

Asvabhāva's Commentary on the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* IX. 56–76

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It will be difficult to determine the exact place of Asvabhāva's thought in the development of the *Vijñaptivāda* school, so long as his Commentary, the *Mahāyānasamgrahopanibandhana* (MSU) is studied only through Hsüan-chuang (玄奘)'s translation. As I have mentioned before¹⁾, Hsüan-chuang seems to have translated it, adding his own interpretation to the original. It follows from this that Asvabhāva has been thought of as a forerunner of Dharmapāla whose interpretation on the *Triṃśikāvijñaptimātrata* has been adopted as the orthodox theory in the *Ch'êng-wei-shih-lun* (成唯識論) by Hsüan-chuang.

On the other hand, the Tibetan translation of the MSU seems to preserve the original more precisely. According to it, it appears to us that Asvabhāva has given his impartial exegesis on the text *Mahāyānasamgraha* (MS), and it is rather difficult to find his own interpretation. It is for this reason that we must reconsider the MSU based upon its Tibetan translation, since the Sanskrit original has been lost.

I

In this paper, we shall take up his other Commentary, the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāraṭīkā* (MSAT)²⁾ which remains only in the Tibetan Tripiṭaka, and investigate exclusively his interpretation on Chap. IX, verses 56–76 of the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* (MSA). We suppose the inquiry will give us

1) See my articles: Hsüan-chuang's translation of the MSU (in Japanese), JIBS, Vol. XVIII, No. 1, 1969; Some features of Asvabhāva's MSU according to its Tibetan translation (in Japanese), JIBS, Vol. XIX, No. 1, 1970.

2) *Theg pa chen po'i mdo sde'i rgyan gyi rgya cher bśad pa*, P. ed. No. 5530, D. ed. No. 4029.

Asvabhāva's Commentary on the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (N. Hakamaya) (24) a clue to the elucidation of Asvabhāva's thought from another aspect.

The reasons why we have chosen the MSAṬ, that is a part of it, are as follows :

1) In the case of the MSAṬ which had not been translated into Chinese, we can easily consider the features of his Commentary, apart from the tradition in which Asvabhāva has been esteemed as a forerunner of Dharmapāla.

2) We can compare it with the *Sūtrālaṃkāravṛttibhāṣya* (SABh)³⁾ of Sthiramati which is a Commentary on the same text MSA and who is said to belong to a different school from Asvabhāva.

3) Chap. IX, verses 56-76 of the MSA are based upon the Five *Dharmas* (*pañca-dharma*) explained in the *Buddhabhūmisūtra*, which both Commentaries acknowledge. Therefore this part must be considered together as a group.

II

First, we shall consider some features of the MSAṬ externally, compared with the same part in the SABh.

The MSAṬ gives a more terse interpretation to the text MSA than the SABh does, and so its whole volume is a little less than a fourth of the SABh. However, both Commentaries show the same tradition in spite of the quantitative difference. They both explain the composition of the verses 56-76 as follows⁴⁾ :

The general consideration of the Enlightenment (*bodhi*) has been given before [the verse 56]. After this the special consideration of it will be tried from the aspects of its proper nature (*svabhāva*), cause (*hetu*), effect (*phala*), activity (*karman*), associated [qualities] (*yoga*) and function (*vṛtti*)⁵⁾.

Till now the Enlightenment has been considered according to the different

3) *Mdo sde [hi] rgyan gyi hgral bśad*, P. ed. No. 5531, D. ed. No. 4034.

4) The following quotation is a summary of both : MSAṬ (80b⁵-81a⁵) and SABh (Mi 149b¹-150a³). In this paper, reference to page number of the Tibetan translations is according to P. ed.

◁25) Asvabhāva's Commentary on the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (N. Hakamaya)

sorts of *Sūtras*. However, the following part is based upon the *Buddhabhūmisūtra*. This *Sūtra* declares; “the stage of Buddha (*buddhabhūmi*) is comprised in the Five *Dharmas*, namely, the *Dharmadhātuvīśuddha* (the Immaculate Ultimate Reality), the *Ādarśajñāna* (the Wisdom like a Mirror), the *Samatājñāna* (the Wisdom of Identity), the *Pratyavekṣajñāna* (the Wisdom of Contemplation) and the *Kṛtyānuṣṭhānajñāna* (the Wisdom of Achievement of Duty)⁶⁾.” Hence, according to the order of the Five *Dharmas* in this *Sūtra*, the topic of this part should be considered; first, the *Dharmadhātuvīśuddha*, then, the four kinds of Wisdom respectively.

