

Something for Nothing: Cognitive Metaphors for Emptiness in the *Upadeśa (Dàzhìdù lùn)*

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Abstract

While the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā upadeśa (大智度論 Dàzhìdù lùn), the extensive commentary of the Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā sūtra and traditionally attributed to Nāgārjuna, is encyclopedic in its scope, it is perhaps the teachings on emptiness (*śūnyatā*) that have been most commonly seen as its philosophical focal point. The accurate presentation of this core doctrine is fraught with the perils of the audience falling to the two extremes of eternalism and annihilationism, as has been the case since the formation of the Buddha’s own teachings on not self (*anātman*).

The author of the *Upadeśa, following the Sūtra itself, thus chooses the rhetorical strategy of exegesis through metaphor, arguing that: “Although all *dharma*s are empty, there are distinctions between emptiness which is difficult to comprehend and emptiness which is easy to comprehend. We now use easily comprehended emptiness metaphors [to comprehend] difficultly comprehended emptiness.” The Sūtra and *Upadeśa give ten metaphors for emptiness: illusion, mirage, moon [reflected] in the water, empty space, echo, city of the *gandharvas*, dream, shadow, image in a mirror, and magical creation. In the *Upadeśa, each metaphor is explicated and tailored into its

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general interpretative strategy of applying Madhyamaka dialectic to interpret and defend the *Prajñāpāramitā* against all manner of Ābhidharmika (generic “Hīnayāna”) and non-Buddhist views of realism and nihilism.

A deeper examination of not only the metaphors so employed, but also how metaphors function in general, reveals that the matter is perhaps not quite so “easily” resolved. I will draw upon theories of “cognitive metaphor” from modern philosophy of language, in particular from Kittay’s acclaimed *Cognitive Metaphor, Its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure*, Lakoff and Johnson’s *Metaphors We Live By*, Ricœur’s classic *The Rule of Metaphor (La Métaphore Vive)*, and other writings. Kittay’s “perspectival” approach utilizes analysis of both the semantic fields and syntagmatic structures of the two sides of metaphor, i.e. the topic (or tenor) and vehicle, to reveal that “the critical feature of metaphor can be seen as a process in which the structure of one semantic field induces a structure on another content domain.” With respect to syntagmatic analysis, due attention will be given to the fact that our present text of the **Upadeśa* is a Chinese translation of the original Sanskrit, two languages having radically different grammatical syntax.

The “cognitive” or “conceptual” approach is the most appropriate theory of metaphor for our study here, because this is exactly what the author of the **Upadeśa* claims when explaining the use of easy vehicle metaphors to “comprehend” the difficult topic content of emptiness. A syntagmatic analysis of the **Upadeśa*’s metaphors enables us to group the text’s ten metaphors in several ways, as it appears that several of the metaphors are possibly merely sub-categories of another metaphor, thus providing little new conceptual comprehension of the topic of emptiness. Furthermore, more thorough analysis reveals that all ten can be divided into quite distinctive categories, distinctions which may have serious implications for the **Upadeśa*’s interpretation of emptiness of which the author himself was perhaps unaware. One distinction concerns the issue of external agency, as some metaphors have structures involving active intentional agency, whereas others lack this. A second distinction relates to the presence or absence of an underlying ultimate real beyond the empty in the metaphor in question. Both agency and real ultimates are key issues for the **Upadeśa*’s Madhyamaka methodology and interpretative standpoint.

While such critical distinctions may possibly be discovered through a very thorough reading of the **Upadeśa* itself, Kittay and others’ analytic and synthetic methods for the understanding of cognitive metaphors allow us to very quickly and clearly make such issues both apparent and accessible for critical interpretation. Final reflections will be made on the matter of applying

kataphatic metaphor vehicles for apophatic empty topics, i.e. how to make nothing out of something.

Keywords:

Prajñāpāramitā, **Mahāprajñāpāramitā upadeśa*, emptiness, cognitive metaphor, metaphor

以有為無 ——《大智度論》之空性認知隱喻

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摘要

傳統中，龍樹為詮釋《摩訶般若波羅蜜經》所撰寫的《大智度論》（*Mahāprajñāpāramitā Upadeśa*），雖然有廣博的範疇，然而一般是以其有關空性（*śūnyatā*）的教義作為哲學上的焦點。當準確地展現此核心教法時，聽聞者卻會有落入恆常與斷滅二邊極端的風險，就如佛陀教授的無我（*anātman*）教法也是如此。

《論》的作者順著經文本身採取了十則隱喻來解經的修辭策略，認為：「諸法雖空而有分別，有難解空，有易解空。今以易解空喻難解空。」《經》與《論》列出十種空性的隱喻：「解了諸法：如幻、如焰、如水中月、如虛空、如響、如犍闥婆城、如夢、如影、如鏡中像、如化。」在《論》當中，每則隱喻被闡明與運用到其通用的解釋策略，就是運用中觀辯證方式來解釋與捍衛《般若波羅蜜經》，反對阿毗達摩系統（所謂的「小乘」）與非佛教的實有與斷滅論說。

透過隱喻以及隱喻作用的深入研究，會發現這個議題可能不是那麼「容易」解決的。本文透過現代語言哲學的「認知隱喻」（cognitive metaphor）理論，以 Kittay 的 *Cognitive Metaphor, Its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure*、Lakoff 與 Johnson 的 *Metaphor's We Live By*、Ricœur 的經典 *The Rule of Metaphor*（原法文 *La Métaphore Vive*）和其他著作來探究《論》的十則隱喻。Kittay 的「視角」（perspectival）方法是運用隱喻之「喻體」（topic）和「喻依」（vehicle），進行兩種分析，即語義場（semantic field）和語言結構（syntagmatic structure）分析，揭示「可以看到隱喻的關鍵特徵是一個過程，一個語義場的結構會導致另一個現實域的結構」。在句法結構分析方面，須注意到並且克服的是：現存《論》的文本原是由梵文翻成中文，此兩種語言有著截然不同的文法與句法。

「認知」或「理解」方法是最適合本研究的隱喻理論，正如《論》的作者所言，用簡易的隱喻喻依來「理解」難懂的空性內容。透過《論》的隱喻句型分析，可將文中的十則隱喻分成幾組，因為有些隱喻似乎只是另一個隱喻的子類型，對空性議題幾乎沒有提供新的概念性理解。此外，更徹底的分析顯示，十個隱喻皆可分成許多獨特的類型，這些類型對空性的理解，產生出《論》的作者本身未曾想到的重大義含。其中一個類型涉及到外在造作者的問題，因為一些隱喻含有造作者的結構，而其他的則缺乏此類結構。第二個類型是有關該隱喻中是否存在著某種「空」以外的實體。對於《論》使用的中觀方法和解釋立場來說，造作者與實體現象都是關鍵議題。

雖然或許此批判性的類型可以通過深入閱讀《論》本身而發現，不過 Kittay 和其他學者對理解認知隱喻的分析和綜合方法，可使我們更迅速且明確地檢視這些問題，也更易於達到批判性解釋。最後是省思關於應用「肯定式」（kataphatic）隱喻喻依在「否定式」（apophatic）空性喻體上，即是如何「以有為無」的探討。

關鍵詞：

《般若經》、《大智度論》、空性、認知隱喻、隱喻

1. The **Mahāprajñāpāramitā upadeśa* on Emptiness & the Middle

1.1 Introducing the **Mahāprajñāpāramitā upadeśa*

The **Mahāprajñāpāramitā upadeśa* (大智度論 *Dàzhìdùlùn*), or “Commentary on the Great Perfection of Wisdom,” is one of the most important Indian Mahāyāna works for the Buddhist traditions of East Asia. Not only is the seminal classic *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* in 25,000 lines explained through the method and rhetoric of the Madhyamaka, but also a copious range of teachings on all manner of Buddhist thought and practice are covered through a range of styles from lofty philosophy to earthy humor and delightful verse. Traditionally, the authorship of the **Upadeśa* is attributed to the Madhyamaka savant Nāgārjuna, with the *Sūtra* itself considered to be the words of the Buddha. In modern Buddhist studies, much ink has flowed on the topic of who the the author might be, with arguments supporting the traditional view—Indian authorship other than Nāgārjuna—to attribution to Kumārajīva or some member(s) of his translation team.¹ Fortunately, however, that the translator was Kumārajīva is largely unproblematic, apart from some claims that he is the author.

1.2 The **Upadeśa*’s Teachings on Emptiness (*Śūnyatā*)

It is important to note, however, that *whoever* the author was, even if it was not Nāgārjuna himself, the writer was obviously remarkably intimate with Nāgārjuna’s writings and the Madhyamaka mode of reasoning. Particularly in

¹ Respectively: Richard H. Robinson, *Early Mādhyamika in India and China* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 35ff. This provides an overview of some of the earlier suspicions, such as those from Japanese scholars. Venkata K. Ramanan, *Nāgārjuna’s Philosophy as Presented in the Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra*, Reprint ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1975); Yinshùn 印順, *Dàzhìdùlùn zhī zuòzhě jí qí fānyì* (Taipei: Dōngzōng, 1993); Etienne Lamotte, *Le traité de la grande vertu de sagesse de Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra)*, vol. I–V (Louvain: Louvain: Bureaux du Muséon, 1944–1980); Edward Conze, *The Prajñāpāramitā Literature*, Bibliographia Philologica Buddhica: Series Maior, 2d ed. (Tokyo: Reiyukai, 1978); Ryūshō Hikata, *Suvikrāntavikrāmaparipṛcchā prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (Rinsen Book Company, 1983); Po-Kan Chou 周伯戡, “The Problem of the Authorship of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā upadeśa*: A Re-Examination,” *Historical Inquiry* 臺大歷史學報 34 (2004): 281–327.

the first 34 fascicles of the text, which are a term-by-term or line-by-line commentary on the first chapter of the *Sūtra*, we see a very consistent method of interpretation. The term or phrase is first stated, along with some basic (folk) etymologies, and perhaps some verses from such well-known classics as the *Udanavārga* (*Dharmapāda*) or *Arthakavārga*, functioning together as a kind of dictionary reference. The commentary will then often move into a Buddhist analysis of the term or concept, using the by then already highly systematized Ābhidharma-type approach. Such an analysis of the *dharmā*(s) in question is often very detailed, and in the process the author will draw from pan-Buddhist *Āgama* sūtras and *Vinaya*, para-canonical literature such as *Jātakas* and *Avadānas*, popular didactic tales of the day, as well as the scholastic *Abhidharma śāstras*. The author's expertise in this entire range is well known. This is by no means the final word, however, and many pages of analysis are ultimately capped off with a much shorter, more significant Madhyamaka position. This usually functions to retain the Ābhidharma analysis but relegate it to some kind of conventional truth or functional utility, with the ultimate truth itself being ultimate emptiness (*śūnyatā*; 空 *kōng*), the true nature of *dharmas* (*dharmatā*; 法相 *fǎxiàng*), suchness (*tathatā*; 如 *rú*), or the like. This hermeneutic process thus matches, even if it does not strictly follow, the system of the four "proofs" (*siddhānta*; 悉檀 *xītán*) that the author gives in the opening passages of the **Upadeśa*.² The first three proofs are conventional, and while useful, do not reveal the truth. Only the fourth and last, the "ultimate proof" (*paramārtha-siddhānta*; 第一義悉檀 *dìyīyì xītán*)—inexpressible emptiness—is the final position of the *Prajñāpāramitā* and its Madhyamaka commentary.³

1.3 Union of Mystic *Prajñāpāramitā* and Philosophic Madhyamaka

Much has been written about the centrality of emptiness for both the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras and Madhyamaka thought, so much so that one could refer to the typical understanding as an academic "narrative of emptiness."⁴ The usual description is that the pre-Mahāyāna Abhidharma and *Āgama*

² *Dàzhìdù lùn* (**Upadeśa*), fasc. 1, T 1509, 25: 59b17–20.

