

Reinterpreting *ekatvādīn* in Mūlamadhyamakārikā MMK 19:4: A Grammatical and Ontological Analysis

Jiayue Kang*

Graduate Student, M.A. Program in Sanskrit, Faculty of Archaeology,

Silpakorn University, Thailand

Email: kangjiayue@gmail.com

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Abstract

This article offers a focused re-examination of the term *ekatvādīn* in MMK 19:4 of Nāgārjuna's *Kālaparīksā* (Chapter 19 of the *Mūlamadhyamakārikā*), arguing that its grammatical form and ontological function have been systematically underappreciated in both classical and modern scholarship. While commentators commonly gloss *ekatvādīn* numerically as "unity, duality and plurality," treating it as a loose analogue to temporal divisions, this reading neither accounts for the masculine plural ending-ādīn attached to the neuter abstract noun *ekatva*, nor does it explain its precise role in Nāgārjuna's extension of the critique of time to space and identity. Through close Sanskrit analysis and engagement with Bhāvaviveka, Candrakīrti, Tsongkhapa, as well as modern interpreters such as Kalupahana, Garfield, and Siderits & Katsura, the article proposes a reinterpretation of *ekatvādīn* as a relational triad, "Identity – Neither Identity nor Difference – Difference" (*ekatvābhedābheda*), rather than a merely numerical series. This grammatical anomaly is read as a deliberate device that destabilises reified identity just as *Kālaparīksā* destabilises temporal phases. The analysis shows that *ekatvādīn* functions as a pivot linking temporal, spatial and identity schemata, thereby revealing them as interdependent conceptual constructions lacking inherent existence (*svabhāva*). In doing so, the article seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions that treat Nāgārjuna not merely as a logician of emptiness but as

* Mr.Jiayue Kang Graduate Student, M.A. Program in Sanskrit, Faculty of Archaeology, Silpakorn University

a subtle reader of language, whose grammatical choices are integral to the deconstruction of substantiality.

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1. Introduction

Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK) stands as a foundational work of Madhyamaka philosophy, renowned for its methodical critique of inherently existing entities (*svabhāva*) through a distinctive dialectical¹ style. Among its chapters, *Kālaparīksā* (Chapter 19, Examination of Time) plays a pivotal role by dismantling the notion of time as an independent reality and exposing its dependence on conceptual and relational structures. Verses MMK 19:1–3 scrutinise the past, present, and future, showing that none of the three can be established without presupposing the others; time as an independent essence collapses once its phases are revealed as mutually dependent.

In MMK 19:4, however, the text appears to shift its surface focus. Nāgārjuna juxtaposes spatial triads such as upper, middle, and lower (*uttama–madhyama–adhama*) with the expression *ekatvādīn*, which is conventionally rendered as “one and so on” or “unity, etc.” Rather than simply assuming that this verse extends the discussion from temporal phases to spatial and unity-related schemata, it is necessary first to ask what role these examples play within the structure of *Kālaparīksā*. The abrupt change of vocabulary raises important questions about how, if at all, the critique of time in the preceding verses is meant to be related to issues of space and *ekatvādīn*, and what precise function *ekatvādīn* is intended to serve in this context.

Modern scholarship on *Kālaparīksā* has largely concentrated on the critique of time as a relational construct, exploring how temporal phases lack independent existence and are intelligible only within networks of causal and conceptual relations.² In this context, *ekatvādīn* in MMK 19:4 is usually taken to refer to a series

¹ Candrakīrti, *Prasannapadā* on MMK 19:4, in P. L. Vaidya (ed.), *Madhyamakaśāstra* of Nāgārjuna with the commentary *Prasannapadā* by Candrakīrti (Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1960), p.164.

² Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Oxford University Press, 1995); Jan Westerhoff, *Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka: A Philosophical Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2009); Mark Siderits and Shōryū Katsura, *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way: Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Wisdom Publications, 2013).

such as “unity, duality, and plurality” or simply “unity, etc.” functioning as a loose analogue to the temporal triad past–present–future. Read in this way, the verse appears to deploy a set of parallel examples—time, space and identity—to illustrate a single point: that no category, whether temporal, spatial or numerical, can be established as inherently existing. Yet such readings tend to pass quickly over the grammatical and conceptual difficulties of the verse, and especially of *ekatvādīn* itself.

At the grammatical level, MMK 19:4 presents a well-known irregularity: the abstract neuter noun *ekatva* (“oneness” or “identity”) appears compounded with the masculine plural suffix-*ādīn* (“and the like”). In classical Sanskrit, the-tva suffix typically yields neuter abstract nouns, and gender agreement between base and suffix is strict. The pairing of neuter *ekatva* with a masculine plural ending is therefore anomalous.

Some classical commentators briefly treat the verse, but without addressing the grammatical anomaly in any detail. *Candrakīrti*, for example, glosses *ekatvādīn* in his *Prasannapadā* as “unity and the like,” explicitly taking it to include duality and plurality, yet he does not comment on the gender irregularity of neuter *ekatva* with the masculine plural ending-*ādīn*. Modern translators often follow this line, treating *ekatvādīn* as a straightforward numerical series. Conceptually, moreover, this numerical understanding sits uneasily with the broader argumentative context. Temporal phases are defined by asynchrony, whereas spatial relations like upper–middle–lower are simultaneous; identity and difference introduce yet another mode of relation. It is not obvious that a simple “one–two–many” series is adequate to capture the sort of conceptual instability *Nāgārjuna* is targeting when he couples *ekatvādīn* with spatial triads and the failure of temporal ontology.

These issues give rise to the central problem this article addresses: what, precisely, does *ekatvādīn* mean in MMK 19:4, and how does its grammatical form contribute to *Nāgārjuna*’s critique of time, space, and identity? If *ekatvādīn* is simply read as “unity, duality, plurality,” both the grammatical anomaly and the depth of the ontological argument risk being flattened into a generic illustration of “many kinds of things.” If, on the other hand, the form and placement of the term are taken seriously, they may reveal a more intricate strategy whereby *Nāgārjuna* destabilises not only temporal phases but also identity-relations themselves. On this reading, MMK 19:4 is not a mere addendum to the critique of time but

a crucial hinge where temporal, spatial, and identificatory schemata are shown to stand or fall together.