Therefore, both commentators completely agree in their analysis of the composition of the verses 59–76. This implies that they have followed the same tradition⁷⁾.

Furthermore, they both cite the same four quotations from the *Tathāgatoṭpattisaṃbhavanirdeśasūtra* (*De bṣin gṣegs pa skye ba ḥbyuñ ba bstan paḥi mdo*)⁸⁾. Though Asvabhāva does not indicate the name of this *Sūtra* except at one point⁹⁾, it is obvious that he quotes them from the same *Sūtra*, when we compare them with Sthiramati's quotations in which this name is indicated respectively. The comparisons of both are as follows :

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|---|--|
| (1) <i>sañs rgyas bcom ldan ḥdas rnams ni rnam pa thams cad mkhyen paḥi rten gyi ye śes dan ldan paḥi phyir ye ses kyi ḥbyuñ gnas chen poḥo</i> (83a ⁷⁾ | <i>sañs rgyas bcom ldan ḥdas rnams ni ye śes kyi ḥbyuñ gnas/ rnam pa thams cad du ye śes kyi rten du gyur paḥi ye śes dan ldan paḥi phyir ro</i> (156b ⁸⁾ |
| (2) <i>sañs rgyas bcom ldan ḥdas rnams ni mthoñ na [sems can]¹⁰⁾ thams cad dgaḥ baḥi phyir/ ye śes chen poḥi zla ba yin no</i> (83b ¹⁻²⁾ | <i>sañs rgyas bcom ldan ḥdas rnams ni ye śes kyi zla ba chen po yin tel sems can thams cad ṣi ba ñe bar ston paḥi phyir ro</i> (157b ⁵⁾ |
| (3) <i>sañs rgyas bcom ldan ḥdas rnams ni rnam pa thams cad du śes bya yañ dag par rab tu gsal bar mdsad paḥi phyir/ ye śes chen poḥi ñi ma yin no</i> (83b ⁴⁾ | <i>sañs rgyas bcom ldan ḥdas [rnams] ni ye śes kyi ñi ma chen po yin tel śes bya thams cad la ye śes kyi snañ bar byed paḥi phyir ro</i> (158a ⁷⁻⁸⁾ |
| (4) <i>sañs rgyas bcom ldan ḥdas rnams ni ñon moñs paḥi nad thams cad rab tu ṣi bar mdsad paḥi phyir/ ye śes chen poḥi sman yin no</i> (83b ⁵⁾ | <i>sañs rgyas bcom ldan ḥdas rnams ni ye śes kyi sman chen po dan ldan pa sems can thams cad kyi ñon moñs paḥi nad ṣi bar byed paḥi phyir ro</i> (159b ⁴⁾ |

Some differences between the two Commentaries seem to be rather those of translation than the original one. Both employ four quotations in order to explain the four kinds of Wisdom. In the case of the first two quotations (1) and (2), both MSAṬ and SABh cite them at the place of explanation for the verses 67 and 71 which declare the *Ādarśajñāna* and the *Samatajñāna* respectively. Regarding the last two quotations, in the MSAṬ, (3) is cited for the verse 73, (4) is for the verse 74, while on the other hand, in the SABh, (3) is cited for the verse 72, (4) is for the verse 75. Although the places of the quotations differ from each other in the last two, they agree in their intention to explain the last two kinds of Wisdom, because both verses 72 and 73 declare the *Pratyavekṣajñāna*, and both verses 74 and 75 declare the *Kṛtyānuṣṭhānajñāna*.

The same four quotations connecting with the four kinds of Wisdom imply that both Asvabhāva and Sthiramati have tried to interpret the text MSA in the same tradition, even though we admit that they have belonged to different schools.

There is also a difference between the MSAṬ and SABh in addition to the above-mentioned agreement.

Asvabhāva interprets it, quoting not only the verse section in the MSA but also the prose section which is the initial commentary on the verses¹¹⁾, while Sthiramati scarcely quotes it. It may be natural for Asvabhāva to

5) These six aspects are treated in the MS, Chap. X, § 27 (ed. by É. Lamotte). Also see: J. Takasaki, A study on the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, Rome, 1966, Appendix III, Description of the Ultimate Reality by means of six categories in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism.

