

The Compatibility of Person-Centred Therapy and Buddhist Teachings

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Abstract:

Previous scholarly studies have discussed the use of Zen Buddhism within the person-centred approach of Carl Rogers, demonstrating the feasible influence of Buddhism over Rogers's theories. The present research delves into the convergence and divergence of person-centred therapy and the Mahāyāna (one of the current mainstreams of Buddhism) philosophy explicated within the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra (a significant Mahāyāna canon); in particular, the bodhisattva spirit and four immeasurables, including loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity. Findings indicate that Carl Rogers's counselling principles and practices comply with the Buddhist teachings of phenomenal vision, actualising tendency, and innate eagerness to alleviate suffering. This discussion also analyses ideas that have seldom been examined in person-centred principles, such as bodhisattva altruism, mind purity in nature and impurity caused by bewilderment, compassion fatigue, causes of suffering, and counselling techniques. Mahāyāna wisdom potentially offers references to the Rogerian family of theories, which also sheds light on the use of Buddhist-influenced non-medical interventions.

Key words: Bodhisattva, bodhisattva altruism, congruence, empathy, Mahāyāna, unconditional positive regard, Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra

Carl Rogers and Vimalakīrti

Carl Ransom Rogers (1940), was a pioneering humanistic theorist (Freiberg, 1994; Gendlin, 1988; Kirschenbaum, 2004; Rogers, 1994; Wood, 1972; Wood, 1984) and founder of person-centred therapy (Joseph & Murphy, 2012; Narknisorn, 2012), also commonly referred to as client-centred therapy (Rogers, Cornelius-White, & Cornelius-White, 2005). This approach emphasises phenomenological visions (Brazier, 1993a, 1993b; Mearns & McLeod, 1984; Raskin, Rogers, & Witty, 2008; Rogers, 1970, 1985b; Watson, 1984), and relies on the good virtues and positive abilities of human beings.

Rogers's tape-recordings of therapeutic interviews inaugurated improvements in counselling techniques (Rogers, 1942b) and generated significant research data (Gaylin, 1989; Rogers, 1961). This influential approach evolved into a "transpersonal movement" (Wood, 1997, p. 1) and became widely prevalent not only in America, but also in Europe (Thorne, n.d.; Witty, 2007) and Asia (Gendlin, 2002; Quinn, 2013). The approach has found merit not only for psychological healing (Rogers, 1953), education (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Rogers, 1984), nursing (Saiko, 2001), religious and spiritual domains (Fuller, 1984; van Kalmthout, 2007), but also for social concerns such as peace-making (Gendlin, 2002).

Since Rogers enjoyed studying Chinese thought, including Taoism (Miller, 1996) and Buddhism (Harman, 1997), and especially for Zen Buddhism (Purton, 2004; Rogers, 1961, 1980a, 1980b; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Wood, 1997), it is not surprising that Eastern religious philosophy (van Kalmthout, 1995) and Buddhist teachings can be traced through his theories (Tophoff, 2006; Wang, 2005).

A person-centred psychotherapy framework implies the presence of the "three necessary conditions [of congruence, positive regard, and empathic understanding] to facilitate self-actualisation" (Wickramasekera II, 2004, p. 486). These three conditions are akin to a good companion who has become enlightened and is congruent with her/his feelings, perception of loving-kindness, and the unconditional acceptance of sentient beings with

empathy for their sorrow. This idea is supported by secondary sources from Trungpa Rinpoche's works in light of the Vajrayāna (Tantric Buddhism) perspective (Wickramasekera II, 2004).

Jōdo Shinshū (True Pure Land School), which is also known as Shin Buddhism in Japan, is related to a "*dharma*-based person-centred approach" (Saiko, 2001, p. 4) or Shinshu counselling (Saiko, 2001). This is a type of "Buddhist counselling" (Saiko, 2001, p. 5) model combining Buddhist ideas with person-centred therapy. The *dharma*-oriented mode highlights a person-to-person relationship which interacts with enlightenment. In the realm of Amitābha Buddha, clients are able to reflect their inward world while counsellors can effectively perform the three essential attributes noted earlier of congruence, positive regard, and empathic understanding.

Chang and Page (1991) have compared Zen Buddhism with the self-actualisation theories of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, and examined the commonalities and dissimilarities between these two disciplines from the following five aspects. First, a self-actualising person is free with a peaceful mind to exercise autonomy, which is similar to becoming free through awakening in Zen. Second, while these Western psychotherapists put an emphasis on interpersonal relationships, Zen is concerned with a transpersonal state of mind with receptive attitude towards other people. Third, the humanistic theorists recognise the phenomenal world as forming different realities, whilst Zen focuses on the here-and-now in the spatio-temporal wholeness. Fourth, a self-actualising person is resilient to adversities, similar to an enlightened person who is capable of facing reality every moment. Lastly, many humanistic scholars seldom discuss life and death from a religious dimension, but Zen aims to transcend life and death. Although Chang and Page (1991) synthesise Eastern and Western wisdom, doctrinal evidence is unfortunately absent from their discussion.

In contrast, Wang (2004, 2005) examines the similarities of client-centred therapy and Zen thought, based on the "*Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch*", a prominent Zen canon in Chinese Buddhism. She compares the

buddha-nature explained by Zen, to the aforementioned actualising tendency postulated by Carl Rogers, conceiving both to be innate human qualities (Wang, 2004; Wang, 2005). She also investigates the similitude between Zen philosophy and the three essential attributes – congruence, positive regard, and empathic understanding – of a counsellor, alluding that these three necessities can be grounded in detachment from self, a principle concept of Zen (Wang, 2004, 2005).

Through the use of primary data sources from the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra*, henceforth simplified as the *Sūtra*, this discussion endeavours to investigate the confluence of person-centred therapy and Mahāyāna wisdom. The *Sūtra* was available over six hundred years earlier than the “*Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch*”. It not only focuses on the premise of the bodhisattva spirit, equally important, significantly influences Zen philosophy (Sheng-yen, 1988; Suzuki, 1938/1981; Wu, 2000; Xing, 2006). Hence, using it in this discussion provides the more primordial originality to scholars who look into Buddhist-inspired psychotherapeutic interventions such as Wang (2004; 2005).

This study analyses the Mahāyāna (one of current mainstreams of Buddhism) worldviews, life views, and human nature. With the aid of Vimalakīrti teachings, it subsequently expounds on the characteristics of the bodhisattva and the bodhisattva path. These can be communicative in counselling theories in order to alleviate clients’ distress. This discussion also investigates the differences between Mahāyāna principles and person-centred theory, including bodhisattva altruism, the relationship between purity and impurity, compassion fatigue, causes of suffering, solutions, and facilitation techniques. However, it inclines towards the theoretical exploration, hinting at the added values of Vimalakīrti philosophy to therapeutic models.

Person-Centred Therapy

As the third force in psychology (Milhollan & Forisha, 1972; Prever, 2010), in contrast to psychoanalysis and behaviourism (Nye, 2000), person-centred therapy is a “growth model” (Rogers, 1980a, p. 2153) of an effective change

agent (Rogers, 1954d). It focuses on philosophical, psychological and phenomenological routes to understanding human beings as sentient beings (Bondarenko, 1999; Cooper, 2007). Since late 1940s (Witty, n.d.), person-centred therapy has been rapidly increasing its importance in the therapeutic field (Kirschenbaum, 2004), and the cultivation of human science in psychology (Milhollan & Forisha, 1972). It also contributes to the development of the non-authoritative tradition (Warner, 2000; Witty, 2007) and utilisation in an eclectic context (Bohart, 2012; Sonne & Goldman, 1957), such as person-centred gestalt (O'Leary & Page, 1990). Person-centred therapy aims at exploring and discovering creative ways of life and adjustment (Bohart, 2007), benefiting from self-enhancement (Rogers, 1967a) and self-integration (Brodley, 1998; Rogers, 1947). Its tectonic setting based in dignity, freedom, and self-determination (Brodley, 1999; Rogers, 1954b, 1974) differentiates it from many other psychotherapeutic interventions. Non-directive practices in person-centred therapy (Kirschenbaum, 2004), which were developed from Rogers's practical and clinical experience (Rogers, 1946), have been applied to therapeutic purposes, such as depression and anxiety (Mosher, Goldsmith, & Stiles, 2008; Tursi & McCulloch, 2004), post-traumatic stress disorder (Rose, 2010), schizophrenia (van Blarikom, 2006), family therapy (Ellinwood, 1989; Gaylin, 1993; O'Leary, 1989, 2008), and work stress.

The Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra

The *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* is a monumental Mahāyāna canon (Watson, 1997), written in the first and second century A.D. (Lin, 1997) in India. It has strongly affected the development of other schools of Buddhism, including Zen (Wu, 2001), Huayan (Ng, 1995), Pure Land (Xie & Pan, 2011), Tiantai (You, 1999), and Vajrayāna (Tantric Buddhism) (Tam, 1995). From among its three available Chinese renditions, this discussion has employed Kumārajīva's translation because of its readability and popularity (Lai & Gao, 2010; Tu, 2005). Also, the English versions of McRae (2004) and Watson (1997) are adopted here since they are based on Kumārajīva's rendition.

The *Sūtra* explicates the attributes of a bodhisattva, as one who strives for

the enlightenment of sentient beings, similar to what can be understood as a therapeutic task of a counsellor. Concurrently, the *Sūtra* elaborates on how to practise the bodhisattva path, which is initiated by an enlightened mind and the four immeasurables (loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity). Vimalakīrti, the protagonist of the *Sūtra*, demonstrates the practice of a bodhisattva, realising the bodhisattva spirit and bodhisattva altruism.

Compatibility of Rogerian Theories and Vimalakīrti Teachings

The philosophical support for counselling theories is associated with worldviews, life views, and human nature. These views directly impose their dominance on the assumptions, beliefs, values, and practices of a specific counselling model. The following discussion explores the compatibility of person-centred therapy and the Mahāyāna spirit elaborated upon in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* from the following aspects: phenomenal realities, inward freedom, relieving distress, and counselling principles (including the therapeutic relationship), and the three imperative requisites of person-centred counsellors (congruence, positive regard and empathic understanding).

Phenomenal Realities

Rogers agreed that changes in life are continuously occurring (Milhollan & Forisha, 1972), but do not happen suddenly (Rogers, 1980b), thus forming “unreal” (Geiser, 1999, p. 2) realities. A radical transformation happens not because it comes about abruptly, but because many adequate factors simultaneously come to pass at that time. His idea echoes the law of dependent origination, the fundamental Buddhist philosophy. The law explains the impermanent (Conze, 1953; Hsu, 2012) and delusive nature of beings¹. First, “all phenomena are no more than phantom forms”². Secondly, the

¹ “Form is emptiness – it is not that form extinguishes emptiness but that the nature of form is of itself empty.” (McRae, 2004, p. 145)「色即是空，非色滅空，色性自空。」《入不二法門品第九》T14, no. 0475, p. 0551a19

² Watson (1997, p. 40) 「諸法如幻相。」《弟子品第三》T01, no. 475, p. 0540a28
International Journal of Integrative Psychotherapy, Vol. 9, 2018

“groundless”³ characteristics of substances in the empirical world are interdependent⁴, ever-changing⁵, temporal⁶, phenomenal⁷, and non-autonomous⁸. A negative mentality towards impermanence produces suffering (Olendzki, 2012) because transience results in powerlessness. Such powerlessness undermines freedom of will and the search for a meaningful life (Frankl, 1970).

The principle of interdependence delineates that everything is relational (Kwee, 2013). The *Sūtra* exemplifies that a body is “a mere coming together of components, realms, and sense-fields”⁹. Nothing exists on its own (Byrne, 2006; Cheng, 2011; Magid, 2002); in contrast, everything is a result of a variety of components. Hence, there are risks and opportunities. For instance, luck is introduced through an assembly of proper causes, while misfortune is due to a bulk of inimical elements. Therefore, positive and negative are constantly changing.

Due to the intrinsic nature of change¹⁰, the concept of incessant change implies transience without imprint¹¹. Nevertheless, change is so normal (Conze, 1953) that “life, at its best, is a flowing, changing process in which nothing is fixed” (Rogers, 1961, p. 27). Rogers recognised that all things “have no fixed

³ Watson (1997, p. 86)「無住為本。」《觀眾生品第七》T01, no. 475, p. 057c20

⁴ “This body is like an echo, dependent on causes and conditions.” (McRae, 2004, p. 83) 「是身如響，屬諸因緣。」《方便品第二》T14, no. 0475, p. 0539b14

⁵ “All things are impermanent in nature.” (Watson, 1997, p. 31) 「知有為法皆悉無常。」《佛國品第一》T14, no. 0475, p. 0538c30

⁶ “This body is like lightning, unstable from one moment to another.” (McRae, 2004, p. 83) 「是身如電，念念不住。」《方便品第二》T14, no. 0475, p. 0539b14

⁷ “This body is like bubbles that do not last very long.” (McRae, 2004, p. 83) 「是身如泡，不得久立。」《方便品第二》T14, no. 0475, p. 0539b12

⁸ “This body is without master, like the earth.” (McRae, 2004, p. 83) 「是身無主，為如地。」《方便品第二》T14, no. 0475, p. 0539b14

⁹ Watson (1997, p. 34)「陰界諸入所共合成。」《方便品第二》T01, no. 475, p. 0 539b17

¹⁰ “That which is without self-nature.” (McRae, 2004, p. 88) 「無自性。」《弟子品第三》T14, no. 0475, p. 0540a28

¹¹ “This body is like a drifting cloud, changing and vanishing in an instant.” (Watson, 1997, p. 35) 「是身如浮雲，須與變滅。」《方便品第二》T01, no. 475, p. 0 539b14

form”¹², just like “this body is impermanent, without durability”¹³. Therefore, there are many different realities (Rogers, 1973, 1980b), implying contextual and phenomenal encounters. Life itself requires the experience of changes (Cooper, 2007). Tackling changes often requires an acceptance of challenges with a positive attitude. Going through hardships is a transcendent process through which sufferers can learn how to overcome nuisances. As many have noted, difficulties and distress may eventually lead to a meaningful life (Johnston, 2007; Kornfield, 2001). As a metaphor from the *Sūtra* says, adversity looks like diving to gain treasures¹⁴. Therefore, tribulations help with constructive personal development¹⁵, analogous to the simile that a charm lotus grows from grimy marshes¹⁶.

Of equal significance, the constancy and possibility of changing also offers hope, creativity, innovation, and opportunities (Bien, 2006; Cheng, 2015d; Lin, 1998), wherein the good is never good and the bad will never be bad. It reminds sentient beings to treasure what they have. It teaches how to face positive and negative circumstances with a peaceful mind, valuing the inner worth (Dalai & Culter, 1999) that is engendered from Mahāyāna wisdom in order to attain the Buddha Land¹⁷.

With reference to Mahāyāna wisdom, non-autonomy alerts human beings to their limitations, and causes them to be humble. Sentient beings likely

¹² Watson (1997, p. 91)「無有定相。」《觀眾生品第七》T01, no. 475, p. 0548b26

¹³ Watson (1997, p. 34)「是身無常。」《方便品第二》T01, no. 475, p. 0539b11

¹⁴ “It is like not being able to attain the priceless jewel-pearl without entering the ocean. Therefore, if one does not enter the great sea of the afflictions, one will not be able to attain the jewel of omniscience” (McRae, 2004, p. 135) 「譬如不下巨海，不能得無價寶珠。如是不入煩惱大海，則不能得一切智寶。」《佛道品第八》T14, no. 0475, p. 0549b07-08

¹⁵ “All the afflictions constitute this (Buddha) seed.” (McRae, 2004, p. 134) 「一切煩惱，皆是佛種。」《佛道品第八》T14, no. 0475, p. 0549a30

¹⁶ “It is just as lotus flowers do not grow on dry land on the high plateau – these flowers grow in the muddy filth of the lowly marshes.” (McRae, 2004, p. 135) 「譬如高原陸地，不生蓮華，卑濕淤泥乃生此華。」《佛道品第八》T14, no. 0475, p. 0549b04-05

¹⁷ “Because his wisdom is pure, his mind is pure. And because his mind is pure, all the blessings he enjoys will be pure.” (Watson, 1997, p. 29) 「隨智慧淨，則其心淨；隨其心淨，則一切功德淨。」《佛國品第一》T14, no. 0475, p. 0538b28

over-estimate “I” and magnify the ego (Van Dusen, 1967). Self-centredness causes trouble and frustration owing to their “error and confusion”¹⁸ and “compounded of false and empty visions”¹⁹. These false perceptions produce exaggerated desire²⁰, vexations, and distress²¹, rooted in self-attachment²² and bound up with misery.

Inherent Demand to Be One’s Self

Person-centred counsellors have an optimistic view towards human beings. They believe that positive changes come about imperceptibly when one can thoroughly accept oneself for what s/he is (Rogers, 1961). This self-acceptance results from an “inner revolution” (Thurman, 1998, p. v). As one of the top ten influential counsellors of the 20th century (Psychotherapy Networker, 2007), Rogers avowed that the basic human nature is “positive, forward-moving, constructive, realistic, [and] trustworthy” (Rogers, 1957b, p. 200). In particular, his focus centred on the inner feelings of a person (Gendlin, 1988; Rogers, 1985a) that reflected the urge of inward freedom.

