

Gradual and Sudden Enlightenment: The Attainment of *yogipratyakṣa* in the Later Indian Yogācāra School

Jeson Woo

Published online: 11 December 2008
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Abstract In the later Indian Yogācāra school, *yogipratyakṣa*, the cognition of *yogins* is a key concept used to explain the Buddhist goal of enlightenment. It arises through the practice of meditation upon the Four Noble Truths. The method of the practice is to contemplate their aspects with attention (*sādara*), without interruption (*nairantarya*), and over a long period of time (*dīrghakāla*). A problem occurs in this position since Buddhists hold the theory of momentariness: how is possible that a *yogin* attains *yogipratyakṣa* even when everything arises and perishes moment by moment. It is not possible for the momentary mind to fix on the object. Neither is the intensification of the practice possible in a stream composed of cognitions different at each moment. To provide a solution of this problem, a renown eleventh century Buddhist logician, Jñānaśrīmitra, assures us that momentariness is incompatible with duration (*sthāyitā*), but not with the occurrence of dissimilarity (*viśaḍṣotpāda*). Even if cognitions are momentary, the vividness of an object continues to intensify in the course of each preceding cognition-moment producing, in turn, its following moment. Jñānaśrīmitra discusses the attainment of *yogipratyakṣa* in terms of Buddhist ontological distinctions of moment (*kṣaṇa*) and continuum (*santāna*). At the level of the continuum, the process of enlightenment is considered gradual. By retaining a strict adherence to the final moment of the practice, on the other hand, the process is considered sudden.

Keywords Buddhist epistemology · Jñānaśrīmitra · Enlightenment · Perception · *Yogipratyakṣa* · Buddhist theory of momentariness

This article is based on a paper first presented at the XVth Congress of the International Association of Buddhist Studies (Atlanta, 2008).

J. Woo (✉)
Department of Buddhist Studies, Dongguk University, 26, 3 Ga Phil-dong,
Chung-gu, Seoul 100-715, Korea
e-mail: jwoo@dongguk.edu

Abbreviations

- AKBh *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. In: *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, ed. by P. Pradhan, Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1975.
- HB II *Hetubindu*. In: *Dharmakīrti's Hetubindu* Part II, tr. by E. Steinkellner, Wien: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1967.
- NB *Nyāyabindu*. In: *Dharmottarapradīpa*, ed. by D. Malvania, Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1971.
- NBT *Nyāyabinduṭīkā*. In: NB.
- PV *Pramāṇavārttika*. In: *Pramāṇavārttika of Dharmakīrti with the Commentaries Svopajñavṛtti of the Author and Pramāṇavārttikavṛtti of Manorathanandin*, ed. by R. Ch. Pandeya, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989.
- SS *Sarvajñānasiddhi*. In: Thakur (1975), pp. 1–31.
- TSP *Tattvasaṃgrahapañjikā*. In: *Tattvasaṃgrahapañjikā with Tattvasaṃgraha of Śāntarakṣita*, ed. by D. Shastri, Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1968.
- YNP *Yoginirṇayaprakaraṇa*. In: Thakur (1987), pp. 323–343.

I

The ultimate goal of Buddhism is to lead sentient beings from the world of *saṃsāra* to *nirvāṇa*. Through its history, the path to *nirvāṇa* has been diversely directed on the basis of how one elaborates on the teaching of the Buddha. In India, Tibet, East Asia and other places, various sects and schools of Buddhism developed independently and they taught their own theories and practices, all of which are intended to enlighten beings and free from ignorance or nescience (*avidyā*).

In order to actualize the Buddhist goal, the later Indian Yogācāra school, which was significant in India up to around the thirteenth century, considers what constitutes valid cognition (*pramāṇa*). Dharmakīrti (ca. 600–660), the most influential figure in this school, begins his *Nyāyabindu* with the statement that “all successful human action is preceded by valid cognition,”¹ which he then proceeds to investigate. According to him, valid cognition is that which is trustworthy (*avisamvādin*).² This cognition is reliable because it causes a person to reach a thing perceived by him. The valid cognition is thus divided into perception (*pratyakṣa*) and inference (*anumāna*). As a sort of perception, *yogipratyakṣa* (or *yogijñāna*) is a key concept used to explain Buddhist enlightenment.