6) *Ḥphags pa sañs rgyas kyi sa ṣes bya ba theg pa chen poḥi mdo*, P. ed. No. 941, 89a³⁻⁴. 佛說佛地經, *Taisho*. Vol. XVI, p. 721a.

7) S. Yamaguchi admits the coincidence of their tradition with regard to their verses of adoration in the beginning of their Commentary. See the *Madhyāntavibhagaṭīkā* de Sthiramati, Nagoya, 1937, Introduction, pp. 12-13.

8) About this *Sūtra*, see J. Takasaki op. cit. p. 35.

9) The name of the *Sūtra* is indicated in the case of (1) of the following four quotations in MSAṬ. The translation of this quotation (1) containing the *Sūtra's* name is shown in the place fixed number 17)

(27) Asvabhāva's Commentary on the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (N. Hakamaya)

quote it, for the word “*ṭīka*” in the title of his Commentary literally means “a commentary on another commentary” or “sub-commentary”. However it will be worthy of notice, if the prose section in the MSA is written by Vasubandhu¹²⁾. Because, in his other Commentary MSU, Asvabhāva does not refer to Vasubandhu's Commentary. Although we do not know what sort of conclusion can be drawn from this fact, until further consideration of the MSA itself, and the MSAṬ and other literatures concerned has been done, we can only indicate it as one feature of the MSAṬ which is different from the SABh.

III

Now we should consider the MSAṬ internally. However our consideration must be limited to the subject of the *Ādarśajñāna*, because of lack of space.

According to the *Ch'êng-wei-shih-lun*, it is said there are two interpretations on the *Ādarśajñāna*. These are introduced as follows¹³⁾:

One asserts that the mind united with the *Ādarśajñāna* appreciates only the suchness, therefore it is a non-discriminative wisdom, but not one attained subsequently, because there is no discrimination between subject and object.

Another claims that this mind appreciates all natures [which are consisting

10) “*sems can*” is supplemented according to D. ed.

11) For example, see note 16).

12) Proffessor Hakuju Ui considered the author of the verses in the MSA as Maitreya, and that of the running prose commentary as Vasubandhu (A Study on the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (in Japanese), Tokyo, 1961, pp. 1-2). Sylvain Lévi who edited the Sanskrit text, however, attributed the author of the whole text to Asaṅga (*Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, Tome II, Introduction, p. 8.). Alex Wayman, though he eliminates the authorship of Asaṅga, says: “But this concerns only the verses that form the basic text. The running prose commentary, published by Lévi along with the verses, is attributed to Vasubandhu in the Tibetan canon (no. 4026, Tōhoku catalogue). Whether this initial commentary is in indeed by Vasubandhu or should be credited to Asaṅga is so far undecided.” (Analysis of the *Śrāvakabhūmi* Manuscript, University of California Publications in Classical Philology, Vol. 17, 1961, p. 40.)

13) 成唯識論, *Taisha*. Vol. XXXI, p. 56b. Siddhi, pp. 668-689

Asvabhāva's Commentary on the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (N. Hakamaya) (28) of not only the suchness but also the conventional], because the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* explains that the *Ādarśajñāna* is free from delusion in all knowable things (*sarva-jñeyeṣv asaṃmāḍham*)¹⁴, and because the *Buddhabhūmisūtra* declares that the various images of sense, object and consciousness appear in the *Ādarśajñāna* of *Tathāgatas*¹⁵).

The tradition of the *Fa-hsiang* school (法相宗) in China and Japan has admitted the second interpretation as authoritative. According to it, the *Ādarśajñāna* is a discriminative Wisdom which is attained subsequently as well as a non-discriminative one.

Under these circumstances, it is useful for us to examine Asvabhāva's interpretation on the verses 68, 69 of the MSA containing the same sentence (*sarva-jñeyeṣv asaṃmāḍham*) that is cited in the *Ch'êng-wei-shih-lun*. Here, the passage of the MSA in question is worth citing in length¹⁶:

In the [verse 68ab] "the *Ādarśajñāna* is non-possessive, non-divided", the word "non-possessive" is said because there is neither adherence to oneself and one's own property nor the things seized and the seizing. With the words "non-divided spatially (*aparicchinnam deśataḥ*)", it is stated here that [the *Ādarśajñāna*] does not divide one direction of the east, etc. from another. Then, "[the *Ādarśajñāna* is] free from delusion in all knowable things, because it always departs

14) The sentence is cited from the MSA Chap. IX, verse 68, p. 46 (ed. by S. Lévi, Paris, 1907).

