

## Conventional Truth in the *Prajñāpradīpa* and Its *Ṭīkā*

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The theory of the two truths is a heuristic device that has been continuously used by Mahāyāna Buddhists since Nāgārjuna. That theory of Candrakīrti (ca. 600–650) has been fully examined and discussed by modern students of Buddhist philosophy,<sup>1)</sup> but relatively little attention has been given to the analysis of the two truths by his predecessor Bhāviveka (ca. 500–570). Saito [1998] once pointed out that Bhāviveka adopted Yogācāra's threefold interpretation of the ultimate truth from the *Madhyāntavibhāga-bhāṣya* attributed to Vasubandhu. However, no attempt has yet been made to clarify Bhāviveka's interpretation of the conventional truth. In this paper, I will focus upon his unique theory of the conventional truth.

It is most likely that Bhāviveka distinguished two levels of the conventional truth, viz. the true statement with reference to Abhidharmic dharmas and that with reference to a person (pudgala). Furthermore, his commentator Avalokitavrata (ca. 700) regards the characteristics of “non-substantiality” (\*niḥsvabhāvatā) and “non-arising” (\*anutpāda) as a kind of convention, which may suggest that Avalokitavrata admitted such a characteristic as a third level of the conventional truth. Thus, the school of Mādhyamikas started by Bhāviveka seems to have developed the concept of three levels of the conventional truth.

### 1. Two Levels of the Conventional Truth in the 24th Chapter of the *Prajñāpradīpa* and Its *Ṭīkā*

Before examining Bhāviveka's interpretation of the conventional truth, I would like to briefly present his interpretation of the ultimate truth together with Avalokitavrata's elucidation.<sup>2)</sup> He distinguishes the following three levels of the ultimate truth:

- (1) Reality (tattva) that is referred to by the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* chapter 18 verse 9.<sup>3)</sup>

(2) Non-conceptual cognition (*nirvikalpajñāna*).

(3) Teaching of “non-arising” (*anutpāda*) as well as Wisdom (*prajñā*) obtained from listening, consideration, and meditation.

In this connection, it is to be noted that Avalokitavratā refers to both the second and third level of the ultimate truth as “conventionally ultimate truth” (*\*sāṃketika-paramārtha-satya*), and refers to the first level of the ultimate truth as “ultimately ultimate truth” (*\*pāramārthika-paramārtha-satya*).<sup>4)</sup> He also refers to the teaching of “non-arising” and the threefold wisdom, the third level of the ultimate truth, as having the role of dispelling the misunderstanding “non-conceptual cognition” and “reality” in subject-object relationship.<sup>5)</sup>

Let us now see how Bhāviveka explains the conventional truth. He says:

In this connection, “the worldly convention” (*loka-saṃvṛti*) means the worldly designation (*loka-vyavahāra*). More precisely, [the statements like] “Things such as *rūpa* (color-form) arise, stay, and perish” and “Devadatta goes, Viṣṇumitra eats, Somadatta meditates, and Brahmādatta is emancipated” are not false as the worldly designation. Hence, they are [called] the worldly conventional truth.<sup>6)</sup>

Now I would like to focus on the two kinds of statements mentioned above, namely (1) “*Rūpa* arises, etc.” and (2) “Someone goes, etc.”<sup>7)</sup> The former is an analytical statement about dharmas as it can be uttered by *Ābhīdhārmikas*, while the latter is a common statement of Buddhists (and perhaps non-Buddhists) disregarding the technical terminology of dharmas.

In order to understand the above interpretation of Bhāviveka, I would like to refer to the *Ābhīdhārmika* theory of the two truths found in the *Abhidharmakośa* chapter 6 verse 4.<sup>8)</sup> According to Vasubandhu, the ultimate truth is an ultimate existence such as *rūpa* and other *Abhidharmic* dharmas that cannot be further analyzed into more fundamental existence, while the conventional truth is a statement regarding conventional existence such as a pot and water that can be analyzed into dharmas. From Bhāviveka’s point of view, it is to be noted that both the ultimate and conventional truths of Vasubandhu or *Ābhīdhārmikas* should be regarded as the conventional truth.

Bhāviveka’s first kind of conventional truth takes a dharma as the subject/topic of the statement, while his second kind takes a person or *pudgala* as the subject/topic.

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This division reminds us of the two kinds of non-substantiality, viz., dharma- and pudgala-nairātmya. Thus, it may be possible to assume that the first kind of conventional truth is negated by the realization of dharma-nairātmya and the second kind by that of pudgala-nairātmya.

