

**A CASE STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BUDDHIST SPIRITUAL
PRACTICES, TEACHER'S EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE TEACHER-
STUDENT RELATIONSHIP IN HONG KONG**

by

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A Thesis Submitted to
The Education University of Hong Kong
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for
the Degree of Doctor of Education

February 2022



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To my mother and life mentor in empathy



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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

I, LI, Puni, hereby declare that I am the sole author of the thesis, and the material presented in this thesis is my original work except those indicated in the acknowledgment. I further declare that I have followed the University's policies and regulations on Academic Honesty, Copyright and Plagiarism in writing the thesis, and no material in this thesis has been published or submitted for a degree in this or other universities.

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ABSTRACT

Research studies on emotion in education have been emerging in recent years due to public concern about emotional health. Considering that teaching requires emotional labor, teachers' emotional health and emotional capability are worthy of investigation. As an ancient religion with abundant accumulation of spiritual practices, Buddhism may provide relevant useful ideas. Therefore, this research, with its frames of reference on emotion in education and Buddhism, is initiated to explore the relationship between Buddhist spiritual practices and teacher emotional capacity and further investigate this relationship's influence on the teacher-student relationship.

The study was conducted in Hong Kong, a region that is influenced by Buddhism. Based on the extant academic literature on emotion and Buddhist spiritual practices, and the empirical data, the researcher investigated and discussed the impacts of long-term Buddhist spiritual practices on teacher emotions, and their further influence on the teacher-student relationship. Employing the research method of case study with the characteristic of using retrospective and reflexive life stories, three Hong Kong schoolteachers were interviewed and requested to make personal documents available, and their life stories were analyzed.

The main finding is that there is a positive relationship between long-term Buddhist spiritual practices and Hong Kong teachers' emotions. Their emotional intelligence, including attention, empathy, self-awareness, and self-regulation, was enhanced, leading them to perform better in their interactions with students. Moreover, the positive teacher-student

relationships supported by Buddhist spiritual practices had extra beneficial impacts on at-risk students.

Besides, the findings have been further analyzed and discussed. Compared to Goleman's emotional intelligence theory, the impacts of long-term Buddhist spiritual practices on teacher emotions and their further influences on the teacher-student relationship featured the cognition of values and seemed to be holistic and even transcendent. Therefore, further research is suggested to explore the role of cognition in emotional capacity building.

Regarding implications for practices, both training for readiness and continuous support for teachers' spiritual state are important. Moreover, training on attention and self-compassion is also recommended for pre-service and in-service teacher development, in order to enhance emotional intelligence.

*Keywords: Buddhist spiritual practice, teacher emotion, emotional intelligence
teacher-student relationship, empathy, compassion, life story*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Being a study on a cutting-edge topic with frames of references of education and Buddhism, I prefer to treat this as a summary of my learning, exploration, and practice in the relevant fields over the years, rather than a research achievement. I commenced this journey as a freshman in academia without a concrete academic background, and fortunately, I received a lot of help and care throughout this period, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Without this warm and selfless support, I am sure I could not have completed this study. Therefore, I would like to take the opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to all those involved.

First, I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. Ping Ho Wong, Dr. Mei Yee Wong May, and Prof. Mark Mason, who guided me along this wonderful journey. At the beginning, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Ping Ho. As a famous expert in spirituality education, he treats academic and professional work as methods of individual spirituality development and further teaches them to his students using precept and example teaching. In these ten years, what I learned from Dr. Ping Ho as an experienced senior colleague in education and doctoral supervisor, is far beyond simply academic.

The same sincere appreciation also goes to Dr. May. As an experienced expert in qualitative research, she always guided me with her rich research experience and genuine passion and love for research. Without her selfless instruction and great kindness in these four years, I could not have overcome the most challenging period caused by my past working experiences; this enabled me to finally get a glimpse of the “beauty of qualitative research.”

Furthermore, Prof. Mason deserves my special gratitude. Without his trust and taking up the supervisor role in the last few months, I would not have completed my writing during the final stage.

Much appreciation is also extended to the research participants. They all joined this research voluntarily and contributed their valuable spare time selflessly, despite their busy lives. Their sharing also inspired me and helped me to better reflect on my practices, since we lived and worked in similar circumstances.

In addition, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my former and current colleagues at the Centre for Religious and Spirituality Education (Centre) of the Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK), including Prof. John Lee, Dr. Ping Ho Wong, Mr. Chin Wa Li, Dr. Wing Hon Ho, Dr. Raymond Kong, Ms. Michelle Li, Pr.(Dr.) Sherman Leung, Pr. Sai Kwong Lo, Mr. Mo Dock Lui, Ms. Pearl Chan, Ms. Cindy Wong, Mr. Joseph Lam, Pr. Sam Tse, Pr. Ho Keung Lau, Pr. Serena Leung, Ms. Wai Chun Chu, Mr. Kin Yip Leung, Pr. Oi Yuen Yau, Dr. Hon Chuen Lee, Ms. Coudy Yui, Mr. Chun Chiu Ng, Ms. Jasper Chu, Ms. Graham Lee, Ms. Rachel Wong, Ms. Jessica Lee, Mr. Tom Yeung, Ms. Joanne Xie, Mr. Aaron Zhang, Ms. Jo Jo Leung, Mr. Louis Chu, Mr. Tommy Choi, Dr. Wai Ting Poon, Mr. Michael Fai, and Ms. Emily Wan.

The projects, professional programs, and academic conferences held by the Centre offered me the valuable space to reflect on my study in practice, leading me to have a more systematic and comprehensive understanding of my research. The excellent teamwork among the Centre's colleagues always encourages me to maintain my passion for education. The selfless instruction from senior colleagues provided me with a valuable opportunity to learn from

their years of working experience in education. Most importantly, their precepts and example teachings keep reminding me the tremendous meaning of being human.

Special appreciation goes to the team members of the *“Heart-to-Heart Connect” Programme for Two Generations of Teachers in Caring Quality Development*. Without the discussion with the core members, i.e., Prof. John Lee (PI), Pr. (Dr.) Sherman Leung (PC), and Ms. Michelle Li, their selfless input, and the rich experiences shared by the other project advisors, I could not have deepened my understanding of the teacher-student relationship in both academia and practice; the engagement in this program full of meaning enabled me to do this.

Finally, I must acknowledge the tremendous support from my family, especially my mother. Like many traditional Chinese parents, my father and mother love their child very much and are willing to offer as much support as possible. In addition, as a retired teacher in early childhood education, my mother has a strong belief in education based on her more than twenty years of teaching experience—a good teacher can change a child’s life. Without her encouragement and persistence, I would not have completed my doctoral thesis. Furthermore, the members of my extended family also deserve special thanks for understanding my limited contributions to family life during my prolonged study period. They helped me care for my parents and shared my responsibility as an adult family member, especially when I could not return home due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other Acknowledgements

I also feel much indebted to the scholars and experts who provided valuable suggestions on my doctoral study, including Prof. Xueyu (CUHK), Pr. (Dr.) Sherman Leung (EdUHK), Dr.

Ida Yip (EdUHK), the external examiner Prof. Hongbiao Yin (CUHK), the internal examiner Dr. Junjun Chen (EdUHK), and Prof. Yoshiharu Nakagawa (DU). Special appreciation is extended to Prof. Xueyu, a well-known scholar in Buddhist studies, for his valuable instruction and guidance since September 2011. Thanks to the academic conferences on Buddhist studies convened by Prof. Xueyu, I had the opportunity of presenting my papers as a young scholar, and was given valuable suggestions by the experienced scholars present.

The scholars of the Department of Cultural and Religious Studies of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) deserve my special thanks too, including Prof. Xueyu, Prof. Wai Lun Tam, Prof. John Lai, Prof. Lap Yan Kung, Prof. Kwok Keung Yeung, Prof. Francis Yip, Fr. (Dr.) Thomas Kwan, Fr. (Dr.) Louis Ha, and Dr. Wai Yin Chow. When I was studying for the master's degree in religious studies, besides the lectures for postgraduates provided by the scholars mentioned above, I also sat in many other lectures offered by them, which were open to undergraduates. As a student without concrete academic background in religious studies, I could not have augmented my related knowledge in such a short time without their selfless instruction and guidance; thanks to them, I managed to complete my study smoothly.

Moreover, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Graduate School (GS), Department of International Education (IE), Library, Estate Office, and the supporting units of EdUHK. Without them, I would not have had a safe and stable environment for my study. Prof. Sing Kai Lo (Dean), Dr. Kwai Sang Li (Assoc. Dean), and the GS administrative staff deserve special thanks for their kindness and considerateness, and the great support they gave graduating students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow students at EdUHK, including Dr. Yan Su, Dr. Xiaojing Liu, Ms. Miranda Lo, Dr. Hon Chuen Lee, Pr. (Dr.) Patrick Yim, Mr. Joseph Lam, Dr. Stanley Ng, Dr. Carrie Chan, Dr. Julia Shum, Dr. Stephanie Chan, Dr. Ronald Yeung, Dr. Brain Hung, Dr. Joe Pong, Dr. Michael Chow, Dr. Cecilia Chen, and Dr. Miaomiao Chen. Without the sparkle and inspiration emerging from the various discussions with them during my studies, I would have much fewer precious memories from my academic journey.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

As a party in teaching and learning activities, teachers play a critical role in influencing the quality of teaching and the personal growth of students. The teacher's personality also influences his or her teaching and consequently their students, via the interaction between teacher and student. However, although technological development significantly impacts both the individual and wider society, such development cannot solve human beings' psychological problems, such as feelings of loneliness, mental stress, and depression. Within this macro environment, teachers and students are facing the same challenges (Bulman, 2018; Meredith, 2018).

In the Hong Kong Special Administrative Regions of the People's Republic of China (Hong Kong), the well-being situation of teachers is also startling. The results of a survey on teachers' physical and mental health issued by the Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers in late 2020 show that almost all the teachers (98%) who participated in the survey reported that they experienced negative emotions in the past week (2020, p. 2). Furthermore, exhaustion (85%), frustration (59%), and anxiety (48%) were the top three discrete negative emotions experienced by these teachers (p. 2). Moreover, the scholars point out that teachers should take care of their own well-being, since teachers' emotions are also vital to students' emotions (Becker et al., 2014). Therefore, considering the disquieting state of teacher emotion and its importance in education, researchers should pay more heed to teachers' emotional capacity and its role in the teacher-student relationship (TSR).

Although in the late of 19th century some scholars developed their philosophy assuming that religion was disappearing (e.g., Nietzsche, 1885), certain phenomena could be observed, such as the New Age movement and the increasing popularity of Buddhism and yoga in Europe and North America, which reflect the re-emergence of religion. People are also seeking to absorb different forms of training for the mind and body from various religions in order to develop new methods or skills that are more suitable in a modern society.

In education, the performance in daily work and life of teachers who are long-term practicing Buddhists is worthy of being studied. This assertion is supported by the Buddhist doctrines and theories of Buddhist spiritual practices. As a spiritual tradition with a long history spanning more than 2,500 years, Buddhism develops and organizes different spiritual methods under the guidance of its philosophy to improve practitioners' spirituality, including emotion as a vital human quality. Moreover, since Buddhism stresses the application of the learning on Buddhism in daily life, Buddhists' interaction with the people around them should be influenced by their spiritual practices. Therefore, the investigation of the relationship between the Buddhist spiritual practices of teachers who are also Buddhist, and their emotions, and their further influence on their interaction with students, may enable new understandings of emotional capacity and its interaction with TSR.

1.2 Problem Statement

Emotion is a ubiquitous experience in human life. With the development of research in emotion, researchers also pay more heed to the study on teacher emotions when they gradually recognize its vital role in education. Although the number of studies is increasing steadily and even has blossomed in these past years (Chen, 2021b), scholars maintain that

this field is still in development (Fried et al., 2015; Uitto et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2020; Chen, 2021a). Moreover, Chen (2021a) also points out that enhancing teachers' emotional capacity should be one of the foci in future studies due to the insufficiency of related empirical studies.

Considering that teacher emotions can influence students (Frenzel, 2014; Becker et al., 2014), some scholars further investigate the role of teacher emotions in their interaction with students (e.g., Frenzel et al., 2018; Burić & Macuka, 2018). As discussed earlier, teacher emotional capacity is critical, and scholars also make an effort to understand its role in the interaction with students. For example, Burić and Frenzel (2019) explore the relationships between teacher anger, emotional expression, and emotional labor. However, since the study of teacher emotion is still in “a pre-mature developmental stage” (Chen et al., 2020, p. 1), further research is needed to understand the relationship between teacher emotional capacity and TSR.

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, due to human psychological problems, people seek inspiration or support from religion to train body and mind, leading to research on Buddhist spiritual practices. However, the setting of most of these studies is Taiwan. Moreover, it can be seen from the literature (Cheu, 2004; Lai, 2008; Xu, 2010), that academia needs further studies on the detailed influences on emotion by Buddhist spiritual practices, especially in the context of TSR.

Since Hong Kong is a region influenced by Buddhism, this study focusing on teachers engaging in Buddhist spiritual practices and their interaction with students may enrich the understanding of Buddhist spiritual practices, especially in teacher emotion and TSR. In

addition, mindfulness-based training, which was developed from religious spiritual practices for the public, became popular in recent years and spurred emerging research on the subject (e.g., Burke, 2009; Lau, 2017b). With its research focus on Buddhist spiritual practice, one of the sources of mindfulness-based training, this study might also enrich the understanding of the aforementioned “shaping” for people without a religious background.

1.3 Research Aims and Research Questions

Based on the discussion about the problem statement, the lack of research regarding teacher emotional capacity and its role in TSR is self-explanatory. Moreover, the emotional experiences of Hong Kong teachers who engage in long-term spiritual practices in the context of TSR could also enrich our understandings of this field. Therefore, in this study the researcher will first identify and explore the relationship between Buddhist spiritual practices and teacher emotional capacity; she will then aim to investigate this relationship’s influence on TSR.

Moreover, considering the recent theoretical development of Goleman’s theory of emotional intelligence (EI; 2013) focusing on attention and empathy, the researcher will employ it to discuss teachers’ emotional capacity. Furthermore, assuming long-term spiritual practices will bring to light more details about changes they bring about, the researcher will invite long-term Buddhist spiritual practitioners (whose daily practice stretches back at least five years) to be research participants.

Finally, to address the research aims, the researcher formulated two main research questions:

- 1) How do long-term Buddhist spiritual practices affect Hong Kong teachers' emotions?
- 2) How do changes in emotional intelligence brought about by Buddhist spiritual practices further influence teachers' relationships with students?

The first question focuses on the relationship of long-term Buddhist spiritual practices and teachers' emotions, and how such impacts come about. In the second research question, the researcher investigates the further influence of the impacts explored in the first question on teachers' TSR.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Since the research field of teacher emotion is still developing, the study's contribution should mainly be that of enriching academia's current theories and understanding through its exploration:

- 1) This study may contribute to the theory of EI proposed by Goleman.
- 2) It will also let us know more about teacher emotions and teacher emotional intelligence in TSR.
- 3) The knowledge about Buddhist spiritual practices could also be expanded, especially in relation to teacher emotional intelligence and TSR.
- 4) The new understandings emerging from this investigation will also contribute to teacher development with regards to emotional capacity building.

1.5 Brief Outline of the Remaining Chapters

Chapter 2 is a review of the literature on emotion and Buddhist spiritual practices related to emotion. Based on the literature review, a research framework is developed to investigate the research questions.

Chapter 3 is about the study's qualitative research methodology. Case study with the characteristic of using retrospective and reflexive life stories is used to try to reveal the characteristics and features of Buddhist spiritual practices and the participants' emotions. Moreover, the research design and the role of the researcher are presented in this chapter.

In Chapter 4, the researcher presents the cases of the three participants, all local teachers who have practiced Buddhist spirituality for over five years. Each life story is presented based on the two research questions.

In Chapter 5, the researcher further explores and discusses the findings emerging from the data collected from the research participants.

Finally, in Chapter 6, the researcher summarizes this study, presents its limitations, and discusses future directions. Furthermore, the researcher also presents her self-reflection on this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins with a review of the studies of emotion and the definition of teacher emotion under the different conceptualizations and operationalizations of the construct. These are followed by a discussion of the construct of teacher emotion as it relates to intelligence. Next, the researcher investigates the relationship between teacher emotional intelligence and teacher-student relationship (TSR) from a broader perspective, i.e., emotional capacity. Existing research is then discussed to support the importance of looking specifically at the teacher emotions related to students based on Goleman's Emotional Intelligence (EI) model. Following the section about the literature review of teacher emotion, the researcher explores the studies on Buddhist spiritual practices with an introduction of Buddhist doctrines and Buddhist spiritual practices and then points out the potential research focus of this field. This chapter ends with a summary of the literature review and a discussion of the conceptual framework of the study.

2.1 Emotion and Teacher Emotion

2.1.1 Emotion

Emotion is a common but essential phenomenon in daily life. As per the definition provided by American Psychology Association (APA), emotion refers to “a complex reaction pattern, involving experiential, behavioral, and physiological elements, by which an individual attempts to deal with a personally significant matter or event” (American Psychology Association, n.d.). Moreover, regarding its difference from “feeling,” “emotion” typically

involves it but “having an overt or implicit engagement with the world” (American Psychology Association, n.d.). Considering the importance of emotion, the scholars try to develop different theories to study and understand it.

After reviewing the extant literature that considers the relationships of emotion and cognition, mind and body, individual and social, Zembylas (2007) classifies different theories and points out that there are three major theoretical approaches to studying emotion with deep discussion: psychodynamic approaches, social constructionist approaches, and interactionist approaches. With the premise of treating emotion as an individual experience, the first kind of approaches claims that emotions are primarily intrapsychic, even though it takes influences from both biology and cognition into account. In comparison, the second one treats emotion as a sociocultural experience and emphasizes construction as its nature, which refers to its being situated and processed.

After reviewing the psychodynamic and social constructivist approaches critically, Zembylas (2007) further discusses the third kind of approach, the “interactionist approach” that “transcends the dichotomies established in the previous two and aims at bridging their differences” (p. 58) with the presupposition of treating emotion as interactional and performative. The interactionist approach focuses on emotion, which “comes to produce these very boundaries that allow the individual and the group to interact” (p. 63). On the other hand, performance concentrates on emotion as “the dynamic process of discursive practices and the materiality of the body in various modes of representation” (p. 64).

Given the current development of tools for investigating the brain, Barrett proposes the theory of constructed emotion based on neuroscience research findings (2017a). This theory

proposes that “emotions should be modeled holistically, as whole brain-body phenomena in context” (Barrett, 2017a, p. 16). For the individual, emotions are not simple reactions to the world; instead, emotions are constructed from a prediction using past experience as a guide. Meanwhile, emotion is also a social reality for the community. The concept related to emotional experiences could be shared among people living in a society, and at the same time, the individual could engage in others’ constructions related to emotion (Barrett, 2017b).

After reviewing the approaches and theories related to emotion mentioned above, it seems that there is a perspective in academia of so-called “social construction” to investigate emotion. This perspective emphasizes the role of cognition and the individual interaction with others in the integrated process of making emotion, from the individual level to the community level, which is beyond a discussion primarily focusing on biological and intrapsychic response to stimulation as an individual experience.

The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between teacher emotion and Buddhist spiritual practices, in the long run, treating the emotional experience as a complex process. In this case, either the definitions of emotions proposed by social constructivist approaches, or interactionist approaches, or the theory of constructed emotion, seem appropriate for the study aim. However, social constructivist approaches focus on the social dimension of emotion and treat emotion as the “cultural artifacts that convey sociocultural messages” (Zembylas, 2017, p. 61). Meanwhile, the interactionist approaches proposed by Zembylas (2007) pay attention to the power in the interaction (Zembylas, 2017, p. 63). Therefore, based on the definition provided by APA, the theory proposed by Barrett (2017a) is employed to generalize the understanding of emotion in this study, considering that this theory explores

the emotion's biological dimension together with its social dimension and treats the teacher as the center of the emotional experiences.

To conclude, in this study, emotion is a complex and dynamic process which is constructed from a prediction using past experience as a guide for individual, involving experiential, behavioral, and physiological elements.

2.1.2 Teacher Emotion Research

With a growing recognition over the past decade of the importance of teacher emotion, there has been a continuous increase in the studies in this field, in parallel with the gradual research development of emotion in psychology and in education. Scholars Fried, Mansfield, and Dobozy point out the reasons for regarding teacher emotion as a critical research field (Fried et al., 2015); in their arguments, the primary concern is that teacher emotional well-being has become crucial since the rates of teacher attrition are high. Poor emotional well-being renders teachers unable to survive in their professional lives. Moreover, teacher emotions are closely linked to student emotions and the process of learning and teaching. For example, the student and teacher relationship influences the student's academic performance through motivation and enjoyment in the classroom.

Although there has recently been notable growth in research on teacher emotion, this field is still in "a pre-mature developmental stage" (Chen et al., 2020, p. 1). This opinion is supported by several systematic reviews (Fried et al., 2015; Uitto et al., 2015; Chen, 2021a). First, the foci of the extant research are varied and lack balanced coverage. Also, conceptual clarity of teacher emotion is needed for there to be potential fruitful discussions in this field.

Moreover, even though it is not a primary concern, the methodology of empirical research in this field is not well balanced and it is skewed considerably towards the quantitative method.

In this past decade, scholars have made an effort to fill the research gap created by lack of conceptual clarity about teacher emotion, and developed three models to deal with this (Frenzel, 2014; Fried et al., 2015; Chen, 2021a). Frenzel develops a reciprocal effects model of teacher and student enjoyment based on theories of emotion transmission (Frenzel, 2014). Meanwhile, the model developed by Fried, Mansfield, and Dobozy in 2015 tries to present “an integrated, multi-componential view of teacher emotion” (Fried et al., 2015, p. 432) and is dynamic, with continual interaction between components (Fried et al., 2015, p. 421). In this model, four main components of teacher emotion have been identified, namely: intrapersonal (teacher emotion), expressions of emotion, interpersonal (parents, students, and school staff), and social, cultural, and political factors. Furthermore, there are five main functions of emotion (information provision, giving quality to experience, influencing cognitive processes, regulating internal and external processes, and providing motivation), three influences on emotions (personal characteristics, appraisals, and social, cultural and political factors), and four complexities of emotion (emotions evolve over time, individual/unique, context specific, and multi-componential).

Based on a systematic review of the literature published between 1985 and 2019, and the extant literature and models (Frenzel, 2014; Fried et al., 2015; Pekrun, 2006), Chen develops a refined Teacher Emotion Model. This model is a dynamic and interrelated one with three themes (nature, antecedents, and consequences of teacher emotion; Chen, 2021a). Three antecedents are identified, namely: personal, contextual, and emotional capacity, while there are four consequences, namely: teachers themselves, students, teaching, and learning.

Recently, some instruments have been developed with the focus on discrete emotions of teachers. According to the relevant data collected from Germany and Canada, Frenzel et al. (2016) developed the Teacher Emotion Scales to measure teachers' enjoyment, anger, and anxiety. Moreover, Chen (2016) develops the Teacher Emotion Inventory, consisting of joy, love, sadness, anger, and fear for the teachers in Hong Kong and mainland China.

Furthermore, relying on the contemporary multi-component definition of emotion (Schuman & Scherer, 2014), Burić, Sliskovic, and Macuka develop the Teacher Emotion Questionnaire to assess joy, pride, love, fatigue, anger, and hopelessness (2018). These studies provide the tools to measure teacher emotion and offer more understanding about teacher emotion from the quantitative perspective.

Scholar Zhu and her studies about affective education (情感教育) are especially noteworthy because of the studies' influence in mainland China. After absorbing study results from different disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, and brain science, Zhu develops the theory of affective education since the late 1980s based on Marxist philosophy (Zhu, 2019). In this theory, she employs the concept of affectivity as the summation of emotion (情緒) and feeling (體驗),¹ which means that it encompasses internal sense and external performance. Moreover, it refers to internal drive, motivation, and self-appraisal (Zhu, 2019, p. 196). With further inputs from her students' research, the idea of teacher affective development in affective education became the core theory guiding the relevant practices in mainland China.

¹ In *Affective Education: An Outline*, Zhu provides her understandings of feeling and emotion, and the definition of affectivity (2019). She points out that the concept of feeling emphasizes the internal and mental dimensions. Moreover, some feelings are transitory, while some are repeated and should be experienced with reflection. Unlike the concept of feeling, she argues that the concept of emotion emphasizes the dimensions of external expression and physiological reaction.

To sum up, along with the development of research of emotion, and the increasing recognition of its importance in education, studies on teacher emotion have been rising steadily in these past years. However, since it is still a developing field, further research is needed. The contribution of scholars during the past decade towards building conceptual clarity around teacher emotion is helpful for future research in that it provides potential research foci and direction. Furthermore, some instruments have also been developed for assessing teacher emotions in different countries or regions from the perspective of teachers' discrete emotions. Chen (2021a) points out that the empirical evidence on how to enhance teacher emotion is still "largely lacking" and that one of the goals of future studies would be cultivating better teachers with enhanced emotional capacity. In the following section, the researcher further explores this assertion.