The search for the “freedom to be one’s self” (Rogers, 1967d, p. 47) is one of the rudimentary assertions in person-centred therapy. This idea is associated with the inherent desire to actualise (Rogers, 1959, 1986; Rogers & Russell, 2002), an inborn eagerness (Rogers, 1959) for the “organismic growth process” (Bozarth, 1998, p. 6). Individuals passionately move towards constructive personal growth and the development of autonomy, whether in favourable or unfavourable environments, through innate energy and a demand for self-actualisation (Raskin et al., 2008; Rogers, 1951, 1964a, 1980b). Although the construct of actualisation is also theorised by other

¹⁸ Watson (1997, p. 35)「從顛倒起。」《方便品第二》T01, no. 475, p. 0539b13

¹⁹ Watson (1997, p. 35)「為虛妄見。」《方便品第二》T01, no. 475, p. 0539b13

²⁰ “Desire and greed are the root.” (Watson, 1997, p. 86) 「欲貪為本。」《觀眾生品第七》T14, no. 0475, p. 0547c17

²¹ “This body is a disaster, vexed by a hundred and one illnesses.” (Watson, 1997, p. 83) 「是身為災，百一病惱。」《方便品第二》T01, no. 475, p. 0539b16-17

²² “Furthermore, the arising of this illness is entirely due to attachment to self.” (McRae, 2004, p. 110) 「又此病起，皆由著我。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0544c28

psychologists, such as Erich Fromm (Brennen, 2006) and Abraham Maslow (Daniels, 1982), Rogerians are able to put it into practice (Bozarth & Brodley, 1991).

Mahāyāna Buddhists recognise and support the idea that sentient beings are pure in essence²³. The distinction between purity and impurity identifies that:

“to have false concepts is defilement; to be without false concepts is purity. Confusion is defilement and the absence of confusion is purity. To grasp the self is defilement, and not to grasp the self is purity”²⁴ (McRae, 2004, p. 93).

This belief recognises that a person’s unadulterated nature is contaminated by the grasp of self. Hence, sentient beings are equal in nature²⁵, from which nature they attain an inborn need to accomplish their true self. Such demand drives sentient beings to be independent, productive, mature, and socially connected (Rogers, 1946), resulting in self-actualisation. Consequently, individuals accept themselves, not only by being able to make responsible choices but also by trusting their own experience.

Self-acceptance

The freedom to be oneself results from self-acceptance through inner communication (Rogers, 1942a, 1954c, 1967d), awareness (Rogers, 1967d, 1978) and a touch of “realness” (Rogers, 1980b, p. 15). This is what it means to be “congruent and genuine” (Rogers, 1980b, p. 19). Self-awareness is essential to detecting feelings and realising the freedom of informed choice (Rogers, 1980b). It then cultivates self-sensitivity to physiological and

²³ “The characteristics of the minds of all sentient beings are likewise, in being without defilement.” (McRae, 2004, p. 93) 「一切眾生心相無垢。」《弟子品第三》T14, no. 0475, p. 0541b14-15

²⁴ 「妄想是垢，無妄想是淨；顛倒是垢，無顛倒是淨；取我是垢，不取我是淨。」《弟子品第三》T14, no. 0475, p. 0541b15-16

²⁵ “He is equivalent to the various types of wisdom and identical to sentient beings. He is without discrimination with regard to the dharmas.” (McRae, 2004, p. 166) 「等諸智，同眾生，於諸法無分別。」《見阿闍佛品第十二》T14, no. 0475, p. 0554c36-37

emotional changes. By comparison, Mahāyāna devotees discern awareness or awakening as relieving distress (Fu, 1986) by:

“eradicating all the afflictions, all the hindrances, and all the non-good dharmas, allowing one to generate all good *karma*. By attaining omniscience and all the good dharmas, one universally generates the dharmas that assist one’s buddhahood”²⁶ (McRae, 2004, p. 105).

Realness is distinct from ego. “Realness” allows one to touch the “innerness” (Stevens, 1967b, p. 37), or to be “centering” (Dole, 1996, p. 34) in acknowledging feelings and experience. It allows people to transparently express the inner self as a “genuine, spontaneous, and alive” (Rogers, 1980b, p. 16) being. Hence, being one’s true self is positively valued (Rogers, 1967g) because this “built-in pathfinder” (Stevens, 1967b, p. 29) accepts disparities of others, tolerates defects in a “non-hurtful, loving, responsive, [and] constructive” (Stevens, 1967b, p. 37) manner, and finally achieves inward contentment (Dalai & Culter, 1999), feeling love, compassion, and forgiveness (Cook, Sandage, Hill, & Strawn, 2010). As a result, a congruent person can compassionately feel suffering of other people (Dalai & Culter, 1999). Conversely, ego creates a fence to keep out external contact (Van Dusen, 1967) being situated in a closed system and becoming untouchable. It is negatively valued (Rogers, 1967g). Person-centred therapy facilitates clients’ ability to shift from being ego-focused to being realness-oriented, resulting in “not [being] afflicted by the defilements”²⁷ (McRae, 2004, p. 129) and attaining the joy of *dharma*²⁸.

²⁶「斷一切煩惱、一切障礙、一切不善法，起一切善業；以得一切智慧、一切善法，起於一切助佛道法。」《菩薩品第四》T14, no. 0475, p. 0543c12-13

²⁷「不為諸垢之所惱也。」《觀眾生品第七》T14, no. 0475, p. 0548a27

²⁸ “... Joy is to maintain one’s intention for enlightenment in all situations. Joy is to benefit sentient beings. ... Joy is to transcend the defilements in wisdom. Joy is the vigorous *bodhicitta*. ... Joy is the eradication of the afflictions. Joy is purification of the countries of the buddhas. ... Joy is to be happy and pure in mind. Joy is to cultivate the immeasurable factors of enlightenment.” (McRae, 2004, p. 102) 「...樂隨護道意，樂饒益眾生，...樂離垢明慧；樂廣菩提心，...樂斷諸煩惱，樂淨佛國土，...樂心喜清淨，樂修無量道品之法。」《菩薩品第四》T14, no. *International Journal of Integrative Psychotherapy, Vol. 9, 2018* 11

Making responsible choices

Remarkably, the freedom to be oneself is to unfasten the external and internal forces so that a person can make conscious, informed and responsible choices (Narknisorn, 2012; Pattern, 1990; Rogers, 1946, 1978, 1981/2007). These actions are based on free will, and demonstrate a way of living and attitude towards the world (Rogers, 1967d). They reflect the conversion of afflictions into capabilities (Dalai & Culter, 1999), and create “wholeness, integration, [and] a unified life” (Rogers, 1980b, p. 128). *Responsible choice* refers to the acceptance of the consequences (Rogers, 1974; Rogers & Wallen, 1946). That is, the realisation of freedom through self-determination and acceptance of responsibilities (Frankl, 1962). The *Sūtra* repeatedly delineates karmic effects²⁹, indicating the responsibilities of self-decision and behaviour. For instance, defilement continuously carries forward the wrongdoings and biases of previous lives³⁰. Thus, once individuals can become aware of their conduct and behaviour, it is possible they can prevent mistakes and repetition of *karma*.

Trust in one's experiencing

Freedom from self also implies a shift from distrust to trust in one's own self (Rogers, 1967d). The process requires to reduce levels of incongruence, manifest the pure nature (Dalai, 1999), and optimise inborn resources (Gethin, 1998). Resulting in a meaningful life can be complicated (Park, 2005), but is not impossible. Through this path, an individual is able to transform (Paloutzian, 2005) into embodying “inner, subjective, existential freedom” (Rogers, 1967d, p. 52) and living as a person “in real contact, in real reciprocity of the world” (Anderson & Cissna, 1997, p. 103).

The *Sūtra* ascertains the pure nature of sentient beings as the essence of

0475, p. 0543a27-31

²⁹ “One should recognise the innumerable kalpas of suffering of one's past lives.” (McRae, 2004, p. 110) 「當識宿世無數劫苦。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0544c19

³⁰ “This present illness of mine comes entirely from the false concepts, confusions, and afflictions of previous lives.” (McRae, 2004, p. 110) 「今我此病，皆從前世妄想顛倒諸煩惱生。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0544c27

becoming a buddha, as delineated previously, implying the positive, inherent quality of human beings. However, it also addresses the fact that defilement produces barriers to achieving enlightenment. The story of the “*Dharma of Inexhaustible Lamps*” eulogises Māra’s heavenly maidens who awaken from pleasure in their desires to the joy of *dharma*, and then go back to the Māra (an evil) world to disseminate *dharma*. This illustrates their good nature, and because of this, they can re-activate an enlightened mind and help others to regain it. The *Sūtra* affirms the significance of self-trust and self-confidence.

