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Dating with Procrustes: Early Pramāṇavāda Chronology Revisited

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Dating Indian philosophy almost invariably ends up in a Procrustean bed. Chronologies, whether traditional or modern, are not entirely absent, but they tend to be frustratingly approximate and bitterly controversial. The timeline of major events and figures in Indian Buddhism is no exception to this paradigm of haziness, probably the only certitude of the subcontinent’s historiography. The present essay ventures out into one of its chapters without hoping to dispel the fog. If anything, it will only stir it.

In spite of dealing with topics related to Buddhist logic, this essay is not the product of a well-reasoned plan, let alone extensive expertise in the field. While tackling a different project, it became necessary to touch upon the dating of Dignāga, the man who found the Buddhist theory on knowledge a pile of mostly unpolished bricks and left it an elaborate edifice of logic (*hetuvidyā*) and epistemology (*pramāṇavāda*).¹ Rather than simply copying Dignāga’s dates from a standard reference source, I thought a bit of fact checking wouldn’t do any harm. I couldn’t have been more wrong. Before I knew it, I was scribbling far too many a line for a mere footnote. And tinkering with Dignāga’s dates set off a chain reaction affecting the chronology of his successors. The more I looked into the details, the clearer it appeared that there is sufficient room for the revisitation of the timeline. Eventually, the footnote exploded into a long-though-far-from-comprehensive essay on the early Pramāṇavāda chronology from the 4th to the 7th century.

¹ The famous Tibetan scholar Bu-ston Rin-chen-grub (1290–1364) tells us that Vasubandhu’s pupil who proved himself sharper than his Master in matters of scholarly accomplishment (Obermiller 1996 [1932], 149, renders ‘in the field of logic’) was Dignāga (*dByig-gnyen gyi slob ma tshad ma rang bas mkhas pa dpal ldan Phyogs-kyi-glang-po ni* | Chos-B, Chandra ed. #847 = Ya 108a3).

Tāranātha (/Kun-dga'-snying-po) (1575-1634), the other bright star of the Tibetan historiography, includes Dignāga among the Six Jewels (*rgyan drug*) of the Buddhist Dharma. Together with Nāgārjuna (Tib. Klu-sgrub) and Asaṅga (Thogs-med), Dignāga (Phyogs-kyi-glang-po) is honoured with the title of ‘author of original treatises’ (*gzhung byed pa po*). These founders of philosophical systems, as we would call them nowadays, are paired with three authors of commentaries (*'grel byed*), or in modern parlance, exegetes refining and elaborating upon these systems: Āryadeva (Phags-pa-lha), Vasubandhu (dByig-gnyen), and Dharmakīrti (Chos-kyi-grags-pa) (Chos-T p. 144, ll. 5-8; cf. Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya tr. 1990, 240; also cf. Eltschinger 2019a, 156).

Dignāga’s place in the history of Indian philosophy goes beyond Buddhism. As Herzberger (1986) points out, ‘Indian logic had its origin in cross-currents between a grammarian, Bhartrhari, and a Buddhist philosopher, Dignāga [...]’ (p. XVII).

Apart from the new hypothesis on Dignāga's dates, I cannot claim much originality for the rest of the chronology. Nonetheless, I dare hope that some rambling thoughts might bear the light of day without over-taxing the patience of the intrepid reader.

Dignāga

The hypothesis I put forward is that Dignāga lived between c. 430 and 500.² I have no doubt that Procrustes will find more than one scholar willing to wield his/her hammer and crush the legs of my conjectures and stretch the backbone of my assumptions. Risky as it may be, let me tell you why I beg to differ from the widely accepted dating of 480-540. The latter largely owes its dominant place in modern Buddhist studies to Erich Frauwallner's 'Landmarks in the History of Indian Logic' (1982 [1961], 856-858). The study is itself a landmark in our understanding of the complex chronology of late Indian Buddhism but, dare I say, here and there some tweaking is possible.

Some of Frauwallner's main arguments do hold: Dignāga should be placed between Vasubandhu and Dharmapāla. Furthermore, the Buddhist logician cites or refers to the work of Bhartṛhari (Frauwallner 1982 [1961], 759-841). This means that either the two were contemporaneous or Dignāga was active after Bhartṛhari. Frauwallner's dating of 'the younger Vasubandhu, the author of the *Abhidharmakośaḥ*' (ibid. 853) to about 400-480 and of Bhartṛhari to 450-510 led him to surmise that Dignāga must be placed between 480 and 540.

The two Vasubandhu-theory has proved rather unpopular over the years, but the 400-480 hypothesis has had a substantial impact on dating Vasubandhu and other Buddhist philosophers following him. To be sure, Frauwallner has not been alone in arguing for these dates. Other leading scholars have also suggested a similar timeline.³ In spite of the wide-spread acceptance of the 400-480 hypothesis, I have argued – cautiously and conjecturally – that dating Vasubandhu to c. 350-430 appears a better, albeit not exactly waterproof, scenario (see Deleanu 2006, 186-194).

I am not the only or the first student of Indian Buddhism to do so (see Katō 1987). My hypothesis was inspired by earlier contributions,⁴ first and foremost by a seminal study published by Lambert Schmithausen in 1992. The German doyen of *Yogācāra* studies points out two passages from the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* which cite from or at least

² I am not the first one to argue for an earlier dating. Ui (1929, 142-145; 1958, 3), for instance, places Dignāga between 400 and 480. Similarly, Nakamura 1989 [1980], 296 (also referring to earlier research on the topic, id. note 1) suggests 480-485.

³ See, for instance, Hirakawa 1973, II-X, Hirakawa 1979, 229. This remains the most widely accepted dating in Japanese Buddhist studies.

⁴ Other scholars, working independently, had also dated Vasubandhu to or around 350-430 (for more details, see Deleanu 2006, 193).

presuppose Vasubandhu's *Triṃśikā*. Since they also appear in the first extant Chinese translation of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, which is dated to 443, it means that Vasubandhu must have written his magnum opus earlier (by probably at least one or two decades).

Another argument I adduced was the fact that the Indian chronology of the Gupta kings with whom Vasubandhu's name is traditionally associated is far from clear. It is anyway much less precise than Frauwallner's study would let us believe. There are quite a few ways to read the historical and epigraphical materials of the epoch, but my conjecture is that the two kings in question can be identified as Candragupta II (r. 375-413/415) and Kumāragupta (r. 413/415-455).

These arguments alongside the lineage of Indian *dharmācāryas* appended to the Chinese translation of Vajrarṣi's commentary upon the **Vajracchedikāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* 金剛仙論 (T 25.874c9-24) suggest the possibility of dating Vasubandhu to c. 350-430. The conclusion is admittedly based on many ifs but it is, I believe, a more likely candidate than the 400-480 hypothesis.⁵

If so (another 'if!'), then the dating of at least some other Buddhist figures connected to or post-Vasubandhu needs re-examining. This, of course, cannot be a mechanical process of lowering the dates by half a century for all later Buddhist authors. We need a careful case-by-case approach corroborated by relevant evidence and tallying with the timelines of other related figures and events. I am not prepared to tackle such a formidable task of Frauwallnerian or Lamottesque proportions in their impeccable manner, but I hope sharing a few iffy conjectures on Dignāga, Sthiramati, Bhāviveka, Dharmapāla, and Dharmakīrti will be condoned as a scholarly misdemeanour.

A crucial point of reference in dating Dignāga is the famous grammarian and philosopher of language Bhartṛhari.⁶ There is no doubt that Dignāga was familiar with Bhartṛhari's work, and some of his arguments appear meant to criticise the latter's views.⁷

⁵ Since its publication, my hypothesis has been favourably mentioned in a few major Buddhological contributions, being supported or accepted as one possibility of dating Vasubandhu (e.g. Lodrö Sangpo 2012, 166-167; Gold 2015, 18; Westerhoff 2018, 155 n. 22; and Kritzer 2019, 496).

⁶ Bhartṛhari appears to have also been an accomplished poet, being traditionally considered the author of the *Subhāṣitatriṣatī*. Whether we have to deal with a polymath or two persons sharing the same name or a false attribution remains a controversial issue (see Houben 1995, pp. 4-5 and n. 5).

⁷ Dignāga's familiarity with Bhartṛhari as well as the latter's knowledge of Buddhism has been discussed in a number of seminal studies. To give just a few examples, see Iyenagar 1950, Nakamura 1955, Frauwallner 1982 [1961], Hattori 1977, Hattori 1979, Herzberger 1986 (which is a monograph dedicated to the subject), Lindtner 1994 [1994], Kelly 1994 [1994] (especially 179-188), Bronkhorst 2011, 108-117, etc. The central piece of evidence supporting Dignāga's familiarity with Bhartṛhari's

Frauwallner places Bhartṛhari life between 450 and 510, but this is far from certain. Bhartṛhari's dates have equally been subject to intense scholarly debate. True, the dates proposed by Frauwallner still have supporters. Coward and Raja (1990, 120), for instance, assert that '[t]hese dates [i.e. 450-510] are accepted by most recent scholarship as the best we can currently do'. 'Most recent scholarship' is, however, a bit of an overstatement.

The survey done by Cardona in 1976 (pp. 298-299) shows that quite a few hypotheses have been put forward. A number of authors actually argue for earlier dates in the 4th or even 3rd century. Cardona himself concludes that 'it must be accepted that Bhartṛhari lived no later than the fifth century A.D.' (ibid. 299). Similarly, Aklujkar (1993 [1994], 21) maintains that Bhartṛhari should be placed 'definitely not later than 425-450', a view repeated in Aklujkar 1999 and supported by Wezler 2002, IX.⁸

Dating the activity of the great grammarian to the first half of the 5th century is thus a possibility supported by some of the heavyweights of the field. In view of this, I would cautiously date Bhartṛhari to c. 380-450,⁹ observing thus the upper limit suggested by Aklujkar (1993, 1994). This would also account for what appears to be an allusion to Vasubandhu's *Triṃśikā* (verses 1, 17, 18a) in the *Vākyapadīya* (Ch. I, verse 124) (see Lindtner 1993 [1994], 196).¹⁰

If my dating of the Yogācāra Patriarch is correct and he wrote his magnum opus in his old age, as generally believed by both tradition and modern studies, then the *Triṃśikā* must have been authored sometime between 420 and 430. Bhartṛhari would have been 40 or 50 years old. Unless an unusually gifted prodigy, he probably wrote the *Vākyapadīya*, a masterpiece of enormous subtlety and ingenuity, around or after this age.

Another detail which we know from Chinese sources and is usually deemed to have credence is that Vasubandhu had a polemical exchange over his (recently authored?)

work is the citation of two verses from the *Vākyapadīya* (Ch. II, verses 158 [p. 76] and 155 [p. 75]) in the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (Ch. V, 147, 149). More examples of parallelism are discussed in Herzberger 1986 and Lindtner 1994 [1993] 200-202.