The present article proposes a reinterpretation of *ekatvādīn* as a relational triad best rendered as “Identity – Neither Identity nor Difference – Difference” (*ekatvābhedābheda*), rather than as a purely numerical series. This proposal both responds to the grammatical problem—the masculine plural *-ādīn* signalling a series of relational states rather than a single neuter abstraction—and clarifies the ontological role of the term within Nāgārjuna’s argument. On this view, *ekatvādīn* does not merely list a set of quantities but marks a structured field of tensions between identity and difference, mirroring the tensions between temporal phases and between spatial positions. In line with *Madhyamaka*’s critique of *svabhāva*, these tensions are not resolved by positing a deeper essence; rather, the series discloses the dependence of each term on the others, thereby undermining any claim to inherent existence.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are threefold. First, it aims to examine the grammatical and philological features of *ekatvādīn* in MMK 19:4, with particular attention to the mismatch between neuter *ekatva* and the masculine plural ending *-ādīn*, and to its syntactic relationship with the spatial triads *uttama–madhyama–adhma*. Second, it seeks to articulate an ontological reinterpretation of *ekatvādīn* as a relational schema—“Identity–Neither Identity nor Difference–Difference”—that parallels but is not reducible to the temporal triads examined in MMK 19:1–3. Third, it aims to show how this reinterpretation illuminates the way Nāgārjuna extends the critique of time to space and identity, thus revealing a unified strategy in *Kālaparīksā* in which temporal, spatial and identity constructs are all exposed as empty conceptual constructions.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The significance of this inquiry is twofold. At the level of textual and doctrinal study, it sharpens our understanding of a verse that has often been treated in passing, showing that the grammatical peculiarities of *ekatvādīn* are not accidental but philosophically charged. At the level of *Madhyamaka* ontology, the reinterpretation of *ekatvādīn* as a relational triad clarifies how Nāgārjuna’s critique of time is inseparable from a critique of space and identity, and how all three are bound up with the way concepts are projected and reified. By paying attention to

a single, difficult term, the article thus aims to contribute to a more nuanced picture of Nāgārjuna's method in Kālaparīkṣā, one in which fine-grained linguistic choices are integral to the deconstruction of substantiality.

2. Review of Literature

This section surveys major modern studies and classical commentaries relevant to Nāgārjuna's Kālaparīkṣā, with particular attention to work on MMK 19 and the term *ekatvādīn*. The aim is twofold: first, to situate the present study within existing discussions of time, space, and identity in *Madhyamaka*; and second, to show that while the temporal argument of MMK 19 has been widely treated, the specific grammatical and ontological issues surrounding *ekatvādīn* in MMK 19:4 have received comparatively little systematic attention.

2.1 Modern Monographs on Nāgārjuna and Time

Early English-language work on MMK established a framework within which Kālaparīkṣā has usually been read. Kenneth Inada's *Nāgārjuna: A Translation of his Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (1970) provides one of the first complete English translations. He renders *ekatvādīn* in MMK 19:4 along the lines of "identity" or "unity, etc." and largely treats the verse as an additional illustration of dependent arising. While Inada's translation is valuable for making the text accessible, his minimal commentary leaves the grammatical anomaly (neuter *ekatva* + masculine *-ādīn*) unexplored, and the ontological role of *ekatvādīn* remains vague.

David Kalupahana's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā of Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way* (1986) and his earlier article "The Buddhist Conception of Time and Temporality" (1974) approach MMK 19 by emphasising Nāgārjuna's rejection of absolute time while retaining a form of pragmatic temporality, often drawing on William James's idea of the "specious present". In this empirical reading, Kālaparīkṣā is seen primarily as a critique of metaphysical time that nonetheless allows for a functional temporal experience. Although Kalupahana usefully highlights the practical dimension of Nāgārjuna's thought, his focus tends to obscure the specifically logical and grammatical features of MMK 19:4, and *ekatvādīn* is treated as part of a general doctrine of impermanence rather than as a precise problem term.

Jay Garfield's *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* (1995) has become a standard reference in English-language *Madhyamaka* scholarship. Garfield presents

time as a relational construct devoid of *svabhāva*, stressing that past, present, and future are mutually dependent and only conventionally real. He translates *ekatvādīn* in MMK 19:4 as “unity, etc.” aligning it with a series of numerical or categorial distinctions that are likewise empty. Garfield’s philosophical commentary offers an illuminating account of MMK 19 as a whole, but his treatment of MMK 19:4 does not address the gender mismatch of *ekatvādīn*, and the term’s function is largely subsumed under a broad relational reading.

Jan Westerhoff’s *Nāgārjuna’s Madhyamaka: A Philosophical Introduction* (2009) develops a rigorous analysis of Nāgārjuna’s arguments using tools from contemporary analytic philosophy. Westerhoff is particularly sensitive to the difference between temporal asynchrony and spatial simultaneity, arguing that one must be cautious in applying temporal logic to spatial relations. His observations are significant for MMK 19:4, where time and spatial triads appear together. However, Westerhoff’s focus is primarily logical rather than philological, and he does not linger on the internal linguistic structure of *ekatvādīn*.

Mark Siderits and Shōryū Katsura’s *Nāgārjuna’s Middle Way: Mulamadhyamakakarika* (2013) offer a detailed translation and commentary that has been influential in recent scholarship. They explicitly gloss *ekatvādīn* as “unity, duality and plurality” and treat it as a straightforward numerical series parallel to the temporal and spatial triads. Their discussion of *Kālaparīkṣā* is philosophically rich, especially in its account of the collapse of the three times, but once again the grammatical irregularity of *ekatvādīn* is not thematised; their interpretation assumes a “one–two–many” reading without asking whether the form of the word suggests a more complex relational structure.

A more recent contribution is Siderits’ revised edition *Buddhism as Philosophy* (2021), which, although not focused on *Kālaparīkṣā* specifically, provides expanded discussions on identity, conceptual construction, and *Madhyamaka* reasoning that support the present study’s emphasis on relational ontologies rather than numerical categories.

Other monographs provide important doctrinal and historical background for reading MMK 19. Bhikkhu K. L. Dhammadhoti’s *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma* (2007) reconstructs the Sarvāstivādin theory of time as a real continuum of past, present, and future dharmas, a position that forms a key target of Nāgārjuna’s critique. T. R. V. Murti’s *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (2013) and Christian Lindtner’s

Master of Wisdom (1986) and Nagarjuniana (1987) present broader accounts of *Madhyamaka* that emphasise Nāgārjuna's systematic rejection of substantialist ontology. These works contextualise *Kālaparīkṣā* within the wider project of denying *svabhāva* but do not specifically examine the linguistic puzzles in MMK 19:4.

