Article

Two Contemplation Models of *Nāmamātra* in the Yogācāra Literature

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Abstract: This article contextualizes the meaning of *nāmamātra* in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkārabhāṣya* and explores the history of modifications of this term in the Yogācāra literature. The term already exists in the pre-Yogācāra literature, such as the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* and the *Bhavasaṃkrāntisūtra*, where it means name only. The chapter *Bodhisattvabhūmi* of the *Yogācārabhūmi* applies this meaning and explains how to interpret it to understand the true nature of the contemplative object; that is, what is named is nothing but a name, and what exists is the inexpressible thing (*vastu*). When people lack this understanding and regard for the expressed object as existent, they suffer subsequent afflictions and suffering. A similar but slightly modified explanation is also found in the *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya*, where the author states that a single object has two intrinsic characteristics (*svalakṣaṇa*s), the conventional and the ultimate, and that the former is expressed by a mere name and is non-existent, while the latter is ineffable and existent. However, the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkārabhāṣya* and Sthiramati's commentary on it, the **Sūtrālaṃkāravṛttibhāṣya*, insert another meaning of *nāmamātra*: there are only mental factors. They also describe two contemplation phases, whereby practitioners should first understand the non-existence of the expressed object before recollecting the term *nāmarūpa* in the context of the five constituents (*pañcaskandha*) and concluding that material and physical factors (*rūpa*) do not exist; rather, only the mental factors do (*nāmamātra*). Finally, this second meaning of *nāmamātra* should be further contemplated, and the mere mental factors should also be regarded as ultimately non-existent because the external objects causing them were already considered non-existent. This examination of various Yogācāra explanations of *nāmamātra* sheds light on the multiple phases of modifications of Buddhist terms that occurred in the Yogācāra literature during the systematization of Yogācāra contemplation.

Keywords: nāmamātra; vastu; prajñapti; svabhāva; vijñaptimātra; cittamātra; Yogācāra; svalakṣaṇa

1. Introduction

This article aims to explore the Yogācāra term *nāmamātra* ("name only"). Previous studies have investigated multiple dimensions of Yogācāra terms, such as *cittamātra* ("mind only"), *vijñaptimātra* ("representation only"), and *vijñānamātra* ("consciousness only").[1] In contrast to the detailed examination of these terms, however, the meaning of *nāmamātra* has been less explored, despite its significance for Yogācāra contemplative practice.

The term *nāmamātra* is found not only in the Yogācāra literature but also in the pre-Yogācāra literature. For instance, the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (Aṣṭ) uses *nāmamātra* and *vyavahāramātra* ("conventional expression only") as synonyms (Aṣṭ, p. 235).[2] The *Bhavasaṃkrāntisūtra* (BhSS) regards it as a synonym for *saṃjñāmātra* ("word only").[3] Some early Yogācāra texts reflect a similar meaning of *nāmamātra*. In the chapter *Bodhisattvabhūmi* of the *Yogācārabhūmi* (BoBh),[4] for example, *nāmamātra* is used together with *vastumātra* ("thing only") and *prajñaptimātra* ("designation only") to explain the relationship between expressions and objects to which expressions are given.[5]

Despite this earlier usage, by the time of Vasubandhu (fifth century CE) and Sthiramati (sixth century CE), at the latest, Yogācāra Buddhist texts seem to reflect an attempt to

connect the term to the famous doctrine of *vijñaptimātra* ("representation only") or *cittamātra* ("mind only") and to use it in contemplative manuals. In the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkārabhāṣya* (MSABh), Vasubandhu equates *nāmamātra* with *vijñaptimātra*,[6] and, in the commentary of the MSABh, the **Sūtrālaṃkāravṛttibhāṣya* (SAVBh), Sthiramati considers it a synonym of *cittamātra*.[7] These various meanings of *nāmamātra* in Yogācāra texts reveal several phases through which the Yogācāra explanation of *nāmamātra* passed before their contemplative manuals were established. I will therefore explore these phases and investigate how contemplation of *nāmamātra* was modified in the Yogācāra tradition.

Before examining the relevant Yogācāra texts and their multiple layers of interpretation, in Section 2, I will first investigate the Aṣṭ and BhSS to explore the earliest meaning of *nāmamātra*. In Section 3, I will turn to the BoBh, the earliest Yogācāra texts examined in this article, to show the first phase adopting the term *nāmamātra* for describing how to investigate the contemplative object for the sake of attaining correct knowledge. Here, understanding *nāmamātra* is described as essential for attaining the correct knowledge (*yathābhūtaparijñā*) that leads to the Mahāyāna version of *parinirvāṇa*. This understanding is related to seeing two natures of a single object; that is, the practitioner is required to see the non-existence of what is named and the existence of the inexpressible thing (*vastu*). Next, in Section 4, while examining the *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya* (MAVBh), I will address the second phase of modification of *nāmamātra* in the Yogācāra tradition. The MAVBh also employs *nāmamātra* and explains two "intrinsic characteristics" (*svalakṣaṇa*) of a single object.[8] The author of the MAVBh discriminates the conventional intrinsic characteristic expressed through names from the inexpressible intrinsic characteristic. Finally, in Section 5, I will examine a Yogācāra contemplation manual in the MSABh, which expands on and elaborates *nāmamātra* in more detail. In the SAVBh, Sthiramati introduces two different meanings of *nāmamātra*; that is, "name only" and "mental factors only". He does not explain why the meaning of *nāmamātra* should be changed in the course of contemplation but simply states that it is changed. He also states that those who reach the first stage of Bodhisattva (**prathamabhūmi*) do not consider even mental factors (*nāman*) existent. His explanation provides an example that reflects how terms were adopted and reinterpreted in the course of systematizing Yogācāra contemplation manuals.