2.2 Emotional Intelligence

From the perspective of practice, it is common to experience teacher emotion and its influences in school either as students or teachers. Also, both teachers' intrapersonal emotional characteristics and competence affect teacher emotional experiences; this is supported by related studies (Chen, 2021a; Frenzel, 2014; Fried et al., 2015; Pekrun, 2006). In the model of teacher emotion proposed by Fried, Mansfield, and Dobozy (2005), these relevant elements are included in teacher personal characteristics and appraisals as influences on emotion, such as personality traits, emotional competence, and the appraisal process. Similarly, in the refined model, Chen (2021a) also points out the elements related to both teachers' intrapersonal emotional characteristics and competence as being the antecedents of teacher emotion, such as emotional capacity and teachers' personality. Moreover, these

scholars imply in their research that more studies are required in this sub-field of teacher emotion (Fried et al., 2015; Chen, 2021a).

Echoing the discussion above, this research is an attempt to provide more understanding in this sub-field by studying teachers who are Buddhists who have engaged in spiritual practices for a long time. Considering its latest development is closely linked with the role of attention, which could be cultivated by spiritual practices, Goleman's theory of EI (Goleman, 1995, 1998, 2013) is adopted in this study. Moreover, its theoretical development is explored and reviewed in the following subsections.

2.2.1 Three Models of Emotional Intelligence

Efforts to remedy the lack of attention paid to emotion in academic studies date from the 1980s. Howard Gardner was a pioneer in this respect who tried to discuss human emotions from an intelligence and development perspective. In his 1983 book *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, Gardner introduced the concept of *multiple intelligences* to extend people's understanding of human intelligence. He identified seven different kinds of intelligence. In his work, *intrapersonal intelligence* refers to the development of the internal aspects of a person and the "access to one's own feeling life—one's range of affects or emotions: the capacity instantly to effect discriminations among these feelings and, eventually, to label them, to enmesh them in symbolic codes, to draw upon them as a means of understanding and guiding one's behavior" (Gardner, 1983, p. 253). *Interpersonal intelligence* refers to other individuals and "the core capacity here is the ability to notice and make distinctions among other individuals and, in particular, among their moods, temperaments, motivations, and intentions" (Gardner, 1983, p. 253). In 1999, Gardner

emphasized the importance of intrapersonal intelligence in a person's life decisions in his book *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century* (Gardner, 1999). In this book, he also started to “consider emotional facets of each intelligence rather than restrict emotions to one or two personal intelligences” (Gardner 1999, p. 43).

Although Gardner's work caused academia to pay heed to the importance of emotion in the 1980s, *emotional intelligence* only became widely known to the public in the 1990s, with the rising popularity of Daniel Goleman's book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* and his other work on a similar theme. There are now three main models of EI: an ability model, a trait model, and a mixed model. These three models are built on different understandings of the plasticity of human beings' EI, that is, they are different in terms of their theoretical premises. The theoretical premise of the ability model is that EI is changeable and conceived as capacity, while the trait model states that EI is stable and also operates at the lower levels of personality. The mixed model falls between these two models. The core content of each model will now be introduced.

Ability model. In Mayer et al.'s studies, EI is conceived as cognitive ability or capacity regarding emotion, both one's own emotions and others'. After many years of study, EI was defined as “the capacity to reason about emotions, and of emotions, to enhance thinking. It includes the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (Mayer et al., 2004, p. 197). In this model, the abilities and skills of EI are divided into four areas: the ability to (a) perceive emotions, (b) use emotions to facilitate thought, (c) understand emotions, and (d) manage emotions (Mayer et al., 2004). Moreover, Mayer, Carlsmith, and Chabot believe that the

order “represents the degree to which the ability is integrated within the rest of an individual’s major psychological subsystem—that is, within his or her overall personality” (cited in Mayer et al., 2004, p. 199).

Trait model. Different from the ability model, EI in the trait model (trait EI, or trait emotional self-efficacy) is concerned with cross-situational consistencies in behavior and is embedded within the personality framework (Petrides & Furnham, 2000). Via another study, Petrides claims that trait EI could be located in the personality space of Eysenckian’s Giant Three and Big Five; he points out that it is a distinct, compound trait located at the lower levels of personality hierarchies (Petrides, Pita & Kokkinaki, 2007).

Mixed model. As the model proposed by Daniel Goleman encompasses both cognitive ability and personality in regard to emotion, it is treated as a mixed model. In 1998, Goleman outlined the five components of EI at work (Goleman, 1998), which had been discussed in his first book on EI (Goleman, 1995). The five components of EI are *self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill* (Goleman, 1998). In the 2010s, Goleman further developed his EI theory by rethinking the role of attention, which is illustrated in the following section.

2.2.2 The Further Development of Goleman’s Theory of Emotional Intelligence

Building on the results of studies in neuroscience, Goleman came to a new, enhanced understanding and further developed EI with attention as an element (Goleman, 2013). Goleman points out that attention could regulate emotion. Moreover, three sub-varieties of attention make up willpower. The first sub-variety of attention is the ability to voluntarily

disengage an individual's focus from an object of desire that powerfully grabs their attention. The second, resisting distraction, enables the individual to keep their focus elsewhere. The third allows them to keep their focus on a goal in the future. Furthermore, the basics of attention training could improve an individual's EI by boosting the neural circuitry at EI's core (Goleman, 2013).

In addition to the above, Goleman enriched the contents of empathy by introducing three types of empathy, the interaction between them, and the function of attention in empathy (Goleman, 2013). His three types of empathy are cognitive empathy, emotional empathy, and empathic concern. Cognitive empathy "lets us take other people's perspective, comprehend their mental state, and at the same time manage our own emotions while we take stock of theirs" (Goleman, 2013, p. 98). Emotional empathy refers to the individual joining "the other person in feeling along with him or her" (Goleman, 2013, p. 98), and the body of the individual resonates in the feeling of what others may be going through. Empathic concern leads the individual to care about the other person, mobilizing the individual to help if need be.

However, a person who has too strong a sympathetic feeling can themselves suffer. Goleman points out that this can sometimes lead people in helping professions to experience emotional burnout, and attention plays a critical role in handling the balance of the three types of empathy (Goleman, 2013). He takes the physician as an example and points out that a physician's daily medical practice challenge is to maintain calm focus while staying open to patients' feelings and experience. Moreover, the basics of attention training could help the physician observe the situation while suspending their own involvement, further improving their interaction by not being completely reactive (Goleman, 2013).

To summarize, in the early stage, the dividing lines of EI models are the assumption of the plasticity of EI and the role of individual personality. Goleman's related research during this past decade mainly focuses on how to improve EI through attention training in the mixed model. Moreover, his theory of EI is a comprehensive one with considerations of the nature of emotion and also its functions, such as regulation and motivation, from a perspective of emotional capacity or competence, which is aligned with the theory of constructed emotion (Barrett, 2017). Furthermore, since this theory treats emotion as interpersonal and integrated, it fits well with the complexities of teacher emotion in the educational context.

2.3 Teacher Emotional Capacity and its Influence in Teacher-Student Relationships

In this section, we review the extant studies about teacher emotional intelligence and TSR from a slightly broader view, i.e., emotional capacity. Emotional capacity is about how people manage emotions, both their own and others'. In Chen's review, emotional capacity is "made up of emotional labor strategies, emotional intelligence, and emotion regulation" (Chen, 2017, p. 338). The main reason for this scope change is that there are some closely related research foci on how humans manage their emotions, i.e., emotional regulation and emotional labor. Regarding the limited empirical studies backing Goleman's theory of EI, reviewing the existing literature regarding the highly related foci could bring more comprehensive understanding and research background for this study. In addition, before exploring the studies about teacher emotional capacity and its relationship with TSR, the researcher tries to provide more understanding about TSR.

2.3.1 Teacher-Student Relationship

The TSR is an important issue in the field of education research. By reviewing the extant literature, Tao and Li (2016) determine that the Model for Interpersonal Teacher Behavior (MITB), the view of extended attachment, and self-determination theory are the main theoretical approaches in TSR research overseas. Some scholars explore the nature of TSRs in the field of education philosophy. Joldersma (2001) does this using the concept of the *other* raised by Emmanuel Levinas, a French philosopher. In Joldersma's opinion, successful teaching and learning involves an asymmetric relationship, and the teacher and student become each other's *other*. Moreover, this kind of relationship is precarious.

Scholar Lin examines the same topic from another perspective explored in Martin Buber's *I and Thou* mode of existence (Lin, 2001). Although the TSR is a kind of role relationship, Buber asserts that its nature is that of a relationship between human and human, as a human owns each role. Since there is a difference in capability between teacher and student, TSRs can easily involve domination, which Lin treats as a trap. Because of this specificity, Buber names the TSR *educative relation*. Furthermore, if teachers and students cannot play their roles in the existence mode of *I and Thou*, it is not possible to cultivate the students' characteristics and abilities. In the conclusion of his study, Lin deems that the necessary condition for being a good teacher is having the attitude and ability to build an educative relationship with the student, which means the teacher should have an educational temperament consisting of educational love, trust, hope, acceptance, and so on. Moreover, the teacher should avoid traits such as inhospitality, hostility, mercilessness, authoritarianism, and aloofness.

Besides philosophical and theoretical studies, there is also empirical research on this topic. Based on Social Capital Theory, the results of Muller's study (2001, p. 241) suggest that "social capital, as defined by a relationship that facilitates action, is especially high for at-risk students who feel their teachers are interested, expect them to succeed, listen to them, praise their effort, and care." Via a meta-analysis (92 studies) of students at heightened risk of encountering an adverse TSR, McGrath and Bergen (2015) find that there are two main functions of TSRs. The first one is protective; positive TSRs enhance students' resilience and mitigate the outcomes of negative events. The second function is predictive; not only can TSRs predict students' performance across their school years but they can also predict their future development regarding social and economic status.

After reviewing the existing studies on TSR in higher education, Hagenauer and Volet propose a heuristic framework for future study. In this framework, Hagenauer and Volet (2014) point out that there are two dimensions of TSR, the affective dimension and the support dimension. Based on the model proposed by Frenzel (2014), Hagenauer and Volet (2015) further explore these two dimensions in the empirical study, and propose two types of TSR, i.e., interpersonal TSR and professional TSR.

2.3.2 Teacher Emotional Capacity and Teacher-Student Relationship

Teachers' emotions can affect students in their interactions in the context of school. This assertion is not only supported by observation in daily life, but also by the relevant research (Frenzel, 2014; Becker et al., 2014; Chang, 2012). Considering its importance, some scholars further explore the role of teacher emotion in the interaction with students. For example, relying on the different theories of emotion transmission between interaction partners, a

reciprocal effects model of teacher and student enjoyment is developed (Frenzel et al., 2018). The model proposes that “there are positive reciprocal links between teachers’ and students’ enjoyment” through their observations of each other’s behaviors in the classroom (p. 628). In addition, Burić and Macuka (2018) examine the reciprocal relations between teachers’ work engagement and their emotions experienced in relation to their students.

However, some news and surveys report that teachers and students are facing mental health challenges (Bulman, 2018; Meredith, 2018). Scholars also reveal that, since teachers’ emotions are as critical in regard to students’ emotions as teachers’ instructional performance, teachers should not only spend an abundant amount of time preparing lessons, but should also take care of their own well-being, to avoid professional burnout (Becker et al., 2014). Therefore, researchers in the field of teacher emotion pay more heed to the research foci related to teachers’ emotional capacity.

In light of the review by Uitto, Jokikokko, and Estola (2015), emotional capacity is a core research focus of teacher emotion. The review of extant literature by Chen (2021b) in Asia also echoes Uitto et al.’s research result. Moreover, scholars tend to employ the Ability model of EI when examining the role of teachers’ EI or exploring its relationship with other constructs (Corcoran & Tormey, 2013; Vesely et al., 2013; Poulou, 2017; D’Amico et al., 2020; Valente et al., 2020).

Besides the models of EI discussed earlier, emotional labor (Grandey, 2000) and emotional regulation (Gross, 1998) are two main theories adopted in the relevant research. For instance, Taxer and Frenzel (2015) employ emotional labor and emotional regulation concepts to investigate teachers’ emotional expression. Moreover, Burić, Slišković, and Penezić (2019)

explore the relationship between discrete emotions of teachers and emotional labor strategies. Furthermore, Burić and Frenzel (2020) discuss the links between emotional labor, instructional strategies, and student self-reported engagement.

Reviewing the extant literature in the field of emotional capacity, one of the foci is the links between teachers' emotional expression, discrete emotion of teachers, teachers' well-being (burnout and job satisfaction), and their engagement (e.g., Burić & Frenzel, 2019; Burić, et al., 2019; Keller et al., 2014; Zhang & Zhu, 2008). Burić and Frenzel (2019) point out that teacher anger was positively related to surface acting and emotional exhaustion. In addition, they find that teacher anger is negatively related to teachers' sense of efficacy, such as classroom management and student engagement. The study of Burić, Slišković, and Penezić (2019) shows that “love positively predicted deep acting² and anger positively predicted hiding feelings and faking emotion over time. The opposite direction of association was also established—deep acting positively predicted joy, whereas hiding feelings positively predicted hopelessness” (p. 27).

In Greater China Region, Hu et al.'s study states that the strategy of reappraisal in emotional regulation positively predicts job engagement (2016). Moreover, the study result of Yin and Huang's study finds that “teachers who tend to use more reappraisal may be psychologically healthier than those tend to adopt more suppression” (2016, p. 1). In addition, based on Mayer's theory of EI, Yin, Lee, Zhang, and Jin's study shows that teachers' emotional intelligence influences deep acting and expression of naturally felt emotion significantly, and only the strategy of expression of naturally felt emotion has a significant impact on teaching

² Deep acting is one of the strategies in the theory of Emotional Labor proposed by Grandey (2000). It means that the employee “consciously modifies his or her feeling in order to express the desired emotion” (Grandey, 2000, p. 96).

satisfaction (2013). However, owing to the limited studies available, empirical evidence in this field is meager.

Moreover, since the extant studies tend to study teacher EI or teacher emotional capacity with several constructs in the context of teacher education, its relationship with TSR is only one of the research objects in the research (e.g., Taxer & Frenzel, 2015; Burić & Frenzel, 2019; Burić & Frenzel, 2020). Therefore, a specific study on its relationship with TSR should help enrich the relevant understanding. Furthermore, it would also contribute to Goleman's theory of EI with the support from the existing academic findings on emotional capacity.

2.4 Buddhist Doctrines and Buddhist Spiritual Practices

2.4.1 Brief Introduction to Buddhist Spiritual Practices

2.4.1.1 Spirituality and Buddhist spiritual practice. Before introducing Buddhist spiritual practice, it would be better to understand the concept of spirituality. There are three commonly mentioned aspects of spirituality, i.e., transcendence, raised awareness, and spiritualism. As a result of his exploration of the interrelationships among these three aspects, Wong (2006) points out that “spirituality is the capability of and disposition to transcendence and raised awareness, including relational consciousness (and human qualities and their manifestations associated with transcendence and raised awareness), with these terms being understood both in their mundane and profound senses” (p. 76). There are different kinds of spiritual traditions globally, including the three main religions, i.e., Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. To improve his or her spirituality, the spiritual practitioner employs and engages in spiritual practices. The details of Buddhist spiritual practice are explored hereunder.

Buddhism is a religion that has more than 2,500 years of history, developing in different countries and cultural backgrounds. Buddhist philosophers have tried to organize Buddhist doctrines into different sects and traditions and then classify and interpret them. This doctrinal taxonomy of works is called *Jiaoxiang Panshi* (教相判釋) or *Panjiao* (判教). From the perspective of curriculum design in modern education, the philosophical systems of different sects and traditions can be treated as educational philosophies. Different kinds of practice methods are systematically organized, based on the specific Buddhist philosophy system, forming the complex and precise curriculum system. In an academic context, there are two main traditions in contemporary Buddhism; one is *Theravāda* (上座部佛教) and the other is *Mahāyāna* (大乘佛教).

Theravāda refers to “the dominant form of Buddhism of Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, which is associated with the study of the Pāli Buddhist canon (巴利文大藏經)” (Buswell et al., p. 904). On the other hand, Mahāyāna refers to the dominant form of Buddhism in China, Korea, Japan, and Mongolia (Buswell et al.) in the modern world. The mainstream form of Buddhism in Hong Kong, a region in China, is Mahāyāna. Moreover, almost all local teachers with Buddhist beliefs are also in the schools of Mahāyāna. Therefore, in this thesis, the researcher illustrates the teachings of Buddhism and Buddhist spiritual practices that mainly follow the perspective of Mahāyāna, unless otherwise specified.

2.4.1.2 Buddhism and emotional intelligence. Emotional experience is ubiquitous in human life. Considering that emotion is an aspect of human quality, it is not surprising that the improvement of spirituality includes the relevant promotion of EI. With this premise, it is not hard to predict that Buddhist spiritual practitioners could enhance their emotional capacity by engaging in Buddhist spiritual practices. However, there are different approaches to studying

emotion in academia, as discussed earlier, and, moreover, there are several approaches to understanding the human mind in Buddhism (Dreyfus, 2002). In this situation, the theoretical discussion on the relationship between Buddhism and emotion is usually treated as a sub-topic in the dialogue between Buddhism and psychology (e.g., Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). Moreover, only a few theoretical studies discuss the practices directly from the perspective related to EI (Shi De Yi, 2015; Zheng, 1999).

As per the discussion above, there is very little literature on the relationship between Buddhist spiritual practice and EI. However, to provide more academic background and even build a better base for this investigation and discussion, it is necessary to review the relevant content in the Buddhism literature on EI. The relationship between Buddhism and EI in the two main Buddhism traditions, Theravāda and Mahāyāna, is explored in the following paragraphs.

As the crucial part of the canon of Theravāda, the Abhidhamma literature attempts to list and describe all phenomena or states that humans could experience in mind. Its method is “analytical, abstract, and scholastic” (Heim, 2008, p. 20). In this case, it is not hard to find some relevant content related to both emotion and EI. For example, anger (瞋), a common emotion in daily life, is elaborated upon in the Abhidhamma literature. The illustration of anger in the Abhidhamma literature includes regulating this emotion, which is related to EI.

Meanwhile, since the teaching of Buddhism aims to help Buddhists achieve emancipation, treating anger as an impediment to a goal, the illustration even includes ways of eliminating it. Moreover, the elaboration in Abhidhamma provides more details about anger. For instance, anger also includes worrying, nervousness, depression, and being irritable. To

summarize, compared to the English “emotion,” Theravāda provides terminology with more meanings according to the Abhidhamma literature (Heim, 2008).

Mahāyāna doctrine differs from that of Theravāda in that it emphasizes *Buddha-nature* (佛性), which exists in all sentient beings (Sheng Yen, 2020). Moreover, Buddhist spiritual practice in Mahāyāna aims to help practitioners cultivate Buddha-nature till they achieve the perfect status. Because of the difference in philosophical systems, the system of Buddhist spiritual practice is presented and organized differently in Mahāyāna. The Abhidhamma literature in Theravāda attempts to list and describe all phenomena or states which humans could experience in the mind in an analytical way and by classification as one main strategy (Heim, 2008). In China, Mahāyāna, on the other hand, mainly organizes Buddhist spiritual practices with Buddha-nature as the aim and compassion as the primary path from the perspective of follower scale³. Therefore, compared to Theravāda, the teaching in Mahāyāna provides some general principles that could be linked to EI. The details are investigated and discussed in the following subsections.

2.4.2 The Fundamental Principle in the Buddhist Spiritual Practice System

The short phrase “*encountering different phenomena and practicing the corresponding spiritual practices*” (歷事練心, 對境修行) is a fundamental principle in the Buddhist spiritual practice system, and is discussed below. Generally, to enable oneself to make spiritual achievement easier, long-term engagement in Buddhist spiritual practices in a quiet

³ The Buddhist doctrines of Abhidhamma influences the Yogācāra School and further influences the east Asian Yogācāra School (法相宗 / 唯識宗) of Mahāyāna in China proper (漢地). Compared to the Chan School (禪宗) and the Pure Land School (淨土宗), the followers of east Asian Yogācāra School in China are much fewer.

place is introduced and recommended to the *Sangha* (僧伽) in Buddhist works. Although this method is useful to help the Sangha achieve certain critical aims in Buddhist spirituality development, this method also has an intrinsic disadvantage. Since they are focusing on their spiritual practices and are far away from the community most of the time, they may not know the actual development level they have achieved, especially in long-term solitude retreat (出世) without instructions from their spiritual masters. To avoid the risks described above, some monks or nuns would leave the solitude of their retreat and return to the Sangha or public community (入世) to experience different living events such as serving others. In this process, they could test the result of their solitude retreat, put the learned practices into use, and could also practice the corresponding spiritual practices to improve their spirituality.

Although laypeople could not engage in long-term solitude retreats like the Sangha, after long-term practice, they might be able to achieve certain levels of spirituality and could then cultivate it further through different events in their daily lives. For beginners, training to prepare their body and mind to be ready for receiving advanced Buddhist teaching is a crucial step.⁴ In this situation, laypeople with long-running practices may achieve a certain level of spirituality, and could then engage in the corresponding spiritual practices to improve their spirituality in the specific event, like the Sangha.

2.4.3 Ultimate Teaching and Expedient Teaching

⁴ In Tibetan Buddhism, this kind of preparation training is called four preliminary practices (四加行), and can be divided into two parts. The first is Four Ordinary Preliminary Practices (四共加行); its training purpose is to cultivate the practitioner's renunciation (出離心). The second is Four Preliminary Practices (四不共加行), the purpose of which is to accumulate the provision and to eliminate the practitioner's karmic obstacles (積資淨障) (Gampopa, 1998; Patrul Rinpoche, 1998; Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse, 2012). In the Tiantai School (天台宗), this kind of preparation training is called the twenty-five practices (二十五方便).

Spiritual practice teaching in Buddhism can be classified into two kinds based on their different starting points, which are *ultimate teaching* (真實教授 / 究竟教授) and *expedient teaching* (方便教授 / 權教). Ultimate teaching is for a practitioner who has almost met the conditions of enlightenment, with the aim of helping the practitioner become enlightened, that is, achieve the path of vision. After being enlightened, the practitioner still needs to improve his or her degree of enlightenment by engaging in different spiritual practices.

The other kind is expedient teaching, which is developed systematically in order to help practitioners improve step by step. Ultimate teaching and expedient teaching interact in the practitioner's spiritual pursuits (Gampopa, 1998; Patrul Rinpoche, 1998; Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse, 2012). Furthermore, in order to have better insight, it is suggested that the spiritual practitioner learn and analyze the relevant Buddhist doctrines, for example, the *twelvefold chain of dependent origination* (十二緣起),⁵ which belongs to cognitive training. In the expedient teaching layer, many kinds of practice methods can be systematically organized to form different training systems (法門) based on different training theories. The main Buddhist spiritual practice methods include meditation, chanting sutras, chanting the name of Buddha or bodhisattva, chanting mantras, prostrating, and upholding precepts.

2.4.4 Compassion in Buddhism

According to the literature on teacher emotion and TSR, teachers' emotional capability affects the cultivation of TSRs. Moreover, the literature on Buddhism reveals that practices

⁵ The twelvefold chain of dependent origination is ignorance (無明), predisposition or volitional actions (行), consciousness (識), name and form, or mentality and materiality (名色), the six internal sense-bases (六入), sensory contact (觸), sensation or feeling (受), thirst or attachment (愛), grasping or clinging (取), existence or a process or becoming (有), birth or rebirth (生), and old age and death (老死) (Buswell et al., 2014).

that cultivate compassion can bring many kinds of benefits to practitioners, for example, tranquility and joy, as well as the cultivation of compassion (Sujiva, 2009). These characteristics may bring certain effects to teachers' emotional capacity. The researcher looks into the meaning of compassion, the most common Buddhist spiritual practices related to the cultivation of compassion, and the relationship of compassion and wisdom, as described in the following paragraphs.

2.4.4.1 Introduction to compassion. *Compassion* is a fundamental concept with rich meanings in Buddhism. The concept of compassion has two meanings. The first is “empathy,” that is, the wish that others will be free from suffering. The second is “loving-kindness,” that is, the wish that others will be happy (Buswell et al., 2014). Furthermore, the concept of compassion has two aspects. One is *vastness* (廣大), which means that the object of compassion should be extended to all *sentient beings* (有情眾生), even the enemy. The other is *equality* (平等), which means that the status of the object of compassion should be without partiality.

Mahāyāna Buddhism has influenced China over a long period of time. The *four immeasurables* (四無量心), *repentance* (懺悔業障), the *six perfections* (六度 / 六般若波羅蜜), and the *means of conversion* (四攝事) are the most common practices related to the cultivation of compassion in this region.

Four immeasurables. This refers to *immeasurable loving-kindness* (慈無量心), *immeasurable compassion* (悲無量心), *immeasurable empathetic joy* (喜無量心), and *immeasurable equanimity* (捨無量心). Practicing the four immeasurables through meditation

is an important method. The meditator is taught to take up each of the boundless states in the same way. Taking the practice of immeasurable loving-kindness as an example, the meditator should fill their mind with loving-kindness at first; then, “he pervades the world with it, first in one direction, then in a second direction, then a third and a fourth, then above, below, and all around, identifying himself with all beings and remaining free from hatred and ill will” (Buswell et al., 2014, p. 59).

Repentance. In Buddhism, the word *repentance* means two things. The first meaning is that the practitioner should be ashamed of behaving in ways that are considered wrong. The second is that the practitioner vows not to behave in such a way again. By repenting, practitioners can clear themselves of unvirtuous deeds and develop a better foundation for advanced practices. As this is essential for practitioners, many kinds of rituals have been developed for repentance, such as *Eighty-Eight Buddhas Repentance* (八十八佛懺悔文), *Thirty-Five Buddhas Confession* (三十五佛懺), *Compassion Samadhi Water Repentance* (慈悲三昧水懺), *Great Compassion Repentance* (大悲懺), and so on.

