

Aśvaghoṣa, Asaṅga, and Vasubandhu:

From the *Vyākhyāyukti* Chapter 5

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Introduction

In this paper, I identify a quotation from Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita* (BC) in Chapter 5 of Vasubandhu's *Vyākhyāyukti* (VyY). I also investigate the quote “*mdo sde'i rgyan*” from the same chapter of the VyY and highlight the little-known connection between Aśvaghoṣa, Asaṅga, and Vasubandhu.

1. Quotation of BC in VyY

There is a previously unknown quote from Aśvaghoṣa's BC, 11.9 (BC-Tib, D39a5–6, P47a6–7) in Chapter 5 of the VyY (VyY, D131a7, P152b2–3).¹⁾ This is the first time that a BC citation has been reported in Vasubandhu's works.

2. Citation of *SA in VyY

2.1. Outline

At the end of the fifth chapter, which is the last chapter of the VyY, Vasubandhu says, “In the *mdo sde'i rgyan*, too, a method of interpreting the sutras is taught.” He quotes two verses from the work and proceeds to interpret them. The corresponding Sanskrit for the *mdo sde'i rgyan* is assumed to be the **Sūtrālaṃkāra* (*SA), and this could be identified with Aśvaghoṣa's work under the same title, which is not extant, or the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (MSA) by Asaṅga. Previous studies have attempted to examine this relation, but they have reported that no correspondence to the MSA was ascertained.²⁾ However, for the second verse, there is a similar, though not identical, verse in the MSA.

2.2. Presentation of the Texts

(VyY, D134a2–7; P155b3–156a3)

mdo sde'i rgyan las kyang mdo sde nman par bshad pa'i tshul bstan to// (I will skip the first

verse and VyY's commentary on it)

(Verse.2)

gzhan yang bstan pa/

gang zhig [1] gzhan gyis brgal na snyan par smra byed rtsub pa ma yin dang//

[2] bstod dam grub par gyur kyang gang gi yid ni rgyags par mi byed dang//

gang zhig don [3] rgyas pa dang [4] sna tshogs [5] 'brel dang [6] go byed smra ba dang//

gang zhig [7] snying la dge rtsa bskyed (bskyed) VyY (D); skyed VyY (P)) pa de ni smra byed mkhas pa yin//

The source of the first verse, which I did not cite here, is unknown. Regarding the second verse, VyY annotates the seven phrases of *SA as denoting two kinds of virtues in two types of speakers.³⁾ This second verse and Vasubandhu's commentary on it are similar to MSA 12.6 and the commentary on it by MSABh.

For context, Chapter 12 of the MSA is named the *deśanādhikāra*, the chapter on teaching the Dharma, and its sixth verse is the latter of the two verses concerning the “perfection of the teaching of the Dharma (*deśanāsaṃpatti*).” Therefore, contextually, it is close to the SA described in the VyY as having taught how to interpret sutras.

[1] *madhurā* [2] *madavyapetā* [X] *na ca khinnā deśanāgrasatvānām* |

[3] *sphuṭa*[4]*citra*[5]*yukta*[6]*gamikā* [7] *nirāmiṣā* [Y] *sarvagā caiva* ||XII.6|| (*Āryā*)

The following section lists sources in *SA, MSA, MSABh,⁴⁾ and VyY's commentary on *SA and compares the Tibetan translation with the Sanskrit. The section is divided into four parts: I, II, III, and IV.

2.3. Comparison of Texts

(I)

*SA: [1] *gzhan gyis (*parena) brgal (*āvṛkṣip) na snyan par (*madhura-) smra byed rtsub pa ma yin (*aparūṣa)* (He who, even when criticized by their opponents, speaks gently, and does not speak harshly.)

MSA: [1] *madhurā* (f. adj., qualifying *deśanā*); 'jam (gentle/sweet [teaching/preach, *deśanā*])

MSABh: [1] *pareṇākṣiptasyāparūṣavacanāt* |; *gzhan gyis brgal ba la tshig rtsub mo mi 'byin pa'i phyir rol*// (He does not speak coarse language when others (our opponents) criticize him.⁵⁾)

Snyan pa is a translation of *madhura* in Mvy (no. 2810: *sgra mnyen (mnyan pa) 'am snyan pa, madhuraḥ svarah*), and there is an example of its translation in the VyY itself (the 36th of the 60 voices of tathāgata, where the same interpretation is mentioned in

MSABh and VyY, is *snyan pa* in VyY. The corresponding Sanskrit in MSA and MSABh is *madhura*⁶¹). Here, *madhura* is a common word, meaning sweet or pleasant; however, gentle or soft would be more appropriate in this context. Alternatively, MSABh annotates the word *madhura* with reference to a special situation in *SA. From another viewpoint, the combination of MSA and MSABh is a form of *SA.

(II)

*SA: [2] *bstod (*stuti) dam grub par gyur (*siddhi) kyang gang gi yid ni rgyags par (*mada) mi byed* (A person whose heart is not arrogant when he is praised or when he succeeds [in his claim concerning the Dharma].)