⁸ More cautious authors like Houben 1995, 5, simply state that Bhartṛhari must have lived 'some two centuries earlier' than early 7th century (the date suggested by Yijing). Beyond that, he adds, '[a] definite date cannot be given' (Houben 1995, 5 n. 7, also referring to Iyer 1969).

The Chinese scholar-monk and translator Yijing 義淨 refers to Bhartṛhari 鉢顛社攞 in the *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan* 南海寄歸內法傳, an account of his journey to India and Southeast Asia. According to him, Bhartṛhari was a contemporary of the *Dharmācārya* Dharmapāla 即是護法師之同時人也 (T 54.229a24). The latter is usually (and less controversially) dated to c. 530-561 (for more details, see below). Mid- to late 6th century is indeed much later than all other sources suggest.

⁹ The choice of a 70-year lifespan will be explained below.

¹⁰ For the critical edition of the former text, see Buescher ed. 2007, pp. 40-48, 108, 110. For the latter, see Rau ed. 2002, p. 28.

Abhidharmakośa with Vasurāta, Bhartṛhari's master.¹¹ According to my conjectural dating, the *Abhidharmakośa* must have seen the light of day when Vasubandhu was around 30 or 40 years old, i.e. sometime between 380 and 390. This might also be the date of the debate between these two Masters. The timeframe surmised here could thus accommodate this as well as other pieces of the admittedly blurry testimony on which we have to rely.

Dignāga is generally dated later than Bhartṛhari. Frauwallner and most scholars following this hypothesis place the grammarian 30 years earlier than the Buddhist logician. As far as I know, there is no clear evidence to suggest this, but in the absence of other clues, it can be taken as a methodologically acceptable presupposition. Based on it as well as on dating Bhartṛhari to c. 380-450, we could speculate that Dignāga was born around 410. His early life would have thus overlapped with (what in my dating would be) the last two decades of Vasubandhu's career.

If that had indeed been the case, it would match an important detail in the account provided by the Tibetan historiography. According to both Bu-ston (Chos-B, Chandra ed. #847-848 = Ya 108a-108b; cf. Obermiller tr. 1996, 149ff.) and Tāranātha (Chos-T 102ff.; cf. Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya tr. 1990, 182ff.), Dignāga studied under Vasubandhu.¹² Frauwallner (1982 [1961], 848) discards, however, the testimony offered by Bu-ston and Tāranātha qualifying it as 'to a very great extent valueless'. To me, the judgement sounds rather harsh. True, their accounts were written many centuries after the events which they depict and their Indian sources are unclear.¹³ But there is no harm in giving them a chance

¹¹ See Frauwallner 1982, 857; Lindtner 1994 [1993] 195, etc. The Chinese source in question is the *Posoupandou fashi zhuan* or *Biography of Dharmācārya Vasubandhu* 婆藪槃豆法師傳 (T 50.190b), transmitted and translated by the Indian scholar-monk Paramārtha 真諦.

¹² The closest thing to a chronology in Yijing's *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan* is a list of Buddhist masters divided into old, middle, and recent periods. Dignāga's name comes up in the generation of recent masters alongside Dharmapāla, Dharmakīrti, Śīlabhadra, etc. placed after Vasubandhu and Asaṅga. (斯乃遠則龍猛、提婆、馬鳴之類。中則世親、無著、僧賢、清哲之徒。近則陳那、護法、法稱、戒賢及師子月、安慧、德慧、慧護、德光、勝光之輩。T 54.229b14-17; my punctuation). The qualification 'recent' 近 is obviously too vague to allow a precise dating.

Dignāga is also mentioned a couple times in Xuanzang's 玄奘 *Da Tang Xiyu ji* (*Records of the Western Regions*) 大唐西域記 (T 51, No. 2087) as well as in his biography *Dacien-si sanzang fashi zhuan* 大慈恩寺三藏法師傳 (T 51, No. 2053), but neither contains clues for his dating.

On Dignāga's name and its translations into Chinese, phonetic and semantic, see He 2017.

¹³ There are, however, modern scholars who have relied, entirely or partially, on the data provided by Bu-ston's and Tāranātha. Stcherbatsky 1993 [1930-1932], for instance, discards the 'mythological

and see whether their scenario might work within the timeframe I've surmised.

For the sake of argument, let us therefore suppose that Dignāga, still a teenager, studied under the septuagenarian Vasubandhu sometime between 420 and 430. Both Tibetan historiographers tell us, however, that Dignāga first joined the Buddhist Order (*rab tu byung*) in the Vatsīputrīya school (*gnas ma bu'i sde*) (Chos-B, Chandra ed. #847 = Ya 108a3-4; Chos-T p. 102, ll. 1-5). According to Bu-ston, he started his studies with the worldly disciplines of grammar, etc. (*sgra la sogs pa tha snyad kyi gtsug lag*; Chos-B, Chandra ed. #847 = Ya 108a3). Tāranātha records that Dignāga became an expert in the Śrāvaka's *Tripitaka* (*nyan thos kyi sde snod gsum la mkhas par byed*; Chos-T p. 102, l. 5) under the Vatsīputrīya Master Nāgadatta.¹⁴ Having grown dissatisfied with the Vatsīputrīya system and his teacher's inability to dispel his philosophical doubts, Dignāga eventually went over to Vasubandhu, under whom he studied the *Piṭakas* of both the Greater and Lesser Vehicles (*theg pa che chung*) and became proficient in five hundred scriptures (*mdo lnga brgya*; Chos-T p. 102, l. 16).

The impression one gets from this account is that Dignāga wasn't exactly a teenager when he reached his dream master. Unless he was a Dharma child prodigy, these events would seem to depict a young man in his 20s, which wouldn't match so neatly with the timeframe I'm suggesting. Of course, dates like 410 (Dignāga's alleged birth) and 430 (Vasubandhu's death) should be taken as very approximate, in which case the pieces of the puzzle would more or less fit. The argument is, however, rather forced, and would make too weak a reason for setting Dignāga's year of birth around 410.

Furthermore, there is one more reason to re-assess the traditional Tibetan chronology. Frauwallner (1982 [1961], 848-849) offers a methodological argument which I incline to support: 'in course of time unimportant persons are forgotten and only the memory of really important personalities is preserved. [...] If, therefore, a famous author is said to be the pupil of another famous man, it is a priori suspicious.' 'A priori' is a bit of an overstatement, but all in all, the argument is applicable especially when no strong proof to the contrary can be adduced.

I do not rule out entirely the possibility to establish a chronology on the basis of Bu-ston's and Tāranātha's scenarios, but here I shall follow in Frauwallner's methodological footsteps and place Dignāga's birth after Vasubandhu's death assuming that the logician studied under a master whose name was forgotten by the tradition. If all these conjectures are acceptable, then Dignāga must have been born around 430.

details' in Dignāga's and Dharmakīrti's biographies transmitted by the two Tibetan historiographers, but argues that 'there are however facts which with great probability must be assumed correct' (p. 31).

¹⁴ Tāranātha gives the Master's name both in Sanskrit pronunciation (*Nā-ga-datta*) and Tibetan translation (*Glang-po-byin* 'Elephant-given') (Chos-T p. 102, l. 4).

How long did the great logician live? As far as I am aware of, there is no traditional hint to support a lifespan of 60 years (as put forward by Frauwallner and adopted by most scholars) or 80 years (as given by Ui 1929, 142-145; 1958, 3) or 85 years (as suggested by Nakamura 1989 [1980], 296). The latter two hypotheses are, I assume, patterned on the universally accepted lifespan of the historical Buddha. Nothing, however, warrants such a conjecture in Dignāga's case. On the other hand, the 60 year-theory may owe its broader currency to a belief that it reflects more realistically the average life expectancy in ancient India. But does it?

I confess I haven't looked deeply into the historical, anthropological, and biological research on the matter, but a preliminary biblio-cum-cyber-hunt hasn't revealed any data on the lifespan in or around the Gupta period. One general fact that emerges is that the average lifespan in traditional societies, South Asia and elsewhere, was lower first and foremost on account of the extremely high rate of infant and child mortality. Other factors as the frequent incidence of epidemics, wars, famines, etc., the endemic poverty affecting large parts of the society, and the lack of efficient medical and socio-political response made matters far worse than in the modern era.¹⁵

One thing which is certain in Dignāga's case is that the logician – obviously! – didn't die in his childhood. Furthermore, no historical source mentions anything about an untimely death due to unnatural causes. Both Bu-ston and Tāranātha actually end their accounts with descriptions of the success which Dignāga had achieved in spreading the Dharma after an apparently long career. Tāranātha adds that the great *ācārya* passed away in a solitary forest (*nags tshal dben pa*) in *Odiviśa after devoting (the last part of?) his life to the twelve ascetic practices (*sbyangs pa'i yon tan bcu gnyis*; **dvādaśadhūtaguṇa*) (Chos-T p. 105, ll.9-11).

To all intents and purposes, we can assume that Dignāga enjoyed at least an average lifespan. But how do we calculate it? Dates and chronologies in Indian history are notoriously approximate (if they can be reconstructed at all). Calculating the average lifespan from the few and highly conjectural dates of the lives of Indian Buddhists would be close to an exercise in fictive statistics.

The next-to-the-best alternative which I could figure out is to use data from the Chinese historiography. Standing at the antipole of the Indian paradigm, the Chinese

¹⁵ The data discussed by Frier 2009, 788–789, shows that the average life expectancy of an Ancient Roman at birth was about 25 years, but if a person made it to 25, statistically he/she could expect a lifespan of 53 years. Similarly, and here the income factor also counts, an aristocrat in late mediaeval England could expect to live until the age of 64 if he/she survived until 21 (see Lancaster 1990, 8). See also Freeman Travers, 2007, with extensive data on similar situations in post-1500 England and some of the American Colonies. See also note 18 below.

civilisation is well-known for its meticulous and generally reliable record of historical events and dates. It is admittedly a non-professional guess, but as far as I know, racially-dependant genetic factors do not have a substantial impact on the average life expectancy. I therefore assume that the statistical data found for one ethnical group (Chinese, in our case) can be applied with a reasonably small margin of error to another ethnical group (here, Indian) especially as both groups shared the same profession and arguably similar ways of life.¹⁶

I thus worked out the average yielded by the lifespans of 313 Chinese Buddhists recorded in the *Chūgoku bukkyō-shi jiten* or *Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist History* edited by the eminent Japanese scholar Kamata Shigeo (1981). Apart from a handful of lay followers, the sample includes mainly monastics covering a period from the second half of the 2nd century CE to the first half of the 20th century. In spite of the steady progress underlying this long period, by and large it represents, I believe, one single paradigm, i.e. the traditional lifestyle predating the advent of modern medicine and social services which have greatly contributed to the marked increase in life expectancy in our age.