2. The Meaning of *Nāmamātra* in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* and the *Bhavasaṃkrāntisūtra*

The Aṣṭ provides a hint that helps us understand the early Mahāyāna Buddhist's definition of the term *nāmamātra*. This term is used together with *vyavahāramātra* as follows:

> The perfection of wisdom is to be approached in the sense that all phenomena/factors (*dharma*s) are spoken about through mere names (*nāmamātra*), mere conventional expressions (*vyavahāramātra*). The conventional expression, moreover, is neither anyplace nor from someplace, nor is the conventional expression anything.[9]

> sarvadharmāś ca nāmamātreṇa vyavahāramātreṇābhilapyante iti prajñāpāramitā anugantavyā. vyavahāraś ca na kvacin na kutaścin na kaścid vyavahāraḥ. (Aṣṭ, p. 235)

The meaning of "mere name" (*nāmamātra*) could be inferred from its elaboration as "mere conventional expression" (*vyavahāramātra*). Although linguistic conventions express phenomena, the author explains that the conventional expression neither refers to nor arises from anything, nor is the conventional expression itself anything. Therefore, the phrase "mere conventional expression" in the Aṣṭ implies that there are the expressed phenomena (*dharma*s) and the act of expressing, but the latter arises from mere conventional expression that is neither based on anything existent nor is itself existent. Likewise, the compound "mere name" would mean that there is the linguistic convention of expressing something by using mere names, which are neither based on anything existent nor are themselves existent.

Here, the negation *na* requires further investigation. Conze suggests,[10] for example, that the brief phrase "*na kaścid vyavahāraḥ*" should be understood as "the conventional

expression is not itself anything real". This translation still leads us to wonder what "real" means in this context and how it could be differentiated from anything unreal.

One possible explanation is to interpret non-existent or unreal as existing mentally. This interpretation can be found in the BhSS, which applies the term *nāmamātra* after providing a Mahāyāna description of the rebirth process.[11] This text contains a dialogue between the Blessed One or the Buddha and the King Bimbisāra, in which the King questions how *karma* and rebirth are possible if all conditioned factors (*sarvasaṃskāra*) are empty:

> How, O Blessed One, does *karma*, though having been performed, amassed, and long ceased, appear again to the mind at the moment when the time of death is approaching? Or, when all the conditioned factors are empty, how are *karmas* known not to disappear?

> katham bhagavan kṛtopacitasya karmaṇaś ciraniruddhasya maraṇakālasamaye pratyupasthite punar manasaḥ sammukhībhāvo bhavati. katham vā śūnyeṣu sarvasaṃskāreṣu karmaṇām avipraṇāśaḥ prajñāyate. (BhSS, pp. 418–19)

Although the King does not elaborate on what emptiness means and why he thinks the empty conditioned factors would not justify *karma* not disappearing entirely but appearing again, we can find further details in the reply of the Blessed One, who states: "The last consciousness is empty of the last consciousness, the death is empty of the death, the first consciousness is empty of the first consciousness, the birth is empty of the birth".[12] The empty and conditioned factors are represented by the last consciousness up to birth, whereby the subsequent arising and ceasing could be considered the process of rebirth. Thus, examining the description of these factors would help us understand how the characteristics of the empty conditioned factors and the process of rebirth are described and justified in this text. Moreover, this description is summarized by verses in which the term *nāmamātra* is adopted. Examining the dialogue between the King and the Buddha therefore helps us understand how *nāmamātra* is defined and what "non-existent expressions" means in the BhSS.

The Buddha's answer reflects a Buddhist thought that defines *karmas* and factors involved in the process of rebirth as mental factors. To explain this, the BhSS begins with the metaphor of a dream:

> For example, Great King, a sleeping man would have sex with the most beautiful woman in the country in his dream. He who awakened from sleep might remember the most beautiful woman in the country. How do you think of this, Great King, does the most beautiful [woman] in the country in the dream exist?

> tadyathā mahārāja śayitaḥ puruṣaḥ svapnāntare janapadakalyāṇyā striyā sārdham paricaret. sa śayitavibuddhas tāṃ janapadakalyāṇīṃ striyam anusmaret. tat kim manyase mahārāja saṃvidyate sā janapadakalyāṇī svapnāntare. (BhSS, pp. 420–23)

The beautiful woman indeed exists as a mental entity because she appears to the mind of the dreamer; however, the King agrees that she does not exist,[13] which suggests the phrase "she exists" (*saṃvidyate*) means as a physical entity in the external world. The Buddha emphasizes that it is not wise to think that this woman exists in this external world and to search for her on waking. The Buddha also explains that this mere non-existent mental object can make the foolish person generate continuous and momentary actions or *karmas* not only in the dream, such as seeing and having sex with her, but also after the dream, such as remembering and searching for her. Even though this dream woman does not exist as a real entity in the external world, *karmas* resulting from this woman arise consecutively.

