

TERMS OF INTENTIONALITY IN EARLY PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ TEXTS ("Phenomenal Reality" (*dmigs pa*), "Abiding" (*gnas pa*) and "Practice" (*spyod*))

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The paper focuses on the connection of some Prajñāpāramitā terms with the conception of intentionality as it is presented in modern phenomenology. Three terms: dmigs pa – "phenomenal reality", gnas pa – "abiding" and spyod – "practice" are taken to demonstrate specific intentional context of Prajñāpāramitā teaching. The interpretation of these terms in the context of a whole teaching shows that the culmination of all Prajñāpāramitā phenomenology is the access to the state beyond intentional constructions and representations. The teaching itself is not a presentation of a new ontology but a "leveling" of the field of present awareness which is deformed by intentional references.

1. The concept of intentionality was introduced into modern philosophy by Franz Brentano, who took what he called "intentional inexistence" to be a feature that distinguished the mental from the physical¹.

Basically, intentionality is a term for a feature exhibited by many mental states and activities: being directed at objects. Each act of consciousness is also an intentional act, and objects (forms, colors, etc.) appear in this very act. In Buddhism this appearance of different objects within the intentional act represents conventional experience as far as things (objects), according to abhidharmic tradition, are merely mental and perceptual interpretation of discrete data flux (*dharmā*). Namely intentionality is responsible for this interpretation because of activity of body, language and mind, which is on the other hand based on *saṃskāra-skandha* ('*du byed*).

Such earlier Buddhist texts as *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* explain suffering and ignorance (main characteristics of phenomenal existence) as results of intentional karmic activity and intentional structure of consciousness².

¹ F. Brentano, "The distinction between mental and physical phenomena", *Realism and the Background of Phenomenology*, ed. Roderick M. Chisholm, Atascadero, CA.: Ridgeview Publishing, 1960, 39.

² On connection of Buddhist philosophy and modern phenomenology see a book by Steven Laycock "Mind as Mirror and the Mirroring of Mind: Buddhist Reflections on Western Phenomenology". John Schroeder in his review

In this paper I would like to demonstrate some Buddhist terms in their connection to intentionality and, what is more, I'll try to show that some terms (namely *dmigs pa* – “phenomenal reality”, *gnas pa* – “abiding” and *spyod* – “practice”) demonstrate intentional nature of early *Prajñāpāramitā* teaching.

2. Let us take *ab init* term *gnas pa* (Sansk. *sthita*) which is possible to translate as “to stay”, “to abide” and in a wider sense as “to live”, “to exist”. Edward Conze translates this term as “to be established” or “to stand”³. This term has topological tinge. Let us take several examples just to show the usage of this term.

From *Prajñāpāramitā-ratna-guṇa-samcaya-gāthā*:

Who practices *non-abiding*⁴ [and] does *not abide* in any element of existence⁵, for whom there are no form, no perception, no discriminative thought, no intention; who has no a trace of “stark” consciousness⁶, this one receives *sugata* wisdom without “grasping” (I, 6).

Another example from *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*:

[...] a Bodhisattva who courses in perfect wisdom and develops it, should *not stand* in form, etc. Because when he stands in form, etc., he courses in its formative influence, and not in perfect wisdom. For, while he courses in formative influence, he cannot gain perfect wisdom, nor exert himself upon it, nor fulfill it (I, 8)⁸.

Another important example also comes from *Prajñāpāramitā-ratna-guṇa-samcaya-gāthā*:

A [Bodhisattva] for whom there is no form, there is no perception, there is no discriminative thought, there is no intention; who practices *non-abiding* and doesn't involve consciousness should be recognized as possessing a [state] of non-production [of elements of existence] and approaches the highest and undisturbed *samadhi*. His practice has no phenomenal support (*mi dmigs*) and his wisdom is stable (I, 10).

It is clear, that the term *gnas pa* points to abiding, to involvement (and correspondingly to not involvement) into the field of attention. ‘*To abide*’ in this context means ‘to be directed at some external things’, ‘to be surrounded by some things’. What is the role of intentionality in this act of cognitive presence? External things may exist only if they are grasped (*grāhya*) as having some qualities. The qualities are perceived not by themselves (as separate entities), but in comparison with other qualities (forms, colours, etc.). These relations between grasper

to this book writes: “Buddhist depiction of the mind as a mirror, however, resists this tendency to objectify what is given in self-reflection, since the mind continually “deflects” or eludes self-presence” (*Philosophy East and West*, vol. 47, No. 1, p. 93).

³ Materials for Dictionary of Prajñāpāramitā Literature. By Edward Conze, Tokyo, 1967, 433.

⁴ *gnas pa med par spyod*.

