

NĀGĀRJUNA'S INFLUENCE ON THE FORMATION OF THE EARLY YOGĀCĀRA THOUGHTS —FROM MŪLAMADHYAMAKAKĀRIKĀ TO BODHISATTVABHŪMI—

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ABSTRACT

It is indeed true that The *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (BBh) has no direct reference to Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK); however, when viewed from the contents of MMK, the BBh shows some significant traces in which we can find clear development of thoughts given in the MMK concerning the key concepts such as *tattva* "truth, lit., thatness", *sugr̥hīta-sūnyatā* "well-grasped emptiness", *prapañca* "verbal proliferation" and *vikalpa* "conceptual discrimination", etc. Although a number of studies have so far been carried out on each text of the highest importance, a comparative approach to them is now extremely needed since the philosophical role that Nāgārjuna played in the history of Buddhism and his influence on the formation of the early Yogācāra tenets still remains our future task.

The present paper, therefore, aims at clarifying how the author of BBh deepened and defined the meanings of the above-mentioned key concepts, all of which were in fact used as significant terms both in MMK and BBh.

Key Words: Nāgārjuna, Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, Bodhisattvabhūmi, sūnyatā.

It is indeed true that the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (BBh) has no direct reference to Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MK); however, when viewed from the contents of MK, the BBh shows some significant traces in which we can find clear development of thoughts given in the MK concerning the key concepts such as *tattva* "truth", or lit. "thatness", *sugr̥hīta-sūnyatā* "well seized emptiness", *prapañca* "verbal proliferation" and *vikalpa* "conceptual discrimination", etc. Although a number of studies have so

far been carried out on each text of the highest importance, a comparative approach to them is now extremely needed since the philosophical role that Nāgārjuna played in the history of Buddhism and his influence on the formation of the early Yogācāra tenets still remain our future task.

The present paper, therefore, aims at clarifying how the author of BBh deepened and defined the meanings of the above-mentioned key concepts, all of which were in fact used as significant terms both in MMK and BBh.

Before analyzing the relationship of the above two works, it seems fitting to briefly refer to the result of my previous paper* in which I examined whether Nāgārjuna can legitimately be called a Mādhyamika or not. As was discussed by the above article, the answer must primarily depend on our approach – traditional, historical, or philosophical – to the question. The topic of this paper has closely related to the last, i.e. philosophical approach.

I. Traditional or Doxographical Approach

Nāgārjuna has traditionally been regarded as belonging to, or rather being the forerunner of, the early stage of the Mādhyamika school²⁾. It is, therefore, usual that we commence our description of the history of the Mādhyamika school by referring to the life, works and thought of Nāgārjuna. This type of description appears to make sense since, putting aside the problematic account of his teacher having been Rāhulabhadra teacher given by some of the Tibetan historiographers and doxographers, no master is reported to have preceded Nāgārjuna, the author of the MK. Further, the early period of the Mādhyamika school may, above all, rightly be characterized by the appearance of the MK and its commentaries, together with Nāgārjuna's disciple's, viz. Āryadeva's (c.170-270) *Śataka* or *CatuHśataka*.

In his well-known doxographical work, *Grub pa'i mtha'i rnam par bzhag pa*, ICang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje (1717-1786), therefore, gives the designation "Mādhyamikas of the Basic Texts" (*gzhung phyi mo'i dbu ma pa*) to both Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva, and that of "Sectarian Mādhyamikas" (*phyogs 'dzing pa'i dbu ma pa*) to other later followers such as Buddhapālita, Bhāviveka and Candrakīrti³⁾. ICang skya explains why he gives the former designation, i.e., "Mādhyamikas of the Basic Texts", to Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva as follows:

"Although the final thought of the father [Nāgārjuna] and son [Āryadeva] lies in the Prāsaṅgika system, in terms of what is taught in their texts,

there is no clearly delineated presentation of whether they conventionally accept things as having their own character (*rang mtshan*, **svalakṣaṇa*), whether they accept the existence of external objects, and whether or not it is suitable to generate an inference against the opponent only from the viewpoint of what is well known to others, and so forth. Therefore, since [their texts] remain common to both the **Prāsaṅgika* and **Svāntarika* factions, they are called ‘Basic’.”⁴⁾