The BhSS continues to explain that the arising and ceasing of *karmas* and the process of rebirth in our lives can be likewise explained:

> The foolish and unlearned ordinary person sees visible objects (*rūpa*) with eyes and becomes attached to states of delight and dejection. Being attached, he becomes affected. Being affected, he becomes enamored. Being enamored, he enacts the *karmas* generated through desire, hatred, and ignorance, by body, speech,

and mind. However, this enacted *karma* ceases in the mind. Upon ceasing, it does not remain in the eastern region, nor in the southern region, nor in the western, nor in the northern, nor above, nor below, nor in any intermediate region.

> bālo 'śrutavān pṛthagjanaś cakṣusā rūpāṇi dṛṣṭvā saumanasyadaurmanasyasthānāny abhiniviśate. so 'bhiniviṣṭaḥ sann anunīyate. anunītaḥ saṃrajyate. saṃraktaḥ saṃrāgajam dveṣajam mohajam karmābhisaṃskaroti kāyena vācā manasā. tac ca karmābhisaṃskṛtam manasi nirudhyate. nirudhyamānam na pūrvam diśam niśritya tiṣṭhati, na dakṣiṇām na paścimām nottarām nordhvam nādho nānudiśam niśritya tiṣṭhati. (BhSS, pp. 424–27)

Here, *karmas* are regarded as those which cease in the mind (*manas*); they do not remain in the external world. The King's question of how *karmas* do not disappear completely (*avipranāśa*) is answered first by pointing out that they should not be considered as physical but mental, and thus, their arising, ceasing, and re-arising are exclusively related to the mind.

> Because the *karma* homogeneous to this [realm] wanes when the moment of dying is near, that *karma* [re]appears to the mind when the last consciousness ceases, like the most beautiful woman in the country [reappears] to [the mind of] the person awakened from sleep. Thus, Great King, the consciousness belonging to the last existence ceases, and the first consciousness which partakes in birth arises, either among gods, human beings, semi-gods, hell dwellers, animals, or ghosts.

> kālāntareṇa maraṇakālasamaye pratyupasthite tatsabhāgasya karmaṇaḥ kṣayāc caramavijñāne nirudhyamāne manasas tat karmāmukhībhavati, tadyathā śayitavibuddhasya puruṣasya janapadakalyāṇī strī. iti hi mahārāja caramabhavikam vijñānam nirudhyate, prathamavijñānam aupapattyaṃśikam utpadyate yadi vā deveṣu yadi vā manuṣyeṣu yadi vāsureṣu yadi vā nirayeṣu yadi vā tiryakṣu yadi vā preteṣu. (BhSS, pp. 428–31)

The reappearance of a *karma* to the mind is compared to the reappearance of the dream woman to the mind of the person awakened from sleep. The cessation of the last consciousness could be naturally comparable to the end of the dream. Just as the dream woman, who does not exist in the external world, can generate another action even beyond the dream, the *karma* that re-arises in the mind can make another consciousness arise, which is the first consciousness of the next life. Like the woman, this *karma* and all forms of consciousness do not "exist" physically in this world, but this flow of mental events can still work and enable the rebirth.

> This exposition is summarized by seven verses, the first of which includes the term *nāmamātra*:

> All this which is nothing but name is established only in designation;[14]

> separated from the expression, that which is expressed does not exist.

> nāmamātram idam sarvam samjñāmātre pratiṣṭhitam;

> abhidhānāt pṛthagbhūtam abhidheyam na vidyate. (BhSS, p. 438)

According to this verse, everything that is expressed, such as "the last consciousness", does not exist. Based on the previous dialogue, the meaning of "existence" in this verse would be understood as existence in the external world. Likewise, the phrase "that which is expressed does not exist" (*abhidheyam na vidyate*) would mean that what is expressed does exist in the external world because it is something "established" in names and designations, and thus, they are mental or conceptual.

As seen at the beginning of this section, the Aṣṭ briefly describes all *dharma*s as expressed by mere expressions that are neither based on anything in existence nor are themselves existent. The Aṣṭ does not explain what non-existence or real means and how non-existent names can express something. Contrary to this, the BhSS specifies the meaning of existence as existence in the external world; *karma*s (e.g., the dream woman) and *dharma*s (e.g., the last consciousness) expressed by mere names are described not as existing in the

external world independently from the expression but as existing as mental or conceptual entities. According to this interpretation, the meaning of "name only" could be understood as follows: names do not exist in the external world, nor do objects expressed by these names.

This explanation in the BhSS seems to have led to philosophical discussion about inexpressible things, which is preserved in the later commentary literature. There, debate arises as to whether there are (1) inexpressible things or not and (2), if there are, whether they exist in the external world or simply in the mind. The BhSS itself does not clearly state a perspective and this has left room for various interpretations.[15]

However, the contemplative model that the BhSS proposes is relatively clear. Like the man who seeks the dream woman after awakening, foolish and ordinary people do not understand that the *karmas* they made do not remain in the external world but cease and rearise in the mind. They do not regard all these *karmas* expressed by mere names (*nāmamātra*) as mere mental entities, and this erroneous thought leads to continuous *karmas* and, in the end, rebirth.

