

6

*Xuanzang and Kuiji on Madhyamaka**Dan Lusthaus*

THE DOXOGRAPHERS TELL US that, at the highest levels of analysis, Madhyamaka and Yogācāra hold positions that are incommensurate; apparently, this is supposed to be true on the lower levels as well. Two avenues available for evaluating such claims are (1) the writings of the protagonists themselves, and (2) historical information that can be gleaned about the major players.

Two valuable sources for exploring the relations between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra during the seventh century are the *Biography* of Xuanzang and Kuiji's *Comprehensive Commentary on the Heart Sūtra*. The famous Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang 玄奘 (600–664) traveled to India (left China in 627 and returned in 645), recording copious details of the places he visited, their histories, customs, legends, monastic population figures, and so on. Upon his return to China, he had the monk Bianji 辯機 (619?–649) compile this information into what has remained one of the peerless masterpieces of ethnography and history, *Record of Western Lands* (*Xiyuji* 西域記).¹ It remains one of our most important and informative resources on seventh-century India. Closely related to the *Record* is the *Biography* of Xuanzang, written by his contemporaries Huili 慧立 and

1. Bianji was executed in 649 after being implicated in an illicit relationship with the married Princess Gaoyang 高陽公主, Emperor Taizong's 太宗 daughter. (She was forced to commit suicide in 653 as a result of further "indiscretions.") *Record of Western Lands* (T.51.2087; full title *DaTang Xiyuji* 大唐西域記, "Record of Western Lands for the Great Tang [Dynasty]") has been translated into Western languages several times. The most recent complete translation is by Li Rongxi. Xuanzang gives directions (so many *li* north-east or southwest from one place to the next) throughout the *Record* that are so accurate that Aurel Stein, following Xuanzang's directions, found lost cities and sites in Central Asia exactly where Xuanzang said they were. Stein could then immediately identify them, thanks to Xuanzang.

Yancong 彦惊, fully titled *DaTang daciensi sanzang fashi zhuan* 大唐大慈恩寺三藏法師傳 (*A Biography of the Tripitaka Master of the Great Cī'en Monastery of the Great Tang Dynasty*).² The focus of the *Record* is on the places and people—Xuanzang himself is almost a ghost observer—but the *Biography* devotes its attention to Xuanzang and his adventures and interactions with the people and places he visited. Countless details and events not found in the *Record* are presented in the *Biography*. For instance, in the *Record*, when Xuanzang arrives at a place associated with an important Buddhist figure, such as Nāgārjuna, Bhāveka, Dignāga, or Dharmapāla, he usually relates some facts and stories about that figure, perhaps concerning debates they engaged in. He never discusses his own activities aside from what, as a pilgrim and tourist, he sees or hears. The *Biography* remedies that with numerous tales of his studies, exploits, debates, teachers, and so on. Xuanzang was one of the major transmitters of Yogācāra (and other) materials to China, and he was one of the best and most prolific translators of Indian texts. He translated *Madhyamaka* as well as Yogācāra and other texts.

Kuiji's *Comprehensive Commentary on the Heart Sūtra* (hereafter *Commentary*) is the earliest extant commentary we have on the *Heart Sūtra*.³ It has two main distinctive features, aside from its inordinate length given the brevity of the sūtra itself. First, more than a third of the text is devoted to explaining what the word “practicing” entails in the early line of the sūtra that states that Avalokiteśvara was “practicing the profound

2. Huili, who was a colleague of Xuanzang's, wrote much of the *Biography* during Xuanzang's lifetime, drawing on Xuanzang's travelog *Record of Western Lands*, oral accounts, and other sources. The work was unfinished when Xuanzang died, and, feeling unable to bring the project to completion on his own, he brought Yancong on board, more for his reputation as a literary stylist than for his familiarity with either Xuanzang or the finer points of Buddhist doctrine. Whether the numerous hagiographical embellishments in the *Biography* were original to Huili's efforts or were additions supplied by Yancong's “literary” stylings is impossible to determine. Like the *Record*, the *Biography* has been translated into Western languages several times. I will be using the most recent complete English translations by Li Rongxi (Li 1995), modifying it when necessary (e.g., Li often mis-Sanskritizes names, titles, and terms), since it often tends to be more reliable in many places than its predecessors.

3. Kuiji 窺基. *Panre boluomiduo xinjing youzan* 般若波羅蜜多心經幽贊 (T.33.1710). A complete English translation is available, which I will be using (Heng-ching and Lusthaus, 2001). Since that English translation provides the Taishō page numbers in the margins alongside the translation, and several of the quoted passages that will be used are lengthy, I will forgo providing the Chinese text or references to it and instead provide the page numbers to the English translation. What I will provide here, which is not given in the published translation, are citations to the sources Kuiji quotes and discusses.

Prajñāpāramitā.” The second distinctive feature of Kuiji’s *Commentary*, more germane to the present topic, is that for every term and passage in the *Heart Sūtra*, he presents first a Madhyamakan interpretation followed by a Yogācāra interpretation, and, when they are at odds, a debate can break out, sometimes extending into extra rounds. Hence the entire *Commentary* is a detailed exposition of the affinities and disagreements between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra.

Some Preliminary Considerations

It is important to recognize that one has to be cautious about essentializing either Madhyamaka or Yogācāra, in the sense of reducing either to a closed, fixed set of doctrines, ideas, talking points, or inviolable commitments. Both exhibit remarkable diversity across the works of their key authors. For instance, not only are there obvious and famous differences between the interpretations of Nāgārjuna propounded by Bhāviveka as opposed to Candrakīrti, but even greater diversity emerges in later figures in India (e.g., the Tibetan understanding of Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla as Madhyamaka rather than Yogācāra thinkers) and especially among the disputants of later Tibetan forms of Madhyamaka.⁴ Similarly, while generalized secondary treatments of Yogācāra tend to lump all Yogācāra

4. Even while recognizing that the labels Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika never existed in India, scholars nevertheless continue to use those terms to identify what are supposed to be the major divisions of Madhyamaka, assuming that even if later concoctions, these labels accurately identify the actual rift in Indian Madhyamaka and the Tibetan understanding from early on. Those inventions of later Tibetan doxographic systems however have distorted the picture, not only by projecting them back into India, but in thereby also obscuring how Tibetans themselves understood divisions within Madhyamaka for many centuries. Some recent studies offer correctives, but due to the relatively late nature of the materials they use, they assume their newer labels didn’t arise until the eleventh century of so in India and Tibet. As will be demonstrated in this paper, the classifications they are now uncovering were already in full force at least since the sixth century during the time of Xuanzang and Kuiji. Kuiji’s description of Madhyamaka as illusionist may strike some as odd and unusual, but that was the dominant understanding at least through the 11th and 12th centuries. See Orna Almogi, “Māyopamādvayavāda versus Sarvadharmāpratiṣṭhānavāda: A Late Indian Subclassification of Madhyamaka and its Reception in Tibet,” *Journal of the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies* [國際仏教学大学院大学研究紀要], Vol. XIV, 2010, 135–212. Although mistaken about this classification being late (speculating that it originates in the 11th century in India), Almogi demonstrates not only that this classification existed in India and early on in Tibet, but that “the rather unfamiliar subclassification into Māyopamādvayavāda—or the ‘strand which maintains that [phenomena] are one, inasmuch as they are like illusions’ (*sgyu ma lta bu gnyis su med par smra ba*, also known as *sgyu ma lta bur ’dod pa*: *māyopamamata or *sgyu ma rigs grub pa*; henceforth

authors, especially those of the first few centuries of Yogācāra's development, into the same doctrinal basket, there are actually vast differences between the putative founders, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, and even between Vasubandhu's earlier and later writings⁵, and additional conflicting interpretations and divergences promulgated by Sthiramati, Dharmapāla, Vinītadeva, etc.. The disputes between the different Yogācāra thinkers and factions display tremendous diversity on a wide range of topics, major and minor, and the tradition revels in that richness. At the same time, one also finds much overlap between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra thinking when one examines the full range of their writings, which shouldn't be surprising given that, together, they constitute the two exemplars of Indian Mahāyāna.

