

On the Retrogression of the Arhat in the Abhidharmakośa

Seiki Miyashita

i) Introduction

“All things past, future and present exist”, “Arhat retrogresses”these characterize the views of the Vaibhāṣikas or the Sarvāstivādins¹. The former statement is the basis for the latter.

ii) Vasubandhu’s argument for non-retrogression of the Arhat in the Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya (ABh)

In the sixth chapter of ABh Vasubandhu argues for the non-retrogression of the Arhat. His argument consists of three parts: (A) scriptural authority, (B) logical reasoning, and (C) application. He adduces seven *sūtras* and a *śāstra*². Through them he re-interpretes in his own way the descriptions of the Arhat given in the scriptures and some of which have been used by the Vaibhāṣikas to support their description of the Arhat³. So the most substantial Vasubandhu’s position can be more clearly understood by following the controversy between Saṅghabhadra and Sthiramati.

The first two *sūtras* adduced in (A), and the text of (B), which form the core of the controversy, are as follows;

(A) 1: “O monks, what has been destroyed by holy insight (*ārya-prajñā*) is what has been destroyed.”

(A) 2: “I declare the need for earnestness (*apramāda-karaṇīya*) by the Śaikṣa when there is need for earnestness.”

(B): If there arises to the Arhat an antidote (*pratipakṣa*) by which his passions are completely [transformed into] the nature of non-arising (*anutpatti-dharmatā*), then how can he retrogress? [On the other hand,] if it doesn’t arise, then how can he be one who has destroyed the defilement (*kleśāsrava*)? This is because he

has not completely uprooted the nature of the seeds (*biḥa-dharmatā*) of passions. How much less can those who have not destroyed the defilement be an Arhat ?

iii) Saṅghabhadra's Criticism of Vasubandhu

Saṅghabhadra criticizes in great detail each item of (A), (B) and (C) set forth by Vasubandhu. Saṅghabhadra's main points can be found in Sthiramati's Tattvārtha (Sth).

(A) 1¹: Concerning the destructions [of passions] brought about by the worldly way (*laukika-mārga*), [even he who has reached] the eighth stage [of attainment (*samāpatti*)], he will be united with the sinful state (*durgati*) later on. An example of this is Udrakarāmaputra. But the destruction [of passions] by the undefiled [way] (*anāsrava-mārga*) is different. This is because he will not be united with the next existence (*punar-bhava*) when he retrogresses from Arhat-ship (*arhattva*). Therefore it is declared, "O monks, what has.....been destroyed"⁴.

(A) 2¹: As regards the statement on the need for earnestness by the Śaikṣa, [although it is certain that earnestness is] not needed by the Arhat but by him [*i. s.* Śaikṣa], it is [so stated] because the Śaikṣa, even one who has detached (*vitaraḡa*) from upto [the stage of] the sphere of nothingness (*akimcanyāyatana*), will be reborn in the realm of form (*rūpa-dhātu*) when he retrogresses. Furthermore it is also because the next existence will never materialize (*abhinirvrt*) to the Aśaikṣa when he retrogresses. Therefore the need for earnestness is not declared for him⁵.

(B)¹: [When the Yogin who, before becoming an Ārya, destroyed the passions of the realm of desire (*kāmāvacara*)] by the worldly way [reaches the way of contemplation (*bhāvanā-mārga*),] he acquires either of the two results [*i. e.* of Sakṛdāgāmin and Anāgāmin]. Now if you consider that the nature of the seeds of passions which obstruct those [two, results] has been completely uprooted [by the worldly way], then retrogression from Arhat-ship would be possible because [Arhat-ship] is also determined in the same way [*i. e.* the seeds is completely uprooted] as the two results. For, [as there arise the passions again to those who have gained the two results even though the seeds have been completely uprooted, so] you should admit that passions would arise to the Arhat again even if the seeds have been completely uprooted by the antidote. [On the contrary,] if you consider that the result of Anāgāmin will be acquired even though the seeds of

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passions of the realm of desire is not yet completely uprooted, then how can the result of Anāgāmin be acquired without uprooting the nature of the seeds of passions of the realm of desire. For it is the result of Sakṛdāgāmin which should be acquired if the seeds of passions of the realm of desire to be destroyed by the way of contemplation has not been completely uprooted by the worldly way. Therefore, for this reason, the retrogression [from Arhat-ship] must be accepted⁶⁾.

iv) Sthiramati's Reply to Saṅghabhadra

Saṅghabhadra's argument of (B)¹ is attacked by Sthiamti.

