

Article

Unraveling Prapañca: A Yogācāra Examination of Consciousness, Language, and Liberation in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*

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Abstract: In Yogācāra epistemology, the term *prapañca* refers to various dimensions of the cognitive process in aspects ranging from consciousness, language formation, the conceptualization of subject–object duality, mental defilements, and ignorance. Given that the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* conveys the richness of early tenets for both the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka traditions, an investigation of the meaning and discourse context of *prapañca* is a necessity. This paper conducts a contextual examination of the word *prapañca*, primarily addressing (1) a range of meanings, (2) possible characteristics, (3) conditions and consequences, especially the associations with the conceptualization (*vikalpa*) process, and (4) the significance of the elimination of *prapañca* that the corresponding dialogue implies. This paper finds that *prapañca* is associated with dualistic conceptualization and the evolution of consciousness within *saṃsāra*. It shows some qualities of the beginningless conceptual structure of *saṃsāric* conditioned negativity and is related to language formation. As the discourse in *Laṅka* adduces it as the root of suffering, liberation from it is a prerequisite for reaching enlightenment and achieving the state of Buddhahood.

Keywords: *prapañca*; Yogācāra; consciousness; enlightenment

1. Introduction

In Chapter 18 of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK) of Nāgārjuna which particularly addresses the concept of non-self, stanza 4 draws our attention to an antidote for suffering in *saṃsāra*, saying ‘Internally and externally, when [the thought] ‘I’ and ‘my’ have ceased, appropriation (*upādāna*) ceases. Through the cessation of appropriation, birth ceases’.¹ Here, the ceasing of birth refers to liberation from *saṃsāra*. In other words, it concerns the path that leads to liberation from suffering by means of the cessation of the concept of self. Following this stanza, the word *prapañca* appears:

Karmakleśaḥ saṃsāraḥ mokṣaḥ karmakleśā vikalpataḥ/

Te prapañcāt prapañcas tu śūnyatāyāṃ nirudhyate//MMK_18.5//²

Through the cessation of karma and afflictive mental states comes liberation. Karma and afflictive mental states come from conceptualizations (*vikalpa*), and they come from fabrication (*prapañca*). That, however, ceases in emptiness.³

The textual picture that Nāgārjuna draws is a causal chain from conceptual structuring (*prapañca*) and conceptualizations (*vikalpa*) to afflictive mental status (*kleśa*) and *karma*. According to him, karma and afflictive mental status come from conceptuality, and conceptuality comes from fabrication or *prapañca*. In this regard, one needs initially to get rid of the fundamental cause—*prapañca*—so as to be free thereafter from conceptuality; one can then eliminate *karma* and the afflictive mental status and thus achieve liberation. Considering this, *prapañca* seems to be the fundamental trait that should be uprooted from one’s mind, and it becomes salient when one foregrounds this account of salvation.

The treatment of *prapañca* in Madhyamaka underscores its significance in Buddhist soteriology. While both Madhyamaka and Yogācāra maintain the ultimate Buddhist objective of universal salvation, an analysis of its representations and characteristics in Yogācāra



Citation: Cai, Tiantian. 2024.

Unraveling Prapañca: A Yogācāra Examination of Consciousness, Language, and Liberation in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*. *Religions* 15: 795. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15070795>

Academic Editor: Todd Lewis

Received: 3 June 2024

Revised: 25 June 2024

Accepted: 26 June 2024

Published: 29 June 2024



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treatises can enhance our comprehension of the doctrinal transition and nuanced distinctions within this soteriological aim. Although Mādhyamikas emphasize the eradication of *prapañca* in the achievement of soteriology⁴, this raises questions regarding the origins of *prapañca* and the means by which its elimination can be attained. The Yogācārins epistemological approach, which highlights the role of consciousness and the intricacies of mental mechanisms, provides insights into the conditions that engender mental afflictions and, consequently, offers solutions for their eradication.

The term *prapañca* has an antecedent in Pali (*papañca*) and has been employed in various contexts by different philosophical schools. Nāṇananda notes that in the Pali canon, the term conveys the meaning of “sense-perception” and indicates a proliferative tendency in ideation.⁵ *The Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary* briefly outlines its ambiguity in both the Pali canon and Mahāyāna treatises, offering translation references in Tibetan and Chinese. The Tibetan translation is regularly given as *spros (pa)*, which means spreading out, enlargement, and activity. Suzuki’s Index to the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* refers to three Chinese translations, *xilun* 戲論, which means frivolous talk, falsehood, and the error of false statements.⁶

In Yogācāra epistemology, the notion of *prapañca* refers to various aspects of conceptual processes, ranging from language formation, subject–object conceptualization, and the ongoing production of mental defilement.⁷ Akira Saito mentioned that, in early Yogācāra treatises such as the *Yogācārabhūmi*, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu treated *prapañca* as a notion closely associated with the human application of terms and concepts, which are rooted in “mental, analytical, discursive, and proliferating activities”.⁸ Speaking in etymological terms, Lugli notes that *prapañca* “derives from the verbal root \sqrt{pac} and conveys the idea of proliferation, increment or expansion”.⁹ She cites the five interpretations that Schmithausen derives from the examination of “*Yogācārabhūmi* (not including the *Tattvārthapaṭala*), Yogācāra commentarial treatises and, partially, the Nikāyas”—(1) subjective conceptual proliferation, (2) conceptual diversification, (3) phenomenal diversity, (4) forms of conceptualization close to *abhiniveśa* or *trṣṇā*, (5) existence (*bhāva*), and (6) the basis of personal existence.

To further specify its connotation and to explore its role in the development of early Mahāyāna philosophy, it would be necessary to explore this key term in Yogācāra treatises and some early Mahāyāna texts, in which the discourse and context of *prapañca* could supply a range of possible interpretations from an epistemological perspective.

This paper focuses on the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (hereafter, *Laṅka*) as the source discourse for our discussion of the meaning of *prapañca*. *Laṅka* reflects the richness of early tenets of both the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka traditions, and this is part of the reason for its frequent citation in later works. The multiplicity of explanations about the operation of consciousness provides accounts for the workings of the mind, and the term *prapañca*, in particular, occurs with some regularity. Suzuki’s translation of the word *prapañca* primarily references the Chinese versions of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*. In light of this, the discussions on consciousness and mental functionality in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* offer valuable insights into the meaning of *prapañca* and its relationship with other concepts pertaining to mental mechanisms from a Yogācāra perspective. However, what we need to keep in mind is that the narrative of *Laṅka* does not provide a systematic, linear framework, and as a result, the regular occurrence of *prapañca* shows some variation in meaning and connotation, inevitably resulting in ambiguity and multiple interpretations. Nevertheless, a contextual study could still help to glean various meanings of this key, thus deepening our understanding of how it fits into the overall account of consciousness and liberation in Mahāyāna Buddhism. In this regard, the contextual analysis becomes a necessity despite the complexity.

To explore *prapañca* in *Laṅka*, this paper addresses the following: (1) the range of meaning of *prapañca*, (2) its characteristics, (3) the conditions for its arising and possible consequences, and (4) the significance of the elimination of *prapañca* for the realization of enlightenment.

This study finds that the meaning of *prapañca* is related to dualistic conceptualization. It shows some of the qualities of a beginningless conceptual structure, which is conditioned by saṃsāric negativity and is related to language formation. As the discourse in *Lañka* identifies *prapañca* as the root of suffering, liberation from it is a prerequisite for reaching enlightenment and achieving the state of Buddhahood. One can claim that the variations of meanings and connotations of *prapañca* in *Lañka* underlies typical Yogācāra ideas about the function of the afflicted mind. Likewise, it is related to the emphasis on the problematic nature of language, especially the notion that the naming and claiming process involves merely conceptualized phenomena without any real referents. As such, *prapañca*—or, more precisely, it is elimination—is central to the understanding as well as the experience of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). This comprehension encompasses not only the realization of the absence of independent inherent existence in an ontological sense but also the emptiness of subject–object dualism from the Yogācāra epistemological perspective.

2. Background

The *Lañkāvatāra Sūtra* is considered an essential work in the Mahāyāna tradition. However, the complexity of language usage, the multiplicity of layers and ideas, and the abundance of crucial concepts blended across schools make an academic analysis of the text considerably complex. Notably, the term *prapañca* appears in the Pali canon as well as many Yogācāra and Madhyamaka treatises, but despite its ubiquity and tight connection with the cognitive process, various interpretations by traditional commentators and academic scholars have given rise to divergent conclusions and definitions.