Additionally, the presentations of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra offered by the much later doxographers often get many positions wrong. Earlier teachings are distorted in the name of freezing messy and complex diversities into a manageable set of comprehensible (and memorizable) teachings by assigning them to niches that edify pre-assumed and preferred hierarchical relations. Fitting things together neatly and vindicating one's own school had precedence over getting the details right in terms of conforming to the actual statements found in the texts that the doxographers pretend to encapsulate and represent. Doxographical classification is heavily agenda-driven.

One way to minimize the pitfalls of distortion through generalization is to focus narrowly on specific texts, and to let them, rather than an agenda or some prior homogenization, do the talking. To that end I focus on Xuanzang and Kuiji. Xuanzang is not only the leading Chinese Yogācāra figure of the seventh century, but he also made a notable impact in India, studying *and* lecturing at Nālandā and elsewhere, and, as we will

Māyopamavāda: sGyu ma lta bur smra ba)—and Sarvadharmāpratiṣṭhānavāda—or the 'strand which maintains that all phenomena have no substratum whatsoever' (*chos thams cad rab tu mi gnas par 'dod pa*, or simply *rab tu mi gnas pa*; henceforth Apratiṣṭhānavāda: Rab tu mi gnas par smra ba) (p. 134) . . . [is i]n fact, the only explicit and clear-cut division into two branches of Madhyamaka found in Indian sources . . . [namely] that into Māyopamavāda and Apratiṣṭhānavāda." (pp. 134–35).

5. The differences have even allowed some leading western academics to argue for decades there were two Vasubandhus. There was only one. For a recent compilation of evidence challenging the two-Vasubandhu theory, see Ōtake, Susumu 大竹晋, *Gengi kan'yaku basubandu shakukyōrongun no kenkyū* (元魏漢訳ヴァスバンドウ釈経論群の研究) Tōkyō: Daizō Shuppan, 2013.

see, impressing royalty, such as King Harsha, in the process. Kuiji, considered the founding patriarch of the *Weishi* school of East Asian Yogācāra, came to represent “orthodox” Yogācāra for all East Asians. Xuanzang’s observation and participation in the Madhyamaka-Yogācāra debates of his day, and Kuiji’s discussions, are thus precious, authoritative, and, as we’ll see, highly informative.

Before looking at Xuanzang’s *Biography* and Kuiji’s *Commentary* more closely, some quick observations may be helpful.

First of all, Yogācāra texts rarely challenge basic Madhyamaka, for example, Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva, who are venerated in the Yogācāra tradition. Rather, when there is criticism, it is aimed at “those who misunderstand emptiness” (meaning later Mādhyamika authors who failed to properly understand the teachings of Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva). Criticism is not leveled at the teachings of the founding figures. Yogācāras wrote approving commentaries of foundational Madhyamaka works, such as Asaṅga’s summary commentary on Nāgārjuna’s *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* (MMK), whose Chinese title, *Shun zhonglun* 順中論, means “Treatise on Conforming to the Middle Way”,⁶ and Sthiramati’s full commentary on MMK.⁷ When Dharmapāla, defending Yogācāra from attacks by Bhāviveka, mounts his counterattack, he does so through the vehicle of his own commentary⁸ on Āryadeva’s root text, *Catuhśataka*; Dharmapāla’s counterattack is aimed at Bhāviveka, not Āryadeva, and hence not at Madhyamaka per se, but at what he would contend is Bhāviveka’s misunderstanding of Madhyamaka, that is, his target is faulty Madhyamaka, not Madhyamaka per se. Since Yogācāra had not yet appeared when Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva were active, neither author mounted an attack on it.

6. *Shun zhonglun* 順中論 (T.30.1565), translated by Gautama Prajñāruci 瞿曇般若流支 in 543. There has been some controversy over whether Asaṅga is the actual author, but that Gautama Prajñāruci, an Indian translator in China who primarily translated sūtras and sūtra commentaries as well as Yogācāra (e.g., Vasubandhu’s *Viṃśikā*, T.31.1588 唯識論 *Weishi lun*) and Madhyamaka texts (e.g., Nāgārjuna’s *Vigraha-vyāvartanī*, T.32.1631 回諍論 *Hui zheng lun*), found the concept of an Asaṅgan commentary on Nāgārjuna feasible illustrates how the two traditions were considered compatible at that time.

7. *Dasheng zhongguanshi lun* 大乘中觀釋論 (T.30.1567), translated by Weijing and Dharmarakṣa between 1027 and 1030.

8. *Dasheng guang bai lun shi lun* 大乘廣百論釋論 (T.30.1571), translated by Xuanzang in 650.

On the other hand, key Mādhyamikas such as Bhāviveka and Candrakīrti devoted sections of their works to attacking Yogācāra. Examples of this include Bhāviveka's chapter on Yogācāra in his *Madhyamaka-hṛdaya*⁹ and Candrakīrti's attack on Yogācāra (and other schools) in chapter six of his *Madhyamakāvatāra*. Generally, Madhyamaka deals with negation and refutation, whatever the topic, while Yogācāra balances refutation with affirmation. Hence Mādhyamikans feel obligated to refute Yogācāra, to find something in it to negate, while Yogācāra is happy to embrace and affirm Nāgārjuna, reserving its counterattacks for the later Mādhyamikans who make Yogācāra one of their prime targets.

Another observation we can make before discussing the *Biography* and the *Commentary* is that Xuanzang believed in the complementarity of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka; while at Nālandā, he wrote a verse text in Sanskrit espousing the reasons. While that text has not come down to us, hints as to its probable contents may be gleaned from the *Cheng weishilun* (T.31.1585), Xuanzang's encyclopedic commentary on Vasubandhu's *Trimśikā* (Thirty Verses) drawn from Indian commentaries and other sources. Additionally, Xuanzang himself debated and defeated Mādhyamikas at Nālandā. We will look at that in a moment.

We should finally note that, when the classical Madhyamakans attack Yogācāra, Dignāga figures prominently on their hit list. The entire *pramāṇavāda* tradition is attacked by Candrakīrti. Bhāviveka, on the other hand, accepts the Dignāgan *anumāna* (logical inference) method while still attempting to refute other aspects of Dignāga's epistemology.

Since Xuanzang left India before Candrakīrti became known, the account he brought to China of the polemics between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra does not include Candrakīrti or any subsequent developments. Rather he takes Bhāviveka, Dharmapāla, and his own encounters with his Indian contemporaries as the cutting edge. Kuiji, reliant on Xuanzang's reports for the Indian context and on contemporary developments in China—most notably the recent writings of Jizang 吉藏 (549–623), the last major Sanlun/Chinese Madhyamaka figure—will understand Madhyamaka in that light, and it is that understanding of Madhyamaka to which he naturally responds.

9. *Madhyamakahrdayam of Bhavya*, edited by Christian Lindtner (Chennai: The Adhyar Library and Research Center, 2001), chap. 5; English translation with corresponding *Tarkajvālā* in M. David Eckel, *Bhāviveka and his Buddhist Opponents* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2008).

Xuanzang and Debates

The context of the well-known classical works that engage in polemics or critiques of their seeming rival Mahāyāna school is *debate*. Debate, by design, exaggerates differences and contrasts, highlights oppositions, and is rhetorically and often emotionally contentious. It is a verbal sport that seeks methods to victory, that often aims to humiliate and vanquish the opponent. Hence, it is in the nature of debate to paint one's opponent with negative labels in order to more easily dismiss or undermine him. That is why Madhyamaka's attackers will call it *nāstika* ("nihilist," literally "adherents to nonexistence"), whether or not they actually believe Mādhyamikas are truly nihilists or not. It is a way to dismiss a troublesome opponent by a caricature of his position. So the Mādhyamikan is dismissed as a nihilist (*nāstika*), while the Yogācāra is ridiculed as an idealist (*citta-mātra*; a term that was turned into the claim that only mind is real—a claim repeatedly attributed to Yogācāra by opponents and doxographers, but typically denied in Yogācāra texts). Neither characterization is accurate. In India, debate was taken very seriously—it could literally be a death sport, with the loser expected to forfeit his life, freedom, or livelihood as a consequence of failure. At minimum, defeat brought loss of prestige for oneself and one's tradition. Even as debates were steeped in seriousness and urgency, they nonetheless were often peppered with sarcastic put-down humor, perhaps as a counterweight to the tension caused by the seriousness of the conflict and competition.

