

On ‘prajñāpāramitānīti’ in the Madhyamaka Treatises

YONEZAWA Yoshiyasu

1. Preamble

The present paper examines the usages of the term ‘prajñāpāramitānīti/ shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa’i tshul’ in Madhyamaka treatises, namely, commentaries on MMK (PP, Pras, etc.), MA, MHK, and TJ. In addition, MaVṬ and SZ are consulted. It is to be noted that the terms ‘prajñāpāramitānaya’ which appears in the alias of the *Saptapañcaśatikā Prajñāpāramitā*, and ‘pāramitānaya’ (Exoteric Buddhism) paired with ‘mantranaya’ (Esoteric Buddhism), have no connection with the present paper.

2. The Commentaries on the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*

This section collects the occurrences in the commentaries on Nāgārjuna’s MMK.

2.1. The *Prasannapadā*

In the initial part of the Pras, the term is found in the explanation of a ‘connection’ (*sambandha*), which runs as follows:

§2. ... yāvad ācārya-Nāgārjunasya viditāvīparītaprajñāpāramitānīteḥ karuṇayā parāvabodhārthaṁ śāstrapraṇayanam ity eṣa tāvac chāstrasya sambandhaḥ ||⁽¹⁾

“§2. ...the Master Nāgārjuna, who had finally understood the correct method (*nīti*) of the perfection of insight (*prajñāpāramitā*), out of compassion composed the treatise (*śāstra*), for the sake of the understanding of others.”⁽²⁾

The following comment is found in *Lakṣ:

yāvad ity ukto **prajñāpāramitānītiṁ** jñātvā śāstraṁ kṛtam ity arthaḥ |⁽³⁾

“What is said from ‘yāvad’ means that, having known the *Prajñāpāramitā* method, [Nāgārjuna] composed the [Middle (Madhyamaka)] Treatise.”

By means of this statement, Candrakīrti clarifies a philosophical position of Nāgārjuna,

the author of MMK.

2.2. The *Prajñāpradīpa*

Candrakīrti's explanation quoted above seems to have been influenced by the initial part of Bhāviveka's PP, which reads as follows:

slob dpon gyi zhal snga nas kyi tshig le'ur byas pa dag kho nas rjes su dpag pa dang | sun dbyung ba'i gsal pa dang | de kho na dag bstan pa dang | lta ba ngan pa'i dra ba zhi bar byed pa dang ldan pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i tshul bka' stsal mod kyi | (D Tsha 45b6-7; P Tsha 53b7-8)

"The Master [Nāgārjuna], just by means of verse [i.e., his *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*], proclaims the method of the *Prajñāpāramitā* which teaches lucid and right inference (*anumāna*) and refutation (*dūṣaṇa*) and pacifies the bad views."⁴⁾

Bhāviveka seems to have been the first person to indicate, as a Mādhyamika, that Nāgārjuna proclaims 'the *prajñāpāramitā* method (*nīti*).'

2.3. Descriptions about the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* in Tibetan Colophons

The term 'shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i tshul' is found within the description of MMK included in Tibetan colophons of MMK, ABh, BP, PP, and PPT. Except for ABh,⁵⁾ the almost identical text runs as follows:

dbu ma rtsa ba'i tshig le'ur byas pa shes rab ces bya ba theg pa chen po'i chos mngon pa nam par gzhas (P: bzhag) pa || don dam pa'i de kho na yang dag par ston pa | shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i tshul gsal bar byed pa | slob dpon bdag nyid chen po 'phags pa klu sgrub mi 'phrogs pa'i mkhyen rab dang thugs rjer ldan pa | de bzhin gshegs pa'i theg pa bla na med pa'i tshul gsal bar byed pa | rab tu dga' ba'i sa bsgrubs nas | bde ba can gyi zhing du gshegs pa | 'jig rten gyi khamas dang ba'i 'od ces bya bar | de bzhin gshegs pa ye shes 'byung gnas 'od ces bya bar 'gyur bas mdzad pa ... (MMK: D tsa 19a1-3; P tsa 22a3-7 = BP: D tsa 280b7-281a2; P tsa 317a4-6 = PP: D tsha 259a5-7; P tsha 325b6-326a1 = PPT: D za 341a2-3; P za 405b7-406a2)⁶⁾

