ABSTRACT

This study is designed to remove many difficulties in approaching the Huizheng Lun, the Chinese version of the Vigraha-vyāvartanī.

The Vigraha-vyāvartanī is a polemical work of Nāgārjuna (Longshu, circ 2 A.D.), the great master of the Mādhyamika school of the Mahāyāna Buddhism. By rearranging the text in somewhat catechetical and categorical order, the dialogical demonstrability of Nāgārjuna’s logic is made clearer. The accusation levelled against Nāgārjuna is that his claim that everything is empty (kong, sūnya) implies inconsistencies which demand explanatory account on (i) linguistically: whether the statement that everything is empty is empty; (ii) epistemologically: whether the means of cognition that takes its objects as empty is empty; (iii) ontologically: whether there are “non-entities” to be named as such; whether there are “entities” to be negated; whether there is any reason (that must not be empty so as) to establish “emptiness”. In Chapter 1 of the present paper, Nāgārjunian ripostes are presented with commentary and notes drawing parallel texts.

That Nāgārjuna’s reasoning is by no means tantamount to a fallacy of division is, perhaps for the first time, brought to the fore (Chapter 2). Candrakīrti construed the trilemma of motion (in the Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā) plausibly in the way of infinite division like those of Huishi’s and Zeno’s. An alternative exposition (consulted Piṅgala’s commentaries in Kumārajiva’s Chinese translation) dovetailed into the whole
argumentation without sacrificing Nāgārjuna's regular application of the principle of interdependence and incompatibility.

In order to avert an infinite regress, the one-way causal link must begin with a "first cause" which inevitably embraces acausality. The theory of dependent co-origination requires no first cause, no ontological foundation. It rejects an origination ex nihilo as well as a perishing end. It is reduced from everyday phenomena qua phenomena. Accordingly, Nāgārjuna did not deduce at the ontological level where the Reality is. In effect, it would make havoc of a theory that manifests the emptiness of everything for affirming a proposition, an Absolute. Following a circumstantial account concerning this problem in Chapter 3, the author concludes that "emptiness" is altogether anti-dogmatic -- a character so unique and valuable which we have so long slighted by labelling it with all those dogmatic nomenclature, be it "absolute" or "nihilism".