Turning now to the *Biography*, the following occurred during Xuanzang's time at Nālandā.

At one time, the worthy Simhaprabha 師子光 who previously had lectured the assembly on the *Madhyamaka-kārikā* and *Catuhśataka-śāstra*, stated that his aim was to refute the *Yogācāra[-bhūmi]*. The Dharma-master (Xuanzang), himself trained in the subtleties of the *Madhyamaka-kārikā* and *Catuhśataka-śāstra*, as well as being skilled in the *Yogācāra[-bhūmi]* took it (to be the case that) the sages who established each of those teachings did so with the same intent; there were no contradictions or oppositions between them. Those who were confused and unable to understand this complementarity (不能會通) would talk about them as contradictory, but this was a fault with the transmitters, not with the Dharma. Pitying his narrow-mindedness, Xuanzang went numerous times to interrogate

him, and repeatedly *Simhaprabha* was unable to respond, so his students gradually dispersed, and came to study with the Dharma-master.

For the Dharma-master, the *Madhyamaka-kārikā* and *Catuḥśatakaśāstra* only aimed to refute *parikalpita*, they don't discuss *paratantra-svabhāva* or *pariniṣpanna-svabhāva*.¹⁰ *Simhaprabha* wasn't able to understand this well, holding the view that when the *śāstras* state "All is unattainable" this refers to what is established in the *Yogācāra* as *pariniṣpanna*, etc., that all must be discarded because every form is (only) a word.

To explain that the tenets espoused by both systems are to be considered a harmonious complementarity and not contradictory to each other, the Dharma-master composed "Treatise on the Complementarity of Tenets" 《會宗論》 (*huizong lun*) in 3000 verses. When completed, he presented it to Śīlabhadra¹¹ and the Great Assembly; there were none who didn't praise its value, and all shared and propagated it.

Simhaprabha, ashamed, left and went to the Bodhi Temple, where he had studied together with someone from eastern India named Candrasīmha 旃陀羅僧訶, whom he now asked to challenge Xuanzang to a debate in order to alleviate his humiliation. But when Candrasīmha confronted Xuanzang, he shrank in fear, awe-struck, silenced, not daring to utter a word. And so the Dharma-master's reputation increased.¹²

The irony between *Simhaprabha* believing that everything is to be dismissed since all things are nothing but words (所以每形於言), and Candrasīmha

10. This is precisely the explicit position taken by Vasubandhu in his *Viṃśikā* (Twenty Verses), in verse 10. Vasubandhu's passage will be discussed shortly. Kuiji will pick up on this theme below in the section of this essay on his Heart Sūtra Commentary.

11. Śīlabhadra was the head of Nālandā at that time.

12. Li 1995, pp. 129–130, modified; 時戒賢論師遣法師為眾講《攝大乘論》、《唯識決擇論》。時大德師子光先為眾講《中》、《百論》，述其旨破《瑜伽》義。法師妙閑《中》、《百》，又善《瑜伽》，以為聖人立教，各隨一意，不相違妨，惑者不能會通，謂為乖反，此乃失在傳人，豈關於法也。愍其局狹，數往徵詰，復不能酬答，由是學徒漸散，而宗附法師。法師又以《中》、《百》論旨唯破遍計所執，不言依他起性及圓成實性，師子光不能善悟，見《論》稱：「一切無所得」，謂《瑜伽》所立圓成實等亦皆須遣，所以每形於言。法師為和會二宗言不相違背，乃著《會宗論》三千頌。《論》成，呈戒賢及大眾，無不稱善，並共宣行。師子光慚赧，遂出往菩提寺，別命東印度一同學名旃陀羅僧訶來相論難，冀解前恥。其人既至，憚威而默，不敢致言，法師聲譽益甚。(T.50.2053.244b26–c14)

being reduced to wordlessness may not immediately come through in Li's translation, even with my modifications. The key misunderstanding of the faulty Mādhyamikans is, basically, to dismiss everything as unreal, illusory, rather than recognizing that it is only *parikalpita* that is illusory and thereby requiring refutation, not *paratantra* or *pariniṣpanna*.

In the *Viṃśikā*, Vasubandhu responds to the following objection after pointing out that the purpose of the teaching of *vijñapti-mātra* is to enter into an understanding that *dharma*s lack selfhood (*dharma-nairātmya*):

yadi tarhi sarvathā dharmo nāsti tad api vijñaptimātraṃ nāstīti
kathaṃ tarhi vyavasthāpyate

If, therefore, no *dharma*s at all exist, then there would not even be “nothing but what is made known by cognition” (*vijñapti-mātra*). So how could [*vijñapti-mātra*] be established?¹³

Vasubandhu responds:

na khalu sarvathā dharmo nāstīty evaṃ dharmanairātmyapraveśo
bhavati | api tu |

kalpitātmanā || 10 ||

yo bālair dharmāṇāṃ svabhāvo grāhyagrāhakādīḥ parikalpitas
tena kalpitenātmanā teṣāṃ nairātmyaṃ na tv anabhilāpyenātmanā
yo buddhānāṃ viśaya iti |

Entry into the non-self of *dharma*s (*dharma-nairātmya*) does not mean that there are no *dharma*s at all. On the contrary:

[what is unreal is]
their imagined nature ([*pari*-]*kalpita*).

Ignorant people imagine (*parikalpitas*) that it is in the nature of *dharma*s to be grasped and grasper, etc. Non-self of *dharma*s applies

13. Xuanzang renders this in Chinese as: 若知諸法一切種無。入法無我。是則唯識亦畢竟無何所安立。(T.31.1590.75c4–5): “If knowing that all types of *dharma*s are nonexistent (is done in order to) enter the *dharma* of non-self, then *vijñapti-mātra* also ultimately would be nonexistent, so how can [it] be established?”

(as an antidote) to this imagined nature, but not to what is not-conceptual-linguistic (*anabhilāpya*), which is the cognitive-field (*viśaya*) of the buddhas.¹⁴

As will be clear, this is a fundamental tenet for Xuanzang and Kuiji, and, as we've already seen, serves as a critical line of demarcation between the "illusionism" of faulty Mādhyamikans and Yogācāra.

Returning to the *Biography*, after these events, we are told that some Hīnayāna monks press King Harsha to invite Mahāyāna monks from Nālandā so that the Hīnayāna monks can debate them, promising to show that the Mahāyāna of Nālandā is just "sky-flower" heresy (*konghua waidao* 空花外道), not real Buddhism. Among these Hīnayāna monks is an old Brahmin Saṃmitīya from south India named Prajñāguṇa 般若龜多 with connections to the court in south India. He had authored a work entitled "Refutation of Mahāyāna" 《破大乘論》 in seven hundred verses.

Harsha issues a formal invitation to Nālandā, requesting they send monks to defend Mahāyāna. A monk named Correct Dharma Store 正法藏, upon receiving the invitation, selects a team of four monks: 海慧 Sāgamati, 智光 Jñānaprabha, 師子光 Simhaprabha (the defeated Madhyamakan), and Xuanzang.¹⁵ While Xuanzang the Yogācāra and Simhaprabha the Mādhyamika might be rival debaters inside Nālandā, when confronted with non-Mahāyāna outsiders, they quickly are on the same side, same team. Thus the rivalry, while serious and heartfelt, becomes moot when facing a larger, that is, anti-Mahāyāna context.