The usage of *nāmamātra* in the BhSS focuses on explaining the non-existence of names and objects expressed by names. The BoBh, which will be examined in the following section, combines *nāmamātra* with *vastumātra* and *prajñaptimātra* and explains not only the non-existence of names and objects expressed by names but also the existence of the ineffable thing. The contemplation model described in the BoBh also focuses on observing both the existence of a name and the non-existence of an ineffable thing.

3. The Description of Understanding *Nāmamātra* in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*

In the BoBh, *nāmamātra* is described as the contents to be investigated (*paryeṣaṇā*) and the methods to attain the right knowledge (*parijñāna*) of reality (*tattva*). The BoBh describes four kinds of investigation, which result in four kinds of correct knowledge (*yathābhūta-parijñā*): the investigation of a name (*nāman*), a thing (*vastu*), that which is designated as the intrinsic nature (*svabhāvaprajñapti*), and that which is designated as the particularity (*viśeṣaprajñapti*).[16] The investigation of a name (*nāmaparyeṣaṇā*) consists in seeing it only with regard to the name (*nāmni nāmamātraṃ paśyati*).[17] By means of this observation, the Bodhisattva attains the correct knowledge about a name. That is, a name is the cause of ideation (*samjñā*), superimposition (*samāropa*), clinging (*abhiniveśa*), and speaking (*abhilāpa*). If a name would be not given to a thing (*vastu*), any ideation does not arise. The BoBh explains this as follows:

> If, for a thing ordinarily conceived of as *rūpa*, etc., a name "*rūpa*" is not decided upon, no one would thus conceive that thing a *rūpa*; and not conceiving it, one would not superimpose or cling to it. And not clinging to it, one could not speak about it. Thus, one knows it precisely, in detail. This is said to be knowing the investigated name precisely, in detail.[18]

> yadi rūpādisamjñake vastuni rūpam iti nāma na vyavasthāpyeta na kañcit tad vastu rūpam ity[19] evaṃ samjānīyāt. asamjānan samāropato nābhiniveśeta. an-abhiniveśaṃ nābhilapet. iti yadevaṃ yathābhūtaṃ prajānāti. idam ucyate nā-maiṣaṇāgataṃ yathābhūtaparijñānam. (BoBh_D, pp. 36–37; BoBh_W, p. 53)

The BoBh differentiates a name from a thing (*vastu*). The thing itself does not cause any ideation; it is the name that is given to that thing and causes ideation, etc. This observation of name only is followed by the observation of thing only (*vastumātra*); specifically, the BoBh subsequently explains that the Bodhisattva should observe thing only (*vastumātratā*) with regard to the thing in order to attain the second correct knowledge. Observing only the thing itself is described as resulting in seeing the thing that is ineffable (*nirabhilāpya*) and not associated with all the the speech (*sarvābhilāpaviśliṣṭa*). The Bodhisattvas attaining this knowledge would not identify the thing itself with what is named.[20]

This contemplation of a name and a thing is followed by observing that which is designated as the intrinsic nature and the particularity. A given thing could arise as having

the nature of *rūpa*. Again, the thing itself exists, but it does not exist as having this nature. There is "only the mere semblance" (*ābhāsatā*) of an intrinsic nature, and thus, the Bodhisattva sees this designated intrinsic nature as "a magical creation, a reflected image, an echo, a hallucination, the moon's reflection in the waters, a dream and an illusion".[21]

In this context, particularity refers to the specific quality of objects, with existence (*bhāva*) and non-existence (*abhāva*) given as examples. The BoBh states that the given thing could be designated as having either of these two particularities; that is, it could be designated as non-existent (*abhāva*) in that it is not "perfected" (*parinispannatva*) through the nature expressed by names [22], but it could also be designated as existent (*bhāva*) in that it is determined to have an ineffable nature.[23]

Here, we can find a dynamic contemplation of a meditative object. The BoBh requires practitioners to see two natures of a contemplative object. Its nature, as expressed by language, should be regarded as non-existent and like a dream. This nature is understood by means of observing *nāmamātratā* and the part of *prajñaptimātratā*. However, there is the ineffable nature of a contemplative object, and practitioners should understand the thing itself exists with the ineffable nature separated from the name. This second nature is understood through observing *vastumātratā* and another part of *prajñaptimātratā*. Ordinary people cannot differentiate between these two natures and, thus, are confused between the truth of existence and non-existence. This confusion generates various sufferings. Contrary to this, those who attain all these forms of correct knowledge reach the complete *nirvāṇa* (*parinirvāṇa*) of the great vehicle because all proliferation (*prapañca*) ceases.[24]

4. Two Intrinsic Characteristics and *Nāmamātra* in the *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāsya*

The MAVBh offers a similar explanation to the BoBh, but the wording is slightly different. This text suggests two different intrinsic characteristics (*svalakṣaṇa*s) of the same object. In a brief verse of the MAVBh, the truth of *nāmamātra* is stated as follows:

Everything is [said to] be the mere name in order for all the imagination not to arise.