"The MMK called 'Prajñā,' representing the Mahāyāna Abhidharma, showing the truth of the ultimate (*paramārtha*), and elucidating the *Prajñāpāramitā* method, composed by the noble Nāgārjuna, [who is] the master (*ācārya*) and the great sage (*mahātma*), possessing the wisdom and compassion of the Inalienable [i.e., the Sun], elucidating the means (*vidhi*?, *tshul*) of the supreme vehicle (*anuttarayāna*) of the Tathāgata, having attained the Stage of Joy (*pramuditā bhūmi*), having gone to the Pure Field (*Sukhāvati*), called the Pure Splendor of world (*lokadhātu*), will become the Tathāgata [called] *Jñānakaraprabha*,"

Undoubtedly, the phrase 'elucidating the *Prajñāpāramitā* method' (shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i tshul gsal bar byed pa) is based on 'the Master [Nāgārjuna] ... proclaims the

Prajñāpāramitā method ...' in PP quoted above.

2.4. The *Prajñāpradīpaṭīkā*

In his PPT, Avalokitavrata comments on Bhāviveka's proclamation quoted above. With regard to the term 'prajñāpāramitānīti,' he makes an etymological explanation of the 'prajñāpāramitā'⁷⁾ and continues as follows:

tshul zhes bya ba ni shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i tshul te | shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i mtshan nyid kyi chos bstan pa gang yin pa'o || yang na shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa nyid tshul te | gang gis chos thams cad dmigs su med par khird par byed pa'am | gang gis gzhan gyi rgyud la don khrid par byed pa'o || yang na gang gis bsod nams dang ye shes kyi tshogs gzhal du med pa nye bar bsags pa'i 'jig rten 'khor ba'i btson ra nas bsgral te | bsam pa thams cad yongs su rdzogs par byed pa'i yid bzhin gyi nor bu rin po che ltar bur khrid par byed pa de ni tshul lo || (D wa 6b5-7; P wa 7b7-8a2)

"In regard to the method (*nīti), it is the *prajñāpāramitā* method, [i.e.,] the instruction in the dharma which has the characteristic of the insight that has gone to the other side (*prajñāpāramitā*). Alternatively, precisely the *prajñāpāramitā* is the method; it is that which leads/guides to the non-perception of all *dharma*s, or that which leads [i.e., conveys] benefit with regard to the continuum of others. Or, it is the method inasmuch as it [i.e., the *prajñāpāramitā*] leads, once it has liberated [those] people who have collected the immeasurable accumulations of merit and gnosis from the jail of *samsāra*, like a wish-fulfilling jewel that perfectly accomplishes all wishes."⁸⁾

Avalokitavrata provides two interpretations of the type of compound here, namely, *tatpuruṣa* and *karmadhāraya*. According to the latter, it is presumed that the *Prajñāpāramitā* is nothing but a method (understanding the relation as an apposition, x = y).

Furthermore, the term 'prajñāpāramitānīti' appears in the following comments on 'madhyamaka-':

yang na dbu ma zhes bya ba ni shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i tshul skye ba med pa la sogs pa'i dngos po bsdu pa'i bstan bcos nam mkha' lta bu dag gi nang nas btus pa'i phyir dbu ma'o || (D wa 8a4; P wa 9b2-3)

"Or, as regards the Middle (Madhyamaka), it is called 'Middle' since it is extracted from the interior of space-like treatises gathering the *Prajñāpāramitā* method, namely, the things unoriginated, etc."⁹⁾

Here, Avalokitavrata seems to postulate the contents of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature behind the term.

3. The Other Treatises

What follows deals with Candrakīrti's MA, Bhāviveka's MHK and TJ, Sthiramati's MaVṬ, and SZ attributed to Asaṅga.

3.1. The *Madhyamakāvatāra*

In MA VI.223cd, Candrakīrti summarizes the 20 sorts of emptiness as follows:

prajñāpāramitānītv ity etāḥ saṃprakīrtitāḥ ||¹⁰⁾

"These (20 sorts of emptiness) are mentioned within the *Prajñāpāramitā* method."¹¹⁾

Here, the term 'prajñāpāramitānīti' seems to be employed just as in Avalokitavratā's explanation quoted above.

