Prapañca in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*

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Preamble

Among many noteworthy terms in Buddhism, *prapañca* (Pāli: *papañca*) is no doubt one of the most important keywords which requires a detailed examination in the contexts of its usage. In Nāgārjuna's works such as the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK) and others, *prapañca* and its derivatives are also crucial in understanding the author's discussion of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) mostly found in the context of how to remove defilements *(kleśa)*.

According to its usage in the MMK, early Yogācāra treatises such as the *Yogācārabhūmi*, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu's works, and the treatises by Bhāviveka and later Mādhyamikas, *prapañca* is closely related to human usage of terms and concepts which themselves are further rooted in mental, analytical, discursive, and proliferating activities.[1] The word *prapañca*, therefore, is mostly used to refer to (1) the mental activity of "conceptualization", to (2) the objects of mental activity, i.e., "conceptualized objects" or "conceptualized world", or to (3) the instruments of mental activity, i.e., "concepts" or "terms".

It also is important to note that while there is a slight difference between Nāgārjuna's and early Yogācāras' understandings of both *prapañca* and *vikalpa*,[2] both Nāgārjuna and the early Yogācāras regarded *prapañca* as the root cause of defilements (*kleśa*). In contrast, they understood the quiescence of *prapañca* to be one of the characteristics of *nirvāṇa*, which they equated with *tattva* "[identical] reality" or *tathatā* "suchness".

With this background information in mind, this paper will focus on Nāgārjuna's usage of *prapañca* in the MMK, with special consideration to his commentators' understandings of terms containing *prapañca* and its derivatives, such as *prapañcayati* and *prapañcita*.

Before turning to Nāgārjuna's usage of *prapañca* in the MMK, it may interest us to refer to both traditional translations and several modern renderings adopted by contemporary scholars as follows:

Traditional Tibetan mostly renders it into *spros pa* (*Mahāvyutpatti* 174, etc.,

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[1] For the etymological interpretation of *prapañcayati* as a denominative verb from *pra-pañca* "fünf/ five," see Mayrhofer 1963: 187.

[2] For the subjective and objective meanings of *prapañca* as used in the early Yogācāra works, see Schmithausen 2007: 509-514 (n. 1405). For an important usage of *prapañca* in relation to *vikalpa* in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, see Appendix.

aprapañca = *spros pa med pa*), i.e., pf. of *spro ba* "to spread, to disperse, etc." On the other hand, Chinese translations use 戲論 [frivolous talk or discussion][3], occasionally 虛偽 [false] (*Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, tr. by *Guṇabhadra, *Śikṣānanda, and others) and 妄想 [delusion], etc.

Modern translations include "les idées discursives" (de Jong 1949: 10-11, 29-30), "le monde différencié" (May 1959: 175-176 (n. 562)), "discursive development" (Seyfort-Ruegg 1981: 64), "Vielfalt" (Erb 1997: 122-123 (n. 198)), "prolific conceptualization" (Ñāṇananda 1971: 21), "the object of prolific conceptualization/ the subjective act of prolific conceptualization" (Schmithausen 2007: 510), "hypostatization" (Siderits and Katsura 2013: 197-198, 202-203), "manifoldness" (MacDonald 2015: 42), "*kotoba no kyokō* ことばの虚構 [fiction of words]" (Kajiyama 1978: 163), "*gengoteki tagensei* 言語的多元性 [verbal plurality]" (Kajiyama 1980: 140), "*kyokōteki gengo* 虚構的言語 [fictional words]" (Ejima: 1980: 21), etc.

Incidentally, *Nyāyakośa* explains *prapañca* as "(1) *vistāraḥ* [spreading or expansion], (2) *vaiparītyam* [contrariety or reverse], (3) *pratāraṇam* [deceiving or cheating], (4) *saṃsāraḥ* [transmigration, the world, worldly illusion]." (Jhalakīkar 1928: 550)

1. Usage of *prapañca* in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*

Let us, first, look at all the usages of *prapañca* and its derivatives found in Nāgārjuna's MMK. There are ten occurrences found in the following six verses:

Intro.   *anirodham anutpādam anucchedam aśāśvatam/*
        anekārtham anānātham anāgamam anirgamam//
        *yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaṃ **prapañco**paśamaṃ śivam/*
        deśayām āsa saṃbuddhaṃ taṃ vande vadatāṃ varam//
        "The Fully Awakened One who taught the dependent-arising, the calming of **conceptualization**, blissful, [qualified by] non-cessation, non-arising, non-annihilation, non-eternity, non-one-thing, non-various-things, non-coming, non-going, I pay homage to him as the best of teachers."

