

From Exegesis to Hermeneutic: Use of Abhidharmic and Mahāyāna Interpretation in the *Prajñāpāramitā Upadeśa* (*Dazhidu Lun*)

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Abstract

The *Prajñāpāramitā Upadeśa* or *Dazhidu Lun* is commonly recognized as a Mādhyamaka text, due to: 1. its attribution to Nāgārjuna; 2. being a *Prajñāpāramitā* commentary; and 3. its status in the Sān Lùn school. However, its hermeneutic approach is more complex than mere application of Mādhyamaka principles to the *Prajñāpāramitā* text alone. Fascicles 11-34, which explain a range of *dharma*s qua practices which pervade the *Sūtra*, show a consistent and structured method of exegesis. Typically, the *dharma*s are first contextualized as to their position within the *sūtra*. Next, an extensive Abhidharma analysis is given, which covers the majority of the exegesis. The question of which Abhidharma system and sectarian affiliation of the author requires clarification. Lastly, the *dharma*(s) are interpreted through the Mādhyamaka method, giving a pithy yet ultimate exegetic conclusion. Here we will examine the critical importance of the Ābhidharmika material and its relationship to the Mādhyamaka in the text's hermeneutical method. Its role is more than simply a patsy against Mahāyāna dialectic. Our findings will build on earlier research by Zacchetti and Walser, as we look to the aims of the author and the way in which the older traditions function within the new.

Key terms:

Dazhidu lun, *Prajñāpāramitā*, *Upadeśa*, hermeneutics, Mādhyamaka, Abhidharma