language as a result of their “disassociation from dualistic thinking [of *svabhāvic* self and dharma]” (離分別), but due to their selfless compassion, they reembrace language to teach (T.38.1782.1004b18-20). This account alludes to the two types of wisdom, *qua* root-

wisdom (*genbenzhi* 根本智, *mūlajñāna*) and acquired wisdom (*houdezhi* 後得智, *prṣṭhalabdhajñāna*), to be realized by practitioners at the phase of seeing (*jiandaowei* 見道位, *darśanamārga*) on the Bodhisattvas' path (T.31.1585.50b16-17).¹⁴ As recounted in the CWSL, practitioners attain root-wisdom in intense meditative practice, through which “the seeing part remains but not the image part” (見有相無) (T.31.1585.49c27-28). In the wake of root-wisdom, practitioners continue to go through various types of mental acts (i.e., the seeing part) without actively directing these acts toward a phenomenon (i.e., the image part) in a way that their consciousness becomes an empty activity. As such, the root-wisdom allows for correcting actualized misperceptions of various phenomena in experience, including their *svabhāvic* notion of the self. The non-arising of egoistic viewpoints soon reveals to these practitioners that if they aim to reach full awakening, they still need to purify habitual tendencies of such misperceptions as shared and unshared seeds inside their eighth consciousness. To purify shared seeds, these practitioners need to refine their personal lived reality of awakening and reform the shared reality of ignorance concurrently, in their return to *saṃsāra*. For that purpose, practitioners embark on developing the acquired wisdom, whereby phenomena reappear and “the two parts [i.e., the seeing and the image parts] remain” (二分俱有) (T.31.1585.50b20). Since these compassionate bodhisattvas do not take these phenomena to be *svabhāvically* real and mutually exclusive, they perceive them as seemingly (*si* 似) real and illusion-like in order to engage their target audience in a collaborative performance (T.31.1585.50b21). For bodhisattvas, illusory phenomena are not regarded as non-existent either. Kuiji follows his mentor Xuanzang to underscore how the seemingly real phenomena provide bodhisattvas with a tool to criticize and challenge – not confirm and conserve – the shared ignorant mindset that predominates the common lifeworld.

¹⁴ The CWSL delineates five phases of the Bodhisattvas' path, which is beyond the scope of this article. I have discussed it elsewhere (Li, 2022: 169-181).

I consider this critical use of seemingly real phenomena as a crucial part of the skillful means motivated by acquired wisdom, which is also known in the East Asian context as the method of *po* 破 (i.e., eradicating the wrong views). This method is detailed at the beginning of Chapter 7 in Xuanzang’s translation of the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, a chapter that, according to Kuiji, “elucidates the benefited [audience of bodhisattvas]” (明其所利) (T.38.1782.1081a28-29):

Vimalakīrti Sūtra: At that time, Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī asks Vimalakīrti: “How should bodhisattvas perceive and regard sentient beings?”¹⁵ Vimalakīrti says: “Just as how magicians perceive and regard illusory events, this is how bodhisattvas should correctly perceive and regard all sentient beings.”¹⁶ (T.14.476.572c6-8)

Kuiji’s commentary: Here below is the answer [from Vimalakīrti to Mañjuśrī’s question]. There are two [parts of the text]. According to the Madhyamaka teaching, bodhisattvas shall first perceive, [in terms of] the conventional truth, the fictitiously existent sentient beings, like magical events that are illusory and not genuine, and then perceive, [in terms of] the ultimate truth, the originally empty sentient beings. This is the first [part of the] text. According to the Yogācāra teaching, bodhisattvas shall first perceive, [in terms of] the dependent nature, the fictitiously existent sentient beings, and then perceive, [in terms of] the imagined nature, the originally empty sentient beings. This is the first [part of the] text. The dependent nature is like a magical event, seemingly real as if it were genuine.¹⁷ (T.38.1782.1081b11-15).