## 2. Third Level of the Conventional Truth in the First Chapter of the *Prajñāpradīpa-ṭīkā*

Moreover we can see another level of the conventional truth in the first chapter of the *Prajñāpradīpa-ṭīkā*. It is well known that Vasubandhu defines dharma as that which possesses its own characteristic (svalakṣaṇa) in his *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*.<sup>9)</sup> On quoting that definition, Avalokitavrata distinguishes two kinds of own-characteristics of the conventional dharmas, viz., “pure” and “impure.” He says as follows:

Since it possesses its own characteristic, it is called dharma. The own-characteristic of the conventional dharmas is of two kinds, viz., the impure nature and the pure nature. Of the two, the impure nature [of the conventional dharma] is [for example] the own-characteristic of perishability (\*rūpaṇa) [of *rūpa*],<sup>10)</sup> etc., and the respective nature of the earth element, etc. [and those which are made of the four elements (bhautika)] such as “supporting.”<sup>11)</sup> The pure nature [of the conventional dharma] is [for example] the characteristic of non-substantiality (\*niḥsvabhāvatā) and non-arising (\*anutpāda) of all dharmas.<sup>12)</sup>

Avalokitavrata’s distinction between the pure and impure own-characteristics again reminds us of the Abhidharma distinction of the own and common characteristics. The Ābhidhārmikas consider that every dharma possesses not only its own characteristic such as perishability of *rūpa* but also common characteristics (sāmānya-lakṣaṇa) such as non-eternity (anityatā) and non-selfness (anātmatā) that are shared by all conditioned (saṃskṛta) dharmas.<sup>13)</sup> Avalokitavrata’s impure own-characteristic precisely corresponds to the own-characteristic of Abhidharma, while his pure own-characteristic seems to be replacing the Abhidharmic common characteristic with Madhyamaka concepts of non-substantiality and non-arising.

In the *Prajñāpradīpa* chapter 24 we notice two kinds of statements as the conventional truth, namely, statements on pudgala or person and statements on dharma. Now in the *Prajñāpradīpa-ṭīkā* chapter 1 Avalokitavrata distinguishes two kinds of own-characteristic of the conventional dharmas such as *rūpa*, namely, the impure own-

characteristic of perishability and the pure characteristic of non-substantiality and non-arising. From this we may assume that he postulated a third level of statement regarding conventional reality, as, e.g., “*Rūpa* is not substantially real (lit., without own-nature)” and “*Rūpa* does not arise.” Although Avalokitavrata does not call such a statement “the conventional truth,” from his analysis of the conventional reality it is quite possible to infer that he assumed there to be three levels of the conventional truth: the truth on pudgala, the truth on the impure nature of dharmas, and the truth on the pure nature of dharmas.<sup>14)</sup>

In this connection, it is important to notice that the concept of “non-arising” appears also in the context of the ultimate truth mentioned above. The third level of the ultimate truth mentioned by Bhāviveka includes the teaching of “non-arising” that is called by Avalokitavrata “the conventionally ultimate truth.” Now, if our assumption that Avalokitavrata admits the highest level of the conventional truth such as “*Rūpa* is unsubstantial” and “*Rūpa* does not arise,” then there is a close connection between the third level of the ultimate truth and the highest level of the conventional truth. In other words, the two truths are bridged by the concept of “non-arising.” As a result, it may be possible to assume that, if not Bhāviveka, at least Avalokitavrata considered a kind of continuity from the conventional truth to the ultimate truth.

From the above investigation I propose the following general scheme of the two truths held by Bhāviveka and Avalokitavrata:

- (1) The (ultimately) ultimate truth of reality (*tattva*)
- (2) The (conventionally) ultimate truth of non-conceptual cognition (*nirvikalpajñāna*)
- (3) The (conventionally) ultimate truth of teaching of non-arising and the threefold wisdom
- (4) The conventional truth of non-substantiality and non-arising (Avalokitavrata)
- (5) The conventional truth of dharmas
- (6) The conventional truth of pudgala

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#### Notes

- 1) In the Cowherds [2011], the anthology of the conventional truth, Candrakīrti still plays a central role.
- 2) See Akahane, Hayashima, and Nishiyama [2013, section 2.2.3].
- 3) *aparapratyayaṃ śāntaṃ prapañcāir aprapañcitam / nirvikalpam anānārtham etat tattvasya*

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lakṣaṇam // MMK chapter 18 verse 9.