Yogipratyakṣa arises through the practice of meditation (*bhāvanā*) upon true objects like the Four Noble Truths (*caturāryasatya*). In the later Indian Yogācāra school, *yogipratyakṣa* plays a role in linking theory and practice. For this reason, the cognition is an object of proof for logicians as well as an object of experience for *yogins*. In medieval India, *yogipratyakṣa* was a central topic in debates between Buddhists and their Hindu opponents, especially Mimāṃsākas and Naiyāyikas. The

¹ NB I.1: *samyagjñānapūrvikā sarvapuruṣārthasiddhiḥ*.

² PV I.3ab: *pramāṇam avisamvādi jñānam*.

twelfth century Buddhist logician, Mokṣakaragupta introduces the following five controversies relevant to this concept:³

- (1) Meditation is [concerned] with fictional constructs (*vikalpa*); fictional constructs refer to unreal objects. How then can a real thing vividly manifest itself [in the meditation]?
- (2) How can [*yogijñāna*, which is by nature] conceptual, attain indeterminateness?
- (3) How can the mind, which is momentary, be fixed upon one object?
- (4) [When the mind is momentary], by whom and how is the superiority (*viśeṣa*) [of the seer in comparison with common people] attained?
- (5) How can a man who has a body be emancipated (*mukta*) through detachment from passions (*rāga*) and so forth?

Since Steinkeller (1978) presented his study of *yogipratyakṣa*, this concept has continuously attracted the attention of Buddhist scholars. In 2006, there was a symposium dealing with this idea, called *Yogic perception, meditation and altered states of consciousness* in Vienna.⁴ The symposium deepened scholars' understanding of *yogipratyakṣa*, and gave them a chance to see it in the overall context of Indian philosophy. Yet, in spite of great academic achievements accomplished by such efforts in modern Buddhist scholarship, there is still room for investigating this concept. Of the controversies I mentioned previously, scant attention has been paid to the third controversy, namely, concerning the ability of the momentary mind to fix on a single object, and the fourth controversy, namely, that of how the distinguished quality (*viśeṣa*) of the seer is obtained, thus setting it apart from ordinary beings.

The aim of my paper is to discuss *yogipratyakṣa* in the context of the Buddhist theory of momentariness (*kṣaṇikatva*). Specifically, I shall examine *yogipratyakṣa* in the *Yoginirṇayaparakaraṇa* of Jñānaśrīmitra (ca. 970–1040), which is considered unique among Buddhist *śāstras* in dealing exclusively with this concept. My main focus is upon examining how Jñānaśrīmitra explains the possibility of a meditative practice even if the *yogin*'s mind is momentary. By doing so, I shall try to expose the process of attaining *yogipratyakṣa* in the Buddhist ontological structure.

II

In the *Nyāyabindhu*, Dharmakīrti articulates what constitutes *yogipratyakṣa*. He defines this cognition as follows, placing it in the category of perception:

Yogipratyakṣa is [the cognition] which arises from the termination (*paryanta*) of the intensification (*prakarṣa*) of meditation (*bhāvanā*) on a true object.⁵

³ Kajiyama (1989, p. 54).

⁴ See http://ikga.oeaw.ac.at/Events/yogic_symp06/program.htm.

⁵ NB I.11: *bhūtārthabhāvanāprakarṣaparyantajaṃ yogijñānam*.

In the later Indian Yogācāra school, the aim of meditative practice is said to be the direct realization of the Four Noble Truths.⁶ It is common in Indian Buddhism that this soteriological core of Buddhism is the object of practice. For instance, the Sarvāstivādins cultivate the Truths in the path of seeing (*darśanamārga*). The Four Noble Truths consist of the sixteen aspects or cognitive images (*ākāra*), four for each Truth.⁷ Such aspects are considered true since they are subject to neither destruction nor alteration over time. The method of practice is to cultivate complete mental concentration (*samādhi*) through forming an intent attention of mind upon the aspects of the Four Noble Truths. All these aspects are simultaneously manifested in the *yogin*'s cognition.⁸ Dharmakīrti implies in the above definition that the process of the practice of meditation has three stages: intensification, termination and yogic intuition.⁹

First of all, the stage of intensification is the process by which the *yogin* repeatedly internalizes the object of meditation. He contemplates the aspects of the Noble Truths with attention (*sādara*), without interruption (*nairantarya*), and over a long period of time (*dīrghakāla*). At this stage, the aspects begin, and continue, to reach a state of clarity in the *yogin*'s mind. The stage of termination, on the other hand, is a moment at the end of intensification. Here, the practice of meditation reaches its culmination. According to Dharmottara, a main follower of Dharmakīrti, it is a state in which the aspects like momentariness are almost clear, as if they were covered by transparent mica.¹⁰ This stage is the direct cause of *yogipratyakṣa*. The following stage of yogic intuition is the moment when the clarity of the object of the practice is complete. At this stage, the aspects appear in the *yogin*'s mind with the same degree of vividness that accompanies sense-perception (*īndrya-jñāna*). The *yogin* grasps them just as clearly as if he were looking at something in the palm of his hand. Since *yogipratyakṣa* is free from conceptual construction (*nirvilāpaka*) through these three stages, it is a sort of direct perception.