(B)²: [Saṅghabhadra's argument is not valid] because there are two kinds of destruction, *i. e.* the destruction of activity (*samudacāra-prahāṇa*) and the destruction of seed (*bija-prahāṇa*), which are brought about by the worldly way and the supra-worldly way (*lokottara-mārga*) respectively. As regards that [*i. e.* the acquirement of the result of Anāgāmin without uprooting the seeds of passions of the realm of desire, that has no fault] because [there can be a situation wherein] the passions of the lower stage are suppressed (*viśkambh*) leaving the seeds not uprooted while the passions of the higher stage are active. And since Āryas who are born there [*i. e.* in the higher stage] have destroyed the passions to be destroyed by the way of seeing (*darśana-mārga*), they will not descend to the lower stage again. When all the seeds of passions of the three realms to be destroyed by the way of contemplation are uprooted by the undefiled way, they will attain Arhat-ship. Thus, what contradiction is there in the case where one who has retrogressed [from a particular virtue], attains (*prati-vyadh*) [it] again due to his extreme loathing [of the passions]?⁷⁾

v) Conclusions

From the foregoing it is clear that the dispute centers on the exact definition of the destruction of passions. According to the Vaibhāṣikas the distinction between 'destroyed' and 'undestroyed' resides in the acquisition (*prāpti*). Thus 'separated from the acquisitions of passions' and 'not separated' mean 'destroyed' and 'undestroyed' respectively⁸⁾. However, Vasubandhu distinguishes them by means of the difference of the body (*āśraya-viśeṣa*)⁹⁾. The difference results from the undefiled way¹⁰⁾. The body is converted (*paravṛtta*) so that it has no efficiency for the passions to sprout again.

As we have already made clear Vasubandhu's and Sthiramati's arguments of the destruction of passions based on the seed-theory in (B) and (B)², we will consider the acquisition-theory of the Vaibhāṣikas.

The Vaibhāṣikas argue that the acquisition is in itself a particular entity (*dravyāntara*) and it is a substantial dharma (*dravya-dharma*). Then, because the acquisition-dharma itself has no characteristic mark, there is no difference in the destructions, no matter whether it is brought about by the worldly way or by the supra-worldly way. And also, even if the passions are destroyed, the substantiality of the passion-dharma is never annihilated because destruction only means separation of acquisition-dharma. Therefore, for the Arhat also the passion-dharma, though destroyed, exists in the past. This is precisely the point of Vaibhāṣika's argument.

The Vibhāṣā says ;

Because the past [passion-dharma] exists, if the conditions for retrogression are satisfied, then the future passion-dharma is brought about with [the past passion-dharma as] the cause¹⁾.

1) cf. J. Takakusu, The Abhidharma Literature of the Sarvāstivādins, Journal of the PTS, 1904-1905, p. 69 n. 1.

2) The passages in question in Tibetan, Chinese and Pāli; (A) 1: ABh 375. 11-12; Śamathadeva's Upāyika-nāma-Abhidharmakośaṭīkā (Up), Peking ed. v. 118, 66b4-67a2. (A) 2: ABh 375. 13; Up 67a2-68a3; Saṃyuktāgama (SĀ), Taisho (T) ed. v. 2, 53c; Saṃyutta-nikāya (SN), PTS ed. 4.124 Devadahasutta; cf. Madhyamāgama (MĀ) 1. 749c 阿濕具經; MN 1. 473 Kiṭāgirisutta. (A) 3: ABh 375. 15-16; Up 68a3-8; Yaśomitra's Sphuṭārtha (Yaś), Wogihara ed. 588. 29-589. 6; SN 2. 239 Bhikkhusutta; cf. MĀ 1. 738a 大空經; MN 3. 109 Mahāsuññatasutta. (A) 4: ABh 376 4-6; Up 68b1-70b1; SĀ 2. 286a & 2. 382c; SN 1. 120 Godhikasutta; Dhammapada comm. 1. 431 Godhikattherapariniḥḥāvatthu; cf. Sth, Peking ed. v. 146, 147 (1-385a=v. 146, p. 193-v. 147, p. 54; 01-0565a=v. 147, pp. 55-282) 0414b4-8. (A) 5: ABh 376. 7-8 Daśottarasūtra; Up 70b1-7; Sth 0415a2-6; DĀ 1. 52c 十上經 & 1. 233b 十報法經; DN 3. 272 Dasuttarasutta. (A) 6: ABh 376. 14-16; Prakaraṇapāda, T ed. 26. 637b12-13 (No. 1541), 702b16-19 (No. 1542); cf. ABh 305. 14-306. 1; Yaś 485. 2-13; Sth 0299a1-b4; Saṅghabhadra's Nyāyānusāra (Saṅ) T 29. 638c8-639b4; Abhidharmadīpa, P. S. Jaini ed. p. 295-296. (C) 1; Aṅgāra-karṣūpamasūtra ④ ABh 376. 20-22, ④' ABh 378. 7-8, ④ ABh 376. 22-377. 1, ④' ABh 376. 2. (④ and ④' as well as ④ and ④' are joined