XI.6   *yatra na prabhavanty ete pūrvāparasahakramāḥ/*
        ***prapañcayanti** tāṃ jātiṃ taj jarāmaraṇaṃ ca kim//*
        "Where there cannot be the order of anteriority, posteriority, and simultaneity, how do they **conceptualize**: 'This is birth and that is old age and death?'"

XVIII.5 *karmakleśakṣayān mokṣaḥ karmakleśā vikalpataḥ/*
        *te **prapañcāt prapañcas** tu śūnyatāyāṃ nirudhyate//*
        "Liberation is [attained] from the destruction of actions and defilements.

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3 Cf. Monier-Williams, *Skt.-Eng. Dic*., "(in dram.) ludicrous dialogue, Sāh(itya-darpaṇa)."

Actions and defilements [arise] from conception. These [conceptions arise] from **conceptualization**. But **conceptualization** is extinguished in emptiness."

XVIII.9   *aparapratyayaṃ śāntaṃ* **prapañcair aprapañcitam***/*
   nirvikalpam anānārtham etat tattvasya lakṣaṇam//
   "Not dependent on anything other than itself, quiescent, **not conceptualized in [various] terms**, beyond conception, undifferentiated, these are the characteristics of reality."

XXII.15   **prapañcayanti** *ye buddhaṃ* **prapañcā***tītam avyayam/*
   te **prapañca***hatāḥ sarve na paśyanti tathāgatam//*
   "Those who **conceptualize** the Buddha, who is beyond **conceptualization** and imperishable, they all, suffering from **conceptualization**, fail to see the Tathāgata."

XXV.24   *sarvopalambhopaśamaḥ* **prapañco***paśamaḥ śivaḥ/*
   na kvacit kasyacit kaścid dharmo buddhena deśitaḥ//
   "[The dependent-arising in its aspect of Nirvāṇa, i.e., *nivṛtti*] is the calming of all perceptions, the calming of **conceptualization**, and blissful. No *dharma* [in the sense of "teaching"] whatsoever was taught by the Buddha to anyone, anywhere.

2. Commentators' Understandings of *prapañca*

Next, let us turn to commentators' understanding of some of the above usages. In the following, I will refer to the explanations given in the *Akutobhayā*, Buddhapālita's commentary, Bhāviveka's *Prajñāpradīpa*, and Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā*. First, let us see how these four commentaries understand MMK XVIII.5c.

2-1:   ad MMK XVIII.5c (Tib. <u>*de dag spros las spros pa ni*</u>// = <u>*te* **prapañcāt** *[prapañcas tu]*</u>)

Akutobhayā (P Tsa 82a1-2; D Tsa 70a4-5): *rnam par rtog pa* <u>*de dag ni spros pa las 'byung ste*</u>/ *tha snyad kyi bden pa la mngon par zhen pa'i mtshan nyid kyi spros pa las 'byung ba'i phyir ro//*
   "<u>These</u> conceptions arise <u>from conceptualization,</u> because they arise from conceptualization characterized by adherence to the truth of verbal habits (**vyavahāra-satya*)."

Buddhapālita (P Tsa 273a2-4; D Tsa 241b2-4): *da yang dag ma yin pa'i rnam par rtog*

pa de dag ni spros pa las byung ba yin te 'jig rten pa'i spros pa las byung ngo// 'jig rten pa'i rnyed pa dang ma rnyed pa la sogs pa'i chos rnams la 'di bden no snyam du mngon par zhen pa'i blo can dag de dang de la rnam par rtog par byed pas de'i phyir rnam par rtog pa dag ni spros pa las byung ngo//

"Now, these wrong conceptions arise from conceptualization, i.e., they arise from conceptualizations [formed by the ordinary people] of the world. Those whose minds adhere to [the idea] that 'this is true' with reference to the values (*dharma*) such as worldly profit and loss (*lābhālābha*), etc., they form conception on this [profit] and that [loss]. Therefore, [these] conceptions arise from conceptualization."

