Prapañca in the Prajñāpradīpa/-ṭīkā:  
Examples from the Commentary on Chapter 22, Verse 11

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1. Introduction

Prapañca (戯論) is one of the most difficult concepts in Madhyamaka philosophy. One of the most well-known passages concerning this concept is found in the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (MMK), chapter 18, verse 5 as follows:

Through the elimination of action (karman) and defilements (kleśa) there is nirvāṇa. Action and defilements arise from discrimination (vikalpa). Those arise from prolific conceptualization (prapañca). Prolific conceptualization is extinguished in emptiness (śūnyatā).  

As quoted above, Nāgārjuna explains that discrimination (vikalpa) gives rise to action (karman) and defilements (kleśa), and prapañca gives rise to discrimination. Furthermore, by examining the other examples of prapañca in the MMK and its commentaries, we may encounter examples where prapañca is to be ceased or to be tranquilized, so there is a tendency in scholarship prapañca with a primarily negative meaning.

Although prapañca in MMK 18.5 and its commentaries have been discussed by many scholars, there are not so many studies about the meaning of prapañca in the rest of the MMK. In this paper, I would like to show some examples of prapañca in the Prajñāpradīpa (PP), one of the best known commentaries on the MMK, by referring to the Prajñāpradīpaṭīkā (PPT), a commentary on the PP. In the context of PP/PPT, chapter 22, verse 11, we can find that the term prapañca is used not only with negative meanings but also with a positive connotation as well.

2. Prapañca in PP/PPT 22.11

Discussion 1 (bold = PP)

[The opponent] objects: “You (Mādhyamikas) admit that all dharmas are beyond prapañca or ‘concepts’; however, you conceive (*prapañcyasi) that dharmas are empty. Therefore, you
invalidate what you have admitted.”\(^2\) . . .

As an answer to this, [Bhāviveka said as follows]: (a) “**That is true, however**” shows that all dharmas are beyond prapañca. [That means], it is true that there is no prapañca in “the supreme reality” (a tentative translation of paramārtha, for which see below); however, unless [the Buddha] teaches with prapañca that [all dharmas] are empty in verbal convention (samvṛti), [his] followers (*sādhaka) do not realize the emptiness of all dharmas. Therefore, as a means to make realize the supreme reality, it is taught with prapañca in verbal activity (vyavahāra).\(^3\) . . .

(b) . . . therefore, [in the preceding quotation from PP, Bhāviveka] means as follows: In order to make [the Buddha’s followers] accomplish both stock of merit (*punyasambhāra) and that of knowledge (*jñānasambhāra) and to wash off the pollution of bad views, there is no fault in conceiving and teaching in verbal convention (samvṛti) that [all dharmas] are (1) empty, (2) non-empty, (3) both empty and non-empty or (4) neither empty nor non-empty with the words of “emptiness,” etc.

Now, in order to explain the necessity of teaching emptiness, etc., in verbal convention, [Bhāviveka] says as follows: “**First, in order to remove a cataract (**paṭala) of views, it should be taught that the object of cognition is empty. In order to remove the view of non-existence, it should also be taught that it is not empty of its illusory or mirage-like nature. Because it does not arise from itself in the supreme reality and is produced from its nature like those of illusion, etc., both [‘it is empty’ and ‘it is non-empty’] should also be taught. In order to make avoid falling into an extreme whatsoever, to remove the poison of fallacious view of both [emptiness and non-emptiness] in terms of the two truths, and to make realize the supreme reality, neither [‘it is empty’ nor ‘it is non-empty’] should also be taught.”\(^4\)

Discussion 2 (**bold = PP**)

[The objection]: (i) “**If you say that because we (Mādhyamikas) conceive that it is neither [empty nor non-empty], we have not removed prapañca or ‘conceptualization’**” corresponds to the opponents’ words meaning that because (4) “it is neither [empty nor non-empty]” is also a concept, there is a fault that we invalidate what we have admitted.\(^5\)

As an answer to this, [Bhāviveka] said: (ii) “**Though you object as above, there is no fault [of prapañca or ‘conceptualization’] because we (Mādhyamikas) admit removing the other prapañcas.”** This is because we (Mādhyamikas) admit removing the other [prapañcas] than neither [“it is empty” nor “it is non-empty”], i.e., “it is empty” and “it is non-empty.”\(^6\)

From discussion 1, we find that prapañca is explained as a means to make realize the supreme reality (paramārtha) (a). The prapañca, i.e., it is (1) empty, (2) non-empty, (3) both empty and non-empty or (4) neither empty nor non-empty, is necessary to be taught in verbal convention, and prapañca (4) neither empty nor non-empty should be expressed to make realize supreme reality (b). From discussion 2, we also find that Mādhyamikas do not commit a fault of prapañca or “conceptualization” when they say “it is neither empty
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nor non-empty," because, in the supreme reality, they admit removing the other basic prapañca or "conceptualization," i.e., "it is empty" and "it is non-empty" (ii).

