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# How Free is the Bodhisattva in Deliberate Rebirth?

Yoke Meei Choong

Assistant Professor, Department of Buddhist Studies  
Fo Guang University

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## Abstract

In the spiritual hierarchy of the bodhisattva-path, the bodhisattva is regarded as being able to be reborn in any form of existence that they wish from the first level onward (hereafter “deliberate rebirth”). Some scholars understand deliberate rebirth as rebirth of bodhisattvas who have abandoned all defilements and have escaped from cyclic existence. This implies that bodhisattvas can be reborn and remain in cyclic existence even after they have abandoned all desire or defilements. If this is the case, it contradicts the teachings of mainstream Buddhism, which states that rebirth must be led by desire, that is, defilement. In an early Mahāyāna text, the *Prajñāpāramitā*, bodhisattvas are expected not to end all their defilements because, by doing so, they will be deprived of the opportunity to remain in cyclic existence to help other sentient beings and fulfill the requirements for Buddhahood. This shows that the *Prajñāpāramitā* aligns with mainstream Buddhism on the requirement of desire or defilement of rebirth, even for bodhisattvas. Despite this, the *Prajñāpāramitā* and its commentary by Haribhadra mention deliberate rebirth. Thus, the *Prajñāpāramitā* furnishes a solid foundation for understanding deliberate rebirth in the context of the bodhisattva’s ideal.

This paper deals with the mechanism of the bodhisattvas’ deliberate rebirth that corresponds with free choice in the form of future existence on one hand and the bondage of karma on the other. Moreover, it identifies the underlying forces in some extended passages of the *Prajñāpāramitā*’s long versions that could lead to the misinterpretation that bodhisattvas’ rebirths are karma-free.

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## Keywords

Bodhisattva-path; Śrāvaka-path; deliberate rebirth; desire; Prajñāpāramitā

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# 1. Introduction

The claim that bodhisattvas can be reborn in any form of existence they wish (called “deliberate rebirth”) is common in the Mahāyāna. Gadjin M. Nagao highlights two phrases related to deliberate rebirth that appear in the *Prajñāpāramitā* —“one who intentionally wishes for existence” (*saṃcintya-bhavapratikāṅkṣī*), and “taking rebirth intentionally” (*saṃcintya-upapatti-parigraha*). Similarly, in the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* (DBh), deliberate rebirth is suggested by the expression “he takes rebirth intentionally by the force of vows” (*saṃcintya prañidhānavaśenopapadyate*), which appears on the Bodhisattva-path at the third level.<sup>1</sup> In the relevant passages, this term “he takes rebirth intentionally by the force of vows” appears in the context of absorptions. According to this passage, the bodhisattvas who practice absorption reject rebirth into the respective realms that correspond karmically to the levels of absorption practiced unless they wish otherwise. Thus, deliberate rebirth refers to the bodhisattvas’ mental act that works against or complies with karma resulting from absorptions. Similarly, in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (BoBh), the bodhisattvas reject not only rebirth into the respective realm of absorptions but also take deliberate rebirth in the realm of sensual pleasures (*kāmadhātu*) to benefit other sentient beings and to fulfill factors leading to Awakening.<sup>2</sup>

Based on deliberate rebirth in terms of a free choice in the form of future existence, scholars interpret this ability as a return to the mundane world by the bodhisattva who has transcended the desire and karma that result in rebirths. For example, Gadjin M. Nagao, based on

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<sup>1</sup> See DBh:36, 17.

<sup>2</sup> See BoBh: 337, 15ff.: *sa tair bahulaṃ vihr̥tya tāni dhyānāni samādhiṃ samāpattiḥ vyāvartya prañidhānavaśena kāmadhātu yatra sattvārthaṃ bodhipakṣyadharmaparipūrīṃ ca paśyati tatropapadyate*. “Having often abided with these [concentrations], he reverses the trance, absorptions [and] concentrations. Through the force of desire, he takes rebirth in the realm of sensual pleasures, where he sees the benefit of sentient beings and the fulfillment of the factors leading to Awakening.”

the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*, understands deliberate rebirth as different from rebirth by force of karma.<sup>3</sup> In the same way, Fujichika Keiichi claims that deliberate rebirth refers to the rebirth of one who is free from karma and is no long subject to cyclic existence.<sup>4</sup> Miranda Shaw extends this thought to suggest that the bodhisattva free from desire and karma recreates bodily forms eternally.<sup>5</sup> These scholars understand free choice regarding the form of existence as freedom from karma. Consequently, they consider the bodhisattva who takes deliberate rebirth as one who has abandoned all defilements and has ended cyclic existence, because according to mainstream Buddhism, one is free from cyclic existence only if one has abandoned all defilements.

However, the requirement of freedom from defilements poses a dilemma for the ultimate goal and nature of the Bodhisattva-path. In the early Mahāyāna, the bodhisattvas are expected not to end all their defilements before the Perfection of Buddhahood because the abandonment of all defilements entails the end of cyclic existence. This deprives the bodhisattvas of any opportunity to remain in cyclic existence to perform tasks that benefit sentient beings and fulfill the requirements for perfecting Buddhahood.<sup>6</sup> If this scholarly assumption that the bodhisattvas can take deliberate rebirth because they have abandoned all defilements is correct, then deliberate rebirth would contradict the Bodhisattva-path's ultimate goal and nature. I

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<sup>3</sup> See Gadjin M. Nagao, "The Bodhisattva Returns to this World," in *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra: A Study of Mahāyāna Philosophies*, trans. Leslie S. Kawamura (Delhi: Indian Books Centre 1991), 29–31.

<sup>4</sup> See Fujichika Keiichi 藤近恵市, "Bodhisattvas and Samsara in Early Mahayana Buddhism 初期大乘仏教における菩薩と輪廻," *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* 47, 2 (March 1999), 7.

<sup>5</sup> See Miranda Shaw, "Blessed are the Birth-Givers: Buddhist Views on Birth and Rebirth," *Parabola* 23, 4 (1998), 51.

<sup>6</sup> For references of Mahāyāna texts, which warn the bodhisattva from eradicating all defilements, see Yoke Meei Choong, "To Realize or Not to Realize the Supreme Truth: A Change of the Conception of Realization" 菩薩應不應證實際 — 從大乘經典看證悟觀念的轉變 (*Bulletin of the Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy* 38, 2011), 217–219.

have shown the karmic nature of deliberate rebirth in the early literature of a later school, the Yogācāra, elsewhere,<sup>7</sup> but the issues in the mechanism for deliberate rebirth remains to be considered, especially in the literature of the early Mahāyāna. An early Mahāyāna text, the *Prajñāpāramitā*, mentions the requirements of defilements (*āsrāva*, *abhisamṣkāra*) for the Perfection of Buddhahood.<sup>8</sup> However, the *Prajñāpāramitā* and Haribhadra's commentary also mention deliberate rebirth. The *Prajñāpāramitā*, thus, furnishes a solid foundation for understanding deliberate rebirth in the context of the bodhisattva's ideal.

The *Prajñāpāramitā* texts are by no means homogeneous in all stratifications of their composition. First, to understand deliberate rebirth from a historical perspective, I deal with the treatment of the bodhisattva's rebirths in the *Prajñāpāramitā*, focusing on the three earliest shorter versions,<sup>9</sup> without neglecting supplementary materials in the long versions. I examine the description of the actual moment of deliberate rebirth (Ch. 2), the requirement of desire in this sort of rebirth (Ch. 3), and the mechanism for deliberate rebirth that works between two antagonistic forces—the force of karma and the freedom of choice in rebirth (Ch. 4). To understand the scholarly assumptions of a karma-free bodhisattva, I investigate some later-extended passages in the *Prajñāpāramitā*'s long versions and some in Haribhadra's commentary, dealing individually with terms such as the holy status of the bodhisattva (Ch. 5), the abandonment of defilements (Ch. 6), the abandonment of defiling impregnations, and the experience of the unconditioned (Ch. 7).