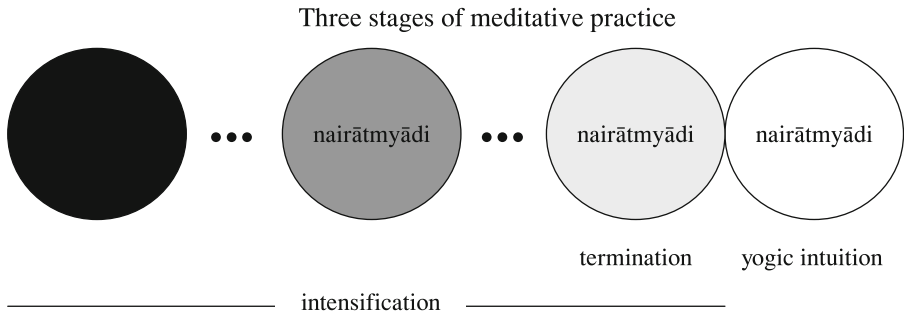
⁶ On the contents of the Buddha's awakening, Hayes (1997, p. 5) analyses three basic patterns: (i) discovering the principle of dependent origination; (ii) mastering the four levels of meditation and acquiring three types of extraordinary knowledge; and (iii) understanding the Four Noble Truths. As Hayes indicates in his article, however, it is the third pattern that is stressed most often by Dharmakīrti and his followers.

⁷ See AK VI.17bc: *tac catuḥsatyagocaram ṣoḍaśākāram*. For instance, the aspects of the Truth of Suffering are impermanence (*anityatā*), suffering (*duḥkhatā*), emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and selflessness (*nairātmya*).

⁸ In the Sarvāstivāda school, a set of the four aspects of each Noble Truth is one by one manifested in the *yogin*'s cognition during the path of seeing. See AKBh 406,1-2: *darśanamārga yad yad evotpadyate kṣāntir jñānam vā tajjātyam anāgataṃ bhāvanāṃ gacchati tadākāra eva catvāraḥ*. For more details, see Sakurabe, et al. (2004, p. 83ff.). In the later Indian Yogācāra school, on the other hand, the sixteen aspects of the Truths appear in the *yogin*'s cognition all together at the same time. See YNP 335,25: *grahaṇārtivīṣeṣa eva hi sphuṭībhūtasakalākāraḥ sākṣātkaraṇam*. It is notable in the following example of Jñānaśrīmītra: When one sees a lotus flower which has the properties of 'being blue,' 'being shaken by wind,' and 'being in full bloom,' he grasps the flower and, at the same time, all of these properties too. See YNP 335,26-336,1: *yathā hi nīlacalavikacādivīṣeṣaṇam utpalaṃ paśyato janasya na vikalpakrameṇa tadviśayasakalākārasākṣātkriyāvyaṅghātaḥ, tathā prastute 'py unneyaḥ*.

⁹ For the explanation on three stages of the practice, see Kajiyama (1989, p. 240, no. 119), Woo (2005, pp. 112–113) and Woo (2007, pp. 347–348).

¹⁰ NBT 68,4-69,1: *abhrakavyavahitam iva yadā bhāvyamānam vastu paśyati sā prakarṣapary-antāvasthā*.



III

The three stages of the practice, that is, intensification, termination and yogic intuition, are based on the ontology of the later Indian Yogācāra school. From the view of this school, everything is momentary, including the *yogin*'s cognition leading up to and inclusive of yogic intuition. During meditative practice, cognitions arise and perish moment by moment. To explain this more systematically, a cognition at the following moment (C_2) arises after its preceding cognition-moment (C_1) perishes; a cognition at the next moment (C_3) arises after C_2 perishes. For this reason, the cognition C_1 is different from C_2 , and its aspect (*ākāra*) A_1 is different from the aspect A_2 which is manifested in C_2 . *Yogipratyakṣa* is produced after the stage of termination when in a continuum (*santāna*) of such different cognitions, the clarity of their aspects is intensified with every succeeding moment.¹¹