Freedom from Suffering

Freedom, as referred to in the Rogerian perspective, is “the widest scope of choice and openness to experience” (Shlien, 1967, p. 155) a happy and healthy life, involving physical and mental health. Pursuance of happiness is the very desire of human beings (Bischof, 1970; Dalai & Culter, 1999), and is critical to mental well-being. This exhibits the dynamics among freedom, happiness and health. Even though freedom includes choices of the free will, it contains internal and external constraints (Berlin, 1969).

In Buddhism, freedom is to alleviate suffering (Rahula, 2001) in the school of early Buddhism and self-restrictions (Dalai & Culter, 1999) in the school of Mahāyāna. Mahāyāna particularly points out the self-created afflictions caused by dualism, which is an either/or option. The dualistic mode of thinking takes only one side, such as life or death, good or bad, long or short, black or white. This inflexibility produces anxiety. On the contrary, non-dualism in practice takes “neither this, nor that” (Kwee, 2010b, p. 5), which goes beyond absolutism and relativism (Kwee, 2012c). This approach is non-discriminate dissolution of the boundary between “I” and “others” (Gethin, 1998). Through it, an individual experiences not only a “unity of self and world” (Thurman, 1998, p. 256) but also forming a “relational self” (Kwee, 2013, p. 359) with others. This experience comes from loving-kindness and compassion towards oneself and others, which eliminate hindrances³¹, such as anger and hostility (Watson,

³¹ “Joy is for one’s mind to be without hindrance.” (McRae, 2004, p. 102) 「心無恚礙。」《菩薩品第四》T14, no. 0475, p. 0543a30

1997).

The *Sūtra* explains that dichotomy induces obstructions in seeing the phenomenal world, touching the true self, and breaking away from distress. The extremities engender “false concepts, [and] confusion”³² (McRae, 2004, p. 110) that result in calamity³³. Hence, the *Sūtra* annotates the theory of non-duality specifically in order to free sentient beings from ill perceptions and erroneous conceptions. For instance, it elucidates:

“What is good and what is not good constitute a duality. If one does not generate the good and what is not good, entering into and penetrating the limit of the non-characteristics, this is to enter the *Dharma* gate of non-duality”³⁴ (McRae, 2004, p. 144).

What the *Sūtra* clarifies is that “good” or “not good” is phenomenal and contextual, depending on conditions and contexts. A particular dose of medicine is good for a specific patient, but not necessarily for another patient. A thief can commit crime and simultaneously donate blood for charity. Non-dualism negates absolutism and provides broader views for sufferers to find a way out.

Counselling Principles

Person-centred therapy, an “applied phenomenology” (Cooper, 2007, p. 68), aims to facilitate clients’ experience their inner worlds and attain their authentic self (Rogers, 1963). As explained earlier, human beings contain internal forces and capacities which compel the search for the best way of life, leading to possibilities for self-transcendence through an “organismic valuing process” (Raskin et al., 2008, p. 156; Rogers, 1967g, p. 15). The school of Mahāyāna wisdom in Mahāyāna affirms that sentient beings, supported by

³² 「妄想顛。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0544c27

³³ “Such a confused [view] is a great calamity.” (McRae, 2004, p. 111) 「顛倒者是即大患。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0544c30-31

³⁴ 「善、不善為二。若不起善、不善，入無相際而通達者，是為入不二法門。」《入不二法門品第九》T14, no. 0475, p. 0550c22

their intrinsic *buddha*-nature, are able to become bodhisattvas, dedicated to enlightening themselves and others (Conze, 1953; Feusi, 2003; Skorupski, 1999; Thurman, 1998). The role of a counsellor and a bodhisattva is thus comparable.

Mission

The term “bodhisattva” in Sanskrit combines the words “*bodhi*” and “*sattva*”. “Bodhi” refers to “enlightenment” (Dayal, 1932/1999, p. 4; Yin-Shun, 1980/1994, p. 170) or “awakened mind” (Glaser, 2005, p. 19; Yin-Shun, 1949/2003, p. 201). “Sattva” means “sentient beings” (Yao, 2006, p. 191). Thus, a bodhisattva is an “enlightenment-being” (Virtbauer, 2010, p. 96; Yin-Shun, 1980/1994, p. 170), whose mission connects passionately to freeing sentient beings from vexations³⁵, symbolising “the physician king, healing the host of illness[es]”³⁶ (McRae, 2004, p. 110). In the broad sense, anyone who makes this vow is a bodhisattva (Hsing-Yun, 1999).

The hallmarks of a bodhisattva are three-fold: the intention of self-giving, eradication of tribulations, and infinite social care. First, a bodhisattva “gives all [s/]he possesses as a gift to others”³⁷ (Watson, 1997, p. 59), which is not a prerequisite to being a counsellor. However, this implies that a counsellor should be dedicated to serving clients by the way of the three essential attributes of empathic understanding, congruence, and unconditional positive regard). Secondly, the mission of a bodhisattva targets reductions in sentient beings’ suffering³⁸, which aligns with the major therapeutic objective of counselling. Lastly, a bodhisattva is willing to relinquish the attainment of perfect stillness, the ultimate goal of Buddhists, in order to, instead, accompany sentient beings for their well-being³⁹. Although it is not required

³⁵ “In releasing the bonds of sentient beings one generates the stages of cultivation.” (McRae, 2004, p. 105) 「解眾生縛。」《菩薩品第四》T14, no. 0475, p. 0543c11

³⁶ 「當作醫王，療治眾病。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0544c20

³⁷ 「一切所有施於彼者，是為菩薩。」《菩薩品第四》T14, no. 0475, p. 0543b13

³⁸ “This is the term for the bodhisattva who has simultaneously eliminated old age, illness, and death.” (McRae, 2004, p. 111) 「如是兼除老病死者，菩薩之謂也。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a18-19

³⁹ “If you are bodhisattvas, you should neither exhaust the conditioned nor abide in the *International Journal of Integrative Psychotherapy*, Vol. 9, 2018 15

that a counsellor accesses such a spiritual realm, the implication of this bodhisattva morality hints at heartily service to clients offered by a counsellor.

Rogerians recognise and respect clients' "phenomenological internal frame of reference" (Rogers, 1951, p. 31; 1964b, p. 129), their subjective feelings, efforts towards the creation of a meaningful life, and their avoidance of control by external forces. Counsellors help clients re-construct their own "wholeness" (Brodley, 1999, p. 110). In practice, they facilitate the discovery of the "fully functioning person" (Rogers, 1961, p. 193; 1963, p. 26; Rogers, 1984, p. 321; Seeman, 1984, p. 131) to carry on a good life (Bozarth, 1998), explicated by Bonhart as follows:

"To be the self that one is also means to be an organism that is in a constant process of growing and learning. To be the self that one is, then, is to be in a process, to be in touch with all aspects of oneself, and to have a trusting relationship towards oneself." (2007, p. 51).

The facilitation of constructive self-reflection (Lietaer, 1993) and "changes in the structure of the perceived self" (Rogers, 1954a, p. 346) rely heavily on therapeutic relationships and three necessary conditions delineated by Rogers (1981/2007) that of congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding, which all combine to unfold as a sacred process (Leijssen, 2008).

Therapeutic relationship

A healthy therapeutic relationship (Mearns, Thorne, & Mcleod, 2013) is a decisive factor in person-centred approaches (Raskin et al., 2008; Thorne, 2002). As such, this relationship resigns the directive power of the counsellor but values the significance of the client (Rogers, 1949). The high demand for meaningful involvement and engagement from both parties (Laungani, 1997; van Kalmthout, 2007) formulates a therapeutic alliance (Kirschenbaum, 2004) through their real and fluid psychological contacts (Rogers, 1957a, 1967e).

unconditioned." (McRae, 2004, p. 161) 「如菩薩者，不盡有為，不住無為。」《菩薩行品第十一》T14, no. 0475, p. 0554b03-04

This “authentic encounter” (Cornelius-White, 2007a, p. 177) requires participants to be “sensitive, responsive, creative, and adaptive” (Rogers, 1957b, p. 201). The outcome is to cater to the iterative exchange of feelings and ideas from both parties.