As shown above, PP as well as PPT ad MMK 22.11 explains that some prapañcas are used with positive meanings since they are necessary in verbal convention in order to make realize the supreme reality. In this regard, let me examine how the means to realize the supreme reality is explained in PP. The clue is the interpretation of paramārtha.

3. Paramārtha and Prapañca

In accordance with some previous papers7) which dealt with paramārtha in PP, chapter 24, verse 8, we confirm their outline here. The interpretation of paramārtha in PP has close relationship with the interpretation of the compound paramārtha. In PP, the interpretation of paramārtha is divided into three portions8): (I) [Karmadhārāya] the supreme object/aim, (II) [Tatpuruṣa] the object of supreme [non-discriminative wisdom], (III-1) [Bahuḥrīhi] non-discriminative wisdom (nirvikalpajñāna), (III-2) the teaching of "non-arising," etc., and (III-3) the wisdom made from hearing, thinking and cultivation. And PPT explains the former two (I) (II) are supremely supreme truth (*pāmārthika-paramārthasatya), and the other three (III-1, 2, 3) are conventionally supreme truth (*sāṃkēti paramārthasatya). Moreover, according to PP, the last two (III-2, 3) correspond to a means (*upāya) to realize paramārtha.

On the other hand, as we examined in above discussion 1, prapañca such as "emptiness," etc., was taught in verbal convention as a means to make his followers realize paramārtha. Therefore, prapañca here approximately corresponds to the teaching of non-arising, etc. which is categorized as conventionally supreme truth in PPT. And from discussion 2, we found that prapañca (4) "it is neither empty nor non-empty" should be taught to make realize paramārtha without committing a fault of prapañca in its negative meaning, i.e., "conceptualization." Although the word "means (*upāya)" is not found in the passage, the prapañca here appears to be used with a positive meaning like a means to make realize the supreme object or purpose, i.e., paramārtha. In this way, some prapañcas in PP 22.11 are used not only in the negative meaning as something to be conquered, but also with a positive meaning corresponding to conventionally supreme truth.
4. Conclusion

The present paper considered several examples of prapañca in the PP and its commentary PPṬ. Although prapañca is explained as the root of defilements by Nāgārjuna in MMK 18.5, we found that in the above-mentioned instances, prapañca is explained as a means to make realize supreme reality, and prapañcas such as (1) empty, (2) non-empty, (3) both empty and non-empty, and (4) neither empty nor non-empty are necessary to be taught in verbal convention in PP 22.11. However, the Mādhyamikas admit removing the prapañca of empty or non-empty, which, according to their claim, corresponds to the fourth choice, i.e., neither empty nor non-empty.

Consequently, the prapañca in a positive sense is not the same as that which lies in us as the root of defilements. The latter prapañca is often translated as “[prolific] conceptualization,” etc.; on the other hand, the former prapañca seems to have the meaning of “words” or “concepts” in general. Thus, as far as the PP and PPṬ are concerned, prapañca is used not only in a negative meaning but also in a positive sense. However, even if it carries such a positive meaning, prapañca must ultimately be overcome in the supreme reality (paramārtha) from the standpoint of Madhyamaka philosophy.

2) PP (D) Tsha 216b1–2, PP (P) Tsha 271a8–271b1; PPṬ (D) Za 207a3, PPṬ (P) Za 248b4.
3) PP (D) Tsha 216b2, PP (P) Tsha 271b1; PPṬ (D) Za 207a4–5, PPṬ (P) Za 248b5–7.
4) PP (D) Tsha 216b4–6, PP (P) Tsha 271b4–7; PPṬ (D) Za 207a7–207b4, PPṬ (P) Za 249a1–7.
5) PP (D) Tsha 216b7–217a1, PP (P) Tsha 272a1–2; PPṬ (D) Za 208b4, PPṬ (P) Za 250b2–3.
6) PP (D) Tsha 217a1, PP (P) Tsha 272a2; PPṬ (D) Za 208b4–5, PPṬ (P) Za 250b3–4.
8) There some discussions exist about whether to divide compound paramārtha into three or four portions in PP 24.8. Here, I do not afford to consider about this discussion in detail, I follow the standpoint of three. About this discussion, see Hayashima [2011], pp.3–4.
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Texts and Abbreviations
PP Bhāviveka’s Prajñāpradīpa, D No.3853, P No.5253.  
PPṬ Avalokitavrata’s Prajñāpradīpaṭīkā, D No.3859, P No.5259.

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