³ **Upadeśa*, fasc. 1, T 1509, 25: 61b9–16.

⁴ See Huifeng Shì, *Old School Emptiness: Old School Emptiness: Hermeneutics, Criticism & Tradition in the Narrative of Śūnyatā*. Humanistic Buddhism Series 人間佛教系列 (Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism 佛光山人間佛教研究院, 2016).

traditions take a naïve realist position with respect to existent dharmas and the emptiness of the individual. The early Mahāyāna sūtras, as typified by the *Prajñāpāramitā*, then further refute this to propose the emptiness of *dharmas*. Finally, the Madhyamaka, as represented by Nāgārjuna and his *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā* in particular, further supports the emptiness of all phenomena through a relentless rational dialectic. In the Madhyamaka tradition, it would be the dialectic of *prāsaṅga*, i.e. *reductio ad absurdum*, that would reign supreme. For many, such as Murti, Conze and Robinson, the Madhyamaka treatises of Nāgārjuna were the rational and philosophical expression of the religious or mystical *Prajñāpāramitā*, both ultimately espousing the exact same teaching.⁵

2. Ten “Easy” Metaphors for “Difficult” Emptiness

2.1 The *Upadeśa’s Employment of Metaphor

Not only does the **Upadeśa* employ a rich selection of textual sources in refuting opponents and establishing its own Madhyamaka interpretation of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, it also utilizes a wide range of rhetorical strategies to achieve these aims. If we take “rhetoric” in the broad classic Aristotelian sense of incorporating the three elements of argumentation (*inventio*), style (*elocutio*) and composition (*compositio*),⁶ we can see the **Upadeśa*’s use of tight Madhyamaka logic and reasoning as well as arguments based on Ābhidharmika premises, appeals to emotion for the compassion of the bodhisattva, cries of foul against perceived *ad hominem* attacks (while at times committing the same offense), appeals to authority, the use of prose, poetry and verse, earthy jokes and tall tales. Very little scholarship has been carried out on the rhetoric of the **Upadeśa* as a whole, due perhaps to the narrative of emptiness and its exclusive focus on rationally demonstrated insubstantiality.

One type of rhetorical strategy or *technê* that is very common throughout the **Upadeśa* is the use of metaphor. Below, in Section §3, we shall more clearly define our terms, but if for now we are permitted to make a general

⁵ T. R. V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism, a Study of the Mādhyamika System* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1955), 83; Edward Conze, *Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies: Selected Essays* (Oxford: Carrer, 1967), 144; Robinson, *Early Mādhyamika*, 61ff.

⁶ Paul Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 8–9.

and loose claim that the term “metaphor” roughly corresponds to the Chinese characters “譬如” (*pirú*), “譬喻” (*piyü*) or just “喻” (*yü*) within the **Upadeśa*, a simple digital search using the CBETA Reader software turns up an astounding 1051 matches for the former term, with 184 and 341 appearances of the latter two. Rough and ready as this is, it is still indicative of the pervasive use of such metaphors, similes, and analogies throughout the text. Many of these figures of speech are standard Buddhist and other Indian philosophical fare. For example, merely skimming through the first half of fascicle 1 alone, we find the metaphor of a composite “person” being akin to a chariot;⁷ or the “person” compared to the qualities of milk;⁸ types of foods which are used to treat disorders of the three humors used in classical Indian medical lore for meditations which treat specific mental defilements;⁹ that a rotten seed does not bear fruit;¹⁰ the non-existence of hare’s horns and tortoise fur;¹¹ a conceited *paṇḍita* in debate as like a crazed stampeding elephant;¹² or the need to hear the Dharma to develop wholesome states just as the lotus flower requires sunlight to bloom.¹³ Even this small sample alone shows the **Upadeśa*’s fondness for metaphorical rhetoric as it carries out its goal of convincing the audience of the truth and righteousness of the Mahāyāna Buddha Dharma.

2.2 Context & Reasons for Metaphors for Emptiness

That point of union between mystic *Prajñāpāramitā* and philosophic Madhyamaka, that is, the core teaching of emptiness (*śūnyatā*; 空 *kōng*), is no exception to the application of metaphor for the **Upadeśa*. On quantitative grounds alone, there are two Sections within the commentary on Chp. 1 of the *Sūtra* which most heavily utilize metaphor in the exegesis of emptiness and the *prajñā* which cognizes it. The first is Section 11 of Chp. 1, in fasc. 6 of the text, concerning the “ten metaphors” (十喻 *shí yü*) for emptiness.¹⁴ The second is Section 43 of Chp. 1, in fasc. 31, which is about “abiding in

7 **Upadeśa*, fasc. 1, T 1509, 25: 59b25–27.

8 **Upadeśa*, fasc. 1, T 1509, 25: 59c14–60a1.

9 **Upadeśa*, fasc. 1, T 1509, 25: 60a16–21.

10 **Upadeśa*, fasc. 1, T 1509, 25: 60c1.

11 **Upadeśa*, fasc. 1, T 1509, 25: 61a29–b1.

12 **Upadeśa*, fasc. 1, T 1509, 25: 61c8–9.

13 **Upadeśa*, fasc. 1, T 1509, 25: 63a28–29.

14 **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 101c8–105c18.

emptiness” (住空 *zhùkōng*).¹⁵ Of these two, the former provides an excellent point of entry for the study of the **Upadeśa*’s use of metaphor for this doctrine, as the very metaphors themselves are embedded in the *Sūtra* itself. This requires that the **Upadeśa* not only utilize metaphor for interpretation of the *Sūtra*, but also provide some meta-discussion on the use of metaphor itself to justify the *Sūtra*’s own usage.

We must thus begin from the *Sūtra*. In Chapter 1, we find the standard “circumstances” (*nidāna*; 因緣 *yīnyüán*) of the text, from “Thus I have heard, one time, while the Buddha dwelt at Rajāgrha on Mount Gṛdhakūṭa, together with the great *bhikṣu* Saṅgha of five thousand members, ...,” and so forth. The *Sūtra* then lists over one dozen qualities of the Buddha’s *arhat bhikṣu* disciples. The commentary on these several sentences of the *Sūtra* are covered in the first three fascicles of the **Upadeśa*, where there is in-depth analysis and exegesis on the various terms both one by one and together as a whole. Then, the bodhisattva *mahāsattvas* are introduced in the *Sūtra*, and another list is given of over 30 attributes that they possess. One of these is our focus of attention here, for it is said that:

解了諸法：如幻、如焰、如水中月、如虛空、如響、如犍闍婆城、如夢、如影、如鏡中像、如化。¹⁶

[the *bodhisattvas*] comprehend dharmas as like an illusion, like a mirage, like the moon [reflected] in water, like empty space, like an echo, like a city of the *gandharvas*, like a dream, like a shadow, like an image in a mirror, and like a magical creation.

For the sake of comparison, it is worth also citing the Sanskrit *Pañcaviṁśati-sāhasrikā* version:

māyā-marīci-dakacandra-svapna-pratiśrutkā-pratibhāsa-pratibimba-nirmāṇopama-dharmādhimuktaiḥ;¹⁷

and Conze’s translation thereof:

resolutely intent on dharmas which they held to be like an illusion, a mirage, a reflection of the moon in water, a dream, an echo, an apparition, an image in the mirror, a magical creation;¹⁸

¹⁵ **Upadeśa*, fasc. 31, T 1509, 25: 285b6–296b2.

¹⁶ **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 101c8–9.

¹⁷ Takayasu Kimura, *Pañcaviṁśati-sāhasrikā prajñāpāramitā*, vol. I-1 (Tokyo: Sankibō busshorin, 2007), 1.

It is philologically noteworthy that in addition to a slight change of order, our present Sanskrit text has only eight metaphors for emptiness, whereas Kumārajīva's much older translations of the *Sūtra*, and thus the **Upadeśa*, feature ten, with the two discrepant metaphors being “like empty space” (如虛空 *rú xūkōng*) and “like a city of the *gandharvas*” (如犍闍婆城 *rú jiàntápó chéng*). We shall discuss in more detail below, at Section §3.4, some other more critical linguistic and philological caveats due largely to working with metaphors across the structurally very different languages of Sanskrit, Chinese, and of course English.

Returning to the opening of the **Upadeśa*'s commentary, it first merely states:

The ten metaphors are in order to comprehend the dharma of emptiness.¹⁹

It is only after a full analysis of each of the metaphors in turn that it gives a justification of using metaphors in general for the topic of emptiness. The rationale of the **Upadeśa* is as follows:

Question: If the dharmas of the ten metaphors are all empty without exception, why merely use ten things as metaphors, and not use mountains, rivers, rocks, cliffs, etc., as metaphors?²⁰

Answer: Although dharmas are empty, there are, however, distinctions. There is emptiness which is comprehended with difficulty, and emptiness which is comprehended easily. Here, emptiness which is comprehended easily is used as a metaphor for emptiness which is comprehended with difficulty.²¹

In a sense, the question being asked here is: Why is a metaphor required at all? If all dharmas are empty, why do we need the metaphor of illusions, etc., are empty? If all X is Y in the first place, why do we require the metaphor of, say, Z is Y (when all Z is X)? The reply is one of cognitive need. We shall

18 Edward Conze, *The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom, with the Divisions of the Abhusamayālaṅkāra* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 38.

19 **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 101c10; or possibly, but less likely, “... the emptiness of dharmas.”

20 **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 105b28–c1.

21 **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 105c1–2.

examine these more theoretical matters below, when we examine how metaphor works in general (Section §3).

2.3 Previous Scholarship on Metaphor in the **Upadeśa*

For now, however, a basic review of how several modern scholars have reflected on the **Upadeśa*'s use of metaphor is in order. Or rather, in many cases, how they have not. For while the use of the metaphors themselves in modern scholarship is not at all uncommon, there is little analysis of what rhetorical function such metaphors have in the process of exegesis.

For example, Ramanan individually takes several of the metaphors in the **Upadeśa* commentary for discussion in his Chapter III on “Ignorance,” both as the “Nature and Function of Ignorance” and also “The Sense of ‘I’ and the False Sense of Self,” namely dream,²² echo,²³ mirror,²⁴ and the moon in the water²⁵ (which is also covered in his Chapter XI, “Consummation”). Ramanan’s paraphrasing and explanation between paragraph translations of the **Upadeśa* text largely also employs the metaphors in the making of philosophical points. However, there is no critical reflection at all on the role that the metaphor plays in defining or structuring such philosophical positions.