The date and author(s) of *Lañka* are still unclear. Records for the earliest Chinese translation show that the time of its composition falls in the 5th century.¹⁰ The current primary texts comprise Sanskrit editions, two Tibetan translations, and three surviving Chinese translations. The edition provided by Bunyiu Nanjiō is currently considered a reliable Sanskrit edition, which is based on four Sanskrit manuscripts and some other primary materials.¹¹ Nanjiō consulted the three versions of the Chinese translation to edit his copies as well.¹² A later edition from Vaidya collated some of the previous work and arguably is overall an improvement. This study relies on the Sanskrit texts from both Nanjiō and Vaidya, facilitated by the digital resources of the Digital Sanskrit Buddhist Canon and GRETEL.¹³ Regarding modern English translations, this paper mainly makes references to Suzuki's work. Moreover, I have consulted the contemporary scholarship on the text. In that context, Japanese scholars, in particular, have made great efforts to examine various aspects of *Lañka*, covering the concept of *tathāgatagarbha* (Ogawa 1961), *citta* (Kamiya 1975), *dharmā*, and *bhāva* (Kamiya 1977) as well as *cittamātra* (Kan 1980). Regarding English secondary scholarship, the most relevant studies for this paper include works from Lambert Schmithausen (1969), Florin Giripescu Sutton (1991), Bikkhu Nāṇananda (1997), Aucke D. Forsten (2006), and Ligeia Lugli (2011).

Turning now to the secondary scholarship in English, Sutton examined the concept of existence and enlightenment in *Lañka*. Although touching upon Yogācāra epistemology and sketching the significance of liberation from the dual categories of discrimination (*vikalpa*) and language, he did not elaborate on *prapañca* specifically. Forsten focused on the second chapter of *Lañka*, in which he approached the concept of *svacittadṛśyamātra* based on a text-critical analysis and translated the phrase as '[the threefold world is] merely something visible consisting of one's own mind', further emphasizing that the term alludes to philosophical idealism. However, Lugli criticized Forsten's approach to the term by questioning his contrast between philology and hermeneutics¹⁴ and his unclear philological analysis. Later, Lugli examined the role of language in Indian Mahāyāna, which particularly took *Lañka* as the reference. According to her exploration, *Lañka* shows the Mahāyāna idea of verbalization as being "inefficacious and potentially misleading".¹⁵ She argues that, in *Lañka*, "language cannot express what is undifferentiated", and "verbalization affects the speaker's conceptual representation of the world and informs the misperception of reality as diversity;" therefore, "enlightenment emerges in silence".¹⁶ It is undeniable that

Lañka lays weight on language and the cognitive distortions that emerge from language; nevertheless, the particular focus on language and the emphasis on the linguistic approach involve the risk of overlooking other possible interpretations and a range of meanings for particular concepts.

With regards to the specific term *prapañca*, earlier scholarships include works of Jacques May (Candrakīrti and May 1959), Lambert Schmithausen (1969), and Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda (1997). In his edition of *Prasannapadā*, Jacques May points out that *prapañca* is more about “the operation of the function [of discursive thought] (“expansion”, differentiation of the global real into distinct objects and concepts. . .), and the result of this operation”¹⁷ instead of the function of mere expansion or proliferation. Lambert Schmithausen also underlines *prapañca* as an action, whereas he touches upon the interconnectedness of the action of “spreading” and maintains the objective sense of *prapañca* when it concerns the manifold appearance of the world. According to him, “*prapañcaḥ* simply means ‘manifoldness’ . . .”. Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda draws attention to the use of *prapañca* in the Pali canon and the commentarial literature thereof, and he reflects briefly on the term *prapañca* in Mahāyāna Buddhism. In accordance with his exploration, *prapañca* (the Pali term for *prapañca* in Sanskrit) is essentially connected with the process of sense-perception, and “*prapañca-saññā-saṅkhā*” could be interpreted as “concepts, reckonings, designations or linguistic conventions characterized by the prolific conceptualizing tendency of the mind”.¹⁸ With regards to Mahāyāna tradition, Ñāṇananda particularly cites the *Mādhyamikakārikā* and *Lañka* to underline the significance of *prapañca* in the philosophical system of Mādhyamika dialect in terms of conceptual constructions and rationality;¹⁹ however, a context-based analysis of the meaning of *prapañca* is largely overlooked.

The scholarship on *prapañca* could be divided into two major trends. One launches into Madhyamaka treatises. Another tends to address the concept from the Yogācāra perspective. For example, based on an enumerative occurrence of the application of *prapañca* in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* and its corresponding commentary, Akira Saito maintained that, for Nāgārjuna, *prapañca* means a “mental activity of conceptualization made in various sets of terms”.²⁰ He pointed out that although both Nāgārjuna and Yogācāra thinkers consider *prapañca* as the fundamental cause of defilement, their understandings differ. However, he did not clarify the different understanding of *prapañca* in Yogācāra contexts nor its range of meanings. Furthermore, Mark Siderits claims that there is a paradox that *prapañca* entails in Madhyamaka discourse. According to him, the concept embodies the falsities of the conceptualization, which contrasts with the understanding of emptiness, as “Mādhyamikas claim there are indirect strategies one may use to rule out whole classes of candidates for *dharmahood*,” “but there can be no strategy that encompasses all uses of all concepts”, and thus there is “no master argument for emptiness” as “a consequence of the emptiness of emptiness”. However, the application of radical contextualist semantics shows a solution for the paradox that *prapañca* has shown. He contends that “to believe in ultimate truth-makers is to believe in context-transcendent truth-conditions”,²¹ and the presupposition entailed by the context-transcendent truth-conditions could be rejected by radical contextualist semantics. In terms of a successful reduction along with mistakes shown in hypostatizing concepts, *prapañca* is false yet useful as being reliably associated with our ultimate aims to see the false of presupposition. He underlines the use of *prapañca* to reveal the falsification of concepts for Mādhyamikas, and this discussion could be further developed by looking at the role of *prapañca* from Yogācāra’s view.

With regards to the Yogācāra perspective, Lugli supplies a terminological investigation of *prapañca* from an etymological and linguistic perspective. According to her, *prapañca-vāsanā*, despite being a newly introduced term in *Lañka*, semantically coincides with the term *abhilāpa-vāsanā* in the *Mahāyānasamgraha* and the *vyavahāra-vāsanā* in the *Samdhinirmocana*. They all collectively highlight the effects of verbalization and language on future perceptions. She took *prapañca* as “differentiation” and further maintained that it accounted for “why verbalization is the origin of conceptual fabrication (*parikalpita*) and causes the perpetuation of illusion through *vāsanā*”.²² It is undeniable that *Lañka* proposes

prapañca as a beginningless factor that gives rise to “the cyclical arising of misperception through language”.²³ In spite of closely correlating to conceptualization (*vikalpa*) while distinguishing from it, Lugli did not clarify in what sense *prapañca* is distinguished from *vikalpa* and *parikalpita*, and whether there are possible connections. Moreover, an emphasis on its association with language could prompt one to overlook other features of *prapañca*, such as its relevance to pre-linguistic cognition that can still be characterized as conceptual and the possible consequences of attachment to *prapañca*, especially in that latter context.

Building on and departing from the prior work sketched above, I propose to re-examine and re-evaluate the range of meanings of *prapañca* in *Lañka*. Setting aside a strong emphasis on its association with language, this paper will focus more on its nature as a beginningless and negative causal structure that results in mental afflictions. The occurrence of these afflictions can be understood as a conceptualization (*vikalpa*) process that appropriates phenomenal events in reality.

3. The Interpretation of *Prapañca* in *Lañka*

This paper will examine the meaning of *prapañca* in *Lañka* in four ways: (1) contextual analysis of its meaning in the compounds in which it is embedded; (2) its connection with *vikalpa* and *vāsanā*; (3) its significance for comprehending mere representations of mind; and (4) the necessity of its eradication in relation to Mahāyāna soteriology.

3.1. A Contextual Analysis of the Meaning of *Prapañca*

The precise meaning of *prapañca* in *Lañka* and in Mahāyāna texts more generally is difficult to determine. Regarding the range of meaning that *prapañca* exhibits in *Lañka*, this taxonomy of meanings could be helpful, but there appears to be more to say about *prapañca*.

The contextual analysis will help situate the term *prapañca* within its linguistic environment in the discourse of the *Lañkāvatāra Sūtra*. This approach aims to specify the grammatical feature of the term concerning its morphological, semantic, and syntactical connections with other closely related terms. In the *Lañkāvatāra Sūtra*, *prapañca* encompasses meanings such as beginningless conceptual structure, characterized by saṃsāric negativity and mental proliferation related to language formation. These meanings, detailed in the following sections, contrast with the use of this term in texts such as the *Vastusamgrahaṇī* section of the *Yogācārabhūmi* (YBh) and the *Cintāmayībhūmi* in the Basic Section of YBh, which explicitly emphasize the linguistic and verbal aspects over the mental aspects.²⁴ Meanwhile, these meanings show some similarities to the usage in texts such as the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* (SNS), where *prapañca* serves as a mental proliferation that conceptualizes phenomenal events.²⁵

In terms of the larger themes with which *prapañca* is connected in *Lañka*, more than half of the lexical occurrences fall in Chapter 2, which concerns the operation and function of *viññāna* (consciousness). Some other occurrences fall in Chapter 3, Chapter 4, and Chapter 6, whose themes mainly address self-nature, ignorance, self-realization, and enlightenment. Within the broad themes found in these various chapters, the discussion of *prapañca* relates more specifically to themes concerning the erroneous views held by brahmins and logicians, the function and operation of consciousness, the necessities of the realization of Buddhahood, word discrimination, dualistic notions of existence and perception, and the characteristics of self-nature. To understand more precisely how *prapañca* is involved in these themes, it is necessary to conduct a detailed examination of the several Sanskrit compounds in which it occurs because it is rarely used on its own outside of a compound.