[This is] non-erroneousness about the intrinsic characteristic; that is, the ultimate intrinsic characteristic.

sarvasya nāmamātratvam sarvakalpāpravṛttaye.

svalakṣaṇe 'viparyāsah, paramārthe svalakṣaṇe. (MAVBh, p. 67 [MAVBh 5.18])

The following auto-commentary elaborates that the word "everything" (*sarva*) is defined as the sense faculty of seeing (*cakṣus*), the visible object (*rūpa*) up to the mind (*manas*), and the object of the mind (*dharma*); that is, twelve elements (*āyatana*). Understanding (*jñāna*) all these elements as mere names is considered non-erroneous (*aviparyāsa*) about the ultimate intrinsic characteristic because this understanding is the antidote against all kinds of imagination (*vikalpa*).[25]

The ultimate intrinsic characteristic is explained by Sthiramati's commentary, the *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā* (MAVT),[26] which regards it as inexpressible (*anabhilāpyatva*; MAVT, p. 221). Although, differently from the BoBh of the YoBh, the MAVBh does not use the term "thing" (*vastu*) but applies the term "intrinsic characteristic", this text still provides a similar model of the contemplation process. Those contemplating should understand two intrinsic characteristics of an object. They should regard conventionally defined objects (*jñeya*), whose intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) is expressed as the sense faculty of seeing, etc., as non-existent and as mere names (*nāmamātra*).[27] This understanding should be combined with the non-erroneous understanding of the inexpressible ultimate intrinsic characteristic of the same object. In other words, the non-existence of the conventional intrinsic characteristic does not mean the complete non-existence of the object in all respects but the existence of the ultimate intrinsic characteristic, and this understanding can be attained by means of contemplating the doctrine of name only (*nāmamātra*).

Despite some variations, the BoBh and MAVBh reflect a similar application of the term *nāmamātra* concerning Yogācāra contemplation: Contemplating the doctrine of the

nāmamātra leads to understanding two different natures of an object: the non-existence of the expressed nature and the true existence of the inexpressible nature. This understanding is described as essential for the cessation of all imagination.

However, contemplating *nāmamātra* is not limited to thinking about language and the relationship between the expression and the expressed object. In the Yogācāra literature, some texts define *nāman* as mental factors—including those ranging from feeling (*vedanā*) up to consciousness (*vijñāna*)—which are opposed to material factors (*rūpa*). In this usage, the meaning of *nāmamātra* is changed to "only mental factors exist", and *nāmamātra* is explained not as a doctrine for understanding the non-existence of the expressed nature and the existence of the inexpressible nature of an object but as a doctrine leading to thinking about the non-existence of material/physical factors. The MSABh reflects this usage, which will be examined in the following section.

5. Two Meanings of *Nāmamātra* in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkārabhāṣya*

In MSABh 11.48, *nāmamātra* is used to explain a kind of "liberation" (*vimukti*). This verse uses the word *nāmamātra* three times. Below, I translate the verse reflecting commentaries before examining the commentaries in more detail:

> When from the collection (*saṃbhāra*), there are base (*ādhāra*) and product (*ādhāna*), one sees *nāmamātra*. In seeing this [*nāmamātra*], one sees [another meaning of] *nāmamātra*. Afterwards, moreover, one does not see even that [*nāmamātra*].[28]

> ādhāre saṃbhārād ādhāne sati hi nāmamātraṃ paśyan

> paśyati hi nāmamātraṃ tatpaśyaṃs tac ca naiva paśyati bhūyaḥ. (MSABh, p. 67)

The verse indicates two dimensions of contemplating *nāmamātra*. The practitioner is required to observe *nāmamātra* at first but should not see it in the end. The following auto-commentary explains that base, collection, and product mean hearing (*śruti*), accumulating [merits] previously (*pūrvasaṃbhāralābha*), and contemplating correctly (*yoniśomanaskāra*), respectively.[29]

The SAVBh, Sthiramati's commentary, helps us understand how these terms were interpreted in ancient India in the sixth century CE. Hearing indicates hearing and thinking about the supreme teaching taught by the virtuous friend (**kalyāṇamitra*);[30] the collection refers to the accumulation of merit in previous lives over one countless eon on the level of devoted conduct (**adhimukticaryābhūmi*);[31] and the product means contemplating all *dharmas* as impermanent, suffering, empty, and selfless on the levels of devoted conduct.[32] The first part of this verse explains that accumulating merits, hearing teachings, and contemplating *dharma*s are needed before observing the doctrine of *nāmamātra* correctly.

Sthiramati continues to explain that *nāmamātra* is observed by those are at the stage of practicing four wholesome roots (**kuśalamūla*), that is, subdivisions ("heat", "summit", "acceptance", and "the highest ordinary stage") of the Mahāyāna path of preparation for reaching the first Bodhisattva stage.[33] Among these four stages, the practitioner sees the name only at the first and second stages; that is, the "heat" (**uṣmagata*) and the "summit" (**mūrdhan*).[34] Through this observation, the practitioner perceives the non-existence of the intrinsic nature of factors (*chos rnams kyi rang bzhin yod pa ma yin par mthong*). Sthiramati explains these stages as follows:

> At the stage of the "heat" and the "summit", one sees all factors (*dharma*s) as mere names (**nāmamātra*, *ming tsam*). They see them as mere words (**padamātra*, *tshig tsam*), mere talks (**abhilāpamātra*, *brjod pa tsam*), mere conventional expressions (**vyavahāramātra*, *tha snyad tsam*), and mere imaginings (**vikalpamātra*, *rnam par rtog pa*), and see thereby the non-existence of the intrinsic nature of factors.