3.2. The *Madhyamakahrdayakārikā* and *Tarkajvālā*

In Bhāviveka's MHK and TJ, the term 'prajñāpāramitānīti' is found in the objection of the Yogācāra.

prajñāpāramitānītir iyaṃ sarvajñatāptaye |
na tūtpādanirodhādipratishedhaparāyaṇā¹²⁾ ||

shes rab pha rol phyin tshul 'di || thams cad mkhyen nyid thob pa yin ||
skye dang 'gag la sogs pa dang || dgag pa lhur len ma yin no || [V.7]¹³⁾

"This approach to the Perfection of Wisdom, which we present, is [the means] to attain omniscience, and the one that concentrates on the negation of arising and cessation is not."¹⁴⁾

...

de ltar kho bo cag gis bstan pa'i shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i tshul 'di ni thams cad mkhyen pa
nyid thob pa'i thabs yin gyi | dbu ma smra ba rnams kyi skye ba dang 'gag pa la sogs pa dag dgag pa
lhur len pa ni med pa nyid du lta ba dang mthun pa nyid du 'gyur bas thams cad mkhyen pa nyid
'thob pa'i thabs ma yin no zhes zer te ||¹⁵⁾

"This approach to the Perfection of Wisdom—namely the one that we [the Yogācāras] present—is the means to attain omniscience. The approach that concentrates on the negation of arising and cessation—namely the approach of the Mādhyamikas (*madhyamavādin*) —is tantamount to nihilism (*nāstikadr̥ṣṭi*) and is not the means to attain omniscience."¹⁶⁾

In some Yogācāra treatises, doctrines are explained in conformity with the teachings of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature.¹⁴⁾ For instance, it is stated that the doctrine of "three identities" (*trisvabhāva*) is not understood through the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, but the latter is understood through the former. Based on Dignāga's PPS verses 27–29,¹⁷⁾ Eckel states, "The Yogācāras interpret the Perfection of Wisdom through a doctrine of "three

identities" (*trisvabhāva*).¹⁸⁾

3.3. The *Madhyāntavibhāga*śāstra

The term 'prajñāpāramitānīti' is also found in Sthiramati's MaVṬ. Concerning the purpose for introducing a doctrine of "three identities," Sthiramati provides the following opinion:

kimartham svabhāvas trividha upadhāryaḥ | ... [4e] prakṛtigāmbhūryāyāḥ prajñāpāramitānīteḥ trisvabhāvadvāreṇābhrāntipratipattyartham ity anye ^[19]

"For what purpose are the three identities comprehended? ... Others say that [the three identities are taught] for the sake of understanding of the *Prajñāpāramitā* method, which is naturally profound, by means of three identities."²⁰⁾

The term 'prajñāpāramitānīti' for Yogācāras is regarded as the method for understanding the *Prajñāpāramitā* literatures, which is demarcated from the usages in PP, MA, Pras, etc.

3.4. The *Shun zhonglun yi da banruo boluomi jing chupin famen*

SZ attributed to Asaṅga or Vasubandhu²¹⁾ is not a Madhyamaka treatise, since, as the title ("Dharma Gate of the First Chapter of the *Prajñāpāramitā* Sūtra Following the *Madhyamaka Śāstra*") shows, it is regarded as a commentary on the [*Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*] *Prajñāpāramitā* following MMK. This purpose of composition is identical with some of the Yogācāra treatises such as MaVṬ.²²⁾

4. A Conclusion

In the commentaries on MMK, the term 'prajñāpāramitānīti/ shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i tshul' is a keyword for clarifying a philosophical position of Nāgārjuna or his MMK. Bhāviveka is the first person, as a Mādhyamika, who used the term in this connotation. Candrakīrti and Avalokitavrata provide an interpretation of the term as the contents of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature.

Bhāviveka recognized that the term 'prajñāpāramitānīti' was used by the Yogācāras, the opponents of Mādhyamikas. Unlike Mādhyamikas, Yogācāras seem to have regarded the term as the method for understanding the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature. Although we find no occurrence of the term 'prajñāpāramitānīti' in SZ, the treatise expounding the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature following MMK shares with it an approach to composition similar to that of several Yogācāra treatises.

My special thanks are due to Prof. Jonathan A. Silk and Dr. Anne MacDonald for their invaluable comments and correction of my English. Needless to say, all remaining mistakes in this paper are my responsibility alone.