Ven. Yinshùn’s citations of this portion of the **Upadeśa* appear in several of his works. In his earlier *Notes on Lectures on the Prajñā[pāramitā] Sūtras*, the **Upadeśa*'s metaphors are used to flesh out the famous verses at the end of the *Vajracchedikā prajñāpāramitā* (金剛般若經 *Jīn'gāng bānrūo jīng*): “All conditioned dharmas are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a shadow; like dew and like a lightning flash; one should contemplate [them] thus.”²⁶ Yinshùn explains that “... the Dharma method of six metaphors (喻 *yū*) explains the correct view of *Prajñā* that is nominal designation is exactly emptiness. This allows trainees to understand the correct intention of the Tathāgata’s teachings on emptiness, on nominal designation, on separation, on non-abiding, and non-grasping, so that beginners will have a point of entry

22 Ramanan, *Nāgārjuna's Philosophy*, 93–95.

23 Ibid., 95–96.

24 Ibid., 96.

25 Ibid., 98–99, 311.

26 *Jīn'gāng bānrūo jīng* (*Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā sūtra*), fasc. 1 T 235, 8: 752b28–29; “*Tārakā timiraṃ dīpo māyāvaśyāya budbudam, svapnam ca vidyud abhram ca evaṃ draṣṭavyaṃ saṃskṛtam*,” in P.L. Vaidya, “*Vajracchedikā-Prajñāpāramitā*,” *Mahāyāna-sūtra-saṃgrahaḥ, Part 1*. Buddhist Sanskrit Texts, Vol. 17 (Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute, 1961).

and be able to deeply enter to the ultimate through this.”²⁷ The metaphors are, he claims, to demonstrate the “impermanence” (無常 *wúcháng*) and “non-substantiality” (無實 *wúshí*) of all phenomena, due to their “conditionality” (緣起 *yüánqǐ*) and “emptiness” (性空 *xìngkōng*).²⁸ Yinshùn then turns to the *Upadeśa notion of emptiness which is “understood easily” (易解 *yìjiě*) or “with difficulty” (難解 *nánjiě*), and paraphrases the text to explain the *Vajracchedikā* metaphors as indicating emptiness, despite the fact that the *Sūtra* never actually uses the term itself.²⁹ Elsewhere Yinshùn has cited the ten metaphors from the larger *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, and given a brief summary of how the later Yogācāra tradition would separate the metaphors apart into indicating one or another of the three natures (*trisvabhāvatā*; 三性 *sānxìng*), even though the *Sūtra* itself does not necessarily imply this. Later still, in one of his final works, *An Investigation into Emptiness*, Chapter 3.9, “Emptiness of Dharmas Like An Illusion,” offers more attention to the metaphors in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, and also the *Upadeśa commentary.³⁰ Here again the “easy” and “difficult” passage is cited, as well as the Yogācāra school distinctions, as he gives general and specific explanations of the metaphors. However, apart from one cautious sentence warning “However, this is a metaphor, and a metaphor is only able to take its metaphorical meaning,”³¹ there is no discussion at all on how metaphor as a rhetorical device affects the intended philosophical meaning. The same passages are cited later in the book, in Chapter 4.8, “Illusory—Dependent Origination which is Emptiness and Designation.”³² Here we are told that “metaphors are one kind of expedient method in Buddha Dharma pedagogy” when the *Madhyamaka Śāstra* gives metaphors to refute opponents’ philosophical tenets.³³ One is tempted to ask—if metaphors are expedients, does this imply that they are thus not ultimate? Should we understand this based on the literal word (*vyāñjana*), or on the meaning (*artha*) behind it? That they are non-definitive (*neyārtha*) statements requires interpretation (*nītārtha*)? If so, how

27 Yinshùn 印順, *Bānrùo jīng jiǎngjì* 般若經講記 (Notes on Lectures on the *Prajñā[pāramitā] Sūtras*) (Xīnzhú: Zhèngwén, 1971), 139. Translation is the author’s own.

28 Ibid., 140.

29 Ibid., 141.

30 Yinshùn, *Kōng zhī tànjiù* 空之探究 (An Investigation into Emptiness)(Xīnzhú: Zhèngwén, 1985), 195–200.

31 Ibid., 197.

32 Ibid., 261–65.

33 Ibid., 261.

then are they to be interpreted? I raise this question based on Buddhism's own standard hermeneutic principles,³⁴ not a challenge derived from some other place or time.

From the above brief review of scholarship which cites the metaphors of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* and their explanation in the **Upadeśa*, it is apparent that while the metaphors are often utilized by the authors in the same manner as in the original texts, there is seldom if any attempt to question the significance or implications of this kind of rhetorical strategy. Why not just directly explain the meaning of emptiness? Why resort to a figure of speech, which is admittedly not explicit or ultimate? What is lost, or gained, or otherwise altered, in the process? How do metaphors influence and structure our understanding of emptiness, or indeed, any other religious philosophical tenets which are so expressed?

3. Cognitive Metaphors & Their Analysis

3.1 Understanding & Models of Metaphor

It is thus critical for us to examine the phenomena of metaphors in some depth. In the disciplines of classics and philosophy, metaphor—under the broader subject of rhetoric as a kind of trope, i.e., a figure of speech—long lingered under the dark cloud of a bad name. A figure of speech was, according to the rhetorician Quintilian, “an expression transferred from its natural and principal signification to another, for the sake of embellishing speech (*ornandae orationis gratia*),” and the most beautiful of these was “transfer,” or “metaphor.”³⁵ Plato used the term “image” for metaphor, and contrasted it negatively against reality, which we see clearly in the “allegory of the cave”—shadows from candles pale when compared to real things seen in the light of the sun.³⁶ For most, metaphors as mere similitudes of reality were thus not to be trusted, though some philosophers saw in metaphorical writings that the texts were “saying something else,” i.e., a deeper meaning, and were not merely cosmetic embellishments.

³⁴ Donald S. Lopez, *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, Studies in East Asian Buddhism (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1988), 11–27.

³⁵ G. R. Boys-Stones, *Metaphor, Allegory, and the Classical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

In the last century, one of the oft neglected original aspects of rhetoric has reclaimed ground in our modern understanding of metaphor. That is, the element of argument, as opposed to figures of speech as mere ornamentation. In Richards' *The Philosophy of Metaphor*, he introduced the "interaction" or "relational" model, emphasizing that metaphor was not merely the case of thing A being a metaphor for thing B, but that metaphor was the actual interaction between the two. These two sides of metaphor he named the "tenor," i.e., that which is referred to, and the "vehicle," i.e., that which references.³⁷ This system was further refined by Black, who indicated that the two interactive aspects depended on a "system of associated commonplaces" which connected them and permitted the metaphor.³⁸ Historically, after a brief challenge by the pragmatist Davidson, who famously argued against the prevailing notion of literal versus metaphorical expression and claimed that metaphors "mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more,"³⁹ scholarship has now largely moved into the "cognitive" or "conceptual" model for understanding metaphor. We can see the earlier threads of this cognitive model in Black's idea that there is a "distinctive intellectual operation" in understanding the relationship between the two associated systems of topic (or tenor, see below) and vehicle.⁴⁰

3.2 Cognitive Metaphor & Kittay's "Perspectival Approach"

Among those scholars advocating the cognitive or conceptual model, by far the most influential writing has been George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By*.⁴¹ Their seminal contribution was in revealing how⁴²

metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.

³⁷ I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Metaphor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936). See also Eva Feder Kittay, *Metaphor: Its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 16.

³⁸ Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), 39–40.

³⁹ Donald Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean," *Critical Inquiry* 5, no. 1 (1978).

⁴⁰ M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999), 156. Emphasis added.

⁴¹ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

⁴² *Ibid.*, 3.

It is worth noting that Lakoff and Johnson are cognitive psychologists, not linguists or philosophers, showing quite a turn in theoretical underpinnings. Taking up the basic structural linguistics position that our cognitions of the world are formed and shaped through our ideas and concepts, and that ideas and concepts themselves are structured and shaped by the languages in which we think and communicate those thoughts to others, Eva Kittay has developed what she calls a “perspectival approach” of cognitive metaphor. In her *Metaphor: Its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure*, Kittay describes this approach as follows:⁴³

To call our theory perspectival is to name it for the function metaphor serves: to provide a perspective from which to gain an understanding of that which is metaphorically portrayed. This is a distinctively cognitive role. Since perspectival implies a subject who observes from a stance, we can say that metaphor provides the linguistic realization for the cognitive activity by which a language speaker makes use of one linguistically articulated domain, and similarly, by which a hearer grasps such an understanding.

Recalling our cognitive justification for employing metaphor in the **Upadeśa*, that is, the use of the easily comprehended to convey the difficult, we can see some clear parallels here. Differing slightly from Richards’s and Black’s use of “tenor,” Kittay calls the content domain which is to be understood the “topic,” though the metaphor which is applied to transfer meaning remains as the “vehicle.”⁴⁴ Kittay’s approach is as broad as it is deep, as she works toward developing a general theory of metaphor applicable to a range of cases. As such, here we shall only draw upon the most directly relevant elements. That her model is relational and features clear guidelines for both linguistic and cognitive aspects gives it particular appeal for our study here. Given that Kittay’s approach has this commonality with the **Upadeśa*’s own position, it is worth examining more specifically how her theory can help us here. We note that other scholars have used Kittay’s approach to examine metaphor in religious texts, such as Long and Moore with respect to the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁵

43 Ibid., 13ff.

44 Ibid., 25f.

45 G. A. Long, “Dead or Alive? Literality and God-Metaphors in the Hebrew Bible,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62, no. 2 (1994): 509–37; Anne Moore, *Moving Beyond Symbol and Myth: Understanding the Kingship of God of the Hebrew Bible through Metaphor*. Studies in Biblical Literature (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

Closer to home, use of Lakoff and Johnson's work has also been applied to Xūánzàng's Chinese translation of the *Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra* (般若波羅蜜多心經 *Bānrūòbōluómìduō Xīn Jīng*) by Chiang and Lu.⁴⁶

3.3 Applied Syntagmatic & Semantic Field Analysis

Several key elements of Kittay's perspectival approach are useful to us here. The first is that of grammatical syntax and syntagmatic analysis; the second is that of semantic fields. It is a structuralist approach, and borrows from de Saussure's system of signs, with spoken or written language as signifier, and with the concepts of this language as the signified.⁴⁷

The first type of application that Kittay employs is her analysis of metaphors through examination of their syntagmatic structures. She takes "the *syntagmatic relations* of a field to indicate the basic underlying structure of sentences that can be formed in a given semantic field or to indicate rules and relations specifying what collocations are possible given certain semantic considerations," model cases of which can be "even a paradigm."⁴⁸ For high literature, we can see how penetrating such analysis is with Kittay's work on Wordsworth's poem "On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic,"⁴⁹ and philosophically with Socrates's "midwife" metaphor in the *Theaetetus*.⁵⁰ Syntagmatic analysis shall be very useful to our analysis of the **Upadeśa*, because, as we shall see below, the text itself in most cases also very clearly gives at least one, but often more, model syntagmatic structural forms for each of the ten metaphors.

Second, the theory of semantic fields is explained first in theory and then demonstrated in application.⁵¹ Semantic fields are comprised of "lexical fields" and "content domains":⁵² "A lexical field consists of a set of *labels*," where "[s]imple labels are generally 'word-forms' of single words," though idiomatic expressions and phrases can also be included. Given that meaning is found not in individual words but in contexts, a "content domain denotes a

46 Wen Yu Chiang and Louis Wei Lun Lu, "Emptiness We Live By: Metaphors and Paradoxes in Buddhism's Heart Sutra," *Metaphor and Symbol* 23 (2008).

47 Kittay, *Metaphor*, 214ff.

48 *Ibid.*, 245.

49 *Ibid.*, 258–63.

50 *Ibid.*, 278–87.

51 *Ibid.*, Chapters. 5 and 6, respectively.

52 *Ibid.*, 227ff.

domain from which we determine the interpretation of an element of the lexical field.” The lexical field maps onto the content domain, as signifier and signified, though the signifiers do not necessarily exhaust the entirety of the signifieds. Semantic fields consist of a set of “contrast sets,” where the elements of the contrast set are hyponyms for the “covering term,” that is, specific examples with more limited range than the covering term itself.⁵³ These contrast sets thus allow for layering and sub-categorization, to whatever degree required, in theory without any limit. Note, however, that ordered contrast sets are not required to be exhaustive, and so there may be many gaps, asymmetries, and indeterminacies within the lexical field.⁵⁴ Indeed, the very fact that the given lexical field may not exhaust the content domain may be one of the very reasons why a metaphor is coined—that is, there is no word or term for a given idea or concept. A distinctly different lexical field originally associated with its own domain may need to be borrowed to cover originally unmapped terms—thus the birth of a metaphor. This is not the only reason for the creation of metaphor, however.