⁵ *chos kun la*.

⁶ Here we find a list of common Buddhist elements of existence or *skandha*. Correspondingly: *gzugs* (Sansk. *nīpa*), *tshor ba* (Sansk. *vedanā*), *’du shes* (Sansk. *saṃjñā*), *sems pa* instead of ordinary in these cases *’du byed* (Sansk. *saṃskara*), *mam par shes pa* (Sansk. *vijñāna*). Term *sems pa* often stands for “thought” or “mind”. It is significant that word *saṃskara* (intention) in early Buddhist texts stands for mind as a whole.

⁷ *yongs su gzung med*.

⁸ Translation by Edward Conze in “The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and Its Verse Summary”, *Bibliotheca Indo-Buddhica*, Series No. 132, Delhi, India, 1994, 85.

(*grāhaka*) and what is grasped (*grāhya*) indicate that perceived phenomenal reality and the consciousness itself (*vi-jñāna*, dis-cernment) are of a sign nature. The sign is, citing Peirce, “something which stands to somebody for something in some respects or capacity”⁹. To “abide in any element of existence” means to stay as a phenomenon among other phenomena and correspondingly to be directed at qualities and characteristics, to be involved into the circus of indirect cognition¹⁰. Enlightenment, on the other hand, is *non-abiding*, putting the end to the consistency of intentional acts, which make five sense consciousnesses to grasp their objects.

3. Another term directly connected to the previous is *dmigs pa* (Sansk. *ārambana*). This term has many meanings and frequently is used in *Prajñāpāramitā* texts with negative particles – *mi dmigs pa*, *ma dmigs nas*, *mi dmigs*, etc. Edward Conze in his *Materials for Dictionary of Prajñāpāramitā Literature* gives the following meanings for this term: *an-ārambana* – “without objective support” (*dmigs su med pa*), *anālabamāna* – “not making into objective¹¹ support” (p. 27), *anupalabdhitā* – “non-apprehension” (*mi dmigs pa*), cannot be apprehended (*dmigs su med pa*, *mi dmigs pa*) (p. 35), *anupalambha* – what offers no basis for apprehension, what is without basis and lacks basis for apprehension, baselessness (*mi dmigs pa*), non-observation, imperceptible, absence of apprehension (*dmigs su med pa*, *mi dmigs pa*), without basis, absence of basis (p. 35)¹².

The following fragments demonstrate how this term is used in *Prajñāpāramitā* texts.

From *Prajñāpāramitā-ratna-guna-samcaya-gāthā*:

The Teaching, which is taught by Jinas, is perceived by the best pupils directly; direct comprehension¹³ is a kind of preceptor [for those persons]. But they use power not of their own, but the power of Enlightening and [according to this power] perfect wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*) devoid of phenomenal reality (*mi dmigs*), Bodhisattva devoid of phenomenal reality (*mi dmigs*), awakening mind¹⁴ devoid of phenomenal reality (*mi dmigs*)¹⁵. Those fearless Bodhisattvas, who have removed delusions and understand this, follow the Sugata¹⁶ wisdom (I, 4–5).

⁹ Charles S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965, 2.228.

¹⁰ See, for example paper by Dan Lusthaus “What is Denied in the Statement External Objects Do Not Exist?”. Here he writes: “Yogācārin describe enlightenment as resulting from Overturning the Cognitive Basis (*āśraya-paravṛtti*), i.e., overturning the conceptual projections and imaginings which act as the base of our cognitive actions. This overturning transforms the basic mode of cognition from consciousness (*vi-jñāna*, discernment) into *jñāna* (direct knowing). Direct knowing was defined as non-conceptual (*nirvikalpa-jñāna*), i.e., devoid of interpretive overlay”. (The paper was read at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, San Francisco, November 21–25, 1997).

¹¹ It is hardly possible to imagine that words “subject” and “object” are proper terms for understanding *Prajñāpāramitā* philosophy.

¹² Many abbreviations may be found in Tibetan texts and one should understand the terms *mi dmigs* and *dmigs med* as an abbreviation standing accordingly for *mi dmigs pa* and *dmigs su med pa*.

¹³ *mngon sum* (Sansk. *pratyakṣa*) – a category of Buddhist theory of knowledge (*blo rig*). It is possible to translate this term as “direct comprehension”, “nonconceptual cognition”, “direct cognition”, “true perception” (*rtog pa dang bral zhiṅ ma 'khrul ba'i rig pa*). Truly existent phenomena (*bden-par grub-pa*) can be apprehended explicitly (*dmogs-su rtogs-pa*) by valid nonconceptual cognition, which means by valid bare cognition (*mngon-sum tshad-ma*). In other words, if a validly knowable object can be explicitly apprehended by valid nonconceptual cognition, it is truly existent.