15) "如來智鏡諸處境識衆像現". In the 佛說佛地經 (*Taisho*. Vol. XVI, p. 721b),"大圓鏡智者 如依圓鏡衆像影現 如是依止如來智境諸處境識衆像影現". In the *Hphags pa saṃs rgyas kyi sa ṣes bya ba theg pa chen poḥi mdo* (40b²⁻⁴), "me loṅ lta buḥi ye ṣes ni ḥdi lta ste dper nal me loṅ gi dkyil ḥkhor la brten nas gzugs brñen dag snan nol de bñin du de bñin gśegs pa rnam kyi me loṅ lta buḥi ye ṣes kyi dkyil ḥkhor la brten nas skye mche dan deḥi yul la rnam par ṣes paḥi gzugs brñen dag snan nol" The Tibetan translation reads that (referring to the *Ādarśajñāna*), the various images of the consciousness of sense and its object appear based upon the *Ādarśajñāna* of *Tathāgatas* likend to the surface of a mirror. With regard to the difference between Hsüan-chuang's translation and the Tibetan, see Kyōyū Nishio, *Bucchikyōron no kenkyū* (in Japanese), Nagoya, 1940, Vol. II, pp. 96-99.

16) The Sanskrit sentences in the following quotation show one quoted by Asvabhāva from the prose section in the MSA.

(29) Asvabhāva's Commentary on the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (N. Hakamaya)

from obstructions (*sarva-jñeyeshv asaṃmūḍhaṃ sadāvaraṇa-vigamāt*”), it means here that the [*Jñāna*] like this way departs from the obstructions which are caused by moral defilement and knowable things at any time whatever. “[the *Jñāna*] also does not set its face to all things (=knowable things) by reason of non-aspect in subject (*na ca teṣv [dharmaṣu] amukham anākāratvāt*)”: it means that the [*Jñāna*] does not evolve¹⁷⁾ owing to the distinction of objects, i. e. form, etc. or the distinction of aspects in subject, i. e. blue, etc. The [*Jñāna*] is equal without distinction between object and subject, and so non-discriminative, and it appreciates the suchness as its own nature. Therefore it is immovable.

The words “the *Jñāna* is liken to the storage of all Wisdom, by reason of the cause of all kinds of Wisdom, i. e. the *Samatājñāna*, etc. (*samatādi-jñānāṇṃ sarva-prakāraṇāṃ hetutvāt sarva-jñānāṇṃ ākarōpamaṃ*)” are connected with the passage of the *Tathāgatatpattisambhavanirdeśasūtra*: “Buddhas, the Blessed Ones are the storage of the great wisdom, because he has the wisdom which is the foundation of the Wisdom of Omniscience (*sarvākāra-jñātā*)¹⁸⁾. In the [verse] “it is also of the Buddha of Enjoyment¹⁹⁾”, the word “of the Buddha of Enjoyment” is said because it is the cause of the Buddha of Enjoyment. In the [verse] “it is this, for the image of the wisdom appears¹⁹⁾”, the word “this” indicates the *Ādarśajñāna*.

It is interesting to compare this quotation from the MSAṬ with one from the *Ch'êng-wei-shih-lun*. Referring to the same sentence (*sarva-jñeyeshv asaṃmūḍhaṃ*)²⁰⁾ that is cited from the MSA in the *Ch'êng-wei-shih-lun* as the basis of the second interpretation, Asvabhāva explains only the meaning of the words. Therefore, according to his interpretation, this sentence of the MSA can not show that the *Ādarśajñāna* is not only a non-discriminative

17) “*hjug pa yin paḥo*” in P. ed. “*hjug pa ma yin paḥo*” in D. ed. Now we read according to D. ed.

18) About its Tibetan, see the quotation (1) in MSAṬ.

19) Cf. the verse 69cd of the MSA. But it is not sure whether these words show the verse or not. In the MSA, the verse is “*sambhogabuddhatā-jñāna-pratibimbōdayāt ca tat*.”