Six perfections. This is not only one of the key doctrines in Mahāyāna (Buswell et al., 2014, p. 513), but is nevertheless an important spiritual practice.⁶ This term refers to the following:

Dāna pāramitā (布施波羅蜜): The perfection of generosity, giving of oneself;

Śīla pāramitā (持戒波羅蜜): The perfection of virtue, morality, discipline, proper conduct;

Kṣānti pāramitā (忍辱波羅蜜): The perfection of patience, tolerance, forbearance,

⁶ In *The jewel ornament of liberation: The wish-fulfilling gem of the noble teachings*, Gampopa elaborates each pāramitā from seven directions (2008). The seven directions refer to (1) reflection on faults and virtues; (2) definition (體性); (3) classification; (4) characteristics of each classification; (5) increase (增長 / 增益); (6) perfection (清淨); (7) result (果報). More details about six perfections can be found in Gampopa’s *The jewel ornament of liberation*.

acceptance, endurance;

Vīrya pāramitā (精進波羅蜜): The perfection of energy, diligence, vigor, effort;

Dhyāna pāramitā (禪定波羅蜜): The perfection of one-pointed concentration,
contemplation;

Prajñā pāramitā (般若波羅蜜): The perfection of wisdom, insight.

Means of conversion. In the sutras, this term refers to “the four methods by which bodhisattvas attract and retain students. The four are (1) generosity (布施), (2) kind words (愛語), (3) helpfulness, viz. teaching others to fulfill their aims (利行), and (4) acting in accordance with one’s teachings, viz. consistency between words and deeds, or perhaps even the ‘common good’ (同事)” (Buswell et al., 2014, p. 754).

The four immeasurables and repentance focus on the practitioner’s mind directly, while the six perfections and the means of conversion train the mind via the practitioner’s behaviors.

2.4.4.2 Compassion and wisdom. Although compassion is a feature of Mahāyāna Buddhism, *wisdom*, with its rich meanings, also plays a critical, fundamental role in this tradition. First, it refers to the understanding of Buddhist doctrines. Second, it refers to a level of understanding beyond that of ordinary wisdom, especially referring to the wisdom associated with, or required to achieve, Buddhahood, according to the ultimate teaching (Buswell et al., 2014). Moreover, “wisdom” refers to *calmness* (止) and *insight* (觀).

The relationship of compassion and wisdom is also crucial in Buddhism. The fundamental principle of learning Buddhism is to “*practice compassion and wisdom simultaneously*” (悲

智雙運; Hsing Yun, 1994).⁷ If the Buddhist practices compassion without wisdom, their actions would lead to bad results and cannot finally benefit the object of compassion. On the contrary, if the Buddhist deems that there is no compassion in this ultimate wisdom, they will fall into a trap and would be unable to develop their wisdom.

2.4.5 Calmness and Insight

Wisdom plays a critical, fundamental role in Mahāyāna Buddhism, and, in expedient teaching, it refers to calmness and insight. In other words, from the perspective of the effects of practices, all practices are reducible to two categories: to cultivate calmness and to cultivate insight.

Calmness refers to the nature of mental stabilization thanks to which the practitioner can focus on a meditative object (Geshe Sopa, 1991; Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse, 2012). For example, chanting *Namo Amitābha* (南無阿彌陀佛) is a common and popular Buddhist spiritual practice in Chinese Buddhism. By chanting *Namo Amitābha*, a practitioner may experience its corresponding effects. For instance, they could transfer their focus from the original thoughts arousing negative emotions to chanting. In this case, they could reduce their negative feelings and stabilize their mind temporarily. Moreover, calmness further means that the practitioner's mind becomes malleable and workable for other functions (Geshe Sopa, 1991; Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse, 2012).

⁷ The original text in Chinese: 佛門最講究的是智慧，並以智慧為生命，故有「慧命」之稱。普願天下每一個人都有文殊的智慧外，更具有觀音的慈悲，能悲智雙運才是學佛之本。

Insight refers to the capacity to reflect discursively on the nature of the meditative object according to the Buddhist doctrines when calmness is present simultaneously (Geshe Sopa, 1991). For example, the practitioner could analyze and reflect on the nature of sentient beings' life as per the twelvefold chain of dependent origination when he or she keeps focusing stably on the corresponding objects. Finally, the union of calmness and insight (止觀雙運 / 止觀雙修) is the path of purification of affliction and ignorance, which are impediments to emancipation (Geshe Sopa, 1991; Hsing Yun, 1995).

2.5 Review of the Empirical Studies on Buddhist Spiritual Practices

Most research on Buddhism employs research methods belonging to the field of the humanities. Lately, empirical research in this field has been increasing. In the empirical studies on Buddhist practices, research topics cover different fields. For example, some research focuses on different groups, such as tertiary education teachers (Jiang, 2015), students (Lin, 2014), religious monks and nuns in Buddhism (Huang, 2012), and so on. Some research focuses on different effects correlated with Buddhist practices, such as the improvement of social relationships (Zhang, 2005) and satisfaction with one's job (Huang, 2017).

In addition to this, some researchers study the potential influence of practices on practitioners' emotions; most of these studies are from Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China (Taiwan). Cheu's research tests the effects of meditation on primary school students' creativity and EI, as well as their physical and spiritual changes during the meditation process, by employing pre- and post-test control group experiments (Cheu, 2004). Cheu employs several evaluation instruments, including the "Williams Creative Thinking

Activity,” the “Williams Creative Thinking Tendency Evaluation,” the self-developed “Self-Examining Evaluation for Meditation,” and the “Questionnaire of Opinions on Meditation.” Students in the experimental group of this study did better in creativity and EI than the students in the control group.

Lai (2008) explores Fu-Chi teachers’⁸ emotional experiences in a professional context, as well as how they engage in emotional management. Via semi-structured interviews with eight junior high school teachers with Buddhist backgrounds, Lai finds that, although the participants still encounter negative emotions such as anger, impotence, depression, and worry about working, they can convert these events and emotions into positive ones with a belief and life philosophy built on Buddhism. In his study, Xu (2010) conducts in-depth interviews with six practitioners to explore their emotional experiences and the changes in their Transformative Learning Processes. Two of the six participants are teachers; they share positive changes, such as changes in handling anger during teaching, which results from their interactions with students; these changes come about after performing meditation as their primary way of spiritual practice.

Moreover, some researchers investigate practitioners’ lives. They treat spiritual practice experience as a living experience rather than a form of psychological intervention, which will continue influencing the practitioners’ understanding of the past, present, and future. Li-fen Tsai, Chia-lin Chung, Ma-Li Tsai, and Ting-yu Guo focus on only one participant’s life story (Chung, 2013; Guo, 2017; Tsai, 2006; Tsai, 2015), while Tsai (2006) and Chung (2013) choose themselves as the research participants. These four studies describe the participants’

⁸ Teachers who regularly join teacher training activities organized by the Buddhist organization Bliss and Wisdom are called Fu-Chi (福智) teachers in Taiwan. More details about this organization are elaborated upon in Chapter 4.

lives in detail and include their experiences before performing Buddhist practices. Chen, Jiang, and Lin's research invites participants from different groups, such as monks and teachers in higher education (Chen, 2004; Jiang, 2015; Lin, 2015). These three studies try to make comparisons based on narrative stories, to discover the differences and similarities in the experiences of their participants.

To summarize, even though the existing literature helps us understand aspects of the impact of Buddhist spiritual practice on teachers' emotions, it fails to address other aspects, particularly: (a) the details of these transformations, and (b) the further influences of the impact of Buddhist spiritual practice on TSR in the context of Hong Kong schools.

2.6 Summary and Research Framework

2.6.1 Summary of Literature Review

The literature review could be divided into two parts. One is about teacher emotion and its relationship with students. The other is about Buddhist spiritual practices and their links with EI. At the beginning of this chapter, based on the definition provided by APA, the main approaches to study emotion are reviewed in order to define emotion appropriately for this study. Following the emotion literature, the studies on teacher emotion are reviewed and discussed. Considering the importance of teacher emotional intelligence in education, the researcher then explores the literature relevant to EI and presents the three models of EI, namely, the ability model, trait model, and mixed model. Goleman's EI theory, a mixed model, is illustrated, including its further development in the 2010s. Following the EI

literature, the studies on teacher emotional capacity and its influence on teacher emotion in TSR are reviewed and discussed.

Since this thesis study is within the frames of reference of emotion in education and Buddhism, the effects of Buddhist spiritual practices on individuals' emotions and the relevant literature are discussed and explored. First, a brief introduction to Buddhist spiritual practices is presented. Following this, the concept of this study, compassion, and its interaction with "wisdom" are discussed with the Buddhist learning principle "Practice Compassion and Wisdom Simultaneously". This is followed by an investigation of calmness and insight, the two main effects of Buddhist spiritual practice, in cultivating the practitioner's wisdom in expedient teaching. Finally, some empirical studies on the effects of Buddhist spiritual practices on individuals' emotions are reviewed.

Because of the dearth of empirical studies in this area, there is sufficient room for deepening the current understandings of teacher EI, Buddhist spiritual practices, and their relationship in the context of TSR. Moreover, the researcher explores and investigates these two questions from a perspective of Goleman's the theory of EI. The current review proposes two research questions, which are as follows.

- 1) How do long-term Buddhist spiritual practices affect Hong Kong teachers' emotions?
- 2) How do changes in emotional intelligence brought about by Buddhist spiritual practices further influence teachers' relationships with students?

2.6.2 Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature review, the conceptual framework of this study is hereby proposed and discussed. Regarding the relationship between teacher emotions and Buddhist spiritual practices, *compassion* and *wisdom (calmness and insight)* are employed as the particular Buddhist spiritual practices and their corresponding effects are studied in a long run. Moreover, the Buddhist spiritual practitioner's teacher emotions are influenced by different spiritual practices together in the long run. Finally, Goleman's EI theory is adopted to explore and investigate the impacts of long-term Buddhist spiritual practices on teacher emotions. First, the five components of EI, which are *self-awareness*, *self-regulation*, *motivation*, *empathy*, and *social skill* are used. Second, since basics of attention training could improve EI (Goleman, 2013), the three sub-varieties of *attention* are employed. In addition, since compassion is one of the main learning aims of Buddhists and its meaning is similar to the concept of empathy in Goleman's EI theory, the researcher makes use of the three types of *empathy* in Goleman's EI theory to discuss the effect of spiritual practice on cultivating practitioners' compassion.

In light of the research questions, teacher emotional intelligence is further discussed in the context of the *teacher-student relationship*. The mutual interaction between the impacts of long-term Buddhist spiritual practices on teacher emotional intelligence and TSR are further investigated and explored. Figure 1 shows the conducts and their relationships discussed in the conceptual framework above.

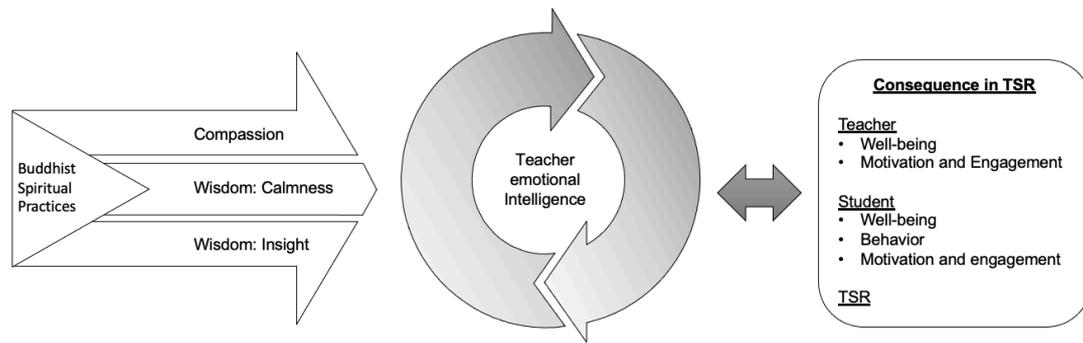


Figure 1 The concept model for the relationship between Buddhist Spiritual Practice, teacher emotional intelligence, and selected consequences.

Note: TSR = Teacher-student relationship

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the methodology for this research is discussed and explored. First, the methodological approach is provided to explain the choice of case study with the characteristic of using retrospective and reflexive life stories. Following this, the research design is explained. In addition, the procedure of data analysis is discussed. Finally, since the study employs qualitative research as its methodology, the researcher's role is investigated in a separate subsection.

3.1 Methodological Approach

Based on the literature review in the previous chapter and the research gaps, this study aims to explore the relationship between long-term Buddhist spiritual practices and Hong Kong teachers' emotions in the education context. Considering that the nature of the research is exploratory, qualitative rather than quantitative research is employed.

Being qualitative in nature, this research makes use of case study as its research method. Yin says that as an empirical method, a case study “investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident.” (Yin, 2018, p. 15).

He further argues three considerations for choosing case study, which are “(a) the form of research question posed, (b) the control a researcher has over all actual behavioral events, and (c) the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to entirely historical events.” (Yin, 2018, p. 9). Then, in summary, Yin points out that a case study is suitable “when a ‘how’ or ‘why’

question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which a researcher has little or no control” (p. 13). The two research questions of this thesis are listed below.

- 1) How do long-term Buddhist spiritual practices affect Hong Kong teachers’ emotions?
- 2) How do changes in emotional intelligence brought about by Buddhist spiritual practices further influence teachers’ relationships with students?

Regarding the first consideration pointed out by Yin (2018, p. 13), this research is asking a “how” question, which makes employing case study as research method self-explanatory. Moreover, this study focuses on the ongoing life stories of the research participants who were still living in a contemporary society, over which the researcher did not have any control. Therefore, employing case study as a research method is reasonable.

The other key characteristic of the methodological approach of this research is the use of retrospective and reflexive life stories. First, it fits the nature of the impact of spiritual experience on the practitioners. Practitioners’ spiritual experiences affect their interpretations of their lives and surroundings from past to future (James, 1902). Moreover, in emotion studies, some scholars have used this method to understand education workers’ emotional experiences in their past lives. For example, Cliffe drew on stories female head teachers recounted, emphasizing their life experiences and their associated learning through positive and/or negative events (Cliffe, 2016).

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Selection of Participants

Three Hong Kong schoolteachers (one male secondary school teacher, one female primary school teacher, and one female secondary school teacher) were invited to participate in this study as the targeted research participants. The participants were recommended by the local Buddhist organizations in the researcher's network, with preliminary considerations of their professional performance and well-being. This means that the participants had qualified professional performance and their well-being situation could be deemed to be normal. Moreover, the following detailed selection criteria were set. First, the research participants were to be long-term Buddhist spiritual practitioners, which means their daily practice stretched back at least five years. Second, they were also to be Mahāyāna Buddhist spiritual practitioners, which means that they carried out their practices according to the religious philosophy of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

The main consideration was that Hong Kong is a region influenced by Mahāyāna and almost all local teachers who hold Buddhist beliefs work in Mahāyāna schools. The understanding of this group could be enriched by exploring the experiences of Mahāyāna Buddhist spiritual practitioners. Third, they were to come from different Buddhist organizations and mainly follow different Buddhist spirituality training systems. Finally, at least one research participant was to come from a primary school and another from a secondary school.

More detailed data on the key characteristics of the three interviewees are presented in the following table. In addition, the researcher employed the names Dora, Carol, and Ben as pseudonyms to ensure the interviewees' anonymity.

Table 1*Key Characteristics of the research participants*

Participants	Dora	Carol	Ben
Fields			
1. Gender	Female	Female	Male
2. Age	~ 30	~ 40	~ 35
3. Family background	<p>She was the only child in the family. Her father passed away when she was very young.</p> <p>Her mother was a working woman. At the time of the interview, she was not married.</p>	<p>She was the second child in a family with three daughters.</p> <p>She was a mother with two daughters. As her husband was a devout Buddhist serving the Buddhist organization on a voluntary basis, she was the main breadwinner of her family.</p>	<p>He was the elder brother in his family and has a sister.</p>
4. Primary education	She studied at a Catholic primary school.	She studied at a Catholic primary school.	He studied at a Protestant primary school.
5. Secondary education	She studied at a Catholic secondary school.	She studied at a Catholic secondary school.	He studied at a Protestant secondary school.
6. Tertiary education – Bachelor’s degree	She studied at two local universities to first gain an Associate Degree and then a Bachelor of Education Degree.	She majored in Arts at a local university.	He majored in English at a local university.



Participants Fields	Dora	Carol	Ben
7. Tertiary education – Master’s degree	Master of Buddhist Studies (local).	None.	Master of Education in Liberal Studies Education (local). Master of Arts in Religious Studies (local).
8. Career	<p>Her first job was as a teacher of Chinese at her secondary school, and she worked there for half a year before joining a secondary school subsidized by a local Buddhist organization, where, at the time of the interview, she was the teacher of Chinese and Buddhism.</p> <p>At the time of the interview, she had three years of full-time teaching experience.</p>	<p>Her first job was as a teacher in visual arts at a direct subsidy primary school. Furthermore, she became a housewife when her child was born. Two years later, she switched to full-time teaching again. Together with her team, she won the Certificate of Merit in the Chief Executive’s Award for Teaching Excellence in the domain of Guidance and Discipline. At the time of the interview, she was serving at another direct subsidy primary school.</p> <p>At the time of the interview, she had 14 years of full-time and two years of part-time teaching experience.</p>	<p>His first job was as a teacher of English at a Christian secondary school. He then served at a Buddhist secondary school. At the time of the interview, he had been teaching English and Ethics and Religious Studies in another Buddhist secondary school for three years.</p> <p>At the time of the interview, he had twelve years of full-time teaching experience.</p>



Participants Fields	Dora	Carol	Ben
9. Serving School	An aided Band 2 secondary school subsidized by a local Buddhist organization.	Primary division in a “through-train” school in the Direct Subsidy Scheme.	An aided Band 3 secondary school subsidized by a local Buddhist organization.
10. Main learning experiences in Buddhism	<p>She started learning Buddhist doctrine and engaging in spiritual practices when she was a local university student.</p> <p>She joined the program on Buddhist learning provided by the Buddhist Urban Academy (都市佛學院) of <i>Fo Guang Shan</i> (佛光山) and the common core courses related to Buddhism offered by the university. She completed a master’s degree in Buddhist studies provided by a local university. Besides academic learning experiences, she also joined meditation camps for learning spiritual practices.</p> <p>At the time of the interview, she had around 10 years of spiritual practice experience.</p>	<p>She commenced her Buddhist learning in Bliss and Wisdom when she finished her bachelor’s degree and graduated from a local university.</p> <p>At the time of the interview, she had around 17 years of spiritual practice experience.</p>	<p>He commenced his Buddhist learning in Fo Guang Shan when he was teaching in a Buddhist secondary school, which was the second school he had served.</p> <p>He joined the programs on Buddhist learning provided by the Buddhist Urban Academy (都市佛學院) of Fo Guang Shan twice, and he also completed a master’s degree program in Religious Studies provided by a local university.</p> <p>At the time of the interview, he had around seven years of spiritual practice experience.</p>



Participants	Dora	Carol	Ben
Fields			
11. Affiliated Buddhist organization	A local Buddhist society led by a famous local Zen master.	The Hong Kong branch of <i>Bliss and Wisdom</i> (福智).	The Hong Kong branch of Fo Guang Shan.



3.2.2 Data Collection

Two main data collection methods were employed in this research: semi-structured interviews and written personal documents.

3.2.2.1 Semi-Structured Interview. A semi-structured interview is “an interview in which some combination of open and closed questions is used. The ratio of open to closed questions depends on the degree of structuring involved” (Sage, n.d.). This feature means that semi-structured interviews “allow much more space for interviewees to answer on their own terms than structured interviews” (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p. 30) and also “provide some structure for comparison across interviewees in a study by covering the same topics, even in some instances using the same questions” (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p. 30). This makes it possible for new ideas to emerge during the interviews. Although the information provided by interviewees is rough and raw, it can reveal a lot to a close reader (Olsen, 2012).

Furthermore, the information provided by semi-structured interviews can surround the focal thematic center created by the interviewer’s prompts (Olsen, 2012). In this study, the semi-structured interviews can provide rich data about the interviewees’ experiences, to help develop an understanding of their life stories as cases relevant to their Buddhist spiritual practices.

Two or three rounds of interviews were conducted with each participant. Each round lasted between 1.5 and 2.5 hours, each with a different focus. The first round mainly focused on the participant’s life story and aimed to gain a general understanding of the participant’s life. The second round focused on the changes in the participant’s emotional dimension caused by long-term Buddhist spiritual practices and the further influences of these changes on the

participants' relationships with their students. If the data collected in the first and second rounds were not deemed to be sufficient, the researcher could have conducted a third round of interviews. After all necessary interviews were conducted, the audio recorded during the interviews was transcribed. The transcriptions were sent to the participants for them to highlight potential errors. The researcher also took notes during each interview as reference for the analysis of the transcripts.

3.2.2.2 Examination of Personal Documents. The examination of personal documents was the second data collection method used in this research. According to Alaszewski, a document can be “defined as a human artifact that contains information. This artifact can take different forms” (Alaszewski, 2018, para. 2). Personal documents, also called “Documents of Life” by Plummer, are “all those documents in which people reveal their social and personal characteristics in ways that are accessible for research” (Plummer, 2004, p. 281). Documents can “provide insight into how individuals and communities make sense of and seek to manage themselves and their interactions with each other” (Alaszewski, 2018, para. 2). Therefore, in this study, personal documents helped the researcher to explore and understand not only the impact of Buddhist spiritual practices on teacher emotions from the perspective of personal growth, but also how these changes further influence the interactions between teachers and students.

The personal document takes various forms, including diary, letter, photograph, life story, and video; they also include computer files, such as a personal website (Alaszewski, 2018; Plummer, 2004). In this study, a personal reflective journal was the main form of personal document that was requested from the participants. There were two main reasons for this. First, keeping personal reflective journals is a universal tool for Buddhist spiritual

practitioners, used to assist their practices. The practitioner recorded the form, time, and duration of their spiritual practices, as well as their feelings and the practices' effects (if any), in order to improve their practice skills (Bodhipaksa, 2007). Second, the reflections on other people or events in the participants' lives were also recorded in the journals, to help the practitioners find new or hidden meaning in them (Bodhipaksa, 2007). Finally, the researcher invited the participants to provide other forms of personal documents related to the study based on their judgments. For example, in this study, the participants provided the documents to help the researcher know more about their spiritual practices or personal backgrounds, such as the Buddhist text employed in the practice and their autobiography.

Collection of the research participants' personal documents was well-designed. The personal reflective journals, which were requested from all three participants, were required to cover their past years of spiritual practices. However, unlike the interviews, the personal documents were treated as an optional method in the process of data collection and were mentioned as a possible data source when the potential participants were first approached. The documents were not requested formally at the beginning of the data collection process, as they may have contained confidential information; they were requested after the first or second round of interviews, mainly depending on the quality of the relationship that was built between each individual participant and the researcher. The participants had the right to decline any data collection request at any time during the research.

3.2.2.3 Overview of the Collected Data. As per the research design, interviews and personal documents were collected, and the researcher took the responsibility for recording all the interviews. Generally, the interviews were held in some quiet restaurant. However, Ben, who lived close to the researcher's workplace, went for his three rounds of interviews to the

meeting rooms booked by the researcher at her place of work. Most of the interviews were conducted during the period from July 2018 to June 2019.⁹ The following table presents more detailed information on the data collected from each participant, both from semi-structured interviews and personal documents.

⁹ The supplementary interviews with Ben and Carol were conducted on 17 September 2021 and 1 Oct 2021, respectively.

Table 2*Overview of the data collected from each participant*

Interviewee	Semi-structured interview	Personal document
Dora (female secondary school teacher)	First round: Sunday, 19 May 2019 Second round: Saturday, 8 June 2019	01 Weekly journals of the program in Buddhist Urban Academy (都市佛學院) in 2012 02 Daily journals of short-term monastic retreat in 2012 03 Meditation log with self-reflection in 2019 04 <i>Text for more effortless daily practice</i> (《六時易行文》)
Carol (female primary school teacher)	First round: Friday, 27 July 2018 Second round: Friday, 10 August 2018	01 Article on interview with Carol by the Buddhist organization Bliss and Wisdom 02 A sample of self-reflection
Ben (male secondary school teacher)	First round: Friday, 4 January 2019 Second round: Friday, 11 January 2019 Third round: Friday, 25 January 2019	01 Autobiography for application to the program at the Buddhist Urban Academy in 2018 02 Weekly journals of the program at the Buddhist Urban Academy in 2018 03 Course term paper of a master's degree program in Religious Studies with self-reflection



3.3 Data Analysis

As the study draws on the retrospective and reflexive life stories recounted by the research participants, narrative analysis, one of the most popular qualitative data analysis methods, is employed as the main analytic method. The details of analysis procedures are presented hereunder.

After transcribing the audio records of the semi-structured interviews, the rough data collected from interviews and personal documents were labeled for easy reference and further citation. The first letter of each label represents the interviewee. “D” is for Dora, “C” is for Carol, and “B” is for Ben. The second letter represents the type of data collected; “I” is for “Interview,” and “D” is for “Document.” With regards to citation, besides the two letters, the digit following the letter indicates the specific document or the interview session numbers. For example, “3” refers to the third document of the participants or the third interview with him or her. Finally, if the citation refers to an interview, the group of numbers following D-I-1 refers to the interview time. For example, “1:02:03” means that the interviewee spoke those words at 1 hour, 2 minutes, and 3 seconds.