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<sup>7</sup> See Yoke Meei Choong, "Nirvāṇa and Tathatā in the Yogācāra Texts: The Bodhisattva's Adaptation of the Śrāvaka-Path," in *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 41: 1 (2013, 2), 87–89.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Aṣṭa 750, 12–14: *atrāntarā bodhisattvo mahāsattvo na parihīyate bodhipakṣair dharmair na cāsrāvākṣayaṃ karoti*; Yoke Meei Choong, *Zum Problem der Leerheit (śūnyatā) in der Prajñāpāramitā* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Verlag, 2004), 43.

<sup>9</sup> The short versions of the *Prajñāpāramitā* refer to the *Prajñāpāramitā* of 8,000 lines, while the long versions refer to those of 18,000 and 25,000 lines.

## 2. Grasping the Realm of Sensual Pleasures

Passages that contain the concept of deliberate rebirth appear in the *Prajñāpāramitā*'s shorter versions. For example, a passage in the Sanskrit version is as follows:

The [bodhisattva], who wishes [to enter into concentrations], enters the first trance, the second, the third and the fourth trance. He abides with these four trances, masters and enters them, but he is not reborn by the [karma] force of trance. On the contrary, he grasps the factors of the sphere of sensual pleasures. Subhūti, you should know, this is also the sign of the non-retrogressive bodhisattva mahāsattva.<sup>10</sup>

This passage presents the crucial idea of working against karma resulting from a trance by “grasping the factors of the sphere of sensual pleasures”. Clearly, practicing trances or concentrations is a karmic action, and the consequences are rebirths in realms that correspond to the trances’ levels, that is, the realm of non-sensual corporeality (*rūpadhātu*) and the realm of incorporeality (*ārūpyadhātu*), beyond the realm of sensual pleasures. The bodhisattva, however, rejects this rebirth by grasping the factors of the sphere of sensual pleasures.

The phrase “grasping the factors of the sphere of sensual pleasures” exists in all the earlier, short *Prajñāpāramitā* versions. The three earliest short versions, the translations by Lokakṣema, Zhiqian (支謙), and Dharmapriya, are difficult to understand, but the idea of “entering into sensual pleasures” or “generating sensual desire” (入欲中) is indubitably present in these versions as well: The bodhisattva generates sensual desire, which acts against rebirth resulting from

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<sup>10</sup> See Aṣṭa 680, 24–681, 3: *sa ākāṅkṣan prathamam dhyānam samāpadyate tathā dvitīyam tathā tṛtīyam tathā caturtham dhyānam samāpadyate/ sa ebhiḥ caturbhir dhyānair viharati dhyānaparijayaṃ ca karoti dhyānāni ca samāpadyate na ca dhyānavāśenopapadyate/ sa punar eva kāmāvacarān dharmān adhyālabate// idam api subhūte 'vinivartanīyasya bodisattvasya mahāsattvasyāvinivartanīyalakṣaṇam vedītavyam//*

abiding in trances.<sup>11</sup> Clearly in the earliest versions of the *Prajñāpāramitā*, sensual pleasures or sensual desire plays a role in the bodhisattva's rebirth.

The later short versions, i.e., Kumārajīva and Dānapāla's translations, contain equivalents of the phrase "grasping the factors of the sphere of sensual pleasures."<sup>12</sup> Other short versions contain similar passages with some variations. The long *Prajñāpāramitā* versions and Xuanzang's translations replace the statement, "he grasps the factors of the sphere of sensual pleasures" with "he is reborn in the realm of sensual pleasures."<sup>13</sup> In other words, free will has disappeared from these statements. Nevertheless, a statement added later, "taking rebirth

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<sup>11</sup> See T224.455b14–16: 阿惟越致不隨錄是四禪，是所禪作三昧越，用人入欲中故，禪三昧，是菩薩終不隨禪教；T225.495b13–14: 隨是四禪不錄禪，是所禪作是定，用人入欲中故；T226.527c21–22: 隨是四禪而不錄禪目，是為三摩越，為人欲故。Seishi Karashima suggests the translation of T224 with uncertainty: "An irreversible bodhisattva does not then consider that [what he practices] are the four meditations." for 阿惟越致不隨錄是四禪 and "Because he enters into the desires of human beings" for 用人入欲中故 by changing 人人 to 人人, see Seishi Karashima, *A Critical Edition of Lokakṣema's translation of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (Tokyo: The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism, 2011), 315 and *A Glossary of Lokakṣema's Translation of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (Tokyo: The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism, 2010), 313. According to *Hanyu Dazidian*, 錄 means "to apply, adopt" (採納, 採取), see Hanyu Dazidian Editing Committee, *Hanyu Dazidian* (Wuhan: Hubei Lexicon Publishing Co., Sichuan Lexicon Publishing Co., 1989), 4226a. With this meaning the statement in T224 stands close to Sanskrit and means something like "The non-retrogressive bodhisattva does not then adopt these four trances". Anyway, in these early versions 不隨錄是四禪/ 不錄禪/ 不錄禪目 is equivalent to "rejecting the karmic force of trances". Moreover, in these early Chinese translations "generating desire" (欲/ 入欲中) corresponds well to Sanskrit "grasping the factors of the sphere of sensual pleasures".

<sup>12</sup> See Kumārajīva's translation T227.565a11: 是菩薩雖入諸禪，選取欲界法，不隨禪生 "Even though this bodhisattva enters the trances, he grasps the factors of the realm of sensual pleasures and is not reborn according to [the karma] of trances." See also Dānapāla's translation T228.642c11–12: 雖入是諸定而不隨禪生選取欲界法。"Even though he enters these concentrations, he is not reborn according to the [karma] of the trances, but he grasps the factors of the realm of sensual pleasures."

<sup>13</sup> Instead of "grasping" (取) as in Dānapāla's translation T228.642c11, "is born" (生) appears in both Xuanzang's translations T220(4).827b28 and T220(5).902a6. It is obvious that Xuanzang's translation of the short version could be influenced by the long versions of the *Prajñāpāramitā*.

according to one's sensual desire," (隨欲攝受所應受身) does appear,<sup>14</sup> explaining that the form of existence or the realm of rebirth at the time of death depends on the realm to which the generated sensual desire belongs. Thus, the phrase reintroduces free will into the bodhisattvas' rebirth. Even though "taking rebirth according to one's sensual desire" appears only in later versions, it can be viewed as a commentary on the earlier phrase "grasping the factors of the sphere of sensual pleasures" or "generating sensual desire." "Taking rebirth according to one's sensual desire" is the result of "grasping the factors of the sphere of sensual pleasures" or "generating sensual desire" at the time of death.

If this is so, the bodhisattva's rebirth resembles all rebirths caused by desire produced at the time of transmigration from one birth to another. The realm of existence to which the desire belongs determines the type of rebirth.<sup>15</sup> However, the rebirth of a trained bodhisattva differs from that of ordinary people. The difference lies in the bodhisattva's ability to control the type of desire to be generated and to direct it to the realm he wishes at the time of death. These observations explain the actual meaning of "not taking rebirth by the force of trance." The bodhisattva averts the course of rebirth that results from achievement in trances by generating desire that belongs to a sphere different from the levels of trance. If this is so, then deliberate rebirth refers to the ability to generate and direct desire to the realm into which the bodhisattva wishes to be reborn. This does not imply that the bodhisattva is free from defilements and has already escaped cyclic existence.

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<sup>14</sup> See T220(4).827b25.

<sup>15</sup> For a vivid discussion on the role desire plays at the moment of death in ordinary rebirth, see Eli Franco, *Dharmakīrti on Compassion and Rebirth* (Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, 1997), 70–71.