Sāgamati and the other two monks were worried, but the master [Xuanzang] said to them, "I have studied the Tripiṭaka of the various

14. Xuanzang's rendering: 非知諸法一切種無乃得名為入法無我。然達愚夫遍計所執自性差別諸法無我。如是乃名入法無我。非諸佛境離言法性亦都無故名法無我。(T.31.1590.75c5–9). "It is not by knowing that all types of dharmas are nonexistent that one attains what is called entering into the dharma of no-self. Rather, understanding that no-self applies to the dharmas that are differentiated by the imaginary nature (*parikalpita-svabhāva*) of foolish people that is called entering into the no-self of dharmas. As well, it is not because the cognitive-objects (*viśaya*) of the Buddhas apart from language are entirely nonexistent that it is called the dharma of no-self (since they are not nonexistent)." If one reads 自性差別 as *svabhāva* and *viśeṣa* (as Kuiji does in his commentary on the *Vimśikā*), then instead of "no-self applies to the dharmas that are differentiated by the imaginary nature (*parikalpita-svabhāva*) of foolish people," that would read: "the no-self of dharmas applies to the self-nature (*svabhāva*) and differential qualities (*viśeṣa*) imagined (*parikalpita*) by foolish people."

15. T.50.2053.244b26–245a15; cf. Li 1995, 130–32.

Hīnayāna schools and completely mastered their theories while I was in my own country and by the time I got to Kashmir [by debating the most prominent monks along the way]. It is impossible for them to refute the Mahāyāna teachings with their own theories. Although my learning is shallow and my intellect weak, I have the confidence to deal with the matter. I hope you teachers will not worry about it. In case I am defeated in the debate, I am a monk from China and you will not be involved in the matter.” The other monks were pleased to hear it.”¹⁶

Xuanzang was borrowing a strategy that the current head of Nālandā, Śīlabhadra himself, is said to have used when still a youth shortly after having become a student of Dharmapāla, according to Xuanzang’s travelogue, the *Xiyuji* (*Record of Western Lands*).¹⁷ When a *tīrthika* from the south challenged Dharmapāla to a debate, Śīlabhadra volunteered to stand in his place, over the objections of Dharmapāla’s other students, who protested that he was too young and inexperienced. He argued that, precisely for that reason, if he were to be defeated, no shame would fall on them, and so Dharmapāla, reassuring the other monks, sent Śīlabhadra to debate the challenger, whom he dispatched handily.

While the Nālandā monks were gearing up for the debate, Harsha sent another letter cancelling the invitation without specifying a reason. A debate of sorts under Harsha’s provenance would take place much later, near the end of Xuanzang’s stay in India (I will return to that shortly).

One of the debates described in the *Biography* that had nothing to do with Madhyamaka concerned a feisty Brahmin who came to Nālandā, challenging anyone to take him on. He was so confident of his ability to defeat all comers that he swore he would kill himself if he lost. Xuanzang takes the challenge, defeats him, but doesn’t allow him to kill himself, insisting that he become his slave instead, an arrangement that the Brahmin accepts. One of the ways this arrangement paid off for Xuanzang, which also provides some behind-the-scenes insight into the debate culture of the time, is spelled out in another story in the *Biography*.

16. Li 1995, 131, slightly modified. 其海惠等咸憂，法師謂曰：「小乘諸部三藏，玄奘在本國及入迦濕彌羅已來遍皆學訖，具悉其宗。若欲將其教旨能破大乘義，終無此理。奘雖學淺智微，當之必了。願諸德不煩憂也。若其有負，自是支那國僧，無關此事。」諸人咸喜。(T.50.2053.245a9–14).

17. *DaTang Xiyuji* T.51.2087.914c. Cf. Li 1996, 240–41.

While still at Nālandā, Xuanzang composed a treatise of 1,600 verses titled *Po ejian lun* 《破惡見論》 (“Refutation of Wrong Views”) in response to having received and studied a 700-stanza treatise by Hīnayānists that attempted to refute Mahāyāna.

At that time when the Master intended to go to Uḍra, he obtained a treatise in seven hundred stanzas, composed by the Hīnayanists in refutation of the Mahāyāna teachings. He read through it and found several doubtful points in it. He asked the Brahman whom he had subdued in debate, “Have you attended lectures on this treatise?” The Brahmin replied, “I have attended lectures on it five times.” When the Master wished him to give an explanation of the treatise, he said, “As I am your slave, how can I explain anything to Your Reverence?” The Master said, “As this is a work of another school, I have not seen it before. There is no harm in you giving me an explanation of it.” The Brahmin said, “If so, please wait until midnight, lest people hear that you are studying the Dharma with a slave and defile your good name.”

Thus in the night the Master sent away all other people and asked the Brahman to expound the treatise. When he had just gone through it once, the Master completely grasped its gist. He found out the erroneous points and refuted them with Mahāyāna teachings in a treatise he wrote in sixteen hundred stanzas, entitled “Treatise on the Refutation of Wrong Views.” He presented the work to the Venerable Śīlabhadra, who showed it to his disciples, who all praised it with appreciation and said, “With such all-comprehensive scrutiny there is no opponent he could not vanquish!” The treatise is to be found elsewhere.¹⁸

18. Li 1995, 134, modified slightly. 時法師欲往烏荼，乃訪得小乘所製《破大乘義》七百頌者。法師尋省有數處疑，謂所伏婆羅門曰：「汝曾聽此義不？」答曰：「曾聽五遍。」法師欲令其講。彼曰：「我今為奴，豈合為尊講？」法師曰：「此是他宗，我未曾見，汝但說無苦。」彼曰：「若然，請至夜中，恐外人聞，從奴學法，污尊名稱。」於是至夜屏去諸人，令講一遍，備得其旨。遂尋其謬節，申大乘義而破之，為一千六百頌，名《破惡見論》。將呈戒賢法師及宣示徒眾，無不嗟賞曰：「以此窮覈，何敵不亡。」 (T.50.2053.245c2–12). That treatise is not extant, and there is no record of its having been translated into Chinese. Perhaps it was translated and circulated privately among Xuanzang's circle. Perhaps this only means that Xuanzang brought a copy back with him from India so that a Sanskrit original was in storage at that time.

Xuanzang then sets the slave free; the slave goes to Kāmarūpa in eastern India, and tells King Kumara about Xuanzang, who then invites him there. The treatise makes its way to Harsha, who then issues a strong invitation for Xuanzang to come.

When Xuanzang finally does make it to Harsha's court, he defeats debaters from the Saṃmitīya and other schools, converts Harsha's daughter from Saṃmitīya to Mahāyāna, and so impresses Harsha that the king calls together a great convocation, inviting eighteen other kings, over a thousand monks from Nālandā, and thousands of monks and scholars from all schools. There are great processions, banquets, and at the heart of the eighteen-day assembly, Xuanzang poses a challenge to all comers.

The Master was invited to take the chair in the assembly to extol Mahāyāna teachings and to explain his intent composing the treatise. The Venerable Vidyābhadrā 明賢, a *śramaṇa* of Nālandā Monastery, was asked to read it to the assembly while a written copy was hung outside the gate of the meeting place for everybody to read.¹⁹

19. This reveals an important factor in debate. Intonation! Proper articulation, including precise enunciation and speaking in a cultivated as opposed to inelegant accent or dialect, were crucial elements of debate. Failure to enunciate properly could not only result in defeat, but would open the one who “misspoke” to ridicule and jeers. Demeanor and articulation were as important as logical acuity in debate, perhaps even more important, since, like any sport, only well-informed aficionados will appreciate and understand the more subtle aspects and rules, while the general audience, including the royalty who often served as arbiters and judges of debates, were not astute students of subtle or arcane logical technicalities; but they could recognize when someone was flustered, stymied, hesitant, stumbling over words, etc., and the rules of debate were such that these tell-tale signs signaled defeat. What is alluded to here is that Xuanzang could “lose” the debate simply by mispronouncing something. His Chinese accent—regardless of his mastery of Sanskrit vocabulary, style, concepts, and logic—would have disqualified him from this sort of high-level formal debate against unsympathetic rivals, or, at minimum, it would have given his opponents openings to criticize *how* he said it while avoiding *what* he said. Understandably, a potential opponent might be concerned about facing someone who had someone else articulate his arguments as unfairly having to work against a stacked deck, since one of the tools for vanquishing an opponent in a debate is to get him to say something unfortunate for his case while caught up in the heat of battle, such as something self-contradictory or something with inadvertent consequences that, had the proponent thought it through, he might not have said. By filtering all answers through an intermediary—with whom he might confer while composing the “reply”—the possibility of catching him off-guard is greatly diminished. The importance of intonation is reflected in stories of debates that ended quickly when one of the disputants simply repeats verbatim the opposing claimant's position while perfectly mimicking that opponent's intonation, implying that one not only understands the logic of the claimant's argument by being able to recite it from memory precisely, down to its finest nuances, having heard it just once, but, by fearlessly repeating it, one implies that one not only understands it down to its roots, but that

If one word was found illogical or refutable in the treatise, the writer would cut off his head in apology. But until nightfall, nobody raised a word of objection. King Śīlāditya [Harsha] was glad of it, and after adjourning the meeting, he returned to his palace. . . . On the following morning they came again. . . .