In his now classic study on early Chinese Madhyamaka, Robinson has noted both lexical and syntagmatic elements:⁵⁵

The primary operation for abstracting definitions is the collocation of passages. This, of course, is the technique that lexicographers have always used, but words are not the only meaningful units, and lexical meaning is not the only relevant kind of meaning. The technique of collocation applies equally to words, grammatical structures, rhetorical figures, figures of syntax, logical structures, citations from other texts, and abstract philosophical relations between terms. To understand this kind of text, a knowledge of lexical meaning alone does not suffice.

We can thus see that as a relational or interactive approach, Kittay’s methods do not consider metaphors as mere words or phrases independent of contexts, or even on the level of sentence semantics alone. Rather, the entire structure of the two respective semantic fields enables the shift in meaning that characterizes metaphorical function.⁵⁶ Thus, such semantic fields themselves must be held in common within a community of language users for the

⁵³ Ibid., 230ff.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 239ff.

⁵⁵ Robinson, *Early Mādhyamika*, 16.

⁵⁶ Kittay, *Metaphor*, 22ff.

metaphor to take effect.⁵⁷ This latter point warns us that we must naturally situate our texts within their own *sitz im leben* in order to understand our metaphors as in the ancient Indian religio-philosophical community (even beyond Buddhism alone).

3.4 Linguistic and Philological Caveats

This brings us to some linguistic and philological caveats before we present the content of the ten cognitive metaphors from the actual **Upadeśa* itself. These caveats are necessary, because we are going to use our own English translations of the Chinese text which has been transmitted over the course of 1,600 years, which is in turn a translation from a (potentially Buddhist hybrid) Sanskrit original. We shall directly use the Chinese text found in the CBETA system,⁵⁸ which has been critically edited and punctuated by Ven. Hoùguān, a well-known and published authority on the **Upadeśa*.⁵⁹ There are thus issues on two fronts, the first due to the differences of the languages, in terms of the lexical fields, i.e., the translated words, and the second due to their grammars, which influence their syntagmatic structures.

First, regarding the use of particular terms: In the Sanskrit, though we no longer have the original extant, our “*upama*”—the term is confirmed by the *Sūtra*—are strictly speaking more akin to similes, not metaphors. This is also shown in the Chinese use of “譬喻 *pìyǔ*,” “喻 *yǔ*” or just “如 *rú*,” the latter of which functions as “like” or “as.” We shall continue to thus use the term “metaphor” in its broadest sense, allowing for the fact that other languages may not categorize this range of tropes into equivalent types. As Sanskrit “*upama*” is often appended to a given term as a suffix, one could be tempted to use an English suffix form such as “-like,” e.g., illusion-like. Chinese cannot work in this manner, however, and the translator may either render compounded binomen forms as basic terms with prefix or suffix, as hyphenated compounds, or as several words that may qualify each other in

⁵⁷ Ibid., 223ff.

⁵⁸ *Dàzhìdù lùn* 大智度論 (**Mahāprajñāpāramitā upadeśa*), translated by Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什. T 1509, 25. Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association (CBETA) 中華電子佛典協會, 2014.

⁵⁹ Hoùguān Shi 釋厚觀. *Dàzhìdùlùn jiǎngyì (1)* 《大智度論》講義 (一) (**Mahāprajñāpāramitā Upadeśa* Lecture Notes 1). 7 vols. Vol. 1 (Xīnzhú: Yinshùn Educational Foundation 印順文教基金會, 2014).

various grammatical senses, for example as adjectives or in the possessive sense.

Second, there is the issue of the differences in the linguistic structures and grammars of the various languages involved. In modern scholarship, there has been no small amount of criticism of Chinese translations of Indian texts, and also of their translators. Sanskrit is typically a Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) structured language, but allows for a fair amount of flexibility. On the other hand, both Chinese and English are Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) structured, with English being somewhat flexible but Chinese heavily dependent on word order to indicate grammatical role. This difference may appear highly problematic, given our proposal to undertake syntagmatic analysis on our metaphors. However, in dealing with early Chinese Madhyamaka texts such as the **Upadeśa*, Robinson long ago argued that for “the Chinese texts to be considered in this study, it is not necessary or useful to distinguish figures of syntax from the normal grammatical apparatus, but it facilitates explanation to draw attention to certain frequent types of construction.”⁶⁰ Kittay, too, possibly aware of this kind of problem, reasons that the relationship between lexical and content fields “ensures that when we move from one part of speech to another (for example, from a noun to a verb, as in from ‘resonance’ to ‘resonate’), we have not thereby moved from one semantic field to another.”⁶¹ Thus, against the naysayers of classical Buddhist Chinese’s ability to accurately communicate Sanskrit, we also propose that we accept that Kumārajīva and his team as scholars and translators were well aware of these problems, and skillful enough to render the original Sanskrit lexical units and structures into natural Chinese forms. While they may have often transformed grammar and syntax in the process, they were still consistently able to ultimately preserve the metaphorical function through the relationship between both the vehicle and topic.

4. The Ten Cognitive Metaphors

4.1 Ten Metaphors in Twenty Forms

It is now high time to present the ten cognitive metaphors from the **Upadeśa*. What follows are English translations of the specifically metaphorical content from the **Upadeśa* for each of the ten passages that use a metaphorical

⁶⁰ Robinson, *Early Mādhyamika*, 18.

⁶¹ Kittay, *Metaphor*, 247.

vehicle to express the topic of emptiness (with Chinese in footnotes). The passages selected are not exhaustive, as the text gives other forms and examples, though the following have been chosen for their more complete structures and detail. Most of the metaphorical vehicles have more than a single form, so they have been labeled Mirage(1), Mirage(2), etc., for ease of reference. There is a total of 20 metaphorical forms. The Chinese source text is given in the footnotes for each form. Each metaphor and form thereof will be individually followed by some brief comments. Then we shall proceed directly into the syntagmatic analysis and then semantic field analysis (in §5). Only after these two types of analysis derived from Kittay's perspectival approach to metaphor shall we engage in a well-founded critical review of what the text is doing, consciously or otherwise.

A. Illusion (*māyā*; 幻 *huàn*)

The first metaphor is that of “illusion” (*māyā*; 幻 *huàn*). Due to its importance, I have elsewhere undertaken a diachronic study on this metaphor, from its pre-Buddhist origins, through early and sectarian Buddhism, into the earliest *Prajñāpāramitā* literature.⁶² The singular form is as follows:

Illusion (1):⁶³ By metaphor, it is just like illusorily created elephants, horses and other various things, although they are known to be without reality, however they have form which is visible, sound which is audible, and correspond to the six senses, not being mutually incoherent. Dharmas are likewise, although they are empty they are visible, audible, and not mutually incoherent.

The metaphor is fairly simple: just as an illusion can be perceived through the senses but does not exist in reality, so too are phenomena empty; they can be perceived but have no real existence.

B. Mirage (*marīci*; 焰 *yàn*)

The second example is “mirage” (*marīci*; 焰 *yàn*). Two structured forms are given, though they are closely connected, and both have more structural detail than the previous example of illusion.

⁶² Huifeng Shi 釋慧峰. “Is ‘Illusion’ a *Prajñāpāramitā* Creation? The Birth and Death of a Buddhist Cognitive Metaphor.” *Journal of Buddhist Philosophy* 2 (2016).

⁶³ **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 101c19–21.

Mirage (1):⁶⁴ A mirage is that by way of sunlight and the wind moving dust, in the wilderness one sees the resemblance of wild horses; [when] ignorant people first see it, they claim it is water. The characteristics of masculinity and femininity are likewise. The sunlight of the bonds, afflictions, heats up the formation dust, the wind of perverse conceptual thoughts, which proceed in the wilderness of life-and-death. The ignorant claim that there is one characteristic, whether masculine, whether feminine.

In this first form, there is the alignment of vehicle and topic not just for mirage and dharmas in the narrow sense, but also for the various factors that go into creating the mirage.

Mirage (2):⁶⁵ Moreover, if one sees a mirage from the distance, there is the perception of water; but from close there is then no perception of water. Ignorant people are likewise. If they are distant from the holy Dharma, they do not know not self, do not know dharmas are empty; and with respect to the aggregates, the elements, and the senses, dharmas that are empty of nature, they generate the perception of a person, the perception of masculinity, the perception of femininity. If they are close to the holy Dharma, they then know the real characteristic of dharmas. At this time, the various false perceptions are eliminated.

For the second, rather than dharmas as phenomena, we have the sense of the Dharma or “real characteristic of dharmas” as the true state of affairs. This is an important distinction that we shall return to below.

C. Moon [reflected] in the water (*dakacandra*; 水中月 *shuǐzhōngyüè*)

Next we have the metaphor of if the “moon reflected in the water” (*dakacandra*; 水中月 *shuǐzhōngyüè*). Again, two forms are given:

Moon (1):⁶⁶ The moon is in empty space, its reflection appears in the water. The moon of the nature of real dharmas is in the empty space of suchness, the nature of dharmas, the reality limit; however, in the

⁶⁴ **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 102b2–6. Philological note: The use of 相 *xiàng* and 想 *xiǎng* in these passages seems to indicate some correspondence or conflation, but it is not consistent.

⁶⁵ **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 102b6–10.

⁶⁶ **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 102b11–14.

water of the minds of common gods and humans appears the characteristic of self and what belongs to self.

For the first form, the vehicle is the moon's reflection in water vis-à-vis the topic of dharmas as perceived as having self or mind. But note that we also have the moon itself as vehicle for the topic of the nature of real dharmas, and this is situated in empty space, i.e., suchness, **dharmatā*, the reality limit, and so forth.

Moon (2):⁶⁷ Moreover, by metaphor, it is just like in still water one can see the reflection of the moon, on disturbing the water it then cannot be seen. In the still water of the mind without wisdom one sees the reflections of me-self, conceit, and the bonds; [using] the staff of real wisdom to disturb the water of the mind, one then cannot see the reflections of me-self, etc., the bonds.

This second form continues the first, with wisdom being the force that disrupts the deceptive reflection of dharmas as self. Note that the staff is of *real* wisdom.

D. Empty space (*ākāśa*; 虛空 *xūkōng*)

The fourth metaphor is one commonly used for emptiness or “empty space” (*ākāśa*; 虛空 *xūkōng*), which does not appear in the Sanskrit *Sūtra*. Three forms are given:

Space (1):⁶⁸ Empty space is a non-visible dharma. Viewing from a distance, with the eye and light, there proceeds vision of blue color. Dharmas are likewise, empty, without existence, a person who is far removed from influx-free, real wisdom, abandons the real characteristic, and sees that self, masculinity, femininity, houses, cities, etc., various assorted things, and the mind becomes attached [to these things].

In many ways this first form resembles that of the mirage, in that the deceptive color of blue is only perceived from afar. This is the vehicle for the topic of dharmas being empty and wisdom, existence. Here again we see the wisdom of seeing from close up described as being “real.”

⁶⁷ **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 102b21–23.

⁶⁸ **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 102b25–28.

Space (2):⁶⁹ It is like a small child who looks up at the blue sky, and claims that there is real color. A person flies up to an extreme height, and yet nothing is seen. By way of seeing from a distance, there is the claim of blue color. Dharmas are likewise.