With regard to this, however, a problem occurs. If the practice is undertaken in a stream composed of cognitions different at each moment, how is this intensification possible? The intensification consists of the process in which the *yogin* repeatedly focuses close attention of his mind upon a true object. So, how then is it possible that the object gradually becomes clearer until it is completely vivid? This is one of the key problems that the followers of Dharmakīrti must account for, as can be seen in the aforementioned controversies outlined by Mokṣakaragupta, concerning the ability of the momentary mind to fix on a single object and the *yogin*'s obtainment of the distinguished quality (*viśeṣa*) which sets him apart from ordinary beings. Kamalaśīla, a well-known eighth century Buddhist philosopher, is another who carefully examined the problem. He states in his *Tattvasaṅgraha-pañjikā* as follows:

What is produced by each preceding practice becomes the nature [of the *yogin*] and hence indestructible; as such it goes on producing fresh distinguished qualities (*viśeṣa*) in their subsequent efforts; [the intensification of the

¹¹ On the clarity of *yogipratyakṣa*, see Macdermott (1978), Iwata (1984, 1986), Steinkellner (2001, 2008), Woo (2003), Funayama (2005), and Dunne (2006).

practice] requires a successive basis; and wisdom and the rest are produced out of previous homogeneous seeds.¹²

During the practice of meditation, the *yogin*'s cognitions at the preceding and following moments are connected via a causal relationship. The preceding cognition-moment (C_1) is a cause of the following cognition-moment (C_2); and again C_2 is a cause of the cognition at its next moment (C_3). So, the process of practice consists of a series of cognitions, each of which, moment by moment, is first of all an effect of what precedes it, before subsequently becoming a cause of what follows it. According to Kamalaśīla, the intensification is, after all, a continuous production of a distinguished quality (*viśeṣa*) in the continuum of the *yogin*'s cognitions from each preceding moment to the next. The quality is gradually increased as the meditative practice progresses.

So, what then is the distinguished quality? In the works of the later Indian Yogācāra school, the distinguished quality is used as the synonym of *atiśaya*, a fresh quality which is added to an effect when a cause is associated with its co-operating causes (*sahakārin*).¹³ Dharmakīrti adopts this technical term to explain the production of an effect from a cause in the context of momentariness.¹⁴ In the case of the production of a sprout, for instance, the last seed-moment produces a sprout when its previous moments consecutively develop the quality in the seed-continuum. Following Jñānaśrīmitra's example, the distinguished quality is the capability for unimpeded vision gained from the process of applying eye-drops to the eyes. In the same way, the practice of meditation results in the distinguished quality of the capability for the aspects of the Noble Truths to be more clearly manifested in the *yogin*'s cognition.¹⁵

The issues then with regard to the attainment of *yogipratyakṣa* are those of how to explain the process by which the first distinguished quality first appears and the subsequent process by which it is capable of being increased in the momentary cognition-continuum. This is one of the problems that Jñānaśrīmitra takes up in his *Yoginirṇayaprakaraṇa*. There, he has an opponent who insists that such intensification is incompatible with the Buddhist stance on momentariness.

The opponent argues that for the Buddhist

such a conceptual cognition itself arisen as grasping the object of the practice perishes [at the next moment] without a trace. And when that [cognition] perishes, since a cognition is arising anew, whatever cognition arises must be [entirely] new. In this way, a newly produced [cognition] cannot have a distinguished quality even if [the *yogin* engages in meditative cultivation] for a thousand *kalpas*! So the formation (*saṃskāra*) which this

¹² TSP 1058,3-5: *pūrvapūrvābhyāsāhītasya svabhāvatvenānapāyād uttarottaraprayatnasyāpūrvaviśeṣādh-ānaikanaiṣṭhatvāt, sthiraśrayatvāt, pūrvasajātīyabījaprabhavatvāc ca prajñādeḥ*.

¹³ For more on *atiśaya*, see HB II, p. 130, no. 40, and Woo (2000, p. 212). See also Pemwieser (1978, pp. 61–62).

¹⁴ For details on Dharmakīrti's theory of causality, see Katsura (1983).

¹⁵ For Dharmakīrti's use of the term, *viśeṣa* in the context of the development of compassion (*karuṇā*), see PV I, vv. 122–133ab.