After the elapse of five days, the Hīnayāna adherents and *tīrthikas*, seeing that the Master has crushed their theories, felt hatred and intended to murder him. The king got wind of it and issued an order . . . “Some evil and presumptuous people who are not ashamed of themselves are trying to hatch a sinister plot against him with malicious intention. If this is tolerable, what else is unforgivable? Anybody in the assembly daring to injure the Master will be beheaded, and anyone who insults or abuses him will have his tongue cut out. But no limit is set on the argumentation of those who wish to make a statement in defense of their own doctrines.”²⁰

Not surprisingly, no one challenged Xuanzang during the entire eighteen days. Debate was a bloodsport, sometimes eliciting homicidal passions. But its purpose was noble, as was the hoped-for outcome.

In the evening when the congregation was about to disperse, the Master once more extolled Mahāyāna teachings, eulogizing the merits of the Buddha, and caused numerous people to return from

one is confident that one recognizes its weaknesses, and that therefore one has intellectual contempt for it as well—the equivalent of having knocked someone down in a fistfight and motioning them to think twice about getting up for further beating. The stress on proper diction and intonation, long an essential element in Sanskrit, also was considered important in early Buddhist Pāli texts. The Vinaya (I.196) and the Sōṇasutta in the *Udānapāli* (5.6.10; PTS ed., p. 59) tell of monk Sōṇa Kuṭṭikaṇṇa reciting the entire *Aṭṭhaka vagga* of the *Sutta Nipāta*, to Buddha’s great approval (*abbhanumodi*), with “proper intonation” (*sarena abhaṇī . . . sarabhañña-pariyosāne*); cf. the Pāli commentaries: *Dh.A.* IV.102; *Ud.A.* 312; *A.A.* 241; etc. See J.A. Jayawickrama, “A Critical Analysis of the Sutta Nipāta,” *Pali Buddhist Review* 1, 3 (1976): 140.

20. Li 1995, 147–148, modified slightly. 施訖，別施寶床，請法師坐為論主，稱揚大乘序作論意，仍遣那爛陀寺沙門明賢法師讀示大眾。別令寫一本懸於會場門外示一切人，若其問有一字無理能難破者，請斷首相謝。如是至晚，無一人致言。戒日王歡喜，罷會還宮，諸王、及僧各歸^[27]所，次法師共鳩摩羅王亦還自宮。明旦復來，迎像送引聚集如初。經五日，小乘外道見毀其宗，結恨欲為謀害。王知，宣令曰：「邪黨亂真，其來自久。埋隱正教，誤惑^[28]群生，不有上賢，何以鑑偽。支那法師者，神宇沖曠，解行淵深，為伏群邪，來遊此國，顯揚大法，汲引愚迷，妖妄之徒不知慚悔，謀為不軌，翻起害心，此而可容，孰不可恕！眾有一人傷觸法師者斬其首，毀罵者截其舌。其欲申辭救義，不拘此限。」(T.50.2053.247c10–26).



the wrong to the right and to discard Hīnayāna theories and embrace Mahāyāna teachings.²¹

Sometime after this debate, when Xuanzang was returning to China, he again ran into the two Mādhyamikan Śiṃhas, now up north in a place called *Vilaśāṇā 毘羅那拏. What were they doing? They were now teaching Abhidharma and Yogācāra texts! Is this a sly hint of their “conversion” as result of their debates with Xuanzang, or merely a sign of the ecumenical nature of Indian Buddhism at the time?

Proceeding further northwest for three *yojanas*, he came to the capital city of the country of *Vilaśāṇā, where he stayed for two months and met two schoolmates, Śiṃhaprabha 師子光 and Candrasīṃha 師子月, who were then lecturing on the *Abhidharmakośa*, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, the *Vijñapti-mātra śāstra*[s] [one ed. has: *Triṃśikā-vijñapti-śāstra*], and so on. They were happy to greet him. After his arrival, the Master also lectured on the *Yogācārabhūmi-viniścaya* and *Abhidharmasamuccaya-vyākhyā* for two months, after which he took his leave and continued his return journey.²²

While the two Śiṃhas are teaching basic texts, Xuanzang offers the advanced courses on the more detailed commentaries.

As mentioned, debate was a bloodsport. Xuanzang acquired his slave in debate—the challenger had vowed that, if he lost, he would kill himself, but Xuanzang insisted he become his slave instead—and that “slave” helped prep Xuanzang for other debates. During Harsha’s convocation

21. Li 1995, 148. 將散之夕，法師更稱揚大乘，讚佛功德，令無量人返邪入正，棄小歸大。(T.50.2053.247c27–29).

22. Li 1995, 155 modified. 復西北行三踰繕那，至毘羅那拏國都城。停兩月日，逢師子光、師子月同學二人，講《俱舍》、《攝論》、《唯識論》等，皆來迎接甚歡。法師至，又開《瑜伽決擇》及《對法論》等，兩月訖，辭歸。(T.50.2053.249.b8–12). The *Yogācārabhūmi-viniścaya* is Asaṅga’s own commentary in the second-half of the *Yogācārabhūmi* on the first half. The title of the second text 《對法論》 is another name for 大乘阿毘達磨雜集論, T.31.1606, Sthiramati’s commentary on Asaṅga’s *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, 大乘阿毘達磨集論 T.31.1605. While later tradition typically identifies Xuanzang with Vasubandhu and Dharmapāla, largely as a result of Kuiji’s *Cheng weishilun* commentaries, it is notable that the two advanced texts his Biography has him teach at the culmination of his time in India are actually by Asaṅga and Sthiramati. On Xuanzang and Sthiramati, see Dan Lusthaus, 2002, *Buddhist Phenomenology*, chapter 15, and SAKUMA Hidenori, 2006 (2008), “On doctrinal similarities between Sthiramati and Xuanzang,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, v.29, n.2, 357–82.

Xuanzang offers his own head if defeated; the Hīnayāna and Tīrthika supposed challengers turn out to be sore losers plotting murder.

Debate is about vanquishing foes. Positions (*dṛṣṭi*) were not casual playthings to try out, dabble in, or take or leave with passing moods. They were one's blood and flesh (*śonita-māṃsa*, 血肉). Rivals could spar to sharpen and strengthen each other, but serious debate was life and death.

The priorities in terms of rivalries as expressed in Xuanzang's *Biography* see the crucial divide as not between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, but between Mahāyāna and the rest. Debate was not just about vanquishing foes, but about winning converts. Even Xuanzang's Madhyamaka rivals end up teaching Yogācāra and Abhidharma texts. Xuanzang was a successful debater worthy of admiration not because he crushed opponents and their theories, but because he won converts.

Kuiji's Heart Sūtra Commentary

As mentioned previously, the *Commentary*, despite being a commentary on a famously short text, the *Heart Sūtra*, is a substantial, lengthy text that provides a Madhyamakan interpretation followed by a Yogācāra interpretation for every term or passage. Briefly, in Kuiji's treatment, sometimes they are in conflict (e.g., certain ideas about emptiness); sometimes they simply take different hermeneutic directions on a certain term or passage without incurring any conflict; and sometimes the Yogācāra statement is basically an expanded exposition of what the Madhyamaka only proposed in a terse sound bite, an unpacking of the implicit meaning of the Madhyamaka statement.