This mutuality and exchange (Cissna & Anderson, 1994; Rogers, 1950) results in a holistic “therapeutic presence” (Geller, 2013, p. 209; Geller & Greenberg, 2002, p. 83) and an I-thou relation⁴⁰ (Rogers, 1955, 1961), which breaks down defensive boundaries. A bodhisattva not only builds the I-thou relationship, but more crucially, transcends the individuality of “I” and “others”⁴¹. Based on the context that the commonalities of sentient beings are the *buddha*-nature and egalitarianism, the transcendence becomes a unity. This unity fosters a holistic alliance that can advance unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding. It realises the four immeasurables, including loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity. As a result, there is no identification of counsellor versus client. Instead, there is revealed a relationship between one bodhisattva and another. The interaction highlights that the counsellor is the bodhisattva to the client, and vice versa. By acknowledging the belief that the client is the expert of her/his own life, values, yearning, feeling, and expectations, a counsellor is a not-knowing facilitator (Rogers, 1955). The facilitator accesses the client “moment-to-moment” (Rice, 1984, p. 184; Rogers, 1980a, p. 2153) and helps reflect feelings (Gazzola & Stalikas, 1997), attain self-acceptance (Rogers, 1947, 1969), enrich self-awareness and self-understanding (Narknisorn, 2012), invoke self-insight (Rogers, Kell, & McNeil, 1948), use internal energy (Rogers, 1947), and achieve self-determination (Narknisorn, 2012).

Congruence

Rogerians assert “the person as a person” (Rogers, 1969, p. 30) in the presence of the here-and-now (MacDougall, 2002; O’Hara, 1984; Rogers,

⁴⁰ The construct “I-thou relation” was invented by Buber (1923/1937, p. ix).

⁴¹ “One may do away with the thought of an I or ego, and the thought of other living beings.” (Watson, 1997, p. 68) 「即除我想及眾生想。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0544c29

1958, 1969). They also recognise their feelings related to “here I am, as I am” (Rogers, 1977, p. 10); namely, *congruence* (Rogers, 1967c, 1980b; Warner, 2007), or *genuineness* (Cornelius-White, 2007a; Rogers, 1977), which is the most important attribute in counselling (Rogers, 1967f, 1980a). During the process of actualisation (Cornelius-White, 2007a), clients are encouraged to freely, deeply and accurately represent their actual experience and feelings (Rogers, 1957a) without inhibitions. Through this process, they finally accomplish the “internal, relational and ecological integration” (Cornelius-White, 2007a, p. 168) of a mature person (Rogers, 1959).

Similarly, a counsellor also needs to be congruent (Quinn, 2008; Rogers, 1980a) and within her/his self (Bondarenko, 1999) in order to transparently convey her/his subjective feeling (Bozarth & Shanks, 1989; Cornelius-White, 2007a; Lietaer, 1993; Quinn, 2008, 2011). Within the congruent self-self relationship (Bohart, 2007; Van Belle, 1980), a therapeutic alliance is created that enables individuals to listen to others more openly and less defensively (Rogers, 1959; Watson, 2007). Consequently, clients achieve internal wisdom through which to view the world and themselves differently. Congruence, in both the intra-personal and inter-personal dimensions (Klein, Michels, Kolden, & Chrisolm-Stockard, 2001), is thus indispensable. It integrates empathy and unconditional regard (Cornelius-White, 2007b). It motivates changes and enables people to be satisfied with the changes (Claiborn, Ward, & Strong, 1981).

The Vimalakīrti teachings have detailed the latent qualities of congruence regarding three states of mind: sincerity, the profound mind, and the enlightened mind. Sincerity⁴² empowers a bodhisattva to maintain purity, frankness, acceptance, and honesty⁴³ so that s/he is able to attract sentient

⁴² “Sincerity is the bodhisattva’s pure land – when the bodhisattva attains buddhahood, it is sentient beings who do not flatter [and lie] that come be born in his country.” (McRae, 2004, p. 76) 「直心是菩薩淨土，菩薩成佛時，不諂眾生來生其國。」《佛國品第一》T14, no. 0475, p. 0538a29

⁴³ “Sincerity is the place of enlightenment, because of the absence of falsity.” (McRae, 2004, p. 99) 「直心是道場，無虛假故。」《菩薩品第四》T14, no. 0475, p. 0542c11-12

beings. The profound mind⁴⁴ refers to hearty intentions for the welfare of sentient beings⁴⁵. The enlightened mind⁴⁶, fully termed *anuttarā-samyak-sambodhi*⁴⁷ (the highest wisdom of awakening), means to be awakened to the ultimate truth in the phenomenal reality⁴⁸, in which “*citta*” signifies “heart, soul, [and] mind” (Dayal, 1932/1999, p. 59), or “heartfelt motivation, steadfast resolve, and self-commitment” (Kwee, 2012a, p. 17). This awakened mind arises from the four immeasurables⁴⁹ – loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity – the qualities necessary for a bodhisattva to serve sentient beings. Loving-kindness focuses on wellness (Sealy, 2013), and brings happiness to sentient beings⁵⁰. Compassion focuses on relieving the suffering of sentient beings⁵¹. Empathetic joy focuses on rejoicing in others’ happiness⁵²; and lastly, equanimity on impartiality⁵³. The

⁴⁴ “A profound mind is the bodhisattva’s pure land – when the bodhisattva attains buddhahood, it is sentient beings who are complete in merit that come to be born in his country.” (McRae, 2004, p. 76) 「深心是菩薩淨土，菩薩成佛時，具足功德眾生來生其國。」《佛國品第一》T14, no. 0475, p. 0538a29-30

⁴⁵ “Profound mind is the place of enlightenment, because of the increase in merit.” (McRae, 2004, p. 99) 「深心是道場，增益功德故。」《菩薩品第四》T14, no. 0475, p. 0542c12

⁴⁶ “The mind of *bodhi* (*bodhicitta*, i.e., the intention to achieve perfect enlightenment) is the bodhisattva’s pure land – when the bodhisattva achieves buddhahood sentient beings of the Mahāyāna come to be born in his country.” (McRae, 2004, p. 76) 「菩提心是菩薩淨土，菩薩成佛時，大乘眾生來生其國。」《佛國品第一》T14, no. 0475, p. 0538a30

⁴⁷ “*anuttarā-samyak-sambodhi*” (McRae, 2004, p. 75) 「阿耨多羅三藐三菩提心。」《佛國品第一》T14, no. 0475, p. 0538c29

⁴⁸ “The mind that aspires to *bodhi* is the place of practice, for it is without error or misconception.” (Watson, 1997, p. 55) 「菩提心是道場，無錯謬故。」《菩薩品第四》T14, no. 0475, p. 0542c12

⁴⁹ “A mind devoted to the four immeasurable qualities is the pure land of the bodhisattva. When he attains Buddhahood, beings perfect in the exercise of pity, compassion, joy, and indifference will be born in his country.” (Watson, 1997, p. 27) 「四無量心是菩薩淨土，菩薩成佛時，成就慈悲喜捨眾生來生其國。」《佛國品第一》T14, no. 0475, p. 0538a33-34

⁵⁰ “Sympathy is the place of enlightenment, because of the universal sameness of sentient beings.” (McRae, 2004, p. 100) 「慈是道場，等眾生故。」《菩薩品第四》T14, no. 0475, p. 0542c14

⁵¹ “Compassion is the place of enlightenment, because of the forbearance of suffering.” (McRae, 2004, p. 100) 「悲是道場，忍疲苦故。」《菩薩品第四》T14, no. 0475, p. 0542c14

⁵² Joy is the place of enlightenment, because of taking pleasure in the *dharma*.” (McRae, 2004, p. 100) 「喜是道場，悅樂法故。」《菩薩品第四》T14, no. 0475, p. 0542c14

⁵³ “Equanimity is the place of enlightenment, because of the eradication of repugnance and affection.” (McRae, 2004, p. 100) 「捨是道場，憎愛斷故。」《菩薩品第四》T14, no. 0475, p. 0542c14-15

enlightened mind and the four immeasurables are interactive, in that the former reinforces the latter, and vice versa⁵⁴. They also refer to simply as great loving-kindness and great compassion⁵⁵, which creates the greatest acceptance (Hartman & Zimberoff, 2003). With the support of these qualities, a bodhisattva is able to help sentient beings that are in difficult situations. These inspire a counsellor to know how to develop and maintain congruence in order to extend the sense of humanity (Mearns et al., 2013) with which s/he facilitates congruence in the client as well.