When the sorting of materials was done, the interview transcripts, personal documents, and organizational background were merged to form each participant’s case. The researcher analyzed the data from the dimension of content (Lieblich et al., 1998). “People” and their “Life and Events” were the primary focus of the analysis for each case. The segments with the potentially or partially relevant answer to each research question were selected and coded with the preset codes generated from the related theories. After careful assessment, some segments with potentially valuable points were also selected and marked with the new codes

created according to their contents. The coded data in the three cases were then grouped into different themes by further analysis. Finally, the researcher focused on finding out the particularities and similarities among the themes of the three life stories.

With regards to ethical issues, the following safeguards were employed. First, at the stage of interviewee invitation, the research aims and data collection procedures were introduced to the potential participants, and their consent was gained if they joined the research. Second, different measures were taken to ensure confidentiality of the research data. For instance, the interview record, the interview transcript, and the personal reflective journals were stored in password-protected files on a password-protected computer. Moreover, one measure was conducted to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. All the transcripts were sent back to the research participants for verification.

3.4 Researcher's Role

When qualitative research is employed as methodology, the researcher plays a crucial role and should maintain a clear self-understanding, frequently reflecting on their own standpoint. In a doctoral degree thesis employing qualitative research, the researcher is the research designer and the conductor of the research procedures such as interview, transcription, and document analysis. The researcher's personality, living experience, knowledge framework, corresponding knowledge accumulation, and professional training influence him or her during the study. Therefore, the researcher is treated as part of the research tool. In addition to being very knowledgeable on the subject matter and well-trained in research skills, the researcher should therefore also have clear self-understanding and engage in self-reflection frequently, which would ensure the objectivity of the analysis results as much as practically

possible. In the following subsection, the researcher presents her own background and explores its influence on the research.

During her childhood, the researcher came into contact with Buddhism when joining the Buddhist assembly for family activities, since she lived in a community with background of Buddhism and folk religion. Moreover, she also began to build a personal relationship with a nun, who became her Buddhist teacher around twenty years later. After working hard for three years in an international business consulting firm, the researcher decided to engage in further studies for a master's degree and treated it as a gap year. Because of her intense curiosity, she chose the master's degree program in religious studies rather than the one in Buddhism studies, even though the latter seemed like a better starting point, given her community background. After completing the program, she had a better understanding of individual spiritual development and the interaction of different religions in the human's long history, leading to her research standpoint be equipped with an "objective" lens.

Her community background, academic experience, and spiritual practice experiences formed the researcher's unique characteristics. At the beginning of her exploration of religion, the researcher mainly engaged in practices that helped her reduce pressure and improve her capacity of concentration to improve her productivity in academic and professional work, such as "in and out breathing practice." Through further investigation, she had more and more opportunities to contact professional spiritual practitioners and observe them closely. Their performance made her think more about ordinary individuals and the interactions she observed in her daily life in the modern society she lived in. Moreover, this comparison gave her a deep feeling for the atomization of the individual and its influence on personal spirituality, including emotion. She then commenced to reflect on the meaning and function

of cultivating personal connection through kindness and compassion, which was emphasized in Chinese traditional culture, Buddhism, and other cultural and religious traditions.

Besides the chosen research foci, the conduct of research was also influenced by the researcher's spiritual practice experiences. Having first-hand experience made it easier for her to understand the research participants' spiritual practice experiences.¹⁰ Furthermore, since she felt emotional resonance with the interviewees with regards to spiritual practices, they were willing to share their deep feelings and experience. However, the researcher's spiritual practice experience could also have reduced her sensitivity. Because of the shared experience in spiritual practices, the researcher might be very accustomed to certain words and behaviors and would therefore not have paid enough attention to the specific meanings embedded in them. Her potentially insufficient sensitivity might have resulted in her ignoring certain valuable research findings. The researcher's thesis supervisors' guidance helped her minimize the related negative effect as much as possible.

¹⁰ The researcher commenced her Buddhist spiritual practice in 2011. Thanks to her Buddhist teacher's trust, even though the researcher is not a Buddhist, she can still learn Buddhist spiritual practices through the instruction of her teacher, who has nearly 40 years of experience in the field.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the research findings based on interviews with the three local schoolteachers and on their personal documents. Each teacher's life story was investigated and discussed separately. The overall discussion of the two research questions listed in Chapter 1 is presented in Chapter 5.

4.1 Dora: A Junior Teacher Supported by Meditation

Dora, the only child in her natal family, was around 30 years old and lived with her mother. When being interviewed, she had three years of full-time teaching experience. As a teacher in a local Band 2 secondary school, she mainly taught Chinese language, Buddhist doctrine, and Buddhist spiritual practices. Moreover, she was also a class teacher.

4.1.1 Buddhism Learning and Spiritual Practices Experiences

Dora's father passed away when she was in primary school. Since she was too young to understand this and was also well protected and cared for by the people around her, she didn't feel strongly about it at the time. However, her mother's suffering caused by the death of her father still impressed her very much. Her second experience of death happened when she was a Form 2 student at a Catholic secondary school. Her close friend Grace passed away due to a medical accident, which was traumatic for Dora, causing her to have great doubts about life and even living, and influenced her engagement in different aspects of her life.

Dora's contact with Buddhism and the relevant spiritual practices started when she was studying at a local university for an associate degree from 2009 to 2011. Her teacher, Catherine, taught her Buddhism during the semester break at university through the Sharing sessions on Buddhism (佛學分享會), using precept and example teaching; thanks to Catherine, Dora overcame this trauma and built strong motivation to become a good teacher. This self-healing experience with the help of Buddhism learning and practices inspired her a lot and gave her the motivation to learn and explore Buddhism formally.

Dora commenced her studies in Buddhism systematically on both doctrine and spiritual practice after becoming an undergraduate student at another local university from 2011 to 2015, reading for a Bachelor of Education degree. During this period, besides taking the elective courses on Buddhism at her university, she also joined the entry level program provided by the Buddhist Urban Academy (都市佛學院) of Fo Guang Shan International Buddhist Progress Society (佛光山佛香講堂) in Hong Kong, and the short-term monastic retreat and International Youth Seminar on Life and Ch'an (國際青年生命禪學營) offered by Fo Guang Shan of Taiwan.

Moreover, Dora also joined a meditation camp in Malaysia and learned the meditation methods in the Theravāda tradition. This learning experience deepened and expanded her understanding of meditation. Regarding "in and out breathing practice," she learned that she could observe more different and detailed features of her breathing and employed more skills, rather than only observing the feeling of "in and out" and counting the number of breaths. For example, she could observe the strength of her breathing and choose to breathe naturally or breathe deeply with attention. Moreover, besides learning sitting meditation and "in and out

breathing practice” at the camp, with guidance, Dora also learned walking meditation and loving-kindness meditation.

Loving-kindness meditation helped Dora when she had difficulties in relationships with others and doing “in and out breathing practice” was not effective for calming herself down. Instead of focusing on others’ errors, she practiced loving-kindness meditation and sent the loving-kindness to herself and others. This practice also improved her relationship with her mother; by sending loving-kindness to herself and her mother, she achieved peace and forgave herself. She then sent wishes to herself and her mother for the improvement of their relationship. After practicing this for some time, Dora found that she gradually could avoid contradicting her mother through her usual unconscious reaction and became more skillful in her interpersonal relationship with her. Consequently, the tension of the relationship between Dora and her mother was released.

In Years 3 and 4, she joined the Dharma Ambassador Programme (弘法使者) held by the Hong Kong Buddhist Association. After graduating, she joined a teaching program on Buddhist doctrine in India in 2015. Moreover, Dora received the Bodhisattva Precepts (受菩薩戒) in 2015, which means she commits to benefit others in her life.

Dora’s learning and beliefs in Buddhism further shaped her career after graduating from university. She had her first full time teaching job as a Chinese teacher in her Alma Mater, the Catholic secondary school, in the second semester of 2016. Owing to her good performance, after the initial temporary contract of six months, she had the opportunity of securing a two-year contract. However, since she felt that she could not really implement her Buddhism-influenced teaching ideas in a Catholic secondary school, she then tried to find

work in secondary schools sponsored by Buddhist organizations. She successfully became a teacher of Chinese and Buddhism in a secondary school sponsored by a Buddhist organization in the academic year 2016-17, where she could carry out what she had learnt and practiced in Buddhism in her learning and teaching activities.

Her school was aided by local government. It was also sponsored by a local Buddhist organization and its school vision and mission were influenced by the spirit of Buddhism. It was a Band 2 co-ed secondary school and in the academic year 2018-19 had 24 classes. Since the school was located in a district where the majority of the population was made up of grassroots residents, the majority of school students were from families with lower socio-economic status.

At the time of the interview, Dora mainly followed Venerable Sik Hin Hung (衍空法師), a local Buddhist monk ordained under the Mahāyāna tradition for Buddhist spirituality development. Ven. Hing Hung is the 45th generation lineage holder of the *LingJi* School of Chan (臨濟宗) and 10th generation lineage holder of the *Guiyang* School of Chan (為仰宗) (Centre of Buddhist Studies, n.d.). As one of the Founding Fellows of the Centre of Buddhist Studies of The University of Hong Kong and the founder of the Awareness Spiritual Growth Centre, his main interest was ‘repackaging’ the Teachings of Buddhism so that they could become more ‘user friendly’ for people in today’s world” (Our Hong Kong Foundation, n.d.). For example, he would integrate different meditation methods or introduce meditation methods in new ways so it was easier to learn and practice. Moreover, he also encouraged his followers to learn different meditation methods from different traditions, such as Theravāda and Tibetan Buddhism.

Dora joined the regular weekly spiritual practice assembly lead by Ven. Hing Hung at the Awareness Spiritual Growth Centre. She would recite *Text for more effortless daily practice* (《六時易行文》)¹¹ after which she would engage in sitting meditation with other participants. Ven. Hing Hung would also give Buddhist instruction and offer consultation to participants. When Dora encountered difficulties, she would also seek her master's help. Instead of giving direct instructions or answers to Dora to solve her problems, Ven. Hing Hung usually provided inspiration and spiritual support. His encouragement would then spur Dora on to come up with new ideas or directions and to have further discussions with her master to continue improving. Besides the regular weekly spiritual practice assembly, Dora would join the meditation camp lead by Ven. Hing Hung during public holidays. The learning and practice at camp was similar to the weekly assembly but had a more intensive schedule.

As part of her daily spiritual practice, Dora recited *Text for more effortless daily practice* (《六時易行文》) and also practiced meditation, depending on her daily schedule.

Furthermore, to improve her professional status in Buddhism, she also finished a master's program on Buddhist Studies at a local university in 2019.

4.1.2 Meditation and its Corresponding Effects

Meditation was Dora's primary method of Buddhist spiritual practice, which helped her a lot in daily life and work. There were different forms of meditation, such as sitting meditation, walking meditation, and love-kindness meditation. Dora learned meditation and kept

¹¹ The Text includes six main parts, namely, compliment (稱讚), taking refuge and respecting (歸敬), confession (懺悔), entreaty (勸請), rejoicing (隨喜), and dedication (迴向).

practicing for around ten years. She mastered different forms and could employ a particular one according to the scenario and environment.

Meditation helped her regulate her emotions in daily life. In her meditation log, Dora described her meditation experience on one particular morning:

First, I recited the name of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara thirty times. After counting “in and out” breaths for a while, I was in a peaceful state without the intrusion of thought. Every breath was very clear and comfortable. The body and mind seemed to be synchronized. After this session ended, I started the day with joy and seemed to be full of energy. (D-D-03)

Moreover, owing to the local secondary school’s intensive schedule, it is easy for teachers’ emotions to pile up and be carried over from one class into the following one after the five to 10 minutes short break in between lessons, and Dora faced a similar difficulty. In the interview, she shared a depressing experience. In that experience, since she carried with her the emotions from the previous class and was not calm enough—she overreacted, punishing a student who forgot to bring his or her book to class. Serving in a secondary school sponsored by a local Buddhist association, Dora could lead a short meditation practice session with her students at the beginning of class. Besides helping the students calm down, this short meditation practice also helped Dora regulate her emotions when she felt that she was not calm due to events in a previous class. Short meditation practice became a useful tool for Dora to regulate her emotions between class shifts.

Good emotional regulation enabled Dora to achieve a stable emotional state, which in turn helped her recognize the students' emotional state, and consequently spot the appropriate moment to introduce a change. Students were not always ready at the beginning of a lesson. Stopping them formally and commencing teaching is ineffective sometimes. Reading their emotions and inducing them into the right mood to start the class is essential for building a good teacher and student relationship (TSR) and to achieve the aim of learning and teaching. Through the short meditation practice mentioned above, Dora found herself becoming more and more skillful in this matter. For example, if she observed that the students' energy level was still high after a short break, she would have a short chat with them, such as "what are you talking about?", "you look so happy!", and "why are you laughing?" and then lead them into the lesson naturally.

Dora's spiritual practices also benefited her when regulating her emotions in challenging situations; they enabled her to build a new way to react in such situations, which also helped her maintain her emotions in a good state. Dora encountered many challenges at work and during daily life, especially as a new teacher. For example, at the beginning of her teaching career, she often had a strong emotional reaction to students disobeying her in the classroom and would be very unhappy for the whole day when this happened. Although she started learning Buddhism and its spiritual practices when she was a university student, she admitted it still took her some time to apply what she learned in the workplace.

Dora became aware of the corresponding reaction patterns during particular events and tried to release her internal emotional tension, managing to relax after class through meditation. Next, with a stable emotional state, she could maintain her awareness and reduce the degree of her emotional reaction in order to become calmer and calmer in a challenging situation,

until she could deal with students' behavior issues skillfully. For example, Dora was very emotional the first few times one of her students openly disobeyed her by using rude words in the classroom. Dora was able to become aware of her emotional status by "in and out breathing practice" and keep calm to avoid overreaction, then tried her best to release the emotional tension after class.

And then, when Dora encountered such challenging situation again, not only could she be aware of her emotional state, but also of that of the students. If they were too emotional, she would even change her emotional state by using deep breathing and avoid interaction with them that was too emotional. Furthermore, she would also try to ask the students to get more information to better handle the situation. Dora's interaction with one of her students, Felix, is investigated in more detail in the following paragraphs. At the time of the interview, mainly by practicing "in and out breathing practice" and sitting meditation, Dora maintained her awareness of new challenging situations in daily working and living situations and gradually expanded her capacity to gain control of her emotional reactions.

In the interview, Dora also shared one experience of using meditation in school to help her handle her TSR. In one meditation class, Dora asked her students to meditate in the meditation room. However, since the previous class was physical education, the students were reluctant to follow Dora's instructions due to their physical fatigue. When Dora discussed the current class arrangements with the whole class, one of her students, Felix, shouted at Dora suddenly and, using foul language, said she was ignoring the students' opinion. Dora was shocked and surprised by Felix's reaction. She gave him a serious reprimand for his awful manners; following this, Felix burst out crying and was unable to

engage in that class. Owing to Felix's strong reaction, Dora compromised and finally held the class in the original classroom.

When she finished the class, Dora returned to her office and engaged in a short session of sitting meditation. After that, she regulated her emotions and managed to stabilize them. She then reviewed the whole sequence of events. Dora was aware that she did not handle the situation well since Felix reacted in a very abnormal way and she worried that something negative might have happened to him. Concerned about this, she sent a WhatsApp message to him and said sorry for her heavy reprimand. Moreover, in the message, she showed solicitude and asked whether he was alright.

Felix replied with a very long message. After saying he was very sorry for his awful manners, he explained the reason for his strong reaction. He arrived home very late the night before due to heavy traffic. However, his father still blamed him and did not believe his explanation. Felix felt wronged and brought this negative emotion to the meditation class, overreacting when he encountered a similar situation in the class. Thanks to Dora's awareness and prompt follow-up after class, the TSR between Felix and her was remedied.

4.1.3 Dealing With Challenges With Positive Emotional State and Reflection

As Hong Kong was an international metropolis, Dora lived and worked here leading a fast-paced life, which was similar to the local teachers. She studied in a Band 1 secondary school, and now she worked in a Band 2 secondary school. She said that at the beginning, her students' learning performance shocked her and made her anxious since it was quite different from her own study experience. For example, in one instance, some students repeated the

same mistakes when writing certain Chinese characters, even after she repeatedly taught them the right way of writing them. Therefore, she needed to spend too much time on Chinese character-writing and did not have enough time to introduce the content of the article or poem and advanced grammar, such as rhetoric, as she had planned to do. However, the most challenging time for her was when students disobeyed her. For instance, some students would just chat away in class and when their teacher corrected them, they would openly disobey and address the teacher using foul language instead of being quiet.

Moreover, professional development was another source of pressure for Dora. She joined the Master of Buddhist Studies (part-time) program held by a local university during the academic year 2017-19. Since she needed to attend two three-hour lectures on weeknights, she felt her daily routine was disturbed. She became exhausted since she only managed to get 5.5 hours of sleep on those nights. Furthermore, she was sometimes late for lectures since she spent time guiding students on their homework after school.

If all of the challenges happened at the same time, and the situation tended to get out of control, she would be frustrated and irritable. In such cases, she would practice loving-kindness meditation to deal with painful and frustrating feelings, which would help her achieve a positive emotional state to enable her to deal with the challenge at hand. In the meditation log, Dora recorded a similar experience and the meditation practice she adopted. In this experience, a student who was feeling sick was absent for detention without having notified anyone or asked for permission. Dora became worried about her and contacted her parents. However, the students' parents didn't understand the situation due to lack of communication and other unknown reasons, and complained to Dora, which made her feel exhausted, very angry, and confused.

I was reciting the name of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara when I was in the Mass Transit Railway... though things happened yesterday, the chaotic thoughts occupied my mind till today. I could let my mind rest for a while by reciting the name of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, hoping that I and my students and their parents can be free from all kinds of suffering. (D-D-03)

Loving-kindness meditation helped Dora calm herself down and helped her be aware of the real situation, what she could do in the current conditions, and accept the limitations and imperfections with self-compassion.

Moreover, she could pay more attention to the strengths of her students and the progress they made. She shared her experience of getting along with her student, Alex, making a comparison to her colleague Eliza's interactions with him. Alex was a student who was not very disciplined. He liked to chat with his classmates in class and sometimes disobeyed the teachers when they corrected him. Moreover, his mother was not easygoing either and sometimes complained to teachers. Since she did not have a way to release her negative emotions, Alex's class teacher Eliza accumulated the negative emotions he caused. She then felt tremendous pressure when interacting with him and his mother and often even became frustrated.

Unlike Eliza, Dora released negative emotions mainly through meditation and could be more open-minded when in a stable emotional state. Moreover, her loving-kindness meditation also helped her have a more positive perspective of Alex's behavior. For instance, Alex liked to meddle in his classmates' affairs and Dora thought his behavior could be seen as positive since he could help her manage the classroom; Eliza, on the other hand, thought Alex just

wanted to seek the limelight (出風頭). Although it was hard to clarify whose opinion was correct, Dora thought that Eliza's negative perspective of Alex was not helpful. "If we think everything done by him [Alex] is wrong, we will suffer from that negative perspective, just like Eliza."

Furthermore, in the interview, Dora shared an instance when the TSR failed and how she got out of the resulting low mood by meditation and reflection. Dora occasionally found that one of her students, Betty, was in a very low mood. After further communication, they built up a close relationship, and Betty disclosed to Dora her difficulties and problems, which had been accumulating for many years. Dora hoped she could do something to help Betty and recommended a summer study tour to her. However, although Betty enrolled in the tour, she ended up not joining since the requirements were very strict that year. Owing to some miscommunication, Betty felt she was cheated by Dora and became very unhappy, resulting in their relationship breaking down after this event.

Dora felt very hurt since Betty did not want to face her and stopped direct communication with her. Betty's heart was closed again! Moreover, since Betty was a Form 2 student at the time, Dora would still meet Betty and even interact with her many times in different events in her remaining four years at school. If their relationship did not improve, their interaction would be poor and embarrassing, which made Dora feel anxious.

During the following summer holidays, Dora had a chance to be a juror. During jury service, she had more time to concentrate by using "in and out breathing practice," and the analysis of the different witnesses' testimonies also inspired her a lot. In the interview, she described this experience.

I analyzed events that happened several years ago. When I went through them in chronological order, I could see how they influenced others according to the Buddhist principles “dependent origination” (緣起) and “cause and effect” (因果). Moreover, I also observed that the way I dealt with a particular daily event was influenced by how it emerged in my mind and from which perspective I chose to think about it. (D-I-1, 18:30)

After this jury duty, Dora learned how to employ a refreshing view to understand events. Regarding the challenge in her relationship with Betty, she had a new understanding because of this refreshing view.

At any one time, different students are in different emotional states. Moreover, it is common to get positive response from some students but not from others. We should try different methods to find out what works and what doesn't. Furthermore, certain methods may not work immediately, and instead bring about good results a few years later. Therefore, we should consider things in the long run rather than only focusing on the students' current negative emotions, such as unhappiness and grievance. (D-I-1, 1:27:00)

Finally, she released the feeling of unhappiness, conflict, and annoyance in her heart. When being interviewed, Betty was in Form 3 and Dora was not her subject teacher. Instead of having interaction in the classroom, Dora could only come across Betty by chance from time to time on the school grounds. In this kind of scenario, Dora kept showing her willingness to

interact with Betty proactively by saying hello and smiling even though Betty hadn't yet given a positive response. She also waited for Betty's change with patience.

4.1.4 Accepting and Expressing the Authentic Feelings in Emotional Regulation

There are complex emotional scenarios in TSR and teachers need to constantly regulate their emotions to fulfill their professional obligations. Whether teachers can express their emotions appropriately or not is critical to building and maintaining the TSR, which further influenced learning and teaching effectiveness. Therefore, Dora sometimes needed to show the appropriate emotions required by the specific scenario by pretending. For example, on one occasion, two students in Dora's class were misbehaving. Although she was not angry, Dora perceived the need in the context and adopted a facial expression that was as still as stone, which helped the students realize the seriousness of their behavior. Although this kind of "feigning" was common for many teachers, in the interview, Dora said she only acted this way once or twice per week so as not to let this kind of behavior become a burden for her. Moreover, Dora shared that most of the time she expressed her true feelings, otherwise she would break down if there was too much "feigning."

As described, her current strategy was the result of her self-awareness, which helped her avoid surface acting in emotional expression. As a junior teacher, Dora met many difficulties in her first two to three years. She studied in a Band 1 secondary school, and at the time of the interview worked in a Band 2 secondary school. The students' attitude towards learning, their habits, and performance were entirely different from her own experience. Dora's temper was gentle, and she was easy to get along with. To achieve better classroom management,

Dora was persuaded by some of her colleagues to change her style and wear a mask in front of her students.

However, Dora didn't follow her colleagues' advice and modify her emotional expression directly. Meditation helped her be patiently mindful of her situation with patience and be aware that some good-tempered teachers could deal with student behavior problems.

Moreover, being compassionate to herself by practicing loving-kindness meditation, Dora decided to give herself some time to build her style, which fits her temper, rather than wearing a mask to quickly solve problems. At the time of the interview, Dora was a teacher with three years' experience, and she became more and more skillful in emotional expression as time went by. This choice of a development path with proper patience and self-compassion helped Dora avoid the stress.

4.1.5 Recovery From Trauma by Meditation and Reflection, and the Empathy Emerging From the Recovery Naturally

Dora lost her close friend Grace when she was a Form 2 student. Grace died in a medical accident and this made Dora sorrowful and depressed. Moreover, Dora hadn't thought about it too much when her father passed away in her early childhood, while this event caused her to ask big questions about mortality. Owing to this confusion, she could not concentrate on her studies, the interaction with her classmates and friends, and even her hobbies. She then became addicted to computer games and didn't perform well at school, which made her mother feel very confused and disappointed in her. In those years, the relationship between Dora and her mother was also tense.

The turning point happened when Dora was a student of an Associate Degree program at a local university. In this program, she met Catherine, her first teacher of Buddhism. Catherine shared her knowledge and understanding of Buddhism and taught the students how to meditate in the Sharing sessions on Buddhism. Most importantly, Dora overcome her trauma thanks to Catherine’s teaching by precept and personal example. In the Sharing sessions on Buddhism, Catherine shared how she kept her mother company and accepted the facts of the matter of the whole process, from her mother getting cancer to her being dead. Dora thought that Catherine was very professional because even though she was very sorrowful due to the death of her mother, and cried at home after work, she still could fulfill her deliverables when teaching. In the meantime, her students were not aware that she was experiencing the challenge of her mother’s death until she shared this with them. Dora felt that the way Catherine faced and handled this event was very impressive.

Moreover, Dora also learnt that living and dying were affected by *karmic effect* (業力)¹² from Catherine’s teaching of the *twelvefold chain of dependent origination* (十二緣起), using her life experiences as examples. Her best friend Grace’s death in a medical accident caused Dora to ponder mortality. She was very confused about the reason Grace died since she was still very young and had many dreams for her future. Finally, from the perspective of karma in Buddhism, Dora understood and accepted that Grace’s death happened due to *causes and conditions* (因緣)¹³ even though she could not know all of Grace’s karman (業). Therefore, she realized that she should not keep feeling depressed about this event and being attached to it, because this negatively affected her performance in other things. Instead, she should try

¹² The power of *karman* (業). Karman is a term used to refer to the doctrine of action and its corresponding “ripening” or “fruition,” according to which virtuous deeds of body, speech, and mind produce happiness in the future (in this life or subsequent lives), while nonvirtuous deeds lead instead to suffering (Buswell et al., 2014, p. 420).