Notes

- 1) MacDonald 2015a, 116–117.
- 2) MacDonald 2015b, 13 and 357–358.
- 3) Yonezawa 2019b, 78, Emended.
- 4) See Nishiyama 2012, 30. As for the other modern translations, see Nishiyama 30–31, n. 25 and Yonezawa 2019a, 1126.
- 5) Although the term 'shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i tshul' is found in the Tibetan colophon of ABh (D tsa 99a3–5; P tsa 113b8–114a5), the description about MMK is different. Cf. Teramoto 1974, 578. In the Tibetan colophon of Pras, there is no description about MMK.
- 6) The variant readings are as follows: BP and PPT: theg pa bla na med pa'i tshul rab tu 'byed pa. BP om. de bzhin gshegs pa ye shes 'byung gnas. The variation of shads is omitted.
- 7) D wa 6b3–4; P wa 7b5–7. See also MacDonald 2015b, *ibid*.
- 8) MacDonald 2015b, *ibid*. Cf. Nishiyama 2012, 33–34.
- 9) Cf. Nishiyama 2012, 37.
- 10) Li 2015, 29.
- 11) Yonezawa 2018, 1117.
- 12) Eckel follows the emendation of *-pratiṣedhaparo nayaḥ* in Lindtner 1995, 50 and 2001, 59. See MacDonald 2015b, 357.
- 13) Eckel 2008, 394.
- 14) Eckel 2008, 66 and 224. Cf. Yamaguchi 1975, 150 and Hoornaert 1991, 157.
- 14) See Yamaguchi 1975, 150–153 and Hoornaert 1991, 159, n. 4.
- 15) Eckel 2008, 394.
- 16) Eckel 2008, 66.
- 17) prajñāparamitāyām hi trīṇ samāśritya deśanā | kalpitāṃ paratantrāṃ ca pariniṣpannam eva ca || 27 nāstītyādīpadaiḥ sarvaṃ kalpitāṃ vinivāryate | māyopamādidṛṣṭāntaiḥ paratantrasya deśanā || 28 caturdhā vyavadānena pariniṣpannakīrtanaṃ | prajñāpāramitāyām hi nānyā buddhasya deśanā || 29 (Frauwallner 1982, 818). "The teaching in the Perfection of Wisdom is based on three [identities]: imagined, dependent, and absolute. The words 'do not exist' rule out everything that is imagined. Examples such as illusion (*māyā*) teach dependent [identity]. The fourfold purification teaches absolute [identity]. The Buddha has no other teaching in the Perfection of Wisdom" (Eckel 2008, 67).
- 18) Eckel 2008, 68.
- 19) Yamaguchi 1941, 112. The reading *prakṛigāmbhīryasya prajñāpāramitārūpasya* is emended following the Tibetan translation: shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i tshul rang bzhin gyis zab pa (D no. 4032, bi 243b1–2). Cf. Kawaguchi 2001, 88, n. 2, in which the reading *prajñāpāramitānāyasya* is proposed.
- 20) Cf. Kramer 2016, 56.
- 21) Jizang 吉藏, in the preface (*Zhonglun xushu* 中論序疏) to his *Zhongguan lunshu* 中觀論疏 states that SZ was composed by Vasubandhu (順中論是天親所作 T. no. 1824: 1c26–27). See also Ōtake 2013, 158. Incidentally, the preface to SZ (初品法門翻譯之記) describes the author's name as 阿僧佉 which

might have been a transliteration of *asāṃkhyā*.

22) Cf. *samāptā ceyam āgamānusārīṇī Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā ācāryaSthiramatyuparacitā* ----- *vimṇṇatisahasrikāyāṃ hṛdayaṃ samāptam* (Yamaguchi 1941, 262). "The MaVṬ following the Āgama composed by the master Sthiramati, ... the essence of the Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā is ended." Cf. Yamaguchi 1975, 151. Incidentally, it is pointed out that SZ has a close connection with the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* and *Madhyāntavibhāga* (Ōtake 2013, 160-165).

Abbreviations

- ABh *Akutohaya*. D no. 3829, tsa 29b1-99a7; P no. 5229, tsa 34a2-114a8.
 BP *Buddhapālita-Madhyamakavṛtti*. D no. 3842, tsa 158b1-281a4; P no. 5242, tsa 178b2-317b1.
 *Lakṣ **Lakṣaṇaṭīkā*. See Yonezawa 2019.
 MA *Madhyamakāvatāra*. See Li 2015.
 MaVṬ *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣyaṭīkā*. See Yamaguchi 1934.
 MHK *Madhyamakahrdayakārikā*. See Eckel 2008.
 MMK *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. D no. 3824, tsa 1-19a6; P no. 5224, tsa 1-22b2.
 PP *Prajñāpradīpa*. D no. 3853, tsa 45b4-259b3; P no. 5253, tsa 53b3-326a6.
 PPS *Prajñāpāramitāpiṇḍārthasaṃgraha*. See Frauwallner 1982.
 PPT *Prajñāpradīpaṭīkā*. D no. 3859, wa 1-za 341a7; P no. 5259, wa 1-za 406a8.
 Pras *Prasannapadā*. See MacDonald 2015ab.
 SZ *Shun zhonglun yi da banruo boluomi jing chupin famen* 順中論義入大般若波羅蜜經初品法門. T no. 1565.
 TJ *Tarkajvālā*. See Eckel 2008.