The second form is largely the same as the first, albeit adding the child as agent, which is the vehicle for the foolish common person. Note that the description of seeing space from a great height is that it is “nothing,” as opposed to being some real nature of empty space.

Space (3):⁷⁰ Moreover, just like the nature of empty space is constantly pure, and people claim that [due to] clouds it is impure. Dharmas are likewise, their nature is constantly pure, but due to the clouds of lustful desire, angry aversion, etc., people claim that they are impure.

This third form merely adds the structural element of the clouds for the afflictions. It could effectively be incorporated into the first (or second) form, above.

E. Echo (*pratiśrutkā*; 響 *xiǎng*)

Our fifth case is that of “echo” (*pratiśrutkā*; 響 *xiǎng*). We shall only use one of the forms in the text, though it is fairly lengthy.

Echo (1):⁷¹ Whether in a narrow valley in the deep mountains, or in a deep sheer ravine, or in an empty large building, whether the sound of a voice, or the sound of striking, there is sound from sound, named “echo.” Ignorant people claim that the sound is from the voice of a person; the wise think in their minds, “This sound is not made by a person, but merely by way of the contact of sound, there is therefore a further sound, named echo. The thing [named] echo is empty, able to deceive the ear faculty.”

Whereas the previous four metaphors have all been visual, the case of an echo is auditory in nature. However, it shares some commonality with the moon reflected in the water in that this, too, is a reflection of sorts, but an acoustic one. This means that in addition to the vehicle of the echoed sound, there is

⁶⁹ **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 102b28–c1.

⁷⁰ **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 102c2–4.

⁷¹ **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 103a11–15.

also the original sound that creates the echo. While not explicitly stated as being real, as in previous metaphors, it is implied by the structure of the vehicle.

F. City of the Gandharvas (*gandharva-nagara*; 犍闍婆城 *jiàntápó chéng*)

The other example not appearing in the Sanskrit *Sūtra*, our sixth case, is that of the “city of the *gandharvas*” (*gandharva-nagara*; 犍闍婆城 *jiàntápó chéng*). Two cases are again given, though they largely overlap, and we shall consider them both together here.

City (1):⁷² When the sun first comes out, one sees city gates, towers, mansions, people walking in and out. The more the sun proceeds to the zenith, the more it proceeds to cease. This city is merely visible to the eyes, however there is no reality.

City (2):⁷³ Some people initially do not see the city of the *gandharvas*, [but] at dawn they look to the east and see it, thinking and claiming there is real pleasure. Swiftly walking toward it, the closer they get the more it vanishes; the higher the sun, the more it ceases. Hungry and thirsty and very frustrated, they see the hot air like wild horses, and claim that it is water; swiftly running toward it, the closer they get the more it ceases. Exhausted and troubled, they reach the middle of a narrow valley in the deep mountains, and loudly shout and cry out. Hearing the responding echo, they claim that there are people living there. Searching for them, exhausted, they still see nothing at all. On contemplation, they realize for themselves, and put an end to their thirsty wishes.

Ignorant people are likewise. With respect to the empty aggregates, elements, and senses, they see a me-self and dharmas, their minds grasping with lust and aversion, crazily running about around in the four directions, seeking pleasure to satisfy themselves, perverse and deceived, extremely frustrated and afflicted. If, by way of wisdom, one knows dharmas as being without self, without reality, at that time the perverted wishes will end.

⁷² **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 103b2–4.

⁷³ **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 103b4–13.

As per the mirage, there is some structuring here with the sun and its position in the sky, though this is not as detailed as the mirage. More material is given for its deceptive effect upon the viewer of the city of *gandharvas*, their afflictions and sorrows. Just as for illusion, there is the deceptive vehicle of the city for dharmas wrongly perceived as self, all without explicit or implicit reference to any reality. That is, there is no real city behind the façade, or mention of the true wisdom that sees through it.

G. Dream (*svapna*; 夢 *mèng*)

The seventh example is that of “dream” (*svapna*; 夢 *mèng*), which is the natural counterpart to that core cognitive Buddhist metaphor of “waking” (*bodhi*; 覺 *jué*). Three forms are given:

Dream (1):⁷⁴ Just as in a dream there are no real things, but one claims that there are real [things], on awakening one knows that there are none, and still laughs at oneself. People are likewise. In the dormant tendencies of the bonds, there is no reality but one still grasps, and on awakening to the path, one then knows that there is no reality, and further laughs at oneself.

The dream experiences are the vehicle for the topic of grasping, and waking from the dream for awakening to the path. The dominance of this metaphor shows even in this simple statement, where even the *topic* is already using the vehicle of “awakening”! The reality of the dream is refuted, and nothing is put in its place as real.

Dream (2):⁷⁵ Moreover, due to the power of sleep of the dreamer, there is no dharma yet one still sees. People are likewise. Due to the power of the dormant tendencies of ignorance, various things are not existent, yet one still sees, and claims that there is a self, what-pertains-to-self, masculinity, femininity, etc.

For form two, we have more detail about the process that creates the topic at hand, i.e., the dormant tendencies, especially ignorance, whereas the vehicle simply has “the power of sleep.”

⁷⁴ **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 103b29–c3.

⁷⁵ **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 103c3–5.

Dream (3):⁷⁶ Moreover, just as in a dream there is nothing to delight in, yet one is still delighted, nothing to be angry at, yet one is still angry, nothing to be afraid of, yet one is still afraid. Living beings of the three realms are likewise. Due to [the power of] the dormant tendencies of ignorance, one should not be angry but is angry, one should not be delighted but is delighted, one should not be afraid yet is afraid.

This third form effectively adds no more to the first two, and functions almost as a combination of the former two.

H. Shadow (*pratibhāsa*; 影 *yǐng*)

Another visual metaphor, the eighth, is that of “shadow” (*pratibhāsa*; 影 *yǐng*). This metaphor is yet another visual one.

Shadow (1):⁷⁷ A shadow is merely visible, yet not graspable. Dharmas are likewise. The eye sense, etc., sees, hears, senses and knows, [but] in reality is not apprehendable.

Not much need to be said for this first case. Though, it is worth mentioning the implicit need for an actual thing that has a shadow. This is not a reflection, unlike the moon and echo, but is structurally very similar.

Shadow (2):⁷⁸ Moreover, just like a shadow, [where] the light shines it is then manifest, [where] it does not shine it is then not manifest. The bonds, afflictions, cover the light of right view, then there is the shadow of the characteristic of self, the characteristic of dharmas.

In the second form, more details are provided. There are some problems here, which may just derive from a corruption in the text. At first, it appears that the shadow is dependent on light, which is physically true in the vehicle, but then in the topic light is right view, which would go against the shadow as metaphor for the deceptive nature of self and *dharmas*. Literally, this form contradicts itself, though I would warrant that most readers would only notice on close analysis, as we all readily know how a shadow works and thus our minds are drawn into a path of seemingly easy comprehension.

⁷⁶ **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 103c5–8.

⁷⁷ **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 104a9–11.

⁷⁸ **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 104a14–15.

I. Image in a mirror (*pratibimba*; 鏡中像 *jìngzhōngxiàng*)

Our penultimate example is that of an “image in a mirror” (*pratibimba*; 鏡中像 *jìngzhōngxiàng*). Here we have another three forms of what is a very clear visual and reflection-type structure of metaphor:

Image (1):⁷⁹ Just like the image in a mirror is not created by the mirror; is not created by the face; is not created by the one who holds the mirror; and is also not created by itself; and is also not without causal condition. Dharmas are likewise. They are not created by themselves; are not created by other; are not created by both [self and other]; and are not without causal condition.

The structure of the first form is mainly designed, it appears, to fit with the classic Buddhist *tetra-lemma*. Though, while the structure of the topic indicates mutually opposing self vs. other, the vehicle does not.

Image (2):⁸⁰ By metaphor, it is just like ... a small child seeing the image in the mirror, their mind delights and they desirously attach to it. On losing [the image], they break the mirror in search of it, and are laughed at by wise people. Losing pleasure and further seeking it is likewise, and one is laughed at by holy people who have attained the path.

The second form is simpler, and mainly just adds the child as vehicle for the foolish; for the wise we would have, we assume, a mature adult.

Image (3):⁸¹ Moreover, just like the image in a mirror is empty, without reality, not generated, nor ceased, deceiving and beguiling the eyes of common people. All dharmas are likewise, in this way, empty, without reality, not generated and not ceased, deceiving and beguiling the eyes of common people.

Our third form merely reiterates the deceptive nature of the reflected image, as a vehicle for our topic, all dharmas.

⁷⁹ **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 104b18–19.

⁸⁰ **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 104c14–16.

⁸¹ **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 104c17–19.

J. Magical creation (*nirmāṇa*; 化 *huà*)

Last but by no means least, is that of the “magical creation” (*nirmāṇa*; 化 *huà*). This, too, would later become one of the dominant metaphors for Buddhism, and was often combined together with the first metaphor: illusion. Here we have two forms that display some differences.

Magic (1):⁸² Just like a magically created person is without birth, aging, disease, and death, without pain and pleasure, and different from human life. Due to this reason they are empty, without reality. All dharmas are likewise, all without generation, abiding, and cessation.

In this first form, we again see the emphasis on the magical creation as being empty and without reality. There is no corresponding real person juxtaposed with the magically created one.

Magic (2):⁸³ Moreover, the generation of the magical creation (/the magical creator) is no fixed thing, there is merely the generation of mind; if it has any further activity, it is all without reality. The human body is likewise. Formerly without any cause (/existence), it is merely from the mind of the previous life, that generates the body of the present life; all is without reality.

For the second, the emphasis is rather on the notion that the magical creation is a product of mind, a vehicle for the topic of the human body as a product of (mental) karma.

5. Analysis of the Metaphors

5.1 Syntagmatic Analysis

We may now proceed with the syntagmatic analysis of the ten metaphors, each of which has numerous forms. Following Kittay’s own illustrative examples, we shall present these via a standardized grammatical sentence structure. We have summarized each of the forms of the metaphors as given above in strict and formal translation. These are then parsed out with an agent, a basic

⁸² **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 105a26–28.

⁸³ **Upadeśa*, fasc. 6, T 1509, 25: 105a29–b2. There are some variant readings in the Chinese which we have bracketed off in the English translation.

primary verb (1), which is enacted upon the object, which in turn may be modified by adjective(s); the verb may take place through an instrument, or adverbially (we have combined these for space reasons); and finally there may be some resultant clause, involving its own verb, object, and so forth. For example:

[Agent] A person [verb₁] sees [adjective₁] unreal [object] mirage phenomena [adjective₂] as if they were real, [instrument] due to sunlight, dust and so forth; [verb₂] they chase after the mirage water.

Where these syntagmatic elements are only implied, we have used square brackets [thus], for example, for many of the agents. While Chinese grammar does not necessarily require an agent for a grammatically correct sentence, Sanskrit usually does, or at least implies one through its verb in terms of gender, number, and so forth. Moreover, sometimes the entire grammar has been converted from (what could perhaps be a Sanskrit-influenced) passive voice construction, into the form of a more regular active voice agent-verb-object structure (as justified above at §3.4). We first present each form of each vehicle of the metaphor, followed immediately by the topic that it represents. In several cases, no topic is given, and it is entirely implied.