When using their acquired wisdom to engage with others, bodhisattvas may still find themselves prone to become attached to those they intend to help. This, then, shows how the second-person perspective of experience can enable the bodhisattvas to help their target audience, but it can also make these compassionate ones regain attachment. Against this backdrop, the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* addresses the question of how bodhisattvas shall perceive and regard their target audience. The purpose, according to Kuiji, is to “criticize attachment

¹⁵ The term I translate as “perceive and regard” is 觀, which is not any ordinary way of perceiving but a contemplative performance of seeing and perceiving as a result of the acquired wisdom. Kuiji specifies that 觀 entails “智慧簡擇,” namely, using wisdom to differentiate the correct from the incorrect (T.38.1782.1081b3).

¹⁶ 時妙吉祥, 問無垢稱: ‘云何菩薩, 觀諸有情?’ 無垢稱言: ‘譬如幻師, 觀所幻事。如是菩薩, 應正觀察, 一切有情。

¹⁷ 下答有二。空理義云, 初觀俗諦, 假有有情, 猶如幻事, 似而非真。後觀真諦, 本空有情。此初文也。應理義云, 初觀依他, 假有有情, 後觀所執, 本空有情。此初文也。依他起性, 猶如幻事, 似非真故。Here, “空理” literally means the principle of the empty, and “應理” can literally be translated as “following the principle.” However, in this commentary, Kuiji indicates that these two terms refer to the schools of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, respectively.

and disclose the unreal” (破彼執，顯皆非實) (T.38.1782.1081b1). Yet, how shall it be interpreted that the perceived phenomenon, which explicitly includes the bodhisattva’s target audience and implicitly encompasses themselves and their collaboration with their audience, is illusory and unreal?

The *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* evokes the analogy of a magic show, further comparing the bodhisattvas to magicians. In his commentary, Kuiji recounts two interpretations of this show, proposed by Mādhyamikas and Yogācārins, respectively. The Yogācāra proposal is articulated in accordance with its theory of three natures, whereby the dependent nature defines how everything depends on consciousness to arise, the imagined nature shows how the arising of consciousness and its phenomena are falsely imagined as immutable entities, and the perfect nature captures the mindset of seeing things as they are and realizing emptiness.¹⁸ Applying the three natures to the bodhisattvas’ perception, Kuiji extends this theory to the interpersonal level to show how bodhisattvas cultivate their realization of emptiness when collaborating with others. Here, Kuiji characterizes the bodhisattva’s perception of other sentient beings with the dependent nature, which makes various phenomena appear in a seemingly real manner. As such, this seemingly real existence enables bodhisattvas to accomplish a twofold task together with their target audience. It becomes possible for them to help ordinary sentient beings who become the “phenomena to be transformed” (所化生境) (T.38.1782.1081b2-3). In this manner, bodhisattvas find a way to enter the shared lifeworld full of ignorance. Moreover, bodhisattvas approach the seemingly real phenomena not to consolidate but to criticize shared ignorance, which ameliorates their own realization of emptiness and illuminates their target audience concurrently. Illusory events, thus, are not reduced to nothingness in a nihilistic way, because of their critical and

¹⁸ Due to the limited space, I cannot unpack the detailed discussion on the three natures, which I have examined elsewhere (Li, 2022: 119-134).

transformative function.¹⁹ In doing so, Kuiji shifts the focus from *whether* illusory phenomena exist in bodhisattvas' experience to *how* illusions can be used by bodhisattvas to facilitate their compassionate task.

Working with bodhisattvas, these regular sentient beings are not passive observers. Just as the audience joins the magician to turn a magic show into an entertaining circumstance, ordinary sentient beings collaborate with the bodhisattva to constitute a mutually reciprocal situation, through which they cultivate pure seeds in their eighth consciousness. Kuiji compares such collaborative constitution in the shared lifeworld of ignorance to the joint effort to build a palace from the empty ground. In his analysis of this palace analogy proposed in the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, Kuiji pinpoints four elements: people as builders, the ground that is empty, the palace, and the empty (T.38.1782.1024a13-17):