I have excluded from my sample all those figures whose dates are unknown (obviously!) or have a margin of uncertainty.¹⁷ I am aware, of course, that in quite a few

¹⁶ True, there are environmental, dietary, epidemic-risk, etc. factors which could have influenced differently the average lifespans of the Buddhists living in India vs those living China. However, my guess (once again, admittedly uneducated) is that the impact of these differences was not dramatic, especially as both civilisations had the benefit of sophisticated systems of traditional medicine.

¹⁷ Some of the monastics included in this sample are said to have enjoyed exceptional longevity. I haven't excluded them as long as they were in the vicinity of 125 years. Several hypothesis concerning the calculation of maximum human life (which, needless to say, is different from the median lifespan) have been put forward. I adopt the 125± year model suggested by Weon and He 2009, corroborated by documented cases as Jeanne Louise Calment (1875-1997) who lived 122 years and 164 days. (For different hypotheses and methods of calculating the maximum human longevity, see *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. 'Maximum life span', accessed 15 July 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maximum_life_span#In_humans)

Apart from the hagiographical accounts stretching way beyond the 125± limit, the Buddhist tradition contains some believable cases of super longevity. The Chan monk Huian 慧安, for instance, is recorded to have lived between 582 and 708, i.e. 127 years (see Kamata 1981, 11, s.v. 'Ean'). In the Tibetan tradition, the great adept (*mahāsiddha*) Thang-stong rGyal-po is said to have lived from 1361 to 1485, reaching the venerable age of nearly 125 (see Shinga 2017).

Interestingly, the traditional Indian view is that the natural, or rather God(s)-given, lifespan is 100 years, a belief expressed as early as the *Atharvaveda* (3.11, pp. 36-37). The view is also found in Buddhist sources (e.g. *Bodhisattvabhūmi* p. 252, l. 20, which considers 100 years to be the maximum lifespan in our aeon: *yaś ciraṃ jīvati, sa varṣaśatam*). The overall picture is, however, more complex

cases the dating is controversial and open to re-examination. This, however, is a situation bound to continue for the foreseeable future, and the adjustments which need to be made will arguably have a moderate impact on the average lifespan of the figures included in this survey.

All in all, I think this sample of 313 people can give us reasonably reliable data. The median lifespan which it yields is 68.9, or to round it off, 69 years. I would actually go one step further and suggest rounding off to 70. Why? Well, I don't deny it: as this age bracket is starting to loom over me, I do want to give myself an extra year (and hope for more from modern medicine and social services). So, yes, there is a subjective note underlying this rounding off. But on the other hand, if I said that Dignāga lived from 430 to 499, it would imply having clear evidence that he died at the age of 69.¹⁸ I trust therefore you will kindly indulge me with the hypothesis that the average life span of monk-scholars in traditional China and by extension India as well as other areas was about 70 years.¹⁹

By way of (very-cautious-cum-indulge-begging) conclusion, I would thus conjecture that the dates of Dignāga are c. 430-500.²⁰

Sthiramati

Does this hypothesis disturb the post-Dignāga chronology advocated by Frauwallner? 'Disturb' may be too strong a word, but tweaking here and there appears necessary. This is not only due to re-dating Dignāga but also called for by other historical reasons. Below we shall look into the timelines of some *ācāryas* whose lives and works were touched by Dignāga's legacy one way or another. (Now, I get a feeling Procrustes is really getting

largely due to the pessimistic idea of the five degeneracies (*pañcakaṣāya*) which adversely affect longevity in our aeon (more details are given in Shinga, forthcoming). Seen from this angle, the longevity hopes of the ancient and mediaeval Indians, hopes reinforced by their religious beliefs, would not have greatly differed from ours. Dying at 60, or for that matter at 70, was to them, as it is for us, ahead of the God(s)- or DNA-allotted time.

¹⁸ Interestingly, the figure roughly matches similar data concerning Muslim scholars. While the general median lifespan in the Mediaeval Islamic world was 35+, the average for scholars was 59 to 84.3 (it's good to be a scholar!) (see *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. 'Life Expectancy', accessed 15 July 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life_expectancy#cite_ref-28; the article bases its data on four studies). This gives us a median figure of 71.5 for the Muslim scholars, which is close to the 68.9 average obtained for Chinese Buddhist monastics.

¹⁹ Tentatively, such a working hypothesis could be extended beyond the Buddhist fold to encompass scholars, contemplatives, etc. belonging to other religious groups.

²⁰ It goes without saying that choosing round figures like '430' or '500' has no basis in reality. It is a mere convention denoting our (or at least my) ignorance concerning the actual dates.

mad.)

Both Bu-ston (Chos-B, Chandra ed. #845-847 = Ya 107a6-108a3; cf. Obermiller tr. 1996, 147-149) and Tāranātha (Chos-T 101-102.; cf. Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya tr. 1990, 179-181) describe Sthiramati as Vasubandhu's disciple. If we follow the hypothesis advocated above, this would require dating him before Dignāga. Not all traditional accounts subscribe, however, to the Tibetan chronology. For instance, Ji 基, Xuanzang's foremost disciple and de facto founder of the Chinese Faxiang 法相 school, tells us that Sthiramati was Guṇamati's pupil (T 43.231c17), a detail corroborated by the Uighur version of the *Tattvārthā Abhidharmakośaṭīkā* (see Kramer 2019, 456).

Most modern scholars place Sthiramati after Vasubandhu. Frauwallner (1982 [1961], 858-859) dates him to 510-570.²¹ The Austrian scholar thus similarly presupposes one generation lapse between Vasubandhu and Sthiramati.²² As far as I can see, there is no reason preventing us from postulating an even longer period between the

²¹ See Kramer 2019, for a state-of-the-art survey of Sthiramati's life and work.

²² Frauwallner as well as many, if not most, modern scholars conventionally set the interval between master and disciple to c. 30 years, a span usually associated with one generation. I do the same but with considerable scepticism regarding this mechanical way of establishing chronologies. The ground-realities of the master-disciple age difference must have been as varied in ancient India as they are in our world. Suffice it to think of the modern academia: throughout their lives, teachers will impart knowledge to students younger than themselves by anything from 5 to 50 years or more, not to mention that some students can be the same or even older than their teacher.

Furthermore, while 'generation' is a concept which is instrumental and quantifiable in genetics and biological anthropology, in humanities its meaning tends to get blurred. In the former disciplines, it measures the median time between parents and their offspring. Devine 2005, for instance, calculates that the interval for female lineages of descendants is 28.72 years while for male-line lineages it is 31.13 years. This may seem to roughly tally with the 30-year interval used in Buddhist studies, but the problem is that a master-disciple relation is not a genetic one.

In spite of my misgivings, I would, however, consider 'unscientific' to work with intervals shorter of longer than 30 years between master and disciple unless warranted by reliable evidence. Shortening or lengthening the interval could open the door to undue subjectivity making room for any span (5 to 50 years!) necessary to accommodate one's pet chronology. One solution would be to measure the median intervals between master and disciple in Chinese or other well-documented tradition, but here situations could vary far more than in the case of lifespans. It would be too wild a guess to extrapolate it to another tradition. Begrudgingly, I therefore see no other alternative than to work with the same 30-year convention. As there is no solution I can offer here, the whole note may seem superfluous, but I believe the discussion serves to emphasise the mechanical counting which our timeline reconstructions are forced to embrace.

two Buddhist thinkers.²³ For reasons which will become apparent below, Sthiramati's death must be set around the middle of the 6th century. So when was the famous exegete born?

The main clue is provided by the *Dabao ji jing lun* 大寶積經論, the Chinese translation of the *Kāśyapaparivartaṭīkā*, a commentary which is attributed to Sthiramati (see Kramer 2019, 456).²⁴ The text was translated into Chinese by the Indian scholar-monk Bodhiruci 菩提流支 sometime between 508 and 535.²⁵ Assuming that Sthiramati was born between 480 and 490 could account for the Chinese translation date. I think choosing 480 is a safer bet. If Bodhiruci translated the *Kāśyapaparivartaṭīkā* close to the 508 *terminus ante quem*, this would entail that Sthiramati wrote his commentary in his late twenties. This seems more plausible than surmising he was barely or younger than 20, as presupposed by setting the birth year to c. 490.²⁶

²³ Neither is there any evidence to suggest direct exchanges or links between Dignāga and Sthiramati.

²⁴ The Chinese translation does not record the name of the author. We know it from the colophon of the Tibetan translation which attributes the text to Blo-brtan = Sthiramati (see Kramer 2019, 456; Matsuda and Asano 1997, 152-153).

²⁵ Unfortunately, the historical records and scriptural catalogues 經錄 do not provide any clues for a more precise dating. One of the most reliable testimonies comes from Li Kuo 李廓, a younger contemporary of Bodhiruci, who lists some of the most important translations done by the Indian master, the *Kāśyapaparivartaṭīkā* included. The only chronological detail he mentions is that Bodhiruci's activity stretches for more than twenty years 二十餘年. Since the note is taken during the Tianping 天平 era (534-537), it means that Bodhiruci must have started his translation activity around 510. Li Kuo's note is recorded in the *Xu gao seng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (T.50.428c17-229a5) (see also Kamata 1990, 146-147). This is practically the only reliable document from Bodhiruci's age.

More data is found in the *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶紀, but this is a notoriously unreliable scriptural catalogue. According to it, the *Kāśyapaparivartaṭīkā* was the result of a co-operation between Ratnamati 勒那摩提 and Bodhiruci, the latter being given a secondary role. Both Indian masters deemed, however, that it was beneath their dignity to consult with each other, so in the end each went his way and produced an independent version. These two separate versions were later collated and edited by unnamed redactors into one single text (see T 49.86b). The *Lidai sanbao ji* also records that Ratnamati translated the *Kāśyapaparivartaṭīkā* in the 5th year of the Zhengshi 正始 era, i.e. 508 (T 49.44c). This would seem, however, rather too early for Bodhiruci, who had just arrived in the Middle Kingdom. Kamata 1990, 156-158, critically examines the *Lidai sanbao ji* claims concluding that the two Indian scholar-monks may have worked together on the *Kāśyapaparivartaṭīkā* but Bodhiruci must be regarded as the main translator. The Japanese scholar does not, however, advance any hypothesis on its date. In all likelihood, this is as far as we can get in this specific case.

²⁶ I would hesitate to go as early as 470-550, i.e. the dates hypothesised for Sthiramati by Cuong Tu Nguyen (see Kramer 2019, 456).