[distinguished quality] gives rise to does not arise in the case of meditative cultivation.¹⁶

In order for the object of *yogipratyakṣa* to become clearly manifest, it must be guaranteed that a distinguished quality is produced in the *yogin*'s cognition at a certain moment, and it is subsequently increased in its following moments. The opponent maintains, however, that it is impossible for Buddhists to establish the relationship of joint-presence (*anvaya*) between two consecutive moments because they maintain the theory of momentariness. As seen previously, two cognition-moments are distinct from each other. The preceding cognition-moment perishes without leaving any trace upon its following moment. On the other hand, the following cognition-moment arises anew independently of its preceding moment. So, the opponent contends that the vividness of the aspects of the Noble Truths is not able to be intensified in the continuum of the *yogin*'s cognitions.

In response to this objection, Jñānaśrīmitra assures us that momentariness is incompatible with duration (*sthāyitā*), but not with the occurrence of dissimilarity (*viśadrśotpāda*).¹⁷ The opponent assumes that a preceding cognition-moment has no relation whatsoever with its following moment. However, the existence of the immediately preceding cause (*samantarapratyaya*) is easily known to an ordinary man through actual experience and an inference based upon that experience.¹⁸ Even if cognitions are momentary, it is thus still possible that the preceding cognition-moment produces its following moment, which is not completely different from it. In a stream of cognition-moments, the following moment comes to be because its preceding moment exists. The following moment arises because its preceding moment arises. So it is certain that there is the relationship of joint-presence (*anvaya*) between the preceding and the following cognition-moments. At the stage of intensification, a cognition-moment goes on adding a distinguished quality, moment by moment, to its continuum in the course of each preceding moment producing, in turn, its following moment. Jñānaśrīmitra states as follows:

Indeed, existence does not despise momentariness like you [the opponent] do! In the case of this [practice of meditation], a causal set (*sāmagrī*) is slightly different [moment by moment]. To be more explicit, when [the *yogin*] is devoted to the cultivation by repeating over and over that all conditioned things (*samskāra*) are momentary, so as to end the suffering of *samsāra*, he has a quite specified cognition. Insofar as this [*yogin*] produces a specified [cognition] as an increase [upon its preceding moment] by [even] as much as an atom, to this extent he finally attains an effect through the

¹⁶ YNP 339,26-340,1: *bhāvyaagrāhī yādṛśo vikalpa utpannas tādṛśa eva niranvayaṃ nirudhyate. tasmīṃś ca niruddhe punar utpadyamāṇaḥ pratyayas tādṛśa evāpūrva utpadyate. tad anena paryāyeṇa kalpasahasre 'py apūrvotpatter aviśeṣān na tajjanyaḥ samskāro 'bhyāsa utpadyate.* The same objection appears in SS 15,12-14. According to Bühnemann, the source of this objection is the *Nyāyaprakīrṇaka* of Trilocana, which is now lost. See Bühnemann (1980, p. 128, no. 353).

¹⁷ YNP 340,6: *kṣaṇikatvaṃ sthāyitayā virudhyate, na viśadrśotpādena.*

¹⁸ In the case that one experienced happiness after being unhappy for a while, it is possible for him to identify the moment when this change took place.

upper and the upmost stage [of practice], as in the case of [production] from a seed etc.¹⁹

For the duration of the practice, a distinguished quality is added to the continuum of the *yogin*'s cognitions and continues to be intensified up to the stage of termination. So, from what then does the initial quality arise? Certainly, such a quality cannot exist anywhere before the *yogin* meditates. According to Jñānaśrīmitra, the distinguished quality originates from its cooperating condition (*saciva*) which does not have such a quality.²⁰ The cooperating condition is none other than the very first cognition-moment which starts to cultivate the aspects of the Four Noble Truths.

In the epistemology of the later Indian Yogācāra school, cognition is discussed in terms of moment (*kṣaṇa*) and continuum (*santāna*). The cognition on the level of continuum consists of constantly changing cognitions on the level of the moment. In fact, the continuum is not a real thing. It is simply a metaphor (*upacāra*) applied to a series of moments. Thus, it is that each cognition-moment actually produces a distinguished quality in its following moment during the meditative practice.²¹

As mentioned previously, what is manifested through the practice is the aspects of the Four Noble Truths. The *yogin* engages in this practice, having learned about, and subsequently contemplated, them by means of reasoning. Since the Noble Truths constitute a truth (*tattva*), they do not undergo any change. Their aspects, such as momentariness and emptiness, are not a cognitive image of an individual thing but the own nature (*svabhāva*) of all things. So the aspects of each Noble Truth are considered universals (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*). They are grasped during the cultivation, depending not on a visual faculty (*cakṣu-indriya*) etc. but on a mental faculty (*mana-indriya*).²²