There is too much in the *Commentary* for me to review here in full, but I have selected some passages that illustrate each of those moves, with most attention to the arguments against the Madhyamakan misunderstanding of emptiness. Some of what Kuiji presents as Madhyamaka will sound familiar to modern scholars, some will not (he doesn't provide sources, but we know that Kuiji made a thorough study of Jizang and his followers, which he seems to have combined with what Xuanzang related about Madhyamaka in India). So, once again, this is an interesting document that reinforces the point made earlier about the diversity of positions and ideas that come under the umbrellas of the two school names.

Kuiji begins by citing the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra's* account of the three turnings of the Dharma wheel. This is because the *Heart Sūtra*, being a *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* that focuses on emptiness, belongs to the

second turning of the wheel. For Kuiji and others, Madhyamaka represents that second turning, while Yogācāra represents the third, which nonetheless absorbs, subsumes, and “corrects” the second turning. As stated in the passage he quotes from the *Samādhinirmocana*, the first turning focuses on the Four Noble Truths, which, despite their profundity, are not ultimate and, so, the first turning “became a source of disputes.” In response, a second turning of the Dharma wheel by the Buddha explained that *dharma*s are “without self-nature, production and extinction, originally nothing other than nirvāṇa.” But this was not yet understood, so this, too, “became a source of disputes.” Finally, “for the sake of aspirants of all vehicles, the Buddha then turned the wheel disclosing . . . unsurpassed, comprehensive and ultimate teachings fully revealing the whole truth, which will not become a source of disputes” (p. 8)²³.

That was, of course, wishful thinking, since Madhyamakans would have nothing to do if there were no one to refute and argue with.

Kuiji then cites a passage from MMK, 18:6:²⁴

Sometimes the Buddhas speak of self,
Other times they speak of no-self.
All phenomena are in reality
Neither self nor no-self.

What is interesting is the implication he takes away from this:

Other sutras also say that the Buddha used one voice to convey boundless teachings and that different sentient beings comprehended them differently according to their own capabilities.

He goes on to say that during Buddha’s day, disciples were too intelligent to engage in disputes, but after his nirvāṇa, disputes broke out. He implies that the same thing happened to Nāgārjuna by then quoting a passage from Vasumitra’s *Doctrinal Differences of the Sects* 異部宗輪論 (T.49.2031.15a15–16), cautioning that, while relying on the Buddhist scriptures, one should be careful to “distinguish gold from sand.” The

23. Page references are to Heng-ching and Lusthaus 2001.

24. 諸佛或說我 或時說無我 諸法實相中 無我無非我 (T.33.1710.523.c4–5), citing Kumārajīva’s translation at T.30.1564.24a1–2.

“sand” apparently is the next passage, which he takes from Bhāviveka’s *Jewel in the Hand Treatise* (translated into Chinese by Xuanzang in 649):²⁵

The true nature of conditioned things is empty
For [such things are] illusory and dependently arisen.
Unconditioned things also lack substantial reality.
For they are unsubstantial like sky flowers.

By stipulating three types of things, namely, (1) illusory, (2) dependently arisen, and (3) unconditioned, Bhāviveka is claiming that all three of the *trisvabhāvas* “lack substantial reality” and are as unreal as “sky flowers.” Here we have the “sky flower heresy” that the Hinayanist detractors of Nālandā’s Mahāyāna were complaining about. It amounts to calling everything unreal, as if all were *parikalpita*, false imagining. Simhaprabha’s Mādhyamika nominalism would be open to the same criticism.

Kuiji responds with what, in his view, is a more correct estimation by first unpacking Bhāviveka’s statement with this restatement:

On the level of conventional truth all dharmas are existent, while according to the ultimate truth all are empty. However, the nature of true emptiness is neither empty nor existent; it is only from the perspective of ultimate truth that the nature of all dharmas is seen as emptiness. *From this teaching, beings develop [an erroneous] view of emptiness.* Thus, the Bodhisattva Aśaṅga requested Maitreya to expound the teaching of the Middle Way so as to eliminate both attachments [to existence and to emptiness].” (9, emphasis added)

Kuiji is accusing Bhāviveka of collapsing the two truths and, thus, creating a confusion that Aśaṅga and Maitreya endeavor to correct. The corrective comes from the *Madhyānta-vibhāga*, which is probably the most quoted text (aside from the *Heart Sūtra*) in his *Commentary*. He explains the two verses he quotes thus:

This is to say that conventionally self and dharmas exist, while ultimately both are empty. However, in order to eliminate clinging

25. *Dasheng zhang zhen lun* 《大乘掌珍論》卷1:「真性有為空 如幻緣生故 無為無有實 不起似空華」(T30.1578.268b21–22). This Bhāviveka text only survives in Chinese. The original Sanskrit title may have been something like *Hasta-maṇi*.

to emptiness or existence, the Buddha claimed that all dharmas are both existent and empty, or that they are neither empty nor existent. . . . It is to eradicate afflictions in accordance with the malady that existence and emptiness are expediently expounded. The followers of later generations grew attached to words and assumed that what they understood was in agreement with the Middle Way and that what others understood was erroneous. (10)

Existence and emptiness are two extremes. As with self or non-self, both can be asserted or refuted, depending on their therapeutic context. They are antidotes to the opposite extreme, not to be confused with the actual middle-way, which is “a middle distinguished from the two extremes” (*madhyāntavibhāga*). Taking existence or emptiness as the middle-way is a confusion that can entail the stubborn belief that one’s theory captures the true middle. This arrogance of believing that one’s own understanding of the middle-way and emptiness is correct and orthodox while considering the understanding by others to be erroneous—which Kuiji sees in some Madhyamakans—is an issue to which we will return later.

That closes his introductory portion, and he begins the actual exegesis of the *Heart Sūtra* with the words that make up its title.

Probably the most profound difference between Kuiji’s *Heart Sūtra* commentary and any other I’ve seen, as well as a key difference between his visions of Yogācāra and of Madhyamaka, is his reading of the sūtra line near the beginning, “When practicing the profound *Prajñāpāramitā*.” The Madhyamakans look right past this line, to what is about to come, which will deal with the emptiness of *dharmas* in order to break attachment to them. Kuiji has them cite a passage from the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (the full passage occurs five or six times in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, T.5.220; similar or partial versions appear nearly thirty times in the sūtra). The *Prajñāpāramitā* passage asserts that *prajñāpāramitā* and its name are imperceptible, rendering the “practice” somewhat invisible and mystical.²⁶

In contrast, Kuiji devotes more than a third of his text to explicating in detail what “practice” entails, in the process giving a thorough account of

26. 大經次言。不見般若波羅蜜多。不見般若波羅蜜多名。般若自性空。般若名空故。(T.33.1710.524C15–17). “The *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* says: ‘*Prajñāpāramitā* is imperceptible and the name *prajñāpāramitā* is also imperceptible, because *prajñāpāramitā* is empty of inherent existence, and the name *prajñāpāramitā* is likewise empty.’” (Heng-ching and Lusthaus, 15).

the various meanings and types of *viññapti-mātra*, an overview of the *pāramitās*, and a condensed but thorough summary of a major portion of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, ranging across a wide range of topics. In contrast to the short shrift *Madhyamakans* give to the notion of “practice,” he writes:

only after one has trained in wisdom can one understand the nature of emptiness; therefore, the *sūtra* first indicates the dharmas to be practiced. (p. 15)

Mādhyamikans assert that conventionally speaking, practice means that in order to realize transcendent, nondiscriminating wisdom (*nirvikalpa-jñāna*) and right contemplation of emptiness, one should train to acquire that wisdom which is obtained from hearing and reflecting and which can do away with the *ālambana*. Training to develop insight into emptiness is called “practice.” However, according to ultimate truth, due to the fact that there is nothing to be obtained and discriminated, there is nothing to be practiced. This, then, is what is termed “practice” . . . Now, what we call “practice” is actually non-practice; this is what is meant by practice. It is not that there is something to be practiced. . . . There is nothing to be practiced and . . . there is nothing that cannot be practiced. This is what is meant by practice. . . . Again, it is explained that any conceptualization or grasping is the root of *saṃsāra*, and thus not practice. Disciplining the mind to eradicate conceptualizations is the root of transcending worldly existence. This is practice.