### 3. Defilements as Requirements

In the *Prajñāpāramitā*, however, terms occur that are used in mainstream Buddhism for freedom from defilements and from cyclic existence. Without a careful examination of these terms, one can easily be misled to think the bodhisattva takes rebirth beyond the force of karma. For example, in the chapter on the non-retrogressive bodhisattva, the bodhisattva is said to be without evil propensities (*anuśaya*).<sup>16</sup> In traditional Buddhism, evil propensities (*anuśaya*) are identified with defilements (*kleśa*), possession (*pariyavasthāna*), and intoxication (*āsrava*). They are the root cause of cyclic existence and are of three types: propensities or intoxications associated with delusion, desire, and becoming. If deliberate rebirth were the result of freedom from propensities, then it would be a type of rebirth different from that produced by karma. However, the commentator Haribhadra explained the passage as follows:

[The bodhisattva] is without propensities, because he does not possess propensities included in intoxication of delusion and [false] views, but not [without] propensities included in intoxication of desire and becoming, because the bodhisattva takes deliberate rebirth.<sup>17</sup>

According to this passage, propensities included in intoxication of desire and becoming are not abandoned because the bodhisattva still has to take rebirth, notwithstanding deliberate rebirth. Out of three types of propensities, mainstream Buddhism attributes the direct cause of rebirth to the propensities of desire and becoming. Therefore, Haribhadra explained the term “without propensities” as simply freedom from propensities of false views and delusion; propensities that are the root cause of the cycle of rebirth, i.e., those that belong to desire and becoming are not abandoned because the bodhisattva still

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<sup>16</sup> See Āloka 670, 17. In the concluding verse, a similar term appears: “the abandonment of all propensities” (*sarvānuśayahānaṃ*), Aṣṭa 678, 16.

<sup>17</sup> See Āloka 670, 18–20: *tatrāvidyāṛṣṭyāsravasamaṅgrhītānām anuśayānām abhāvān nirānuśayatvam. na tu kāmabhavāsravasamaṅgrhītānām bodhisattvasya saṃcintyabhavopādānāt.*

has to take deliberate rebirth. In other words, “without propensities” is reinterpreted as “not without the intoxications of desire and becoming,” because these intoxications are necessary for rebirth.

This special use of the term *anuśaya* is not confined only to the commentary. It appears also in the *Prajñāpāramitā*. For example, the chapter on the good qualities of Perfection mentions that the bodhisattva generates thoughts of loving kindness, when they do not “bear *anuśaya* (*nānuśayaṃ dhārayati*).”<sup>18</sup> The bodhisattva’s thought is as follows:

The following thought occurs to him: “If I give rise to hatred, my sense-organs will be destroyed and my complexion will be burnt by it. It is improper for me to be overcome by anger, when I have set forth towards and wish to practice in the supreme and perfect Awakening.”<sup>19</sup>

Clearly, the bodhisattvas have not yet abandoned their evil propensities because, as the passage says, they suppress them with thoughts about the disadvantages of hatred and enmity. According to mainstream Buddhism, if one does not bear *anuśaya*, then one should be free from hatred and no longer needs to suppress it. Since the bodhisattvas have to work hard to suppress hatred and enmity, they are not free from them. Here Haribhadra explained the term *anuśaya* to mean propensities connected with hatred and enmity.<sup>20</sup> In other words, the bodhisattva is free from only certain types of evil propensities. If “freedom from evil propensities” means that the bodhisattvas are only partly free from evil propensities or that they have suppressed evil propensities, then they are not free of karma.

In the *Prajñāpāramitā* long versions, the bodhisattva rejects not only rebirths into the respective realms of trance but also the four fruitions

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<sup>18</sup> See Aṣṭa 198, 7–20.

<sup>19</sup> See Aṣṭa 198, 26–199, 3: *tasyaivaṃ bhavati. saced ahaṃ vyāpādam utpādayisyāmi tenendriyāṇi me paribhetsyante mukhavarṇas ca me dhakṣyate ayuktaṃ caitan mama yad aham anuttarāyāṃ samyaksambohou samprasthitas tatra śikṣitukāmaḥ krodhasya vaśaṃ gaccheyam ity evaṃ sa kṣipram eva smṛtiṃ pratilabhate//*

<sup>20</sup> See Āloka 198, 14: *anuśayam iti dveṣāṃśiko vairaprabandho 'nuśayaḥ.*

of the śrāvaka:

Although the bodhisattva mahāsattva enters the four trances and proceeds until he brings forth the five supernormal powers, he does not assume their fruitions. Because of this, he will not be reborn in accordance to the force of trances, concentrations of the [four] immeasurables ..., the cessation of ideations and feelings, and any other merit. He does not also realize the fruitions of the Stream-Enterer, the Once-Returner, the Non-Returner, the Arahāt or the Pratyekabuddha. In order to benefit sentient beings, he assumes the body as he desires, he takes whatever rebirth as he wishes, he abandons whatever he has done.<sup>21</sup>

Here, the bodhisattva rejects not only the fruitions of concentrations (which are mundane) but also supramundane fruitions. Since the bodhisattvas reject the four fruitions of the śrāvaka, they have not left the cycle of rebirth. This reinforces deliberate rebirth as possible only if the bodhisattva has not given up the mundane, i.e., all the conditioned, and crossed over to the supramundane, i.e., the unconditioned, the *nirvāṇa*.

Finally, in the *Prajñāpāramitā*, the bodhisattvas can take deliberate rebirth only if they have not abandoned all defilements. “Free will” does not mean freedom from karma, but the ability to generate thoughts of desire that work against the highly tranquilized and concentrated state of mind and against the propelling karma of abiding in trances. That is, the bodhisattva directs rebirth by posing hindrances to the ripening effect of trances and producing desire or the required karma for the intended rebirth.

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, T220(2).7.267a7-8; T220(3).7.631a8-15: 是菩薩摩訶薩雖入四靜慮乃至引發五神通，而不受彼果。由此因緣，不隨靜慮、無量等乃至滅定及餘功德勢力而生，亦不取預流果、或一來果、或不還果、或阿羅漢果、或獨覺菩提，為欲利樂諸有情故，隨欲攝受所應受身，即隨所願皆能攝受，作所作已即便捨之。

## 4. Freedom within One's Karma

Because the bodhisattva is not yet free from karma, one who takes deliberate rebirth has to work against the antagonistic karmic force of unintended rebirths, which include rebirth into woeful states besides the realms beyond the realm of sensual pleasures as a result of practicing trances. The latter deprives the bodhisattva of any active beneficial acts because the realms correspond to the realms of trances comprising long periods of inactive concentration; the former robs the bodhisattva with overwhelming sufferings of any freedom of choice. Unless bodhisattvas wish to be reborn there for some beneficial acts, they must possess some ability to be free from these unintended rebirths.

However, there is no mention of avoiding rebirth into woeful states, for example, the realm of hell, hungry ghosts, and animals. Instead, it is said that the bodhisattva always obtains a good birth. For instance, in the short *Prajñāpāramitā* versions, the non-retrogressive bodhisattva or the bodhisattva who practices *prajñāpāramitā*<sup>22</sup> is said to be free from a bad rebirth:

Subhūti, the bodhisattva mahāsattva, who practices [All-knowing] in this way, is not reborn into hell, as an animal, in the realm of hungry ghost, or into the bodies of Asura. He is not reborn on the border, in the families of Caṇḍāla, bird-catcher, hunters, fisherman, shepherd, and not in other families of low ranks and low occupations as such.<sup>23</sup>

When the bodhisattvas practice All-knowing, that is, *prajñāpāramitā*, they are exempted from rebirth into woeful states and lower births.

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<sup>22</sup> In this paper, *Prajñāpāramitā* (upper-cased) denotes the text with this title, while *prajñāpāramitā* (lower-cased) refers to the practice expounded in the text.

<sup>23</sup> See Aṣṭa: 819, 7–13: *evam śikṣamāṇaḥ subhūte bodhisattvo mahāsattvo na nirayeṣūpapadyate na tiryagyoniṣūpapadyate na pretaviṣayeṣūpapadyate nāsūreṣu kāyeṣūpapadyate na pratyantajanapadeṣūpapadyate na caṇḍālakuleṣūpapadyate na śākunikakuleṣūpapadyate na niṣādadhīvaraurabhrikakuleṣūpapadyate nāpy anyeṣv evamrūpeṣu hīnajātikeṣu hīnakarmaseviṣu vā kuleṣūpapadyate/*

Bodhisattvas are obviously free from a bad rebirth, not because they are free from karma, but because by practicing All-knowing, they do not perform bad karma or conditions that lead to bad rebirths.