Unconditional positive regard

Unconditional positive regard (Quinn, 2008; Rogers, 1959, 1967c, 1977, 1980a) pertains to the “prizing, valuing, respecting, and/or accepting of the whole person of a client” (Cornelius-White, 2003, p. 7). This “non-possessive warmth” (Lietaer, 1984, p. 42) allows clients to express and accept both their positive and negative emotions (Kirschenbaum, 2004; Rogers, 1947). The purpose of counselling is to facilitate clients to gain self-regard (Bozarth, 2007) from the positive regard received from other people (Tyler, 1999).

Evidence indicates a positive correlation between unconditional positive regard and congruence (Quinn, 2011), in which non-judgement (Brink, 1987; Landreth, 1984; Rogers, 1972) is also a key element of the therapeutic process. Non-judgemental acceptance can be accomplished through “a deeply sensitive non-judgemental understanding” (Rogers, 1980a, p. 2153). Through respect for their individuality (Laungani, 2000), clients may realise their potential (Farber & Lane, 2001). In a similar way, a Mahāyāna bodhisattva retains the quality of equanimity that treats sentient beings equally and indiscriminately. This indiscrimination strengthens mutual trust without

⁵⁴ “Through *bodhi* one cultivates a loving mind, through saving living beings one cultivates a mind of great compassion, through adherence to the correct Law one cultivates a joyful mind, and through one’s grasp of wisdom one exercises an indifferent mind.” (Watson, 1997, p. 60) 「謂以菩提，起於慈心；以救眾生，起大悲心；以持正法，起於喜心；以攝智慧，行於捨心。」《菩薩品第四》T14, no. 0475, p. 0543c05-06

⁵⁵ “the great compassion and great pity of the bodhisattva” (Watson, 1997, p. 89) 「菩薩大慈大悲。」《觀眾生品第七》T14, no. 0475, p. 0548a25

barriers⁵⁶, and realises an unconditional caring for sentient beings (clients). It also offers a foundation on which to practise congruence and empathy (Klein et al., 2001).

Empathy

Differing from sympathy (Bohart, 1988), empathy (Barnard, 1984; Gendlin, 1967; Rogers, 1967c) refers to “full emotional contact with the client” (Boy & Pine, 1982, p. 6). It enables counsellors to listen to and feel clients’ phenomenological internal worlds (Bozarth, 1984; Vanaerschot, 1993) compassionately (Rogers, 1977) and selflessly (Boy & Pine, 1982), particularly when a counsellor has also attained personal growth through such a process of change (Freire & Tambara, 2000; Joseph, 2004). This “giving of self” (Boy & Pine, 1982, p. 7) results in empathic understanding (Quinn, 2008; Rogers, 1980a, 1987; Snyder, 1989) that raises a “deep empathic response” (Vanaerschot, 1993, p. 61) in the present moment (Rogers, 1980a, 1981/2007; Thorne, 2002), and weaves a positive relationship with unconditional regard (Rogers, 1959).

Like an empathic counsellor, the empathy of a bodhisattva is realised through her/his total engagement in experiencing others’ suffering. A bodhisattva feels metaphorically ill because sentient beings are suffering⁵⁷. S/he is willing to fall into the cycle of death and rebirth⁵⁸ and is living with sentient beings. This aspiration originates from great compassion⁵⁹. It evokes a bodhisattva’s enthusiasm to love sentient beings as if beings were her/his

⁵⁶ “In humility and non-interference they are even-minded toward all sentient beings.” (McRae, 2004, p. 155) 「等心眾生，謙下無礙。」《香積佛品第十》T14, no. 0475, p. 0553a30

⁵⁷ “Since all sentient beings are ill, therefore I am ill. If the illness of all sentient beings were extinguished, then my illness would be extinguished.” (McRae, 2004, p. 108) 「以一切眾生病，是故我病；若一切眾生病滅，則我病滅。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0544b20

⁵⁸ “Because the bodhisattva for the sake of living beings enters the realm of birth and death, and because he is in the realm of birth and death he suffers illness.” (Watson, 1997, p. 65) 「菩薩為眾生故入生死，有生死則有病。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0544b21

⁵⁹ “The illness of bodhisattvas arises from great compassion.” (McRae, 2004, p. 108) 「菩薩病者，以大悲起。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0544b23

own children⁶⁰, and makes it possible for bodhisattvas to comfort these ill sentient beings⁶¹.

Divergence in Approaches

Although Rogers (in the 20th century) and Vimalakīrti (about the 1st century) shared significantly similar world views, life views and views of human nature, all applicable to counselling, there are divergences. Differences in thought are apparent regarding bodhisattva altruism, purity and impurity, compassion fatigue, suffering, and counselling techniques.

Bodhisattva Altruism

Person-centred therapy is tied to the theory of the presence of an actualising tendency as a motivational force in personality change (Rogers, 1980a). This tendency develops from a “socio-centric view of the self” (Bohart, 2007, p. 50), which is equivalent to the mission of a bodhisattva. This therapeutic process of “self-discovery, self-esteem, and self-directed learning” (Rogers, 1994, p. iii), in contrast to a pathological model, is an altruistic event from the Rogerian viewpoint (Brazier, 1993b). Its “journey to the centre of self” (Rogers, 1970, p. 21) results in clients becoming their own inner counsellors (Bohart & Tallman, 2012; Kwee, 2012b). That is, the client of the client (Gendlin, 1984). Although Rogers spelled out the helping nature of counselling, he remained primarily concerned with the client and not the counsellor or how the counsellor might be changed or impacted within the therapeutic relationship (Cain, 1989; Roberts, 1985).

When the role of a bodhisattva is similar to that of a counsellor, a client becomes a bodhisattva in order to help her/himself. Moreover, a counsellor always discovers more about her/himself when s/he is providing services to

⁶⁰ “They have affection for sentient beings as if for their own children. When sentient beings are ill the bodhisattvas are ill also and when sentient beings recover from their illness the bodhisattvas recover also.” (McRae, 2004, p. 108) 「菩薩如是，於諸眾生，愛之若子；眾生病則菩薩病，眾生病愈，菩薩亦愈。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0544b22-23

⁶¹ “To use his own illness as a means of sympathising with the illness of others” (Watson, 1997, p. 67) 「以己之疾，愍於彼疾。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0544c19

clients. In this way, clients are bodhisattvas to the counsellor. This interaction goes beyond an I-thou relationship (Anderson & Cissna, 1997), transcending it to a bodhisattva-bodhisattva companionship from the Mahāyāna perspective. It realises the process of co-experiencing and co-reflecting (Schmid, 2004), which forms “bodhisattva altruism” (Cheng, 2017, p. 95), previously translated as “self-benefiting altruism” (Cheng, 2014a, pp. 141-146; 2014b, pp. 359-365; 2014c, pp. 79-83; Cheng, 2015a, pp. 206-207; Cheng, 2015b, pp. 286-287; 2015c, pp. 41-42; Cheng & Tse, 2014a, p. 34). A bodhisattva practises Buddhist teachings and the bodhisattva path for her/himself and for other people as well⁶², achieving personal growth and enlightenment for both participants in a relationship, as well as all beings. Furthermore, when enlightened individuals carry out bodhisattva altruism in order to strive for the welfare of sentient beings, a radiant effect will be produced. This mission is augmented from the individual to social level.

Purity in Nature and Impurity by Contamination Factors

The Rogerian school of thought focuses on “beingness” (Hendricks, 2002, p. 52), in particular, valuing the person as a person (Rogers, 1967b; Stevens, 1967a, 1967c). However, over-emphasis on individuality may lead to self-centredness (van Kalmthout, 2007). Rogerian psychotherapy assists clients in re-formulating their self-concept, and then in the “facing of reality as it exists within the self” (Rogers, 1946, p. 417). This process leads to self-congruence and an authentic existence, once again demonstrating Rogers’s strong inclination through the concept of congruence towards the positive facet of human nature.

In contrast, Vimalakīrti iterates that sentient beings are constantly changing without fixed forms, like “the moon in the water, or a face or form seen in a mirror”⁶³ (McRae, 2004, p. 83). However, their *buddha*-nature is

⁶² “By following the teaching as it has been preached, one keeps adding until one has acquired all good teachings.” (Watson, 1997, p. 59) 「而自增益一切善法。」《弟子品第三》T14, no. 0475, p. 0543b16

⁶³ 「水中月，如鏡中見其面像。」《觀眾生品第七》T14, no. 0475, p. 0547b01

invariable⁶⁴. This nature enables them to be enlightened and transcend, just as with buddhas⁶⁵. Nevertheless, the impeccable nature of sentient beings within the secular world, the evil world⁶⁶ (Watson, 1997, p. 114), has been contaminated by “eighty-four thousand gateways of affliction of the four Māra, which trouble sentient beings”⁶⁷ (McRae, 2004, p. 159). This pollutant creates a monkey mind⁶⁸ and stubborn character⁶⁹ in sentient beings that is difficult to teach. Thus, each being carries its own personality and capacities⁷⁰ affected by disparate external factors. The *Sūtra* presents a more comprehensive view of sentient beings, involving both positive and negative domains, which is closer to practical experience in dealing with human beings.