3.2. *Prapañca* Compounds in *Lañka*

According to the number of constituents in each compound, Table 1, the Morphological Structure of Compounds with *prapañca* (attached in Section 3.4), displays the variations of the morphological structure that involve *prapañca*. The compounds that appear more than once are marked by a number. Despite the complexity of compounds, there appears

to be a rather regular sequence in the morphological structure—from *anādikāla* (beginningless time), *prapañca*, *dauṣṭhulya* (saṃsāric negativity) to *vāsanā* (imprint). Here, the word *anādikāla*, meaning beginningless (*anādi*) time (*kāla*), indicates the causal and innate nature of *prapañca*. It signifies that *prapañca* is intrinsic and arises in dependence on causes and conditions. According to Edgerton’s *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, the term *dauṣṭhulya* is associated with various forms of wickedness and depravity.²⁶ When associated with *prapañca* and *vāsanā*, it conveys the meaning of saṃsāric negativity, highlighting the continuity of suffering in the cycles of life and rebirth. *Vāsanā* represents subtle tendencies that arise in consciousness as a result of repeated exposure to positive or negative phenomenal events. *Vāsanā* is also described as subtle forms of afflictions (*kleśa*) that obstruct the attainment of Buddhahood.²⁷

Specifically, it is noticeable that *prapañca* is closely associated with *vikalpa* (conceptualization), *dauṣṭhulya*, and *vāsanā*, and Table 1 manifests at least four tendencies: (1) *Anādikāla* occurs before *prapañca*, (2) *vāsanā* tends to be placed at the end of the compound, (3) *dauṣṭhulya* tends to occur between *prapañca* and *vāsanā* and embodies a closer relation with *prapañca*, and (4) the position of *vikalpa* tends to be flexible; it appears either before or after *prapañca*, but in most cases, it is placed before *vāsanā* and after *dauṣṭhulya*.

The general trends in these compounds raise questions about the relation between *prapañca*, *vikalpa*, *vāsanā*, and *dauṣṭhulya*. Accordingly, the next section of the paper will explore these connections and provide possible interpretations. As some passages offer clues for the grammatical relation between *prapañca* and *vikalpa*, let us examine this pair first.

3.3. Relation with Vikalpa

Prapañca coexists with *vikalpa* in many contexts. The following examples convey two major points: (1) *Prapañca* is semantically distinguished from *vikalpa*; (2) *vikalpa* emerges from or is one of the consequences of *prapañca*. The first example comes from a passage in the second chapter about various forms of cessation (*nīrodha*). Here, the “cessation of the continuum” (*prabandhanīrodha*) is discussed:

*prabandhanīrodhaḥ punar Mahāmate yasmāt sa pravartate*²⁸ / *yasmād iti Mahāmate yadāśrayena yadāmbanena ca/tatra yadāśrayam anādikālaprapañcadauṣṭhulyavāsanā yadāmbanam svacittadrśyavijñānaviṣaye vikalpāḥ*²⁹

“Moreover, Mahāmati, the cessation of the continuum is [the cessation of that] from which it occurs. Mahāmati, “that from which” means through that which is its basis and that which is its support. Here, the basis (*āśraya*) is the imprints of the saṃsāric negativity associated with beginningless *prapañca*; the support is the conceptualizations about the object of consciousness, namely, something perceptible that is [actually] one’s own mind”.

Here, the basis for the continued occurrence of perceptual consciousness (*pravṛttivijñāna*) consists in the imprints for *prapañca*, while the support is the conceptualizations (*vikalpa*). While both contribute to the flow of the six forms of experiential consciousness, it is clear that *prapañca* and *vikalpa* connect to distinctive aspects of consciousness, namely, as their basis or foundation and as their “support”—i.e., their focal object.³⁰

The next example comes again from the second chapter in a passage describing various forms of distorted cognition, including the “conceptualization that is an imputation of an unreal characteristic” (*asallakṣaṇasamāropavikalpa*):

*punaraparam mahāmate asallakṣaṇasamāropasya lakṣaṇam katamat? yaduta skandhadhātvoāyatanānāmasatsoasāmānyalakṣaṇābhīniveśaḥ idam evam, idaṃ nānyathety etad dhi mahāmate asallakṣaṇasamāropasya lakṣaṇam/ēṣa hi mahāmate asallakṣaṇasamāropavikalpo ‘nādikālaprapañcadauṣṭhulyavicitravāsanābhīniveśāt pravartate*³¹

“Mahāmati, there is another characteristic of the imputation of unreal characteristics. What is it? It is, namely, the fixation (*abhīniveśa*) on the unreal unique and shared characteristics of the aggregates, the constituents, and the spheres,

as in [the thought], “This is just this, and not otherwise”. Mahāmati, this very conceptualization that imputes unreal characteristics [to those things] occurs through fixation from the variegated imprints for saṃsāric negativity through beginningless *prapañca*”.

The ablative ending of *abhiniveśa* (fixation, attachment, grasping)³² indicates that the origin of *vikalpa* is dependent on imprints of *prapañca*.³³ In this regard, *vikalpa* and *prapañca* are not only syntactically separated but also semantically distinct from each other. The wording here indicates that these terms convey different connotations and specify their causal relation—the imprints in relation to *prapañca* lead to *vikalpa*, as mediated by *abhiniveśa*.

The following passage also comes from the second chapter, introducing four types of Speech (*vāk*) and the corresponding conditions that give rise to each type of Speech. The example here particularly shows the type of Speech associated with *prapañca* and its condition.

*caturvidhaṃ mahāmate vāgvikalpalakṣaṇaṃ bhavati/yad uta lakṣaṇavāk svapnavāg
dauṣṭhulyavikalpābhiniveśavāg anādivikalpavāk//*³⁴

...

*anādikālavikalpavāk punar mahāmate anādikālaprapañcābhiniveśadauṣṭhulyasvabījāvāsā-
nātaḥ pravartate/etad dhi mahāmate caturvidhaṃ vāgvikalpalakṣaṇam iti me yad uktam
idaṃ tat pratyuktam//*³⁵

“Oh Mahāmati, the conceptualization of Speech (*vāk*) is of four types: definition-Speech, dream-Speech, Speech from fixation on the conceptualization of saṃsāric negativity, and Speech from beginningless conceptualization.

...

Moreover, Mahāmati, Speech from beginningless conceptualization is arisen from the imprints of its own seed, which is the saṃsāric negativity from the fixation of beginningless *prapañca*. Oh, Mahāmati, this is the fourfold word-conceptualization, and this is my answer to what was said”.

In this passage, Speech from conceptualization is categorized into four dimensions, and each dimension corresponds with one reason. The first two categories could be considered as Speech with apparently extra-mental reference, and Speech without extra-mental reference. *Vikalpa* occurs as a term in the third and fourth dimensions, which do not concern the reference of language; rather, it is about the formation of words, which is attributed to discrimination processes. On the one hand, words cannot exist without the application of concepts which is endowed with saṃsāric negativity. On the other hand, the formation of words concerns the beginningless conceptualization process.

The difference between the third and the fourth dimension lies in the causes of words that the prose notes: the cause of the third dimension is the *anusamarāṇa* (recollection), while the fourth is *vāsanā* (imprints). In other words, recollection indicates that attachment/grasping of concepts involves intentional efforts, whereas imprints show the conceptualization process does not necessarily require an effort. However, regardless of whether there are efforts or not, words of conceptualization arise due to the imprints in the consciousness seed, which is influenced and ripened by saṃsāric negativity. And that negativity, which fuels the rebirth, comes from the grasping of *prapañca*. In this regard, *prapañca* underpins the basis of the conceptualization process.

Table 1. Morphological structure of compounds with *prapañca*.