This becomes clear in the long *Prajñāpāramitā* versions, where a rebirth into a good state is attributed to the bodhisattva's wholesome roots:

In this way, Subhūti, the bodhisattva mahāsattva purifies the Buddha-fields. He practices in the Awakening until all these wishes are fulfilled. He himself becomes endowed with all wholesome qualities, and he makes others endowed with all wholesome qualities. He possesses a handsome, charming and good looking body adorned with the signs of the great person. Those sentient beings ripened by this bodhisattva possess also a handsome, charming and good looking body adorned with the signs of the great person. The reason lies, namely, in the acquisition of merits.<sup>24</sup>

The wholesome roots result from the bodhisattvas' worldly deeds, such as the purification of Buddha-fields and the fulfilling of all the bodhisattva's wishes. The bodhisattva obtains a handsome body because of the acquired wholesome roots. He ripens sentient beings so that they too can obtain a handsome body. This explains the reason for not falling into unintended woeful states, namely, immeasurable merits accumulated for uncountable kalpas. Clearly, bodhisattvas are free from bad rebirths because of their wholesome roots. Wholesome roots belong to and are not without karma.

In a passage following the previous one, the bodhisattva, who is free from a bad rebirth, can nonetheless take rebirth into the realm of

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<sup>24</sup> See PVS VI-VIII: 129, 2–9: *evaṃ khalu subhūte bodhisattvo mahāsattvo buddhakṣetraṃ pariśodhayati, sa tīvad bodhau carati yāvad ime sarvābhiprāyāḥ paripūrṇā bhavanti, sa ātmanā ca sarvakuśaladharmasamanvāgato bhavati, parāṃś ca sarvakuśaladharmasamanvāgatān karoti, tasya svabhirūpaḥ prāsādiko darśanīyo mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇavibhūṣita ātamabhyāvo (sic; should read ātmabhāvo) bhavati, ye ca tena bodhisattvena mahāsattvena sattvāḥ paripācītās teṣaṃ ca sattvānāṃ svabhirūpaḥ prāsādiko darśanīyo mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇavibhūṣita ātmabhāvo bhavati yad uta puṇyaparigrahād.*

animals out of compassion for sentient beings:

Therefore, Subhūti, in this manner you should know that the bodhisattva mahāsattva who is fulfilling great compassion is reborn in the realm of animals for the benefit of sentient beings. Upon these words, Subhūti said the following to the Blessed One: “On which wholesome factors does the bodhisattva mahāsattva abide, so as to take body of such form?” Upon this question the Blessed One answered Subhūti: “Subhūti, the bodhisattva mahāsattva should fulfill all wholesome karma. Fulfillment of all wholesome factors is the Supreme and Perfect Awakening. From the first moment of generating the mind [that strives] for Awakening until the sitting down at the seat of Awakening, there is no factor, which the bodhisattva mahāsattva would not fulfill. With this fulfilled [wholesome factors] he would attain the Supreme and Perfect Awakening.<sup>25</sup>

These “wholesome factors” and “wholesome karma” are quasi-synonyms of “wholesome roots.” The question raised by Subhūti expresses the condition under which the bodhisattva takes the body of animals, that is, abiding on wholesome factors.<sup>26</sup> Notably, the bodhisattva who takes rebirth into woeful states also needs wholesome roots. The reason is obvious: one is free to choose a destiny of rebirth provided that one is not bound to any type of rebirth. Two ways to be free from bound rebirth are as follows: 1. abandonment of defilements and freedom from karma, e.g., the Arhat; and 2. suppression of

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<sup>25</sup> See PVS VI-VIII: 132, 9–21: *tad anena te subhūte paryāyenaivaṃ vedītavyaṃ tathā bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ sattvānām arthāya mahākaruṇaṃ paripūrayamaṇo' nūttarāyāṃ samyaksambodhau (anuttarāyāṃ samyaksambodhau is unintelligible here; it is absent in the Chinese translations T7.415b1, 8.409c11. I omitted it in the translation above.) tiryagyonau varṭate. evam ukte āyusmān subhūtir bhagavantam etad avocat: katameṣu bhagavan kuśaladharmeṣu sthītvā bodhisattvo mahāsattva imam evaṃrūpaṃ ātmabhāvaṃ pariḡrḥṇāti? evam ukte bhagavān āyusmantaṃ subhūtim etad avocat: sarvaṃ tat subhūte kuśalaṃ karma yad bodhisattvena mahāsattvena paripūrayitavyaṃ sarvakuśaladharmapariḡrīr anuttarā samyaksambodhis tena bodhisattvena mahāsattvena prathamacittotpādam upādāya yāvad bodhimaṇḍaṇiṣaṇṇena na kaścīd dharmo yo na paripūrayitavyo, yena paripūritenānuttarāṃ samyaksambodhim abhisambudhyeta.*

<sup>26</sup> The gerund (*kuśaladharmeṣu sthītvā*) here expresses a certain logical relation, see J. S. Speijer, *Sanskrit Syntax* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass), §380.

defilements and abstaining from creating karma, e.g., the bodhisattva. The bodhisattva acquires these abilities by developing an immense amount of wholesome roots.

As shown above, the bodhisattva refrains from abandoning all defilements, but coarse defilements can be destroyed by wholesome roots accumulated in immeasurable kalpas. A passage in the short *Prajñāpāramitā* versions explains how the bodhisattva purifies the mind via wholesome roots:

“Accordingly as the wholesome roots grow, the bodhisattva mahāsattva acquires purity of the body, speech and mind.” Subhūti asks: “The Blessed One, what then should be known as the bodhisattva mahāsattva’s purity of mind?” The Blessed One replies: “Subhūti, accordingly as the wholesome roots grow, the bodhisattva mahāsattva acquires a mind that has less business, without deceit, does not employ deceit, without dishonesty, and without crookedness. Subhūti, with this purity of mind he surpasses the stage of the śrāvaka and the pratyekabuddha.”<sup>27</sup>

According to this excerpt, wholesome roots purify the mind from bad habits or inclinations, such as a distractions, deceit, and crookedness. Free from these inclinations, a purified mind does not create karma that blocks freedom of rebirth. Only when bodhisattvas are free from bound rebirths, can they take deliberate rebirth. In other words, the bodhisattva is freed from bad karma not by abandoning the roots of defilement, but by purifying the mind through accumulation of wholesome roots.

Wholesome roots can, on one hand, suppress defilements and

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<sup>27</sup> See Aṣṭa: 671, 25–672, 13: *yathā yathā ca tasya tāni kuśalamūlāni vivardhante, tathā tathā sa bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ kāyapariśuddhiṃ ca parigrhṇīte, vākpariśuddhiṃ ca parigrhṇīte, cittapariśuddhiṃ ca parigrhṇīte/ subhūtir āha: kā punar bhagavaṃs tasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya cittapariśuddhir vedittavyā? bhagavān āha: yathā yathā subhūte tasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya tāni kuśalamūlāni vivardhante, tathā tathā sa bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ cittāpakṛtyatām ca parigrhṇīte, cittāśāṭhyatām ca cittāmāyāvitām ca cittākuṣilatām cittāvanīkatām ca parigrhṇīte, yayā ca subhūte cittapariśuddhyā śrāvakapratyekabuddhabhūmim atikrānto bhavati/*

eradicate coarse defilements that bind the bodhisattva to bound rebirths; on the other hand, as a type of karma, wholesome roots can keep the bodhisattva in cyclic existence to benefit sentient beings. Therefore, to choose their destiny, bodhisattvas need an abundance of wholesome roots. Because bodhisattvas are free from defilement and unintended rebirths from the accumulation of wholesome roots, they are never really free from karma. In short, the mechanism of deliberate rebirth is propelled by immense amounts of wholesome roots and karma driving the cycle of rebirth. This means that, according to the *Prajñāpāramitā*, the Bodhisattva-path is mundane.

## 5. Elevation of the Bodhisattva to the Holy Status

Despite the Bodhisattva-path being mundane, the bodhisattva in the *Prajñāpāramitā* is sometimes associated with terms used solely for liberated saints in mainstream Buddhism. Thus, close examination of the definition and application of these terms is necessary.