¹³ “The process of causality is provisionally divided between hetu and pratyaya, “causes and conditions”: hetu designates the main or primary cause of production, which operates in conjunction with pratyaya, the concomitant conditions or secondary, supporting causes; these two together produce a specific “fruition” or result” (Buswell et al., 2014, p. 348).

her best to observe the causes of the event. Furthermore, she should also transform her negative karma and accumulate positive karma and merit.

Before being interviewed in May 2018, Dora encountered yet another death event—her aunt had just passed away. She died merely 15 days after being informed by her doctor that she had cancer. Similar to Grace’s death, this event made Dora feel sad. Moreover, when being informed of her aunt’s sickness, Dora was upset and felt that she was in a mess due to her mother’s poor state, which was triggered by her aunt’s sickness—her mother was very worried about her sister and became emotional, which led to emotional behaviors, such as insistence on visiting her sister even though she was very tired. Dora then practiced “in and out breathing practice” to help calm herself down, and reviewed the situation. After reflecting “the causes and conditions of the issue regarding my mother and my aunt,” she let go of her thoughts and emotions, emerged from the mess she was in, and was able to concentrate again. In this event, Dora was able to honor her deliverables in teaching; she even could comfort her mother and other relatives although she was also very sorrowful at the time her aunt passed away.

Dora’s personal experience of the recovery from the trauma caused by Grace’s death gave her strong first-hand knowledge of the angst experienced during adolescence. In the interview, “fish carrion” is how Dora described her trauma. “Now you have fish carrion. If you do not deal with it and instead hold on to it, it would continue to decompose and pollute other good things and turn them into carrion too.” The aimlessness that teenagers often feel can cause pain or confusion that may easily become obstacles across life dimensions. The loss of her close friend in Form 2 made her become disengaged from her studies, personal hobbies, and social life. Moreover, Dora was addicted to playing games to get away from the sadness.

These changes affected the relationship with her mother, as her mother could not understand her pain and therefore could not help her disentangle herself from it.

When recalling these memories, Dora thought that most of the students who did not make an effort to study, or who had addictions, were the ones who had a “knot in heart” (心結) and could not untie it. Furthermore, the more critical point here is that most students could not become aware of their knots, making it much harder for disentanglement to happen. Dora deemed that the process of disentanglement needed time.

Armed with the empathy that naturally emerged from her recovery from the grief discussed in the preceding paragraphs, Dora always reminded herself to be patient and to pay more attention to students’ positive changes when dealing with their behavioral issues. There are many possible reasons for such behavioral issues and sometimes the students were not even aware they actually had issues, which resulted in them being trapped in the same fixed views and behavior patterns. Therefore, Dora had more empathy for her students. She found it easy to understand students’ difficulties and not demand too much from them. Affirming their efforts, acknowledging their learning difficulties, helping them break up complex tasks into simpler ones, and finally encouraging them to work, became Dora’s core skills.

Dora shared a detailed experience in her interview. One of her students, Alex (mentioned earlier), was from a new immigrant family. He was very arrogant and prone to disobeying teachers’ instructions in class. As his Chinese teacher in Form 2, Dora endured Alex’s bad behavior and avoided increasing the relational tension between Alex and herself. However, this kind of interaction with Alex still made Dora upset. As mentioned earlier, during the summer holidays that followed, Dora cultivated her focus by meditation and reflected deeply

from the perspective of Buddhist doctrine when fulfilling her jury duty. She learned how to employ a fresh view to understand events, and regained self-confidence.

As Alex's Buddhist teacher in Form 3, Dora changed the interaction style with him and tried to build up a much better relationship. First, Dora no longer set targets that Alex could not achieve. Instead, she began to find or even create the appropriate moments to praise him. For example, since Alex was the subject monitor of Buddhism, Dora would directly assign him the task of collecting the students' assignments during the morning assembly. When Alex accepted the task and completed it, Dora would praise him. This new interaction mode worked very well. Alex became willing to greet Dora when they met in school, and their relationship improved considerably. Moreover, it also had a positive effect on Alex's engagement and performance in other academic areas.

4.1.6 Summary

To sum up, mainly through meditation, Dora could become more aware and regulate her emotions and those of others during daily life and work. In addition, when encountering challenges, Dora could employ a more systematic method of reflection built on her learning from Buddhist doctrines. This awareness, regulation of emotions, and systematic reflection help her no end in handling her relationships with her students. Moreover, the self-healing that Dora experienced when she overcame trauma with the help of Buddhism learning and practices, endowed her with more empathy for her students.

4.2 Carol: From Happy Housewife to Excellent Frontline Teacher

Carol was a teacher who was around 40 years old and who worked in a direct subsidy primary school. When being interviewed, Carol had 14 years of full-time and two years of part-time teaching experience. She was a subject teacher in Visual Arts and Liberal Arts (人文素質). She also participated in the management of the Student Support Team as deputy panel head.

4.2.1 Buddhism Learning and Spiritual Practice Experiences

There were three daughters in Carol's natal family. Her father wanted a son, and as the second child of her family, she felt that she was not necessary to her parents. In the interview, she described how she felt that she was just like "a redundant child" and behaved rebelliously in her teenage years. When she was young, her father and mother ran a vegetarian restaurant. She and her mother would sometimes be invited to join the Buddhist assembly, and she liked to tag along. When Carol recalled her childhood memories many years later, she reckoned that was her initial contact with Buddhism.

Carol studied in Catholic primary and secondary schools and read for her bachelor's degree in Fine Arts at a local university from 1999 to 2002. During her primary, secondary, and tertiary education, Carol did not have the chance to learn Buddhism formally through the courses provided by the public education system, even though she needed to gain the relevant knowledge of Buddhism in some subjects, such as Chinese history in secondary school, and philosophy in the General Education Course at university. Moreover, her secondary school Chinese history teacher, whom she admired, told her and her classmates that Buddhism was too complicated to teach and learn in class and instead asked them to study independently using lecture notes he had provided.

Carol's formal contact with Buddhism started when she graduated from university. After graduating, Carol became a full-time teacher in Visual Arts in a direct subsidy primary school without religious affiliation in 2002. Since her boyfriend was a follower of the Buddhist organization *Bliss and Wisdom* (福智), Carol joined the program and commenced her study of Buddhism. Bliss and Wisdom is a Buddhist organization established by Ven. Ri Chang (日常老和尚). This organization has two main parts: one is the Bliss and Wisdom Sangha (福智僧團), and the other is the Bliss and Wisdom Public Services as legal persons (福智法人事業). Based on the study on *The great treatise on the stages of the path to enlightenment* (《菩提道次第廣論》)¹⁴, the organization Bliss and Wisdom has two primary missions: one is to cultivate Buddhist monks, and the other is to cultivate followers through the promotion of Buddhism, education, and organic farming. Presently, Bliss and Wisdom is an international organization with around 60,000 followers, and its main operation offices are in Taiwan. Although Carol could commence her formal study of Buddhism in this organization, she did not engage much since most study group members were married women and their sharing in group discussion was too detached from Carol's experiences.

Carol loved family life. She liked taking care of children, cooking, and being a housewife (少奶奶). When her first daughter was born, Carol started teaching part-time after her husband suggested it, and with his support. The turning point came when her husband decided to devote himself to being a full-time volunteer of the Buddhist organization Bliss and Wisdom in 2004. Although he took up the core responsibility of taking care of their daughter, Carol needed to become the family's primary breadwinner. After initially struggling with the

¹⁴ This Buddhist work is written by Tsong-kha-pa (宗喀巴), who is a famous religious master in Tibetan Buddhism and who was the founder of the Gelug School (格魯派) in AD 1405.

situation, Carol decided to take responsibility for her husband and his level of dedication to Buddhism, albeit feeling under a lot of pressure.

Since, at the same time, the primary school where Carol taught asked her to revert to full-time teaching, Carol became a teacher in Visual Arts and Moral Education. She did very well in her job and, with her team, won a Certificate of Merit in the Chief Executive's Award for Teaching Excellence in the domain of Guidance and Discipline. In this primary school, Carol tried her best to drive learning and teaching in this area to improve students' quality of life and ensure her position at the same time. However, she suffered pressure from her colleagues. Since her hard work also created extra workload for them, they did not support her. They did not have a normal collegial relationship with Carol, which caused her suffering. Moreover, during this process, she sourced lots of existing learning and teaching resources from the Buddhist organization Bliss and Wisdom, which made her colleagues deem that she was missionizing.

During this period fraught with challenges, Carol gained a lot of support from the organization Bliss and Wisdom through the camps for teacher professional development and the direct guidance from sangha to deal with the struggles in her inner heart. Moreover, it became another crucial period in Carol's religious life. She had a much deeper appreciation of the Buddhist term "Fa Jing Zi Zhao" (法鏡自照)¹⁵ and began carefully employing the Buddhist doctrines and spiritual practices that she had learned to guide and improve her

¹⁵ This term is also written as "Fa Jing Nei Zhao" (法鏡內照), which refers to a learning step in the study group on *The great treatise on the stages of the path to enlightenment* of the Buddhist organization Bliss and Wisdom. As per the learning requirements, the learner should utilize the Buddhist doctrines to observe and correct his or her behaviors after hearing/learning (聞) rather than focusing on others. If the practitioner could not do this, he or she would hurt his or her spiritual growth for two main reasons. First, it is easier for the practitioner to observe others than themselves due to human habits. Moreover, owing to the moral standard of Buddhism being higher than that of the secular world, if the practitioner employs the Buddhist standard to observe others, he or she is easily annoyed by others' behaviors and becomes arrogant.

mindset and behavior in daily life and work rather than mainly enrich and enhance the learning and teaching activities in moral education.

In the end, Carol left the primary school in the summer of 2016 and she worked in the primary section of another direct subsidy school with a Protestant background from the academic year 2016-17. It was a co-ed school and its primary section in the academic year 2017-18 had 30 classes. She participated in the management of several functional teams and also taught Visual Arts and Liberal Arts. Moreover, she was nominated to be on the List of Commended Teachers in 2017.

In her daily life, Carol followed the Buddhist teachings provided by Bliss and Wisdom; she had done so for nearly 17 years, according to the learning and teaching timetable prepared by the organization. Bliss and Wisdom provided learning and teaching materials both in video and audio formats through smartphone and desktop apps, which were easy for their followers to access. Carol mainly spent her time learning the Buddhist work *The great treatise on the stages of the path to enlightenment* and reflecting on it. Besides, she wrote spiritual practice journals on the theme “Cultivate Faith and Appreciate Kindness” (修信念恩) to her spiritual master.¹⁶ Carol also practiced observing merits and appreciating kindness in daily life and sometimes practiced “Thirty-Five Buddhas Confession” (三十五佛懺).¹⁷ Moreover, she

¹⁶ According to *The great treatise on the stages of the path to enlightenment*, “Relying on the teacher” (依止法) is the crucial foundation of Buddhist spiritual practice. “Teacher” refers to the spiritual practitioner’s “Principal spiritual master” (根本上師). Meanwhile, Bliss and Wisdom treats “Cultivate Faith and Appreciate Kindness” as the cornerstone of “Relying on the teacher.” In this practice, in order to cultivate their faith, followers need to write down their reflections on faith and the kindness from their spiritual master. Since it is one of Bliss and Wisdom’s fundamental practices, all followers can write their journals to the spiritual master, while the master does not directly respond to them.

¹⁷ This confession is a common confession practice in Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Thirty-five Confession Buddhas are the central object of worship in this practice. It is believed that the Thirty-five Buddhas have the power to purify practitioners’ defilements and eons of negative karma via chanting the Buddhas’ names and practicing prostrations to them.

joined the camps for followers and teachers organized by Bliss and Wisdom when her schedule permitted.

Although Bliss and Wisdom's system of Buddhist teaching doesn't include the teaching of meditation, it offers learning and practice opportunities of other spiritual practices to its followers. The followers could engage in these practices to help them become aware of their emotions and consequently regulate them when they encounter a triggering scenario that arouses their feelings. For example, before commencing the primary agenda item in the group study meeting, that is, discussing the learning of Buddhist doctrine, the participants would chant the Sutra Opening Gatha (開經偈).¹⁸ Carol said that she and other participants regulated their emotional status through this practice, which also helped them avoid quarreling during the discussion. The Sangha also taught Carol to chant the mantra "oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ"¹⁹ (六字大明咒) once she felt angry. These practices could help practitioners transfer their foci from the things that triggered them to the object of the practice, such as the mantra. Moreover, the practices would further help them retain the foci to avoid being stimulated by the emotional cues and to better regulate their emotions.

As a teacher, Carol's education ideas were influenced by those promoted by the Buddhist organization Bliss and Wisdom. As described above, Bliss and Wisdom has public services as legal entities, and one of them is the culture and education service (文教). Ven. Ri Chang (日常老和尚), Bliss and Wisdom's former spiritual master, deemed that "Education is the

¹⁸ This gatha is written by Wu Zetian (武則天), Emperor of the Chinese Tang Dynasty, showing her fondness of Buddhist doctrine and her willingness to understand Buddha's teaching. Since this gatha presents the Buddhist practitioners' learning spirit very well, it is usually placed at the front of the sutra in Chinese books and is also chanted before the formal sutra is chanted.

¹⁹ This mantra is associated with Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisattva presenting compassion in Buddhism (Buswell et al., p. 728). Traditionally, this mantra is renowned in Tibetan Buddhism.

pivot of human development.” (「教育是人類升沉的樞紐」). Furthermore, he initiated and set up the Bliss & Wisdom Foundation of Culture and Education (福智文教基金會) in Taiwan in 1997, whose aim was to improve education quality in different sectors of society. Bliss and Wisdom promoted two main education ideas to teachers via its official website (<https://bwfoce.org/web/education>) and the regular professional development camps for teachers, namely, “Camp for teachers’ growth of life” (教師生命成長營). One was *Observe Merits and Appreciate Kindness* (觀功念恩, OMAK), and the other was *Caring Education* (關愛教育). Regarding “Observe Merits and Appreciate Kindness,” according to Bliss and Wisdom, everyone followed their habits and ideas to observe and assess others’ behavior, which caused hostility. Furthermore, with the accumulation of antagonism, suffering increased. Therefore, the spiritual practitioner should get into the habit of observing all people and things, observing others’ merits, and appreciating others’ kindness, no matter what the circumstances were.

“Caring Education” is another education idea introduced and promoted by Bliss and Wisdom to the teachers among its followers. It focuses on cultivating loving behavior, which could help students grow up. This education idea is summarized into four short phrases for easier reference: “Opposition vs. Acceptance” (“對立 vs. 接納”), “Humility & Discovery” (“謙卑 & 發現”), “Accompanying & Waiting” (“陪伴 & 等待”), and “Being stronger vs. Seeking help” (“強者 vs. 求助”). Carol deemed that “Caring Education” is also a kind of spiritual practice for her.

Carol thought that her Buddhism learning changed her life a lot. The related experiences helped her address her weaknesses and enabled her to become an excellent frontline teacher

who could contribute to students' growth. In the interview, she described it as being the merit of her spirituality masters and of Buddhism.

4.2.2 Particular Practice Method and its Corresponding Effects

4.2.2.1 Daily learning and practices about *The great treatise on the stages of the path to enlightenment*. In contrast with Dora, Carol seldom meditated in her daily life. This is because Carol was following the study system discussed in *The great treatise on the stages of the path to enlightenment* by joining the corresponding study group (廣論研討班) and meditation is an advanced method for her current study status. In comparison, hearing/learning (聞), reflection/analysis (思), and writing the journal “Cultivate Faith and Appreciate Kindness” are her core methods in learning Buddhism. The spiritual master of Bliss and Wisdom provided two or three new sessions of learning materials per week through the website and the app. The learning material is concise, and each session is around 10 minutes long, designed for laypeople in modern society. Early every morning, Carol listened to the learning material, and would then employ what she learned in that day's life and work—she kept being aware of her mind, tried to observe and analyze her thoughts, and even changed them as per her learning. In the evening, she wrote the journal “Cultivate Faith and Appreciate Kindness” to summarize that day's learning and practices.

Since Carol's daily workload was hefty, she could not write the journal “Cultivate Faith and Appreciate Kindness” every evening. Challenges in daily life that aroused strong feelings in her, such as anger and disappointment, usually became a learning opportunity for her. When encountering a specific scenario, Carol would first employ the practices mentioned above, such as chanting mantras, to regulate her emotions and be able to handle the situation better

once she was aware of her feelings. Then, she would address her emotions by writing the journal in the evening or at another appropriate time. When there is a conflict between her feelings and the teaching requirements, which one should she trust? She would write down the inner debate between her authentic feeling, such as anger, and the Buddhist teaching from the spiritual masters. Through this process, she would gain more awareness of her emotions and be able to regulate them better.

Cultivation of habits and behaviors happens after hearing/learning and reflection/analysis. Reflection/analysis is derived from hearing/learning.

However, the practitioner does not know whether their reflection/analysis is correct. Writing has an advantage because besides the practitioner making journal records for their master as required, they could simultaneously work through their messy ideas. (C-I-1, 30:05)

Therefore, in any specific scenario, it was now much easier for her to control the situation.

“Since you could see why you are triggered, you could not lose control of your emotions and would also know the reason behind the students’ behaviors,” said Carol.

Being such a large international Buddhist organization, Bliss and Wisdom also provided learning opportunities to its followers through different channels, such as webinars led by experienced monks, online chat groups on instant messaging apps, the app *Lucid Happiness* (澈見幸福), YouTube channels, and Facebook pages. Besides the daily learning materials of *The great treatise on the stages of the path to enlightenment*, Carol also utilized these learning resources. For instance, Carol joined a morning webinar held regularly every Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday and could learn from the discussion among followers led

by experienced monks. Thanks to the development of information and communication technology, Carol could reach Buddhist doctrine and the daily dhamma message (佛語) via these different ways and even gain timely support from the sangha. All the support from Bliss and Wisdom was “nurturing” Carol.

4.2.2.2 Learning and practices about “unlimited life.” Although Carol was a senior teacher with many years of working experience, she still needed to address her work challenges. In the interview, Carol shared her experiences regarding the collegial relationship with her colleagues. As a teacher of moral education in her previous school, she tried her best to drive the learning and teaching in this area to improve the students’ life quality and ensure her position at the same time. Although her efforts were affirmed by the headmaster, the students, and their parents, unfortunately her colleagues did not support her since her hard work increased their workload. Moreover, during this process, she sourced lots of existing learning and teaching resources from Bliss and Wisdom, which made her colleagues deem that she was missionizing. During this particular period, she wrote spiritual practice journals to help her face this challenge.

Also, one crucial teaching from Carol’s master and the camps assisted her in getting over this challenging time. Her master guided her to reflect on the concept “unlimited life” (無限生命), which in turn is a concept that is derived from the concept “saṃsāra” (輪迴/生死輪迴). “Saṃsāra” first appeared in Brahmanism (婆羅門教), and Buddhism further developed it in its doctrine. “Saṃsāra is said to have no beginning and to come to an end only for those individuals who achieve liberation from rebirth” (Buswell et al., 2014, p. 758). As all ordinary sentient beings are wandering in unlimited time, they have the chance to meet others in the entirety of our universe. Compared with “saṃsāra,” Bliss and Wisdom’s “unlimited

life” focuses on human beings and refers to the notion that people are always wandering the universe. If spiritual practitioners face difficulty in their current life cycle and feel that it is hard to get over it, they could still try to resolve it when they are reincarnated. In the interview, Carol described the positive influence of learning “unlimited life.”

This positive idea occasionally comes to me when I am in a low mood...

This is a very core mindset (for me). Otherwise, it would be hard for me to face difficulties without this mindset—Do not fear the sense of hopelessness and think positively. “Unlimited life” helps me a lot. (C-I-1, 26:50)

Moreover, the concept “unlimited life” also helped Carol change her perspective and become more humble and found it easier to forgive others. She once asked an experienced member of the Bliss and Wisdom Sangha what she should say when she observed someone’s bad behavior and wanted to correct him or her. The monk reminded her that she should think about why she met that person first, in light of unlimited life. Then, he said that it was hard to judge whether the causes of this so-called “bad behavior” were someone’s mistake or the result of Carol’s interactions with him or her in their unlimited life. After this guided reflection, Carol realized she should release the attachment to “I am right.” In addition, since life is unlimited, everyone should have the chance to be changed. Based on this idea, as the practitioner, Carol could do something that would serve as happy or good causes for the future. Moreover, owing to the complicated causes and conditions in unlimited life, she did not insist on achieving immediate results in her endeavors and employed a long-term perspective instead.

Because of its importance, the concept “unlimited life” was embedded in “Caring Education,” the idea proposed by Bliss and Wisdom. As a practitioner of “Caring Education,” Carol was also influenced by this concept when interacting with her students. The details are further explored later.

4.2.3 Self-Healing Experiences

Carol was an emotional person who was different from Dora. She had no qualms about showing her emotions, not only in the interview but also in her interactions in the workplace and in daily life. For example, it was not unusual for her eyes to well up, and she sometimes would even cry. The death of Dora’s close friend caused her to fall into depression when she was in secondary school. As an emotional person, Carol also encountered a similar problem of depressive mood and suffered a lot because of it. Moreover, no one could help her when she sank into a low mood, not even her ex-boyfriends.

I had a terrible habit of blaming myself in the extreme when I was unhappy, and I did not have the autonomy to recover from the low mood I would be in. This was “ME” before learning Buddhism. I knew that I had this bad habit. And this was also the worst fear of my ex-boyfriends—no matter what they did to make me feel happy, I just could not cheer up. This was my most significant shortcoming. (C-I-1, 43:08)

Through learning Buddhism and the Buddhist spiritual practices described earlier, Carol became more and more aware of her emotional state and fought her depression by reminding herself that the low mood was one kind of affliction caused by her *Incorrect attention* (非理

作意). *Attention* (作意) is one of six causes of the *afflictions* (煩惱) according to *The great treatise on the stages of the path to enlightenment* of Tsong-kha-pa (Tsong-kha-pa, 2014); it refers to “incorrect attention that projects ‘pleasantness’ onto what has an unpleasant character, conceives an impermanent thing to be permanent, and the like”²⁰ (p. 301). Carol said that because of these Buddhist spiritual practices, she was not so attached to being in an unpleasant state and her husband also felt these positive changes in her, observing that she recovered more quickly, and that the degree of her depression was not as substantial as before.

According to Buddhist doctrine, being filial to parents is one of the ways of accumulating the merit and wisdom necessary to achieve enlightenment. Therefore, Bliss and Wisdom emphasized the importance of filial piety (孝順) as a spiritual practitioner’s virtue when cultivating followers. Like Dora, with the help of the learning on Buddhism and the relevant spiritual practices, Carol also improved her relationship with her natal family.

Carol’s father had a strong desire to have a son due to Chinese tradition, but instead he had three daughters. As the second child of her family, she felt that she was “a redundant child.” “Ever since I was little, I had a deep feeling that I was not as sharp as my elder sister and not as cute as my younger sister. This feeling was tangible.” As she could not feel her parents’ love, Carol became very rebellious when she was young.

Since I was not being understood and paid attention to, I became rebellious and hoped others would give me more attention because of this. However, I

²⁰ This is the Tibetan-English version. The corresponding Tibetan-Chinese version is “作意者謂妄增益愛非愛相，及於無常妄執常等非理作意” (Zhimin, 2003, p. 363).

did not realize this (hidden reason for my rebelliousness) by myself at that time. I only felt that they were terrible since they did not treat me well... So why should I listen to them and obey what they say? I would just do what I liked to do as they did not love me anyway. That's the way I felt. (C-I-1, 5:40)

After learning Buddhism, especially by practicing observing merits and appreciating kindness, Carol reflected on her interaction with her parents and finally felt their deep love for her. For example, her mother taught her some exercises one day. However, since the style of the exercises was too outdated to appeal to Carol, she did not respond positively enough to her mother at the time. Her mother then said that she just wanted Carol to remember these exercises and practice them when she became old since aging was painstaking. "She was worrying about me even at the moment when she left the world and cannot see me," said Carol.

Moreover, regarding her parents' discipline, Carol understood much more by practicing observing merits and appreciating kindness. Parents were only human, and when they disciplined their children, they might not understand their children's pain. Since Carol was "a very egocentric person," she realized that her mother's instruction could help her to not be selfish in order that she could avoid more suffering in her life. Carol also recalled the experience of being punished by her father in her teenage years. Because she said the short phrase equivalent to "what" in Cantonese (咩呀) with a poor attitude, her father hit her with his fist even though she was already a young lady in Form 7, which made her feel unloved.

“ ‘Observing merits and appreciating kindness’ is my Dokodemo Door²¹ (哆啦 A 夢任意門). Through this door I could reach any moment when my parents made me feel lonely in the past and then tell ‘ME’ that such feeling was not true,” said Carol. When she was looking back, she could see her father’s sadness and unwillingness of punishing her severely, passing through the rage he showed at that time. The reconciliation of herself and her parents finally released her deep inner sense of insecurity and helped her change how she interacted with the outside world. She felt happy and found it easier to forgive others when the relationship between her parents and herself had improved significantly.

4.2.4 Integrated Effects of Spiritual Practices in Teacher-Student Relationship

The culture and education service is an important one among the public services of Bliss and Wisdom because of Ven. Ri Chang’s belief. “Caring Education” is the education idea promoted by the organization. Carol deemed that “Caring Education” is also a kind of spiritual practice for her. Furthermore, compared to learning and employing the Buddhist doctrines discussed in *The great treatise on the stages of the path to enlightenment*, “Caring Education” was an easier way for her to cultivate her spirituality as a teacher. For instance, the concept of “unlimited life” was employed in “Caring Education” and was further elaborated in the context of education for practitioners. Since every human being has an unlimited life, the student also owns a life formed by different karmic powers and thoughts, as rich and complex as a book. Therefore, the teacher should be humble enough to read “this book” carefully and understand it. Based on this understanding, the teacher can further enter the students’ heart and build a good TSR for educating.