Table 1 Syntagmatic Analysis of the Ten Metaphors in Twenty Forms

	Summary	Agent	Verb (1)	Adjective (for Object)	Object	Adverb or Instrument	Resultant Action
A. Illusion (1)	Illusorily created things are without reality, but can be seen, heard, etc., and known by the senses.	[People]	see, hear, sense, know	without reality	illusorily created things	[illusionist, mantra, etc.]	
	All dharmas are without reality, but can be seen, heard, etc., and known by the senses.	[People]	see, hear, sense, know	without reality	dharmas		
B. Mirage (1)	A mirage is created by way of sunlight, wind and dust; it resembles wild horses; people think it is water.	People	see		mirage	sunlight, wind, dust	thinks it is wild horses
	The characteristics of [dharmas] are created by way of the bonds, afflictions, formations and conceptualization; they proceed in cyclic existence; people think that they really exist.	People	[know]	[not real]	characteristics of [dharmas]	bonds, afflictions, formations, conceptualization	proceed in cyclic existence

B. Mirage (2)	A mirage when seen from a distance resembles water; but from close does not.	[People]	see	not water	mirage	distantly [sunlight, wind, dust]	resembles water
	The Holy Dharma when seen from the view of emptiness, etc., [resembles ??]; but from the view of emptiness, etc., then the real characteristic of dharmas is known.	[People]	see	real	Holy Dharma	view of emptiness	
C. Moon (1)	The moon is in empty space; its reflection appears in the water.	[People]	[see]		moon	reflected in water	
	The real nature of dharmas is in suchness, etc.; the appearance of self and mine appears in the minds of ordinary beings.	[The wise] Ordinary people	[know] see		real nature of dharmas self and mine	in suchness	
C. Moon (2)	When the water is still the reflection of the moon is seen; when disturbed it is not seen.	[People]	see		water	reflected in water	
	When the mind is without wisdom me-self, conceit and bonds are seen; when there is wisdom they are not seen.	Foolish people Wise people	see not see		conceit and bonds	in the mind	

D. Space (1)	Space, when viewed from a distance, appears blue.	[People]	see		space	distantly	appears blue
	Dharmas, when viewed without wisdom appear to have real characteristics.	[Foolish people]		not real	dharmas	without wisdom	appears real
D. Space (2)	Space is seen by a child as having a real color; when viewed up close there is no [color]; when viewed from a distance there is blue color.	Child	sees		space	distantly	appears blue
	[*None given]						
D. Space (3)	Space is constantly pure, due to clouds people claim it is impure.	People	[see]		space	clouds	appears impure
	Dharmas are constantly pure, due to afflictions people claim that they are impure.	People	[see]		dharmas	afflictions	appear as impure
E. Echo(1)	An echo is a [reflected] sound, made in a space between large objects; people claim that the [reflected] sound is real; the wise know that the sound is a [reflection] of sound.	People	hear		echo	valley, room, mountains	laughed at by the wise
	[*None given]						

F. City(1)	[A city of the <i>gandharvas</i> is seen by the action of the morning sun; it is visible but not real; it ceases as the sun rises.	[People]	see	disappears towards midday	[city of the <i>gandharvas</i>]	sun in the morning	
	[*None given]						
F. City (2)	[A city of the <i>gandharvas</i> is seen by the action of the morning sun; it is seen but not real; people run towards it seeking pleasure, hungry and thirsty; they get lost; it ceases as the sun rises.	[People]	see	ceases as sun rises	[city of the <i>gandharvas</i>]	sun in the morning	run toward it seek pleasure
	Dharmas are seen [due to what?]; they are seen as me-self and dharmas; people run towards them seeking pleasure, lusting and averse; they are deceived and frustrated; views of a me-self, reality and desires cease when wisdom arises.	[Foolish] people Wise [people]	see		dharmas	[afflictions] wisdom	as me-self seeking pleasure deceived and frustrated

G. Dream (1)	In dream no real thing; claims they are real; awakens to the fact that nothing real; laughs.	[Person] dreaming	[sees]	unreal	things in a dream		awakens; laughs
	In dormant tendencies of bonds nothing real; one grasps at things; awakens to the fact that nothing real; laughs.	People	[see]	unreal	dharmas		awakens; laughs
G. Dream (2)	The dreamer, due to the power of sleep, sees things.	[Person] dreaming	sees		dreams	the power of sleep	
	People, due to the power of dormant ignorance, see things that are not real and claims they are a self, etc.	People	see	not real	things		
G. Dream (3)	In a dream there is nothing delightful but is delighted; nothing to be angry at but gets angry; nothing to be afraid of but is afraid.	[Person] dreaming]	dreams		dreams	[the power of sleep]	delights in non-delightful; angry at the non-angering; afraid of what is not fearful

	Due to dormant ignorance one should not be delighted but is delighted; should not be angry but is angry; should not be afraid but is afraid.	Ignorant [people]	[perceive]		things		delight in the non-delightful; angry at the non-angering; afraid of what is not fearful
H. Shadow (1)	A shadow is visible but not graspable.	[⁸⁴ People]	see	not graspable	shadow	[shadowed thing]	
	Dharmas are perceivable but not apprehendable as real.	[People]	perceive	non-apprehendable	dharmas		
H. Shadow (2)	A shadow is manifest when light shines; not manifest when light does not shine.	[⁸⁵ People]	see do not see		shadow	when there is light when there is no light	
	The characteristics of self and dharmas are manifest when right view is covered.	[People]	see		characteristics of self and dharmas	right view covered	

⁸⁴ Strictly speaking, this should be in the passive, i.e., the shadow is manifest to the people, rather than the people see the manifest shadow.

⁸⁵ Strictly speaking, this should be in the passive, i.e., the shadow is manifest to the people, rather than the people see the manifest shadow.

I. Image (1)	An image is not created by the mirror; is not created by the face; is not created by the holder of the mirror; is not created by itself.	[⁸⁶ People]	[see]	not created (in any of four ways)	image	[reflection]	
	Dharmas are not created by themselves; are not created by other; are not created by both self and other; are not created without conditions.			not created	dharmas	by self by other by self and other without cause	
I. Image (2)	A child sees the image in the mirror and becomes attached; on losing the image they break the mirror; they are laughed at.	Child	sees		image in a mirror	[reflection]	becomes attached breaks mirror is laughed at
	[A foolish person sees dharmas] and becomes attached; on losing the <i>dharmas</i> they seek them; they are laughed at.	[Foolish people]	see		[dharmas]		become attached seek <i>dharmas</i> are laughed at

⁸⁶ Strictly speaking, this should be in the passive, i.e. it is the image which is seen by the people, rather than the people which see the image.

I. Image(3)	An image in a mirror is empty; is neither generated nor ceased; it deceives common people.	[People]	[see]	empty not generated	image in a mirror	[reflection]	deceives people
	Dharmas are empty, without reality; are neither generated nor ceased; they deceive common people.	Common people	[know]	empty without reality neither generated nor ceased	dharmas		are deceived
J. Magic(1)	A magically created person is without birth, aging, disease, or death; without pleasure or pain; not a human life; empty.			not human empty without birth, death without pleasure, pain	magically created person		
	Dharmas are without generation, abiding and cessation.	[People]	[know]	without generation, abiding or cessation	dharmas		
J. Magic(2)	A magical creation is not a fixed entity; it is a product of the mind; any activity is not real.	[People]	[know]	not entity product of the mind not real	magical creation		
	The human body is a product of the mind; it is without reality.	[People]	[know]	mind- produced not real	human body		

5.2 Semantic Field Analysis

Having parsed out the syntagmatic forms for the ten metaphors, let us look at the various semantic fields that are involved. We shall undertake this based on the previous grammatical structure, from the semantic fields for the agent, to the primary verb, and so on. The field analysis features contrasted sets, with covering term “L” and various hyponyms “E₁, E₂ ... E_n.” We shall work backwards, in taking the various grammatical terms in the forms as the hyponyms, and add our own covering term for the entire category itself:

<< L >: E₁, E₂, E₃, ... E_n >

Let us start from the semantic fields for the agent. This is a relatively simple affair, given that most are an explicit or implicit “people” or “person,” with a few examples of the “child” or the “wise.” This is turn has the two contrasted forms, depending on the correct or mistaken nature of their action (see verb analysis, next):

<< Agents (of misperception) >: people, common people, ignorant people, children >

<< Agents (of correct perception) >: the wise >

Note that the term translated into Chinese as “child” (小兒 *xiǎoér*) most likely comes from Sanskrit “*bāla*,” which can be both “child” or “foolish [person],” implying that children are ignorant and foolish.⁸⁷ “Children” can thus in turn be subsumed under the category of “ignorant people” in this linguistic context. Note that between the vehicle and topic, there is very little distinction. That is, the cognitive function of the vehicle is not to introduce an otherwise unknown topic agent.

Next, consider the primary verb that the agent performs. These are almost all basic verbs for perception or some kind of knowing. As we have already noted above, the use of “seeing” is predominant, followed by a general “knowing,” though there is also “hearing” and “dreaming,” for example.

<< Perceiving >: seeing, knowing, hearing, dreaming, perceiving >

⁸⁷ See T. W. Rhys-Davids and William Stede, *The Pali-English Dictionary* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1997), 485.

As for the agents, most of these verbs refer to misperceptions: the state of being deceived by the object. We could thus make a similar distinction between verbs for misperception and correct perception, depending upon the agent and the object that is perceived. For the latter, which are our ten basic metaphorical vehicles plus the topics that they stand for, this depends upon the qualifying adjectives such as “real” or “unreal.” As per the agent, there is only a slight distinction between the verbs for the vehicle and agent. The vehicles are largely external forms of perception, e.g. seeing, hearing, etc., and the topic is mainly knowing, although seeing is also used here, but already as a metaphor itself for knowing.⁸⁸

For semantic fields for the objects of perception we thus have two types in terms of misperceptions and correct perceptions, and we begin to see a clear distinction between the objects of the vehicle and those of the topics (which we shall separate with a double bar ||):

<< Objects (of misperception) >: illusions, mirages, reflections of moons, empty space, echoes, cities of *gandharvas*, dream (experiences), shadows, images in mirrors, magical creations || dharmas (as things), self, what pertains to self >

<< Objects (of correct perception) >: moons, sounds, things (which have shadows), things (which are reflected in mirrors) || the Dharma (as reality) >

The ten vehicles themselves are of course hyponyms of “dharmas (as things),” but not of the Dharma (as reality). A very important matter we can now clarify, is that while some of the vehicle metaphors only indicate objects of misperception, other vehicles also give a potential object of correct perception or knowledge. This may be explicit, as the statement about seeing the Holy Dharma, or more often implicit, with the actual moon, the original sound which causes the echo, the thing which has a shadow, and the thing or face which is reflected in the mirror.

The semantic fields for the various adjectives describing the objects (of misperception and correct perception) are as follows:

⁸⁸ “Understanding is seeing,” in Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 48, 103–04.

<< Adjectives (for objects of misperception) >: unreal || unreal, not self, not pertaining to self, empty, ungraspable, unapprehendable, non-created, non-abiding, non-ceased, mind produced >

<< Adjectives (for objects of correct perception) >: real || real >

The only explicit example of the latter is the “real Holy Dharma,” though implicitly the “actual” face, or “true” moon, and so on would also be valid. As above, here we see quite some overlap between the adjectives “unreal” and “real” for the vehicle and the topic, though the topic also had quite a number more as well.

