

Sumatiśīla's Explanation of *saṃtatipariṇāmaviśeṣa* in the *Karmasiddhi*

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1. Introduction

The *Karmasiddhi* (KS) is considered to be a treatise written by Vasubandhu after the composition of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (AKBh) and the *Vyākhyāyukti*. Its commentary, the *Karmasiddhiṭīkā* (KST), is a work by Sumatiśīla who was active around 800 C.E. A common topic found in both the AKBh and the KS is the theory of seed (*bīja*), wherein the expression “specific modification of the [mental] continuum” (*saṃtatipariṇāmaviśeṣa*), is proposed. Even though the same expression is employed by the two texts, a striking difference is that in the KS a classical Yogācāra doctrine of the store consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) is posited as the locus for the process of *saṃtatipariṇāmaviśeṣa*. In this regard, scholars have expressed different opinions regarding Vasubandhu's affiliation with the school of Yogācāra as seen in the KS.

It should be noted that in general only the internal evidences of the KS were considered for determining Vasubandhu's school-affiliation in the KS. In the KST, interestingly, Sumatiśīla points out that in the KS Vasubandhu has established his theory of karma based on the doctrinal tradition of Yogācāra (cf. KST: D 101b7, P 117a3–4). This external evidence found in the KST has not been paid attention to in the previous studies. Since the KST is the earliest commentary of the KS extant today it is of great significance to examine its comment regarding the relation between Vasubandhu and the school of Yogācāra. This paper sets forth to examine this external evidence found in the KST.

2. *saṃtatipariṇāmaviśeṣa* in the *Karmasiddhi*

In the KS Vasubandhu refutes Sarvāstivāda doctrine of **traikālyavāda* which claims that past actions are non-perishable:

How do they (past actions) produce their results? It should be investigated that whether this is through a specific modification of the continuum (*rgyud yoñs su 'gyur ba'i khyad par, saṃtatipariṇāmaśeṣa*), as is the case with a seed of a rice-plant, or whether it is through a condition of its being (*ran gi mtshan ñid kyi gnas skabs, *śvalakṣaṇāvasthā*). If only a condition of its being can produce the result, then it should be explained how it (the past action) produces its result by not having been destroyed ... However, at the final moment [of existence of Arhats who have] destroyed all defilements (*zag pa zad pa, kṣiṇāsrava*) the result is not entailed, and there is also the cessation resulting from non-discrimination (*so sor brtags pa ma yin pas 'gog pa, apratisaṃkhyānirodha*) through which the result can be called a destruction. [For both cases] since from the very beginning the efficacy (*bya ba, *kāritra*) is not exercised, how can it (the result) later be destroyed? Thus, the entailment of a result for something with such a nature is not proven. How then? A result is entailed through the nurturing (*gso bar byed pa, *paripoṣaṇa*) of the seed of the result (cf. KS: D 138a6-b4, P 160b2-8).

The above passage can be traced back to Chapter IX of the AKBh where Vasubandhu argues that past karma can maintain its force until the final moment of fruition by using the metaphor of the transformation of a seed to its fruit (cf. AKBh: 477.10–15). It is noteworthy that although in both the AKBh and the KS the concept of *saṃtatipariṇāmaśeṣa* is used to explain how a past action can give rise to its result in the future, in the KS the expression “nurturing of the seed” is added. Since Vasubandhu gives no further explanation of this expression its meaning remains unclear.

3. Sumatiśīla's Explanation

What is of interest in the above passage of the KS is Vasubandhu's use of the term “nurturing of the seed.” For this term Sumatiśīla explains:

“The nurturing of the seed of the result” means that the seed, which exists internally and being efficacious with the effect, is developed (*rtas par byed*). Here, the occurrence of a [new] seed which does not exist before is not entailed. Why so? In the continuum of consciousness, it should be known that only the existing seed is nurtured. If this is not the case, then the different continuums of spiritual genera (*rigs, gotra*) such as *śrāvaka* and so on can no longer be individually ascertained (cf. KST: D 81a4–6, P 90b7–91a2).

In the above explanation it is clear that Sumatiśīla emphasizes that the seed which is nurtured is only the one exists internally (i.e. in the *ālayavijñāna*) and has efficacy with the result. Important in this regard is the fact that during this process new seed is not produced. Here Sumatiśīla raises two interesting points: only the existing seed is nurtured and

that the continuum of a gotra depends on this seed. Since these points can, as far as I can see, not be found in the AKBh nor the KS, one may speculate that either they are Sumatiśīla's own ideas or they are borrowed from other sources.