MSA: [2] *madavyapetā; rgyags bral* ([the teaching] that is free from arrogance)

MSABh: [2] *stutau siddhau vā madānanugamanāt; bstod dam grub na rgyags par mi 'gyur ba'i phyir ro//* (He is not conceited in praise or success.)

Here, the Tibetan in *SA and the Tibetan in MSA and MSABh seem consistent. The same thing appears in the commentary of MSABh as in (I). In these two cases, it is as if MSABh is using *SA to annotate MSA.

(III)

*SA: *don (*artha) [3] rgyas pa (*sphuṭa) dang [4] sna tshogs (*citra) [5] 'brel (*yukta) dang [6] go byed (*gamaka) smra ba* (One who speaks the meaning that is [3]open, [4]various, [5] correct, and [6]causing to understand)

MSA: [3] *sphuṭa*[4]*citra*[5]*yukta*[6]*gamikā*; [3] *gsal zhing* [4] *sna tshogs* [5] *rigs pa dang* [6] *go (go) P; 'go D) zhing* ([the teaching that is] [3]open, [4]various, [5]correct, and [5] causing to understand)

MSABh: [3] *sphuṭā nirācāryamuṣṭitvāt kṛtsnadeśanataḥ* ; [3] *gsal ba ni zad par ston pas slob dpon gyi (gyi) D; gyis P) dpe mkhyud med pa'i phyir ro//* [4] *citrā apunaruktatvāt* ; [4] *sna tshogs ni mi zlos pa'i phyir ro//* [5] *yuktā pramāṇāviruddhatvāt* ; [5] *rigs pa ni tshad ma dang mi 'gal ba'i phyir ro//* [6] *gamikā pratītapadavyaṅjanatvāt* ; [5] *go (go) MSA (P); 'go MSA (D), MSABh (DP)) ba ni tshig dang yi ge grags pa'i phyir ro//* ([3] “Open” because by preaching everything, it (the teaching) is leaving the master’s clenched fist; [4] “Various” because it does not reiterate; [5] “Right” because it does not contradict the valid means of cognition; and [6] “Makes one understood” because the phrases and characters used are well known [to the world].)

VyY (commentary on the above SA): [3] *yongs su rdzogs pa dang/* [4] *mi zlos pa (apunarukta) dang/* [5] *tshad ma dang mi 'gal ba'i (pramāṇāviruddha) don dang/* [6] *gsal ba'i tshig brjod pa nyid kyis so//* (By speaking the meaning that is [3] complete, [4] without restatement, [5] not contradictory to the valid means of cognition, and [by speaking] [6] clear sentences.)

As for 4 and 6, it is clear that the original Sanskrit of *SA is the same as that of MSA. However, it is necessary to examine the discrepancy between the Tibetan words in 3 and 5. First, *rgyas pa* is listed as a translation of *sphuṭa* in Mvy (no. 6492: *sphuṭam*, *rgyas pa 'am gas pa 'am gsal ba*), together with *gsal ba*, which is found in MSABh. *Sphuṭa* also means “clear,” but according to the commentaries, in this context, it means “open” or “complete” (remember that it is possible to preach “clearly” but not “all”). Second, *'brel ba* is interpreted to be a translation of *sahita* in the VyY (refer 30th of the 60 voices of tathāgata⁷⁾). However, VyY’s commentary on this word is the same as MSABh’s commentary on *yukta* (see [5] above). Moreover, in the 30th of the 60 voices of tathāgata, VyY has *rigs pa ni tshad ma dang mi 'gal ba'i phyir ro* and its correspondence in MSABh is *yuktā pramāṇāviruddhatvāt*, *rigs pa ni tshad ma dang mi 'gal ba'i phyir ro*.⁸⁾ Alternatively, the word *sahita* is interpreted differently in the VyY, as illustrated above. Thus, *'brel ba* can be assumed to be *yukta*.

From the above, it is clear that items 3–6 are completely consistent between *SA and MSA and MSABh’s annotations for 4 and 5 are consistent with VyY’s annotations.

(IV)

*SA: [7] *snying la dge rtsa bskyed pa* (*de ni smra byed mkhas pa yin//*) (He, who causes roots of merit to arise in the heart, (is the one who preaches well).)

MSA: [7] *nirāmiṣā; zang zing med* (free from the desire for worldly things)

MSABh: [7] *prasannādhikārānarthikatvāt* | (It [the preach] does not seek the offerings of the faithful ones.)

VyY: [7] *bdag dang gzhan gyi rgyud la dge ba'i rtsa ba bskyed pa'i bsam pa'i sems zang zing med pa* (**nirāmiṣa*) *nyid* (*nyid*] D; *nyis* P) *kyis so//* (For he who has the intention of causing to arise the roots of merit in the personal continuance of self and others, there is no desire for worldly things in his heart (**nirāmiṣa*).)

There seems to be no connection here between *SA, MSA, and MSABh. However, in commenting on the *SA, VyY mentions **nirāmiṣa* in the last part (a word in the MSA), although the first half of the commentary is merely an elaboration of the *SA. In terms of content, it is difficult to derive the word *nirāmiṣa* from the *SA [7]. This seems to suggest that VyY has borrowed a word from the MSA here.