Compounds		Morphological Structure						
Anādikālaprapañcadauṣṭhulyavicitravipākavikalpavāsana	Anādikāla			Prapañca	Dauṣṭhulya	Vicitra	Vipāka	Vikalpa vāsana
Anādikālaprapañcābhiniveśadauṣṭhulyasvabijavāsana	Anādikāla			Prapañca	Abhiniveśa-dauṣṭhulya	Svabīja		Vāsana
Anādikāladauṣṭhulyavikalpaprapañcavāsana	Anādikāla	Dauṣṭhulya	Vikalpa	Prapañca				Vāsana
Anādikālaprapañcadauṣṭhulyavikalpavāsana	Anādikāla			Prapañca	Dauṣṭhulya		Vikalpa	Vāsana 2
Anādikālaprapañcadauṣṭhulyarūpavāsana	Anādikāla			Prapañca	Dauṣṭhulya	Rūpa		Vāsana
Anādikālavividhaprapañcadauṣṭhulyavāsana	Anādikāla	Vividha		Prapañca	Dauṣṭhulya			Vāsana
Anādikālaprapañcadauṣṭhulyavicitravāsana	Anādikāla			Prapañca	Dauṣṭhulya	Vicitra		Vāsana
Anādikālaprapañcavikalpavāsanaḍauṣṭhulya	Anādikāla			Prapañca	Vikalpa		Vāsana	Dauṣṭhulya
Anādikālaprapañcadauṣṭhulyavāsana	Anādikāla			Prapañca	Dauṣṭhulya			Vāsana 3
Anādikālavividhaprapañcavikalpavā	Anādikāla	Vividha		Prapañca			Vikalpa	
Anādikālaprapañcaviṣayavāsana	Anādikāla			Prapañca		Viśaya		Vāsana
Anādikālavākprapañcavāsana	Anādikāla			Prapañca		Vāda		Vāsana
Anādikālaprapañcadauṣṭhulyasvaprativikalpa	Anādikāla			Prapañca	Dauṣṭhulya		Svaprati	Vikalpa
Bāhyacittadṛṣyavikalpānādikālaprapañca ³⁶	Bāhyacittadṛṣya	Vikalpa	Anādikāla	Prapañca				
Vikalpaanādikālaprapañcadarśana	Vikalpa	Anādikāla		Prapañca		Darśana		
Anādikālaprapañcavāsana	Anādikāla			Prapañca				Vāsana
Anādikālaprapañcadauṣṭhulya	Anādikāla			Prapañca	Dauṣṭhulya			
Anādikālabhāvābhāvaprapañca	Anādikāla	Bhāvābhāva		Prapañca				
Svacittadṛṣyavikalpaprapañca	Svacittadṛṣya	Vikalpa		Prapañca				
Sarvadṛṣṭiprapañcavikalpa			Sarvadṛṣṭi	Prapañca			Vikalpa	
Jalpaprapañca		Jalpa		Prapañca				
Vikalpaprapañca ³⁷		Vikalpa		Prapañcā				4
Sarvaprapañca		Sarva		Prapañca				2
Prapañcavāsana				Prapañca				Vāsana
Prapañcā				Prapañca				

3.4. Relation with *Vāsanā*

Another issue that the compound analysis raises is the relationship between *vāsanā* and *prapañca*. As we mentioned earlier, the imprints of *prapañca* are consequent to *vikalpa* (conceptualization). However, the direct relation between *prapañca* and *vāsanā* has not been clarified. According to the compounds collected in Table 1, *prapañca* closely associates with three words—*anādikāla*, *dauṣṭhulya*, and *vāsanā*, and the word sequence in compounds shows *anādikāla* coming first, then *prapañca*, *dauṣṭhulya*, and the last one is *vāsanā*.

To analyze a Sanskrit compound, the foremost step is to clarify the grammatical relationship between constituents by analyzing the morphological layers in a compound. This step will determine the semantic association between constituents and contribute to a clearer and more accurate understanding of both the term *prapañca* and the meaning of the compound.

According to John Dunne’s analysis of the two basic forms of imprints (*vāsanā*) as (1) “those that are ‘placed’ (*āhita*) in the storehouse by experiences”, and (2) “those that are innate or ‘beginningless’ (*anādi*)”, it is reasonable to take the second form of imprints which is in relation to “beginningless” into account. In the first layer of a *prapañca* compound, we can thus consider an attributive relation between *anādikāla* and *vāsanā*.³⁸ With this in mind, a *Karmadhāraya* compound³⁹ indicates a meaning as “beginningless imprints/perfuming”.

Then, the second layer of the compound is constructed by *prapañca*, *dauṣṭhulya* (saṃsāric negativity), and *vāsanā* (perfuming/imprints). There could be two ways of division of this compound: (1) *prapañca* [*dauṣṭhulya vāsanā*], and (2) [*prapañca dauṣṭhulya*] *vāsanā*. The linguistics feature and traces from commentary tell that the second reading should be adopted in this context. There are three reasons that we can consider. First, in terms of the linguistic feature of *prapañca* and *dauṣṭhulya*, *prapañca* is a substantive noun while *vāsanā*, distinctively, is a verbal noun; thus, the first two constituents tend to be bound (see layer 3 in the diagram). For another thing, the phrase *spro pa’i gnas ngan len* shown in Jñānaśrībhadrā’s commentary on *Lañka* survived in Tibetan indicates that *spro pa* (*prapañca*) and *gnas ngan len* (*dauṣṭhulya*) become associated through a genitive relationship, which means “the saṃsāric negativity of *prapañca*”⁴⁰ Moreover, with regard to saṃsāric negativity (*dauṣṭhulya*), which mostly appears between *prapañca* and *vāsanā* in the compound, it most likely assumes a Yogācāra account, whereby “the cycle perpetuates itself through karmic traces”.⁴¹ In this regard, the relation of constituents in the third layer would be read as appositional or attributive, meaning “the saṃsāric negative *prapañca*,” or “the *prapañca* which is the saṃsāric negativity”.⁴²

<i>anādikāla</i>	[<i>prapañca dauṣṭhulya vāsanā</i>]	layer 1
	[<i>prapañca dauṣṭhulya</i>] <i>vāsanā</i>	layer 2
	<i>prapañca dauṣṭhulya</i>	layer 3

After clarifying the grammatical structures of layer 1 and layer 2, a problem arises concerning the relationship between *prapañca* (which is saṃsāric negativity) and *vāsanā*. It is important to outline all possible grammatical relationships between these two constituents to identify and determine the most reasonable interpretation within the context of the *Lañkāvatāra Sūtra*.

According to Apte, the word *vāsanā* is a verbal noun meaning perfuming or imprinting, which derives from the verbal root $\sqrt{vās}$.⁴³ According to Sanskrit grammar, there could be the following possible interpretations:

1. Instrumental *Tatpuruṣa*
Prapañcena vāsanā, meaning perfuming by means of *prapañca*.
2. Ablative *Tatpuruṣa*
Prapañcāt vāsanā, meaning the *vāsanā* from *prapañca*.
3. Accusative *Tatpuruṣa*
Prapañcaṃ vāsanā, meaning *prapañca* is what is being perfumed (“perfuming performed on *vāsanā* as its object”).

4. *Dative Tatpuruṣa*
Prapañcāya vāsanā, meaning perfuming for the purpose of producing *prapañca*.
5. *Locative Tatpuruṣa*
Prapañce vāsanā, meaning the *vāsanā* located in *prapañca*.
6. *Genitive Tatpuruṣa*
Prapañcasya vāsanā, meaning the *vāsanā* of *prapañca*, which could indicate that the *vāsanā* is the cause or source of *prapañca* (as in, “the imprints for [the arisal of] *prapañca*”), or that the *vāsanā* is coming from *prapañca* (as in the imprints that have been placed by *prapañca*).
7. *Karmadhāraya*, meaning the *vāsanā* that is *prapañca*.
8. *Dvandva*, *prapañca* and *vāsanā*

To identify the relationship between *vāsanā* and the constituents preceded, we need to have a look at other applications of *vāsanā* in *Laiika*. For example, here is a statement in which the position of *prapañca* is substituted by *nagara* (city).

*sā ca nagarākṛtir anādikālanagarabījavāsanābhiniveśāt khyāti
tacca nagaram nānagaram na nagaram*⁴⁴

“And the image of the city appears due to fixation on the seed-*vāsanā* for [cognizing] the city from beginningless time. And that city is not a non-city, nor is it a city”.

According to this message, the *nagara-bīja vāsanā* is a karmic trace or imprint that prompts the appearance in cognition of an image identified as a city, but that imprint itself is presumably the result of previous experience of what is identified as a city. Thus, the relationship between the imprints and the city is reciprocal. In other words, the formation of imprints entails a cyclical process as a representing and re-enhancing mode, in which *nagara-vāsanā* indicates cognition by identifying a mental image as a city. In this regard, the imprints that come from previous cognition of a city can result in the present recognition of the city.

In addition, the formation of the notion of city is further represented and re-enhanced in a cyclic manner. The city presented in mind is not a real city nor an unreal city; instead, it is a mental event caused by a cyclically conceptualized operation. The cognition of the city resulted from a notion of the city. And, the notion of a city is re-produced and re-enhanced in the recognition of a city, in which the process leaves imprints of conceptual tendency behind. Therefore, it is possible to say the structure of a *vāsanā* with a genitive case preceded by a non-case noun conveys a relationship evincing mutual influences and productions between *vāsanā* and the noun.

*evameva mahāmate anādikālatīrthyaprapañcavāsanābhiniviṣṭāḥ ekatvānyatvāstitva-
nāstitvavādān abhiniviṣante svacittadṛśyamātrānavadhāritamatayaḥ*⁴⁵

“In this very way, Oh Mahāmati, those who are fixated on the beginningless imprints for the *prapañca* discourse of the Tīrthikas are fixated on discourses about identity/difference and existence/non-existence, [and as such] they have opinions that have not determined that [the objects of experience are actually] one’s own mind [presented as] perceptual objects”.

In accordance with the example of *nagara*, the compound *anādikāla-tīrthya-prapañcavāsanā-abhiniviṣṭa* in the example above maintains the same morphological structure as *anādikāla-nagarabīja-vāsanā-abhiniveśā*. Therefore, it is reasonable to interpret the relationship between *prapañca-vāda* and *vāsanā* as a genitive *Tatpuruṣa*, meaning the words-imprints are the genitive object of *prapañca*; specifically, the imprints and *prapañca* are related in a mutually re-enforced mode. Imprints are left by mental activities that *prapañca* involved in (imprints result from *prapañca*), whilst *prapañca* leads to imprints, being interconnected as the cause and effect in a cyclic continuum of *saṃsāra*. In this regard, amongst the eight possible interpretations above, the sixth (genitive *Tatpuruṣa*) that is most relevant means

that *prapañca* could cause *vāsanā* to occur, and at the same time, the *vāsanā* is the latent propensity that causes *prapañca* to arise.