As for his death, this must have happened around 550. The date is required not only by the 70-year lifespan argued above but also by two traditional testimonies. We owe the first one to the same Ji 基 who records that Sthiramati was ‘the senior contemporary of the *Śāstra* Master Dharmapāla’ (護法論師同時先德。T43.231c21).²⁷

The second one comes from Xuanzang’s biography. Apart from the intensive training received at Nālandā Monastery, the famous Chinese translator furthered his knowledge of the *Yogācārabhūmi* with a layman-scholar named *Jayasena or *Prasenajit 勝軍. According to Xuanzang’s account, in his youth Jayasena ‘had studied grammar (**śabdavidyā*) as well as Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna treatises under Bodhisattva Sthiramati. He had also studied the *Yogācārabhūmi* with *Dharmācārya Śīlabhadra*’ (又從安慧菩薩學聲明大小乘論。又從戒賢法師學瑜伽論。T50.244a8-10). Jayasena was very old when Xuanzang met him, probably as old as or slightly younger than Śīlabhadra, Xuanzang’s main *ācārya* and Nālandā abbot, who was aged 106 in 630.²⁸ If we place Sthiramati’s death much earlier than around 550, this chronology wouldn’t fit.

So if Jayasena was born sometime between 525 and 530, we can arrive at a plausible scenario of Sthiramati’s teaching Jayasena not long before his death around the middle of the 6th century. Tentatively, I would thus suggest adjusting the dates of Sthiramati to c. 480-550.²⁹

²⁷ The binome 先德 raises a few problems. Literally, it means ‘earlier [/previous] virtuous [/accomplished] [person]’, and its semantic sphere encompasses such meanings as ‘virtuous or accomplished person(s) of earlier generation(s)’ and ‘one’s senior in age and/or virtue’. As such it is often used as a term of respect for patriarchs or eminent monks (see Nakamura 1981, 837a, s.v.; Oda 2009 [1954], 1046c, s.v.). It is the collocation with 同時 ‘same age’ that makes me choose the meaning of ‘one’s senior’ in this specific context.

More importantly, the passage allows for different punctuations leading to different meanings. The Taishō editors punctuate: 護法論師同時先德。南印度境羅羅國人也。The two sentences can, however, be punctuated as 護法論師同時。先德南印度境羅羅國人也。 This translates as ‘[Sthiramati] was the contemporary of the *Śāstra* Master Dharmapāla. The Venerable Master 先德 [i.e. Sthiramati] was a man of the Country of *Lāla/Lāta [*Valabhī?], on the border with/of Southern India.’ Classical Chinese is notoriously difficult in deciding where one sentence ends and the next begins. One often needs to trust his/her instinct. As an old Japanese pun goes, ‘Classical Chinese (漢文 *kanbun*) is a written language of intuition (勘文 *kanbun*)’. I can’t boast of much of an intuition (otherwise I’d be playing the stock market rather than dating Buddhism), so I’ll just follow the instincts of the Taishō editors.

²⁸ See also note 30 below.

²⁹ This discussion here does not incorporate the scenario of two Sthiramati-s, advocated by a number of scholars, most recently and convincingly by Sakuma (2013). The re-examination of external evidence (historical documents and epigraphical records) as well as internal evidence (differences in

Bhāviveka

Bhāviveka is usually dated 500-570 (Kajiyama 1982, 9; Seyfort Ruegg 2010 [1982], 23; Eckel and Eltschinger 2019, 81 [following Kajiyama], etc.) or 490-570 (Ejima 2003, 48; He 2014, 166). Given the 70-year median value, I favour the former hypothesis, without tweaking the dates. True, Bhāviveka's argumentation presupposes familiarity with the Dignāga's logic (see Ejima 2003, 48-49, 424-426; He 2014, 169-170), but placing the latter two generations earlier than the Frauwallnerian theory (which presupposes a two-decade interval between the two philosophers) doesn't, I believe, make a real difference.

Dharmapāla

Most modern scholars date Dharmapāla to 530-561 (see Moriyama 2019, 168). One of the few exceptions is Funayama (2000) who argues for placing Dharmapāla between 530 and 590.³⁰ No matter whether we agree or not with the short-life scenario found in most traditional and modern sources, by all accounts Dignāga predated Dharmapāla. Tāranātha actually makes the latter Dignāga's disciple. The Tibetan chronicler tells us that Dharmapāla 'repeatedly listened to *ācārya* Dignāga [expounding] the *Piṭaka*, accompanied by all ancillary branches [of knowledge]' (*slob dpon Phyogs kyi glang po las sde snod yan lag dang bcas pa thams cad slar yang nan te* | Chos-T p. 124, ll. 2-3).

the content of the works attributed Sthiramati) leads the Japanese scholar to postulate two authors named Sthiramati, one active before the Valabhī inscription number 7 (dated 588), the other active around the Valabhī inscription number 21 (dated 662). As pointed out by Sakuma, we are still in the process of re-assessing the Sthiramati corpus, and more data about the content of each work is necessary. In this sense, it is too early to draw definitive conclusions, but I tend to agree with Sakuma and his two-Sthiramati scenario. The discussion above therefore refers to Sthiramati the younger.

One more aspect: placing Sthiramati's birth 20 years earlier has the additional advantage of accounting chronologically for a philosophical debate which also involved Dignāga. If Sthiramati was born around 480, his teacher, Guṇamati, should likewise be dated earlier, i.e. c. 450-520. We know that Guṇamati won a debate against a Sāṅkhya master named Mādhava (see Eltschinger 2019b, 179) whose views are also attacked by Dignāga in the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (see Hattori 1968, 57-59).

³⁰ The episode adduced by Funayama is not conclusive. Xuanzang records in the *Da Tang Xiyu ji* (T 51.914c-915a) the story of Śīlabhadra's being entrusted by his master Dharmapāla with an important debate when the former was only 30 years old. Śīlabhadra was the learned Nālandā abbot under whom Xuanzang studied. We know that when Xuanzang met him in 630, the venerable Master was already 106 years old, which puts his year of birth earlier than Dharmapāla. As Xuanzang does not specify Dharmapāla's age at the time of this episode, nothing prevents us from assuming that he was in his (late?) twenties and died aged 32 as the traditional sources record (e.g. Ji's account at T 43.231c13). (Incidentally, Śīlabhadra passed away at the venerable age of 116 – so yes, one more Buddhist supercentenarian!)

This would imply that Dharmapāla was born earlier than 530. According to my hypothesis, we would have to place Dharmapāla's birth at least as early as c. 480. Even according to the Frauwallner's dating, we would need to lower the year of his birth by at least one decade. Given that no historical evidence supports the possibility of such an earlier date, the adjustment would be forced. Furthermore, no other source, traditional or modern, corroborates the master-disciple scenario depicted in Tāranātha's account.

This does not mean, however, that there is no connection between the two scholar-monks. Dharmapāla appears to have been familiar with Dignāga's work, a fact suggested by a passage in the **Vijñaptimātratāsiddhiśāstra* 成唯識論 which interprets and elaborates on *Pramāṇasamuccaya* 1.10 (see Hattori 1968, 5; Moriyama 2019, 170-171). But to explain this, we do not need to postulate a master-disciple relation. If my dating approximates the historical reality, Dignāga's works must have already attained recognition amongst Buddhist scholars in the early decades of the 6th century. It comes thus as no surprise that an eminent exegete like Dharmapāla was familiar with Dignāga's logic. It is therefore not necessary to modify the widely accepted dating of 530-561.

Dharmakīrti

The last major figure to discuss is Dharmakīrti, whose dating is actually *the* thorniest. Both Bu-ston (Chos-B, Chandra ed. #851 = Ya 110a; cf. Obermiller tr. 1996, 152-153) and Tāranātha (Chos-T p. 135, ll. 13-20; cf. Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya tr. 1990, 229) tell us that Dharmakīrti studied the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* under Īśvarasena who allegedly was Dignāga's direct pupil. Tāranātha (Chos-T p. 135, l. 12; cf. Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya tr. 1990, 229) further mentions that Dharmakīrti had been ordained by Dharmapāla (*slob dpon Chos-skyong las rab tu byung nas* |).

Modern scholars, on the other hand, have rarely adopted this straightforward lineage and the chronology it suggests.³¹ Once again, Frauwallner's hypothesis (1982 [1961], 859-861), which places Dharmakīrti between roughly 600 and 660, reigns supreme.³² The main argument put forward by Frauwallner is Xuanzang's silence. The

³¹ One of the few modern scholars who favours the chronology and lineage recorded in the Tibetan tradition is Stcherbatsky (1993 [1930-1932], 31-32, 34).

³² Frauwallner is not the first scholar to propose this dating. As early as 1857 in the *Buddizm, ego dogmaty, istoriya i literatura* (translated into German as *Der Buddhismus, seine Dogmen, Geschichte und Literatur* in 1860), the Russian Sinologist and Buddhologist Vasily Pavlovich Vasilyev (better known in the West as Wassili Wassiljew) dated Dharmakīrti to the 7th century while the Bengali scholar Satis Chandra Vidyabusana (alternatively spelled as Satish Chandra Vidyabhusan) suggested c. 635-650 in his posthumous *A History of Indian Logic*, published in 1921. For this and more details, see Franco 2018a, 117-118.

In modern Japanese studies, the dating of Dharmakīrti often follows Frauwallner's hypothesis.

great Chinese translator, who journeyed to Central Asia and India between 629 and 645,³³ does not say a word about Dharmakīrti. On the other hand, the scholar-monk Yijing, who wrote a travelogue of South and Southeast Asia sometime before 691, lists the Indian logician among the recent 近 generation of outstanding Dharma masters.³⁴ Yijing also notes that ‘Dharmakīrti further clarified the [principles of] logic (**hetuvidyā*)’ 法稱則重顯因明 (T 54.229b20).³⁵

Alternatively, scholars like Nakamura (1989 [1980], 301) and Hirakawa (1979, 229) suggest an even later date by placing Dharmakīrti’s activity around 650.

³³ Many historical sources place the beginning of Xuanzang’s journey in the 8th month of the 3rd year of the Zhenguan 貞元 era, i.e. 629. The *Guang hong ming ji* 廣弘明記, on the other hand, records that Xuanzang set off on the journey in the 1st year of the Zhenguan era, i.e. 626, a date adopted by some modern scholars (see Kamata 1999, 262). Chen 2018, 7, similarly mentions that the historical sources disagree on the date when Xuanzang began his journey. Chen adopts 627 according to the chronology established by the Chinese historian Yang Tingfu (1988). I haven’t looked into all the details of the matter, but I follow Kamata (1999, 262) who favours the year 629, a date actually adopted in many other scholarly publications.

Xuanzang made his triumphal return to the Tang capital Chang’an 長安 on the 24th day of the 1st month of the 19th year of the Zhenyuan era, 645 (ibid. 282), a date which, as far as I know, is not disputed in any historical source (most probably because it was a major public event).