2.2 Articles and Thematic Studies on Time and Temporality

Beyond monographs, several studies address Buddhist conceptions of time and temporality. Kalupahana's article "The Buddhist Conception of Time and Temporality" (1974) surveys Pāli and Sanskrit sources to argue that Buddhism rejects an absolute time while allowing a psychological or experiential temporality. M. Gauvain's master's thesis *Time and Temporality in Indian Buddhism* (2008) offers a broader map of Indian Buddhist views, including Sarvāstivāda and Sautrāntika, and situates Nāgārjuna against this background. These works clarify the doctrinal environment in which MMK 19 operates, but they engage *Kālaparīkṣā* mainly at the level of temporal ontology; term-specific issues such as *ekatvādīn* remain outside their main scope.

Other thematic studies, such as Zhihua Yao's "Four-dimensional Time in Dzogchen and Heidegger" (2007), explore comparative questions of temporality across Buddhist and Western traditions. While not directly focused on MMK 19, such works underscore the continuing philosophical relevance of Buddhist reflections on time. They also suggest possible frameworks—phenomenological, hermeneutic, or analytic—within which a refined reading of *Kālaparīkṣā* might be received, but they do not address the philological detail required here.

Text-critical work by J. W. de Jong³ on the *Prasannapadā* and related texts is also relevant. De Jong's careful attention to variant readings and manuscript traditions underscores the need for precision when dealing with problematic terms and formulations in Nāgārjuna's corpus. While the present article does not rely on any specific proposal of his regarding MMK 19:4 or *ekatvādīn*, his studies provide important methodological support for the kind of close reading undertaken here.

2.3 Classical Commentaries and Tibetan Exegesis

The most important pre-modern witnesses for MMK 19 are the classical Indian and Tibetan commentaries. Bhāvaviveka's *Prajñāpradīpa* (extant in Tibetan

³ Jan Willem de Jong, *Cinq chapitres de la Prasannapadā* (Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1949); Jan Willem de Jong, "Textcritical Notes on the *Prasannapadā*", *Indo-Iranian Journal*, Vol. 20 No. (1–2)(1978) : 25–59.

and Chinese translations) and *Candrakīrti*'s *Prasannapadā* form the core of the Indian exegetical tradition. Both read *Kālaparīkṣā* as a sustained critique of time's inherent existence, and both recognise the role of analogies with space and identity. *Candrakīrti*, in particular, glosses MMK 19:4 by expanding the scope of the spatial triads and by reading *ekatvādīn* as "unity and the like," explicitly including duality and plurality. In his *Prasannapadā* he writes that the expression "upper, lower, and middle" (*uttamādhānamadhyamān*) should be understood, via the word *ādi*, to cover all kinds of threefold classifications (wholesome/unwholesome / indeterminate, arising / abiding / ceasing, the three realms, and so on), and that by *ekatvādīn* "unity and the like" duality and plurality are also taken up.⁴ Yet even in this detailed gloss, *Candrakīrti* does not treat the gender irregularity of *ekatvādīn* as a problem in its own right; the term is assimilated to a general pattern of numerical or categorial series.

Tsongkhapa's *Ocean of Reasoning* (2006), a major Tibetan commentary, develops a systematic Gelug reading of MMK. He emphasises that *Kālaparīkṣā* shows time to be empty of inherent existence, while insisting that conventional temporal discourse remains pragmatically valid. His treatment of MMK 19:4 reinforces the idea that temporal, spatial, and numerical distinctions are all dependently designated, but, like the Indian commentators, he does not single out *ekatvādīn*'s morphology as philosophically significant.

Taken together, these classical works provide indispensable guidance for understanding MMK 19, yet they also reveal a consistent pattern: *ekatvādīn* is acknowledged and loosely interpreted as "unity and so on," but neither its anomalous form nor its precise role in bridging time, space, and identity is thematised. The commentators attend primarily to logical and doctrinal issues; the internal structure of *ekatvādīn* remains largely unexamined.

2.4 Identified Gap

This brief survey shows that modern scholarship has offered rich analyses of *Nāgārjuna*'s critique of time and of *Madhyamaka* ontology more generally, while classical commentaries have preserved crucial exegetical traditions. However, across both corpora a specific gap remains. *Ekatvādīn* in MMK 19:4 is typically treated as

⁴ *Candrakīrti*, *Prasannapadā* on MMK 19:4, in P. L. Vaidya (ed.), *Madhyamakaśāstra* of *Nāgārjuna* with the Commentary *Prasannapadā* by *Candrakīrti* (Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1960), p.164.

a transparent numerical expression (“unity, duality, plurality,” “unity, etc.”), and the grammatical irregularity of neuter ekatva combined with masculine -ādīn is either passed over in silence or explained away as a minor feature. None of the major studies examined here has proposed a sustained reinterpretation of ekatvādīn as a relational schema with its own ontological significance.

The present article addresses this gap by combining philological, logical, and doctrinal analysis to argue that ekatvādīn should be read not merely as “one, two, many” but as a structured triad—“Identity – Neither Identity nor Difference – Difference”—which plays a pivotal role in extending Nāgārjuna’s critique of temporal ontology to space and identity in Kālaparīkṣā.

3. Methodology

This study employs a philosophical-critical method designed to integrate close philological work with systematic ontological analysis. The approach consists of four mutually supporting components: (1) close reading of the primary Sanskrit text of MMK 19:4; (2) unified engagement with classical and modern commentaries; (3) logical reconstruction of Nāgārjuna’s argument; and (4) limited cognitive reflection, constrained by the textual focus of Kālaparīkṣā.