II. Historical Approach

The above-mentioned doxographical approach is no doubt one of the possible avenues for understanding the important role that Nāgārjuna played in the history of Buddhism. It is to be noted that in the doxographical material Nāgārjuna is often considered not on the basis of his own statements but rather from the point of view of the later developed aspects of the Mādhyamika school. Incidentally, the first and third points of controversy to which lCang skya referred in the above explanation are those believed to have been differences between **Svāntarika* (Bhāviveka) and **Prāsaṅgika* (Candrakīrti), while the second point was between **Sautrāntika*-Mādhyamika (Bhāviveka, Jñānagarbha, etc.) and **Yogācāra*-Mādhyamika (Śāntarakṣita, Kamalaśīla, etc.).

However, if we turn to the following, rather historical facts, Nāgārjuna’s place in the history of Mahāyāna Buddhism looks somewhat different.

(1) It is indeed true that Nāgārjuna was the author of the influential MK, which came to be called *Zhōng-lùn* (中論), i.e. *Madhyamaka-śāstra* at the latest in the beginning of 5th century A.D. However, Nāgārjuna recognized himself only as a “Sūnyatāvaadin” in his *Viśvavārtanī* (VV) and *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa*⁵⁾, and not as a “Mādhyamika” or “dBu ma pa”.

(2) As far as our present knowledge goes, in the history of the so-called Mādhyamika school Bhāviveka was the first to call himself a “dBu ma pa” (Mādhyamika) or “dBu ma(r) smra ba” (Madhyamaka-vādin)⁶⁾, opposing the then influential Yogācāra tenet of “Three Natures” (*trisvabhāva*) and its related idea of practice, *asallakṣaṇānupraveśopāya* “the expedient for entry into the characteristic of non-existence”. The same designation “Mādhyamika” was further used by Candrakīrti (c.600-650) who, following Buddhapaṇita’s example⁷⁾, once called himself a “Pratītyasamutpāda-vādin”⁸⁾.

(3) Asaṅga and Sthiramati wrote commentaries on the MK, both of which are extant only in Chinese translation⁹⁾. As was discussed by

Kajiyama[1963] and Ejima[1980], Sthiramati criticized the explanation given by Bhāviveka in the *Prajñāpradīpa*.¹⁰⁾ According to Avalokitavrata, comments on the MK by other Yogācāras, viz. Guṇamati and Devaśarman, are also critically referred to by Bhāviveka in his *Prajñāpradīpa*.¹¹⁾ Also well known is the fact that Dharmapāla wrote the commentary *Dà-chéng-guāng-bǎi-lùn-shì-lùn* (大乘廣百論釋論) on the second half of Āryadeva's *Catuhśataka*, and in it refuted both Bhāviveka's way of commenting on the MK¹²⁾ and his understanding of several verses quoted from the *Bhavaśaṅkrāntisūtra* and *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*.¹³⁾

The above-mentioned facts tell us that historically speaking, Nāgārjuna should be placed in the pre-Mādhyamika as well as pre-Yogācāra stage, that is, in the earliest stage of the history of the Mahāyāna-Abhidharma movement,¹⁴⁾ which is mainly based on the early *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*. It is most probable that the MK was therein regarded as common property to the advocates and followers of the Mahāyāna scriptures, though a slight difference in the understanding of some of the key concepts of the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* such as *śūnyatā* "emptiness" and *niHsvabhāva* "absence of own-nature" later caused the Yogācāra group to appear and thereafter the Mādhyamika school.

III. Philosophical Approach

Let us now take a philosophical approach to Nāgārjuna's position in the history of how to interpretations of some of the key concepts of the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* such as *śūnyatā* and *niHsvabhāva*.