The emphasis on purification of the mind via wholesome roots is, on one hand, important for the Bodhisattva-path because the bodhisattva must remain in cyclic existence to benefit sentient beings. On the other hand, the bodhisattva, who despite being free from bad karma has not abandoned karmic roots, has not yet arrived at the status of a saint. The *Prajñāpāramitā* texts that exhort the bodhisattva not to abandon the roots of defilement, thus, face a problem: Bodhisattvas are not yet saints in the traditional sense; they are ordinary people, contaminated by defilements and inferior to the śrāvakas, who are saints. The *Upadeśa* clearly registers this problem in the commentary on the long *Prajñāpāramitā* versions compiled by Kumārajīva and attributed to Nāgārjuna:

Furthermore, there are śrāvakas, when they see that the bodhisattva practicing in the six perfections stays long in cyclic existence, because his intoxications are not yet abandoned, he accumulates all kinds of knowledge, [masters] literatures of Buddhism as well as non-Buddhism, and yet he does not realize the supreme truth and is therefore not exempted from birth, old age, and death, they feel sympathy for him and

criticize: “When this man dies, because the three poisons of him have not been eradicated, where will he fall into? Just as the Buddha said: ‘Those ordinary people always open the three doors of unwholesome path, they take the threefold wholesome path as guest, but take the threefold unwholesome abode as home.’ The power of the three poisons is strong, despite of the accumulation of unwholesome karma in so many kalpas of the past he refuses to enter *nirvāṇa*, he will experience various sufferings, how pity he is.” These śrāvakas as such despise the bodhisattva....

[Because] the two vehicles (the śrāvaka and the pratyekabuddha) have realized the supreme truth, they are the field of merits of all sentient beings, [so] what is the reason that they are inferior to the bodhisattva who has just made his first vow?<sup>28</sup>

This passage shows the problem faced by the *Prajñāpāramitā* or the contemporary Mahāyāna: how to encourage Buddhist practitioners to embark on the Bodhisattva-path and to convince either practitioners or laypeople of bodhisattva’s superiority due to the Bodhisattva-path’s mundane nature. This can be the motif behind the extended *Prajñāpāramitā* portions where the bodhisattva is slowly elevated to the status of a saint.

For example, one passage, present only in the long versions, says that the bodhisattva takes rebirth in the same way as the Tathāgata, the holy one, and is uncontaminated (*anāśrava*):

Upon these words venerable Subhūti asked the Blessed One: “The Blessed One, how is then the bodhisattva mahāsattva, who is endowed with white factors, holy and uncontaminated factors, reborn into woeful states or into the realm of animals?” The Blessed One answered: “Subhūti, is then the Tathāgata holy and uncontaminated?” Subhūti

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<sup>28</sup> See T25.1509.336c13-20: 復次，有聲聞人見菩薩行六波羅蜜，久住生死中，漏未盡故，集種種智慧，內外經書，而不證實際，未免生、老、病、死，愍而輕之言：「此等命終，以三毒未盡故，當墮何處？」如佛說：「諸凡夫人，常開三惡道門；於三善道為客，於三惡處為家。」三毒力強，過去世無量劫罪業積集，而不取涅槃，將受眾苦，甚可愍之！如是等小乘人，輕愍是菩薩。… and 460a21: 二乘已證實際，是一切眾生福田，何以故不如初發意菩薩？

answered: “The Blessed One is holy and uncontaminated.” The Blessed One said: “Does then the Tathāgata enter the realm of animals, transform himself into animal, having transformed into that he performs the deeds of the Buddha?” Subhūti said: “The Blessed One, he does perform, the Well-Gone, he does perform.” The Blessed One said: “Does then the Tathāgata become an animal?” Subhūti answered: “No, the Blessed One.” The Blessed One said: “Does then [the Tathāgata] experience sufferings of the realm of animals?” Subhūti answered: “No, the Blessed One.” The Blessed One said: “Exactly so, Subhūti, exactly so, the bodhisattva mahāsattva, who is endowed with white factors, holy and uncontaminated factors, take upon oneself at will the body of such form, endowed with which he could ripen others, just as the Tathāgata.”<sup>29</sup>

This passage in the long *Prajñāpāramitā* versions brings deliberate rebirth (*sañcintya tathārūpam ātmabhāvaṃ pariṅhñāti*) and wholesome factors together, in a similar vein of the short versions, but with a slight difference. Wholesome roots are now known as holy and uncontaminated white factors. In mainstream Buddhism, adjectives such as “holy” and “uncontaminated” are restricted to supramundane factors or to saints with experience of the unconditioned. Moreover, the passage compares the bodhisattva with the Tathāgata in terms of holiness and non-contamination. Wholesome roots turn out to be factors that are supramundane and a quality of saints, the liberated ones. Nevertheless, unlike the Buddha who just transforms himself into animals, the bodhisattva is said to take deliberate rebirth. That means, these white factors do not eradicate the roots of rebirth, but

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<sup>29</sup> See PVS VI-VIII: 132, 24–133, 7: *evam ukte āyusmān subhūtir bhagavantam etad avocat: kathaṃ punar bhagavan bodhisattvo mahāsattvo yāvac chukladharmasamanvāgata āryeṇānāsraveṇa dharmenāpāyeṣūpapadyate tiryagyonau vā? bhagavān āha: kiṃ punaḥ subhūte tathāgata āryo 'nāsravaḥ? subhūtir āha: āryo bhagavann anāsravaḥ. bhagavān āha: kiṃ punas tathāgatas tiryagyonigataṃ prāṇinam ātmānam abhinirmīṇoti, yad abhinirmāya buddhākṛtyam kuryāt? subhūtir āha: kuryād bhagavan kuryāt sugata. bhagavān āha: kiṃ punas tathāgatas tiryag bhavati? subhūtir āha: no bhagavan. bhagavān āha: kiṃ punas tiryagyoner duḥkhaṃ pratyānubhavati? subhūtir āha: no bhagavan. bhagavān āha: evam etat subhūte evam etat, bodhisattvo mahāsattva āryeṇānāsraveṇa dharmeṇa samanvāgataḥ sañcintya tathārūpam ātmabhāvaṃ pariṅhñāti, yenātmabhāvena samanvāgatam anyān paripācayed yathā tathāgataḥ.*

rather they maintain the karmic nature of wholesome roots. Therefore, using white factors in terms of wholesome roots does not deny the importance of karma in the bodhisattva's rebirths, but only elevates the bodhisattva to a stage equal to that of the śrāvaka saints. Bodhisattvas, though possessing karma, are saints such as the śrāvaka, because they possess white uncontaminated factors. However, associating the bodhisattva with the śrāvaka can easily mislead the reader to assume that the bodhisattva is similar to the Arhat or the Tathāgata, i.e., free from karma.

## 6. The Adaptation of Traditional Terms in the *Prajñāpāramitā* Commentary

Similarly, owing to the Bodhisattva-path's mundane nature, the commentary elevates the bodhisattva to the status of a saint. In his commentary on the short *Prajñāpāramitā* versions, Haribhadra (9<sup>th</sup> cent.) explained the manifestation body (*nairmāṇika kāya*) of the Buddha in terms of the bodhisattva's 27 uninterrupted deeds from the first level to the Tathāgata level.<sup>30</sup> Among these deeds are the abandonment of attachments (*sarvabhāvābhiniveśaprahāṇa*) and the pacifying of the states of existence (*gatipraśamana*). If these terms mean that the bodhisattva terminated attachments and the states of existence, the bodhisattva's manifestation body could be different from rebirth due to karmic forces. However, a careful study of the passage reveals otherwise. These two deeds seemingly imply freedom from the circle of rebirth:

(1) The bodhisattva fixes [the mind] in the abandonment of attachment to all existence.<sup>31</sup>

However, "abandonment" here is used differently. According to the verse that summarizes the 27 uninterrupted deeds, the bodhisattva

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<sup>30</sup> See Āloka 924, 3–925, 25.

<sup>31</sup> See Āloka 924, 18: *sarvabhāvābhiniveśaprahāṇe ... niveśayati/*

produces in the mind the antidote to attachment (*abhiniveśasya nivāraṇa*): “He causes [the mind] to settle on the antidotes to attachment.”<sup>32</sup> Antidotes can work only against attachments; they are not insights into *nirvāṇa* that eradicate the roots of attachment, to ensure that desires—which do not hinder the Bodhisattva-path, but are necessary for cyclic existence—are not abandoned. As shown above, bodhisattvas have not abandoned intoxications of desire because they have to generate desire for the state of existence into which they wish to be reborn for the benefit of sentient beings. This kind of desire is indubitably a type of attachment as well.