³⁴ T 54.229b16-17. See note 12 above. Yijing’s journey took place from 671 to 695, but he wrote the travelogue while still in Southeast Asia and gave the manuscript to a Chinese monk returning to the Middle Kingdom (see Li 2000, ‘Translator’s Introduction’, p. 2). Kamata 1999, 387, mentions a hypothesis which places Yijing’s return to China in 698, but he adopts the more common date of 695.

³⁵ Li (2000, 152) translates: ‘Dharmakīrti reglorified the study of *hetuvidyā*’. It is no doubt a possible interpretation but I incline to take 顯 here in the sense of ‘clarify’. Li construes it as ‘make [something] conspicuous’, with the derived meaning of ‘extol, to glorify’.

As far as one can judge from the testimony of the Chinese pilgrims, the *hetuvidyā* was a well-established discipline in the large monastic centres in the 7th century. Xuanzang tells us that logic was one of the regular subjects at Nālandā (T 50.239b26). Yijing mentions several contemporary *dharmācāryas* active in various parts of India who were ‘intent on emulating Dignāga in mastering logic (**hetuvidyā*)’ (曉因明論, 則思擬陳那。T 54.229c16-17). From the viewpoint of institutional success at least, logic appears to have been ‘glorified’ enough even before Dharmakīrti’s impact.

In line with my reading of 顯, I construe 重 as expressing here an intensifying degree of the verbal action, i.e. ‘further’. Alternatively, 重 may have a temporal meaning, in which case the sentence would read: ‘Dharmakīrti once again clarified the [principles of] logic (**hetuvidyā*)’. This would imply that he was the first philosopher after Dignāga to bring a substantial contribution to the field.

We shall shortly return to Xuanzang's silence but let's first take a look at some recent hypotheses on Dharmakīrti's dates. The past decades have witnessed a few attempts challenging Frauwallner's theory and arguing for new possibilities of dating. The most important ones include Lindtner 1980, Kimura 1999, Krasser 2012, and Balcerowicz 2016. The first two contributions are generally believed to rest on inconclusive evidence (see Eltschinger 2019b, 157), but Krasser 2012 was initially met with approval, albeit cautious, even from some of the leading scholars in the field.³⁶ Krasser's arguments do appear solid especially as he relies not only on historical materials but also on inner evidence supposedly derived from primary sources. The conclusion reached by Krasser is that both Bhāviveka and Sthiramati were familiar with several key doctrines formulated by Dharmakīrti and Kumāriḷa (see especially pp. 578-580). This led Krasser to hypothesise that Dharmakīrti's activity should be placed by the middle of the 6th century.³⁷

It didn't take long, however, for other experts to show that the interpretation of the inner evidence adduced by Krasser was not as sound as it first appeared. In a meticulously argued contribution, Franco (2018a) examines each piece of evidence presented by Krasser and shows that it is either flawed or open to different interpretations. Franco's verdict is merciless: 'when considered closely, Krasser's entire evidence for the alleged relationship between Bhāviveka and Dharmakīrti disappears into thin air' (2018a, 123).

According to Franco (2018a, 127-129), the dating of Dharmakīrti's activity to mid-

³⁶ Eltschinger, for instance, seems to favour in his 2010 study the dates suggested by Krasser (whose study is referred to as 'forthcoming'). Later, however, Eltschinger (2019b) changes his view adopting a more cautious dating (see below). Likewise, Steinkellner (2013, vol. I, XXIX-XXX), the doyen of Buddhist logic and epistemology, initially shows openness to 'Krasser's new dating', adding, however, that 'prudence is still called for when applying internal relationships for establishing relative chronologies in this period' (id. XXIX). As we shall see below, Prof. Steinkellner has meanwhile modified his position.

I confess that initially I was quite enthusiastic about Krasser's arguments. It was thanks to Prof. Steinkellner, who kindly shared his recent views on the subject and provided me with Franco's study (2018a), that I reformulated my hypothesis on Dharmakīrti's dates. I take the opportunity to acknowledge and express my heartfelt gratitude for Prof. Steinkellner's feedback.

³⁷ Balcerowicz investigates the problem from a fresh angle: Dharmakīrti's critical exchanges with two Jain writers, Samantabhadra (530-590) and Pūjyapāda Devanandin (540-600). (These are the dates given by Balcerowicz.) Samantabhadra in particular seems to have influenced Dharmakīrti directly, and can allegedly be taken as the *terminus ante quem* for dating the Buddhist logician. Balcerowicz (2016, 477) concludes that the dates of Dharmakīrti should be set between 550 and 610. Balcerowicz's insights offer valuable hints, but the basic argument as far Dharmakīrti's dating is concerned heavily relies on Krasser's hypothesis.

6th century makes hard to understand why neither Buddhist philosophers (most importantly Candrakīrti) nor Jain authors active in the 7th century make no mention of Dharmakīrti or show no awareness of his doctrines. ‘Consequently’ – Franco tells us – ‘we may conclude that Xuanzang’s silence is also due to the fact that Dharmakīrti was not generally known before the second half of the seventh century’ (2018a, 129). Franco (2018a, 132) does not commit himself to a concrete dating wrapping up his meticulous examination with the following words:

As we have seen, Krasser’s essay creates more problems than it solves. But it is also a useful reminder that our current dating of Dharmakīrti as well as of practically all Indian philosophers from the sixth and seventh centuries does not rest on solid foundations and is to some extent suppositious.

In one of the most recent contributions on the great Indian logician, Eltschinger (2019b, 157) also mention Krasser’s arguments adding that they have received ‘detailed [...] criticism’.³⁸ Eltschinger (ibid.) prudently opts for a rough dating:

Given the weakness of all arguments proposed so far (including Frauwallner’s), the wisest course is perhaps to provisionally date Dharmakīrti’s period of activity to around 600, or some time between 550 and 660.³⁹

Should we then return to Frauwallner’s hypothesis? My guess (and it’s only a guess) is that placing Dharmakīrti’s birth around 600 may be too late. If Dignāga lived between c. 430 and 500, as argued in this paper, that would put more than three

³⁸ Eltschinger mentions here contributions by Kataoka, Franco, and Watanabe, all referred to as ‘mostly as yet unpublished’. (The qualification most likely suggests that Eltschinger had drafted his contribution before the publication of Franco’s article in 2018.)

³⁹ Tillemans 1999, 53, chooses an even wider span of time for dating Dharmakīrti: ‘6th-7th C.E.’.

Prof. Steinkellner’s latest thoughts on the matter, which he generously shared with me in a personal communication, also show a great deal of caution opting for an approximate dating. With his kind permission, I reproduce here the main points: ‘As far as Dharmakīrti’s dating is concerned, I now desist from saying anything more concrete than “around 600”. I don’t think Dharmakīrti can be much earlier. The only firm *terminus ante quem* is Śāntarakṣita before whom we have to pile in the early commentators, i.e. Devendrabbuddhi, Śākyabuddhi, and Jinendrabbuddhi as well as Arcaṭa.’

I must stress here that although Prof. Steinkellner’s views, together with Franco’s and Eltschinger’s latest contributions, have greatly influenced my rethinking of Dharmakīrti’s dates, I’m entirely responsible for the hypothesis I surmise in this paper.

generations between the two great Patriarchs of the Pramāṇavāda tradition.⁴⁰ In such a case, one would expect to see the names of more prominent logicians within the space of one century which had elapsed between Dignāga's death and Dharmakīrti's birth.⁴¹ Given, however, the hazy nature of Indian records, the argument is admittedly weak.

Apart from this subjectively tinted guess, my conjecture is encouraged by some of the most authoritative voices in the field of Buddhist logic which seem open to the idea of dating Dharmakīrti around 600 rather than 600-660. True, real scholars wisely avoid committing themselves any further. But being neither a real scholar nor wise, I'll take the bull by its horns and state it in concrete terms: how about 570-640? (Now I have to face both Procrustes and the bull!)

By tentatively dating Dharmakīrti to c. 570-640 we would have about two generations plus separating him from Dignāga, which seems more plausible and is also tacitly presupposed by Frauwallner's hypothesis. One name in the generation preceding Dharmakīrti is well-known, i.e. that of his own master Īśvarasena. But wasn't Īśvarasena Dignāga's pupil? At least, this is what Bu-ston and Tāranātha are telling us. This, however, is not supported by any other historical source, and no inner evidence suggests the

⁴⁰ I say 'more than three generations' because in a scenario setting the logician's birth c. 600, Dharmakīrti would have mastered Dignāga's system of logic around, I surmise, 615-620. We don't know exactly at what age Indian monks began their study of advanced logic, but even if they started by simply memorising the texts at an early age, I find it hard to believe that they would have fully comprehended and engaged in (what we would nowadays call) critical assessment of the doctrines before the age of 14-15. Dharmakīrti may have been a *hetuvidyā* prodigy but within humanly possible limits. By his own account, his 'commitment increased by the study of the well-spoken words over and over again for a long time' (*ciraṃ sūktābhyāsavivardhitavyasanam*). This is a statement made by the logician himself in the *maṅgalaśloka* of the *Pramāṇavārttikasvavṛtti*, which probably is his first work (see Frauwallner 1982 [1954]; Steinkellner forthcoming). It is hard to quantify 'for a long time' but the *śloka* doesn't strike me as being written by a young teenager reminiscing about his childhood efforts. (For the full translation of the *maṅgalaśloka*, see below.)

Furthermore, Tāranātha tells us Dharmakīrti studied the Vedas, ancillary subjects, and classical systems of philosophy but 'became extremely proficient in all *tīrthika* tenets only around the age of sixteen or eighteen' (*lo bcu drug gam bco brgyad tsam mu stegs kyi grub mtha' thams cad la shin tu mkhas par gyur* | Chos-T 135.4-5). It was actually after being recognised by the brahmin pundits for this proficiency that Dharmakīrti began studying Buddhist scriptures and realised the faults of the *tīrthika* systems (Chos-T 135; cf. Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya tr. 1990, 229). In spite of its late date and hence diminished historical value, Tāranātha's account paints a fairly believable picture at least in terms of the 'debut' age of a young scholar in traditional India.

⁴¹ Needless to say, quantifying the distance between thinkers in terms of generations is a highly arbitrary and subjective process.

straightforward lineage.