²¹ This door is the tool owned by the fictional character Doraemon, a cat robot in the Japanese manga series *Doraemon*. The Dokodemo Door can link the departure and destination directly so that users can easily go anywhere by employing it.

In the interview, Carol shared her experience of interacting with the student David. One day Carol observed that David was touching decorations on the classroom wall. Since David was usually very naughty, Carol thought he intended to damage the decorations and wanted to stop him immediately. However, she became aware of her feeling and chose just at that moment to use humility to address David's "bad behavior." Instead of scolding and stopping him, she asked him: "Do you think these decorations are interesting?" David answered: "Yes! The head teacher printed out and pasted the name of every student in this class on the wall!" Just by this simple communication with a humble heart, Carol realized that she misunderstood David—he was not destroying the decorations. He kept touching them just because he liked them and envied the attention that the students in this class received from the head teacher.

Moreover, by tapping into the authentic feeling emerging from addressing her relationship with her natal family, Carol recognized the importance of making students feel understood and cared about in order to cultivate their self-discipline, which was proposed in "Caring Education." Carol always reminded herself to be humble and then got to understand her students. If she could find out the students' strengths, they would feel understood, which enabled the building of a better TSR and ultimately benefited their lives, especially those of students with difficulties.

As her current school's deputy panel head in student support, Carol often needed to address students who had severe behavior problems. Carol shared the interaction between her and her student Frank in the interview. Frank was a Primary 1 student with special education needs. Frank had some bad and painful experiences during his development. One day Carol resolved to find out what his strengths were and asked him: "Do you think you also have positive

attributes?” And Frank answered: “My positive attribute is that I am very well-behaved when very sleepy.”

Do you like others saying that you are at your best when sleepy? Actually, the sentence (from Frank) is very complicated... I deem that this sentence derives from his parents rather than himself. And he also realized that he was well behaved only when he was sleepy... I feel sad that facing Frank, I was not humble when he was going through this challenging period in his life. (C-I-2, 43:20)

And then Carol introduced Frank to another “troublesome” boy and said Frank was the student she loved most in Primary 1, which was why he often went to her office.

Why do I love him most? I find he cares about me very much. One day he stayed till around 6 p.m. on detention; his mother usually arrived at 7 p.m. and he asked me: “Miss Carol, will you be off duty after the meeting with my mom?” He asked when I could be off duty and rest rather than when he could finish his detention and leave school. (C-I-2, 45:15)

When Carol said this to the “troublesome” boy, Frank dropped his head and kept silent. After this, when Carol asked Frank to go to her office, he would always say to his classmates that Miss Carol just asked him for a chat! Carol felt that a better TSR had been built between them. Also, Frank’s mother, a troublesome parent who never appreciated the teachers’ efforts, said to Carol: “Thank you very much! My son says you are very fair when dealing with him.”

Besides acknowledging the importance of being humble and practicing consistently, Carol also agreed that teachers should not always act as being 100% stronger (強者) when facing their students since it would easily make the teacher break down. Teachers should try to disclose their real self to their students and make being their students' friend part of the TSR. Moreover, teachers should sometimes seek help from their students.

Carol always reminded herself to not act as being 100% stronger in her daily work. In the audio sharing record, Carol described an interaction with one of her students, Edward, a Primary 3 student with severe behavior problems. One day he caused trouble again and was brought to Carol's office. However, at the same time, another Primary 1 student, Gary, was also brought to her office due to his behavior. Since the other teachers in the Guidance and Discipline Team were off campus on other business, she felt it was impossible to handle Edward and Gary simultaneously and became aware that she should seek Edward's help (C-I-2, 52:55).

Carol: "Please help me. I cannot handle the current situation! Can you say something to him? I have another case that I needed to handle. How about doing me a favor?"

Edward: "What's up?"

Carol: "Can you have a word with the boy on your left? You are the elder one, so please help me by giving some guidance to him by saying that it is not good behavior to beat others up."

Edward observed Gary quietly and said Gary was a notoriously "troublesome" boy in school. Carol asked for help again, and Edward finally accepted her request. Edward talked to Gary: "Don't beat others up. Okay?"

Don't hit others when you are angry. Beating others up is wrong. You still don't know how to calm yourself down..."

Carol appreciated Edward's help and said to him: "You should use the same words you said to Edward to remind yourself too. Okay?"

Not to act as being 100% stronger and learn how to adequately disclose one's real self and authentic emotions in front of students and ask for their help was a skill that was beneficial for teachers to build a better TSR. Moreover, when students show caring towards teachers, teachers benefit from the TSR.

Different stakeholders affirmed her working performance, and Carol was nominated to be on the List of Commended Teachers in 2017, which endorsed her excellent performance.

However, Carol emphasized that practicing "Caring Education" aimed to change her heart rather than changing the students' behaviors and helped them grow better. "When I am capable of changing the lens through which I observe this student, I already feel happy," said Carol. If the student could feel her caring and become better, it would be a bonus for her. Carol further said: "I would not feel unhappy when I cannot see the positive changes."

This attitude towards the positive emotions brought by students' growth became more crucial for Carol when she took up more management responsibilities after being an excellent teacher—in her new position Carol had much less time to care for students directly than she did before. Her spiritual master also reminded her that the positive results and feelings emerging from successful direct interaction with students were only encouragement for her hard work rather than an achievement to be chased.

4.2.5 Summary

Learning Buddhism and engaging in spiritual practices also helped Carol build up and maintain her motivation for being a good teacher. Compared with Dora, this change was more critical to Carol as her original dream was being a happy housewife. When she graduated from university, Carol chose to be a teacher, mainly because it is a stable job. At the time of the interview, Carol deemed that it was tough to be a teacher in Hong Kong. However, in that challenging environment, she did quite well in her position and became an excellent frontline education worker. Reflecting on this journey, Carol thought the support from Bliss and Wisdom helped her very much.

The guidance on the learning of *The great treatise on the stages of the path to enlightenment* is the primary method of support. She could employ the materials provided by her spirituality master regularly to assist her learning, apply her learnings on Buddhism in her daily life, and then write the reflection journals when needed. Moreover, Bliss and Wisdom employed information and communication technology to provide other learning resources that Carol could use for study and to seek Sangha's support timely. For example, she could raise her questions in the online seminars or online chat groups. Finally, as a teacher, Carol also followed up on the education ideas promoted by the organization and could better handle her interaction with students.

4.3 Ben: A Devout Volunteer

Ben was a single man, around 35 years old, and lived with his natal family. He had around seven years of spiritual practice experience as a devout follower of *Fo Guang Shan* (佛光山),

and his primary spiritual practice method was doing voluntary work (義工服務). Meanwhile, he was a teacher working in a secondary school sponsored by a local Buddhist organization. In the school, he taught English, Buddhism, and Ethics and Religious Studies. He was also a class teacher. When interviewed by the researcher, Ben had been in this career path for about twelve years, and he still kept his original aspiration and passion for being a teacher serving in a Band 3 school, in which most students were of lower socio-economic status and had low academic performance.

4.3.1 Buddhism Learning and Spiritual Practice Experiences

4.3.1.1 Ben's religious life in his early years. Ben cultivated his basic understanding of Christianity owing to his educational background and the relevant learning in kindergarten, primary school, and secondary school sponsored by a Protestant organization. After graduating from a local university in 2007 with a bachelor's degree in teaching English as a Second Language, he found a teaching position in a secondary school sponsored by a Christian organization. In the school, some of his colleagues did missionary work with passion and often introduced the belief of Christianity to him. During the third year working in this school, he recited the decision prayer (決志禱告) on the recommendation of one of his colleagues who said that reciting this prayer signifies one's desire to consider placing their faith in Jesus.

However, Ben did not cultivate his Christian faith after reciting this prayer. Strangely, his colleague did not introduce Ben to the church he belonged to or invite him to join in their activities. Moreover, as a junior teacher, Ben needed to spend most of his time preparing teaching plans and did not try to join other churches on his own initiative.

Before being a follower of Buddhism, Ben came into contact with Buddhism from the perspective of folk religion through his natal family. His family worshipped different deities including Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva in Buddhism, to seek their blessings. In 2010, when serving at his second school, Ben became interested in exploring Buddhism. His school was a secondary school sponsored by a local Buddhist organization. Since Ben was not a devout Christian at that time, as mentioned earlier, he joined this school without too many considerations of the potential effects of his religious belief. His colleague, the teacher of Buddhism, was biracial, half Chinese and half British, and a devout Buddhist. He was friendly with Ben and introduced him to Buddhism in his spare time. He further shared his experience of taking refuge in Buddhism and let Ben know that Buddhism was becoming popular in western society. Moreover, since this school had a close cooperative relationship with a famous local monastery and was physically close to it, Ben often led school students to join the religious activities there, so he had the opportunity to learn more about Buddhism. After a period of learning and investigation, his original understanding that developed from his natal family's belief in folk religion was changed.

Like his previous experience in the secondary school sponsored by a Christian organization, he took refuge in Buddhism in May 2011 through the introduction and recommendation of a colleague. Ben deemed that this change of religious belief came about because he was a reasonable person and liked to ask questions. He even asked the ultimate question about mortality in his childhood. Therefore, it was hard for him to accept sacred things that he could not see, such as God and miracles. However, when he took refuge in Buddhism, he was not required to have a strong belief in sacred things that were intangible, as was the case with Christianity. At this stage, Ben still could not join activities in the monastery since, as junior teacher, he had lots of teaching preparation to do.

4.3.1.2 New thinking and learning in joining Fo Guang Shan activities. Fo Guang Shan was founded by Master Hsing Yun (星雲大師) in Taiwan in 1967. As an international Buddhist organization, it had over 200 branch temples with the aim of promoting the principles of Humanistic Buddhism and to foster peace and harmony among all peoples of the world. Its efforts to achieve its objectives were guided by providing educational opportunities, sponsoring cultural events, engaging in community service, and by extensively writing and teaching about the Buddhist path of wisdom and compassion (Fo Guang Shan Monastery Worldwide Web, n.d.a & n.d.b).

Ben came into contact with the Buddhist organization Fo Guang Shan when joining the year-end gathering organized by its Hong Kong branch in January 2012. Since one of his students was due to perform at the gathering, he was invited by this student's parents to support him at the gathering. When joining this activity, Ben found Fo Guang Shan's idea of Humanistic Buddhism awe-inspiring. The branch of Fo Guang Shan in Hong Kong was located in a commercial building in the downtown area. This choice of location was different from the traditional Buddhist temple, which was located away from downtown areas and characterized by solitude and simplicity. The Fo Guang Shan branch was in a location that was more accessible to urban followers, and it became their spiritual home. Moreover, Fo Guang Shan presented Buddhist beliefs in a modern way, such as employing advanced communication and information technology in organizing events.

After this gathering, his student's parent invited him to attend the preparation meeting for volunteer teachers of the Fo Guang Children Class (佛光兒童班) in February 2012. "It was interesting that my student's parent invited me to attend the meeting directly rather than asking me beforehand whether I was willing to become a volunteer teacher. Maybe this

arrangement was his social skill, however, I felt comfortable to attend the meeting and I decided to join Fo Guang Shan formally after attending,” said Ben.

Although Ben had become a follower, initially he was not devout because of his heavy teaching workload, and he could not contribute much spare time in Fo Guang Shan.

However, since he worried that he might not be qualified enough to be a volunteer teacher of Fo Guang Children Class due to his limited understanding of Buddhism, in September 2012 he joined the program on Buddhist learning provided by the Buddhist Urban Academy (都市佛學院) of Fo Guang Shan. The most impressive teaching for him in this program was the introduction of *Four Sights*²² (四相). This learning let Ben recall the ultimate question that he raised when he was still a young boy in primary school, which was the meaning of human life. And he thought he found the answer in Buddhism and built his belief on the Buddhist doctrines of *samsāra* (輪迴/生死輪迴) and *six destinies*²³ (六趣/六道), which were highly related to human beings’ life and death.

Ben came to another turning point in 2013. In the summer of that year, he joined the International Youth Seminar on Life and Ch’an (國際青年生命禪學營) in Taiwan. This seminar enabled Ben to gain much more confidence in Buddhism since it introduced intellectual evidence of Buddhism and the close relationship between Buddhism and daily life. Moreover, during the trip, Ben was really moved by the authentic hospitality of the volunteers supporting this seminar. What impressed Ben most was the volunteers telling

²² This term refers to the catalysts that led the future buddha Prince Siddhartha to renounce the secular world and pursue liberation from the unlimited cycle of birth and death. The first three sights, an old man, a diseased man, and a dead man, demonstrated to Prince Siddhartha the vanity of life and the reality of suffering. In contrast, the sight of a religious mendicant provided him with the prospect of freedom of mind and a model to follow in finding a way leading to liberation (Buswell, et al., 2014, pp. 171-172).

²³ This term refers to the six places of rebirth, that are divinities (天人), asura (阿修羅), humans (人), animals (畜生), ghosts (餓鬼), and hell denizens (地獄) (Buswell, et al., 2014).

visitors that they were always welcome to visit again, just as authentically as a family member would. Compared to the personal relationship he experienced in Hong Kong, this interaction was more sincere, and that touched Ben.

Another crucial factor in Ben's conversion and becoming a devout follower was the teaching of Master Hsing Yun (Master), the founder of Fo Guang Shan. Master made great efforts in the establishment and development of Fo Guang Shan. For example, when his followers needed it, he even held a dhamma talk with them during his recovery from brain surgery. Moreover, although Fo Guang Shan was an enormous international Buddhist organization, Master was still selfless and liberated from any attachment. Master was a role model of selflessness and liberation from attachment for Ben, which made him become willing to spend his spare time volunteering in Fo Guang Shan activities.

4.3.1.3 Ben's latest status in both religious and professional lives. Ben mainly did three kinds of voluntary work in Fo Guang Shan. First, he was the volunteer teacher of the Fo Guang Children Class (佛光兒童班) of the local branch for children aged from five to 11, every Saturday. Second, as the leader of the Buddhist dhamma translation Hong Kong team, he and his teammate were translating *Fo Guang Dictionary of Buddhism* (《佛光大辭典》) into English. Third, since he was a core member of the youth group of the local branch of Fo Guang Shan, he engaged in preparation and fieldwork for a number of significant events held by the local branch, such as the celebration event on Buddha's birthday. Moreover, he also joined the International Youth Seminar on Life and Ch'an every summer from 2013 onwards, as a volunteer worker.

During most of his teaching life, Ben was a secondary school teacher, but in fact, he worked as a teacher of English in a local primary school in the academic year 2014-15, not least since this would offer him greater opportunity of career promotion. However, since he found that the workload of student assessment in primary school was too heavy for him and the room for teachers' individual professional autonomy in learning and teaching was comparatively limited, he left this school when his contract ended. Considering his religious belief and its potential influence on his job responsibility as a school teacher, he only applied for teaching positions at schools supported by organizations without religious background or those with a background in eastern religions, such as Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.

Fortunately, his application during this period was successful. Then, from the academic year 2015-16, he served at a secondary school sponsored by local Buddhist organizations. This school was also aided by local government and was located in the New Territories. As a school sponsored by two local Buddhist organizations, the school vision and mission were influenced by the spirit of Buddhism. It was a Band 3 co-ed school with 16 classes in the academic year 2018-19. The majority of students were from families of lower socio-economic status, and because of its location, some students were cross-boundary students (跨境學童).²⁴

4.3.2 Voluntary Work and Other Spiritual Practice Methods

4.3.2.1 Ben's engagement in voluntary work and related experiences. Ben accepted the principles of Humanistic Buddhism promoted by Fo Guang Shan and regarded voluntary

²⁴ This term refers to the students who are born and study in Hong Kong but live in Shenzhen, mainland China. Hong Kong borders Shenzhen to the north. These students arrive in and exit from Hong Kong mainly through the land boundary control points.

work as his primary spiritual practice method. As a Buddhist organization with the objective of promoting the principles of Humanistic Buddhism, Fo Guang Shan deemed itself a bodhisattvas site (菩薩道場) advocating the importance of human birth and this world, since people can realize their true nature right here and now rather than some places else (Fo Guang Shan, n.d.b & n.d.c). Moreover, a Fo Guang Member (佛光人) should give top priority to monastery (常住), community (大眾), and Buddhist cause (佛教事業) and also actively engage in services to transform the world. Ben's self-identity was as a Fo Guang Member and he agreed with Fo Guang Shan's idea of being a bodhisattvas site (菩薩道場). Therefore, as a follower of Fo Guang Shan, Ben also chose to follow the bodhisattvas path (菩薩道) for his spirituality growth and gave a much higher priority to voluntary work than meditation practice and Buddhist assembly ritual.

Fo Guang Shan set up the Fo Guang Shan Volunteer Group (佛光山義工團) for volunteers in 2012; in 2016 it became the Fo Guang Shan Volunteer Association (佛光山義工會).

According to age group, volunteers were divided in two groups: Youth Volunteers (青年義工) and Adult Volunteers (菩薩義工). Moreover, to enable volunteers to better service others by specializing in their profession or vocation, the volunteers were organized in functional groups, such as Reception and tour guiding, Cultural advertising, and Dharma service.

Regular training was given to improve volunteers' understanding of and faith in Fo Guang Shan, and to help them strengthen their service skill sets. Meanwhile, for each significant event, the Sangha of Fo Guang Shan also provided specific training and instruction for the volunteers. This kind of training and instruction helps them deepen their understanding of Buddhist doctrine or knowledge related to the event, and also assists them in applying what they have learned through their volunteer work.

“When doing voluntary work, we are spiritual practitioners rather than workers.” (我們做義工，不是做工人，而是做行者。) — Ben shared this instruction of the Abbot of the Hong Kong Branch of Fo Guang Shan in the interview. This instruction pointed out the crucial spirit of voluntary work for cultivating the followers of Fo Guang Shan, that is that doing voluntary work is “the offering of heart and life, the generosity of strength and time” (一種心意和生命的奉獻，是一種力量和時間的布施) (Fo Guang Shan Volunteer Association, n.d.). Ben further said that the difference was that the workers’ focus was on completing the work task while the spiritual practitioner should cultivate their empathy by paying attention to and trying to fulfill others’ needs when serving. For example, Ben should keep paying attention to others’ emotions through their facial expressions in order to serve them better.

Moreover, when giving service, volunteers are encouraged by the Sangha to chant either the name of a particular Buddha or Bodhisatva, or chant a mantra. These spiritual practices during intervals could help them focus on the chanting to avoid thinking too much and haphazardly, which was beneficial to emotional stability. For example, when Ben participated in an event as a volunteer worker in the functional group of Reception and tour guiding, he could chant Buddha's name if there were no visitors. Moreover, Buddhist chanting is played over the PA system at the venue, reminding volunteer workers to chant when they have time. Through chanting, followers can utilize their time during voluntary work much better and cultivate their emotional stability.

Another primary learning Ben derives from doing voluntary work is genuine expression. Since followers should continually cultivate their mind as per Master’s teaching “Think good thoughts” (存好心), their words and behaviors reflected their empathy when serving others, which was more genuine and easier to touch others, compared to other workers in modern

society's service sector. Since this genuine expression was awe-inspiring to Ben at the beginning of his engagement in Fo Guang Shan, he also cultivated his empathy and expression through doing volunteer work. Furthermore, he applied this learning in his interaction with students. The details of this are explored later.

Finally, thanks to voluntary work, Ben also learned the optimal attitude to adopt when encountering difficulties. In the interview, Ben said that he learned that the volunteer should not forget his or her "initial intension" (初心), and when encountering challenges, he or she should take responsibility and try to solve the problem at hand rather than giving up easily. Ben further shared his experience of taking on the voluntary task of playing a role in the celebration event on the birthday of Buddha. Because of the lack of volunteers, he at first hesitated to take on the role of the person in charge.

However, during the preparation meeting, the Sangha reminded him of the importance of taking responsibility. Although he had complex feelings at that time, he still undertook the task and saw it through. When looking back during the interview, Ben deemed that he learned a lot from this experience²⁵. "(The challenge) provides a space for self-growth, which is needed," said Ben. Furthermore, the positive attitude he built when doing voluntary work further influenced his view on the difficulties in his work. Ben often reminded himself not to forget his "initial intension" of being a teacher and undertook his responsibility when encountering challenges in his daily work.

4.3.2.2 The nurture from Sangha mainly in voluntary work. By comparison with the other two research participants, Ben's Buddhist spiritual experiences featured his devotion and

²⁵ More details about this experience are elaborated upon in the following section.

engagement in Fo Guang Shan's voluntary work. Ben spent most of his spare time doing voluntary work, including the three main kinds mentioned above, after becoming a devout member in the summer of 2013. Owing to this, he met the Sangha face to face much more than Dora and Carol. Even though he was very devout, he thought he gained a lot more than he gave in these activities as a volunteer because of the unreserved devotion and teaching from the Sangha. During the research interviews, Ben described the nurture he received from the Sangha, mainly while doing voluntary work.

Ben was deeply encouraged and influenced by Master Hsing Yun and the other Sangha members, who were role models of compassion and selflessness. In the three rounds of interviews, Ben was emotionally stable most of the time; however, when he recalled Master's good deeds, he had a strong feeling of being touched again, and cried.

I feel that as a religious leader, Master's charisma is his great selflessness.

Since he does not become attached to anything in the human world, he is liberated from them and has great autonomy. (B-I-1, 2:38:30)

Moreover, even though Master was around 90 years old, he still tried his best to fulfill his responsibility as a monk. For example, he kept writing Chinese calligraphy every day, giving his writing as gifts to his followers. Master attached great importance to introducing Buddhism to youth. In the interview, Ben employed the word "stirring" (震撼) to describe his meeting with Master and other young followers in 2016. Before the meeting, Master had just undergone brain surgery after suffering a stroke. Even though he was still in convalescence, he did his best to offer a dharma talk to the young followers, who had a strong desire to meet him.

Furthermore, these teachings by precept and personal example were not only by Master Hsing Yun, but also by the other Sangha members. The monks and nuns gave service to the followers and the public scrupulously and unselfishly, and were even in charge of the most difficult tasks when the team encountered challenges. In the interview, Ben shared his experience during the celebration event on Buddha's birthday in 2018. During the event, Ben took on the task of playing the role of the Little Monk with Three Acts of Goodness (三好小沙彌), together with other volunteers. Buddha's birthday was in early summer, which in Hong Kong always brings with it high temperatures. The volunteers needed to wear heavy clothes and accessories to play the role, making this voluntary work one of the most difficult tasks during the celebration event.

However, since there weren't enough volunteers, there was one timeslot when the Little Monk could not make an appearance as scheduled. One Sangha member observed this and tried to play the role himself although this task was not his responsibility. Through his behavior, it was obvious that "the Sangha not only hope devotees do voluntary work, but are also willing to do the work themselves," said Ben in the interview. In brief, Ben's compassion was nurtured by the teachings of the Sangha via precept and personal example, which were the basis of Ben's trust in acknowledging the Sangha's instruction for his further development.

Apart from learning from the Master and other Sangha members as role models, Ben sincerely appreciated the Sangha's instruction during voluntary work, which helped him grow a lot. In his opinion, unlike the workplaces in the secular world, there was no conflict or competition in the volunteers' working environment. Therefore, Sangha members could instruct followers from the perspective of compassion rather than only task orientation. They

would observe the followers' performance and give them gentle reminders when needed. Ben cherished this.

The Sangha members can observe much more and have great insight. For instance, they can detect followers' bad habits, neutral habits, and even their attachments and ignorance; they then give us instructions accordingly. (B-I-02, 00:01:30)

In a preparation meeting for a significant event, the guiding venerable (輔導法師) of the youth group of the local branch found that, as the person in charge, Ben took on many tasks. The venerable reminded Ben that besides having his full-time job as teacher, he had already taken on the translation task and was volunteering as a teacher for the Fo Guang Children Class; he could easily become overloaded if he engaged too much in the event preparation. In the interview, Ben said that because of this instruction, he preferred to concentrate more on a few matters and complete them well rather than taking on lots of things and not complete them properly.

In addition, Ben shared two examples of the Sangha's instruction that he found most impressive and that further influenced his daily life and his relationship with students. "Paths only cross once" (一期一會) is a four-character idiom usually employed in the Japanese tea ceremony. It is linked with Zen Buddhism and concepts of transience. In the context of the Japanese tea ceremony, it means participants should engage fully in the current gathering since every particular gathering will never be replicated. The Sangha emphasized this idiom during voluntary work. In this particular context, it meant the practitioner ought to treat every

instance of voluntary work as the first and last opportunity to do it, and then fully engage in the work to achieve the best possible result.

Ben said this phrase motivated him a lot since it differed from the typical attitude in other workplaces; in competitive workplaces, people usually preferred the strategy of doing things to their best ability gradually rather than immediately. For example, when certain events are organized on a regular basis, some good ideas may be kept and applied from one event to another while the four-character idiom “paths only cross once” reminded Ben and other Fo Guang Members to cherish the current opportunity and urged them to try their best to complete their voluntary work.