The *Yogācāras* say that although a magician who plays tricks cannot actually transform anything, it appears that he can. Similarly, due to causes and conditions, a person hears the Dharma, believes it, trains to realize it, and teaches it without forsaking it for a moment. However, [cognizing] nonconceptually (*nirvikalpa*) [while] not showing the marks of practice (i.e., the various experiential and meditative realms of cognition) is what is meant by practice. It is not that there is no need to practice. It is the “illness” [of erroneous conceptions] that should be eliminated, not the Dharma. If there are fundamentally no dharmas that can be practiced or from which one can sever [attachment], then those ignorant of the Dharma will claim that they are already enlightened and, wrongly claiming to be enlightened, they will cause themselves great harm. Since the substance of

the “flowers” [seen in the sky] due to cataracts of the eyes is empty, the flowers are not what needs to be cured. Since these flowers do not exist, how can they be eliminated? However, if the cataract is not eliminated, there will be no healthy eye. How can ultimate truth (*paramārtha*) reveal that the [sky] flower is essentially empty?²⁷

If there is nothing that is to be practiced and nothing that is not practiced, and if the unenlightened state of sentient beings is nothing other than enlightenment, then all beings should have been enlightened from beginningless time. However, from the very beginning, they are not enlightened so, who is it that is enlightened? This is like the presumptions of non-action by the non-Buddhists, which contradict reason and violate the scriptures. How can they accomplish the wisdom of enlightenment? If terminating conceptualization were a genuine [exclusive] practice, no-thought would be the true and perfect path, all precepts would be useless, and training would be forsaken. Consider this carefully and quickly eliminate such a perverted view. (16–17)

Then Kuiji begins his long excursus on the details of practice, nearly twelve Taishō pages (63 pages in English!), later finally returning to the words of the *Heart Sūtra*.

Why is the practice “profound”? The Madhyamakans again display their arrogance and sense of superiority:

[*Prajñā*] is a subtle teaching and inconceivable, those of the two vehicles cannot comprehend it and common people cannot fathom it. Therefore, it is said to be profound.

The Yogācāras comment . . . it is difficult for the bodhisattva to perfectly realize the true form of suchness, to obtain illuminating wisdom, to express teachings in words, to achieve myriad practices, and to penetrate the existence and emptiness of the field of objects of cognition (*viśaya-gocara*). The perfection of wisdom is foremost and the others are supplementary. They are called “*prajñā*” and are therefore profound. (80)

27. Restated, this means: “It is not by simply declaring that a sky flower is empty that the eye disease is cured.”

It is not just the poor fools of the two vehicles (that is, the Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas, both considered Hīnayāna, followers of the “inferior vehicle”) who have a hard time understanding the subtleties—it is the bodhisattvas themselves, the practitioners of the third vehicle, Mahāyāna, the “great vehicle.” And the difficulties entail not just abstract principles, but the profusion of details involved in each of the practices, which make it difficult to marshal the necessary skills for expressing the teachings verbally in an effective way to assist others. Bodhisattvas have difficulties in comprehensively and deeply understanding how “existence and emptiness” fully apply to the concrete objects of experience, the *viśaya-gocara*, which confront each of us—the cognitive field in which each of us is embedded, immersed, that is, the concrete existential dimension of the teachings applied to actual human life.

Commenting on the passage “[Avalokiteśvara] had an illuminating vision of the emptiness of all five skandhas, and so forth”²⁸ Kuiji further illustrates how *Madhyamaka* sound bites, even when proper, tend to be too cursory, requiring further unpacking and clarification.

The Mādhyamikans comment [that the previous passage aimed] to break attachment to the perceiving subject by revealing its emptiness, while this passage is to break attachment to the perceived object by revealing its emptiness. If one is obstructed by ignorance and confused about the principle of *paramārtha*, and falsely takes the *skandhas* and others as existent, one is like a person who believes images seen in a dream to be real. If one correctly comprehends the principle of ultimate truth and does not become attached, one is like a person who awakes from a dream and realizes that the phenomena [seen in the dream] do not exist. Therefore, the practice of *prajñā* can illuminate the empty nature [of phenomena].

The Yogācāras comment that although all practices are nothing but the practice of *prajñā*, realizing the true and expelling the false

28. The *Heart Sūtra* commentaries of Kuiji and his rival Wōnch'uk 圓測 both include “etc.” (“and so forth”)—Ch. 等 *deng*, which would correspond to Skt. *ādi*—on a couple of occasions where the received versions of the Xuanzang translation as well as the Sanskrit editions lack anything corresponding. Wōnch'uk explicitly says that he checked the Chinese against Sanskrit versions and found the *ādi* there. See Dan Lusthaus, “The *Heart Sūtra* in Chinese Yogācāra: Some Comparative Comments on the *Heart Sūtra* Commentaries of Wōnch'uk and K'uei-chi.” *International Journal of Buddhist Thought and Culture* 3, Sept. 2003.

comes from the wisdom that illuminates emptiness. Therefore, the text emphasizes this point. The word “emptiness” here signifies the three non-self natures: the substance of everything with the nature of mere imagination (*parikalpita*) is nonexistent and lacks self-nature; therefore, it is said to be empty. [The nature of] “arising dependent on others” (*paratantra*) [is analogous to the following:] form is like foam, feeling is like floating bubbles, perception is like the shimmer of heat (e.g., as in a desert mirage), impulses are like the plantain (i.e., hollow on the inside), consciousness is like the tricks of a conjurer; since they are unlike the way they are grasped [in ordinary perception] and lack a self-creating nature, they are also called “empty.”

According to another interpretation, it is the absence of *parikalpita* in *paratantra* that is the true nature (*pariniṣpanna*), which is why the latter is called “empty.” Actually, the three natures are neither empty nor non-empty. The implicit intent of calling them empty is to break attachment. The reason the last two (i.e., *paratantra* and *pariniṣpanna*) are called empty is not because they are completely nonexistent. Buddha’s implicit intent in calling them empty is to indicate, in general, that [both] existence and nonexistence are said to be empty. The Buddha said:²⁹

The ultimate truth is that the production of form is devoid of self-nature. I have already taught that. Anyone who does not know the hidden intention (密意) of the Buddha loses the right path and cannot proceed to enlightenment.

Furthermore, this emptiness is the essence of suchness, the nature of which is neither empty nor existent but is revealed through emptiness. In order to counteract attachment to existence, emptiness is spoken of provisionally (*prajñapti*). Foolish people who do not understand this assert that the five *skandhas* and other *dharma*s are definitely devoid of true existence; hence they discriminate between them (i.e., true existence and the *skandhas*). To trace them back to their original substance, they are nothing but suchness. For, apart from the noumenal, the phenomenal has no separate nature (82–83).

29. *Samdhinirmocana sūtra* T.16.676.696b4–5; also quoted in *Yogācārabhūmi* T.30.1579.722a5–6.

Kuiji lets the *Madhyamakan* and *Yogācāra* disagreements heat up while commenting on the passage “Form does not differ from emptiness, and emptiness does not differ from form. Form itself is emptiness and emptiness itself is form.” He has the *Madhyamakan* say:

The phrase “form does not differ from emptiness, and emptiness does not differ from form” is to break attachment to the notion that apart from conventionally grasped form (*grāhya-rūpa*) there is true emptiness. Beings do not understand true emptiness and thus cling to form, erroneously increase deluded karma, and revolve in *saṃsāra*. Now, [this passage] shows that the form of a flower seen through a cataract is actually caused by the diseased eye and is nothing but empty existence. Ultimately, form does not differ from emptiness. According to the Holy Teaching, whatever dependently arises is completely empty.

“Form itself is emptiness, and emptiness itself is form.” This is to break foolish people’s views that it is only when form has become nonexistent that it becomes empty. . . .