3.5. About Representation of the Mind

Some negative aspects of *prapañca* include obstacles to the true awareness of visible objects as representations of the mind. *Lañka* see true awareness as having to do with the use of language.

jalpaprapañcābhiratā hi bālās tattve na kurvanti matiṃ viśālām/

jalpo hi traidhātukaduḥkhayonis tattvaṃ hi duḥkhasya vināśahetuḥ/ /3.93/ /⁴⁶

“Indeed, childish people who are of verbiage and *prapañca* do not think extensively about the ultimate. Indeed, verbiage is the origin of suffering in the three worlds, and the ultimate is the cause for being free from suffering”.

This text makes it clear that one of *prapañca*'s detrimental consequences is its propensity to acquire discourses, words, and names. And because of the verbiage propensity that childish people have, they fail to comprehend the ultimate. The following dialogue between Mahāmati and Buddha explains the erroneous nominalization by emphasizing that the awareness and the realization of representations of reality as mind should never be confused with a verbiage name of mind-only. The basic idea is that when one first adopts words and names, the mind has already conceptualized objects as external existence and has designated a name upon them. In this regard, one is only concerned with forms or labels of references, thus further making judgments of the reference in terms of whether the reference is existent or non-existent. Despite one's assertion that the mind is all that exists, it is still the name of the ultimate awareness instead of the awareness itself. True awareness should be a realization that awareness does not perceive an object that is taken as its focus because there are only representations of the mind, and there is even nonperception of the awareness, either.

Mahāmati specifically questioned the Buddha as to how it was possible that nothing could sustain awareness because he believed awareness exists wherever there is a knowing object. If one ignores individuality, generality, plurality, and self-nature, then the awareness that has nothing to focus on cannot possibly be awareness; rather, it is simply non-awareness. In other words, Mahāmati thinks that awareness should refer to a knowing object that evinces individuality, generality, multiplicity, and self-nature. Otherwise, knowledge is another word for non-awareness.

punar api mahāmatir āha/yat punar idam uktaṃ bhagavatā—yadā tv ālambyam arthaṃ nopalabhate jñānaṃ tadā vijñaptimātravyavasthānaṃ bhavati/vijñapter grāhyābhāvād grāhakasyāpy agrahaṇaṃ bhavati/tadagrahaṇān na pravartate jñānaṃ vikalpasamśabditam/ tat kiṃ punar bhagavan bhāvānāṃ svasāmānyalakṣaṇānanyavaicitryānavabodhān nopalabhate jñānaṃ?atha svasāmānyalakṣaṇavaicitryabhāvasvabhāvābhibhavān nopalabhate jñānaṃ/atha kuḍyakataṣṭapraprākārabhūjalapavanāgnivyavahitātīdūrasāmīpyān nopalabhate jñānaṃ jñeyam/atha bālāndhavṛddhayogāndriyāṇāṃ jñeyārthaṃ nopalabhate jñānaṃ/tad yadi bhagavan svasāmānyalakṣaṇānanyavaicitryānavabodhān nopalabhate jñānaṃ, na tarhi bhagavan jñānaṃ vaktavyam, ajñānaṃ/etad bhagavan yad vidyamānaṃ arthaṃ nopalabhate/atha svasāmānyalakṣaṇavaicitryabhāvasvabhāvābhibhavān nopalabhate jñānaṃ, tad ajñānaṃ eva bhagavan na jñānaṃ/jñeye⁴⁷ sati bhagavan jñānaṃ pravartate, nābhāvāt/tadyogāc ca jñeyasya jñānaṃ ity ucyate/⁴⁸

“And again, Mahāmati said: But there is this that the Blessed one said, namely, that when awareness is not perceiving an object which is taken as its focus, then there is the establishment of mere representation (*vijñaptimātra*). Because the representation has no object to be grasped, there is the no apprehension of a grasper also. Since there is no apprehension of that, an awareness called ‘conceptual’ does not occur. Also, the Blessed one, does awareness not perceive [objects] because there is no cognition of the non-different variegation of particular and general characteristics, or does awareness not perceive [objects] without realizing of the

nature and variations of their particular and general characteristics? Or is it that awareness does not perceive an object to be known because of the proximity or distance of what is obscured by walls, mats, ramparts, fences, the earth, the water, the wind, or fire? Or is it due to having the senses of one who is infantile, blind, old, and so on that awareness does not perceive an object to be known? If, Blessed One, awareness does not perceive [objects] because there is no cognition of the non-different variegation of particular and general characteristics, then, Blessed One, it should not be called awareness, [it should be called] non-awareness. This is not perceiving a presently existing object, Blessed One. Because of not realizing the nature and variations of [objects'] particular and general characteristics, awareness does not perceive [objects], then it is just non-awareness; it is not awareness, Blessed One. When there is an object to be known, awareness occurs, Blessed one; it does not occur due to something non-existent. And because of its connection with the object to be known, it is called 'awareness'."

The Buddha answers in the following way.

*Bhagavān āha/na hi tan mahāmate evam ajñānaṃ bhavati/jñānam eva tan mahāmate, nājñānam/na caitat saṃdhāyoktaṃ mayā—yadā tvālambyam arthaṃ nopalabhate jñānaṃ tadā vijñaptimātravyavasthānaṃ bhavatīti/kiṃ tu svacittadrśyamātrāvabodhāt sadasator bāhyabhāvābhāvāḥ jñānaṃ apy arthaṃ nopalabhate/tadanupalambhāḥ jñānajñeyayor apravṛtṭiḥ/vimokṣatrayānugamāḥ jñānasyāpy anupalabdhiḥ/na ca tārkiḥ anādīkālabhāvābhāvaprapañcavāsītamātaya evaṃ prajānanti te cāprajānanto bāhyadravyasaṃsthānalakṣaṇabhāvābhāvāḥ kṛtvā vikalpasyāpravṛtṭiṃ cittamātratāṃ nirdeśyanti/ātmatmīyalakṣaṇagrāhābhīniveśābhīniviṣṭāḥ svacittadrśyamātrānavabodhāḥ jñānaṃ jñeyam pratīkalkalpayanti/te ca jñānajñeyaprativīkalpanayā bāhyabhāvābhāvapravicayānupalabdher ucchedadrṣṭim āśriyante/*⁴⁹

"Said the Blessed One: Oh Mahāmati, it is not non-awareness in this way; it is just awareness, and not non-awareness, Mahāmati. It is not intending this, that I said the following: when awareness does not perceive an object which is taken as its focus, then there is the establishment of mere representation. Rather, awareness indeed is not perceiving objects because, through recognizing that [apparent objects] are merely one's own mind presented as perceptible, there are no external objects, whether real or unreal. And through the nonperception of those [external objects], there is no occurrence of awareness and what is to be known. And through realizing the three forms of liberation, there is also the nonperception even of awareness. Also, the Sophists (*tārkiḥ*), with their minds perfumed with *prapañca* about existence and non-existence from beginningless time, do not know wisely in this way. And not wisely knowing this, having construed [mere-representation] as the absence of external substance, shape, characteristics, and existence, would teach that mind-only is just the non-occurrence of conceptuality. Attached by the attachment and grasping to the characteristics of 'I' and 'Mine', they conceptualize awareness and objects of awareness due to not recognizing that [what is appearing] is merely one's mind presented as perceptible. And due to conceptualizing awareness and objects of awareness, they resort to a nihilistic view because they do not perceive the distinction between the existence and non-existence of external things".

The verses 3.58, 3.59, and 3.60 following this dialogue briefly summarize the response to Mahāmati's inquiry, which highlights the aforementioned wrong views because of non-awareness. I did not list verses here because the content of these verses has been explicitly exhibited by the passage above.

Then, the Buddha's answer continues on as below:

Punar aparaṃ mahāmate bālaprthagjanā anādīkālaprapañcadauṣṭhulyasvapratīkalkalpanānāṭake nṛtyantaḥ svasiddhāntanayadeśanāyām akuśalāḥ svacittadrśyabāhyabhāvālakṣa-

*ṇābhiniṣṭhā upāyadeśanāpāṭham abhinivīsante, na svasiddhāntanayaṃ cātuskoṭikanaya-
viśuddhaṃ prativibhāvayanti*⁵⁰

“Furthermore, Mahāmati, those childish ordinary people, who are dancing the dance of their own conceptualizations due to the saṃsāric negativity of beginningless *prapañca*, are unskilled in the teaching of their own philosophical system and attached to the characteristics of the external things that are [actually] their own minds presented as perceptible. As such they are attached to the teaching of means, and they do not cultivate a form of their own philosophical system that has been purified by the use of the four options”.

The Buddha’s response conveys a crucial message that the awareness that is not perceiving an object, which is taken as its focus, is the actual awareness because the realization—awareness is not perceiving—entails a cognition: visible objects are merely a representation of the mind, and nothing exists externally. It is because there is not the kind of external object that could be perceived, nor is there the awareness whose perceiving should rely on objects. Moreover, because there is no external object to be perceived as awareness, there is neither the awareness of objects nor the perception of awareness.