20) The sentence “於一切境常不愚迷 (= *sarva-jñeyeshv asaṃmūḍhaṃ*)” is inserted in the explanation for the *Ādarśajñāna* in Hsüan-chuang's translation of the MSU (*Taisho*. XXXI, p. 438a), while it isn't found in its Tibetan translation.

Asvabhāva's Commentary on the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (N. Hakamaya) (30) wisdom but also a discriminative one. In fact, he defines clearly the *Jñāna* to be non-discriminative. Consequently his interpretation differs from the orthodox theory in the *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*.

If we consult the SABh about this matter, we will find that Sthiramati's interpretation is almost similar to Asvabhāva's. He interprets the verse 69 as follows:

"Why is the non-discriminative wisdom called the *Ādarśajñāna*? Because the images of the *Samatajñāna*, the *Pratyavekṣajñāna* and the *Kṛtyānuṣṭhānajñāna* appear in the non-discriminative wisdom, just like as the various images appear in a mirror (*adarśa*), it is called the *Ādarśajñāna* (the Wisdom like a Mirror)"²¹.

This proves that Sthiramati has regarded the *Ādarśajñāna* as a non-discriminative wisdom. We must comprehend that there is no contradiction between the non-discriminative wisdom and the reflection of the various images.

Furthermore, we can also find the same fact as mentioned above, in the case of the sentence of the *Buddhabhāmisūtra* which is used in the *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun* as the other basis of the second interpretation.

Hsüan-chuang's translation, the *Fo-ti-ching-lun* (佛地經論, the treatise on the *Buddhabhāmisūtra*) which had been written by Bandhuprabha (親光, Ch'ing-kuang), etc. shows like the *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun* that the *Ādarśajñāna* is not only a non-discriminative wisdom but also a discriminative one²², while Śīlabhadra defines in the *Āryabuddhabhūmividyākhyāna* which is preserved in Tibetan translation that the *Ādarśajñāna* is the non-discriminative wisdom which appreciates the suchness²³.

21) SABh. Mi, 157a⁴⁻⁵.

22) *Taisho*. XXVI, pp. 302c-303a. It is said, "When the *Ādarśajñāna* appreciates only the suchness, it is called the non-discriminative wisdom. When it appreciates the conventional, it is called (the discriminative) wisdom which is attained subsequently. Though the essence of the *Ādarśajñāna* is one, it appreciates necessarily the conventional, after the suchness is realized. The orthodox theory (如實義) admits that the *Jñāna* appreciates all natures."

23) *Īphags pa saṅs rgyas kyi saḥi rnam par bśad pa*, P. ed. No. 5498, 300a⁷. "(me loṅ lta buḥi ye śes ni·····/ rnam par rtog paḥi gnas yoiṅ su gyur paḥi no bo) de bṣin űid la dmigs pa ste/ rnam par mi rtog paḥi ye śes sol/".

(31) Asvabhāva's Commentary on the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (N. Hakamaya)

In this paper, we can neither afford to consider more in detail the matter concerned nor is there necessity for doing so, due to the detailed research work published by Dr. Kyōyū Nishio²⁴.

IV

Now we can draw the following conclusion:

1) From both the external and internal point of view, Asvabhāva's interpretation in his Commentary is more similar to Sthiramati's than to the orthodox theory in the *Ch'êng-wei-shih-lun*, which values the former (Asvabhāva) more highly than the latter (Sthiramati). Accordingly we can not regard Asvabhāva as a forerunner of Dharmapāla in the same degree as before.

2) It is difficult to find a similar interpretation to the orthodox theory in the *Ch'êng-wei-shih-lun*, in the Tibetan translations concerning the *Vijñaptivāda*, but we can find it numerously in other translations of Hsüan-chuang, of which the original authors are different. Therefore it seems that the interpretation regarded as the orthodox theory in the *Ch'êng-wei-shih-lun* has been arranged by Hsüan-chuang himself.

3) On the other hand, the Tibetan translation of the MSAT seems to preserve the original form from India. It is a well known fact that the Tibetan translations are generally accepted as a word-for-word translation. If we intend to consider Asvabhāva's thought in the historical development of the *Vijñaptivāda* school in India, it will be useful to consider extensively the MSAT, comparing it with the SABh, apart from the tradition of the *Fa-hsing* school or Hsüan-chuang's interpretation.

24) K. Nishio op. cit.