Compassion Fatigue

Although the *Sūtra* recognises the qualities and contributions of a bodhisattva, it warns “novice bodhisattvas”⁷¹ (McRae, 2004, p. 177) of “sentimental compassion”⁷² (McRae, 2004, p. 112), similar to compassion fatigue. In contrast, person-centred therapy has little discussion on this topic. Compassion fatigue refers mainly to emotional exhaustion and is most likely to

⁶⁴ “All sentient beings are the characteristic of *bodhi*.” (McRae, 2004, p. 98) 「一切眾生即菩提相。」《菩薩品第四》T14, no. 0475, p. 0542a35

⁶⁵ “All living beings are a part of Suchness, and all other things as well are a part of Suchness. The sages and worthy ones too are a part of Suchness, even you, Maitreya, are a part of Suchness. So if you have been given a prophecy of enlightenment, the all living beings should likewise be given such a prophecy.” (Watson, 1997, p. 53) 「一切眾生皆如也，一切法亦如也，眾聖賢亦如也，至於彌勒亦如也。若彌勒得受記者，一切眾生亦應受記。」《菩薩品第四》T14, no. 0475, p. 0542a33-34

⁶⁶ 「五濁惡世。」《香積佛品第十》T14, no. 0475, p. 0552b09

⁶⁷ 「有此四魔，八萬四千諸煩惱門，而諸眾生為之疲勞。」《菩薩行品第十一》T14, no. 0475, p. 0553c28

⁶⁸ “These people who are difficult to convert have minds like monkeys.” (Watson, 1997, p. 118) 「以難化之人，心如猿猴。」《香積佛品第十》T14, no. 0475, p. 0552c32

⁶⁹ “The living beings of this land are stubborn and strong-willed and hard to convert.” (Watson, 1997, p. 117) 「此土眾生剛強難化。」《香積佛品第十》T14, no. 0475, p. 0552c26

⁷⁰ “The Buddha explains the *Dharma* with one sound, and sentient beings each attain understanding according to their capacity.” (McRae, 2004, p. 74) 「佛以一音演說法，眾生各隨所解。」《佛國品第一》T14, no. 0475, p. 0537b53

⁷¹ 「新學菩薩。」《囑累品第十四》T14, no. 0475, p. 557a17

⁷² 「愛見悲。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a26

occur when human service professionals, such as nurses, social workers, and counsellors, and family caregivers who look after chronically ill patients are continuously over-involved in serving vulnerable individuals (Flanagan, 2007; Gallavan & Newman, 2013; Gilmore, 2012; Keidel, 2002). This emotional exhaustion can result in decreases in empathy and resilience (Mathieu, 2012).

At the beginning of learning to be a bodhisattva, the individual may carry defilement when over exposed into others' travail (Cheng, 2013). When this occurs, new bodhisattvas may abandon sentient beings in order to regain and attain their own perfect stillness⁷³. Hence, they are unable to fulfil their bodhisattva vow for seeking the happiness of another sentient being. This can be seen as equivalent to beginners in the counselling field, when new counsellors are vulnerable to becoming too involved in their clients' predicaments, causing them to yield easily to compassion fatigue.

Vimalakīrti preaches that novice bodhisattvas must reduce bondage in order to save sentient beings⁷⁴. New bodhisattvas perceive sentient beings prudently ⁷⁵ to detach phenomenal existence, even though they compassionately care for sentient beings⁷⁶. They need Mahāyāna wisdom to practise skilful means⁷⁷, and practising skilful means needs Mahāyāna

⁷³ "If his compassion is marked by affection and concern, then he will have feelings of weariness and revulsion toward the realm of birth and death." (Watson, 1997, p. 70) 「愛見悲者，則於生死有疲厭心。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a26

⁷⁴ "It is impossible for someone with bonds to emancipate others from their bonds. It is only possible for someone without bonds to emancipate others from their bonds. Therefore, bodhisattavas should not generate bonds." (McRae, 2004, p. 112) 「若自有縛，能解彼縛，無有是處！若自無縛，能解彼縛，斯有是處。是故菩薩不應起縛。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a27-28

⁷⁵ "As if he were a magician seeing a conjured person so should a bodhisattva view sentient beings." (McRae, 2004, p. 123) 「譬如幻師，見所幻人，菩薩觀眾生為若此。」《觀眾生品第七》T14, no. 0475, p. 0547b01

⁷⁶ "Although one attracts all sentient beings, to be without the attachment of affection: this is the practice of bodhisattvas." (McRae, 2004, p. 114) 「雖攝一切眾生，而不愛著，是菩薩行。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0545b27

⁷⁷ "having wisdom with one's skilful means emancipated" (McRae, 2004, p. 113) 「有慧方便解。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a33

wisdom⁷⁸ as well. Mahāyāna wisdom refers to the contemplation of the true reality⁷⁹ (impermanence, suffering, and non-self) and removal of the binary thinking mode⁸⁰ regarding opposite pairs, for example, happy/sad, and quick/slow. Skilful means connotes devotion⁸¹ and limitless methods⁸². Both skill and methods can inspire counsellors to know how to prevent burnout or compassion fatigue.

Person-centred therapy emphasises the congruence of counsellors and the role of counsellors in creating therapeutic rapport. However, it lacks a consideration or discussion of the possibility of emotional exhaustion of helping professionals. In this regard, this popular concern in the field of human services is left unaddressed.

Causes of Suffering

Suffering is maintained to be a core concept in Buddhism (Rahula, 2001) and is an inescapable experience among sentient beings⁸³. Rogers also concurred that suffering is inevitable (Milhollan & Forisha, 1972). Rogerians conceive that self-incongruence creates bewilderment (Schmid, 2003) but there is a dearth of explanation as to why and how incongruence is produced. Vimalakīrti illustrates this by explaining that ignorance is the root cause of

⁷⁸ "having skilful means with one's wisdom emancipated" (McRae, 2004, p. 112) 「有方便慧解。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a31

⁷⁹ "To contemplate the body as impermanent, suffering, empty, and no-self is called wisdom." (McRae, 2004, p. 113) 「又復觀身無常、苦、空、非我，是名為慧。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a33-34

⁸⁰ "Also, in contemplating the body, [one should realise] that the body does not transcend illness and illness does not transcend the body, and that this illness and this body are neither new nor old – this is called wisdom." (McRae, 2004, p. 113) 「又復觀身，身不離病，病不離身，是病是身，非新非故，是名為慧。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a34-35

⁸¹ "Although the body is ill, it always exists in *saṃsāra*. To benefit all without tiring – this is called skilful means." (McRae, 2004, p. 113) 「雖身有疾，常在生死，饒益一切，而不厭倦，是名方便。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a35-36

⁸² "For one's body to be ill but never die is called skilful means." (McRae, 2004, p. 113) 「設身有疾，而不永滅，是名方便。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a36

⁸³ "about the sufferings of the body" (Watson, 1997, p. 67) 「說身有苦。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0544c18

suffering and craving is the immediate cause⁸⁴. From this viewpoint, sentient beings suffer because of their attachment to body⁸⁵ and self⁸⁶. Such attachment results in “troublesome entanglement”⁸⁷ (Watson, 1997, p. 69), “desire and greed”⁸⁸ (Watson, 1997, p. 86), “false discrimination”⁸⁹ (McRae, 2004, p. 126), and “confused conception”⁹⁰ (McRae, 2004, p. 126). In short, this can be understood as clinging onto the “erroneous views on self/I-me-mine” (Kwee, 2010a, p. 6). Therefore, while self-centredness is the focus of Western traditions, Buddhism emphasises the letting go of self-attachment (Hartman & Zimberoff, 2003), and endeavours to facilitate sentient beings to see deeply and fearlessly the phenomenal body and self⁹¹. Herein it lies in another divergence of thought between Buddhism and a Rogerian approach.

The Search for Solutions

Although person-centred counsellors probably pay less attention to causes of suffering due to excessive self-attachment as the Buddhist views, they set the qualities of a counsellor as being those that effectively facilitate clients to search for a meaningful life, including the three essential components (congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding), as elaborated on earlier. How well these components will be developed affects the effectiveness of therapeutic solutions.