Buddha uses the Sophists⁵¹ as an example to show how true awareness should be understood. On the one hand, Sophists construe the representation of the mind as an absence of external objects and, therefore, claim that the mind-only is just the non-occurrence of conceptuality. This comprehension of the representation of the mind falls into the problematics of external–internal duality and nihilism. The Sophists’ dualistic conceptualization concerns their distinction between the mind as internal and objects to be known as external. The negation of external objects presupposes the existence of an internal mind, creating a dualistic conceptualization of reality. However, the true approach to mind-only should be nondual.

Second, the Sophists conceptualize both awareness and the object of awareness due to the lack of understanding of objects as merely mental representations presented as perceptible in the mind. This is because the Sophists fail to understand the structural relationship between external objects and the internal mind as the essential problem of dualistic mental afflictions. Their attachment to the negation of objects of awareness indicates their attachment to awareness itself. However, according to the Buddha’s answer to Mahāmati’s question, both awareness and the object of awareness belong to the category of representations of mind. There are neither real nor unreal external objects to be perceived; therefore, there is neither the perception of external objects nor the perception of the occurrence of awareness. Through such a realization of the nonperception, there is even a nonperception of awareness. A realization of the structural relationship between awareness and the object of awareness contributes to the understanding of the nonperception of awareness, which is a nondual awareness. This is because, in negating the existence of the object of awareness, the existence of awareness itself, as the dualistic pair of the object, is simultaneously negated.⁵²

The Buddha further implies the causes of the Sophist’s misunderstanding, which is the attachment to the self and its belongings and the perfuming effect from *prapañca*. As a result, they mistakenly take external objects with various characteristics as mere representations of the mind and attach them to only the means of teaching.

Two key messages are notable, to put it briefly. First, it is important to distinguish between the Sophist’s understanding of mind-only and the real meaning of mind-only. Sophists use the term “only seeing one’s own mind”⁵³ (*svacittadṛṣyamātra*) to distinguish between the categories of “mind” and “external objects”, as well as between existence and non-existence, rather than pursuing real awareness of mental representations. They fail to understand that the representation of the mind does not concern the absence of external objects; rather, it is about the nonperception of both awareness and objects of awareness. Second, the Sophists’ claim of mind-only, which is a conceptualization process that results in nihilism and the discrimination of mind and external objects, should never be an appropriate approach to the real awareness of the representation of mind; instead,

Sophists' teaching merely keeps one distant from the real and truthful mind-only, and their teaching of the mind-only is not only incorrect but even worse than teaching nothing.

3.6. Relation with Consciousnesses

Another important factor is how the imprints of *prapañca* affect consciousness (*vijñāna*). In particular, the message that follows shows how the consequences of imprints of *prapañca* influence consciousness.

*tatra khyātivijñānaṃ mahāmate acintyavāsanāpariṇāmahetukam/vastuprativikalpavijñānaṃ ca mahāmate viṣayavikalpahetukam anādikālaprapañcavāsanāhetukam ca//*⁵⁴

“In this regard, Mahāmati, consciousness of appearances has as its cause the evolution of inconceivable imprints, and the consciousness that constructs real things has as its cause the conceptualization of objects, and it also has as its cause the beginningless *prapañca*-imprint”.

In the Buddha's response about the divisions and nature of consciousness,⁵⁵ *khyāti* consciousness⁵⁶ and the *vastuprativikalpa* consciousness⁵⁷ mutually function as cause to each other, but the two kinds of consciousness arise based on other different conditions. *khyāti-vijñāna* refers to the first five activated consciousness, whilst the *vastuprati* consciousness is designated to the sixth and seventh consciousness.⁵⁸ For one thing, the prose specifies the distinctions between the *khyāti-vijñāna* and *vastuprativikalpa-vijñāna*.⁵⁹ For another thing, it points out different conditions that give rise to the operation of the two types of consciousnesses. One of the factors that activate the object-discriminating consciousness (*vastuprativikalpa-vijñāna*) in this context is the imprint of *prapañca*. As *prapañca* happens preceded *vikalpa* (the conceptualization of objects), *prapañca* could be understood as the circumstance or mental framework that produces the distinction between subject and object.

*anādikālavividhaprapañcadauṣṭhulyavāsanāvāsitaḥ ālayavijñānasamśabdito 'vidyāvāsanabhūmijaiḥ saptabhir vijñānaiḥ saha mahodadhitaramgavan nityam avyucchinnaśarīraḥ pravartate anityatādoṣarahita ātmavādavinivṛtto 'tyantaprakṛtipariśuddhaḥ//*⁶⁰

“Influenced by the imprints of saṃsāric negativities of the variegated beginningless *prapañca*, the so-called *Ālaya* consciousness—which is the uninterrupted constituent element as itself, along with the other seven consciousness—which produced the imprints of ignorance, like waves arisen on the great ocean. [The constituent element itself] is free from the fault of impermanence and is devoid of the word of self, whose absolute nature is supreme purity”.

In this prose, the relation between *prapañca* and *Ālaya-vijñāna* is explicitly uttered, which is implied by the word “*avāsita*” (influenced by). *Ālaya-vijñāna* has an absolutely pure nature that is free of self-grasping. Although if *Ālaya-vijñāna* is interrupted and immutable, the effect of *prapañca* causes the seven *vijñāns*, which exhibit the propensity for ignorance, to emerge. It is important to emphasize that while *prapañca* can activate the seven consciousnesses, which leads to ignorance, *prapañca* is powerless to change the pure nature of *Ālaya-vijñāna*.⁶¹ Because the writing does not demonstrate a direct connection between *prapañca* and ignorance, it would be risky to assert that the imprints about *prapañca* result in ignorance or that the imprints about *prapañca* are ignorant. The most likely interpretation here is the following: The imprints about *prapañca* effect on eight consciousnesses, but the pure nature of the *Ālaya-vijñāna* (the eighth consciousness) cannot be altered; in addition, the arising of the other seven consciousnesses, under the impacts of *prapañca*, becomes the base of unknowing and leads to ignorance. Moreover, regarding the originally pure nature of *Ālaya-vijñāna*, as the prose has shown, one of the necessities to avoid the production of defilements and to maintain the pure nature of consciousness is to be free from the influence of the imprints of *prapañca*. This utterance evinces an insight for the realization of liberation which is about an antidote for ignorance.

3.7. The Elimination of *Prapañca*

As mentioned earlier, *prapañca* consists of negativity (as being modified by *dauṣṭhulya*) and is continuously entangled with the cyclic rebirth. This sort of feature is closely associated with ignorance and suffering. In terms of the Buddhist purpose for liberation, the elimination of suffering, uprooting ignorance and the cause of ignorance are supposed to be the fundamental antidote. The conversations in *Lañka* propose some hints for the eradication of *prapañca*, which concerns the ideal mental status and the antidote Buddhists are supposed to look for.

*ye punaranye mahāmate śramaṇā vā brāhmaṇā vā niḥsvabhāvaghanālātacakraṅgandharvanagarānutpādamāyāmarīcyudakacandrasvapnasvabhāvabāhyacittadyāvikalpānādikālaprapañcadarśanena svacittavikalpapratyayavinivṛttirahitāḥ parikalpitābhidhānalakṣyalakṣaṇābhidheyarahitā dehabhogapratīṣṭhāsamālayavijñānaviśayagrāhyagrāhakavisamyuktam nirābhāsagocaram utpādasthitibhaṅgavarjyam svacittotpādānugatam vibhāvaviśyanti, nacirātte mahāmate bodhisattvā mahāsattvāḥ saṃsāranirvāṇasamatāprāptā bhaviṣyanti*⁶²

“Furthermore, Mahāmati, those monks and brahmans, by perceiving the beginningless *prapañca* which leads to the conceptualization of visible objects perceptible outside the mind, with [an understanding of] the nature of oneself like a dream, a moon in water, an illusory mirage, the unreal city Gandharva, a wheel of firebrand, and the cloud which have no essence, understand that such occurrences is merely one’s own mind. Without the occurrence of the conceptualization in one’s own mind, in avoidance of names, the defined and definitions, discourse and conceptualization, without the subject-object dualistic appearance in *Ālaya* consciousness which is the store of form and body, without arising, sustaining and cessation in a sphere of no fallacious appearance (without any appearance), Oh Mahāmati, they will shortly become the great beings—Bodhisattvas, accomplishing the synthesizing of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*”.

This discourse highlights the significant role that the elimination of *prapañca* plays on the path to enlightenment. For one thing, the perception of *prapañca* as a recognition of the negativity of *prapañca* could lead to the avoidance of words, names, and definitions, which concerns the illusory appearance in the mind as incorrect recognition of something outside the mind. The second benefit of the elimination relates to the prevention of dualistic conceptualization, especially the subject–object duality. The subject–object duality comes along with the *Ālaya* consciousness (not the nature of *Ālaya*, but after being activated, there are other consciousness evolving from it). Having been free from the dualistic consciousness, there appears a sphere without fallacious appearance regarding arising, sustaining, and cessation. Indeed, we still need further exploration to determine whether there could be an underlying causal chain between the grammatical chunks. Nevertheless, it is possible to contend that the eradication of *prapañca* is one of the necessities to achieve an enlightened state. Also, based on the mental defilements listed, in aspects ranging from language definition, the thinking of objects as things outside of the mind, the subject–object dualistic conceptualization, and the arising, sustaining, and cessation of appearance, it is possible that the eradication of *prapañca* contributes to the elimination of defilements and the accomplishment of the ultimate enlightenment.