People are like bodhisattvas. The empty is what is falsely imagined. Self and dharmas are not *svabhāvic* entities, and since dharmas are the root, we speak of the emptiness of the dharma. The empty ground refers figuratively to the dependent nature. All the sentient beings who constitute the respectful and sublime palace etc., share parallels with those sentient beings who aspire for goodness and avoid evil to generate pure virtue and realize the perfect nature. As such, they attain and achieve the Buddha-fields.²⁰

Echoing the earlier excerpt about how bodhisattvas turn the material world into a precious locale for the purpose of transforming ordinary sentient beings, Kuiji delves deeper into the transformability of a lifeworld. Even though Kuiji matches bodhisattvas with builders, the last part of this passage about “those sentient beings who aspire for goodness and avoid evil” puts forward a definition of builders that is not confined to bodhisattvas but also extends to regular sentient beings with the potential to pursue the Bodhisattvas' path themselves.

¹⁹ During the Yogācāra revival in early republican China, when most intellectuals discerned the parallels between Buddhism and Bergsonian philosophy, some, like Ouyang Jingwu (1871-1943) and Liang Shuming (1893-1988), turned to Confucianism to secure social transformation (Aviv, 2020: 151-160; Li, 2023a: 57-59), whereas others, like Lü Cheng (1896-1989) and Wang Enyang, continued to explore a Buddhist version of social theory (Zu, 2021: 58-62).

²⁰ 人如菩薩。虛空如所執。人法體無，法為本故，但言法空。其空地者，喻依他性。一切有情，造生宮室莊嚴等者，喻彼有情，增長饒益，生淨功德，證圓成實，即便攝受如是佛土。

Positioning the discussion in the Yogācāra framework of three natures, Kuiji portrays how ordinary sentient beings, through their interactions with the bodhisattvas, acknowledge the imagined nature of their mistake of misperceiving things as *svabhāvic* entities, subsequently becoming self-critical of their ignorance so as to embrace the dependent nature and eventually aspiring to rehabitualize themselves in order to realize the perfect nature.²¹

Figuratively, through working with bodhisattvas, each sentient being cultivates pure seeds in their singular mind that will mature into the shared aspiration for the Bodhisattvas' path.²² By then, ordinary sentient beings become bodhisattvas, further refashioning the lifeworld of ignorance into a precious locale of sublime palaces, as the starting point of achieving an ideal society *qua* Buddha-fields. The sense of the *we* is transformed through the joint effort of its members.

That is why, in his analysis of the acquired wisdom in South Asian Yogācāra, Roy Tzohar remarks that “the advanced bodhisattva is not a mere nonparticipating guest... but an interacting and communicating member” (Tzohar, 2018: 203). Building upon Tzohar's insight, I delineate how the possibility of interaction and communication is grounded in a shared lifeworld underpinned by the second-person perspective of experience. To be more specific, what is shared by bodhisattvas and their target audience is not only a common material world, but also the mode of joint action through which a consensus on the importance of being self-critical can be reached, and a plural subject can be transformatively achieved. This new lifeworld, which is compared to a precious locale, is mutually constituted by bodhisattvas and their target audience. And it marks a turning starting point to initiate the transformation of shared ignorance into universal awakening.

²¹ Here, I use the term “rehabitualize” to underscore how the change of habit entails a systematic training process in the Buddhist context, which shall be demarcated from the commonly used term of “rehabilitate” in phenomenology.

²² As I have discussed elsewhere, such collaboration also features in Kuiji's commentary of the *Śrīmālā Sūtra* (Li, 2021: 312-314).