2.4. SA and MSA

In this section, the *SA is illustrated using the assumed Sanskrit words obtained from the above discussion. Compare it with the MSA.

gang zhig [1] gzhan gyis (*pareṇa) brgal (*āvṛkṣip) na snyan par (*madhura) smra byed rtsub
 pa ma yin (*aparūṣa) dang//
 [2] bstod (*stuti) dam grub par (*siddhi) gyur kyang gang gi yid ni rgyags par (*mada) mi
 byed dang//
 gang zhig don [3] rgyas pa (*sphuṭa) dang [4] sna tshogs (*citra) [5] 'brel (*yukta) dang [6]
 go byed (*gamaka) smra ba dang//
 gang zhig [7] snying la dge rtsa bskyed pa de ni smra byed mkhas pa yin// (*SA cited in VyY)
 [1] madhurā [2] madavyapetā [X] na ca khinnā deśanāgrasatvānām |
 [3] sphuṭa[4]citra[5]yukta[6]gamikā [7] nirāmiṣā [Y] sarvagā caiva ||MSA, XII.6||

It is unlikely that the two are different versions based on the same source as the wording differs. Alternatively, it is also unlikely that they are completely unrelated since their words and contents closely correspond to each other although they are unique—i.e., they are not based on formulaic phrases or common doctrines. As mentioned earlier, the contexts are similar in the first place, as they are sutra interpretation (*SA) and complete preaching (MSA). In addition, the only work known to us today under the name of *SA is that of Aśvaghōṣa. Therefore, it can be inferred that the verse of Aśaṅga's MSA was based on the *SA of Aśvaghōṣa.

The following is a more specific restatement of the above.

—MSA used *SA as the basis for the verse (see [1]–[7], especially [3]–[6]).

—MSABh was aware of such a situation, so it used the *SA description to annotate the MSA word (see [1] and [2]).

—In relation to VyY, VyY's explanation of 4 and 5 is completely consistent with MSABh, and VyY uses MSA words to explain 7 in *SA.

Incidentally, *SA and MSA are related by their titles, and it is presumed that MSA (*Mahāyāna-sūtrāṃkāra*) may be a Mahayana version of *SA (*Sūtrāṃkāra*).⁹⁾ In fact, this paper is the first to substantially point out the flow of *SA>MSA, and also, in terms of content, the above [X] and [Y] would be MSA's own supplements from the Mahayana viewpoint. In particular, [Y] and the commentary on it by MSABh are worth noting because the MSA says “all-pervading” and the MSABh comments “[Y] ‘all-pervading’ because it (the teaching of bodhisattva) pervades the three vehicles.” Based on the examples of the use of *kheda* and related words inside the same work, [X] can also be understood as a word related to Mahayana and bodhisattvas.

Instead of a conclusion

This paper explores the connection of the two verses cited in Chapter 5 of the VyY with Aśvaghoṣa. However, some of the sources in Chapter 5 of the VyY are still unclear and await further study.

Notes

- 1) See Horiuchi and Ueno forthcoming for details. 2) Lee 2001, 53; Ueno 2015, 216ff. Although Ueno 2015 suggests a similarity between the first verse of the *SA cited here and a passage in the *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* (*Dazhidulun*, T 25, 518a13–20), it has nothing to do with SA or Aśvaghoṣa. 3) See Horiuchi and Ueno forthcoming for details. 4) MSA-Tib: D 16b7, P 18b7–8. MSABh-Tib: D 181b6–182a2, P 194b2–5. 5) Cf. SAVBh, D Mi 227b7–8a1, P Mi 252b6–8. 6) Ueno and Horiuchi 2018, (38). 7) *ibid.*, (37)–(38) and n29. 8) *ibid.*, (37). 9) Since Sylvain Lévi. See Ueno 2015 for details.

Abbreviations

BC: *Buddhacarita*. Aśvaghoṣa's *The Buddhacarita: Or, Acts of the Buddha*. Ed. E. H. Johnston. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1935–1936. **-Tib:** D 4156, P 5656. **MSA-Tib:** Tibetan translation of the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*. D 4020, P 5521. **MSA (Bh):** *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra (bhāṣya)*. *Daijōshōgonkyōron wayaku to chūkai Nagao Gajin kenkyū nōto* (2). 『大乘莊嚴經論』和訳と註解 長尾雅人研究ノート (2). Ed. Nagao Gajin 長尾雅人. Kyoto: Nagao Bunko, 2007. **-Tib:** D 4026, P 5527. **SAVBh:** *Sūtrālaṃkāravṛttibhāṣya*. D 4034, P 5531. **VyY:** *Vyākhyāyukti*. D 4061, P 5562. **Mvy:** *Mahāvīyūtpatti. Hon'yaku myōgi daishū: Bon Zō Kan Wa yon'yaku taikō* 翻訳名義大集: 梵藏漢和四訳対校. Kyoto: Shingonshū Kyōto Daigaku, 1916.

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