4. Summary

This paper focuses on a few key issues regarding the concept of *prapañca*, including its defining characteristics, its relationship to *vikalpa*, its association with linguistic applications, and its connection with the mechanism. It is worth noting that the current study of *prapañca* in *Lañka* clarifies its role as an innate mental affliction rooted in dualistic conceptualization, whose elimination is a necessary condition for the experience of nondual awareness and the realization of emptiness that transcends linguistic and conceptual constructions.

In specific, this study includes the following essential aspects: (1) *Prapañca* differs from *vikalpa*, which relates to the subject–object conceptualization process and is likely a

fundamental mechanism for mental operation; (2) it exerts significant influences on seed consciousness, which can activate other consciousness but cannot alter the pure nature of the seed; (3) *prapañca* is innate, which exhibits the essence of beginninglessness and is structurally conditioned by negativities; (4) given that language is a key conceptualization tool, it may have something to do with language formation, language use, and the impact of language on consciousness.

The characteristics of *prapañca* concern beginningless and saṃsāric negativities. Non-saṃsāric beings, including the enlightened Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, are devoid of birth and rebirth; therefore, the imprints of *prapañca* and *prapañca* itself could not affect them. The feature implies that only when one is free from *prapañca* could one obtain enlightenment—a state devoid of ignorance and sufferings of saṃsāra. In addition, an analysis of *prapañca*'s relation with conceptualization (*vikalpa*), subject–object duality, and mind-only (*citta-matra*) helps in approaching an ontological inquiry—“what is *prapañca*?” On the one hand, *prapañca* not only distinguishes from conceptualization but also appears to be the cause that leads to conceptualization. It is a mechanism that shapes and reshapes the categorization and conceptualization process. However, it is noticeable that features and functions of *prapañca* that have been articulated in *Lañka* are endowed with fluidity and flexibility because of the mediation of “*vāsanā*” (imprint/tendency). With this in mind, it is risky to pin down a single determinative definition of *prapañca* without further clarification of the relationship between *prapañca* and *vāsanā*. Thus far, amongst the potential grammatical implications, it is reasonable to maintain that *prapañca* and *vāsanā* evince a mutually reinforcing relation, simultaneously operating as the cause and result for each other, and this relationship connects *prapañca* with the foundational operation of mind and consciousness. This reading unfolds the significance of the role that *prapañca* plays in framing the structure of the conceptualization mechanism.

Another important aspect of understanding *prapañca* is its association with the representation of the mind. According to *Lañka*, Sophists attach to words, names and the concept of self and self-belongs, thus giving rise to the wrong view of mind-only. The Buddha's answer indicates that, because of the perfuming of *prapañca*, Sophists not only conceptualize both the awareness and the object of awareness but also simply consider the representation of the mind just as an absence of external objects. Their means of teaching via linguistics application become a hindrance to true awareness, as the language used in Sophists' teaching of the mind-only refers to nothing but concepts without real reference. Also, according to the Buddha, real awareness of the representation of the mind is a nonperception of awareness due to the absence of both awareness and the object of awareness. This emphasis on the nonperception of awareness induces a tendency to transcend “mind-only”, potentially bringing the voice of Madhyamaka with a focus on the empty nature of concepts and conceptualization and giving rise to the understanding of the lack of inherent existence for both awareness and the object or awareness.

Given the complexity of the language application of *Lañka*, which shows an extent of the fluidity of the meaning of *prapañca* in the textual conversations, it might be necessary to further address the meaning of *prapañca* by referring to other influential Buddhist treaties around the 4th century. So far, it is undeniable that the meaning of *prapañca* still shows variations. Regardless of the wide range of thesis that *prapañca* might associate with, it is crucial to be aware that its coexistence with other important notions in the Yogācāra system reveals the value of further clarification and illustrations.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- 1 Translated by Dr. John D. Dunne. I want to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Dunne's generous help with the Sanskrit translations from *Lañka* in this paper and his assistance with the edition.
- 2 The transliteration comes from the database of Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages (GRETIL), SUB Göttingen. See the webpage: https://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/corpus/transformations/html/sa_nAgArjuna-mUlamadhyamakArikA.htm (accessed on 2 June 2024).
- 3 Translated by Dr. John D. Dunne. *Prapañca* was translated as conceptual structuring. Mark Siderits translated the verse as "Liberation is attained through the destruction of actions and defilements; actions and defilements arise because of falsifying conceptualizations; those arise from hypostatization; but hypostatization is extinguished in emptiness", in which *prapañca* was translated as hypostatization. Other translation choices include "proliferation", "expansion", "elaboration", etc.
- 4 According to Akira Saito's analysis of *Prapañca* in the piece "*Prapañca* in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*", he mentioned that Nāgārjuna considered it as the root cause of defilements. The usage thereof in MMK reveals that *prapañca* represents "the mental activity of 'conceptualization', objects of mental activity, and the instruments of mental activity". See (Saito 2019).
- 5 For detailed analysis about the meaning of *prapañca* in Pali canon. See (Ñāṇananda 1997, p. 5).
- 6 The dictionary edited by Edgerton briefly introduced the ambiguity that the term *prapañca* conceals, see (Edgerton 1953, pp. 380–81). This information can also be found in Suzuki's *An Index to the Lañkāvatāra-sūtra*. See (Suzuki 2000).
- 7 Jinchuan Wan's serial of works about *prapañca* underlines its connotation on speech act, see (Wan 1984). Bei Wang brought up the usage of *prapañca* in the form of imprint in conceptualization and world-making through the mediation of language, see (Wang 2022).
- 8 Saito's article focuses on *prapañca*'s meaning in the tradition of Madhyamak, but he introduced Yogācāra's interpretation and drew us attention to their similarities and differences. See (Saito 2019).
- 9 For more detailed discussion about this issue, please see (Lugli 2011, p. 137).
- 10 In terms of the current study of *Lañka*, a bibliographical summary by Florin Deleanu supplies detailed information about the state of scholarship on the text. Dharmakṣema 曇無讖's *Lengqie jing* 楞伽經, in four scrolls was said to have been translated in 414, which attribution and date are found in the *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶紀 (T49.84b7) by Fei Changfang 費長房 in 597. However, this version of translation is not survived and is widely regarded as a false attribution, according to Florin Deleanu. There are three versions of Chinese translation survived today, respectively the four volumes *Lengqiebaduoluo bao jing* 楞伽阿跋多羅寶經 by Guṇabhadra 求那拔陀羅 (394–468), the ten volume *Ru Lengqie jing* 入楞伽經 by Bodhiruci (d. 527), and seven scroll *Dasheng ru Lengqie jing* 大乘入楞伽經 by Śikṣānanda 實叉難陀 (652–710). See (Deleanu 2018).
- 11 Nanjiō's critical edition of *Saddharmalañkāvatāra* is based on four Sanskrit manuscripts, respectively the MS in the royal Asiatic Society, London, the MS in the University Library, Cambridge, the MS in the possession of Rev E. Kawaguchi, acquired in Nepal, and the MS in the possession of J. Takakusu, acquired in Nepal. See (Nanjiō 1956). The information of the Sanskrit manuscript can be found in the Digital Library of University of Cambridge. <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-ADD-00915/1> (access on 2 February 2024).
- 12 More detailed information about the process of editing the text can be found in (Nanjiō 1956, p. 7).
- 13 The Website of Digital Sanskrit Buddhist Canon: <http://www.dsbcproject.org> (access on 25 April 2022), and GRETIL: <http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil.html#org61346> (access on 25 April 2022). Vaidya's edition see (Vaidya 1963).
- 14 More details about this debate can be found in (Lugli 2010).
- 15 Lugli's idea about the role of *Lañka* can be found in (Lugli 2011, p. 2).
- 16 This argument and more details can be found in (Lugli 2011, p. 2).
- 17 Jacques May's edition of Prasannapadā (Candrakīrti and May 1959), 175n562: "Prapañca, littéralement 'expansion', tib. spros pa, me paraît désigner non pas tant la fonction de pensée discursive, correspondant, sous divers aspects, à vikalpa, vitarka, vicāra, que l'opération de cette fonction ('expansion', différenciation du réel global en objets et en concepts distincts. . .), et le résultat de cette opération, c'est-à-dire le monde constitué en objets et concepts distincts". Translation from Birgit Kellner: "*Prapañca*, literally 'expansion', tib. spros pa, seems to me to designate not so much the function of discursive thought, corresponding, in various aspects, to vikalpa, vitarka, vicāra, as the operation of this function ('expansion', differentiation of the global real into distinct objects and concepts. . .), and the result of this operation, i.e., the world constituted by distinct objects and concepts". I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Birgit Kellner for providing the translation of Jacques May and Lambert Schmithausen's interpretation.
- 18 This analysis can be found in (Ñāṇananda 1997, p. 5).
- 19 This argument can be found in (Ñāṇananda 1997, p. 127).
- 20 Saito's exploration sheds light on Nāgārjuna's idea about *prapañca*. See (Saito 2019).
- 21 For more discussion about contextualist semantics, see (Siderits 2019).
- 22 Lugli's exploration about the meaning of *prapañca* as differentiation can be found in (Lugli 2011, p. 143).
- 23 Lugli's reading on *prapañca* closely associates to language application. See (Lugli 2011, p. 143).