Prajñāpradīpa (P Tsha 231a1-2; D Tsha 185a6-7): *las dang nyon mongs pa'i rgyu rnam par rtog pa gang yin pa de dag ni spros pa las byung bas de dag spros las zhes bya ba gsungs te/ tha snyad kyi bden pa la mngon par zhen pa'i mtshan nyid kyi spros pa las 'byung ngo//*

"Because these conceptions which cause actions and defilements arise from conceptualization, [Nāgārjuna] stated that 'these arise from conceptualization.' They arise from conceptualization characterized by adherence to the truth of verbal habits (*vyavahāra-satya*)."

Prasannapadā (LVP, 350.13-15): *te ca vikalpā anādimat-saṃsārābhyastāj jñāna-jñeya-vācya-vācaka-kartṛ-karma-karaṇa-kriyā-ghaṭa-paṭa-mukuṭa-ratha-rūpa-vedanā-strī-puruṣa-lābhālābha-sukha-duḥkha-yaśo-'yaśo-nindā-praśaṃsādi-lakṣaṇād vicitrāt prapañcād upajāyante/*

"These conceptions originate from conceptualization repeated in the beginningless transmigration, which has a variety of characteristics such as knowledge and the object of knowledge, a word and its meaning, an agents, the object of action, the means of action, and action, pot and cloth, crown and chariot, matter and sensation, female and male, profit and loss, pleasure and suffering, honor and dishonor, blame and praise, etc."

Secondly, let us look at MMK XVIII.9b.

2-2: ad MMK XVIII.9b (Tib. *spros pa rnams kyis ma spros pa/* = ***prapañcair aprapañcitam***)

Akutobhayā (P Tsa 83b7; D Tsa 72a1): *spros pa rnams kyis ma spros pa zhes bya ba ni mngon par brjod pa'i mtshan nyid kyi spros pa nye bar zhi ba'i phyir ro//*

"[Nāgārjuna] spoke of [the characteristic:] 'not conceptualized in [various] terms', because, [in the reality (*tattva*)], conceptualization characterized by verbal expressions (*abhilāpa*) is calmed."

Buddhapālita (P Tsa 277a8-b1; D Tsha 245a7-b1): <u>*spros pa rnams kyis ma spros pa* zhes bya ba ni *'jig rten gyi chos rnams dang bral ba* zhes bya ba'i tshig go</u>//

 "'<u>Not conceptualized in [various] terms</u>' means that [the reality] is freed from worldly values (**lokadharma*)."

Prajñāpradīpa (P Tsha 237b2-3; D Tsha 190a4): <u>*spros pa rnams kyis ma spros pa* zhes bya ba ni mngon par brjod pa'i mtshan nyid kyi spros pa nye bar zhi ba'i phyir ro</u>// (=*Akutobhayā*)

 "[Nāgārjuna] spoke of [the characteristic:] '<u>not conceptualized in [various] terms</u>', because, [in the reality (*tattva*)], conceptualization characterized by verbal expressions (**abhilāpa*) is calmed."

Prasannapadā (LVP, 373.9-10): *ata eva tat **prapañcair aprapañcitam**/ prapañco hi vāk prapañcayaty arthān iti kṛtvā (/) **prapañcair aprapañcitam** vāgbhir avyāhṛtam ity arthaḥ*//

 "Therefore, this [reality (*tattva*)] is '<u>not conceptualized in [various] terms</u>', because 'term' means a word since it conceptualizes [various] objects. Thus, '<u>not conceptualized in [various] terms</u>' means that [the reality] is not spoken of by words."