4 Conclusion: The skillful combat against injustice as a collaborative effort

In the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, these collaborative performances of bodhisattvas and their target audience usually feature a level of playfulness. I consider such playfulness, in particular, as the expression of bodhisattvas' resilience when they aim to transform the shared lifeworld and end the domination of a common ignorant mindset. The playful critique is encapsulated in the story that follows Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī's conversation in Chapter 7 on how bodhisattvas should regard their audience.²³

The moment their question-and-answer session ends, a Devī enters Vimalakīrti's chamber and engages Śāriputra in a dialogue. After several rounds of exchange, Śāriputra asks the Devī, "why don't you transform your current female body?" (今何不轉此女身) (T.14.476.574b19). In response, the Devī says: "I have lived in this room for eleven years and I never attained the nature of women. So, what is to be transformed? Only that, Śāriputra! It is just like a magician who appears as an illusory woman" (T.14.476.574b20-22).²⁴ This allows the Devī to confront Śāriputra and ask him if he posed a "correct question" (正問) (T.14.476.574b23). Then Śāriputra shifts from eternalism to nihilism with the pronouncement that, "if the body is illusory and unreal, what can be transformed?" (幻既非實，當何所轉) (T.14.476.74b23-24). At that point, the Devī exercises miraculous power, changing Śāriputra into her bodily form and embodying Śāriputra's bodily form herself (T.14.476.574b26). "The honorable one, why don't you transform your female body?" (尊者，云何不轉女身), the Devī questions (T.14.476.574b27-28). And Śāriputra confesses that he does not know how to turn a man into a woman (T.14.476.574b29). This is when the Devī underscores that, if

²³ In another article (Li, 2023b: 706–711), I have portrayed how joy, as a type of *vedanā*, also transforms together with sociality, as illustrated by this story of the Devī in the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*.

²⁴ 我居此室，十有二年，求女人性，了不可得，當何所轉？惟，舍利子！譬如幻師，化作幻女。若有問言，汝今何不轉此女身，為正問不？

Śāriputra can transform his current female body, then all women can reach the same achievement (T.14.476.574c1-4). After turning Śāriputra back to his original bodily form, the Devī finally hears from Śāriputra that he acknowledges neither the existence nor the non-existence of a female bodily form (T.14.476.574c5-6).

Existing scholarship has approached the encounter between the Devī and Śāriputra in various manners. A sectarian reading usually construes this encounter as the victory of Mahāyāna. Rather than associating Śāriputra with a specific Buddhist school, feminists have applauded this encounter as a call for renouncing socially constructed gender. On this front, the feminist discussion investigates whether gender, in terms of masculinity and femininity, ultimately exists (Paul, 1985: 221; Gross, 2004: 5; Mattice, 2021:139). Furthering the feminist reading, I follow Kuiji's shift from existence to functionality in his analysis of illusion. Hence, I recommend interpreting this literary encounter in a critical way to explore not *whether* gender ultimately exists, but rather *how* illusory gender can be used in Buddhist literature, which allows for examining the collaborative effort to criticize and transform a dominant viewpoint of gender in Buddhist communities.

In this vein, I conceive of Śāriputra as a fictional figure who internalizes a popular and predominant viewpoint that regards the female material form as an accumulation of desire and deems the female body obstructive to awakening. It, thus, explains why people in favor of this dominant discourse find it crucial to change the female material form into that of a man before attaining awakening. It is important to note, moreover, that this viewpoint is not the invention of one specific individual. Rather, how it becomes internalized in people, like the story-figure-Śāriputra, shows a general past in which a viewpoint becomes normalized generation after generation in virtue of shared seeds, to the point that those inside such a shared lifeworld have lost the capacity to be self-critical. Developing his own worldview in

this shared lifeworld, the story-figure-Śāriputra is cultivated to have an expectation of what a wise being should be like in a collective setting. Hence, he cannot make sense of the fact that someone as smart as the Devī appears in a female form. In asking the question of sex-transformation, this story-figure exposes an unquestioned bias about the inferiority of the female body. To encourage her interlocutor to see the deeply rooted misperception of the body, as well as its related gender/sex, the Devī moves from the margin to the center, further using her lived body and language as a skillful means to problematize the eternalist and nihilist standpoints as expressed by Śāriputra. As an advanced bodhisattva, the Devī retools her illusory female appearance to criticize ignorance and awake Śāriputra from his unquestioned stereotypes. As such, what is to be transformed is not the female body as such, but the dominance of a discourse that renders femininity inferior. Together, the Devī and Śāriputra present to readers how this dominant discourse on the inferiority of a female body is ungrounded and needs to end. If the pursuit of justice is about ending domination and marginalization (Young, 1990: 15), then the Devī and Śāriputra jointly combat a crucial form of injustice *qua* sex discrimination: a combat that starts with a playful critique.