First, the core of the analysis is a close reading of MMK 19:4 in Sanskrit. Particular attention is given to the morphology and syntax of ekatvādīn: the neuter abstract noun ekatva and the masculine plural suffix -ādīn, and their placement in relation to the spatial triads *uttama*–*madhyama*–*adhma*. The grammatical irregularity is not treated as a merely technical curiosity, but as a potential carrier of philosophical significance. Standard works on Sanskrit grammar are consulted in order to determine how unusual this construction is, and what range of meanings the suffix-ādīn can bear in philosophical contexts. This philological step establishes the textual constraints within which any reinterpretation of ekatvādīn must operate. Second, the study adopts what may be called a “unified commentary” approach to exegetical sources. Rather than privileging a single authority, it reads classical Indian and Tibetan commentators—above all Bhāvaviveka’s *Prajñāpradīpa*, Candrakīrti’s *Prasannapadā*, and Tsongkhapa’s *Ocean of Reasoning*—together with key modern interpreters such as Kalupahana, Garfield, and Siderits & Katsura as participants in a continuous interpretive conversation about MMK 19. Candrakīrti’s gloss on MMK 19:4 in particular, in which ekatvādīn is treated as “unity and the like”

including duality and plurality, provides an important reference point against which the present proposal is articulated. At the same time, the study recognises that these sources do not explicitly address the gender anomaly of *ekatvādīn*, and therefore cannot be taken as exhaustive. Their readings are carefully summarised, critically evaluated, and used to delineate both the inherited consensus and its limitations. In addition, Tillemans (2017) provides an important clarification of how *Mādhyamikas* employ *prasaṅga*-style reasoning rather than establishing independent theses. His analysis reinforces the methodological decision of the present study to treat *ekatvādīn* as a relational construct destabilised through dialectical critique rather than as a self-sufficient doctrinal category.

Third, building on the philological and exegetic groundwork, the article undertakes a logical reconstruction of Nāgārjuna's argument in MMK 19:4, situated within the structure of *Kālaparīkṣā* as a whole. This involves tracing how the extension from temporal phases in MMK 19:1–3 to spatial triads and *ekatvādīn* in MMK 19:4 is meant to function, and how the verse relates both to the immediately following MMK 19:5 and to Nāgārjuna's explicit discussions of conceptual designation (*prajñapti*) and various forms of "dependence" (*upādāya*) in other chapters of the *Mūlamadhyamakārikā*. The proposed reinterpretation of *ekatvādīn* as a relational triad—"Identity – Neither Identity nor Difference – Difference"—is tested against the inferential moves of the chapter: does this reading preserve Nāgārjuna's dialectical strategy, and does it illuminate otherwise opaque transitions between time, space, and identity? This step draws on standard *Madhyamaka* tools such as *reductio* arguments (*prasaṅga*), analysis of dependence, and critique of *svabhāva*.

Finally, the study employs a cautious cognitive and phenomenological reflection, strictly delimited by the textual data. It does not attempt to construct a full theory of mind, but rather uses simple heuristic distinctions (for instance, between identity as a conceptual posit and identity as lived self-experience) to make explicit what is implied by Nāgārjuna's analysis of grasping (*grhyate*) and designation (*prajñapyate*) in MMK 19, and by his later use of terms such as *prajñapti* and *upādāya* in other chapters of the MMK. The aim is not to impose an external psychological theory on the text, but to articulate how the proposed relational reading of *ekatvādīn* helps to show temporal, spatial, and identity constructs as products of conceptual projection rather than as independent realities.

Taken together, these four components—close philology, unified commentary, logical reconstruction, and restrained cognitive reflection—are intended to ensure that the reinterpretation of *ekatvādīn* remains firmly anchored in the primary text and its commentarial tradition, while still allowing for a philosophically robust account of its grammatical and ontological significance.

4. Results and Analysis

This section presents a focused analysis of the expression *ekatvādīn* in MMK 19:4, organised into three parts. First, it examines the grammatical and morphological peculiarities of the compound and their implications for reading the verse. Second, it considers the ontological stakes of *ekatvādīn* by situating it in relation to temporal and spatial triads, arguing that the term is best understood as marking a structured field of identity, identity-in-difference, and difference. Third, it explores how this reinterpretation clarifies the relation between time, space, and identity in *Kālaparīkṣā*, and why MMK 19:4 should be read as a hinge rather than a mere appendix to MMK 19:1–3.

4.1 Grammatical Anomaly: Neuter *ekatva* with Masculine *-ādīn*

The term *ekatvādīn* is grammatically striking. Its base, *ekatva*, is a neuter abstract noun derived from *eka* (“one”) through the suffix *-tva*, a productive formation for abstract qualities such as *śūnyatva* (“emptiness”) or *svabhāvatva* (“possessing intrinsic nature”). Standard grammars and lexica consistently treat *-tva* as yielding neuter abstracts. By contrast, *-ādīn* is a masculine accusative plural form of *-ādi* (“and so on”), familiar from expressions like *devādīn* (“the gods and the like”), where a masculine head noun governs the series.

In classical Sanskrit usage, agreement between stem and inflectional ending is ordinarily strict, especially in carefully composed philosophical verse. Against this background, the compounding of neuter *ekatva* with masculine plural *-ādīn* is morphologically unexpected. If one assumed a purely formal series “oneness, twoness, manyness,” one would expect a neuter form such as *ekatvādīni* rather than the attested masculine plural *ekatvādīn*. The fact that *Nāgārjuna* applies the same masculine inflection to both *uttamādhamamadhyādīn* and *ekatvādīn* suggests deliberate parallelism, but the gender shift with *ekatva* remains unexplained if the term is treated as a straightforward neuter abstraction.⁵

⁵ *Candrakīrti, Prasannapadā* on MMK 19:4, in P. L. Vaidya (ed.), *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna with the Commentary Prasannapadā* by *Candrakīrti* (Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1960), p. 164.

Classical commentators recognise and gloss the passage but do not resolve the grammatical tension. *Candrakīrti*, in the *Prasannapadā*, explicitly understands *ekatvādīn* as “oneness and so on,” specifying that the “and so on” (*ādi*) covers twoness and multiplicity:

ekatvādīmś ca ityanena ādiśabdena dvitvabahutvayor grahaṇāt te eva uttamādayah ekatvādayaś ca kālatrayavyākhyānena vyākhyātā veditavyāḥ.⁶

In other words, he reads *ekatvādīn* as a numerical triad (oneness, twoness, multiplicity) that is to be “understood as explained through the exposition of the three times”.⁷ *Bhāvaviveka*, in his *Prajñāpradīpa*, likewise treats “one, two, three, many” as a series to be deconstructed in terms of mutual dependence and lack of intrinsic identity, offering a detailed refutation of oneness, twoness, and manyness.⁸ *Tsongkhapa* likewise treats *ekatvādīn* as referring to unity, duality and multiplicity.⁹

Modern translators generally follow this line. Garfield renders *ekatvādīn* as “unity, etc.” and explicitly glosses it in terms of unity, duality, and plurality.¹⁰ Siderits and Katsura likewise take the series to be “unity, duality, and plurality”.¹¹ Inada translates *ekatvādīn* simply as “identity,” supported by a brief footnote, but does not address the gender anomaly.¹² Kalupahana reads the verse through his broader concern with pragmatic temporality, treating *ekatvādīn* as one more set of conceptual categories that lack intrinsic being.¹³ In all these cases, the masculine *-ādīn* is either passed over without comment or implicitly treated as a minor irregularity.