Thirdly, the glosses on MMK XVIII.5 are as follows:

2-3: ad MMK XXII.15 (Tib. <u>*gang dag sangs rgyas spros 'das shing// zad pa med la spros byed pa// spros pas nyams pa de kun gyis// de bzhin gshegs pa mthong mi 'gyur*</u>// = ***prapañcayanti** ye buddhaṃ **prapañcā**tītam avyayam/ te **prapañca**hatāḥ sarve na paśyanti tathāgatam*//)

Akutobhayā (P Tsa 98a8-b3, D Tsa 85a3-5): <u>*gang dag sangs rgyas* bcom ldan *'das spros* las *'das shing zad pa med pa la*/ yod pa dang med pa dang rtag pa dang mi rtag pa dang gzugs kyi sku dang chos kyi sku dang gsung rab kyi sku dang/ mtshan nyid dang mtshan nyid kyi gzhi dang rgyu dang 'das bu dang blo dang rtogs par bya ba dang/ stong pa dang mi stong pa la sogs pa'i spros pa dag gis *spros* par *byed pa* dang/ rtog par byed pa dang rlom sems su byed pa dang *spros pas* blo gros kyi mig *nyams pa de* dag thams cad *kyis* (=D; *kyi* P) dmus long gis nyi ma bzhin du/ *de bzhin gshegs pa* spros pa las 'das shing zad pa med pa chos kyi sku las (=PD; read *la*) *mthong* bar *mi 'gyur* ro</u>//

 "Their eyes of intellect <u>suffering from conceptualization</u>, <u>those who conceptualize</u>, conceive, and think of <u>the Buddha</u> or the Glorious One - <u>who is beyond conceptualization and imperishable</u> - in [various] terms such as existence and non-existence, permanence and impermanence, material body, *dharma*-body, and teaching body (**pravacana-kāya*), characteristic and the object of characteristic,

cause and effect, intellect and the object of intellect, emptiness and non-emptiness, etc., <u>they all fail to see the Tathāgata</u> who is beyond conceptualization, imperishableness and *dharma*-body, just as a blind person from birth [does not see] sunshine."

Buddhapālita (P Tsa 301a1-3; D tsa 266a 4-5): d*e'i phyir de ltar <u>gang dag sangs rgyas</u> bcom ldan 'das 'jig rten pa'i <u>spros pa thams cad las yang dag par <u>'das shing zad pa med pa la</u>/ yod pa dang med pa dang rtag pa dang mi rtag pa la sogs pa'i spros pa rnams kyis <u>spros par byed pa de</u> dag thams cad ni <u>spros pa</u> de dag gi<u>s</u> ye shes kyi mig <u>nyams pas</u> dmus long gis (=D; gi P) nyi ma bzhin du/ <u>de bzhin gshegs pa mthong</u> bar mi 'gyur te/*

"Therefore, their eyes of intellect <u>suffering from</u> those <u>conceptualizations</u>, <u>those who</u> thus <u>conceptualize the Buddha</u> or the Glorious One - <u>who is beyond conceptualization and imperishable</u> - in [various] terms such as existence and non-existence, permanence and impermanence, etc., <u>they all fail to see the Tathāgata</u> just as a blind person from birth [does not see] sun-shine."

Prajñāpradīpa and *Prasannapadā* om.

3. Concluding Remarks

At the beginning of this paper, I mentioned the three possible meanings as used by Nāgārjuna in his MMK as follows: "The word *prapañca*, therefore, is mostly used to refer to (1) the mental activity of 'conceptualization', to (2) the objects of mental activity, i.e., 'conceptualized objects' or 'conceptualized world', or to (3) the instruments of mental activity, i.e., 'concepts' or 'terms'."

Regarding the "concepts" or "terms", there appear different contexts in which *prapañca* and its derivatives are used. One of those contexts may be called a "verbal context" related to an agent, the object of action, the means of action, and action (*kartr̥-karma-karaṇa-kriyā*, see under **2-1**, PSP ad MMK XVIII.5c). In contrast, some others may be called "nominal contexts" expressed typically by "pot" and "cloth" (*ghaṭa-paṭa*), "crown" and "chariot" (*mukuṭa-ratha*) and so on (*loc. cit.*).

Some of these "concepts" or "terms" relate to epistemological factors, i.e., knowledge and the objects of knowledge (*jñāna-jñeya*), and others to semantic ones, i.e., words and their meanings (*vācya-vācaka*) (*loc. cit.*).

Some refer to Buddhist traditional categories such as matter and sensation (*rūpa-vedanā*) (*loc. cit.*), material body, dharma-body, and teaching body (*pravacana-kāya) (*gzugs kyi sku dang chos kyi sku dang gsung rab kyi sku*, see under **2-3**, ABh ad MMK XXII.15), and others to worldly categories such as female and male, profit and loss, pleasure and suffering, honor and dishonor, blame and praise (*strī-puruṣa-lābhālābha-sukha-duḥkha-yaśo-'yaśo-nindā-praśaṃsa*, see under **2-1**, PSP

ad MMK XVIII.5c).