One possible source is encountered in the *Triṃśikāṭikā* (Trṭ), a sub-commentary written by Vinītadeva (ca. 690–750 C.E.):

There are three types of accounts of Yogācāra [regarding imprints]. [1.] Some say that the imprint which does not exist before is produced. [2.] Others say that the imprint exists at all times. The [existing imprint] simply develops through various dharmas of affliction, and by this development of the imprint its result can manifest. [3.] Others think that on one hand the existing imprint is developed, on the other hand those [imprints] that do not exist before are produced (cf. Trṭ: D 13b2–3, P 15b3–5).

The similarity of Sumatiśīla's explanation (i.e. only the existing seed is developed) to that of the second type of *vāsanā* mentioned in the Trṭ is significant. It is to be noted that in this context the term imprint (*vāsanā*) is a synonym for seed (*bīja*).⁶⁾

Furthermore, Yamabe (1991: 97, n.2) points out a similarity between Sumatiśīla's explanation and the passage found in the commentary of the first chapter of the **Mahāyānasamgraha*, the *Vivṛtagūḍhārthapīṇḍavyākhyā* (VGPVy):

Some say that the imprint does not depend on infusion (*sgo bar byed pa*, **paribhāvanā*) but exists intrinsically (*chos nīd kyis*, **dharmatayā*). [The imprint is] simply nurtured by its arising and cease simultaneously with lust and so forth, and [during this process new imprint] is not produced. This is [explained] as followed. This is because the cause of arising of the *ālayavijñāna* and the noble path is the inborn spiritual genus (*rañ bžin gyi rigs*, **prakṛtigotra*). If the imprint is admitted to be a causal condition (*rgyu'i rkyen nīd*, **hetupratyayatva*), since they (the *ālayavijñāna*, the noble path and the existing imprint) arise and cease simultaneously their own [new] imprint cannot be produced. This is because there is no such thing as two *ālayavijñāna* joining together [in an individual], and also the noble path is something which has not yet been experienced before (cf. VGPVy: D 328a7–b3, P 394a6–b1).

The above explanation found in the VGPVy is compatible to the second type of *vāsanā* mentioned in the Trṭ. This passage provides arguments that support the idea that only the existing seed is nurtured and that *gotra* acts as the cause for the arising of the *ālayavijñāna* and the noble path.

By comparison it is clear that Sumatiśīla's commentary resembles one of the three types of *vāsanā* stated in the Trṭ as well as the VGPVy. This does not, however, prove that

Sumatiśīla has borrowed these ideas from the above two sources, but their similarities suggest that these ideas might have been commonly shared among scholars of the Indian school of Yogācāra. In fact, Yamabe (1911: 111) suggests that this doctrine of the three types of *vāsanā* was commonly known among the school of Yogācāra in India. On the basis of the evidence presented above, I shall set about suggesting that in explaining the expression “nurturing of the seed” in the KS it is possible that Sumatiśīla has in his mind adopted one of the positions of the three types of *vāsanā* that come from Yogācāra doctrines.

4. Concluding Remarks

I hope to have demonstrated that there exists an external evidence from the KST which claims that in the KS Vasubandhu has based his theory of karma on Yogācāra doctrines. The KST can thus provide a particular perspective from which to view the development of Vasubandhu's idea from the AKBh to the KS. In particular, the course of analyzing the concept of *saṃtatipariṇāmaśeṣa* based on the explanation from the KST could indicate that Sumatiśīla considered the KS to be a Yogācāra text. Further study will clarify how far this is true for the entire KST.

Notes

cf. Yamaguchi (1951: 151, n. 16), this passage refers to “the theory of the five-*gotra* system based on seeds which exist in the *ālayavijñāna* of sentient beings since beginningless time.”

Abbreviations

- AKBh *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* of Vasubandhu: Ed. P. Pradhan. Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1967.
 KS Vasubandhu, *Karmasiddhi*: D no. 4062 134b2–145a6, P no. 5563 156a5–168b6.
 KST Sumatiśīla, *Karmasiddhiṭīkā*: D no. 4071 63b1–102a5, P no. 5572 69a6–117b1.
 TrT Vinītadeva, *Triṃśikāṭīkā*: D no. 4070 1b1–63a7, P no. 5571 2a1–69a5.
 VGPVv *Vivṛtagūḍhārthapīṇḍavyākhyā*: D no. 4052 296b1–361a7, P no. 5553 356b7–434a8.

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Key words *Karmasiddhi*, Sumatiśīla, *saṃtatipariṇāmaśeṣa*

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