⁶ *Candrakīrti*, *Prasannapadā* on MMK 19:4, in P. L. Vaidya (ed.), *Madhyamakaśāstra* of *Nāgārjuna* with the Commentary *Prasannapadā* by *Candrakīrti* (Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1960), p.164.

⁷ *Candrakīrti*, *Prasannapadā* on MMK 19:4, in P. L. Vaidya (ed.), *Madhyamakaśāstra* of *Nāgārjuna* with the Commentary *Prasannapadā* by *Candrakīrti* (Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1960), p.164.

⁸ *Bhāvaviveka*, *Prajñāpradīpa* (《般若燈論釋》), Chinese trans. in CBETA edition, p.132.

⁹ *Tsongkhapa*, *Ocean of Reasoning: A Great Commentary on Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakārikā*, trans. Ngawang Samten and Jay L. Garfield (Oxford University Press, 2006), p.397.

¹⁰ Jay Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakārikā* (Oxford University Press, 1995), p.256.

¹¹ Mark Siderits and Shōryū Katsura, *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way: Mūlamadhyamakārikā*, (Wisdom Publications, 2013), p.112.

¹² Kenneth K. Inada, *Nāgārjuna: A Translation of His Mūlamadhyamakārikā with an Introductory Essay*, (Hokuseido Press, 1970), p.118.

¹³ David J. Kalupahana, *Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way*, (State University of New York Press, 1986), p.278.

Taken together, the grammatical data suggest that the masculine-ādīn deserves more weight than it has usually been given. Within the constraints of anuṣṭubh metre, Nāgārjuna could simply have written a metrically equivalent neuter form if all that was intended were a neuter abstract series. The choice of a masculine plural ending suggests that ekatva in ekatvādīn is not functioning as an isolated neuter abstraction but as the first member of a series whose final element is masculine in gender. In other words, the form hints at a series that culminates in a masculine noun such as bheda (“difference”), rather than in a purely neuter triad of numerical abstractions.

This observation is consistent with the way small shifts in Nāgārjuna’s terminology often prove to be argumentatively significant in the MMK. On the reading proposed here, ekatvādīn encodes not just “unity, duality, plurality” but a structured progression from ekatva (identity), through an intermediate state, to a masculine endpoint such as bheda (difference). This opens the way for a reinterpretation of the compound as pointing to a triad of identity–identity-in-difference–difference, rather than to a purely numerical series.

4.2 Ontological Stakes: From Numerical Series to Identity-in-Difference

If ekatvādīn is read purely numerically as “one, two, many,” the term functions as a loose analogue to the temporal triad past–present–future, and the verse becomes a general reminder that such conceptual groupings lack svabhāva.¹⁴ Yet this flattening sits uneasily with both the grammatical anomaly and the broader argumentative context. Temporal phases are defined by asynchrony; spatial relations such as upper–middle–lower are simultaneous; and identity and difference introduce a further, logically distinct mode of relation. It is far from obvious that the same inferential pattern applies unchanged across all three cases.

Here an alternative, semantically richer possibility suggests itself. Kumārajīva, the earliest known translator of the MMK, renders ekatvādīn in his Chinese Zhōnglùn as 一異 (yīyì), literally “one and different” or “identity and difference”.¹⁵ Rather than reproducing a numeric triad, this translation highlights a polarity between identity and otherness. On this basis, the present article proposes that ekatvādīn is best understood as designating a relational triad:

¹⁴ Jay Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna’s Mūlamadhyamakārikā* (Oxford University Press, 1995); Mark Siderits and Shōryū Katsura, *Nāgārjuna’s Middle Way: Mūlamadhyamakārikā* (Wisdom Publications, 2013).

¹⁵ Nāgārjuna, Zhōnglùn 中論, Chinese trans. Kumārajīva, in CBETA edition, ch. p.19.

Identity — Identity-in-Difference — Difference
ekatva — bhedābheda — bheda

The intermediate member, bhedābheda (“difference-non-difference” or “identity-in-difference”), is not drawn from nowhere. In Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, the pair bheda / bhedābheda is used to articulate the notion of “identity-in-difference,” especially in the context of explaining how a dharma can retain a form of continuity across temporal phases without collapsing into strict numerical identity.¹⁶ While Nāgārjuna does not explicitly use the compound ekatvābhedābheda, the Sarvāstivādin terminology offers a doctrinal backdrop against which his own play with identity and difference becomes more intelligible.

On this reading, ekatvādīn does not merely enumerate “unity, duality, and plurality” but points to a more articulated field of ontological tension. The first member, ekatva, names the intuition of a stable identity; the last, bheda, names recognisable difference; the middle term, bhedābheda, names the ambiguous condition in which something is neither simply identical nor simply different — precisely the kind of “in-between” status exemplified by the present in temporal analysis and the middle in spatial analysis. Just as the present is often characterised as neither past nor future yet dependent on both, bhedābheda is “neither-identical-nor-different” yet parasitic upon both identity and difference.

This mapping brings ekatvādīn into close structural parallel with the temporal reasoning of MMK 19:1–3. There, Nāgārjuna shows that the past, present, and future lack independent existence: the present cannot be established without reference to past and future; the past cannot be what it is without a future to contrast with; and so on. If one attempts to treat any of the three as self-standing, the others collapse, and with them the notion of “time” as a stable ontological field. On the reinterpretation proposed here, ekatvādīn functions in the same way at the level of identity: identity, identity-in-difference, and difference cannot be stabilised independently of one another; each is intelligible only within a network of mutual contrast and dependence.