> drod dang rtse mo'i tshe na chos thams cad ming tsam du mthong bar'gyur te/tshig tsam brjod pa tsam tha snyad tsam rnam par rtog pa tsam du zad par mthong gis chos rnams kyi rang bzhin yod pa ma yin par mthong ngo. (SAVBh II, p. 117)

This explanation reflects the contemplation of *nāmamātra*, which is similarly described in the BoBh and MAVBh, as examined above in Section 4.

However, we can also find a simplification of the contemplation. Sthiramati does not distinguish between a thing (*vastu*) and a name (*nāman*), as in the BoBh, or between the ultimate and conventional intrinsic characteristics, as in the MAVBh. While these two texts describe contemplating *nāmamātra* as the way to lead practitioners to understand the non-existence of what is expressed by name and the existence of the inexpressible thing, Sthiramati simply explains observing *nāmamātra* as perceiving the non-existence of an intrinsic nature.

Sthiramati continues by explaining how to investigate *nāmamātra* further. Contrary to the BoBh and MAVBh, he regards *nāmamātra* as having two different meanings and interprets observing *nāmamātra* in the third stage, the "acceptance" (**kṣanti*), as perceiving the non-existence of material constituents (*rūpa*); that is, *nāmamātra* is interpreted as the doctrine of mental constituents only:

> Afterwards, in the stage of "acceptance", one sees all factors as nothing but the mind (**cittamātra*, *sems tsam*). Only four mental constituents [are seen], and the constituents (**dharma*, *chos*) that do not belong to those [four], including "visual object" (**rūpa*, *gzugs*), etc., are not seen. Therefore, one sees [them] as the name-only (**nāmamātra*, *ming tsam*) because the object to be grasped is abandoned.

> de'i 'og tu bzod pa'i dus na chos thams cad sems tsam du mthong ste / ming gi phung po bzhi tsam du zad kyi de las ma gtogs pa'i gzugs la sogs pa'i chos gang yang ma mthongs bas na ming tsam du mthong ba zhe bya ste / gzung ba rnams de'i tshe spangs pa'i phyir ro. (SAVBh II, p. 117)

Nāmamātra is equated to *vijñaptimātra* (representation only) by Vasubandhu (MSABh, p. 67) and to *cittamātra* (mind only) by Sthiramati.[35] Previous research has shown that in the Buddhist literature, *nāmarūpa* has been explained as five psycho-physical constituents (*pañcaskandha*); material factors (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedāna*), ideation (*samjñā*), impulse (*saṃskāra*), and perception (*vijñāna*).[36] Except *rūpa*, the other four constituents are often denominated as *nāman*, non-material factors.[37] Therefore, Sthiramati's interpretation of *nāmamātra* as "non-material factors only" could be supported by Buddhist texts, although he does not mention any textual grounds for his interpretation.

However, the equation of *nāmamātra* with *cittamātra* diverges from the description of *nāmamātra* in the BoBh and MAVBh, which do not state the non-existence of material constituents but rather focus on explaining the non-existence of what is named and the existence of the inexpressible thing (the BoBh) or the inexpressible ultimate characteristic (the MAVBh). Contrary to this, the MSABh uses this term not to distinguish between the expressed thing and the ineffable thing but to classify various traditional constituents into two groups: the non-existent material factors (*rūpa*) and the existent but non-material factors (*nāman*).

Sthiramati also describes "the highest ordinary stage". Those who are at this stage are described as no longer perceiving "mental factors only"; in other words, they regard even non-material constituents as non-existent. This stage is obtained by understanding the non-duality of agent and object. This practice is described as not seeing *nāmamātra*:

> After that [stage], at the highest ordinary stage (**laukikāgradharma*, *'jig rten gyi chos mchog*), what is seen as *nāmamātra* at the stage of "acceptance" is not seen [anymore] because the grasping at the existence as mind-only is also given up at this stage. This is because it is understood as being not suitable to say that [the object] grasped does not exist, but the grasping perception does exist.

> de nas 'jig rten gyi chos mchog gi dus na bzod pa'i tshe ming tsam du mthong ba de yang ma mthong ste/sems tsam du yod par 'dzin pa yang de'i tshe spangs pa'i phyir te/gzung ba med pa yang 'dzin pa yod par mi rigs par khong du chud pa'i pyir ro. (SAVBh II, p. 118)

Those who are at this stage are described as contemplating the distinction between the object to be grasped (**grāhya*, *gzung ba*) and the grasping (**grāhaka*, *'dzin pa*) perception. The non-existence of the material constituents is equated to the non-existence of objects to be grasped by the mind. According to the passage, if all external objects are considered non-existent, it is impossible to defend the claim that the grasping perception caused by external objects exists. Sthiramati explains that this reasoning leads to the conclusion that there is neither a cognized object nor a cognizing agent. This knowledge (*jñāna*) of non-duality is explained as leading the practitioner to the first stage of Bodhisattva.[38]

This systematization of the contemplation model in the MSABh, or in Sthiramati's commentary at the latest, sacrifices the established meaning of *nāmamātra* and requires two layers of interpretation: the practitioner perceives *nāmamātra* first as "name only" and second as "mental factors only". However, this practice has the advantage of attaining two kinds of knowledge:

1. Practitioners have a chance to think about the relationship between a name and an object to which a name is given and to conclude that what is named does not exist.
2. By thinking about another meaning of *nāmamātra*—that is, that only the four mental constituents exist, except the material constituents (*rūpa*)—the practitioner abandons attachment to external and material constituents.
3. Through contemplating the nature of perception and understanding the impossibility of any mental phenomena without objects to be grasped by the mind, the practitioner attains the knowledge of the non-existence of mental constituents.