IV

So then, how is the attainment of *yogipratyakṣa* possible as a whole in the position of the later Indian Yogācāra school? First of all, meditative practice is required to gain this perception. Just as fire makes water boil when it continues to provide heat, so the practice allows the *yogin* to attain *yogipratyakṣa* when it continues to produce a distinguished quality in the continuum of his cognitions. The causal set (*sāmagrī*) of the quality is the mental faculty, the Noble Truths and so forth. Conditioned by the

¹⁹ YNP 340,8-12: *na hi bhavata iva bhāvasyāpi kṣaṇikatāyāṃ pradveṣaḥ. asti cehāpi leśena sāmagrībhedah. tathā hi kṣaṇikāḥ sarvasaṃskārā ity anuvādamātrāpekṣayā samsāraduḥkṣasayārthitayā bhāvanāyāṃ abhiprayujyamānasya viśiṣṭa eva saṃkalpaḥ, so 'pi viśiṣṭam aṇumātrayātiriktaṃ janayati yavat taratamādikrameṇāntimāt phalalābhah, bijādivat.*

²⁰ See YNP 340,21-22: *tathā hi prathamam viśeṣaṃ tādṛgviśeṣavinākṛtād utpannaḥ. ayaṃ tu tādṛgviśeṣasacivād iti katham samānaḥ syāt.*

²¹ For Dharmakīrti's *kāryānumāna* theorem in the context of *yogipratyakṣa*, see Steinkellner (1999, especially pp. 353–354).

²² See YNP 329,11-13: *tathā hi [yogijñānaṃ] mā bhūd indriyāpekṣā. vīkṣaṇaṃ tu yathā svasāmarthyānūrūpāṃ yogyadeśāvasthitim apekṣya svavijñānajanane pravartate tathā mana-indriyāpi pravartīyate, aprāpyakāritāyā ubhayoḥ sādharmaṇatvāt, arthavattāyāś ca namaso 'pi tadāntim iṣṭatvāt.*

mental faculty, the Noble Truths have the property of being grasped (*grāhyatva*), that is, their aspects are internalized into the *yogin*'s consciousness. In other words, a distinguished quality is produced in the stream of the *yogin*'s cognitions when the mental faculty is focused on the Noble Truths. The process of producing *yogipratyakṣa* on the level of the moment is as follows:

The stage of intensification:

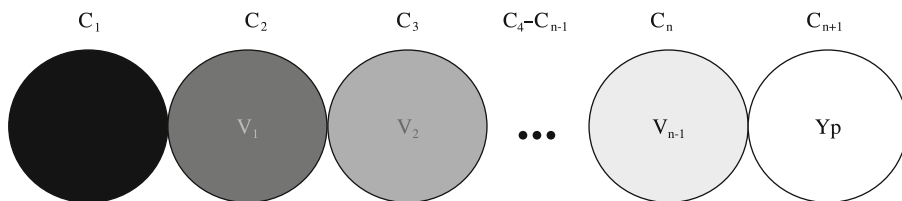
- (1) The cognition-moment C_1 , the Four Noble Truths T , and so on produce the first distinguished quality V_1 in the next cognition-moment C_2 .
- (2) On the basis of V_1 , C_2 , T , etc. produce the second distinguished quality V_2 in the cognition-moment C_3 .
- (3) In this way, C_3 – C_{n-1} , T , etc. produce V_3 – V_{n-1} in succession in each following cognition-moment C_4 – C_n .

The stage of termination:

The cognition-moment C_n has the distinguished quality which is completely developed.

The stage of yogic intuition:

C_n , T , etc. finally produce *yogipratyakṣa* (Y_p).



Therefore, based on the ontological distinction implied by the terms “moment” (*kṣaṇa*) and “continuum” (*santāna*) in the later Indian Yogācāra school, there is a sense in which the *yogin*'s enlightenment is both gradual and sudden. The increase in vividness of manifestation of the aspects of the Four Noble Truths happens over a long period of time by means of continually produced distinguishing qualities, spread out within a series of momentary cognitions, and represented above by C_1 to C_{n+1} . At the level of the continuum, the process of enlightenment can be considered gradual. On the other hand, it is precisely the cognition-moment C_n that underpins the crucial ‘breakthrough’ transition to *yogipratyakṣa*. By retaining a strict adherence to the concept of momentariness, the process can also be considered sudden.

Acknowledgement I gratefully acknowledge the help and suggestions received from Prof. Sh. Katsura and Dr. A. McGarrity, who carefully read this article.

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