This also clarifies why a purely numerical understanding is inadequate. As discussed in section 2.1, a set like “one, two, many” does not mirror the completeness of temporal triads: “two” has no privileged structural role

¹⁶ K. L. Dhammadajoti, Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, 4th ed. (Centre for Buddhist Studies, University of Hong Kong, 2007), p.137.

comparable to that of the present, and the series does not obviously exhaust the “space” of numbers in the way that past–present–future exhaust the “space” of time. By contrast, the triad identity–identity-in-difference–difference forms a closed field of mutually defining poles, with the middle term (*bhedābheda*) playing a structurally central role analogous to the present. This is precisely the kind of architecture that Nāgārjuna’s argument in MMK 19:4 seems to presuppose when he says that “by this very method” (*etenaiva*) the “remaining two” cases—spatial triads and *ekatvādīn*—are to be regarded (MMK 19:4cd).

Moreover, interpreting *ekatvādīn* in this way makes good sense of the masculine *-ādīn*. Since *bheda* is uncontroversially masculine, and *bhedābheda* inherits masculine agreement, the series *ekatva* — *bhedābheda* — *bheda* naturally culminates in a masculine end member, justifying the masculine accusative plural *-ādīn*. The grammatical anomaly thus turns out to be a clue rather than a problem: *ekatvādīn* is “identity and so forth,” where the “and so forth” leads not to mere numerical plurality but to a masculine term of difference.

4.3 Space, Identity, and the Scope of Nāgārjuna’s Critique in MMK 19:4

If *ekatvādīn* is read as the triad identity–identity-in-difference–difference, MMK 19:4 gains a clearer internal structure. The verse brings together two *-ādi*-marked series: first, *uttamādhamamadhyādīn* (“upper, lower, middle, and the like”), and second, *ekatvādīn* (“identity and the like”). *Candrakīrti* explicitly expands the first into a long list of triadic categories—wholesome–unwholesome–indeterminate, arising–persisting–ceasing, beginning–middle–end, the three realms, trainee–post-trainee–neither, and so forth.¹⁷ His gloss makes clear that *uttamādhamamadhyādīn* is not confined to spatial height but stands for all triply structured conceptual schemes.

Yet not all such triads operate in the same way, nor should they be treated as interchangeable. Some, like arising–persisting–ceasing or beginning–middle–end, involve temporal succession and thus can be brought under the inferential pattern of MMK 19:1–3. Others—such as wholesome–unwholesome–indeterminate—do not necessarily involve temporal asynchrony; their members can coexist without contradiction. To say that unwholesome depends on wholesome, for example, is not to say that one must temporally precede the other.

¹⁷ *Candrakīrti*, *Prasannapadā* on MMK 19:4, in P. L. Vaidya (ed.), *Madhyamakaśāstra* of Nāgārjuna with the Commentary *Prasannapadā* by *Candrakīrti* (Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1960), p.164.

This observation underscores the need to distinguish carefully between different kinds of triads. Temporal triads are defined by asynchrony and causal ordering; spatial triads like upper–middle–lower are simultaneous and depend on relative position; identity triads, as encapsulated in *ekatvādīn*, concern relational sameness and otherness rather than location or sequence. To treat all of these as if they were mere interchangeable “examples of threefold categories” risks blurring the very differences on which Nāgārjuna’s argument trades.

The double use of -ādi in MMK 19:4 can therefore be read as indicating two distinct, though structurally comparable, domains: first, the domain of triply articulated “positions” (spatial or otherwise), and second, the domain of identity-relations. Nāgārjuna’s claim that “by this very method” these “remaining two” are to be regarded suggests that the logic deployed in MMK 19:1–3—namely, showing that the members of a triad cannot be established without presupposing one another, and hence that the whole field they define lacks inherent existence—applies analogously, though not identically, in all three domains.

On the reinterpretation proposed here, the application proceeds as follows. In the temporal case, past, present, and future cannot be independently grounded; any attempt to privilege one collapses into dependence on the others, undermining time’s *svabhāva*. In the spatial case, “upper,” “middle,” and “lower” exist only in mutual contrast; remove one and the others lose determinate meaning. In the identity case, *ekatva*, *bhedābheda*, and *bheda* likewise constitute a mutually defining field: identity can be identified only against difference; difference is difference only against some prior sense of identity; and identity-in-difference presupposes both to make sense at all. In each case, what appears to be an independently existing structure turns out, under analysis, to be a web of conceptual dependencies.

This has two important consequences for the reading of MMK 19:4. First, it shows that the verse is not merely an afterthought tacked onto the conclusion of *Kālaparīkṣā*. Rather, it is the point at which Nāgārjuna generalises the strategy of MMK 19:1–3 from time to other fundamental schemata — space and identity — without collapsing their differences. Secondly, it clarifies why *ekatvādīn* occupies such a pivotal position: the term stands at the juncture where temporal analysis (grounded in asynchrony) and spatial analysis (grounded in simultaneity) are brought into relation with the question of how we identify “the same” and “the different” at all.

In this sense, the grammatical oddity of *ekatvādīn* is itself philosophically significant. By violating standard gender agreement, Nāgārjuna draws attention to a field — identity and difference — that does not sit comfortably within the neat categories of neuter abstraction or masculine count nouns. The compound gestures toward a triad that structurally parallels the temporal triplet but operates at the level of conceptual identification itself. Once that level is brought under the scope of critique, Nāgārjuna's examination of time is revealed not as an isolated exercise but as part of a wider dismantling of the conceptual scaffolding—temporal, spatial, and identificatory—through which we project *svabhāva* onto an empty field.

For present purposes, it is enough to note that careful attention to the grammar and internal architecture of MMK 19:4 already shows that identity-relations are as vulnerable to Madhyamaka analysis as temporal phases and spatial positions. The term *ekatvādīn*, far from being a negligible shorthand for “one, two, many,” turns out to be a carefully poised instrument for extending the critique of time into the domains of space and identity.

5. Discussion and New Knowledge

The foregoing analysis yields three main contributions, corresponding to the philological, ontological, and systematic-philosophical dimensions of MMK 19:4. Taken together, they suggest that *ekatvādīn* is not a marginal technicality but a crucial hinge in *Kālaparīkṣā*, one that allows Nāgārjuna to extend his critique of time into the domains of space and identity without effacing important structural differences between them.