Since a discussion of this topic in detail would require more than this paper, let me confine myself here to referring to the following four points in regard to his philosophical contribution:

First, it is certain from his argumentation in the MK and its related works that in the late 2nd century A.D. Nāgārjuna had already faced rather severe criticism concerning his interpretation of and justification for *śūnyatā*. This can easily be traced in the discussion in the MK and VV, in which he quotes, or introduces, the opponents' objection that the teaching of *śūnyatā* – more or less taken by them to mean "non-existence" – not only destroys the traditional teachings such as "The Four Noble Truths", "The Three Jewels" and so on, but also makes impossible our common word usage and moral criteria.

Secondly, what Nāgārjuna tried to do in response to this kind of criticism set forth by the then influential Abhidharma thinkers such as the Sarvāstivāda

and Sāṅghitīya was to justify his understanding of the meaning of *śūnyatā* by means of the well-known Kātyāyānāvavāda “The [Buddha’s] Teachings to Kātyāyana” regarding the teaching of Middle Path (*madhyamā pratīpat*). In its Pāli counterpart, Kaccāyana-gotta “A Man of Kaccāyana lineage” of the *Nidāna-saṃyutta* (SN XII.15), the Buddha, when asked what the right view (*sammā diṭṭhi*) would be, explains it as seeing things as they are, with the right wisdom, from the viewpoint of middle [path] which denies both extremes, viz. existence and non-existence.

Thirdly, as concerns the meaning of *śūnyatā*, Nāgārjuna stresses the following two points: (1) The word “*śūnyatā*”, on the one hand, means “absence of own-nature” (*niHsvabhāva*), as already defined in the early *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*. The teaching of *niHsvabhāva* is therein emphasized in order to criticize the then influential Sarvāstivāda’s understanding of *dharma*s as having their own-nature. In his main work, the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, Nāgārjuna rather constantly criticized such essentialistic or elementalistic understanding of *dharma*s as typically shown by the Sarvāstivāda thinkers. What Nāgārjuna stressed in this regard is that the teaching of *śūnyatā* is significant because it is able to lead the Mahāyāna practitioner to the quiescence of verbal proliferation (*prapañcopaśama*). According to his understanding, it is verbal proliferation that causes imagination (*vikalpa*) from which defilements (*kleśa*) and actions (*karman*) arise. Therefore, the teaching of *śūnyatā* in the sense of *niHsvabhāva* is crucial for one’s attainment of liberation (*mokṣa*)¹⁵.

(2) On the other hand, according to Nāgārjuna’s definition of *svabhāva* in MK 15.2cd¹⁶, *niHsvabhāva* at the same time means “dependence on others” (*paratra apekṣaH*) or “artificially made” (*kṛtrima*). This idea is also attested in his identification of *śūnyatā* with *pratītyasamutpāda* “dependent-arising” in MK 24.18ab¹⁷. Therefore, because of the absence of own-nature, all things can be dependently produced, can be dependently named (*upādāya prajñaptiH*), and can bring their own purpose (*kārya/ prayojana*) into being. This message of Nāgārjuna’s is worth noting, for, though often overlooked, it was clearly asserted in MK 24 and VV. *Śūnyatā* in the sense of *pratītyasamutpāda* is stressed there in the context of removing a nihilistic understanding of *śūnyatā* in the sense of “non-existence”.

Forthly, it is to be noted that the above two points regarding the meaning of *śūnyatā* or *niHsvabhāva* were later keenly discussed and further developed in early Yogācāra works such as the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*,

Sanḍhinirmocanasūtra and the *Viniścayasaṅgrahaṇī* section of the *Yogācārabhūmi*, etc. It seems certain that without Nāgārjuna's contribution to the elucidation of the concept of *śūnyatā*, the so-called Yogācāra tenets of Five Categories (*pañca vastūni* 五事 or *pañca dharmaH* 五法) and Three Natures (*trisvabhāva* 三性) would not have later come into being. And it also appears certain that without the foundation of the Yogācāra school by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu in the 5th century A.D., the Mādhyamika as a school would not have been brought into being by Bhāviveka (c.490-570).