Here, I believe, we can invoke Frauwallner's methodological principle according to which tradition is likely to lose track of minor figures and patch up lineages with names of famous masters (1982 [1961], 848-849). This is not a mere convenient magical wand. In this case it is a pretty safe guess. By placing Dharmakīrti one more generation earlier, i.e. something like c. 540-610, we would risk having part of his activity coincide with Bhāviveka. This would be too close to Krasser's dating, which, as pointed out above, is marred with serious flaws.⁴²

All in all, it seems preferable to surmise a two-generation gap between the two great logicians and thus date Dharmakīrti to roughly 570-640.⁴³

What are we to make of Xuanzang's silence? This is one of the most uncertain certainties concerning Dharmakīrti. We know for a fact that neither Xuanzang nor his direct disciples say a word about the Pramāṇavāda Patriarch. But how to read this remains uncertain. It is a semantic black hole: it sucks any possible interpretation and lets nothing sure come out of it. Xuanzang's silence can be made to accommodate pretty much any hypothesis, and my own reading won't escape this gravitational pull. Truth be told, I'll avail myself of the emptiness (*śūnyatā!*) of conclusive proof and surmise a scenario accounting for the 570-640 dating. The only consolation is that so does everyone no matter how we juggle the data.

Xuanzang travelled and studied in Central Asia and India between 629 and 645. Timewise, no matter what chronology we adopt, the famous Chinese pilgrim could have come in contact with Dharmakīrti's works and ideas. Why doesn't he say a word? Two lines of interpretation are possible. Either Xuanzang knew about Dharmakīrti but chose to remain silent. Or he had no knowledge of Dharmakīrti's works because they had not attained the fame they would enjoy later in the century. The latter is the interpretation put forward by Frauwallner 1982 [1961] and, in a newly argued manner, by Franco 2018a. Roughly speaking, I agree with this scenario but my conjecture of the whys and hows is

⁴² It is possible to speculate that although Dharmakīrti's youth coincided with Bhāviveka's last 30 years of life, the latter was not aware of the logician's theories. Nonetheless, the only merit of such a hypothesis would be to give credit to Bu-ston's and Tāranātha's account of the Dignāga-Īśvarasena direct lineage. Even if we leave aside the Frauwallnerian principle discussed above, this scenario would still suffer from a major weakness. Following in the footsteps of Franco (2018a, 127-129), one could argue that placing Dharmakīrti too early in the 6th century would leave unexplained why 7th century Buddhist and Jain philosophers do not show awareness of his theories. The gap between Dharmakīrti's life and his recognition would be too wide.

⁴³ An in-between dating is hypothesised by Barcelowicz (2016) who suggests c. 550-610.

rather different, which makes it possible to date the logician to c. 570-640.

I'll say more in a few moments but let's first briefly examine the deliberate omission scenario. This has been advocated by Krasser 2012 as well as, in softer tones, by Balcerowicz 2016. According to Krasser (2012, 585-7), Dharmakīrti became a *persona non grata* in the eyes of the Nālandā leaders for some of his overly audacious theories, first and foremost the alleged claim that 'āgama, including the words of the Buddha, is not a *pramāṇa* on a *sāṃvyaavahārika* level' (ibid. 585-6). This was hell of a damning challenge to the entire Buddhist establishment. And it was also the reason behind Xuanzang's silence, the Chinese master staying in line with the Nālandā orthodoxy. Once again, Franco's outstanding study (2018a) convincingly shows that none of Krasser's arguments are tenable. They represent forced conclusions or speculations made without sufficient, if any, textual proof.

One thing we know straight from the horse's mouth is that Dharmakīrti complains about being misunderstood and his work doomed to oblivion. He does it twice in the *Pramāṇavārttika*, at the beginning of his autocommentary on Chapter One and at the end of the opus. In the second auspicious verse (*maṅgalaśloka*) opening the *Pramāṇavārttika* (p. 2),⁴⁴ the logician laments the Dharma Philistinism and declares his work a failed effort to make the 'well-spoken words', i.e. logic, known to the world:

Most⁴⁵ people wont to vulgar [pursuits] and intellectually unfit not only find the well-spoken words [of logic] insignificant but being afflicted with foul envy [may] even show hostility [towards it].

Hence, this [treatise of mine] is, methinks, of no use to others. My mind, however, its commitment increased by the study of the well-spoken words over and over again for a long time, has grown [so] fond of them [that I shall expound their principles in what follows].

(*prāyaḥ prakṛtasaktir apratibalaprajñō janaḥ kevalam
nānarthy eva subhāṣitaiḥ parigato vidveṣṭy apīrṣyāmalaiḥ |
tenāyaṃ na paropakāra iti naś cintāpi cetaś ciram
sūktabhyāsavivardhitavyasanam ity atrānubaddhaspṛham ||*)

Dharmakīrti's pessimism is again voiced at the end of the magnum opus. In verse 286 of

⁴⁴ Miyasaka ed., p. 2, names them 'salutation verses' (*namaskārakaśloka*). According to Miyasaka (id. note 1) the opening verses were added later by another author. The Japanese scholar mentions, however, that Kaṇḍakagomin writes in his commentary that these are Dharmakīrti's own verses. Other scholars, Frauwallner included, also regard them as being part of Dharmakīrti's original work.

⁴⁵ Skt. *prāya* can also mean 'as a rule, usually', etc. (see Monier-Williams 708, s.v.). Cf. Tib. *phal cher*, likewise meaning 'majority of' as well as 'usually'.

Chapter IV (id. p. 204),⁴⁶ the logician bewails the tragic fate of his teachings in words echoing the feelings of a misunderstood genius of the Romantic age:

Not comprehended is it even by those with considerable intellectual⁴⁷
capacities who have immersed themselves in it,
Not understood is it, [its very essence] being the Supreme Truth, even by those
who make utmost efforts –
This doctrine⁴⁸ of mine which has found no one in this world able to grasp
it.⁴⁹
Once old age [will creep] upon my body, it will exhaust itself as the waters
[flowing] into the [vast] sea.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ The verse is also quoted in the aesthetics masterpiece *Dhvanyāloka* Ch. 3, §41 (text division following Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan 1990, which base their translation on the Kashi Sanskrit Series, Volume 135, edition unfortunately unavailable to me; I checked the original in Rai ed., pp. 537-538, as well as the citation in Balcerowicz 2016, 476, for which see note 51 below).

It must be added, however, that the stanza is not found in the *Pramāṇavārttika* versions cited in the later commentaries (see Balcerowicz 2016, 476).

⁴⁷ Skt. *analpadhīśaktināpy* literally renders as ‘even those of no small wisdom ability’.

⁴⁸ Skt. *mata* literally means ‘[what is] thought/believed [by me]’. The lexeme also has, however, the more abstract meaning of ‘view, doctrine’ (see Monier-Williams 783, s.v.). Balcerowicz 2016, 476, translates as ‘philosophy’. Rai 2004, 537, likewise renders into Hindi by using the same word *mata* (which has been preserved in Hindi with the similar meanings of ‘creed, idea, doctrine’) and adds in brackets *dārśanika siddhānta*, i.e. ‘philosophical theory/tenets’. I single out the term because it is suggestive of how Dharmakīrti viewed the nature of his intellectual efforts, which probably tally with our modern perceptions. They are described as *mata*, i.e. a philosophical system or set of doctrines rather than writings based on faith or spiritual praxis guidelines (though presumably it was relevant to the latter, too).

⁴⁹ Skt. *jagaty alabdhasadrśapratigrāhakam* can also be construed as ‘has not found in this world one worthy of receiving it’, or, as rendered by Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan (1990, 626), ‘has failed to find in this world a philosopher worthy of its challenge’ (see more in note 50 below). Balcerowicz (2016, 476), on the other hand, suggests another line of interpretation: ‘[my philosophy] which makes one understand even [things] in the world which equal something ungraspable’.

⁵⁰ I fear my rendering of the stanza may be rather crude. In the accomplished hands of the distinguished Indologists Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan (1990, 626), its translation reads:

‘My philosophy, into which the brightest minds
have not trusted to plunge,
of which the ultimate truth has not been seen
by their greatest efforts, has failed to find in this world

(*anadhyavasitāvagāhanam analpadhīśaktināpy
adṛṣṭaparamārthattvam*⁵¹ *adhikābhiyogair api |
mataṃ mama jagaty alabdhasadrśapratigrāhakam
prayāsyati payonidheḥ paya iva svadehe jarām ||*)⁵²

We get it: the logician was as bitter as bitter can be. But that was at the time of writing the *Pramāṇavārttika*, which in all likelihood is an early work.⁵³ It does not, therefore, entail that he remained the same misunderstood genius throughout life. After all, no other work of his contains similar verses. And an opus like the *Nyāyabindu* seems to have been ‘composed for a circle of students who gathered around Dharmakīrti’ (Franco 2018a, 129). Furthermore, as also pointed out by Franco (id.), there is no compelling evidence to suggest that the ‘people went to vulgar pursuits and intellectually unfit’ (*prakṛtasaktir apratibalaprajñō janah*) were the inimical Nālandā officials postulated by Krasser (2012).

So if not a threat to the establishment and not exactly a lifelong solitary genius, how do we explain Xuanzang’s silence? The scenario I surmise presupposes a slow gradual recognition of Dharmakīrti’s genius due to (1) geographical, (2) human, and (3) technical reasons. Let’s take them one by one.

a philosopher worthy of its challenge:
it will grow old within myself like the unplumbed
waters of the sea within the sea.’

⁵¹ The citation in Balcerowicz 2016, 476, reads: °*paramārthasāram*. Balcerowicz follows the Durgāprasāda & Paṇṣīkar edition and Krishnamoorthy edition (unfortunately neither available to me).

⁵² It is interesting the note the context in which Ānandavardhana (9th century) cites the stanza in his *Dhvanyāloka*. The Kashmiri aesthete first quotes another poem attributed to Dharmakīrti, in which the great logician sings of a belle sorely distressed by the fact that she can find no lover to match her qualities. Ānandavardhana tells us that Dharmakīrti couldn’t have meant a real belle because, inter alia, such feelings could not have come from the mouth/pen of an ascetic. (But isn’t beauty all the more enticing when refusing oneself sensual gratification?). Therefore, the aesthete concludes, the poem must be an allegory (*aprustutaprasāmsā*) for ‘a lament by a man puffed up with pride in his uncommon talents, on seeing that others fail to recognize his qualities because he has fired their jealousy by the degree of his brilliance’ (Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan 1990, 625). As an illustration that this is indeed the way Dharmakīrti must have felt, and hence meant by the poem under discussion, Ānandavardhana cites the above verse from the *Pramāṇavārttika* (without, however, mentioning the title of the source).

⁵³ For a classical study on the chronology of Dharmakīrti’s works, see Frauwallner 1982 [1954]. In his excellent forthcoming study, Prof. Steinkellner revisits the chronology offering an updated version. Both towering figures of the Buddhist logic concur that the *Pramāṇavārttika* is an early opus.