¹⁴ *byang chub sems* (Skt. *bodhicitta*).

¹⁵ In fact, an attitude is presented here according to which in structures of our awareness there are no such things as ‘*Bodhicitta*’, ‘*Bodhisattva*’ or ‘*Prajñāpāramitā*’. It paradoxically means that *Prajñāpāramitā* is a teaching which proves that there is no such teaching as *Prajñāpāramitā*.

¹⁶ *bde gshes* (Skt. *Sugata*).

Another fragment also from *Prajñāpāramitā-ratna-guṇa-saṃcaya-gāthā*:

Srenika the Wonderer¹⁷ the absence of phenomenal reality¹⁸ in *skandhas* understood as [compatibility] of origination and disappearance¹⁹ [of elements of existence]. In the same way he understood [the nature of] Bodhisattva. He didn't care about *Nirvanā*²⁰ and stayed in wisdom (I, 7).

According to my previous interpretation, the most appropriate way to translate the term 'dmigs pa' together with its negative particles is 'phenomenal reality' and 'absence of phenomenal reality' accordingly. On the one hand, 'phenomenal reality' is the totality of all phenomena, which constitutes present field of awareness. On the other hand, each of the phenomena in this field may disclose or not disclose its 'phenomenal reality'. For example, it may seem that structures of our present awareness include a certain phenomenon, which we can call "envy" (we just define a certain "thing" as envy). But analyzing this phenomenon we may come to the conclusion that it has no phenomenal reality and that it cannot be a basis for further unwrapping of cognitive structures of awareness. In other words, our attention cannot be directed at (or involved in) envy, because there is no such phenomenon as "envy".

As it is said in the *Samadhiraja Sutra*, "An existential element 'desire' would be roused by something in someone; an existential element 'aversion' would be aversion in someone to something; an existential element 'illusion' would be illusion in someone concerning something." One cannot discover in thought nor perceive in fact such an element of existence. One who does not discover such an existential element in thought nor perceives it in fact is said to be free of desire, aversion and illusion, to have a mind free of disbelief, to be composed in spirit. He is said to have crossed to the other side, to have penetrated deeply, to have attained peace"²¹.

Things, which constitute present field of awareness, are intentional objects *per se*. Besides, they do not differ from the attention itself, because according to Buddhist epistemology the field of present awareness does not have any privileged "observation point" standing for "me" or "I". As Dan Lusthaus writes: "According to Buddhism, the deepest, most pernicious erroneous view held by sentient beings is the view that a permanent, eternal, immutable, independent self exists. There is no such self, and deep down we know that. This makes us anxious, since it entails that no self or identity endures forever. In order to assuage that anxiety, we attempt to construct a self, to fill the anxious void, to do something enduring. The projection of cognitive objects for appropriation is consciousness' main tool for this construction. If I own things (ideas, theories, identities, material objects), then "I am." If there are permanent objects that I can possess, then I too must be permanent. If I can be identified with something permanent, then I too must have a permanent identity. To undermine this desperate and erroneous

¹⁷ Kun tu rgyu ba phreng can (Skt. Śrenika), also known as Vatsagotra.

¹⁸ *dmigs med* here abbreviation = *dmigs su med pa*.

¹⁹ *rnam par 'jig pa 'byung ba ltar*.

²⁰ *mya ngan 'das la mi reg*, literally: "he didn't touch Nirvana". *Mya ngan 'das* here abbreviation = *mya ngan las 'das* (Sansk. *Nirvanā*).

²¹ In M. Sprung, *Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way: The Essential Chapters from the Prasannapadā of Candrakīrti*. Boulder: Prajñā Press, 1979, 222.

appropriative grasping, Yogācāra texts say: *Negate the object, and the self is also negated* (e. g., *Madhyānta-vibhāga*, 1:4, 8)²².

Phenomenal reality is a field of intentional dispositions in which it is possible to be involved or not to be involved.

The culmination of all Prajñāpāramitā phenomenology is the access to the state beyond intentional constructions and representations. It is not a construction of a new ontology but a “leveling” of the field of present awareness, which is deformed by intentional references. Edward Conze writes on Nirvana in Prajñāpāramitā texts: “The Prajñāpāramitā teaches that Nirvāṇa is the same as this world of birth-and-death (*saṃsāra*), that “the very defilements are Nirvāṇa”. The unconditioned is identified with the conditioned, the everchangeless with the ever-changing, the pure with the defiled, the complete with the deficient. However, and this must be born in mind, the identity thus postulated is an absolute identity and does not exclude an absolute difference. As a matter of fact, an absolute difference is equivalent to an absolute identity, as follows: Nirvāṇa and I are absolutely different. I cannot get it, and it cannot get me. I can never find it, because I am no longer there when it is found. It cannot find me, because I am not there to be found. But Nirvāṇa, the everlasting, is there all the time. “Suchness is everywhere the same, since all dharmas have already attained Nirvāṇa” (*Aṣṭasahasrikā*, XXIX. 476). What keeps me apart from it, now, in me? Nothing real at all, since the self is a mere invention. So, even now, in truth, there is no real difference at all between me and Nirvāṇa. The two are identical”²³.