This contemplation model is different from that described in the BoBh and MAVBh. The MSABh and its commentary apply two meanings of *nāmamātra* to make practitioners continuously negate various kinds of existence. Unlike the BoBh and MAVBh, understanding existence of the ineffable thing is not mentioned in describing contemplation of *nāmamātra* in the MSABh. Moreover, the doctrine of *nāmamātra* is explained as what should be abandoned before reaching the first stage of Bodhisattva.

6. Concluding Remarks

Examining *nāmamātra* in the Yogācāra literature demonstrates that this term has been modified according to the contemplation models provided by each text. The BoBh exclusively focuses on describing the relationship between a name and a named thing, while observing *nāmamātra* leads practitioners to regard the expressed object as non-existent and to consider the ineffable thing existent. The MAVBh provides a similar description, but this text also reflects Yogācāra's striving to unify various terms into a single word; that is, the MAVBh uses the single term "intrinsic characteristic" (*svalakṣaṇa*) to distinguish between what is non-existent and what is existent. According to this explanation, a single object has a conventional intrinsic characteristic, which is expressed by names and is non-existent, and an ultimate intrinsic characteristic, which is ineffable and existent. The MSABh still uses *nāmamātra* to explain the nature of language, but understanding the nature of language through contemplating *nāmamātra* is described as a first step toward reaching the first stage of Bodhisattva. The MSABh then inserts a new definition of *nāmamātra* and uses it to establish a gradual practice. That is, *nāman* is redefined as the non-material factor that is opposed to the material factor (*rūpa*), and thus, *nāmamātra* means that only mental factors exist—not material ones. Those who observe this *nāmamātra* regard material factors as non-existent. After that, those who are at the highest mundane stage abandon even the doctrine of *nāmamātra*, and thus, they also regard mental factors as non-existent. To establish this gradual practice, the MSABh uses the term *nāmamātra* in two different senses.

In summary, the insertion or modification of *nāmamātra* stands as an example of modifying the meaning of traditional Buddhist terms to align with the philosophical and meditative perspective expressed in Yogācāra texts. Moreover, this modification did not happen just once but continuously, as I have shown by comparing the passages in the BoBh, MAVBh, and MSABh. The BoBh reflects the first phase in which the traditional term was applied to describe Yogācāra practice. In the MAVBh, we witness various terms summa-

rized into a single word: intrinsic characteristic (*svalakṣaṇa*). The MSABh reveals the third phase, where the established meaning of the term is inserted or changed when it is needed for systemizing Yogācāra contemplation manuals.

Abbreviations

Aṣṭ	*Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā.* See Vaidya (1960).
BhSS	*Bhavasaṃkrāntisūtra* (*Bhavasaṃkrāntināmamahāyānasūtra*). See Tseng (2010).
BoBh	*Bodhisattvabhūmi.*
BoBh$_D$	*Bodhisattvabhūmi.* See Dutt (1979).
BoBh$_W$	*Bodhisattvabhūmi.* See Wogihara (Wogihara [1936] 1971).
MAVBh	*Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya.* See Nagao (1960).
MAVṬ	Sthiramati: *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā. Exposition systématique du Yogācāravijñaptivāda.* See Yamaguchi (1934).
MSABh	*Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkārabhāṣya.* See Lévi (1907).
SAVBh II	**Sūtrālaṃkāravṛttibhāṣya.* See Hayashima (1978).

Notes

1 Schmithausen (2014) provides the most up-to-date bibliography. See also Willis (1979, pp. 20–36).

2 References to Aṣṭ in text refer to Vaidya (1960).

3 Here, the term *saṃjñā* means not a concept or ideation arising in an individual mind but the designation used by those who share a linguistic convention. See Tseng (2010, p. 438); Schmithausen (2014, p. 366 fn. 1660); Choi (2023, p. 19). Vinita Tseng, also known as Bhikṣuṇī Vinīta, published a Sanskrit edition of the text with the title *Bhavasaṃkrāntināmamahāyānasūtra*, together with an annotated English translation and a comparison to Chinese and Tibetan translations (Tseng 2010, pp. 409–51). I use her edition in this article, i.e., references to BhSS refer to (Tseng 2010).