(1) According to Bu-ston (Chos-B, Chandra ed. #851 = Ya 110a; cf. Obermiller tr. 1996, 152) and Tāranātha (Chos-T p. 134, l. 18; cf. Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya tr. 1990, 228), Dharmakīrti was born in the Kingdom of *Cūḍāmaṇi (Tib. *rGyal dbang gTsug gi nor bu*) in South India.⁵⁴ The same accounts also record events which link his life mostly to the southern part of the subcontinent.⁵⁵ More importantly, neither Bu-ston nor Tāranātha associate his main activities with Nālandā.

The only mention of the famed monastic university is found in Tāranātha's account (Chos-T p. 138, ll. 7ff; cf. Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya tr. 1990, 232-233). According to it, Śāṅkarācārya dispatched a messenger to Nālandā challenging the Buddhist community to a public debate. The Nālandā monastics postponed the event for one year in order to send for Dharmakīrti to come from the South. Needless to say, when the clash of titans happens one year later, the great Buddhist logician carries the day.

In all likelihood, the whole episode is an embellishment to Dharmakīrti's legendary career of defeating one *tīrthika* heavyweight after another. Śāṅkara's dates are equally controversial, but most modern scholars seem to agree that he lived after Dharmakīrti.⁵⁶ What is more important for us is that even by Tāranātha's time, about one millennium later, Dharmakīrti's main place of activity was not associated with Nālandā. In the account above, he had to be called from the South, which took one year. This is another relevant detail. It reminds us that the movement of people and ideas did take long even in a pan-Indian network like the Buddhist Saṅgha.

(2) The 'human factor' argument is admittedly the weakest chain in my scenario.

⁵⁴ As far as I know, the precise location of the kingdom has not been identified. While giving the same name, Tāranātha adds that such a place does not appear (*mi snang*) to be known. (Chos-T p. 134, l. 19). I wonder if it has any connection to the Cūḍāmaṇivihāra in Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu.

⁵⁵ We must add, nonetheless, that Tāranātha also mentions such places like Magadha and Mathurā, albeit as temporary locations where Dharmakīrti carried out his debate tour (Chos-T p. 139; cf. Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya tr. 1990, 234).

⁵⁶ It is true that Śāṅkara's dating stretches between early 5th century to early 9th century, but the 8th century remains the most likely candidate. I'll only mention here the dates hypothesised by two top specialists in the field. Flood 1996, 239, gives the widely adopted 788-820 dating. Potter 1981, 14, on the other hands, argues for placing Śāṅkara a century earlier, which would still make the Vedānta Patriarch one or two generations younger than Dharmakīrti even if the latter's dates were 600-660. It is true that Śāṅkara refers to Dharmakīrti's works, but this is generally taken as an indication that the Vedānta master must be placed after the Buddhist logician (see Flood 1996, 239).

Obviously, there is so little we know about Dharmakīrti the man and his milieu that anything I'm going to say is doomed to be hyper-speculative. But two hardly discernible dots in this fog of uncertainty give me some hope that my speculations might be sharable with a readership tamed by the bodhisattvic ideals of generosity and endurance.

The first 'discernible dot' is the following: Dharmakīrti most probably had pupils but they were few and not well organised. This conjecture is inspired from a seminal paper by Eli Franco (2018b) dedicated to 'Yamāri and the Order of Chapters in the *Pramāṇavārttika*'. The 11th century Buddhist logician Yamāri⁵⁷ argues that the reason for which Dharmakīrti wrote an autocommentary only on the first chapter of the *Pramāṇavārttika* was his old age. Furthermore, the argument continues, advanced age also accounts for the fact that Dharmakīrti had lost the energy necessary for ensuring the proper handing down of his writings (see Franco 2108b, 258). This in turn explains why the order of the *Pramāṇavārttika* chapters had varied so much in the four centuries separating Dharmakīrti and Yamāri.

Yamāri is most probably trying to put up a plausible scenario explaining the many whys surrounding the Pramāṇavāda Patriarch. (What a relief to know I'm in prestigious company!). The presupposition underlying Yamāri's argument is that the *Pramāṇavārttika* autocommentary was composed when Dharmakīrti was an old man. This, however, as pointed out by Frauwallner and Steinkellner, is not likely.⁵⁸ The second part of Yamāri's argument may also be doubted. Was the image of an old Dharmakīrti unable to supervise the handing down of his works based on factual information reliably transmitted into Yamāri's times? Or was Yamāri doing pretty much the same thing we're all doing nowadays, i.e. trying to come up with educated guesses? It's hard to say.

Even if the latter part of the argument is speculative, the fact remains that the order of the *Pramāṇavārttika* chapters was not fixed for many centuries. For the sake of argument, let's assume with Yamāri that this was the result of Dharmakīrti's advanced age. This, however, raises another question: why didn't his pupils do anything about this? I may be extrapolating from the Sino-Japanese tradition, but one usually expects an accomplished scholar-monk to be surrounded by a number of disciples who act more or less as a well-organised community meant to hand down the master's legacy to posterity. Of course, the case-by-case principle reigns supreme here as almost everywhere else, but even if we suppose that Dharmakīrti was half as successful as Buston and Tāranātha tell us, I would still imagine a fairly large number of followers who would make sure that their master wouldn't lose precious time on such trifling details like editing and putting chapters in good order.

I know I'm subjective but my favourite answer to the puzzle is to surmise that

⁵⁷ For the dating of Yamāri, see Steinkellner and Much 1995, 103.

⁵⁸ See note 53 above.

Dharmakīrti had only a handful of close disciples who were not organised into a unified group able to manage efficiently the master's legacy. Why didn't they act alone? Probably they did, and such isolated attempts would explain the later variation in the tradition. Bottom line is that for whatever reasons Dharmakīrti did not or could not supervise the transmission of his complete works in a standard edition, so to speak. This again seems to suggest a small, disparate community of first-generation pupils which was not conducive to a fast and efficient circulation of the *Opera Dharmakīrtiana* throughout the learned members of the Saṅgha.

The second 'discernible dot' suggesting a slow recognition of Dharmakīrti's genius may have been his lack of diplomatic skills. To put it bluntly, Dharmakīrti may have been too smart for his own good. He was no doubt a remarkably profound philosopher and fiercely successful debater, but his victories may have gained him not only admirers but also enemies. You may think I'm letting my imagination run wild, and to a certain extent I am. But only to a certain extent. His work bears testimony to the fact that he was unforgiving with his enemies. And his perfect argumentation, probably delivered with a stinging tongue, was directed not only at heretics but also at Buddhists, including his own teacher Īśvarasena.

The intricate technicalities of Dharmakīrti's criticism of Īśvarasena's theories are brilliantly analysed in a forthcoming study by Steinkellner. Here suffice it to mention that his attacks are relentless. More importantly, Dharmakīrti can't resist spicing his refutation with scathing sarcasm. Speaking of his own master, the great logician 'casually' remarks, 'even if he [were to] listen to [my refutation] again, the Gods-beloved [Īśvarasena] obviously is not clever enough to embrace it' (*śrīvann api devānāmpriyo nāvadhāraṇapaṭuḥ*; *Pramāṇavārttika Autocommentary* p. 104, ll. 26–27).⁵⁹ Steinkellner (forthcoming) surmises that Dharmakīrti probably refers here to a previous dispute which he must have had with Īśvarasena.

Refutation of ideas lies at the heart of the philosopher's trade, but it is usually directed at opponents outside one's close circle. True, dedicated philosophers will subscribe to the *Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas* adage,⁶⁰ but criticism of a 'master' is more likely to be voiced against a theory or two of an otherwise revered idol of Antiquity rather than one's direct mentor, especially if he/she is still alive. Dharmakīrti must have been one of those super-dedicated philosophers committed to the truth no

⁵⁹ The translation closely follows the rendering of Steinkellner, forthcoming.

⁶⁰ While the roots of the maxim go to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* 1096a11–15, its current wording is modern, the closest source being Bacon's *Opus Majus*, Pars I, cap. V. The fastest *upāya* to check its history is – of course! – a quick peek at *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. 'Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas' (accessed 19 September 2019), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amicus_Plato,_sed_magis_amica_veritas.

matter how unwelcome his professionalism may have been. That was unique enough within the paradigm of his time, but what made him singular was to unleash his sharp irony against his own *ācārya*, and do it in writing.

If he went no-holds-barred against his teacher, then how fierce would he get against other opponents? Professional? Yes! Diplomatic? Most likely, no! We can imagine how emotionally bruised, if not scarred for life, were Dharmakīrti's opponents after being philosophically hammered and publicly scorned in a bout of *hetuvidyā* Vale Tudo. No matter what the noble Dharma tells us about letting go, the defeated opponents must have hated his guts, and some may have put this hatred to work.

As some of these opponents were Buddhist fellow-believers (Īśvarasena was more than a fellow!), Dharmakīrti's image within Saṅgha circles familiar with him was probably quite mixed. While he may have had his admirers, there must have been a sizable number of those who loathed him. The monastics whom Dharmakīrti faced in the debates were most probably members of the scholarly elite, abbots or leading figures of their communities surrounded by their own disciples. *These* were also the people who must have played a key role in the spread of information within the Saṅgha.

It is very hard, if not impossible, to know how new works and ideas circulated in the traditional Buddhist communities. And why did some of them attain fast recognition while others were slow or, worst, vanished from the picture altogether? Of course, there was a continuous flow of people moving around the *vihāras*, but was a simple recommendation from any monastic Tom, Dick, and Harry (or to approximate the context, any Rahul, Abhishek, and Aditya)⁶¹ enough to propel a certain work to the distinguished eyes of the Nālandā elites?

My guess is a qualified 'no'. If something got 'viral' among the rank and file of the Saṅgha, it would have probably caught the attention of the establishment pundits, too. But Dharmakīrti's highly technical treatises aren't exactly the kind of stuff easily becoming huge hits on the 'Buddhajāla.com'. The key factor in making a text known outside its local community was, I imagine, the recommendation from the local elites of scholar-monks, i.e. the very people whom Dharmakīrti would have antagonised with his sharp mind and tongue. The deliberate thwarting of Dharmakīrti's efforts to reach wider recognition obviously did not go for ever, but it probably slowed the circulation of his works by decades.⁶²

⁶¹ These being apparently the most common male first names in India nowadays according to <http://www.studentsoftheworld.info/penpals/stats.php3?Pays=IND> (accessed 20 September 2019).

⁶² We can allow imagination its full play and further speculate on the feelings which a figure like Dharmakīrti may have elicited. Not only was he hated by those humiliated in public debates, but his genius may also have stirred up envy from peers and even senior members of the Saṅgha. Dharmakīrti's verse cited above squarely puts the blame for the lack of recognition on those afflicted

(3) By technical reasons I refer to two aspects: the huge difficulty of Dharmakīrti's philosophy and the inherent nature of institutions to resist change. The former doesn't need much explaining. Dharmakīrti's works *are* difficult! It does take considerable time and assiduous efforts to comprehend his complex ideas and elaborate argumentation. Yes, things must have been much easier for the traditional elites trained in logic and reading in their native, or near-native, language. But even for such elites a treatise like the *Pramāṇavārttika* could have hardly been their casual bedtime reading. Fully grasping the entire Dharmakīrtian logical and epistemological edifice with all its technical subtleties and novelties could have taken years even for the brightest minds.