“Takes one’s job seriously but pays little attention to or does not care about the results” (認真而不當真) was also a golden sentence for Ben. To him it meant that since the resources of Buddhist organizations were donated by followers or the public, the Sangha and volunteers ought to take their jobs or tasks seriously, and then plan and organize scrupulously. However, they did not care about the results, no matter whether they were positive or negative. When it was done, it was done. Furthermore, they should reflect upon it and look forward to improving it. As a teacher serving in a Band 3 secondary school, Ben applied this golden sentence in his job. Although he made great effort in TSR to nurture students, he did not care too much about the positive rewards brought about by the students’ growth. His application is further explored later.

4.3.2.3 Ben’s other spiritual practice methods. In addition to doing voluntary work, Ben practiced other kinds of Buddhist spiritual practices occasionally, as his teaching schedule permitted. Ben’s natal family did not support his engagement in Buddhist activities and

spiritual practices much. In his mother's opinion, religious activities were mainly for the elderly. His family hoped he would spend more time engaging in family life or other youthful activities. Although his family members joined the events organized by Fo Guang Shan and found that many young people also participated, they still expected that Ben should engage in more non-religious activities. As a result, Ben seldom engaged in spiritual practices at home and could not keep doing it on a daily basis. Instead, he did other kinds of spiritual practices mainly when he participated in Fo Guang Shan activities or learning programs. For example, when he participated in the programs provided by the Buddhist Urban Academy of Fo Guang Shan, he practiced tea meditation and sitting meditation.

Moreover, although there were some constraints, Ben still tried his best to improve his spirituality as much as possible and he sometimes utilized his free time to practice. For instance, he did practices verbally by following audio or video media about the related practices on YouTube, such as Morning and Evening Chanting (朝晚課), and Chanting Buddha's name on his way to work. Finally, he joined the dhamma assemblies at the local branch of Fo Guang Shan when his teaching schedule permitted in order to accumulate his merits (福報) since merit and wisdom should be cultivated simultaneously.

Besides the spiritual practices presented above, Ben learned Buddhism systematically through various related programs. First, he joined the university's academic program, i.e., the Master of Arts program in Religious Studies, provided by a local university. He completed these studies in 2018, with a focus on Buddhism. Second, he joined the Buddhism programs provided by the Buddhist Urban Academy of Fo Guang Shan in Hong Kong in 2012 and 2018. Compared to the academic program at the local university, these programs featured “*dual emphasis on understanding and practice*” (解行並重). Participants could gain the

knowledge of Buddhism to improve their understanding (解) by lectures on Buddhism doctrine and related knowledge. They could also learn the practice (行) of their Buddhism understanding in their lives, such as sitting meditation and the Buddhist assembly ritual. Moreover, the programs adopted the study group as a learning and teaching strategy to encourage peer communication and to build the community network.

4.3.3 Effects of Spiritual Practices in Teacher-Student Relationship

Buddhist spiritual practices also helped Ben improve his performance in his relationship with students. In the interviews, Ben shared his experiences of dealing with students with his perception and nurturing TSR methods. The details are investigated in the following paragraphs.

Ben's ability of genuine expression cultivated through voluntary work helped him instruct his students. He thought that the pre-service teacher training about classroom management and how to address students' disobedience usually adopted methods of handling problems from the perspective of cognition, such as reasoning with the students (講道理). Thanks to his devout engagement in voluntary work, his empathy had been cultivated. Moreover, since he kept cultivating his mind as per Master's teaching "Think good thoughts" during voluntary work, he retained his good thoughts when with his students during his daily work. Based on this, he could express his ideas or requirements more genuinely and with empathy when instructing students.

Ben further shared that compassion should be most important in the process of disciplining students; he would adjust his instructions accordingly, with the aim of helping them improve

their behavior. For example, he would try to use more praise rather than direct criticism when communicating with students. Moreover, since Ben was teaching in a Band 3 school, some of his students were naughty and even rebellious. When teachers discipline them, some students may feel that the teachers are picking on them, and might then not be willing to follow the teachers' guidance. In this case, Ben would share his views with his students from the perspective of empathy. For instance, regarding staying in detention, he would ask the students: "If I keep you in detention, I also need to be there with you. So, do you still think that that's something I'd like to do?" The students would then reflect on their behavior and follow Ben's guidance, rather than be trapped in their negative feelings. "They like it when I express myself genuinely, and they can feel my good intentions in their respect," said Ben.

Moreover, Ben described himself as a person who tended to empathize with others' emotions, no matter whether they were negative or positive. For example, when his friend laughed, he would connect to his friend's emotion and laughed too as an immediate reaction. Therefore, early in his teaching career, since he cared for students very much, their negative emotions could easily influence him in his interaction with them. In the interview, Ben further described his poor performance due to this tendency.

I had no patience to wait for the students' response. If they did not respond, I kept asking them questions like mad. No matter if the student did something wrong, or the student was in an unstable or sad situation, I would be helpless and have no idea about what follow-up action to take.

(B-I-03, 00:50:00)

When Ben participated in voluntary work for Fo Guang Shan, he would practice chanting, such as chanting Namó Amitābha (南無阿彌陀佛), whenever he had a break. Ben could focus his attention on his chanting through this spiritual practice rather than thinking constantly and haphazardly. Because of this practice, the fluctuation in his emotions was weaker and less frequent. Ben deemed that he became much more stable when being in similar situations mentioned above, and he could liberate himself from the intense emotions caused by students, which helped him take appropriate action.

Furthermore, “as per the Buddhist doctrines ‘dependent origination’ (緣起) and ‘cause and effect’ (因果), there were reasons for students’ behavior,” said Ben in the interview.

Therefore, if a student would not speak out due to their strong emotions, Ben would not be triggered by the student’s behavior and experience strong emotions himself, which was different from what he would have done early in his career. On the contrary, he would be patient and employ “silence time.” In such a situation, he would accompany the student to avoid further negative influence, remain aware of the student’s status, and wait for the appropriate moment to intervene, or seek help from a counselor, an educational psychologist, or other professional support staff.

In addition, in terms of TSRs, Ben preferred to be his students’ friend. Ben agreed with the view in Buddhism that “all sentient beings are equal” (眾生平等) because every sentient being has Buddha nature and the opportunity of being a Buddha with enlightenment.

Therefore, in the TSR, teacher and student are equal since they are human beings, the same type of sentient being. Moreover, being either paternalistic or authoritarian was not helpful for Ben to get to know the issues and potential risks that his students faced. On the contrary, Ben tried to remain his students’ friend and build and maintain their trust in him. “I would

rather the students trust me. As a result, they would seek help from me when encountering difficulties... If the students hide issues and do not disclose them, the situation could easily become too serious to handle.”

Compared to Band 1 and Band 2 school students, Band 3 school students were usually of lower socio-economic status and had low academic performance due to the lack of supporting resources. Therefore, their growth relied more on the teachers, and in some extreme cases, teachers and schools were the only supporting source the students actually had. Given this situation, Ben deemed that the TSRs were critical to the students, and he made additional effort to cultivate these relationships to promote student growth and well-being, regarding it as one way of engaging in spiritual practice. For example, to nurture the TSRs, he would chat with students during the short breaks and lunchtime, organize gatherings at traditional festivals, and make use of Facebook and Moments of WeChat (微信朋友圈) to maintain connection with them. At the same time, Ben would be showing them he cared for them.

This kind of effort may bring intangible rewards to Ben, such as the students’ regard and trust, students’ enjoyment of learning, and student growth. For example, Ben thought the first few days of every academic year were his happiest times. Since the students’ learning motivation at the school he served was low, their safe return to school was an endorsement of their positive relationship with the teachers and school. This positive relationship meant that the students liked and trusted the teachers and school, and wanted to rely on them. Moreover, the students had grown physiologically and may have become more mature after the summer holidays.

However, Ben did not care about the reward much as he was influenced by his understanding of the wisdom of emptiness (空性智慧), which was enhanced by his Buddhism learning and relevant spiritual practices. “Takes one’s job seriously but pays little attention to or does not care about the results” (認真而不當真) expresses the meaning of the wisdom of emptiness. Moreover, he deemed that “performing actively (積極有為) and the wisdom of emptiness (空性智慧) were not contradictory.” “Performing actively” meant that a teacher should take his or her responsibility as an individual. However, as per the wisdom of emptiness, when the result was negative, he or she should let it go since the individual was only one of many “causes and conditions” (因緣) from which the result emerged.

Based on the understanding above and related practices in life, even though he attached importance to the rewards brought about by the students’ growth, he paid little attention to this in his deep mind. He gave a detailed explanation of this idea in the interview.

We should assess our endeavor in students’ growth from a more generous perspective. ... If we offered a lot of our energy and time for his growth in earnest and the negative result happened in the end, we should still accept it in peace. We should not regret what we have done for him. Therefore, as a teacher, I shall not emphasize the output of my efforts. In reserve, if I didn’t make an effort initially, it should be my problem that I didn’t fulfill my responsibility as a teacher. (B-I-03, 02:13:17)

Ben’s perception was that what he had done for the students was to fulfill his responsibilities of being a teacher as much as possible. It was good to see students’ positive changes after putting effort into their development; however, if the change did not happen, he would

continue in his path anyway as being rewarded was not the aim of his actions, and he was not attached to the rewards. This kind of perception assisted Ben in avoiding emotional burnout.

4.3.4 Summary

Ben was a devout follower of the Buddhist organization Fo Guang Shan, and he deemed that his primary spiritual practice method was doing voluntary work. Owing to Fo Guang Shan's training system for voluntary work, Ben cultivated his abilities of attention, awareness, empathy, and his attitude towards challenges when serving others. Moreover, the instructions provided by the Sangha during voluntary work also helped him grow in spirituality. Ben further employed what he learned during voluntary work in his interaction with students at school. Moreover, he observed that his performance in TSR improved, and his relationship with students became better than before.

4.4 Summary of Findings

In light of the theoretical framework, Goleman's theory of EI is employed to investigate the relationship between long-term Buddhist spiritual practices and teacher emotions in each participant's life story. This theory of EI includes five components: *self-awareness*, *self-regulation*, *motivation*, *empathy*, and *social skill*. In the following, the key findings in each participant's life story are summarized from the perspective of Goleman's theory of EI.

In Dora's life story, the findings first show that Dora could become more aware and regulate her emotions and those of others during daily life and work mainly through meditation.

Second, Dora could apply her learning of Buddhist doctrines in the progress of reappraising

when she encounters challenges. This awareness, regulation of emotions, and systematic reflection further assisted her in cultivating her social skills continually in handling her relationships with her students. Third, regarding empathy, the findings also reveal that the practice of compassion helped Dora cultivate her empathy. Besides, the self-healing that Dora experienced with the help of Buddhism learning and practices, endowed her with more empathy for her students.

Compared with Dora, Carol was supported by the Buddhist organization Bliss and Wisdom in her journey from a happy housewife to an excellent frontline education worker. First, the findings show that though the learning materials provided by her spirituality master regularly and the learning activities organized by Bliss and Wisdom, she could apply her learnings on Buddhism in her daily life. This application helps her no end in cultivating her self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy in EI. Second, like Dora, Carol also had the self-healing experience when she overcame the challenges with the help of Buddhism learning and practices, which improved her empathy for her students. Third, the findings further reveal that as a teacher, Carol also followed up on the education ideas promoted by the organization and could better handle her interaction with students.

Ben's life story featured his engagement in the Buddhist organization Fo Guang Shan. The findings show that Ben's abilities of attention, awareness, empathy, and his attitude towards challenges when serving others were cultivated in doing voluntary work with the supports from Fo Guang Shan's training system for voluntary work. Second, Ben further employed what he learned during voluntary work in his interaction with students at school, which assisted him in cultivating his social skills in handling his teacher-student relationships

continually. For example, the wisdom of emptiness helped him have a better emotional experience in response to students' performance.

To sum up, although engaged in different training systems of Buddhism, the three participants' self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy in EI were improved through practicing Buddhist spiritual practices in the long run. Meanwhile, Carol and Dora's experiences of self-healing by Buddhist learning and spiritual practices also helped cultivate their empathy. Regarding teachers' EI in TSR, the findings show that participants' long-term Buddhist spiritual practices helped cultivate their social skills in managing relationships. Moreover, their positive TSRs with at-risk students supported by Buddhist spiritual practices had extra beneficial impacts. Notably, Carol and Dora's characteristic empathy had been enhanced by their experiences of self-healing through Buddhist spiritual practices, enabling them to better take the perspective of students with difficulties in social behavior and comprehend their difficulties. In Chapter 5, these similarities and differences of the findings are further elaborated and analyzed. Furthermore, the reasons for them are investigated as well.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This research focuses on the study of Buddhist spiritual practices and their impact. The research focus guiding this work is the exploration of the relationship between long-term Buddhist spiritual practices and teacher emotions. In the previous chapter, the findings of the individual cases were described.

The research questions are recapitulated hereunder before analyzing the findings:

- 1) How do long-term Buddhist spiritual practices affect Hong Kong teachers' emotions?
- 2) How do changes in emotions intelligence brought about by Buddhist spiritual practices further influence teachers' relationships with students?

In this chapter, the researcher first analyzes the findings to address the two research questions. The researcher then discusses the implications of this study for practice and research.

5.1 The Relationship Between Long-Term Buddhist Spiritual Practices and Teacher Emotions

5.1.1 Particular Buddhist Spiritual Practice

It can be seen from the collected data that the interviewees' particular long-term Buddhist spiritual practices have their corresponding effects in EI. Each practice and its effects are presented separately below.

First, the participants cultivated their empathy through Buddhist spiritual practices. For example, Dora's loving-kindness meditation practices helped her improve her emotional empathy. In Ben's experience, the Sangha's teaching of Buddhism by precept and example influenced him greatly and the direct teaching from Master Hsing Yun, the founder of Fo Guang Shan, was the crucial factor in him becoming a devoted follower, engaging actively in the public service organized by Fo Guang Shan.

Second, the interviewees all stated that Buddhist spiritual practice, aiming to cultivate the practitioner's calmness, improved their willpower and further enhanced their emotional self-awareness and self-regulation. For instance, Dora disengaged her focus on chaotic thoughts by concentrating on reciting the name of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, helping her regulate her emotion. Another example is Ben's interaction with his students. Chanting practice during voluntary work helped him reach a more stable emotional state. Therefore, when his students showed strong negative emotions, he could be aware of his emotions, regulate them by disengaging from the influence of students' behavior, and consequently be more considerate to take more appropriate action.

Third, the findings show that interviewees could apply the Buddhist doctrines they learned to reflect on their experiences and to further help them reappraise life events, assisting them in regulating their emotions. Buddhist spiritual practice, the aim of which is to cultivate the practitioner's calmness, helps stabilize practitioners' emotional state and improve their

attention capacity. In this case, when encountering challenges, participants could be in the appropriate state to be able to think more before acting. Moreover, their Buddhism learning also backed them up in the reappraising process. For example, even though initially David triggered Carol's emotion, she could still apply the teaching of "being humble," which enabled her to learn more about the situation, regulate her emotion, and ultimately take the appropriate action.

Finally, the participants had more motivation to be good teachers for two reasons. One was that the interviewees' motivation for being good teachers was strengthened by Buddhist spiritual practice. As per Buddhist doctrine, earning a living as a teacher is "right livelihood" (正命). If they taught and nurtured their students well, they were obeying a requirement of Buddhist teaching. The other is that they could receive support from the Sangha, whether from a specific Sangha member, or the spiritual master of the whole organization, helping them pursue goals with energy and persistence.

Moreover, some practitioners may use one or two specific spiritual practices as primary practices, and after long-term practice, are able to employ them in specific events to help them handle issues or even improve their spirituality. In the interview, Dora shared her experience of employing meditation to address the event in school that affected her TSR with Felix. She practiced sitting meditation for a short while during her break, which helped her regulate her emotion and enabled her to better review the event. It seems that the effects of practicing specific spiritual practice could come about quickly and help the practitioner handle an event the moment it happens.

However, it is interesting that in class, Dora could not employ “in and out breathing practice,” another form of meditation, to assist her in calming down and being aware that there must be a reason for Felix’s abnormal behavior. Dora’s sharing shows that some factors constrain the application of specific spiritual practice and its corresponding effects in daily life and during work events. The practitioner’s spiritual state, the difficulties emerging during the event, and how well the practitioner employs the particular practice, all affect the utilization of the practice and its effects.

Notably, in contrast with Dora, the Buddhist spiritual practices claimed by Carol and Ben, i.e., caring education and voluntary work, were “integrated” ones. The word “integrated” means that either caring education or voluntary work consist of simple spiritual practices. For example, it was not hard to find that “unlimited life” was embedded in caring education and was elaborated in more detail to the followers who were teachers. Moreover, voluntary work also includes the practice of cultivating calmness, and the practice of building up compassion. Besides, Buddhist organizations employed different learning channels, such as Facebook and YouTube, to help their followers learn and practice easily in their daily lives. It seems that, based on Buddhist doctrines, the large Buddhist organizations to which Carol and Ben were affiliated developed their systems to cultivate and support their followers as laypeople living in a modern society.

5.1.2 Self-Healing and Empathy

When exploring the relationship between Buddhist spiritual practices and individuals’ emotions, besides the effects of specific spiritual practice, the main change of practitioners’ characteristics should be another focus. It is not hard to imagine that owing to practitioners’

varying spiritual states and personal features, the main change in characteristics that they undergo would be different. For example, the practitioner may become better at handling some of the main negative emotions in Buddhism, that are anxiety, fear, anger, jealousy, desire, and depression.

Self-healing has been an emerging topic in Buddhist spiritual practice in this past decade, even though it plays a fundamental role in the practice system. It is not hard to find its source in Buddhist doctrine. For example, in *Four immeasurables*, the first object in meditating should be the self of the practitioner, which means the practitioner should be empathetic and loving-kind to himself or herself. This is not common in traditional Buddhist spiritual training; however, in these past couple of decades, when teaching Buddhism, Buddhist spiritual teachers sometimes found that laymen, especially urban educated ones, could not fully accept themselves and be empathetic and loving-kind to themselves. Lau's practice report also provides academic support for this perspective from laypeople (Lau, 2017a). Therefore, self-healing becomes a kind of preparation training to make the Buddhist practitioner a better container for receiving Buddhist teaching (法器) (Thích Nhất Hạnh, 2010; Tsoknyi Rinpoche, 2015, 2020).

It transpired from Dora and Carol's sharing, that their experiences of self-healing helped cultivate their empathy. Dora healed from the trauma caused by her close friend's passing away and Carol overcame her depression and improved her relationship with her parents. Owing to these authentic feelings related to being liberated from suffering, and the corresponding reflection, Dora and Carol were more empathic when others were suffering. Dora and Carol had better cognitive empathy for others and their suffering from the perspective of Buddhism. By comparing themselves to others, they also had more vital

emotional empathy, that is, they could join people struggling with difficulties by sharing their feelings. Moreover, their empathic concern had been enhanced, which means that they had a stronger desire to help others be free from suffering. Their sharing is supported by Buddhist doctrine in that the practitioners' understanding of truth of suffering (苦諦) in the four noble truths (四聖諦)²⁶ is essential to cultivate their compassion.

5.1.3 Holistic Improvement in Spiritual State

Based on the findings, one could see that the participants reached a better spiritual state by engaging in Buddhist spiritual practices in the long run. This kind of holistic improvement is consistent with the view of developmental stages in Buddhism. Similar to training systems in education, there are also different developmental stages in the systems of Buddhist spiritual practices. Therefore, spiritual practitioners could check their spirituality status accordingly and employ the corresponding practices for further improvement. For example, *five paths* (五位) in the Yogācāra school, and Dzogchen (大圓滿) in the Rnying ma (Nyingma) School of Tibetan Buddhism, employ developmental stages. Five paths refers to the description of the path to enlightenment, which are the path of accumulation (資糧道), the path of preparation (加行道), the path of vision (見道), the path of cultivation (修道), and the adept path (無學道) (Buswell, et al., 2014).

²⁶ Four noble truths (四聖諦) refers to truth of suffering (苦諦), truth of origination (集諦), truth of cessation (滅諦), and truth of path (道諦). The truth of suffering originates from the first sermon Buddha delivered after his enlightenment. He enumerated eight types of suffering, as follows: birth (生苦), aging (老苦), sickness (病苦), death (死苦), encountering what is unpleasant (怨憎會苦), separation from what is pleasant (愛別離苦), not gaining what one desires (求不得苦), and the five aggregates that are produced by contaminated actions and afflictions (五蘊熾盛苦) (Buswell et al., 2014). More generally, the truth of suffering encompasses the three forms of suffering: (1) "misery caused by (physical and mental) suffering" (苦苦), (2) "misery caused by change" (壞苦), and (3) "misery caused by conditioning" (行苦) (Buswell et al., 2014, p. 272).

From the perspective of the five paths developmental stages, it seems that holistic improvement in spiritual state is more crucial for participants than simply improvement in EI by training. First, this kind of improvement is beyond the scope of EI. The cognition of values is also embedded in this variety of improvement through Buddhist spiritual practices in the cultivation process. In comparison, the positive relationship between long-term Buddhist spiritual practices and practitioners' EIs are embedded in their cultivated spiritual state, such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and motivation.

Second, this change is also a transcendence for the research participants, which carries significant meanings. As they work in a helping profession, it is easy for teachers in Hong Kong to encounter different emotional challenges, similar to social workers and counselors. Since the participants were liberated from deep suffering caused by significant life events such as trauma emerging from daily life events, they had more autonomy (自在) in their lives, which was consistent with the Buddhist texts. This transcendence helped them be in a better state to tackle emotional challenges in their professional service.

As James (1902) pointed out, practitioners' spiritual experiences affect their interpretations of their lives and surroundings from past to future. This means that transcendence also refers to the reinterpretation of certain significant past life events, which would allow the practitioner to have a new view of significant challenging experiences. For example, in Dora's experience, when facing the death of her aunt, she employed a different view of death built through Buddhism learning and Buddhist spiritual practices, and was able to perform much better in both her daily and professional life, compared to when she was faced with the death of her best friend.

5.2 The Influence of Emotional Intelligence Changes on Teacher-Student Relationship

5.2.1 The Integrated Effects

As discussed earlier, the short phrase “*encountering different phenomena and practicing the corresponding spiritual practices*” (歷事練心, 對境修行) is the fundamental principle in the Buddhist spiritual practice system. Accordingly, the researcher explored and discussed the participants’ performance in the specific event or scenario, that is, their TSR in the study, to address the second research question.

Based on the discussion in the preceding subsection, it was found that the participants’ long-term Buddhist practices helped them cultivate a better spiritual state. The research participants’ performance in the specific TSR event could be treated as the acting out of their current spiritual developmental state.

Being more sensitive. As per the preceding discussion, Buddhist practice helped the interviewees build a better spiritual state, one of the characteristics of which was that they became more emotionally stable, with better self-awareness and self-regulation in emotion. This stability served as a cornerstone, enabling the interviewee to be more sensitive in the TSR event. Based on the interviewees’ experiences, the researcher explored this theme via two effects: one was “*reading the students’ emotion,*” and the other was “*spotting the appropriate moment.*”

Reading the students’ emotion. In their sharing, the interviewees could read students’ emotions when interacting with them. For example, Dora shared her change in handling her

students' emotions at the beginning of the lesson. Since she could read their emotions appropriately, she interacted with the students rather than formally stopping them from chatting, which is suitable for building a better TSR.

Spotting the appropriate moment. In the interviews, the participants also presented their ability to recognize the appropriate moment in TSR. Besides reading students' emotions, Dora could also spot the appropriate moment when she was interacting with students, and then lead them to the formal teaching contents.

Being more skillful in managing relationships. In their experiences, the interviewees became more skillful at managing relationships as the acting out of their spiritual state. This is investigated by looking at two aspects in the context of TSR. One was “expressing the practitioners' emotion,” and the other was “being virtuous and skillful regarding students' emotion.”

Expressing the practitioners' emotions. Through their awareness of the different elements of TSR, such as timing and students' emotions, the practitioners were able to express their emotions correctly. For example, Dora described how she acted being very angry when she was handling two students' problem behavior in order to make them aware of its seriousness, hopefully leading them to not make the same mistake again. Similarly, Carol described how she adequately expressed her fragility and needs, proceeding to create a learning opportunity for Edward.

Being virtuous and skillful regarding students' emotions. Apart from the expression of their emotions, the participants further described their virtuousness and skills in leading students'

emotions. For example, in the interaction with her student Alex, Dora presented her skills to lead Alex to build a better TSR based on trust and respect. Similarly, in the interview, Ben described that he was patient and accompanied the student to avoid further negative influence, and waited for the appropriate moment to intervene if the student would not speak out due to his or her intense emotions.

5.2.2 Cognition Changes in Emotional Regulation

When Goleman developed his EI theory further, he built his new understanding of focus, adding attention as an element, and arguing that it could help regulate emotion (Goleman, 2013). The research findings show more details of the interaction between attention and emotional regulation. Although Buddhist spiritual practices could cultivate practitioners' characteristic calmness, becoming stable in emotion is not by itself sufficient for cultivating spirituality from a Buddhist perspective. In the Chan School, the meditation that could only help practitioners be calm is called Kumu Chan (枯木禪), and Chan masters do not endorse it. This kind of effect on emotion could not provide a definitive solution for them, and suffering would still re-emerge.

In comparison, the effect of calmness on regulating emotion, which is provided by Buddhist spiritual practice, creates a space for practitioners to reflect or analyze a challenge according to what they learned from Buddhism. For instance, Dora employed "in and out breathing practice" to regulate her emotion to be stable when she fulfilled her jury duty. Subsequently, the period of jury service became a space for her to review the TSR event that was troubling her. Only when their emotion and cognition were synchronous and reconciled could they finally free themselves from the suffering caused by the challenge. Moreover, the writing

journal on “Cultivate Faith and Appreciate Kindness” also provided a stable space for Carol to regulate her emotion by reflecting on the life event, supported by her learning on Buddhism.