The *Yogācāras* comment that, according to [to the *Mādhyamika* interpretation of] ultimate truth, all dharmas are empty and nonexistent. Although this sounds reasonable at first glance, actually it is not necessarily so. The true and the conventional mutually shape each other, for if the conventional is not existent, the ultimate ceases. Form and emptiness are mutually dependent, for if form ceases, emptiness disappears. Therefore, the substance of form is not originally empty.

The *Madhyamakans* comment that actually emptiness is neither empty nor not empty. It is for the purpose of turning confusion into understanding that form is said to be empty. It is not that the emptiness of form is definitely empty, for emptiness is also empty.

The *Yogācāras* comment that if form produced through conditions is originally nonexistent, then the fool would originally be wise, and common people and a sage would be mutually interchangeable. If we all consider ourselves teachers, who are the confused?

Madhyamakans comment that afflictions (*kleśa*) become enlightenment. *Saṃsāra* is *nirvāṇa*. The troubles of the world are the seeds of *Tathāgatahood*. All sentient beings are originally in quiescence. Are not the foolish originally wise?

The Yogācāras comment that [there are two extremes: one claiming that form and emptiness are radically different, and the other claiming that they are identical.] If one asserts that things of form are separate from the principle of emptiness, then one [can] reject form as delusion and seek emptiness [alone] for enlightenment. If [on the other hand] emptiness already is originally form, wisdom becomes identical to stupidity. [If so,] wouldn't it be perverse to seek wisdom and reject stupidity? Furthermore, why abhor saṃsāra and seek nirvāṇa if pain (*duḥkha*) and pleasure (*sukha*) are not distinct? [If they are the same,] what is the use of seeking nirvāṇa? Stupid people in saṃsāra would have already attained nirvāṇa, and sages seeking the highest accomplishment would be committing heretical error.

The Madhyamakans comment that worldly affairs, delusion and awakening, seeking the state of a sage, and forsaking worldliness are all ultimately empty, so why [should one] seek one and forsake the other?

The Yogācāras comment that if the phenomenal is allowed to be called nothing but emptiness, then in ultimate truth there is self-contradiction, because it would be as if the unenlightened realize that form is emptiness, while the enlightened do not realize the emptiness of form; that the diligent sages are pitiable and detestable, and the indolent and foolish are admirable. The Buddha said, "How does a bodhisattva comply with the perfection of skillful means?" If sentient beings do not understand the sūtra in which the Buddha expounds all dharmas as devoid of self-nature, existent things, production and extinction, and as like an illusion and a dream, then the bodhisattva should explain to them that the sūtra does not mean all dharmas are nonexistent; rather, it means that only the self-nature of dharmas is nonexistent. Therefore, all dharmas are said to be devoid of self-nature. Although there are designations of things depending on [whatever level of] discussion is yet possible, according to ultimate truth, their expressible nature is not their own true nature. Therefore, it is said that all dharmas are nonexistent.

If in theory the self-nature of all dharmas is originally nonexistent, what then is produced and what is destroyed? Hence, all dharmas are said to be neither produced nor destroyed. Illusions and dreams are not real or existent as they appear, but it is not that their

shapes or images are nonexistent. Similarly, all dharmas are not as real and existent as foolish people habitually think they are, and yet it is not that all dharmas, though ultimately beyond language, are, in themselves, entirely nonexistent. When one awakens to the fact that all dharmas are neither existing nor nonexistent, this is like [awakening] from an illusion or a dream whose nature is nondual (i.e. dream realities are neither entirely existent nor nonexistent). Therefore it is said that all dharmas are like an illusory dream.

With regard to all dharmas in the Dharma realm (*dharmadhātu*), the bodhisattva does not become attached to or forsake them even a little bit, nor does he increase, decrease, or destroy them. If the dharmas are truly existent, he sees them as existent, and if they are truly nonexistent, he sees them as truly nonexistent. To instruct others like this is what is meant by the bodhisattva's complying with skillful means. (pp. 90–93)

This discussion continues for awhile. Then for the passage where what has been said about form being interlocked with emptiness is extended to the remaining four *skandhas*, Kuiji gives an account of those *skandhas*, cites the *Vimśikā* and *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, and then points out that “the Madhyamakans and Yogācāras have the same interpretation in regard to this” (97). This brings them back to being on friendly footing, nicely patching things up after the heat generated by the dispute over the previous passage. From that point on, Kuiji primarily cites the *Madhyānta-vibhāga*, since that resolves, to his satisfaction, all remaining tensions about the proper understanding of the middle-way.

Do the Madhyamakans among us recognize themselves in his characterization of Madhyamaka? If so, his critique has found its target. If not, then we have a case of an authoritative Buddhist mischaracterizing a rival—but authoritative Buddhists would never do that, would they?

Did anyone notice that Kuiji takes *gocara* and *dharmas* as really existent? Did anyone see his warning against taking the “illusion” analogy too literally, unless carefully understood as comparable to dream images, which are both existent and nonexistent? They are occurrences, experiences with impact, which are not what they appear to be. But they are not simply fantasies, either. To think they are is to reduce everything to *parikalpita*, which would mean enlightenment is impossible, and our situation hopeless. There is reality, suchness, which is the precise occurrence of things (*vastus*) just as they are (*yathā-bhūta*), devoid of our illusory projections.

For Xuanzang and Kuiji, grounding themselves in a pivotal statement from Vasubandhu's *Vimśikā*, when Mādhyamikans take emptiness as license to treat everything as illusion, they have abandoned the middle-way to inhabit an extreme. In comparison to Mādhyamikans, Yogācāras are realists.

References

- Almogi, Orna, "Māyopamādvayavāda versus Sarvadharmāpratiṣṭhānavāda: A Late Indian Subclassification of Madhyamaka and its Reception in Tibet," *Journal of the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies* [國際仏教学大学院大学研究紀要], Vol. XIV, 2010, 135–212.
- Heng-ching Shih and Dan Lusthaus, transl. 2001. *A Comprehensive Commentary on the Heart Sūtra*. Berkeley, CA: BDK.
- Huili 慧立 and Yancong 彦惊. *DaTang daciensi sanzang fashi zhuan* 大唐大慈恩寺三藏法師傳 (A Biography of the Tripiṭaka Master of the Great Ci'en Monastery of the Great Tang Dynasty). T.50.2053. (English tr., see Li 1995)
- Kuiji 窺基. *Panre boluomiduo xinjing youzan* 般若波羅蜜多心經幽贊 (A Comprehensive Commentary on the Heart Sūtra). T.33.1710. (English tr., see Heng-Ching and Lusthaus 2001).
- Li Rongxi, transl. 1995. *A Biography of the Tripiṭaka Master of the Great Ci'en Monastery of the Great Tang Dynasty*. Berkeley, CA: BDK.
- Li Rongxi, transl. 1996. *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*. Berkeley, CA: BDK.
- Lusthaus, Dan. 2002. *Buddhist Phenomenology: A Philosophical Investigation of Yogācāra Buddhism and the Ch'eng Wei-shih lun*. New York and London: Routledge-Curzon.
- Lusthaus, Dan. 2003. "The Heart Sutra in Chinese Yogācāra: Some Comparative Comments on the Heart Sutra Commentaries of Wōnch'uk and K'uei-chi." *International Journal of Buddhist Thought and Culture* 3, Sept.
- SAKUMA Hidenori. 2006 (2008). "On doctrinal similarities between Sthiramati and Xuanzang," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, v.29, n.2, 357–82.
- Ōtake, Susumu 大竹晋. 2013, *Gengi kan'yaku basubandu shakukyōrongun no kenkyū* 元魏漢訳ヴァスバンドウ釈經論群の研究 (A Study of the Yuan-Wei Dynasty Translations of Vasubandhu's Sūtra Commentaries). Tōkyō: Daizō Shuppan, 2013
- Xuanzang 玄奘. *DaTang Xiyuji* (大唐西域記 (Record of Western Lands), compiled and edited by Bianji 辯機 in 646 CE. T.51.2087. (English tr., see Li 1996).