Lastly, in regard to the above-mentioned relationship between Nāgārjuna's thought and those found in the early Yogācāra treatises, let me point out the following key concepts such as *tattva*, *sugṛhīta-śūnyatā*, *vikalpa-prapañca*, and the religio-philosophical tension between *paramārtha/nirabhilāpyasvabhāvatā* and the role of *vyavahāra/ abhilāpa*. Although these significant terms were already used in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, it was thereafter in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, especially in Chapter 4 entitled *tattvārtha* "meaning of *tattva*" that, as far as our present knowledge goes, they were fully analysed and developed with, more or less, a slight modification.

(1) On *tattva* "truth"

MK: *tattvasya lakṣaṇam* (18.9, see below), *tattva-darśana* (26.10), etc.

BBh: *tattvārtha*

- *divividha*: 1) *yathāvadbhāvikatā: dharmāññ bhūtata*

2) *yāvadbhāvikatā: dharmāññ sarvatā*

- *caturvidha*: 1) *lokaprasiddha*

2) *yuktiprasiddha*

3) *vikalpāvaraṇaviśuddhijñānagocara*

4) *jñeyāvaraṇaviśuddhijñānagocara*

(2) On *sugṛhīta-śūnyatā* "well seized emptiness" vs. *durgrhīta-śūnyatā* "badly..."

MK: *vināśayati durdṛṣṭā śūnyatā mandamedhasam/*

sarpo yathā durgrhīto vidyā vā duṣprasādhitā// (24.11)

"A wrongly seen 'emptiness' ruins a feeble-minded person.

It is like a badly seized snake or a badly executed incantation.”

BBh: *yah kaścīta śramaṇo vā brāhmaṇo vā tac ca necchati yena śūnyaṇ tad api necchati yat tena śūnyam iyaṃ evaṇrūpā **durgrhūtā śūnyatety** ucyate//...// sarvābhāvāc ca kutra kiṇ kena sunyaṇ bhaviṣyati//* (Takahashi ed., p.101)

*yataś ca yad yatra na bhavati tat tena śūnyam iti samanupaśyati/ yat punar atrāvaśiṣṭaṇ bhavati tat sad ihāstīti yathābhūtaṇ prajānāti// iyaṃ ucyate śūnyatāvakraṇtir yathābhūtā aviparītā//...iyaṃ ucyate **sugrūtā śūnyatā** samyakprajāyā supratividdheti//* (ibid., pp.101-102)

(3) On **vikalpa** “conceptual discrimination” and **prapañca** “verbal proliferation”

MK: *karmakleśakṣayān mokṣaḥ karmakleśā **vikalpataḥ/** te **prapañcāt prapañcas** tu śūnyatāyāṇ nirudhyate//* (18.5)

*aparapratyayaṇ śāntaṇ **prapañcair aprapañcitam/** **nirvikalpam** anānārtham etat tattvasya lakṣaṇam//* (18.9)

BBh: *aṣṭavidho **vikalpah**: svabhāva-**vikalpa**, viśeṣa-v., piṇḍagrāha-v., aham iti v., mameti v., priya-v., apriya-v., tadubhayaviparīta-v.* (ibid., pp.107-110)

*sa punar ayam aṣṭavidho **vikalpah** katameṣāṇ trayānāṇ vastūnāṇ janako bhavati// yaś ca svabhāvavikalpo yaś ca veśeṣavikalpo yaś ca piṇḍagrāhavikalpa itīme trayo **vikalpā vikalpaprapañcādhiṣṭhānaḥ vikalpaprapañcālambanaḥ** vastu janayanti rūpādīsaṇjñakam// yad vastv adhiṣṭhāya sa nāmasaṇjñābhilāpaparigṛhīto nāmasaṇjñābhilāpaparibhāvito **vikalpah prapañcayan** tasminn eva vastuni vicaraty anekavidho bahunānāprakārah//* (ibid., p.107)