- 24 For the discussion about the usage of prapañca in early Yogācāra treatise, such as *Yogācārabūmi* and *Cintāmayībhūmi*, see (Wang 2022).
- 25 For more detailed discussion of prapañca in *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*, see (Wang 2022).
- 26 Edgerton's *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary* provide a brief explanation regarding a general menaing of the term *dauṣṭhulya*, see (Edgerton 1953, p. 272).
- 27 This interpretation of *vāsanā* can be found in (Buswell and Lopez 2013, p. 960). For more explanation, see (Tola and Dragonetti 2005).
- 28 The texts come from page 38 of (Nanjiō 1956). The *yasmāt sa* in the Tibetan version shows as *yasmān na*, which means "the cessation of the continuum is not [the cessation of that] from which it occurs". However, since the previous passage are talking about another type of *nirodha* (cessation), it makes more sense to follow Nanjiō's reading that took it as *sa* instead of *na*.
- 29 Nanjiō, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, page 38, line 5 to 8. See (Nanjiō 1956).
- 30 See footnote 39. According to Baosheng Huang, *Khyātivijñāna* is designated to the seed consciousness in *Laṅka's* discourse, while the *vastuṣratīvikalpa* refers to the *praṛṭti* consciousness, which the six consciousness(es) that are generated from the base consciousness.
- 31 Nanjiō, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, page 71, line 9 to 14. See (Nanjiō 1956).
- 32 *abhinivṛṣāt*. The ablative case in Sanskrit could be used to indicate reason and source.
- 33 The relationship between *vāsanā* (imprint) and prapañca will be addressed in the following section. The most possible relationship could be indicated by "of" in translation.
- 34 Nanjiō, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, page 86, line 3 to 5. See (Nanjiō 1956).
- 35 Nanjiō, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, page 86, line 10 to 13. See (Nanjiō 1956).
- 36 The original word is *niḥsvabhāvaghanālātacakragandharvanagarānutpādamāyāmarīcyudakacandrasvapnasvabhāvabāhyacitta-dṛśyavikalpānādīkālaprapañcadarśanena*. The compound could be segmented into *niḥsvabhā-vaghana-alātacakra-gandharvanagaraanutpādamāyāmarīci-udakacandra-svapna-svabhāva-bāhya-citta-dṛśya-vikalpa-anādīkāla-prapañca-darśanena*. Since constituents before *bāhya* could be separated as some instances to explain their lack of essence, and the *darśana* at the end participate in the sentence level meaning "perceive", the morphologically related constituents in this compounds left for prapañca is *bāhya-citta-dṛśya-vikalpa-anādīkāla-prapañca*. Therefore, merely this part was included in the table.
- 37 One of the compounds is *asadbhūtavikalpaprapañca*. Likewise, *asadbhūta* and *vikalpaprapañca* could be firstly separate as two trunks, and *vikalpaprapañca* is the most relevant part; thus it was counted.
- 36 The original word is *niḥsvabhāvaghanālātacakragandharvanagarānutpādamāyāmarīcyudakacandrasvapnasvabhāvabāhyacitta-dṛśyavikalpānādīkālaprapañcadarśanena*. The compound could be segmented into *niḥsvabhā-vaghana-alātacakra-gandharvanagaraanutpādamāyāmarīci-udakacandra-svapna-svabhāva-bāhya-citta-dṛśya-vikalpa-anādīkāla-prapañca-darśanena*. Since constituents before *bāhya* could be separated as some instances to explain their lack of essence, and the *darśana* at the end participate in the sentence level meaning "perceive", the morphologically related constituents in this compounds left for prapañca is *bāhya-citta-dṛśya-vikalpa-anādīkāla-prapañca*. Therefore, merely this part was included in the table.
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- 38 For more thorough dicussion about the meaning of *anādi* (beginningless), see (Dunne 2011).
- 39 Deshpante, *Samskr̥tasubodhinī: A Sanskrit Primer*, 267.
- 40 *de'i phyir thog ma med pa'i dus kyi spros pa'i gnas ngan len gyi bag chags rnam pa mang pos bsgos pa kun gzhi rnam*. From Jnanasribhadra. 'Phags pa lang kar gshogs pai grel pa'. In *bsTangyur* (sde dge), edited by Zhu chen tshul khirms rin chen, 121:4–525. Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Choedhey, Gyalwae Sungrab Partun Khang, 1982–1985. Accessed 28 February 2023. http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW23703_4018. [BDRC bdr: MW23703_4018].
- 41 For this reading, see (Lugli 2011, p. 127).
- 42 In other words, according to Sanskrit grammar, it is a *Karmadhāraya* compound. See (Deshpande 2014, p. 267).
- 43 Vaman Shivaram Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1419–1420. $\sqrt{vās}$ means 'to perfume'. *vāsanā* is a *vās-lyuṭ*, meaning *vāsanā* derives from *vās* with a *kṛt* affix, indicating a sense of verbal activity of perfuming.
- 44 Nanjiō, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, page 90, line 13 to 15. See (Nanjiō 1956).
- 45 Nanjiō, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, page 90, line 15 to 17. See (Nanjiō 1956).
- 46 Nanjiō, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, page 186, line 8 to 9. See (Nanjiō 1956). Barclay underlines the significance of the language issue that has been expanded in *Laṅka*. According to Barclay, *Laṅka* "sees the use of words in the form of discourse as a practical tool to direct the reader toward an experience to which the application of words is impossible, the internal realization of the truth. The sutra seeks to use words as a lever to detach individuals from attachment to the world by meeting certain problems in the minds of its ignorant readers and to destroy erroneous views which block realization. It seeks to drive the reader to the level on which he may become conversant with meaning rather than words". See (Barclay 1975).

- 47 Nanjiō's edition prints as *jñāye*, see Nanjiō, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, 170. According to the previous discussion, it makes more sense to consider it was a typo. *jñeye*, meaning the object of knowledge in locative case, grammatically aligns with the following passage.
- 48 Nanjiō, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, page 169, line 4 to 17, and page 170, line 1 to 2. See (Nanjiō 1956).
- 49 Nanjiō, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, page 170, line 7 to 17, and page 171, line 1 to 2. See (Nanjiō 1956).
- 50 Nanjiō, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, page 171, line 10 to 14. See (Nanjiō 1956).
- 51 The word "Sophist" was translated from *tarkikā*. This translation aims to maintain the connotation of Buddhist attitude towards non-Buddhists.
- 52 The Buddha's message about awareness as non-awareness, or knowledge as non-knowledge, can be further explored from philosophical perspectives. The passages here attempt to reveal true nondual awareness through negation. This approach demonstrates an effort to use linguistic discussion to evoke non-linguistic experience and to use conceptual mind to reveal the experience of non-dualistic awareness that transcends *prapañca* and subject–object duality.
- 53 See (Suzuki [1932] 1991, vol. 40, p. 147).
- 54 Nanjiō, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, 37, line 18 to 19, and 38, line 1 to 2.
- 55 According to what Buddha has expressed about the division of consciousness, there are three categories, and in details there are eight categories. The passage here refers to the latter two type of consciousness in three-category division. Nanjiō, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, 37.
- 56 Suzuki translated *khyāti-vijñāna* as perceiving consciousness. See (Suzuki [1932] 1991, vol. 40, p. 34).
- 57 Suzuki translated *vastuprativikalpa-vijñāna* as object-discriminating consciousness. See (Suzuki [1932] 1991, vol. 40, p. 34).
- 58 Huang Baosheng thinks *ākhyātivijñāna* (显现识 *xianxian shi*) refers to *Ālaya-vijñāna* which in contrast to the second type of consciousness—*vastuvikalpa-vijñāna* (分别事物识 *fenbie shiwu shi*). Also, according to him, the usage of *ākhyāsyati*, a future form from *ākhyā* meaning 'will explain', in the previous passages does not make sense. However, based on the context, despite the varied application of *ākhyā*, it is still clear that it refers to the perceiving consciousness. See (Huang 2011, vol. 9, p. 85).
- 59 Since the *khyāti* in this text is still different from *ākhyāti*, it is risky to simply regard the *khyātivijñāna* as *Ālaya-vijñāna*. Thus, I adopt perceiving-consciousness and object-discriminating consciousness to address the division.
- 60 Nanjiō, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, 220, line 13 to 16, and 221, line 1.
- 61 It noticeable that the '*prapañca*' and '*avidyā* (ignorance)' are both followed by '*vāsanā*', meaning imprints or tendency carries the operation of *prapañca* and *avidyā*. However, more research needs to be done about the application and the meaning of *vāsanā*.
- 62 Nanjiō, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, 41, line 16, and 42, line 1 to 8.

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