Several of the metaphors—both vehicle and topic—provide details on the adverbs or instruments through which the perception takes place. Again, of two types:

<< Means (of misperception) >: sunlight, dust, clouds, water, reflection, from a distance, in valley or mountain, power of sleep || afflictions, lust, desire, grasping, aversion, anger, ignorance >

<< Means (of correct perception) >: close by, awake, light || view of emptiness, right view, with wisdom >

Finally, we have a resultant clause following the primary statement. This could be further reduced into its constituent grammatical elements, but we shall simplify this somewhat by considering that the agent remains the same, and it is largely the verb and its object that are significant. We have:

<< Resultant action >: think it is water, think it is blue, become desirous, become angry, run toward it, are laughed at || become desirous, become angry, grasp at it, continue in cyclic existence >

No doubt this can be extended out to include the usual Buddhist notion of experiencing various types of dissatisfaction, sorrow, lamentation, and so forth. Numerous secondary clauses are again repeated in the vehicle and topic, such as becoming desirous, angry, and so on.

5.3 Discussion of the Analysis

By first breaking down each of the forms of the ten metaphors—both vehicle and topic—by their syntagmatic/grammatical structures, followed by rendering these into their respective semantic fields, we can determine a clear overall picture of how they function to express the notion of emptiness.

Syntagmatically, we could reduce the vehicle to the following generic statement:

[Agent] People [verb₁] misperceive [adjective₁] unreal [object] phenomena of some type [adjective₂] as if they were real, [instrument] due to some natural conditions such as sunlight, spatial situation, etc.; [verb₂] as a result they grasp at an unreal object and experience frustration.

The topic may be shown such:

[Agent] People [verb₁] misperceive [adjective₁] empty, selfless [object] phenomena [adjective₂] as if they were real, self or what pertains to self, [instrument] due to the afflictions of desire, aversion and ignorance; [verb₂] as a result they experience dissatisfaction in continued cyclic existence.

However, to simply say that all the metaphorical forms nicely fit this structure would be to overlook issues that we have noted. We can see these by the various ways of grouping the vehicles. I would like to draw attention to four issues: namely, the mode of sensory perception (the verb), objects which are reflections versus those which are some kind of creation, and, as an extension of this last point, objects that have real counterparts as opposed to those which are entirely fictitious, as well as a distinction between those objects which are natural phenomena and those which are produced by external agency.

First, mode of sensory perception. With respect to modes of perception in general, a number of vehicles use the visual: illusion, mirage, empty space, moon reflected in water, city of the *gandharvas*, dream, shadow, image reflected in mirror (and perhaps magical creation). This is nine out of ten vehicles in total. The odd one out is an auditory vehicle, such as the echo. This heavy emphasis on the visual, which is an extremely common metaphor for inner, mental knowledge—“understanding is seeing”⁸⁹—should alert us to the relationship between how visual perception versus mental perception works. It is entirely assumed and implicit in the rhetorical expression, and not raised as potentially problematic or at least open to debate. This is despite the fact that many Mahāyāna sūtras reject the notion of true perception through the usual external senses and also through the mental, e.g., “The nature of

89 Ibid.

Dharma cannot be cognized, it is not able to be cognized,” in the verses of the *Vajracchedikā prajñāpāramitā*.⁹⁰

Second, reflected versus non-reflected objects of perception. Two of our vehicles are clearly a kind of reflection—the moon reflected on the water, and the image reflected in the mirror. In addition, the shadow is a kind of reverse reflection (if we may be permitted the expression), in that it too only appears when there is an object to cast a shadow. These three are all visual, but our solitary auditory vehicle, the echo, is also a reflection of sorts, a reflection of a human voice or clapped hands bouncing off the valley walls or mountainside. These reflective metaphors rely on the notion that the reflection (or shadow, or echoed sound) is false and unreal, yet we must also note that it implies that the original actual object is real: the moon, or voice, or face, etc. We shall return to this, below. The other examples which are not reflections—the illusion, mirage, empty space, city and magical creation—appear and are (mis)perceived not due to a singular real equivalent, but due to a number of other conditioning factors. For example, the mirage is described in detail as being due to the sunlight, dust, and so forth on the wide open plains; likewise the city; and elsewhere we understand that in ancient Indian culture an illusion is a creation through mantra and other ritual acts.⁹¹

Third, objects which have real counterparts. Just as the Vedic form of the illusion metaphor implied an illusionist (*māyī*)—whether as Indra or as the Vedic seer—so too those metaphorical vehicles here which have real counterparts to a reflected misperceived object, have implications for the understanding of emptiness. While all of the vehicles indicate that the various phenomena of the world are not real, deceptive, and misperceived as self or pertaining to self, is there some other reality, a true thing, the object of right view, wisdom and insight? On one hand, the metaphors of illusion, mirage,

⁹⁰ Edward Conze, *Buddhist Wisdom: The Diamond Sutra and the Heart Sutra*, 1st ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 63. Sanskrit: “*dharmato buddho draṣṭavyo dharmakāyā hi nāyakāḥ | dharmatā ca na vijñeyā na sā śakyā vijānitum || 2 || 26 ||*”, in Vaidya, “*Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā*,” 17.

⁹¹ For example, in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, vv 4:9–10; Sanskrit Documents, “*Svetasvatara-Upaniṣad (Svetasvataropaniṣad)*”. *Svetasvatara-Upaniṣad* “*chandāmsi yajñāḥ kratavo vratāni | bhūtaṃ bhavyaṃ yac ca vedā vadanti | asmān māyī sṛjate viśvam etat | tasmimś cānyo māyayā saṃniruddhaḥ | SvetUp_4.9 |*”; “*māyāṃ tu prakṛtiṃ vidyān | māyinaṃ tu maheśvaraṃ | tasyāvayavabhūtais tu vyāptaṃ sarvaṃ idam jagat | SvetUp_4.10 |*” Translation in Patrick Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*, Oxford’s World’s Classics (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 260. See discussion in Huifēng Shi, “Is ‘Illusion’ a Prajñāpāramitā Creation?.”

empty space, city of the *gandharvas*, a dream, and a magical creation would imply—no! There is a continuous rejection of the real, e.g., in the form city (2)—“dharmas as being without self, without reality” (無我、無實法者 *wúwǒ wúshífǎzhě*); for dream (1)—“no real thing” (無實事 *wúshíshì*) and “no reality” (無實 *wúshí*); in image (3)—“empty, without reality” (空無實 *kōng wúshí*); and likewise magical creation (1)—“empty, without reality” (空無實 *kōng wúshí*). But, this rejection of the real is for the specific deceptive object; does it apply to all objects? For the so-called reflected metaphors, the moon in the water, the echo, shadow, and image of a face in the mirror, perhaps the answer may be that some objects are, in fact, real. This is not merely an implied message, either. Nor is it confined to the reflected metaphors. We see reference to terms such as in mirage (2)—“real characteristic of dharmas” (諸法實相 *zhūfǎshíxiàng*); in the moon reflected in water (1)—“the nature of real dharmas is in the empty space of suchness, the nature of dharmas, the reality limit” (實法相月在如、法性、實際虛空中); again, in the form moon reflected in water (2)—“real wisdom” (智慧 *zhìhuì*); space(1)—“real wisdom” (實智慧 *shízhìhuì*). We could add the implication of the original face which is reflected in the mirror, and the sound which produces the echo.

Fourth, the implication of external agency. While many of the vehicle objects are natural phenomena, this is not always the case. A mirage, the moon in the water, empty space, an echo, the city of *gandharvas*, and a shadow are all obviously or apparently natural. This means that they do not have a single causal agency, but depend on such things as sunlight, and so forth. Several other examples are more ambiguous, like a dream—a natural experience, but potentially able to be influenced by the dreamer; the image in the mirror—also partly natural, but the mirror itself is a human product, unlike the water which reflects the moon; and finally the illusion and magical creation—both necessitate an intentional illusionist or magician, as in the example of Indra who creates the illusion of the world, just as the Vedic seer invokes mantra to bring about some effect. Such an external agency would very much counter the Buddhist notion of dependent origination as a natural phenomenon, and lean heavily toward the idea of either an external creator god (Brahma, or what have you), or possibly an internal generative force (*ātman*, *puruṣa*, or *prakṛti*, etc.). Again, these are but implied, but the shadow of an external agent does lie upon these particular examples.

When we look at the problems that these implicit issues raise, we may note that the metaphoric vehicle of “empty space” stands alone. It is not doctrinally tainted by the implication of a real counterpart in any sense, nor any act of agency in its creation. In *Abhidharma* terminology, empty space

was considered as pervasive and unconditioned, which means that like the topic of *all* dharmas, there are no exceptions. It is little wonder that this particular example became such a powerful, if not understated, vehicle metaphor for a fully negating emptiness that brooked no exceptions.

6. How Can Metaphors Make Something for Nothing?

6.1 Rhetorical vs Rational Presentations of Emptiness

The question of whether Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka propounds a kind of absolute emptiness, i.e., a so-called non-affirming emptiness that denies an own nature (*svabhāva*) without positing anything real, or whether it does in fact propose some ultimate reality, is a debate that has been taking place for as long as commentators on Nāgārjuna have existed. A huge number of books have taken on this question, and we do not intend to revisit the matter in its entirety. It needs to be pointed out, though, that the majority of the discussion has taken place in the mode of philosophical discourse on this question. That is, through reasoned argument, Madhyamaka logical forms, and so forth, both classically and also in modern terms. We are told, over and over again, that the Madhyamaka of Nāgārjuna and his commentators uses a kind of sharp, unflinching reason in stripping away of all such essential positions. Little is said, though, of the role of rhetorical forms such as metaphor in making their point, such as what we have seen here in the **Upadeśa*. We can see in this that the classical bias still remains, namely, that metaphor is mere embellishment and is thus inferior to reason.

While the authorship of the **Upadeśa* is still a matter of debate, irrespective of the person holding the pen, we do find a particular element to the Madhyamaka found in the **Upadeśa* that is seldom if ever seen in other Nāgārjunian works. That is the notion of “the true characteristic of dharmas” (諸法實相 *zhūfǎshíxiàng*), the Sanskrit of which has been variously reconstructed as “**dharmānām bhūtātā*,” “**dharmānām bhūta-lakṣaṇa*,” “**dharmānām dharmatā*,” “*dharmānām tattva*,” and so forth, and which we have seen on several occasions in our ten metaphors for emptiness. With or without a Sanskrit reconstruction, this term of rather enigmatic origins again highlights the question of whether or not some reality or true nature exists. Indeed, elsewhere the **Upadeśa* itself states:⁹²

⁹² **Upadeśa*, fasc. 46, T 1509, 25: 396b7–9.

There are two types of “own nature” (*svabhāva*). One, as per mundane dharmas, the solidity of earth, etc. Two, that known by the holy ones, suchness (*tathatā*), the Dharma element (*dharmadhātu*), the reality limit (*bhūta-koṭi*).

Yinshùn has covered this matter in detail, showing how a diachronic study across the history of translation recensions of the *Pañcaviṃśati-sāhasrikā prajñāpāramitā* shows shifts from an affirmation of a real own nature, to a negation thereof, to finally a synthesis in the form of dharmas “take no nature as own nature” (以無性為自性 *yǐ wúxíng wéi zìxìng*; **abhāva-svabhāva*, **abhāvena svabhāva*) in the later Tang dynasty translations of Xūánzàng.⁹³ These statements in the *Sūtra* are not reasoned argumentation, but simply direct assertions, as per our original statement employing the ten metaphors, i.e. the bodhisattvas “comprehend dharmas as like an illusion, like a mirage, like the moon [reflected] in water, like empty space, like an echo, like a city of the *gandharvas*, like a dream, like a shadow, like an image in a mirror, and like a magical creation.”

Against the older Western notion of metaphor as sheer adornment without the rational power of argumentation, Ricœur states, “Metaphor will therefore have a unique *structure* but two *functions*: a rhetorical function and a poetic function.”⁹⁴ While on one hand the casual reader may sense that the ten metaphors are solely fulfilling the poetic function of providing color and gloss to what is ostensibly a Madhyamaka rational argument against substantiality, a more critical reading such as what we present here will also note how the metaphorical structures provide their own persuasive power.