(4) On nirabhilāpyasvabhāvatā and abhilāpa

MK: *vyavahāram anāśritya paramārtho na deśyate/ paramārtham anāgamyā nirvāṇaṇ nādhigamyate//* (MK 24.10)

BBh: *evaṇ nirabhilāpyasvabhāveṣu sarvadharmeṣu kasmād abhilāpaḥ prayujyate// tathā hi vinābhilāpena sā nirabhilāpyadharmatā pareṣāṇ vaktum api na śakyate śrotum api// vacane śravaṇe cāsati sa nirabhilāpyasvabhāvatā jñātum api na śakyate/ tasmād abhilāpaḥ prayujyate śravaṇajñānāya//* (Takahashi ed., p.106)

III. Conclusion

The following diagram shows a possible position for Nāgārjuna in the context of the development of not necessarily Mādhyamika thought, but rather of the Mahāyāna tenets related, in particular, to the concept of *śūnyatā*. Nāgārjuna is there placed as the originator of Mahāyāna-Abhidharma movement prior to the advent of the early Yogācāra, that is, long before the birth and formation of the Mādhyamika school which was, historically speaking, founded by Bhāviveka in the early 6th century A.D.

A.D.1c. *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* (early *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*-)

Daśabhūmikasūtra

A.D.2c. [I. The Beginning of the Mahāyāna-Abhidharmas]

(Pre-Yogācāra; Pre-Mādhyamika)

A.D.3c. Nāgārjuna (c.150-250): “Śūnyatāvādin”

Āryadeva (c.170-270)

Rāhulabhadra (c.200-300)

Prajñāpāramitāsūtra

(early *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*-)

A.D.4c. *Piṅgala(c.320-400), *Zhōng-lùn*

(中論)

Unknown author, *Akutoḥbhayā*

[II-1. Early Yogācāra]

Yogācārabhūmi (Maulī bhūmiḥ) (c.300-450)

(Śrbh, Bbh → other bhūmis (?))

[II-2. The Birth of Vijnaptimātratā and Trisvabhāva theories]

Sanḍhinirmocanasūtra, *Mahāyānābhidharmasūtra*

Yogācārabhūmi (Vinīścayasaṅgrahaṇī etc.)

Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra (MSA), *Madhyāntavibhāga* (MAV)

Buddhapālita (c.370-450): “Pratītya- samutpādavādin”

A.D.5c. Asaṅga (c.395-470), *Abhidharmasamuccaya*,
Mahāyānasāṅgraha,

Xiǎn-yáng-shèng-jiào-lùn (顯揚聖教論)

Shùn-zhōng-lùn (順中論), etc.

Vasubandhu (c.400-480), MSAbh, MAVbh, etc.

[II-3. The Establishment of Buddhist Logic and Epistemology; The Age of Commentary Works on Asaṅga and Vasubandhu's treatises]

Dignāga (c.480-540), *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, *Ālambanaparīkṣā*, etc.

A.D.6c. [III. The Birth and Formation of the Mādhyamika School]

Bhāviveka(c.490-570):"Mādhyamika", "Madhyamaka-vādin"

Sthiramati (c.510-570), SAVbh, MAVT, *Triṇśikaṭīkā*, *Dà-chéng-Zhōng-guāng-shì-lùn*, (大乘中觀積論), etc.

Dharmapāla (530-561), **Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi*, *Dà-chéng-guāng-bǎi-lùn-shì-lùn* (大乘廣百論積論), etc.

A.D.7c. Candrakīrti(c.600-650):"Mādhyamika"

"Pratītyasamutpādavādin"

Dharmakīrti (c.600-660)

Notes

* "Is Nāgārjuna a Mādhyamika?", *Hokekyō to Daijōkyōten no Kenkyū* (Studies in the Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra and Mahāyāna Scriptures, 2006, pp.153-164.