4 References to BoBh refer to Dutt (1979, BoBhD) and Wogihara (Wogihara [1936] 1971, BoBhW).

5 See Willis (1979, pp. 109–10, 170–73).

6 MSABh, p. 67. References in text to the MSABh refer to Lévi (1907).

7 SAVBh II, pp. 117–18. References in text to the SAVBh II refer to Hayashima (1978).

8 References in text to the MAVBh refer to Nagao (1960).

9 Conze (1970, p. 198) translates as follows: "[A Bodhisattva] should approach the perfection of wisdom in the conviction that 'all talk about the dharmas [is extraneous to them], consists in mere words, mere conventional expression,'—but the conventional expression does not refer to anything real, it is not derived from anything real, nor is itself anything real". See also Kumārajīva's Chinese translation (T227.8.579b15–17): 一切法但假名字, 當知般若波羅蜜亦如是. 一切法以言說故有, 當知般若波羅蜜亦如. The Tibetan translation treats the iti-phrase as a causal statement (D12.257b6): "[The Bodhisattva] should approach the perfection of wisdom because all phenomena are expressed through mere names, mere conventional expression. The conventional expression neither refers to anything real nor arises from anything real, [and] the conventional expression itself does not exist" (chos thams cad ming tsam dang tha snyad gdags pa tsam gyis brjod pa'i phyir shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin par rjes su rig par bya'o/tha snyad gdags pa yang gang la yang ma yin gang gis kyang ma yin gang yang tha snyad gdags pa med do).

10 *Loc. cit.*

11 Hakamaya (2001, p. 272) suggests that the BhSS reflects Yogācāra application of *Prajñāpāramita* thought for interpreting a Sarvāstivāda text.

12 BhSS 2010, p. 432: "caramavijñānaṃ caramavijñānena śūnyam. cyutiś cyutyā śūnyā. prathamavijñānaṃ prathamavijñānena śūnyam. upapattir upapattyā śūnyā."

13 BhSS, p. 422.

14 See fn. 3.

15 On these interpretations, see Hakamaya (2001, pp. 255–60).

16 BoBh$_D$, p. 52; BoBh$_W$, p. 53.
17 Willis (1979, p. 170) translates this phrase as "[Bodhisattva] sees with regard to a name that is just a name".
18 See also Willis (1979, p. 171).
19 Rūpamitm BoBh$_D$.
20 BoBh$_D$, p. 37; BoBh$_W$, p. 54. Takahashi (2003) investigates how the YoBh explains that the name is not essential to the thing.
21 Willis (1979, p. 172).
22 BoBh$_D$, p. 37; BoBh$_W$, p. 54: "abhilāpyenātmanā 'parinispannatvān na bhāvah".
23 *Op. cit.*: "na punarabhāvo nirabhilāpyenātmanā vyavasthitatvāt".
24 BoBh$_D$, p. 38; BoBh$_W$, p. 55.
25 "All these, namely, the sense faculty of seeing, the visible object up to the mind and the object of mind, are the mere name. Understanding this is the non-erroneousness about the intrinsic characteristic because it is the antidote against all the imaginations" (sarvam idam nāmamātram yad idam caksūrūpam yāvan manodharmā iti. yaj jñānam sarvavikalpānām pratipaksena ayam svalaksane 'viparyāsah). (MAVBh, p. 67).
26 References in text to MAVT refer to Yamaguchi (1934).
27 "All objects to be known (*jñeya*), which have the nature of twelve fields, are nothing but names. There are names, and designations as the intrinsic nature and the particularity, but there is no [ultimate/real] intrinsic nature of the designated object and the designation itself" (ato dvādaśāyatanātmakam jñeyam sarvam nāmamātram. tatra nāmasvabhāvaviśesaprajñaptih, na ca prajñāpyasyārthasya prajñapter vā svabhāvo 'sti). (MAVT, p. 221).
28 See also Thurman (2004, p. 135).
29 MSABh, p. 67: "'When there is base' means 'when there is hearing', 'from collection' means 'because one who is endowed with the collection accumulate [merits] previously", [and] 'when there is product' means 'when there is the correct contemplation'" (ādhāra iti śrutau sambhārād iti sambhrtasambhārasya pūrvasambhāralābhāt, ādhāne satīti yoniśomanaskāre).
30 SAVBh II, p. 117: As dge ba'i bshes gnyen la brten nas dam pa'i chos nyan pa dang sems pa la sogs pa byed pa.
31 *Op. cit.*: tshe rabs snga mar mos pa spyod pa'i sar bskal pa grangs med pa gcig tu gsod nams (? probably bsod nams) kyi tshogs bsags pa ni tshogs so. An anonymous reviewer improved my translation.
32 *Op. cit.*: mos pa spyod pa'i sa dag tu chos thams cad mi rtag pa dang sdug bsngal ba dang stong pa dang bdag med par tshul bzhin yid la byas pa ni gzhag pa.
33 These four stages are described as four "stages of penetrating insight" (*nirvedhabhāgīya*) in the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* and *Abhidharmakośabhāsya*. See Gethin (1998, pp. 194–98).
34 The chapter *Śrāvakabhūmi* of the Yogācārabhūmi explains why names like "heat" are given: these stages can be compared to the process of making a fire. Practitioners are like those who endeavor to make a fire from collected firewood, which becomes warm at first, before this heat rises, smoke appears, and then a flame is produced. See Śrāvakabhūmi Study Group (2007, pp. 226–29).
35 The Yogācāra idea that *cittamātra* is equivalent to *vijñaptimātra* seems to have been established, at the latest, at the time of the MAVBh and MSABh. See Schmithausen (2014, p. 597 [paragraph 552]).
36 For an overview of five constituents, see Gethin (1986), Vetter (2000, pp. 19–73), and Kramer (2013, pp. xi–xx).
37 For an overview of *nāman* and *rūpa* in the context of *pañcaskandha*, see Olade (2014, pp. 62–72) and Salvini (2015, p. 34).
38 SAVBh II, p. 118.

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