In addition, the findings also suggest that according to the discussion on the interaction between attention and emotional regulation through Buddhist spiritual practice, the strategy employed by the research participants in emotional regulation was “deep acting.” As per the theory of emotional labor (Grandey, 2000), “deep acting” is the strategy whereby the employee tries to fulfill the required emotional expression by modifying their feelings after deploying attention and effecting cognitive change, rather than simply modifying their expressions. The Buddhist spiritual practices used by the participants to express the appropriate emotion in TSR are consistent with this strategy. First, the calmness achieved through Buddhist spiritual practice helped practitioners change their focus of attention and become emotionally stable. Once in this state, the interviewees were able to employ their learning on Buddhism to reflect on the present situation, leading to cognitive changes. Since research shows that deep acting is positively related to teaching satisfaction (Yin, Huang & Chen, 2019), it implies that Buddhist spiritual practices provide practitioners a way of regulating emotion, which enables them to achieve better well-being in TSR.

5.2.3 Self-Compassion and its Influence

The importance, from a Buddhist perspective, of accepting the authentic feeling in the interaction between attention and emotional regulation, is worthy of further discussion. *Attention* (作意 / 非理作意) is one of six causes of the *afflictions* (煩惱; Tsong-kha-pa, 2014). However, in a specific event or scenario, the practitioner should recognize their

feeling as a real one rather than a true one (不真實, 但真切; Tsoknyi Rinpoche, 2015) and then respect and accept it from the concept of self-compassion in Buddhism.

Dora's experience regarding cultivating her emotional expression style in front of students should be a good example for understanding this process. Dora's Buddhist spiritual practice improved her willpower. This willpower, together with three sub-varieties of attention, rather than effortful attention, further improved her self-awareness and self-regulation. Moreover, with the influence of self-compassion cultivated by loving-kindness practice, she then accepted, respected, and recognized her personality. Furthermore, better self-regulation helped her build her style to enable her to address students' problem behaviors with patience.

Dora's experience is consistent with the principle "*practice compassion and wisdom simultaneously*" in the discipline of Buddhism. Self-compassion played a critical role in this cultivation process. Without self-compassion and its effect of accepting authentic feelings, self-awareness and self-regulation could not function well even if they were improved by willpower in developing social skills.

5.2.4 Perception of Students' Growth and Wisdom

It is common to read reports by teachers that they experience pleasant or unpleasant emotions regarding students' positive or negative school performance. In the Teacher Emotion Inventory developed by Chen, there are five factors: Joy, Love, Sadness, Anger, and Fear (Chen, 2016). Joy consisted of seven items, one of which is "I feel proud when I see my students make progress" (p. 72). By contrast, Fear consisted of seven items, one of which is "I am worried about how to improve my student engagement and achievement" (p. 72).

Moreover, this study indicates that teachers most frequently experienced worry about improving student achievement (Chen, 2016); this finding is consistent with the conclusion of Bahia et al.'s study (2013). Therefore, it seems that devoted teachers may suffer more negative emotions.

Ben's sharing showed that through Buddhism learning and relevant spiritual practices, his understanding of the wisdom of emptiness improved his emotional experience caused by students' performance, which helped him keep his engagement in TSR. Serving in a Band 3 secondary school, Ben was a devoted teacher and made great effort in TSR to nurture students. However, even though Ben cherished the students' growth and attached importance to them, he did not get attached to students in his deep mind, based on his understanding of the wisdom of emptiness. Therefore, he could experience positive emotions while experiencing much fewer negative emotions regarding students' growth, enabling him to maintain his devotion in TSR to nurture students. Moreover, his perception, discussed previously, is supported by Buddhist doctrine that the origin of suffering is attachment, which is truth of origination in four noble truths.

Carol's experience was similar to Ben's. As an excellent and devoted frontline teacher, Carol practiced caring education to nurture her students. However, she was reminding herself, and was constantly reminded by the Sangha, that the aim of caring education was changing herself, and she should treat student growth and endorsement from different stakeholders as encouragement, which meant that she should not become attached to them. Moreover, when she took up more management responsibilities at school, this view of detachment became vital since she could not care for the students directly like she did before and experience the relevant positive emotions.

5.2.5 Further Influence on the At-Risk Students Through the Teacher-Student Relationship

Through the TSR, the impact of long-term Buddhist spiritual practices on Hong Kong teachers' emotions further influenced at-risk students. Due to their specific schools and/or positions they held, it was common for the interviewees to interact with at-risk students, such as those who have difficulties with social behaviors. Since the interviewees improved their spiritual state, they could address their negative emotions much better, resulting in improved TSR, which benefited the students whose behavior was problematic. For example, the TSR between Dora and Alex and the one between Carol and Edward positively affected Alex and Edward since Dora and Carol's negative emotions, such as anger, were regulated successfully. Chang made a similar finding in his study, that is, that teachers' transformative improvement regarding their negative emotions positively affects the quality of TSRs and benefits students who have difficulty with social behaviors (Chang, 2012).

In addition to the above, the participants' better TSRs further affected the students in other dimensions. In the interview, Dora shared that her TSR with Alex also made positive impact on Alex's academic performance—he became more engaged in classroom learning activities and in independent learning, resulting in better grades. As Alex was from a new immigrant family, this finding is also supported by the result of Muller's study that a positive TSR could create high social capital for at-risk students (Muller, 2001).

Finally, since Buddhist learning and spiritual practice helped them deal with their deep suffering, Dora and Carol had more cognitive empathy and emotional empathy for others' suffering. Therefore, when they faced students having difficulties with social behavior, they

were humble, and their cultivated empathy for others made it more natural for them to take and comprehend the students' perspective—they were more sensitive and willing to know about the students' current state and difficulties. Moreover, because of the Buddhist doctrine on *Samsāra* (輪迴/生死輪迴), they believed that people were connected in unlimited time, which made them more patient when cultivating appropriate behavior in students and when waiting for their growth and development.

5.3 Implications

5.3.1 Implications for Practice

The results of this research show that the holistic spiritual state improvement cultivated by long-term Buddhist spiritual practice was important for the participants as teachers in their interaction with students. This suggests that the educator in teacher education should pay heed to pre-service teachers' spirituality status during pre-service teacher training. Since teaching is a professional service requiring emotional labor, like counseling, corresponding training or support for student-teachers would help them achieve qualified status to address the challenges encountered during daily work. Moreover, continuous training or support for in-service teachers is also advised. For example, an organised retreat incorporating guidance to assist them in reflecting on the significant events in life and transforming their influences, could be added to the full-time block release professional development programs required for career promotion.

The results of this research also reveal that attention and self-compassion play a critical role in emotion capacity building. This is consistent with the findings on the effects of

mindfulness and self-compassion on well-being (Broderick, 2021; Germer, 2009; Wimmer et al., 2019). Therefore, training to enhance the capacity of attention and self-compassion is suggested. Moreover, the findings of this study, with the focus on long-term Buddhist spiritual practices, show that daily practices, even regular practices, are essential to maintain the related capacities. In this case, the introduction to and training in the regular practices to enhance attention and self-compassion are also recommended for inclusion in pre-service teacher programs and in-service teacher professional development programs.

5.3.2 Implications for Research

The physical and mental training developed from religious spiritual practices, such as MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) and MSC (Mindful Self-Compassion) is becoming popular in European and American academia (e.g., Kabat-Zinn, 2003, 2005, 2013; Neff, 2018, 2020). This training and the relevant research are beginning to influence the Greater China region and even the education sector (e.g., Lau, 2017b; JC School Mindfulness, n.d.; JC PandA, n.d.). In this research trend, rather than the research being focused on this training, the research focuses on Buddhist laypeople and their Buddhist spiritual practices. One of the reasons for this focus shift is that the researcher is curious about the elements in religious spiritual practices and their influences, which might have been “dropped” in shaping the appropriate training methods and programs for the public.

Through this exploration and investigation, it is not hard to observe that Buddhist doctrines serve a fundamental role in Buddhist spiritual practices. The participants had been supported by their learning about Buddhism, such as emptiness, dependent origination, and “cause and effect,” to reflect on the challenging experiences and to reappraise the situation, helping them

regulate their emotions and even achieve holistic spirituality development. However, these elements full of religious connotation have been reduced significantly and even “dropped” to develop training for people without religious backgrounds.

This kind of “absence” could also be found in the cross-disciplinary studies in brain science and Buddhist spiritual practices that have been emerging in recent years with the development of tools for studying the brain. For example, in Davidson’s series of studies on the relationship between emotional capacity building and Buddhist spiritual practices (2012), the participants’ cognition changes influenced by their learning of Buddhist complex doctrines are not in the research scope. Therefore, the research results and the discussion above remind researchers who are interested in teachers’ EI, about the essential role of cognition change in the process of emotional regulation.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Research Summary

For this research, the researcher invited three local teachers who were recommended by Buddhist organizations as suitable research participants. The researcher then investigated their life stories to reveal the impact of their Buddhist spiritual practices on their individual emotions in the long run and how these impacts further influenced their teacher and student relationships. Qualitative research was adopted as the research methodology. Employing case study as research method, semi-structured interviews were conducted and personal documents were requested from the research participants. The researcher then analyzed the data collected from the interviews and the documents by transcribing and coding.

In this study of emotion in education and Buddhism, a conceptual framework is developed to investigate the research questions based on the literature review. The specific Buddhist spiritual practice of compassion and wisdom (calmness and insight), and its corresponding effects, are employed in the exploration of the relationship between teacher emotions and Buddhist spiritual practices. Then, Goleman's theory of EI, with its further theoretical development on attention and three types of empathy, is adopted to discuss the impacts of long-term Buddhist spiritual practices on teacher emotions. Teachers' EI in the teacher-student relationship is further discussed to address the research questions. The mutual relationship between the impacts of long-term Buddhist spiritual practices on teacher emotions and TSR is discussed. More details about the conceptual framework can be seen in Figure 1.

The researcher addresses the two research questions in turn. Regarding the relationship between long-term Buddhist spiritual practice and teacher emotions, the researcher first discusses a particular spiritual practice, i.e., compassion and wisdom (calmness and insight). The research findings show that the participants cultivated their empathy through the practice of compassion. Moreover, they improved their willpower and further increased their self-awareness and self-regulation in emotion by practicing Buddhist spiritual practices aimed at cultivating the practitioner's calmness.

Furthermore, the study also reveals that the participants could apply their learning of Buddhist doctrines to reappraise life events to assist them in regulating their emotions. The study results also show that participants had more motivation to be good teachers. Finally, the participants could employ the specific spiritual practice in particular events to help them handle the situation; however, the application of the practice and its corresponding effects are constrained by other factors, such the practitioner's spiritual state.

Another key finding is that there was a main change in the interviewee's characteristics caused by long-term Buddhist spiritual practices. Dora and Carol's experiences of self-healing by Buddhist learning and spiritual practices helped cultivate their three types of empathy, i.e., cognitive empathy, emotional empathy, and empathic concern. The last key finding is that the participants reached a better spiritual state through different Buddhist spiritual practices in the long run. This holistic improvement was beyond the scope of EI. Moreover, the interviewees enjoyed more autonomy in their lives and could better handle significant events from their new viewpoint cultivated through Buddhist spiritual practices.

To answer the second research question, the researcher further investigates and explores the mutual interaction between the impacts of long-term Buddhist spiritual practices on teacher emotions and TSR. First, the study shows that the better spiritual state, cultivated by participants' long-term Buddhist spiritual practices, helped them become more sensitive in TSR and more skillful in managing relationships. Second, the study expands the current knowledge about the interaction between attention and emotional regulation by Buddhist spiritual practices — Buddhist spiritual practice, aiming to cultivate the practitioner's calmness, provides a space for them to reflect or analyze the situation based on their learning on Buddhism. Moreover, as per the theory of emotional labor, the study further implies that Buddhist spiritual practices allow the practitioner to adopt deep acting as a strategy in regulation, resulting in better well-being in the TSR.

Third, the study further reveals that self-compassion cultivated by Buddhist spiritual practice was essential in the interaction between attention and emotional regulation. If the individual could not accept their authentic feelings through self-compassion, they could not properly develop their social skills even if their self-awareness and self-regulation were improved by willpower. The fourth finding is that the wisdom of emptiness, cultivated by Buddhism learning and relevant spiritual practices, helped the interviewees have a better emotional experience in response to students' performance.

Fifth, based on the discussions of the further influence of practitioners' change on at-risk students through TSRs, the study shows that positive TSRs supported by Buddhist spiritual practices had extra beneficial impact. Finally, the study shows that Dora and Carol's characteristic empathy had been enhanced by their experiences of self-healing through

Buddhist spiritual practices, enabling them to better take the perspective of students with difficulties in social behavior and comprehend their difficulties.

As the first study focusing on local teachers with long-term engagement in Buddhist spiritual practices that employs a qualitative research methodology, the researcher hopes this thesis makes the following contributions through achieving its research aims. First, through its empirical data, the thesis would help teachers and other stakeholders expand and deepen their understanding of the relationship between Buddhist spiritual practices and teacher emotions at the individual level and in TSR. Second, through its findings and discussion, the thesis would enrich Goleman's theory of EI. Besides the potential contribution to education and emotional capacity, the researcher also hopes this study could inspire studies on spiritual practitioners in other specific professional groups, such as doctors, nurses, social workers, and counselors and religious practitioners from other rich spiritual denominations, such as Catholicism, Daoism, Hinduism, and Islam.

6.2 Limitations

This thesis study has several limitations. First, owing to the limited study period, only two or three rounds of interviews could be conducted with each participant, and the advantages of using case study with the characteristic of using retrospective and reflexive life stories based on participants' personal documents to investigate Buddhist spiritual practices weren't entirely clear.

The second limitation is the research participants. Although the interviewees were recommended by the relevant Buddhist organizations and selected according to the sampling

design, they could not fully represent teachers who have engaged in Buddhist spiritual practices in the long term. Therefore, the findings of this study are limited by the research resources. If more participants could be recruited and investigated, more effects of long-term Buddhist spiritual practices may emerge from the experiences they shared. For example, the relationship between physical health and Buddhist spiritual practices has not been explored in this study since the researcher could not find sufficient valid data from the three participants' experiences.

The final limitation is self-report bias. As a data collection method, respondents are asked to report directly on their behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, or intentions through self-report (Holbrook, 2008). It is a common method of data collection, and is employed to “gather personal information that cannot be obtained objectively” (Salkind, 2007, p. 878).

Considering individuals' emotional experience is subjective, self-report should have been suitable for this study; however, the respondents' willingness to answer the questions, and their ability to do so, influence the accuracy of the data (Holbrook, 2008). Since the research participants joined this research on a voluntary basis after being invited, and the researcher went through the ethical issues with them before the interviews, including data anonymity, the participants were willing to share their experiences when being interviewed.

Moreover, as the interviewees were in-service teachers with qualifications, it could be assumed that they had the ability of cognition and oral presentation to report their experience. The participants' reflective journals or personal documents with self-reflection elements mitigated the adverse effects of memory on lengthy retrospective reporting. However, it must be admitted that in this research, the interviewer's personality influenced the quality of their

self-reports on their own experiences. With a more thoughtful mind, the interviewee tended to provide more details about his or her experiences.

6.3 Future Directions

In Buddhist spiritual systems, there are developmental stages that the practitioner could achieve, and this kind of spirituality achievement affects their spiritual states and views on the world as per Buddhist doctrines. In future, if a longitudinal study employing narrative research could be conducted, the differences in interpreting the same events caused by different spirituality achievements could be found and investigated. This would provide more valuable empirical data to help academia understand the impact of Buddhist spiritual practices in the long run and the further influence of such impact on teacher emotions and TSR.

Moreover, if research funding could be gained in future, Buddhist spiritual practitioners having specific experiences in the themes mentioned above could be recruited. They might help academia gain a more in-depth understanding of the spiritual states cultivated by Buddhist spiritual practices and their impacts on the participants' TSRs. For example, the study of Buddhist spiritual practices through neuroscience has been an emerging practice during this past decade. Moreover, practitioners who engage in spiritual practices that employ the body and who experience an authentic feeling of change in their physical health, could be invited to join the study. They might also provide valuable data to the research in the field of medicine.

In developing mindfulness-based training for the public, the elements highly related to religion, such as religious philosophy, are not involved. Meanwhile, the research findings reveal that the participants' cognitive changes by systematic self-reflection backed up by their learning on Buddhism, are essential in the process of emotional regulation, or even spirituality improvement. Therefore, it seems that besides attention training, appropriate education about life is also vital to enhance EI. To be more practical, reflection with guidance could be developed for some specific scenarios in professional service, such as dealing with students' disobedience in the classroom.

On the other hand, mindfulness-based training should be infused with ideas or philosophies about life to help individuals achieve better emotional states or even growth. The emergence of Positive psychology in these past years, including mindfulness training, is an example (Lopez, et al., 2018, pp. 277-304). To sum up, in future studies, researchers who are interested in EI, emotional capacity, and mindfulness-based training should pay heed to the influence of cognition changes.

6.4 Researcher's Reflection

Rather than only being directly generated from the extant literature, this research was initiated from the researcher's experiences and observations in daily life. As this study covers Buddhism and Emotion in education and focuses on the impacts of Buddhist spiritual practices, the critical issue in addressing the research questions is the choice of research method. Case study with the characteristic of using retrospective and reflexive life stories was ultimately selected after careful consideration. Since the mainstream research methods in Buddhism belong to the field of the humanities, this research is an attempt to employ research

methods typically used in the social sciences, in order to reveal the characteristics and features of Buddhist spiritual practices and of practitioners.

The interviews with the three teachers were a great inspiration for both the researcher and the participants themselves. All the participants endorsed the significance of this research and shared their experiences genuinely during the interviews. Moreover, they appreciated the emotional resonance emerging in the interviews and the structuring of the interview questions, which gave them a chance to reflect on their spiritual experience and even provide some new perspectives.

The researcher also learned a lot from the experiences shared by the interviewees about their efforts in spiritual practices. No matter how many doctrines the practitioners had learned, they only affect their life when they employ them in their spiritual practices and finally apply them in daily life. The research findings are valuable for the expansion and deepening of the understanding in this field. Moreover, since the participants were long-term Buddhist spiritual practitioners, the researcher learned from their experiences. Their sharing provided valuable perspectives to help the researcher reflect on her own spiritual practices since, like her, the participants lived in Hong Kong and were education workers.

The completion of this thesis was the culmination of a long journey. Therefore, this research is a doctoral thesis while also being a summary of the researcher's learning and practices in the related fields during this period. Furthermore, based on the exploration during this fantastic and challenging journey, some learning results have already been employed and have made contributions to the projects and programs that the researcher has engaged in. The positive feedback from the participants in the various projects and programs has encouraged

the researcher to be more engaged in this research study and gave her valuable inspiration. It also encouraged her to make greater effort in the study and practice of similar research themes.

In late 2020, the local Education Bureau added “Empathy” as a value and attitude of priority in values education to foster students’ whole-person development and lifelong learning (Education Bureau of HKSAR, 2020). It seems more and more stakeholders in education have realized the significance of empathy. Following this trend, the researcher hopes this study inspires the design and implementation of other research studies, projects, and programs in the related fields.

6.5 Concluding Words

“A man can enlarge the principles which he follows; those principles do not enlarge the man” (人能弘道，非道弘人; Legge, 1960, p. 302). Many doctrines are recorded and interpreted in the sacred text; however, they only become vibrant and vivid when practitioners employ them in their spiritual practices and ultimately apply them in daily life. Even though the researcher investigated the impact of Buddhist spiritual practices on teachers’ emotions, the real area of research inquiry was teachers’ self-cultivation, with a view to becoming better educators through the interaction of ancient wisdom and today’s modern society. Teachers can directly influence students’ lives. To achieve a better future, teachers should make an effort to improve themselves in order to be good role models.

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APPENDIX A: Sample of Consent Form and Information Sheet for Participants

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

The Impacts of Buddhist Spiritual Practice on Teachers' Emotions

I _____ hereby consent to participate in the captioned research supervised by Dr. WONG Mei Yee, May and conducted by Ms. LI Puni Polly, who are the staff of Department of Social Sciences and the student of Graduate School respectively in The Education University of Hong Kong.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and may be published. However, my right to privacy will be retained, i.e., my personal details will not be revealed.

The procedure as set out in the **attached** information sheet has been fully explained. I understand the benefits and risks involved. My participation in the project is voluntary.

I acknowledge that I have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Name of participant

Signature of participant

Date

INFORMATION SHEET

The Impacts of Buddhist Spiritual Practice on Teachers' Emotions

You are invited to participate in a project supervised by Dr. WONG Mei Yee, May and conducted by Ms. LI Puni Polly, who are the staff of the Department of Social Sciences and the student of Graduate School respectively in The Education University of Hong Kong respectively.

The introduction of the research

The goal of this study is to try to understand how long-term Buddhist spiritual practices affect Hong Kong teachers' emotions from the perspective of personal growth in the education context. This study will be conducted through the following two research questions:

- 1) How do long-term Buddhist spiritual practices affect Hong Kong teachers' emotions?
- 2) How do the changes further influence their relationships with students?

This study will invite four Hong Kong school teachers (one male and one female teachers from two different primary schools, and one male and one female teachers from two different secondary schools) to take part in this study as the targeted research participants. All of the research participants should be long-term Buddhist spiritual practitioners, which means their daily practice should stretch back at least five years. Furthermore, they should also be *Mahāyāna Buddhist* spiritual practitioners, which means that they should carry out their practices according to the religious philosophy of *Mahāyāna Buddhism*.

The methodology of the research

This study will invite four Hong Kong local school teachers (one male and one female teacher from two different primary school, and one male and one female teacher from two different secondary school) as the targeted research participants. The researcher invited and recruited the potential participant personal network, including the aim of this work and the researcher's contact. When the potential participant with interest to take part in this work contacts the researcher, the researcher will introduce the detailed research arrangement and the right of the participants. The potential participant's contact information will be asked when he or she accepts the invitation.

There are two main data collection methods employed in this research: semi-structured interviews and written personal documents. The total interview time is 10 hours, and the interviews will be conducted in three rounds. The interviews will be record and converted to a transcript for further analyse. The researcher will do the field note during the interview as reference for the later study. Regarding the written personal documents, the researcher will try to request your personal reflective journals.

This study will not offer any individual benefit to you. However, the collected data will provide valuable academic research materials to the study on how the Buddhist spiritual practices affect teachers' emotion.

The potential risks of the research

Your participation in the project is voluntary. The question asked by the researcher may make you feel no so good. If you encounter emotional fluctuations and psychological stress during the interview, the researcher will pause the interview. After the interview, the transcripts would be sent to you, and you have the right to refuse to use the data for the study. You have every

right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. All information related to you will remain confidential, and will be identifiable by codes known only to the researcher.

The dissemination of the research results

This research is conducted for the doctoral dissertation and will only be reviewed as a degree thesis with viva examination. It will not be open to public.

If you would like to obtain more information about this study, please contact Ms. LI Puni Polly at telephone number _____ or her supervisor Dr. Wong Mei Yee, May at telephone number 2948 8425.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research study, please do not hesitate to contact the Human Research Ethics Committee by email at hrec@eduhk.hk or by mail to Research and Development Office, The Education University of Hong Kong.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

LI Puni Polly
Student Investigator

APPENDIX B: Interview Protocol

Basic information of the research participant

- Age, Gender, Education Background, School, Position (e.g., Teacher, Panel), Professional experience

Part II: Interview questions (Round 1)

Question 1: Could you talk about your life experience (in chronological order)?

- When and where did you born?
- What's your family background, study and work experience?
- How about your relationship with your important others, such as family members, close friend, religious master and so on?

Part II: Interview questions (Round 2)

Question 2: Could you talk about how Buddhist spiritual practices affect your emotion?

- When did you know about Buddhism?
- Why do you start your religious belief?
- When did you start your Buddhist spiritual practices?
- Could you talk about your spiritual experience in detail?
 - Sub-question: Could you describe any important spiritual experience?
- Do you think Buddhist practices affect your personal growth in emotional dimension?

Please elaborate with examples.

Question 3: How did these changes affect your interaction with your student in emotional dimension?

- Could you talk about this kind of effect in detail? Please elaborate with examples.

APPENDIX C: Sample of coding

Interviewee's Verbatim	Coding
... ¹ <u>After counting "in and out" breaths for a while, I was in a peaceful state without the intrusion of thought.</u> Every breath was very clear and comfortable. The body and mind seemed to be synchronized...	1. Code: Spiritual practice helped the practitioner regulate emotion
... I was reciting the name of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara when I was in the MTR... ² <u>I could let my mind rest for a while through reciting the name of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara...</u>	2. Code: Spiritual practice helped the practitioner regulate emotion
... I chanted the Manjushri mantra while I was taking MTR to HKU. ³ <u>When I was an undergraduate, I always chanted the Manjushri mantra when I had pressure of study. It helped me to stay calm and relax.</u> ⁴ <u>Therefore, the mantra often arose whenever I am thinking or worried about study. I felt at ease when chanting...</u>	3. Code: Connected to other power 4. Code: Connected to other power
... ⁵ <u>Now you have fish carrion. If you do not deal with it and instead hold on to it, it would continue to decompose and pollute other good things and make them become carrion...</u>	5. Code: Suffering
... ⁶ <u>This positive idea occasionally comes to me when I am in a low mood...</u> This is a very core mindset (for me) ...	6. Code: Buddhist learning helped the practitioner regulate emotion