(2) [The bodhisattva] performs a deed that pacifies the states of existence (*gatiprasāmanam karma kṛtvā*).

However, pacifying all states of existence is interpreted in the passage not as escape from cyclic existence, but rather as non-attachment to good or bad states of existence (*praśastāpraśastagatyanabhiniveśāvasthānalakṣaṇa*):

[The bodhisattva] performs deed that brings all states of existence to rest which is characterized by the abiding in non-attachment at either good or bad states of existence.<sup>33</sup>

Clearly, the bodhisattva brings all states of existence to rest by non-attachment to good or bad states. In mainstream Buddhism, only the eradication of defilements leads to the end of future rebirths. As shown in (1), non-attachment refers to pacification of current defilements without abandoning their roots. Therefore, non-attachment to any state of existence does not imply escape from future rebirths.

In other words, Haribhadra’s commentary uses the abandonment of attachments and the pacification of states of existence in a specific

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<sup>32</sup> See Āloka 925, 14: *abhiniveśasya nivāraṇe ... niveśayati/*

<sup>33</sup> See Āloka 924, 4–5: *praśastāpraśastagatyanabhiniveśāvasthānalakṣaṇam gatiprasāmanam karma kṛtvā ...*

way. The bodhisattva never really abandons the roots of defilement and the circle of rebirth. This is evident when the non-abandonment of karma is said to be one of the bodhisattva's 27 uninterrupted deeds:

a) The bodhisattva fixes [the mind] on [the state] where the connection of karma and fruitions is not destroyed.<sup>34</sup>

“Fruition” (*phala*) is mentioned with karma, which clearly denotes giving rise to future rebirths. This is repeated in the summary verse:

b) The bringing of [the mind] onto the non-destruction of karma.<sup>35</sup>

Emphasis on the bodhisattva not destroying all karma appears in the commentary and the verse-summary. Clearly, the end of cyclic existence, that is, *nirvāṇa*, never occurs to the bodhisattva before the perfection level, the Tathāgata level.<sup>36</sup> This shows clearly that the bodhisattva retains karma to the tenth level.

The commentator Haribhadra uses terms such as “abandonment” (abandonment of attachment to existence) and “pacifying” (pacifying the states of existence) that are used in mainstream Buddhism to denote the change of status from an ordinary person to a saint, but with a new meaning. Haribhadra's use of these terms demonstrates the tendency in contemporary Mahāyāna Buddhism to elevate the bodhisattva to the level of a saint equal to the śrāvaka despite the mundane nature of the Bodhisattva-path.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See Āloka 924, 23–24: *karmaphalasambandhāvipranāśe ... niveśayati/*

<sup>35</sup> See Āloka 925, 17: *anāśe ca karmanāṃ ... niveśanam/*

<sup>36</sup> See Āloka 925: *tathāgatyaṃ bhūmau nirvāṇe niveśayati/*

<sup>37</sup> For a discussion on the tendency in Mahāyāna Buddhism to elevate the bodhisattva to the level of a saint equal to that of the śrāvaka despite the mundane nature of the Bodhisattva-path, see Yoke Meei Choong, “To Realize or Not to Realize the Supreme Truth: A Change of the Conception of Realization,” 228–231.

## 7. Eradication of Impregnation (*vāsanā*) at Perfection

The *Prajñāpāramitā* contains, besides traditional terms for a liberated saint used in a new way, terms that occur without a new, given sense. The long *Prajñāpāramitā* versions, for example, contain a seemingly contradictory statement: He abandons all sequences/connections of defiling impregnations (*sarvavāsanānusamdhim prajahāti*).” In traditional Buddhism, defiling impregnations are equivalent to defilements or intoxications (*āsrava*). The discontinuance of defiling impregnation entails the attainment of *nirvāṇa* and the end of cyclic existence. Therefore, if bodhisattvas abandoned the connections of defiling impregnations, they would be free from all defilements and cyclic existence. Nevertheless, according to this passage, the bodhisattva who has severed the sequence of defiling impregnations can still remain in the world to benefit sentient beings. The passage reads as follows:

He, abiding in this perfection of trances, brings forth all doors of concentrations, obtains the fourfold special knowledge and attains the thorough knowledge about [those] born due to ripening [of karma]. By no means is he reborn into the mother’s womb. By no means does he frequent lusts. There is no rebirth, which he does not grasp, but the rebirth is not smeared by faults. What is the reason? Namely, he sees and perceives all phenomena like illusion. Having known all conditioned as illusion he possesses compassion and performs benefit for all sentient beings. But then he does not perceive sentient beings as the verbal convention of “sentient being.” When he does not perceive sentient beings as the verbal convention of “sentient being,” all phenomena are just non-perceptible. He establishes sentient beings by means of conventional speech, but not on the highest truth. Abiding in the perfection of trances he practices in all trances, absorptions, concentrations, and attainments. By no means is he devoid of the perfection of trances, not before he attains the Supreme and Perfect

Awakening. Here, he practicing in the All-knowing brings forth All-knowing. Abiding there he abandons all connections of defiling impregnations.<sup>38</sup> Having abandoned all connections of defiling impregnations, having performed benefit of one's own, he performs benefit of the others. He, who performs benefit of one's self and the others, becomes one worth to be offered by the world consisting of deities, men and asura. Subhūti, in this way the bodhisattva mahāsattva practicing in the perfection fulfills the perfection of trances on the aspect of factors without characteristics.<sup>39</sup>

Here, several points are worth noting: 1. Thorough knowledge about births replaces the realization of *nirvāṇa* as the simple reason for bodhisattvas not entering the mothers' wombs. This point shows that even when bodhisattvas have control over their rebirth, it need not imply that they are free from karma because they gain control not by realization of *nirvāṇa*, but rather through thorough knowledge about the ripening of karma and births; 2. Although bodhisattvas do not enter mothers' wombs, they take rebirths of all forms, and this could mean deliberate rebirth. Clearly, not entering the mother's womb refers only to unintended rebirths, but not all rebirths; 3. Abiding in

<sup>38</sup> In Xuanzang's translations (T220(1).6.948c28, T220(2).7.363a3, T220(3).7.716a11), the modification "permanent" in "permanent ending" (永斷) is just a rendering of *sarva* (all); it is absent in Kumārajīva's version (T223.8.389b13).

<sup>39</sup> See PVS VI-VIII: 26, 17–27, 3: *sa iha dhyānapāramitāyāṃ sthitvā sarvasamādhimukhāny abhikirharati catasraś ca pratisamvidāḥ pratilabhate vipākajānāṅ cābhijñānāṃ lābhī bhavati. sa na jātu mātuḥ kukṣāv upapadyate, najātu kāmān pratiṣevate, na sā kācid upapattir yāṃ na grhṇāti na cotpattir doṣair lipyate. tat kasya hetoh? tathā hi tena māyopamā sarvadharmā dṛṣṭāḥ supratibuddhā bhavanti sa māyopamā sarvasaṃskāragataṃ viditvā mahākaruṇā pratigrhāḥ sarvasattvānāṃ arthaṃ karoti, na ca tatra sattvān sattvaprajñāptim upalabhate, sa sattvān sattvaprajñāptim anupalambhamānaḥ sarva dharmānāṃ anupalambha eva sattvān pratiṣṭhāpayati lokavyavahāram upādāya na ca punaḥ paramārthena. iha dhyānapāramitāyāṃ sthitvā sarvadyānavimokṣasamādhisamāpattiṣu carati na jātu dhyānapāramitāyā virahito bhavati, yāvan nānuttarāṃ samyaksambodhim abhisambhotsyate. sa iha sarvākārajñatāyāṃ caran sarvākārajñatāṃ abhikirharati, yatra sthitvā sarvavāsānānusamādhim prajahāti, sarvavāsānānusamādhim prahāyātmano 'rthaṃ kṛtvā parasyārthaṃ karoti, sa ātmanaḥ parasya cārthaṃ kurvan sadevamānuṣāsuralokasya dakṣiṇīyo bhavāti. evaṃ khalu subhūte bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ prajñāpāramitāyāṃ carann ānimitteṣu dharmeṣu dhyānapāramitāṃ paripūrayati.*

All-knowing, bodhisattvas abandon all connections of defiling impregnations. According to the *Prajñāpāramitā*, this happens to bodhisattvas at the tenth level.<sup>40</sup> This is confirmed by the subsequent point that bodhisattvas bring forth All-knowing, i.e., become a Buddha; and 4. Having abandoned all connections of defiling impregnations, bodhisattvas continue to benefit themselves and sentient beings. This last point implies that bodhisattvas remain in the world even though they are at the perfection level and have abandoned all defiling impregnations. Defiling impregnations being abandoned at the Perfection of Buddhahood aligns with the idea in the short *Prajñāpāramitā* versions where intoxications or defilements are just eradicated on the Perfection of Buddhahood.