In her feminist theories, María Lugones stresses how an attitude of playfulness, which is not instrumentally used for winning but showcases “the openness to surprise,” will facilitate the feminist resistance to domination and oppression (Lugones, 2003: 95-96). The collaborative performance of bodhisattvas and their target audience can be perceived as embodying such a playful attitude, which works as a skillful means, a practical wisdom, and a critical tool for transformation. Detailing the formation and transformation of a shared lifeworld through the *I-we* interdependency, the Buddhist presentation of such a playful critique complements Lugones’s articulation from an intercultural perspective. In this way, transformative sociality, as undergirded by the second-person perspective, brings us a sense of optimism: no matter how deeply we have been conditioned by the past, we can always

work together to transform our society, undo injustice, and end domination, through a collaborative effort.

Acknowledgement

I want to thank the special issue editor Joy Brennan, as well as the anonymous reviewers, for their valuable comments on the earlier draft of this article. My thanks must go to the Dutch Research Council (NWO) for awarding a Veni grant to my project “A Lost Pearl: Feminist theories in Buddhist philosophy of consciousness-only” (project number VI.VENI.211F.078), which makes the research for this article possible.

Bibliography

- Al-Saji, A. 2010. “The Racialization of Muslim Veils: A Philosophical Analysis.” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 36, no. 8: 875–902.
- . 2019. “Durée.” In *Fifty Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology*, edited by G. Weiss, A. V. Murphy and G. Salamon, 99–106. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Aviv, E. 2020. *Differentiating the Pearl from the Fish-Eye*. Leiden Brill.
- Brewster, E. 2018. “What is Our Shared Sensory World? Ming Dynasty Debates on Yogācāra versus Huayan Doctrines.” *Journal of Chinese Buddhist Studies* 31: 117–170.
- Brinck, I., Reddy V., and Zahavi, D. 2017. “The Primacy of the ‘We’?” In *Embodiment, Enaction, and Culture. Investigating the Constitution of the Shared World*, edited by C. Durt, T. Fuchs, and C. Tewes, 131–147. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Dhammajoti, K.L. 2017. “Introduction to the *Cheng Weishi Lun*.” In *Vijñapti-mātratā-siddhi: A Commentary (Cheng Weishi Lun) on Vasubandhu’s Triṃśikā by Xuanzang. The Collected Works of Louis de la Vallée Poussin, Vol II*, translated by G. Lodrö Sanpo, G. Migme Chödrön, and A. Mayer, 27–70. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Garfield, J. 2019. “Second Persons and the Constitution of the First Person.” *Humana. Mente- Journal of Philosophical Studies* 36: 42–66.
- Gross, R. 2004. “The dharma of Gender.” *Contemporary Buddhism* 5, no. 1: 3–13.
- Guenther, L. 2019. “Critical Phenomenology.” In *Fifty Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology*, edited by G. Weiss, A. V. Murphy and G. Salamon, 11–16. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Husserl, E. 1954. *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die Transzendente Phänomenologie. Hua 6*, edited by W. Biemel. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.
- Jiang, T. 2006. *Contexts and Dialogue: Yogācāra Buddhism and Modern Psychology on the Subliminal Mind*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Kachru, S. 2021. *Other Lives: Mind and World in Indian Buddhism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kuiji. *Shuo Wugoucheng Jing Shu (Commentary on the Vimalakīrti Sūtra)*. T.38, no. 1782. (see Takakusu et al., 1924–1932).
- . *Cheng Weishilun Shuji (Commentary on the Perfection of Consciousness-only)*. T.43, no. 1830. (see Takakusu et al., 1924–1932).
- Li, J. 2019. “Through the Mirror: The Account of Other Minds in Chinese Yogācāra Buddhism.” *Dao* 18, no. 3: 435–451.