Bibliography

- Eckel, Malcom. 2008. *Bhāviveka and His Buddhist Opponents: Chapters 4 and 5 of the Verses on the Heart of the Middle Way (Madhyamakahrdayakārikāh) with the Commentary Entitled the Flame of Reason (Tarkajvālā)*. Harvard Oriental Series, volume 70. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Frauwallner, Enrich. (1959) 1982. "Dignāga, sein Werk und seine Entwicklung." *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens* 3: 83-164. Repr. in *Kleine Schriften*, ed. by Ernst Steinkellner, 759-841. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag.
- Hoornaert, Paul. 1999. "An Annotated Translation of *Madhyamakahrdayakārikā* Tarkajvālā V. 1-7." *Kanazawa Daigaku Bungakubu ronshū, kōdōkagaku tetsugaku-hen* 金沢大学文学部論集 行動科学・哲学編 19: 127-159. <http://hdl.handle.net/2297/923>
- Kawaguchi, Teruo 川口輝夫. 2001. "Shoki yuishikiha no sanshōsetsu no ichikōsatsu: Vasubandhu no sanshōsetsu (2)" 初期唯識派の三性説の一考察 ヴァスバンドウの三性説(2). *Nihon Bukkyō Gakkai nenpō* 日本仏教学会年報 67: 71-92.
- Kramer, Jowita. 2016. "Some Remarks on Sthiramati and His Putative Authorship of the *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā*, the **Sūtrālaṃkāravṛttibhāṣya* and the *Triṃśikāvijñaptibhāṣya*." *Buddhist Studies Review* 33 (1-2): 47-63. doi: 10.1558/bsrv.31641
- Li Xuezu 李学竹. 2015. "Madhyamakāvatāra-kārikā Chapter 6." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 43(1): 1-30. doi: 10.1007/s10781-014-9227-6
- Lindtner, Christian. 1995. *Bhavya's Madhyamakahrdaya (Pariccheda Five) Yogācāratattvaviniśca-yāvatāra*. Madras: The Adyar Library and Research Centre.

- . 2001. *Madhyamaka-hṛdayam of Bhavya*. Chennai: The Adyar Library and Research Centre.
- MacDonald, Anne. 2015a. In *Clear Words: The Prasannapadā, Chapter One*. Vol. I, *Introduction, manuscript description, Sanskrit text*. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- . 2015b. In *Clear Words: The Prasannapadā, Chapter One*. Vol. II, *Annotated Translation, Tibetan Text*. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Nisiyama, Ryo 西山亮. 2012. "Prajñāpradīpa-ṭīkā dai 1 shō wayaku (2)" Prajñāpradīpa-ṭīkā 第一章和訳 (2). *Ryūkoku Daigaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyūshitsu nenpō* 龍谷大学佛教学研究室年報 16: 23-41.
- Ōtake, Susumu 大竹普. 2013. *Gen Gi kan'yaku Vasubandhu shaku-kyōron-gun no kenkyū* 元魏漢訳ヴァスバンドウ釈經論群の研究. Tokyo: Daizō Shuppan.
- Teramoto Enga 寺本婉雅. (1937) 1974. *Bon-kan-doku taikō Seizōbun wayaku Ryūju zō Chūron mu'i sho* 梵漢獨對校西藏文和譯 龍樹造・中論無畏疏. Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai.
- Yamaguchi, Susumu 山口益. 1934. *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā: exposition systématique du Yogācāra-vijñaptivāda*. Nagoya: Hajinkaku.
- . (1941) 1975. *Bukkyō ni okeru mu to u tono tairon* 佛教における無と有との對論. Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin.
- Yonezawa, Yoshiyasu. 2018. "The *Dhāraṇīśvararājaparipṛcchā* Quoted in the *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*." *IBK* 66(3): 1115-1121.
- . 2019a. "On *svatantram anumānam*." *IBK* 67(3): 1124-1130.
- . 2019b. "A Textual Study of the **Lakṣaṇaṭīkā*." PhD diss., Leiden University. <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/79823>

Key words prajñāpāramitānīti, Mādhyamika, Yogācāra, Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, Prajñāpradīpa, Prajñāpradīpaṭīkā, Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā, Tarkajvālā, Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣyaṭīkā, Madhyamakāvatāra, Prasannapadā, 順中論

(Associate Professor, Taisho University, PhD)