In contrast, the *Sūtra* expounds on the causes of suffering, rooted in

⁸⁴ “The illness of mine is born of ignorance and feelings of attachment.” (Watson, 1997, p. 65) 「從癡有愛，則我病生。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0544b20

⁸⁵ “The body is the root.” (Watson, 1997, p. 86) 「身為本。」《觀眾生品第七》T14, no. 0475, p. 0547c17

⁸⁶ “attachment to ego” (Watson, 1997, p. 68) 「著我。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0544c28

⁸⁷ 「攀緣。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0545a16

⁸⁸ 「欲貪。」《觀眾生品第七》T14, no. 0475, p. 0547c17

⁸⁹ 「虛妄分別。」《觀眾生品第七》T14, no. 0475, p. 0547c18

⁹⁰ 「顛倒想。」《觀眾生品第七》T14, no. 0475, p. 0547c19

⁹¹ “It is not of the body since the body transcends characteristics. Nor is it of the mind, since the mind is like a phantasm.” (McRae, 2004, p. 109) 「非身合，身相離故；亦非心合，心如幻故。」《文殊師利問疾品第五》T14, no. 0475, p. 0544c12

story-telling¹⁰⁰, psychoeducation¹⁰¹, and role modelling¹⁰².

Both person-centred therapy and Mahāyāna advocate non-pathological stance in dealing with clients. Nevertheless, the *Sūtra* offers more references to counselling techniques and person-centred approach reinforces congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding.

Discussion

Rogers and Vimalakīrti share certain compatibilities in their views of the world and human nature which contribute to counselling principles (refer to Table 1). However, they also show dissimilarities (refer to Table 2) for further discussion.

Table 1

Similarities between Rogers and Vimalakīrti

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Phenomenal realities: interdependent, ever-changing, temporal, and non-autonomous● Actualisation of the authentic self: self-acceptance, responsibilities, self-trust, and freedom from suffering● Counselling principles: mission, therapeutic relationship, congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathy |
|--|

it past world-systems as numerous as the grains of sand in the Ganges River." (McRae, 2004, p. 120) 「住不可思議解脫菩薩，斷取三千大千世界，如陶家輪，著右掌中，擲過恒河沙世界之外。」《不思議品第六》T14, no. 0475, p. 0546b27-28

⁹⁷ Examples are illustrated throughout the *Sūtra*, particularly in Chapter 3 The Disciples.

⁹⁸ An example of using contrast is the bliss of Māra goddesses before and after attaining joy of *dharma*.

⁹⁹ The famous "thunderous silence" (Leighton, 1998, p. 8; McRae, 2004, p. 59) performed by Vimalakīrti is a good example.

¹⁰⁰ For instance, the story of a goddess who scatters heavenly flowers (Chapter 7 Viewing Sentient Beings) has become a renowned Chinese opera.

¹⁰¹ The preaching of Vimalakīrti is also a form of psychoeducation.

¹⁰² Both the Buddha and Vimalakīrti are role models of being a bodhisattva to help sentient beings.

Table 2

Differences between Rogers and Vimalakīrti

Rogers	Vimalakīrti
Focus on individual achievement	Focus on bodhisattva altruism
Elaborate on the pure nature of human beings, but addresses little about impurity	Purity in nature, but impurity through contamination factors
No discussion on compassion fatigue	Compassion fatigue
Agree regarding suffering in life, but provides little discussion on the causes of suffering.	Details the causes of suffering.
Does not focus on diagnosis and counselling techniques.	Skilful means guides the skill principle, and many kinds of techniques are illuminated in the <i>Sūtra</i> .

Different Origination

This discussion investigates similarities and differences between Rogerian and Vimalakīrti theories and methods. Person-centred therapy continued to evolve since its inception in the 1940s (Kirschenbaum & Jourdan, 2005). Empirical research has supported the delineation of a set of counselling principles and practices for helping clients search for their true self and attain happiness in their lives (Cloninger & Cloninger, 2011; Perko, Kinnunen, Tolvanen, & Feldt, 2016). Its continued development and expansion of the theory also strove to accommodate social needs, such as mental health

(Gibbardi & Hanley, 2008; Joseph, 2015) as demonstrated by the lived experiences of clients.

The *Sūtra* is, however, a Buddhist canon written 2000 years ago, which preaches Mahāyāna teachings. Its comparability with counselling in this discussion lies within this writer's interpretation and analysis of the perceived convergence and divergence of the two approaches. This interpretation is still open-ended, needing further verification. The current investigation is viewed from a therapeutic perspective connected to the practicality of the doctrines, reshaping "old wine in new bottles" (Gaylin, 2008, p. 235).

Both approaches agree that sentient beings are able to cope with difficulties by themselves. Therefore, a counsellor and a bodhisattva are facilitators, rather than saviours. A counsellor plays a critical role in the Rogerian family of theories, in which a congruent counsellor facilitates clients to be congruent with themselves through empathy and unconditional positive regard. The *Sūtra* progresses upwards to bodhisattva altruism in the counsellor-client relationship. A bodhisattva experiences three phases. First, s/he, being a service provider, carries out the facilitation as an altruistic activity. Second, s/he is better equipped with intellectual and personal development, which can be seen as self-benefiting. Notably, altruism is an objective while self-benefit is merely a by-product. However, as a result of the self benefit of intellectual and personal development, a bodhisattva is able to better carry out her/his altruistic career.

Ultimately, under the teaching of indiscrimination, namely, equanimity, all sentient beings are equal, forming the unity of "I" and "other". This unity causes bodhisattvas to immerse themselves into sentient beings as a whole. Bodhisattvas realise that "I" and "other" have no differences. In this respect, self-benefiting and altruism actually are the same thing. Admittedly, the third phase is a highly spiritual realm. We are hesitant to apply it to counselling practices because it is not necessary for a counsellor to be a saint, nor are person-centred counsellors required to be saints. Despite this, the *Sūtra* explains the significance of viewing the dynamics within the four

immeasurables, including loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity. This is different than viewing them as four separate components as many Western scholars do, such as Gilbert (2009), and Salzberg (1995).

Rogers was Christian (Hayes & Cowie, 2005; Rogers, 1967d) who demonstrated the willingness to accept philosophies outside of his religion. This discussion does not intend to testify to his adoption of Buddhism in his theories. Instead, it attempts to explore some of the commonalities between his theories and Buddhism. It yields the way for a dialogue between the Western and Eastern camps. As such, it reveals that both camps have a positive vision towards human beings, which is a significant cornerstone in the quest for the well-being of humankind.

Limitations

Although this exploratory research analyses the comparability of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* and person-centred therapy, this is an introductory analysis and further studies are desirable. In particular, the differences reveal some philosophical variations between these two theories which have been insufficiently explored. In addition, this discourse centred around canonical interpretation, and admittedly lacks direct discussion with person-centred practitioners. A gap between interpretation and practices likely exists. However, it begins from a theoretical inquiry that may open up similar investigations to extend the philosophical dimensions of Rogerian models compared to other philosophical stances both Western and Eastern.

Implications and Future Research Directions

Many scholars who study the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* have contributed to applying its doctrines to daily life, focusing on philosophical discourses rather than practical applications (Cheng & Tse, 2014b). This discussion supports the use of the *Sūtra*'s teachings in applied social sciences, and illustrates possible ways to work with other disciplines within the helping professions, namely counselling. Future studies are suggested to cover a wider spectrum, such as conflict resolutions, and/or education, as per Rogers's

forward thinking efforts.

Moreover, as presented here, findings report that some ideas in the *Sūtra* have rarely been discussed in person-centred approaches, such as compassion fatigue and causes of suffering. Further research on these themes could potentially deepen person-centred theories and practices, and extend its applications to serve a greater variety of clients. This discussion reflects the fact that mutual contributions have been achieved in both disciplines.

Therefore, research on compatibility with other Buddhist canons and therapeutic models is proposed, from which both disciplines will gain insight into serving sentient beings.

Conclusion

The present investigation of the compatibility of person-centred therapy and the Mahāyāna philosophy illuminated in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* results in an epochal dialogue, linking these two theories from the 20th century A.D. and the first century A.D. respectively. The presentation of their commonalities in phenomenal visions and positive views towards human nature unveil that Rogers, perhaps unwittingly, espoused Buddhist wisdom in his counselling practices. Rogerian therapy has initiated a humanistic approach that differs from psychoanalytic and behavioural models. Although, a comparison of these models, both Rogerian and Buddhist, is beyond the purview of this current discussion, this points to other possible future investigations. While this article only presents views from a scriptural interpretation of Rogerian and Buddhist thought, as related to the individual and/or social levels to accomplish a meaningful life, and achieve freedom from distress and avoid compassion fatigue, future examinations regarding the further utilisation of Buddhist elements, not only in Rogerian interventions, but also in Buddhist-informed psychotherapy are encouraged.

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