First, at the level of philology and grammar, the article offers a concrete proposal for resolving the long-noted but seldom analysed anomaly of *ekatvādīn*. Rather than relegating the masculine *-ādīn* to the status of a metrical accident or scribal lapse, the analysis treats it as a meaningful signal that *ekatva* in this compound is not functioning as a lone neuter abstraction. The suggestion that *ekatvādīn* encodes a series such as *ekatva* — *bhedābheda* — *bheda* (identity — identity-in-difference — difference) makes sense of the morphology: the series culminates in a masculine head (*bheda*), and *bhedābheda* shares its gender, thus justifying the masculine accusative plural ending. This reading is consistent with standard descriptions of *-tva* and *-ādi* formations, while avoiding the need to posit an unexpressed masculine noun such as *bhāva* or *svabhāva* merely to repair agreement.

At the same time, the proposal remains conservative in scope. It does not deny that classical commentators like *Candrakīrti* and *Bhāvaviveka* understood *ekatvādīn* in terms of oneness, twoness, and plurality.¹⁸ Rather, it suggests that such numerical glosses can be read as partial articulations of a deeper, relational structure already hinted at by the Sanskrit form and supported by parallel doctrinal usage in *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*.¹⁹ In this respect, the article contributes “new knowledge”: it does not overthrow the traditional understanding, but it adds a layer of grammatical and conceptual precision that has so far been largely absent from the discussion.

Second, at the level of ontology and doctrinal interpretation, the reinterpretation of *ekatvādīn* as a triad of identity – identity-in-difference – difference clarifies how MMK 19:4 is meant to relate to the temporal analysis in MMK 19:1–3. Existing treatments often assume a loose parallel: just as past, present, and future lack *svabhāva*, so too do “unity, duality, plurality”. On that reading, MMK 19:4 simply multiplies examples. The present analysis shows that something more precise is at stake. The triad *ekatva* – *bhedābheda* – *bheda* forms a closed field of mutually defining poles: identity, difference, and their “middle” are each intelligible only in relation to the others, much as the present is intelligible only in relation to past and future. This relational architecture fits the logic of *Kālaparīkṣā* better than a simple “one–two–many” schema, and it explains why *bhedābheda*—“identity-in-difference”—is central in *Sarvāstivāda* attempts to secure temporal continuity.²⁰

In addition, the appeal to *Kumārajīva*’s translation 一異 (yīyì, “one and different”) in the *Zhōnglùn* suggests that early Chinese *Madhyamaka* also heard in *ekatvādīn* more than a purely quantitative series.²¹ By opting for a compact phrase that foregrounds the polarity of identity and difference, rather than a ternary “one–two–many,” *Kumārajīva*’s rendering supports the idea that the term was already understood within a semantic field of sameness/otherness, not merely of counting.

¹⁸ *Bhāvaviveka*, *Prajñāpradīpa* (般若燈論釋), Chinese trans. in CBETA edition, n.d.; *Candrakīrti*, *Prasannapadā* on MMK 19:4, in P. L. Vaidya (ed.), *Madhyamakaśāstra* of *Nāgārjuna* with the Commentary *Prasannapadā* by *Candrakīrti* (Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1960), p.164.

¹⁹ K. L. Dhammadhoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, 4th ed. (Centre for Buddhist Studies, University of Hong Kong, 2007), p.137.

²⁰ K. L. Dhammadhoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, 4th ed. (Centre for Buddhist Studies, University of Hong Kong, 2007), p.137.

²¹ *Nāgārjuna*, *Zhōnglùn* 中論, Chinese trans. *Kumārajīva*, ch. 19, CBETA edition.

This convergence between grammatical form, Abhidharmic background, and translation history strengthens the case for reading *ekatvādīn* as a relational, rather than simply numerical, series.

Third, at the level of systematic Madhyamaka philosophy, the findings illuminate how *Kālaparīkṣā* participates in a broader deconstruction of cognitive schemata. Time, space, and identity are not treated as three unrelated topics; they are shown to share a structural vulnerability. Temporal phases (past – present – future) depend on one another and fail to yield an independent “time”; spatial triads (upper – middle – lower) depend on reciprocal contrast and fail to yield an independent “space”; identity-relations (identity – identity-in-difference – difference), as encapsulated in *ekatvādīn*, likewise fail to ground a self-standing “essence” that remains the same through change. The point is not that all three are “the same” kind of relation — indeed, temporal asynchrony, spatial simultaneity, and identity-difference are distinct — but that the attempt to reify any of them as *svabhāva* dissolves under analysis.

In this way, the article corroborates and refines the picture of Madhyamaka as targeting not merely isolated doctrines (e.g., *Sarvāstivādin* theories of time) but the deeper habits by which conceptual schemes are projected as realities. By focusing on one difficult term in one verse, it becomes possible to see how Nāgārjuna’s critique of time already anticipates, and in some sense requires, a critique of the very identity-relations that make “temporal continuity” thinkable in the first place. This has implications beyond textual exegesis. It suggests, for example, that modern debates on personal identity and temporal experience — whether in analytic philosophy²² or phenomenology²³ — can fruitfully engage with Madhyamaka not only at the level of “emptiness” as a global thesis, but also at the level of specific micro-structures like identity-in-difference.

At the same time, the scope of the present article remains deliberately modest. It does not claim that Nāgārjuna explicitly formulates an Abhidharmic triad *ekatva–bhedābheda–bheda*, nor that MMK 19:4 by itself yields a fully fledged theory of cognition. Rather, it argues that attending to the grammar of

²² John McTaggart Ellis McTaggart, *The Nature of Existence*, vol. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 1988); Mark Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy: Empty Persons*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2016).

²³ Zhihua Yao, “Four-dimensional Time in Dzogchen and Heidegger,” *Philosophy East and West* 57, no. 4 (2007): pp.512–532.

ekatvādīn, to its doctrinal background in Sarvāstivāda discourse, and to its early Chinese reception allows for a more coherent reading of MMK 19 that preserves both the specificity of its argument and the interconnectedness of its themes. In that sense, the “new knowledge” offered here is both precise and limited: it concerns the local structure and function of a single compound, but that local insight has ramifications for how we understand the reach of *Kālaparīkṣā* as a whole.

Future work can extend this line of inquiry in at least three directions. First, a systematic comparison of *ekatvādīn* with other anomalous -tva formations in Nāgārjuna’s corpus could test whether the strategy observed here recurs elsewhere.

Second, a more sustained engagement with MMK 19:5—especially its use of the verbs *grhyate* (“is grasped”) and *prajñapyate* (“is designated”)—together with Nāgārjuna’s explicit discussions of *prajñapti* and *upādāya* in other chapters, might clarify how conceptual designation and different forms of “dependence” relate to the identity-triad encoded in *ekatvādīn*. Third, comparative work with non-Buddhist traditions, such as Kant’s account of schemata²⁴ or classical Chinese discussions of naming and relationality,²⁵ could further explore the philosophical significance of identity-in-difference as a cross-cultural theme.