Another passage in the long *Prajñāpāramitā* versions cannot so easily be reconciled with the shorter versions' import. This passage again mentions the abandonment of defiling impregnations. In addition, the bodhisattva's abandonment is considered equal to that of the Tathāgata and the śrāvaka. This occurs along with a comparison of three kinds of knowledge: All-modes-of-knowing of the Buddha, Knowledge-of-the-path of the bodhisattva, and the All-knowledge of the śrāvaka (passage A):

Subhūti asked: "Is there any difference in the abandonment of defilements among the three All-knowledges: All-modes-of-knowing [of the Buddha], Knowledge-of-the-path [of the bodhisattva] and the All-knowing [of the śrāvaka]? Is their abandonment with remainder or without remainder?" The Blessed One answered, "Subhūti, there is no difference with regard to the abandonment of defilements. However, the Tathāgata has abandoned all connections of defiling impregnations, but the śrāvaka has not." Subhūti asked, "However, the Blessed One, when All-knowledge [of any of the three] is attained, is it then the

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<sup>40</sup> See PVS I-2: 102, 24–27: *yāvad ... sarvākārajñātajñānaṃ ca sarvavāsanānusamdhikleśaprahāṇaṃ bhavati, ... evaṃ hi bodhisattvo mahāsatvo daśamyāḥ punar bodhisattvabhūmeḥ paraṃ tathāgata eveti vaktavyaḥ*; according to the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, this happens to the bodhisattva on the ninth level. See Jikido Takasaki, *A Study on the Ratnagotravibhāga (Uttaratantra): Being a Treatise on the Tathāgatagarbha Theory of Mahāyāna Buddhism* (ROMA: Is. M. E. O., 1966), 11.

unconditioned, the abandonment without remainder?” The Blessed One said: “Exactly so, Subhūti, exactly so.” Subhūti asked: “Is there difference with regard to the unconditioned [of the three]?” The Blessed One answered: “No, Subhūti, there is no difference with regard to the unconditioned [of the three].” Subhūti asked: “If there is no difference, why is the following taught: ‘This one has abandoned all connections of defiling impregnations that one has not abandoned all connections of defiling impregnations?’” The Blessed One answered: “Subhūti, [the śrāvakas] have not abandoned all connections of defiling impregnations, yet they have abandoned greed, hatred and illusion. But they show [some] bodily and verbal actions, which to the foolish and ordinary people are unwholesome, but to the śrāvakas they are not [really unwholesome actions]. The Tathāgata does not have these [seemingly bad bodily and verbal actions].<sup>41</sup>

From the very outset, this passage is ambiguous as to whether the knowledge of the bodhisattva equals that of the śrāvaka and the Tathāgata with regard to abandonment of defilements and experience of the unconditioned. At the beginning of the comparison, three types of knowledge are mentioned: 1. All-modes-of-knowing of the Buddha, 2. Knowledge-of-the-path of the bodhisattva, and 3. All-knowing of the śrāvaka (including the pratyekabuddha). These three types of knowledge are treated in the comparison. However, in the actual comparison, only the knowledge of the Tathāgata and that of the

<sup>41</sup> See PVS V: 126, 7-24: *subhūtir āha: yāḥ punar imā bhagavan sarvākārajñatā ca mārgajñatā ca sarvajñatā ca, kaccid bhagavann āsāṃ tisṛṇāṃ sarvajñatānāṃ kleśaprahāṇasya nānātvam asti, asya sāvaśeṣaprahāṇam asyānavaśeṣaprahāṇam? bhagavān āha; na subhūte kleśaprahāṇasya nānātvam asti, asti punas tathāgatasya sarvavāsānānusamdhiklēśaprahāṇam na punaḥ śrāvakasya sarvavāsānānusamdhiklēśaprahāṇam. subhūtir āha: kiṃ punar bhagavan sarvajñatāyāṃ anuprāptāyāṃ aśeṣaprahāṇam asaṃskṛtam bhavati? bhagavān āha: evam etat subhūte evam etat. subhūtir āha: kiṃ punar bhagavann asaṃskṛtasya nānātvam upalabhyate? bhagavān āha: na subhūte 'saṃskṛtasya nānātvam upalabhyate. subhūtir āha: yadi nopalabhyate kuta etan nirđiśyate? asya vāsānānusamdhiklēśaprahāṇam, asya na vāsānānusamdhiklēśaprahāṇam iti. bhagavān āha: na subhūte vāsānānusamdhiklēśaprahāṇam, api nu (tu?) teṣaṃ rāgadoṣamoḥaprahāṇam asti, kāyavāgvikārās tu pravartante, te tu bālapratgjanānāṃ anarthāya pravartante, na tu śrāvakāṇaṃ, te tathāgatasya na santi. This passage is absent from all the short versions of the Prajñāpāramitā.*

śrāvaka (including the pratyekabuddha) are mentioned. There are two possibilities for omitting the knowledge of the bodhisattva. 1. The knowledge of the bodhisattva is implicitly included in the comparison because it could be taken as equal to and represented by the knowledge of the śrāvaka and that of the Tathāgata before and after perfection, respectively. 2. The knowledge of the bodhisattva is not included in the comparison because the mention of it at the beginning hints at its inclusion only at the perfection level, that is, the attainment of the All-modes-of-knowing of the Tathāgata. Whether or not the comparison includes knowledge of the bodhisattva is important because this determines whether the bodhisattva abandons defilements and experiences the unconditioned just as the liberated saints.

Three vehicles are clearly involved in the comparison. As mentioned, the three types of knowledge of the śrāvaka, the bodhisattva, and the Tathāgata are noted at the beginning of passage A. The *Upadeśa* clearly states the comparison of the abandonment and the experience of the unconditioned as among the three kinds of knowledge.<sup>42</sup> However, according to this passage, the difference lies solely between All-modes-of-knowing of the Buddha and All-knowing of the śrāvaka (including the pratyekabuddha). The Buddha has abandoned defiling impregnations, but the śrāvaka (including the pratyekabuddha) has not. However, these impregnations are not said to be defilements, and they do not act as hindrances to experiencing the unconditioned. As far as the abandonment of defilements and the experience of the unconditioned are concerned, they are the same for the three. The problem lies with this “three”: if the “three” here refers to three types of knowledge mentioned at the beginning, that is, the knowledge of the Tathāgata, the bodhisattva, and the śrāvaka (including the pratyekabuddha), then the bodhisattva experiences the unconditioned and abandons defilements as do the śrāvaka. This passage implies that

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<sup>42</sup> The wording cited in the *Upadeśa* is different from the text; see T25.1509.649c4: 「世尊！三種斷，是有為、是無為？」佛答：「皆是無為。」 “Subhūti asked: ‘Blessed One, are the three types of abandonment conditioned? Or are they unconditioned?’ The Buddha replied: ‘They are all unconditioned.’”

the bodhisattva is free from karma as are the śrāvaka. However, as in the actual comparison, only knowledge of the Tathāgata and that of the śrāvaka (including the pratyekabuddha) are mentioned; “the three” could refer to the knowledge of the Tathāgata, the knowledge of the śrāvaka, and the knowledge of the pratyekabuddha. In this case, the bodhisattva’s knowledge is not considered in the comparison of the abandonment and the experience of the unconditioned. He is included only when his knowledge reaches perfection, that is, the knowledge of the Tathāgata. In other words, if the “three” means the knowledge of the two lower vehicles and that of the Tathāgata, then this speaks for the second possibility, that is, the knowledge of the bodhisattva is excluded in the comparison and is included only at the level of perfection.