- . 2021. “Eroding Sexism: A Yogācāra Dialectics of Gender.” *Dialogue* 60, no. 2: 297–317.
- . 2022. *Comparing Husserl’s Phenomenology and Chinese Yogācāra in a Multicultural World: A Journey beyond Orientalism*. London: Bloomsbury.
- . 2023a. “Liang the Buddhist.” In *Dao Companion to Liang Shuming’s Philosophy*, edited by T. Meynard and P. Major, 41–62. New York: Springer.
- . 2023b. “Joy as Contextualized Feeling: Two Contrasting Pictures of Joy in East Asian Yogācāra.” *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 91, no. 3: 698–713.
- . 2024. “Reorientating Illusory Convention in Renewing the Tradition: Taixu and Fazun’s Humanistic Buddhism.” *Studies in Chinese Religions* 10 (3–4): 422–46.
- Lugones, M. 2003. *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Lusthaus, D. 2002. *Buddhist Phenomenology: A Philosophical Investigation of Yogācāra Buddhism and the Ch’eng Wei-shih Lun*. New York: Routledge.
- MacKenzie, M. 2013. “Enacting Selves, Enacting Worlds.” *Philosophy East and West* 63, no. 2: 194–212.
- Mattice, S. 2021. *Exploring the Heart Sutra*. Lanham: Lexington.
- Paul, D. 1985. *Women in Buddhism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Reddy, V. 1996. “Omitting the Second Person in Social Understanding.” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 19, no. 1: 140–141.
- Schmid, H.B. 2014. “Plural Self-Awareness.” *Phenomenology and Cognitive Sciences* 13, no. 1: 7–24.
- . 2016. “On Knowing what We’re Doing Together.” In *The Epistemic Life of Groups: Essays in the Epistemology of Collective*, edited by M.S. Brady and M. Fricker. 51–72. Oxford: Oxford University press.
- . 2018. “The Subject of ‘We Intend’.” *Phenomenology and Cognitive Sciences* 17, no. 2: 231–243.
- Schweikard, D. and Schmid, H.B. 2013. “Collective Intentionality.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/collective-intentionality>. (last accessed Aug 26, 2022).
- Takakusu, J., Watanabe, K., & Ono, G., eds. 1924–1932. *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*. Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai. The SAT Daizōkyō Text Database. https://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/index_en.html.
- Tiwald, J. 2018. “Zhu Xi’s Critique of Buddhism.” In *The Buddhist Roots of Zhu Xi’s Philosophical Thought*, edited by J. Makeham. 122–155. Oxford: Oxford University press.
- Tzohar, R. 2018. *A Yogācāra Buddhist Theory of Metaphor*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wang, E. 1940. “佛法中之宇宙人生” (The Cosmos and Life in the Buddha Dharma). *Haichaoyin* 21, no. 2: 6–9.
- Xuanzang, trans. *Shuo wugoucheng jing (The Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra)*. T.14, no. 476. (see Takakusu et al., 1924–1932).
- . *Cheng weishi lun (Treatise on the Perfection of Consciousness-only)*. T.31, no. 1585. (see Takakusu et al., 1924–1932).
- Young, I.M. 1990. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Zahavi, D. 2017. *Husserl’s Legacy*. Oxford: Oxford University press.
- . 2018. “Collective Intentionality and Plural Pre-Reflective Self-Awareness.” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 49, no. 1: 61–75.

- . 2021. “We in Me or Me in We? Collective Intentionality and Selfhood.” *Journal of Social Ontology* 7, no. 1: 1–20.
- Zu, J. 2021. “A Spiritual Evolutionism: Lü Cheng, Aesthetic Revolution, and the Rise of a Buddhism-Inflected Social Ontology in Modern China.” *Journal of Global Buddhism* 22, no. 1: 49–75.
- . 2025. *Just Awakening: Yogācāra Social Philosophy in Modern China*. New York: Columbia University Press.