Some of them are contradictory concepts such as existence and non-existence, permanence and impermanence (*yod pa dang med pa dang rtag pa dang mi rtag pa,* see under **2-3**, ABh and BP ad MMK XXII.15), etc., and others are relative such as cause and effect (*rgyu dang 'das bu*, see under **2-3**, ABh ad MMK XXII.15), etc.

Therefore, taking into consideration all the usages of *prapañca* in Nāgārjuna's MMK as shown in the above section **1** as well as commentators' interpretations on some of the verses of MMK as cited under section **2**, it is most probable that, for Nāgārjuna, *prapañca* or the verb *prapañcayati* means a mental activity of conceptualization made in various sets of terms. In this respect, it is interesting to note that Candrakīrti in his PSP ad MMK XVIII.9b (see above **2-2**) paraphrases *prapañca* by *vāc* "word, etc."

Appendix: Usage of *prapañca* in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (BBh), Chapter 4 titled *Tattvārtha* or "Meaning of Reality":

The author of BBh classified the meaning of *vikalpa* into eight types, i.e., "conception of own-nature" (*svabhāva-vikalpa*), "conception of particularity" (*viśeṣa-vikalpa*), "conception of a group" (*piṇḍagrāha-vikalpa*), "conception of 'I'" (*aham iti vikalpaḥ*), "conception of 'mine'" (*mameti vikalpaḥ*), "conception of the agreeable" (*priya-vikalpa*), "conception of the disagreeable" (*apriya-vikalpa*), and "conception of what is contrary to both these" (*tadubhayaviparīta-vikalpa*)".

The relationship between *vikalpa* and *prapañca* is also referred to in relation to the first threefold conceptualization as follows:

> *sa punar ayam aṣṭavidho vikalpaḥ katameṣāṃ trayāṇāṃ vastūnāṃ janako bhavati// yaś ca svabhāvavikalpo yaś ca viśeṣavikalpo yaś ca piṇḍagrāhavikalpa itīme trayo vikalpā vikalpa**prapañcā**dhiṣṭhānaṃ vikalpa**prapañcā**lambanaṃ vastu janayanti rūpādisaṃjñakam// yad vastv adhiṣṭhāya sa nāmasaṃjñābhilāpaparigṛhīto nāmasaṃjñābhilāpaparibhāvito vikalpaḥ **prapañcayan** tasminn eva vastuni vicaraty anekavidho bahunānāprakāraḥ//*
> (Wogihara ed. 1930-1936: 107)
>
> "Further, which of the three bases (*vastu*) does the eightfold conception create? 'Conception of own-nature, conception of particularity, and conception of grasping a group', this three-fold conception creates the base called 'form' and so on, i.e., the base which serves as the foundation of conceptual **proliferation** and the objective-basis of conceptual **proliferation**. With that base as its foundation, the **proliferating** conception of many kinds and various species — enveloped in names, appellations, and verbal expression and saturated with names, appellations, and verbal expression — spreads on the very base."
> (See also Saito 2010: 1215-1216)

Abbreviations

ABh: *Mūlamadhyamaka-vṛtty-Akutobhayā* of Nāgārjuna, D No. 3829, P No. 5229.

BP: *Buddhapālita-mūlamadhyamaka-vṛtti* of Buddhapālita, D No. 3842, P No. 5242.

BBh: *Bodhisattvabhūmi*. See Wogihara 1930-1936.

D: Tibetan tripiṭaka, sDe dge edition.

LVP: La Vallée Poussin. See PSP.

MMK: *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* of Nāgārjuna. See Ye 2011 and PSP.

P: Tibetan tripiṭaka, Peking edition:

PP: *Prajñāpradīpa-mūlamadhyamaka-vṛtti* of Bhāviveka, D No. 3853, P No. 5253.

PSP: *Mūlamadhyamaka-vṛtti-Prasannapadā* of Candrakīrti. See La Vallée Poussin 1903-1913. D No. 3860, P No. 5260.

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