Moreover, two statements before passage A seem to support the second possibility: one statement aligns with the general import of the shorter *Prajñāpāramitā* versions where the bodhisattva is told not to realize the unconditioned before the Perfection of Buddhahood (sentence X):

The bodhisattva mahāsattva should not realize the supreme truth before he has fulfilled [his] wish, ripened sentient beings, and purified the Buddha-fields. Because of this reason, it is called “Knowledge-of-the-path of the bodhisattva.”<sup>43</sup>

Here, “supreme truth” is a synonym of *nirvāṇa*. If bodhisattvas refrain from realizing the supreme truth, they have not yet realized the supramundane experience, and therefore cannot be free from karma and cannot experience the unconditioned. Sentence X seems to support the second possibility that the comparison includes the knowledge of the bodhisattva only at the level of perfection.

The other sentence occurs immediately before passage A (sentence Y):

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<sup>43</sup> See PVS V: 125, 8–10: *nāparipūrya prañihānaṃ nāparipācya sattvān nāpariśodhya buddhaḥṣetran tena bodhisattvena mahāsattvena bhūtaśāstṛiḥ sākṣātkartavyā, tena kāraṇenocyate bodhisattvānāṃ mahāsattvānāṃ mārgajñatā.*

Subhūti, this is so [as you have said], “the bodhisattva mahāsattva should realize the supreme truth by abiding nowhere.”<sup>44</sup>

Sentence Y advocates the realization of the supreme truth of the bodhisattva, and occurs after Sentence X, which asserts realization of the supreme truth of the bodhisattva only at perfection. Because sentences X and Y occur in the same section, sentence Y refers logically to the realization of the bodhisattva on the tenth perfection level. Thus, the knowledge of the bodhisattva in the enumeration of the knowledge of the śrāvaka, the bodhisattva, and the Tathāgata that comes after Sentence X and immediately after Sentence Y should refer to the knowledge at perfection. In other words, the evidence supports the second possibility, that is, Passage A excludes the knowledge of the bodhisattva in the comparison and includes it only at the level of perfection. In this way, Passage A aligns with the shorter *Prajñāpāramitā* versions, that is, the abandonment of all defilements and the experience of the unconditioned refers to the bodhisattva exclusively at the tenth level, the attainment of Buddhahood.

All this is not to deny that the inclusion of the knowledge of the bodhisattva in the comparison is superfluous, or more aptly, misleading. As we have seen, Passage A centers around abandonment and the experience of the unconditioned between the śrāvaka, pratyekabuddha, and the Buddha; the bodhisattva is included only at the perfection level, which is none other than the Buddha. Such a misleading inclusion establishes the bodhisattva with the saints of the Arhat and the Tathāgata.

There are good reasons for the *Prajñāpāramitā* to treat the bodhisattva as a saint. After all, the *Prajñāpāramitā* says that the bodhisattva who practices in the knowledge of the Buddha surpasses the śrāvaka, as well as the pratyekabuddha, and comes close to the Supreme and

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<sup>44</sup> See PVS V: 126, 5–6: *evam etat subhūte bodhisattvena mahāsattvena na kvacit sthivā bhūtakotiḥ sākṣātkartavyā.*

Perfect Awakening.<sup>45</sup> The claim that the knowledge of the bodhisattva surpasses the two lower vehicles could be viewed as an attempt to elevate the bodhisattva who follows a mundane path to the rank of the śrāvaka and the pratyekabuddha. It is, thus, necessary to include the bodhisattva among the Buddhist saints.

Anyway, Passage A does not deviate from the import of the *Prajñāpāramitā*'s short versions, in which the bodhisattva avoids unintended rebirths and gains power over future forms of existence in a mundane way. Nevertheless, the tendency in later versions to elevate the bodhisattva to saintly status with saintly insight can easily lead to the misinterpretation of a karma-free bodhisattva.

## 8. Conclusion

In summary, bodhisattvas have to fulfill two requirements to be free to choose future forms of existence for perfecting the Bodhisattva-path and benefitting sentient beings. On one hand, bodhisattvas have to preserve desire or the root of their defilements because even rebirth by contemplation cannot dispense with the power of karma, defilements, and desire. On the other hand, although they have not eradicated the roots of defilement or have abandoned all desires, they suppress them and gain power over them, so that they can control the destiny of their future rebirth. In other words, rebirth by contemplation functions through two mechanisms: 1. desire and 2. power over desire. To gain power over desire, bodhisattvas must collect immense amounts of wholesome roots that allow them to suppress defilements, bad karma, or conditions that lead to unintended rebirths.

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<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Aṣṭa 695, 17–19: *avinivartanīyena hi subhūte bodhisattvena mahāsattvenānantam aparyantaṃ jñānaṃ pratilabdham asaṃhāryaṃ sarvaśrāvakaṃ pratyekabuddhaiḥ!* “Subhūti, because the unlimited knowledge attained by the non-retrogressive bodhisattva mahāsattva is not to be checked by the śrāvaka and the pratyekabuddha,” and 715, 14–16: *evaṃ hi subhūte bodhisattvo mahāsattva ebhir evaṃ rūpāir manasikārair viharann āsannībhavaty anuttarāyāḥ samyaksambodher!* “Subhūti, when the bodhisattva mahāsattva abides with mental applications of this form, he comes close to the Supreme and Perfect Awakening.”

The *Prajñāpāramitā*'s long versions elevate bodhisattvas into a status similar to a liberated saint without deviating from the import of the short versions. One instance is the replacement of wholesome roots with "white uncontaminated factors," despite them still having a karmic nature. Another instance is the reinterpretation of "abandonment" to suit the nature of the Bodhisattva-path. In the Bodhisattva-path, abandonment refers either to abandonment of simply incorrect views or to suppression of defilements without eradication of their roots. In the *Prajñāpāramitā*'s extended portions, passages such as Passage A could, along with the elevation of bodhisattvas to the level of liberated saints, mislead readers incorrectly to assume a karma-free bodhisattva. Without close scrutiny of this passage, an important point could easily be missed: adding the bodhisattvas' knowledge into the comparison is misleading, because it takes place exclusively at the tenth perfection level. Raising the bodhisattva to the sainted level, such as the śrāvaka, the *Prajñāpāramitā*'s long versions unknowingly open opportunities for the misinterpretation of a karma-free bodhisattva.

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# 菩薩如願轉生

宗玉嫻

佛光大學佛教學系助理教授

## 摘要：

根據大乘經典，菩薩進入菩薩初地之後便能如願轉生。一些學者認為「如願轉生」是已斷盡煩惱，不再輪迴的菩薩的轉生。這將意味菩薩斷盡煩惱愛欲後，還能留在世間，並且投入母胎。這樣的說法與早期以及聲聞佛教的說法相牴觸。根據早期以及聲聞佛教，投胎轉生需要依靠愛欲，也即是煩惱。同樣的，《般若波羅蜜經》也有這樣的說法。此經典經常勸勉菩薩修空時，不可斷漏或煩惱的根本，因為菩薩還須留住世間利益眾生以及累積功德，以便圓滿佛道。可見，菩薩如願轉生需要依靠愛欲，《般若波羅蜜經》與早期以及聲聞佛教是一致的。雖然如此，《般若波羅蜜經》以及此經注釋書的作者師子賢都提到如願轉生。因此，此經提供了研究菩薩道上如願轉生的基礎。

本文研究菩薩如願轉生如何在兩者之間運作：一方面，菩薩能在六趣之中自由選擇他投胎的方向，另一方面，菩薩需要保留業才能轉生。另外，《兩萬五千頌般若波羅蜜經》一些比較晚才加入的段落把菩薩提昇到聖者的地位，容易讓人誤會菩薩已斷愛欲。所以本文還探討這些段落，找出這些說法的背後因素。

## 關鍵詞：

菩薩道、聲聞道、如願轉生、愛欲、般若經