The second aspect refers to institutional inertia, a tendency inherent in any human institution. By their very nature, institutions, whether ancient monasteries or modern companies, need to ensure stability, and therefore deal with change in a cautious manner, albeit at different paces.⁶³ Needless to say, traditional institutions are far less open to change, especially when paradigms of faith play a role in the process.

Nālandā was, most probably, no exception to this rule. The pace at which its learned elites accepted and incorporated new ideas into its orthodoxy must have been sluggish. Actually, even by the end of the 7th century, Dignāga's works remained the basic materials for the study of Buddhist logic. Yijing gives a list of eight of Dignāga's treatises which constituted the 'standard' curriculum for monastics specialising in this field (T 54.230a6-7). So even if some of Dharmakīrti's texts had made their way into the Nālandā library by the time Xuanzang was studying there, it is very unlikely they would have been recommended to him as must-read treatises.⁶⁴

by 'foul envy' (*īrṣyāmala*). Centuries later, Ānandavardhana will be assessing the situation behind the verse in the same way: his brilliance fired the jealousy of other people. It is hard to say how much truth is in such statements, but they are quite plausible. If so, envy may have been another factor which slowed down the spread of Dharmakīrti's works.

⁶³ This basic characteristic of all human institutions is well-known in sociological and economical studies. See, for instance, Kingston and Caballero 2009 (especially section 6), from which I borrow the term 'institutional inertia'.

⁶⁴ The old argument that Xuanzang's had a poor knowledge of logic and/or lacked interest in the subject has few, if any, proponents in our days. The hypothesis as voiced by R. Sāṅkrtyāyana is already refuted by Frauwallner (1982 [1961], 860-861). The Austrian scholar pertinently points out that Xuanzang was not only well trained in logic but his translation of Dignāga's *Nyāyamukha* also proves 'quite a good knowledge' of the subject. We know now better than ever that Xuanzang received first-class education in logic in Indian monasteries and did a very good job with his renditions of two basic (as well as far from easy) treatises, i.e. Dignāga's *Nyāyamukha* 因明正理門論, translated in 649, and

To put my arguments together, here is in brief the scenario I conjecture. Born and active mostly in Southern India, far from the great monastic centres of learning in the North, Dharmakīrti's chances of fast recognition were hampered from the very beginning.

Furthermore, his extraordinary genius, which should have brought much quicker fame, was 'crippled' by his fiercely polemical nature and a penchant for mocking his opponents. This *did* reflect badly on the human relations factor, which in turn must have influenced the readiness of the local elites to promote or circulate his works.

We know for sure that by the time he completed the *Pramāṇavārttika* Dharmakīrti was feeling misunderstood, even hated by 'people wont to vulgar pursuits and intellectually unfit', a phrase which I take to refer to the local pundits in the South rather than the Nālandā establishment. Later in life he seems to have gathered a group of disciples around him, but it is rather unlikely their number was large. Even less likely is whether this group functioned as a well-organised community actively engaged in the preservation and promotion of the Master's works.

The immense technical complexity of Dharmakīrti's philosophical system was another 'natural' obstacle preventing a speedy access to wide recognition. It did take time even for the well-educated readers to comprehend the subtleties and novelties of his genial contribution. To make things worse, by the time Dharmakīrti's works 'trickled' into Nālandā's library, another delaying factor kicked in: the institutional inertia which acted as the last barrier to the logician's hope that his system would find enough minds 'in this world able to grasp it'.

But things were going to change, and change for the better. Not as quickly as Dharmakīrti had hoped, but his philosophical legacy was not destined to 'exhaust itself

Śāṅkarasvāmin's *Nyāyapraveśa* 因明入正理論, translated in 647. For an excellent survey of Xuanzang's logical training in Central Asia and India as well as his translations of Buddhist texts connected to logic and epistemology, see Chen 2018, 7-11. Furthermore, his pupils, first and foremost Ji 基, the second Patriarch of the Faxiang 法相 school, brilliantly furthered this legacy in their own writings. For recent studies discussing Xuanzang's and his disciples' familiarity with Buddhist logic, see, for instance, Yao 2009, Moro 2013, He 2014, Chen 2018, etc.

If Xuanzang had a chance to become familiar with Dharmakīrti's works, he would have been well prepared as well as quite interested in introducing them to the Chinese audience. As argued above, my guess is that he simply didn't know anything about the logician's contributions. Even if manuscripts containing Dharmakīrti's works were somewhere in what must have been the immense library of the Nālandā Monastery, they were probably (and wrongly!) placed on the back shelves of *opera minora*. (I wonder if and how such huge collections were organised. Were they catalogued? Or did the readers simply browse the shelves? Was there a monastic library staff ready to help?)

as the waters flowing into the vast sea'. About one generation after his death, Dharmakīrti was becoming more than a local name. 'Śākyabuddhi, a late 7th century (?) commentator of Dharmakīrti, already points to several alternative explanations of a particular difficult passage (PVSV 21,6-9), thus testifying to Dharmakīrti's increasing audience' (Eltschinger 2010).⁶⁵ And later in the same century, Yijing will be mentioning the logician's name amongst the crème de la crème of the Buddhist *ācāryas* throughout the centuries.

This is the story I imagine. I say 'story' and 'imagine' deliberately. Reconstructing a sequence of events and circumstances when solid evidence is so scarce requires imagination which crystalizes best in narrative plots. We can euphemistically call this 'surmise' and 'hypothesis', but the process has more than one thing in common with fiction. Of course, the more prudent historian will steer clear of the temptation of such reckless reconstructions and venture into few, if any, conjectural statements. This is, no doubt, the most reasonable approach, but preferring fiction to reason, I took the liberty of spinning my yarn.

Devendrabuddhi and Śākyabuddhi

Dating Dharmakīrti's death 30 years earlier than the Frauwallnerian theory also impacts the chronology of his followers. The dates of his direct disciple Devendrabuddhi, placed by Frauwallner 1982 [1961], 867) between 630 and 690, should thus be revised to c. 600-670.⁶⁶ Similarly, Śākyabuddhi's dates, set by Frauwallner (ibid.) to c. 660-720, should be adjusted to 630-700.

As for the post-Śākyabuddhi chronology, I simply don't know how and how much of it should be altered. Only a careful and case-by-case consideration of all evidence, external and internal, can decide the matter.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ PVSV is the siglum for *Pramāṇavārttika Autocommentary* (Gnoli ed.).

⁶⁶ On Devendrabuddhi's *Pramāṇavārttikavṛtti* (*Tshad ma rnam 'grel gyi 'grel pa*), see Frauwallner 1982 [1960].

⁶⁷ The new dating proposed here makes it necessary to tweak the chronology of Dignāga's opponents (something which I am not prepared to undertake). A convenient table of the philosophers and/or works which are criticised by Dignāga is found at Steinkellner 2017, 215 (Appendix 2).

The hypothesis placing Dharmakīrti to c. 570-640 may also affect the dating of Candrakīrti and other authors, Buddhists or not, currently believed to have lived in the early and mid-7th century. The dating of Candrakīrti in particular seems closely connected to Dharmakīrti whose works he does not cite. On the other hand, the Madhyamaka philosopher shows familiarity with Dignāga (see Lang and Eltschinger 2019, 125; Seyfort Ruegg 2010 [1982], 23). On the basis of this detail, 'the date most commonly accepted for Candrakīrti is 600-650' (Lang and Eltschinger 2019, 125, referring to Seyfort Ruegg 1981, 71). I am not sure whether my hypothesis placing Dharmakīrti between 570 and 640

In Lieu of Conclusion

To make Procrustes's work easier, here are the main conclusions hypothesised in this essay, some of them rather bold, others pretty modest or unchanged from the widely adopted dating. It goes without saying that the rounded off figures simply reflect our ignorance regarding concrete dates. All of them should therefore be understood as 'circa':

- Vasubandhu 350-430
- Dignāga 430-500
- Sthiramati (the younger) 480-550
- Bhāviveka 500-570
- Dharmapāla 530-561
- Dharmakīrti 570-640
- Devendrabuddhi 600-670
- Śākyabuddhi 630-700

I'm the first one to admit that my arguments are highly conjectural and definitely open to re-visitation. I am also aware that a 50- or 30-year adjustment means something only as long as the rigorous (German-style!) reconstruction of timelines is deemed the top priority for a historian. No doubt, getting as accurate as it gets is a 'must' for the chronology of political, socio-economical, and military events.

I wonder, however, if the history of ideas should always stick to dating along rocket-science lines. When historical evidence is in short supply, approximating the sequences of philosophers, works, and their interactions may be as effective as the precision-aiming tweaking of chronologies. After all, Frauwallner's theory did, does, and most probably will continue to function as a viable hypothesis without bringing any big, if any, changes to the larger picture of the Indian philosophy.⁶⁸

should be automatically reflected on the dating of Candrakīrti, who is generally regarded as the logician's contemporary. If there are no other clues, then the Madhyamaka philosopher's dates should also be adjusted to c. 570-640 (presupposing he enjoyed an average lifespan). At any rate, I conjecture that the reason for Candrakīrti's lack of familiarity with Dharmakīrti (supposing they were contemporaries) is similar to the one behind Xuanzang's silence, i.e. the poor and slow circulation of the logician's works.

Needless to say, any adjustments to the dates of the authors and works connected to the chronology discussed here should be done on a case-by-case basis. This will have the additional benefit of testing my hypotheses. If the assessment of the timelines of other authors and works yields sufficient evidence pointing to the untenability of my dating, the chronology will have to be re-re-visited and re-revised.

⁶⁸ In a very recent contribution, Eltschinger maintains, for example, that 'Dignāga's dates are

So, yeah, if we adopt a more laidback (say, Californian?) approach to chronology, 430-500 vs 480-540 ain't such a biggie. And if we take an even looser (Romanian?) view on history, all you need to know is that Dignāga lived in the 5th or 6th century and was a damn good philosopher, one of India's finest.

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Chos-T: Tāranātha's *rGya gar chos 'byung* (Schiefner ed.)

Dacien-si Sanzang fashi zhuan 大慈恩寺三藏法師傳 (T 51, No. 2053)

Da Tang Xiyu ji 大唐西域記 (T 51, No. 2087)

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reasonably well established' (2019b, 179), referring to the theories of Frauwallner (1982 [1961]) and Hattori (1968) who place the logician between 470/80 and 530/40.

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⁶⁹ In case of reprints, the original year of publication is noted in square brackets.

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