For the present article, however, the central claim is straightforward: when *ekatvādīn* is read in light of its grammatical form, Abhidharmic background, and early translation history, MMK 19:4 emerges not as an incidental aside but as a carefully constructed locus in which Nāgārjuna’s critique of time is inseparably linked with a critique of space and identity.

6. Conclusion

This article set out to address a seemingly narrow question: what does *ekatvādīn* mean in MMK 19:4, and how does its grammatical form contribute to Nāgārjuna’s wider critique in *Kālaparīkṣā*? In the course of answering that question, it has become clear that *ekatvādīn* is not a minor technical expression but a carefully positioned term through which Nāgārjuna extends the analysis of time into the domains of space and identity. Rather than being an incidental illustration, MMK

²⁴ Adrian Bardon, *A Brief History of the Philosophy of Time* (Oxford University Press, 2024).

²⁵ Witter Bynner, *The Way of Life According to Lao Tzu: An American Version* (Capricorn Books, 1962).

19:4 emerges as a structural hinge, marking the point where temporal, spatial, and identificatory schemata are brought under a single critical method.

At the philological level, the article has argued that the compound *ekatvādīn* cannot be adequately explained if it is taken simply as a neuter abstract series “oneness, twoness, plurality.” The pairing of neuter *ekatva* with a masculine plural *-ādīn* is morphologically anomalous and resists explanation as a mere metrical compromise. By attending to this anomaly, and by considering parallel uses of *-tva* and *-ādi* in Sanskrit more generally, the analysis has suggested that *ekatvādīn* encodes a series whose final element is masculine — plausibly *bheda* (“difference”) — and whose middle term is a relational state such as *bhedābheda* (“identity-in-difference”), familiar from *Sarvāstivāda* discussions of temporal continuity.²⁶ This proposal is supported, though not conclusively proved, by the fact that Kumārajīva’s *Zhōnglùn* renders *ekatvādīn* as 一異 (yīyì, “one and different”), foregrounding the polarity of identity and difference rather than a simple numerical progression.

On this basis, the article has proposed that *ekatvādīn* is best read as designating a triad of “Identity – Identity-in-Difference – Difference” (*ekatva* – *bhedābheda* – *bheda*), rather than a purely quantitative sequence. This reinterpretation clarifies the internal logic of MMK 19:4. Just as MMK 19:1–3 show that past, present, and future cannot be established as independently existing phases of time, so MMK 19:4 suggests that identity, identity-in-difference, and difference cannot be stabilised as independently existing modes of being. The same “method” (*etenaiva*), which reveals time as lacking *svabhāva*, when applied to spatial triads (upper–middle–lower) and to *ekatvādīn*, shows that the conceptual structures by which we organise space and identity equally lack inherent existence. Temporal asynchrony, spatial simultaneity, and identity–difference relations are not collapsed into one another; rather, they are shown to share a common structural vulnerability when reified.

In doing so, the article refines existing scholarly treatments of *Kālaparīksā*. While Garfield, Siderits and Katsura, and Westerhoff have convincingly read MMK 19 as a critique of time’s relational ontology, they tend either to treat MMK 19:4 as a relatively straightforward extension to “unity, duality, plurality” or to subsume

²⁶ K. L. Dhammadajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, 4th ed. (Centre for Buddhist Studies, University of Hong Kong, 2007).

spatial and identity examples under a single, generic pattern.²⁷ By contrast, the present reading keeps faith with their central insight — that time is intelligible only within networks of dependence — while insisting that space and identity require more careful differentiation. The proposed reading of *ekatvādīn* both explains the verse's grammatical difficulties and shows how identity-relations themselves become explicit objects of *Madhyamaka* analysis in *Kālaparīkṣā*, rather than being left to other chapters. Recent discussions by Tillemans (2017) similarly emphasise that *Madhyamaka* analysis operates by revealing the instability of conceptual structures rather than by proposing alternative metaphysical foundations. His insights support the present reinterpretation of *ekatvādīn* as a relational schema whose members are rendered untenable once subjected to the same *prasaṅga* method applied to temporal and spatial categories.

The scope of the argument has, however, been deliberately restricted. The article does not claim that Nāgārjuna explicitly formulates an Abhidharmic triad *ekatva*–*bhedābheda*–*bheda*, nor that MMK 19:4 alone can bear the weight of a complete theory of conceptual designation. Its claims are more modest: that the form and placement of *ekatvādīn* in MMK 19:4 support a relational, rather than purely numerical, interpretation; that this interpretation is consonant with Sarvāstivādin uses of *bhedābheda* and with Kumārajīva's early translation; and that such an interpretation yields a more coherent view of how time, space, and identity are linked in *Kālaparīkṣā*.

Further work is needed to explore these connections in greater depth. A closer examination of MMK 19:5, especially its use of *grhyate* ("is grasped") and *prajñaptyate* ("is designated"), in conjunction with Nāgārjuna's explicit discussions of *prajñapti* and *upādāya* ("depending on," "on the basis of") elsewhere in the MMK and in related texts, could clarify how the identity-triad implicit in *ekatvādīn* is embedded in broader accounts of conceptual designation. Comparative analysis with non-*Madhyamaka* traditions — Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, but also classical

²⁷ Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Oxford University Press, 1995);

Mark Siderits and Shōryū Katsura, *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way: Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Wisdom Publications, 2013);

Jan Westerhoff, *Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka: A Philosophical Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

Indian and Western discussions of identity and time — might further test and enrich the reading proposed here.²⁸

Nonetheless, even within these limits, the central conclusion is clear. When read with due attention to its grammar, doctrinal background, and reception history, ekatvādīn reveals MMK 19:4 to be more than a rhetorical flourish in a chapter on time. It is a carefully composed point of transition at which the critique of time opens out into a critique of space and identity, showing that the emptiness of temporal phases cannot be separated from the emptiness of the very relations by which we take things to be “the same,” “different,” or “neither.”

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²⁸ Adrian Bardon, *A Brief History of the Philosophy of Time* (Oxford University Press, 2024); John McTaggart Ellis McTaggart, *The Nature of Existence*, vol. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 1988);

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