4. Any activity itself and particularly activity aimed at Enlightenment is an intentional event by definition. Prajñāpāramitā texts continually tell as about ‘action’, ‘activity’, ‘conduct’ ‘practice’– *spyod*, *spyod pa* (Sanskrit. *caryā*). Edward Conze translates this term with a quite polysemantic word “course”, “coursing”²⁴. Alexander Berzin translates this term as ‘behavior’ and even as ‘daily behavior’ emphasizing routine ritual activity, which is necessary for Buddhist practitioner²⁵.

Let us take another fragment from *Prajñāpāramitā-ratna-guṇa-samcaya-gāthā*:

Acting (*spyod*) in a proper way, Bodhisattva follows Sugata wisdom. Namely Sugatas are very skillful in practicing without practice²⁶. Whatever dharma they follow, their practice (*spyod pa*) devoid of phenomenal reality. This is the core [essence] of practice (*spyod pa*) of the highest perfect wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*) (I, 12).

What is this practicing without practice? Each action is intentionally approved and implies some object to be directed at. Action in *Prajñāpāramitā* is always directed at objects, which are

²² Dan Lusthaus. *What is Denied in the Statement External Objects Do Not Exist?* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, San Francisco, November 21–25, 1997.

²³ Edward Conze, “The Ontology of Prajñāpāramitā”, *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 3 (1953), 127–128.

²⁴ Materials for Dictionary of Prajñāpāramitā Literature. By Edward Conze, Tokyo, 1967, 172. Although this translation may have many meanings, it clearly shows that we have ‘aimed action’ here.

²⁵ See A. Berzin, *Developing Balanced Sensitivity: Practical Buddhist Exercises for Daily Life*, Ithaca, Snow Lion, 1998.

²⁶ *spyod med spyod pa yin*.

devoid of phenomenal reality. Objects disappear in this action and action itself becomes void. Directed consciousness also disappears because it lacks its aims and objects (directions). Voidness (*śūnyata*) “talks” to Voidness (*śūnyata*). Here we have total absorption (*mnyam bzhaḡ*) on voidness that is like space, and this absorption is, on the one hand, a union of method and wisdom and, on the other hand, the result of the attitude, therefore there is no such thing as true phenomenal existence and there is no such thing as apprehension or directed consciousness. Here intentionality loses its *aboutness*, mere vector transforms into pure space without directions and preferences.

It would be appropriate to formulate a peculiar *Prajñāpāramitā* imperative: act in such a way as if neither you nor the objects of your action exist.

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INTENCIONALUMO TERMINAI ANKSTYVUOSIUOSE PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ TEKSTUOSE

(„FENOMENALUS PASAULIS“ (*DMIGS PA*), „BUVIMAS“ (*GNAS PA*) IR „PRAKTIKA“ (*SPYOD*))

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Santrauka

Straipsnyje siekiama atskleisti budistinio Prajñāpāramitos mokymo ir šiuolaikinės fenomenologinės intencionalumo teorijos ryšį. Tam tikri Prajñāpāramitos tekstuose dažnai pasitaikantys terminai leidžia interpretuoti Prajñāpāramitos mokymą kaip dėmesio struktūrų analizę, sudarančią sąlygas susilieti išminčiai ir tuštumai.

Prajņāpāramitos tekstai modelioja intencionalumo erdve, kuri yra deformuota intencijų. Ši deformacija ir intencionalus disbalansas sudaro „fenomenalų pasaulį“ ir jo daiktus, kurie yra sąmonės objektai.

Viena vertus, dėmesio nukreipimo priežastys yra objektai, kurie pagal Prajņāpāramitos mokymą neturi savo esmės, o kita, dėmesio nukreipimo priežastis yra pati sąmonė, iliuziškai patalpinta į privilegijuotą „vietą“, į „Aš“. Sąmonės ir sąmonės objektų dispozicija, anot Prajņāpāramitos mokymo, yra iliuzinių požiūrių reprezentacija. Taigi Prajņāpāramitos mokymo tikslas yra ne naujos ontologijos kūrimas, bet intencionalaus balanso atkūrimas.

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