6.2 Birth & Death of Metaphors for Metaphors

While the **Upadeśa* offers “easy” metaphors for “difficult” emptiness, the text itself presents a question to challenge this, as mentioned previously: “If the dharmas of the ten metaphors are all empty without exception, why merely use ten things as metaphors, and not use mountains, rivers, rocks, cliffs, etc., as metaphors?” This insightful question from the text itself deserves some attention, and answers can also be found from a clear understanding of the linguistic lives of metaphors.

⁹³ Yinshùn, *Kōng Zhī Tànjù*, 180–88.

⁹⁴ Ricœur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 12.

At first glance, and if we read just the **Upadeśa*, it appears as though the ten metaphors are the vehicles for the concrete topic. However, if we look more closely, we discover that the term “emptiness” is itself originally a metaphor, and there is much evidence to show this original linguistic usage of “emptiness” (空性 *kōngxìng*, P: *suññatā*, S: *sūnyatā*) or “empty” (空 *kōng*, P: *suñña*, S: *sūnya*).⁹⁵ “Empty” was used adjectivally with reference to the physical abode of the meditator, i.e., a hermitage (P: *arañña*) or empty hut (P: *suññāgāra*) or empty house (P: *suññageha*).⁹⁶ These are literal senses, “empty” referring to a physical space devoid of some thing or another, most typically illustrated in the *Cūḷasuññatā sutta*.⁹⁷ The first metaphorical sense is then that the meditator’s appeased state of mind is also empty. Together, we then see the metaphorical notion of the “emptiness abiding” (空住 *kōngzhù*, P: *suññatā-vihāra*, S: *sūnyatā-vihāra*) which uses the vehicle of the empty peaceful abode for the topic of the internal meditative calmness.⁹⁸ Other similar metaphorical terms include “devoid” (*ritta(ka)*), “deserted” (*tuccha(ka)*) and “coreless” (*asāra(ka)*),⁹⁹ though none of these later proved to have the staying power of the “empty” metaphor. The metaphorical use was simple, and seldom structured, though there were examples, such as with reference to the fact that the body lacks a self in the *Mahāhatthipadopama sutta*:¹⁰⁰

Friends, just as when a space is enclosed by timber and creepers, grass, and clay, it comes to be termed “house,” so too, when a space is enclosed by bones and sinews, flesh and skin, it comes to be termed “material form.”

⁹⁵ For details of this early material, see Huifēng Shì, *Old School Emptiness*.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 87–110.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 118–27.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 91–95.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 95–97. Refer also Rhys-Davids and Stede, *Pali-English Dictionary*, 88, 304, 571.

¹⁰⁰ Ñānamoli and Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 283. Pāli text in V. Trenckner and R. Chalmers, *Majjhima Nikaya* (London: Pali Text Society, 1888), MN 28 i 190: “*Seyyathāpi, āvuso, kaṭṭhañca paṭicca valliñca paṭicca tiñhañca paṭicca mattikañca paṭicca ākāso parivārīto agāraṃ tveva saṅkham gacchati; evameva kho, āvuso, aṭṭhiñca paṭicca nhāruñ ca paṭicca mamsañca paṭicca cammañca paṭicca ākāso parivārīto rūpaṃ tveva saṅkham gacchati.*”

The term “space” (*ākāśa*) is also rendered as “empty” (空 *kōng*) in the Chinese parallel, and the physical sense is very clear. This reminds us of the work of Lakoff and Johnson when they refer to “orientational metaphors,” which include the spatial. They argue that, “Most of our fundamental concepts are organized in terms of one or more spatialization metaphors,” which are “rooted in physical and cultural experience.”¹⁰¹ These “so-called purely intellectual concepts ... are often—perhaps always—based on metaphors that have a physical and/or cultural basis.”¹⁰² Our example of emptiness here also accords with their notion of “ontological metaphors”: “Just as the basic experiences of human spatial orientations give rise to orientational metaphors, so our experiences with physical objects (especially our own bodies) provide the basis for an extraordinarily wide variety of ontological metaphors—that is, ways of viewing events, activities, emotions, ideas, etc., as entities and substances.”¹⁰³ To which we would only add that the ultimate form of such reification is the very “self” (*ātman*) or “own nature” (*svabhāva*) which emptiness in the Buddhist sense negates.

If “emptiness” itself is originally also a metaphor, why does it still require further metaphors for its comprehension? Because it’s a dead metaphor. Originally the Buddha taught in a religious philosophical context of selves (*ātman*), life monads (*jīva*) and essential forces (*prakṛti*), persons (*purusa*, *puṅgala*) or substances (*tattva*), etc. In order to present his realization of dependent origination and the absence of self which it entails, he was challenged (at least) in terms of vocabulary. No such specific term for the “absence of self” was in existence at the time, and we may surmise that the sheer novelty and radical nature of the Buddha’s denial and rejection of such a core Indian religious notion of self—by this, or any other synonymous term—was initially an act of catachresis, or “abuse of language.” With the initial coining of “emptiness” as vehicle for the topic of not self, as Ricœur states, “The borrowed term, taken in its figurative sense, is substituted for an absent word... When the substitution corresponds to a real gap in vocabulary, when it is forced, one speaks of catachresis.”¹⁰⁴ This is how it may have been perceived by the Vedic Brahmins—an abuse of language; but to the Buddhists, it became the birth (or perhaps the adoption) of an appropriate metaphor.

¹⁰¹ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 17.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 18–19.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁰⁴ Ricœur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 51f.

The “death” of metaphors is well known to those who study them. Ricœur, paraphrasing Fontanier, states how over time the metaphor “... ‘appears in a more and more fixed and standardized fashion,’ and, in this sense, can be said ‘to be part of the foundation of language’—that is, it begins to act like a literal meaning.”¹⁰⁵ This is because the original semantic field of the vehicle metaphor can extend over time to fully include the topic field, and thus becomes no longer metaphorical. Semantically, we must therefore keep in mind that not only do the doctrinal positions of Buddhist and other systems change, but so too do the metaphors’ lexical elements, words, and other signifiers that are used to signify them.

We could surmise that when the majority of Buddhists talk about “emptiness” they are quite unaware of it as a metaphor. In the specific context of their philosophical discourses, the term “emptiness” functions quite directly and explicitly—literally, if you will—as meaning absence of self, own nature, or substantiality. Thus divorced from the cognitive aid that a good rhetorical metaphor provides in comprehending a concept, the notion of philosophical “emptiness” becomes “difficult to comprehend.” This is why in the **Upadeśa*, new metaphors are required—metaphors that are still obviously seen to be metaphors—in order to understand. No doubt, this process of coining ever new living metaphors as the older metaphors die away could effectively continue *ad infinitum*, as I have elsewhere demonstrated with the metaphor of “illusion” (*māyā*; 幻 幻). So, too, the notion of “illusion” as a metaphor moved through the process of birth (or perhaps adoption), youth, maturity, and to death, i.e., reached a state of literal meaning, over many centuries in Buddhist thought.¹⁰⁶

6.3 Something for Nothing: Metaphors for Emptiness

An even deeper issue that we face is that while most metaphors are for actual substantial things, e.g., “But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? It is the east, and Juliet is the sun,” both the original difficult metaphor of emptiness and also the ten easy metaphors here refer to an *absence* of things. They are apophatic rather than kataphatic statements. After all, do not words—nouns in particular, but also implicit in verbs through their agents—refer to things? In Buddhist terms, *nama* and *artha*. How does one substitute some-thing for no-thing, that is, use real metaphorical vehicles to stand for an

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 71f.

¹⁰⁶ Huifēng Shi, “Is ‘Illusion’ a Prajñāpāramitā Creation?.”

unreal empty absence? How does a kataphatic statement do the work of an apophatic one?

Perhaps another metaphor is required to explain this peculiar phenomenon. In the contemporary artistic tradition of the “blank canvas”—the question of the value or meaning of such works aside—we note that something is still required to distinguish the blank canvas from the very walls of the gallery in which it hangs. The frame is not the painting, even of a blank canvas, but a clearly delineated border that somehow magically creates the *tabula rasa* upon which the artistic work of the “blank canvas” is performed. Our metaphors for emptiness take on a similar character. Starting from the non-metaphoric sense of empty as a spatial quality, the space is defined by its boundaries, such as the space enclosed by the timbers and clay that is the empty house, as above. The spatially empty is defined in terms of and in dependence upon the spatially non-empty. This then transfers to the metaphoric vehicle, for example, in the cases of the metaphoric vehicles of the mirage or moon reflected in the water, the real heat of the sun, dust and so forth, the actual moon in the sky, and the water below, all provide the framework to indicate that which appears to the senses yet is not in fact real. Likewise, returning to the metaphorical topic, the so-called person or phenomena appear as such due to ignorance and linguistic convention, but are ultimately non-existent.

Psychologically speaking, the wheels of our minds fall into ruts in thinking, grooved patterns which once established are difficult to avoid. Conditioned into the perceptions of “persons” and “things,” how are we to avoid falling into this mode of conceptualization, which from the Buddhist point of view is our fundamental ignorance? The mind cannot but rely on some model or paradigm of thought while conceptually active. A metaphor for unreality, whether it be of illusion, a reflection, a dream, or the like, is such that while we already have patterns for these phenomena established in our thinking apparatus, we have known all along that they are false. By a metaphor, we now have another track, but which leads out of the wrong path, rather than further into it. Speaking on the role of metaphors in the creation of new paradigms, Kittay points out that:¹⁰⁷

When the new sciences of electricity, magnetism, genetics, and molecular biology emerged, they were exploring previously unarticulated content domains. Such an understanding of the content domain is especially important for the project of understanding the

¹⁰⁷ Kittay, *Metaphor*, 226–27.

cognitive role of metaphor. It is precisely to provide such an articulation that we often require metaphor—in the case of metaphor, the structure of another, articulated or *formed* content domain is used to provide the articulation of the as yet unarticulated or *unformed* content domain.

As we move from first a misconception about selves and things literally, to struggling with “difficult” emptiness as we are caught in our patterns, we then substitute an already well established *metaphorical* model but one which we know to be deceptive, and our minds are freed from the aporia of contemplating a *literal* not self. We are then informed that the topic of emptiness works in the same manner as the metaphorical vehicle, and satisfied that we *understand the vehicle*, we believe that we *understand the topic*, too. Perhaps we do, but there is also the possibility that the vehicle has led us to tracks of conceptualization that do not parallel our original topic at hand. Or, multiple metaphors may function in structurally incompatible ways. But our mental rut is escaped, which may be more important, at least from a soteriological point of view.

By substituting the vehicle for the topic, and then replacing our comprehension of the topic with a comprehension of the vehicle, we have effectively brought about a new paradigm in our thinking. In discussing the notion of scientific models as metaphoric models, and how Kuhnian changes of scientific paradigm may be also considered through the underlying metaphors behind such models, Kittay insightfully asks: “The interests of linguistic philosophers and philosophers of science converge again on the question of change of meaning. When one theory replaces another in a paradigm-shift, do the terms of the second theory which are carried over from the first theory change in meaning?”¹⁰⁸ By the time of the **Upadeśa*, Buddhists considered that things were then *literally* “empty,” metaphorically “illusory.” As the centuries passed, they too became *literally* “illusory.” Our study here shows the reasons behind the necessity of metaphor, and also reveals the lives of metaphors as they model our thoughts and comprehension of core Buddhist doctrines, such as those found in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* and its commentary the **Upadeśa*.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 8; 226.

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