1) See Warder[1970] p.376; Kalpahana[1986] pp.5-8; Tachikawa[1994] pp.(3)-(5), etc.

In addition to Tachikawa's pertinent comment on Kalpahana[1986], it is worthy of note that in MK 24.32 Nāgārjuna clearly acknowledges the importance of *bodhisattvacaryā*, which runs: *yaś cābuddhaH svabhāvena sa bodhāya ghaṭann api/ na bodhisattvacaryāyāṇ bodhiṇ te 'dhigamiṣyati//*. (Hereafter, verses of MK are cited from de Jong[1977].)

2) See, e.g., Seyfort Ruegg[1981] pp.4-47 and [1982];Kajiyama[1982] pp.2-7; Saito [1988][1996].

3) *Grub pa'i mtha'i rnam par bzhag pa*, Peking ed., Śatapiṭaka Series 233, New Delhi, 1978, p.433.2-3 (Kha 8a2-3); see also Lopez[1987] p.253.

4) *Ibid.*, p.433.4-p.434.1 (Kha 8a4-b1) ; Tada Collection preserved in the University of Tokyo, *Kitamura Catalogue*, no.85 (Ser-byes ed.), Nga 6a5-6: *yab sras gnyis kyi dgongs pa mthar thug thal 'gyur pa'i lugs su gnas kyang gzhung gi bstan tshod la tha snyad du dngos po la rang mtshan zhal gyis bzhes mi bzhes dang/ phyi rol gyi don zhal gyis bzhes mi bzhes dang/ gzhan grags tsam gyi sgo nas phyi rgol la rjes dpag bskyed du rung mi rung sogs kyi rnam bzhag (pzhag P; gzhag Ser-byes) gsal bar phye ba med pas thal rang gi phyogs gnyis ka'i (ga'i P) spyi la bzhugs pas na phyi mo zhes zer ro//.*

5) See Seyfort Ruegg[1981] p.2(n.2); Saito[2000] pp.94-98, 111(n.8,9); Mochizuki [2004] p.209.

6) See Saito[1988] p.(40).

7) See Saito[2000] pp.98-103.

8) See Ejima[1985] pp.144, 150, 156(n.25).

9) Asaḡga, *Shùn-zhōng-lùn* (順中論), tr. by Prajñārucci (般若流支) in 543, Taisho no.1565; Sthiramati, *Zhōng-guāng-shì-lùn* (大乘中觀積論), tr. by Wéi-Jīng (惟淨) et al. from 1009-1050, Taisho no.1567+ 卅 26-1.

10) See Kajiyama[1963] and Ejima[1980] pp.165-171.

11) See Ejima[1980] pp.159-165.

12) See Kajiyama[1963] pp.149-152.

13) See Ejima[1992].

14) Cf. The colophon of *Prajñā-nāma*-MK (D Tsa 19a1; P Tsa 22a4): *dBu ma rtsa ba'i tshig le'ur byas pa shes rab ces bya ba theg pa chen po'i chos mngon pa rnam par gzhag pa/...*, “The *Prajñā-nāma-mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, in which Mahāyāna- Abhidharma is established, ...”. In his *Prajñāpradīpaṭīkā*, Avalokitavrata also considers the well-known reverential verse of MK, which contains eight negations characterizing *pratītyasamutpāda*, as a “*Paramārtha-abhidharma (don dam pa'i chos mngon pa)”, and those given in the traditional Tripiṭaka as “*Samvṛty-abhidharmas (kun rdzob pa'i chos mngon pa)” (D Wa 39b6-7; P Wa 46a5-6).

15) MK 18.5: *karmakleśakṣayān mokṣaH karmakleśā vikalpataH/ te prapañcāt prapañcas tu śūnyatāyān nirudhyate//*

16) MK 18.2cd: *akṛtrimaH svabhāvo hi nirapekṣaH paratra ca//.*

17) MK 24.18ab: *yaH pratītyasamutpādaH śūnyatān tān pracakṣmahe/.*

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