- 4) See Akahane, Hayashima, and Nishiyama [2013, sections 2.2.3.2 and 2.2.3.3].
- 5) See Akahane, Hayashima, and Nishiyama [2013, section 2.2.3.3.2].
- 6) Akahane, Hayashima, and Nishiyama [2013, section 2.2.2]: de la 'jig rten pa'i kun rdzob ni 'jig rten gyi tha snyad de / 'di lta ste / gzugs la sogs pa dngos po rnams skye'o // \* gnas so // 'gag go zhes bya ba dang / lHas byin 'gro'o // Khyab 'jug shes gnyen za'o // Zla bas byin bsgom mo // Tshangs pas byin grol lo zhes bya ba dag 'jig rten gyi tha snyad kyi phyir phyin ci ma log pas de ni 'jig rten pa'i kun rdzob kyi bden pa yin no // (\*PP-DC, PPT-DC: gzugs la sogs pa dngos po rnams skye'o //, PP-PN: gzugs la sogs pa dngos rnams kyi skye'o //, PP-G: gzugs la sogs pa dngos rnams skye'o //, PPT-PNG: gzugs la sogs pa rnams skye'o [omit //]).
- 7) Ichigō [1988, p. 268.12–14] and Tanji [1992, pp. 27–28] have already noticed this distinction.
- 8) AKBh ad chapter 6 verse 4 (pp. 333.21–334.12, Tib. D khu 7a7–b5, P ngu 8b6–9a6. Cf. Katsura [1976]): yatra bhinne na tadbuddhir anyāpohe dhiyā ca tat / ghaṭāmbuvat saṃvṛtisat paramārthasad anyathā // 6.4. (commentary of paramārtha:) ato 'nyathā paramārthasatyam / tatra bhinne 'pi tadbuddhir bhavaty eva / anyadharmāpohe 'pi buddhyā tat paramārthasat / tadyathā rūpam / tatra hi paramāṇuśo bhinne vastuni rasādīn api ca dharmān apohya buddhyā rūpasya svabhāvabuddhir bhavaty eva / evaṃ vedanādayo 'pi draṣṭavyāḥ / etat paramārthena bhāvāt paramārthasatyam iti /.
- 9) AKBh ad chapter 1 verse 2b (p. 2.9): svalakṣaṇadhāraṇād dharmāḥ /.
- 10) Cf. AKBh ad chapter 1 verse 13d (p. 9.10): kasmāt punar ayam avijñaptiparyanto rūpaskandha ity ucyate / rūpaṇāt /.
- 11) Cf. AKBh ad chapter 2 verse 65b (p. 102.22–23): bhautikasya tu bhūtāni pañcaprakāro hetuḥ / katham “jananān niḥśrayāt sthānād upastambhopavṛmhaṇāt /.”
- 12) D wa 3b1–2, P wa 3b8–4a2: rang gi mtshan nyid 'dzin pa'i phyir chos so // kun rdzob pa'i chos rnams kyi rang gi mtshan nyid ni rnam pa gnyis te / ma dag pa'i ngo bo nyid dang / dag pa'i ngo bo nyid do // de la ma dag pa'i ngo bo nyid ni gzugs su rung ba nyid la sogs pa'i rang gi mtshan nyid dang / sa la sogs pa dang / rton pa (P ston pa) la sogs pa rang (D omits rang) rang gi ngo bo nyid dag go // dag pa'i ngo bo nyid ni chos thams cad kyi ngo bo nyid med pa nyid dang / skye ba med pa'i mtshan nyid do //.
- 13) Cf. AKBh ad chapter 2 verse 72 (p. 108.9–22).
- 14) This system reminds us the progress of meditation in the *Tattvasiddhi* of Harivarman. Cf. Katsura [1979].

### Abbreviations

- MMK *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* of Nāgārjuna. Ye, Shaoyong 葉少勇, ed. *Zhonglun song* 中論頌. Shanghai: Zhongxi Shudian, 2011.
- PP *Prajñāpradīpa* of Bhāviveka. D no. 3853, P no. 5253.
- PPT *Prajñāpradīpa-ṭīkā* of Avalokitavrata. D no. 3859, P no. 5259.
- AKBh *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* of Vasubandhu. Pradhan, Prahlad, ed. *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya of Vasubandhu*. Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1967.

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