How to Interpret and Preach the Buddha’s Teaching:
The Discussion in Chapter 5 of the \textit{Vyākyāyukti}

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1. Introduction

The \textit{Vyākyāyukti} (VyY) is a work by Vasubandhu which deals with methods of exegesis. As has been exhaustively shown by Peter Skilling (2000), this work had a great influence on later Indian and Tibetan Buddhism. This is especially the case with the fivefold method of exegesis discussed in Ch. 1 of the VyY. This method of exegesis is, however, taken up again from a somewhat different viewpoint at the start of Ch. 5. Moreover, this section is important for considering not only the characteristics of the VyY but also methods of interpreting and preaching the Buddha’s teaching.

This paper first examines the method of exegesis elucidated in the VyY by investigating descriptions found in Ch. 1 and Ch. 5 of the VyY. Secondly, this paper points out with reference to some passages from Ch. 5 that the VyY was written for those who undertake exegesis and that the method of exegesis in the VyY is closely linked to preaching in the presence of an audience.

2. The method of exegesis in the VyY

2.1. The argument in Ch. 1 of the VyY

At the start of Ch. 1, after having given two opening verses, Vasubandhu proclaims the three necessary conditions which those who wish to elucidate the \textit{sūtras} must fulfill.

Those who wish to elucidate the \textit{sūtras} should first (1) be erudite (*bahuśruta), (2) hold fast (retain in their minds) the sacred word (\textit{thos pa'i gzhi can, *śrutādhāra}¹), and (3) accumulate hearing (*śrutasaṃnicaya). (VyY, Lee 2.3-4)

After interpreting one canonical passage immediately after the above passage, Vasubandhu then explains the well-known fivefold method of exegesis which comprises (1) \textit{prayojana} ‘purpose’, (2) \textit{piṇḍārtha} ‘summarized meaning’, (3) \textit{padārtha} ‘meaning of

¹\textit{śrutādhāra} is a word used in Buddhist exegesis to refer to the sacred utterance that is the object of study in the \textit{Vyākyāyukti}. It is derived from the root ‘śruti’ which means ‘to hear’ or ‘to understand’. The term refers to the sacred words or verses that are the object of study in the \textit{Vyākyāyukti} and that are used to explain the \textit{sūtras}.
words’, (4) *anusāmdhi* ‘connection’, and (5) *codyaparīhāra* ‘objections and responses’ (VY, Lee 6.5-11). As is evident from Lee (2001), the critical edition of the VY, this text is itself composed in line with this fivefold method of exegesis. Further, this method as advocated in Ch. 1 of the VY had a great influence on later Buddhist traditions.

In Ch. 5, on the other hand, this method is mentioned again from a somewhat different perspective, Ch. 5 begins as follows:

(A) The aspect of objections and responses (*codyaparīhāra*) is also explained, and (B) the method of how to elucidate the *sūtra* is also explained [in the previous chapters]. Furthermore, the preacher of the teaching (*chos smra ba po, *dharma-bhānakal karthika*) first ought to cite (/write down, *bkod*) the *sūtra* and then (*nas*) [ought to] inquire [into the meaning of the *sūtra*]. However, in order to establish an attentive ear (*avaḥitaśrorea*), I shall explain [a story] about hearing the teaching (*dharma*) with respect (*gus par mnyan pa dang ldan pa*).

[Question] What is this “[story] about hearing the teaching with respect”? [Answer] [This means to teach to hear with respect based on a story (*kathā*). If [the hearer] is attentive of ear, one should explain the *sūtra* in the order of purpose (*prayojana*), etc. (VY, Lee 250.4-13)

“Purpose, etc.” here means the fivefold method of exegesis elucidated in Ch. 1. Thus, the descriptions of the method of exegesis in Ch. 1 and Ch. 5 of the VY seem to be contradictory. This is because, as quoted above, in the system of the method of exegesis described in Ch. 1, the “purpose” is referred to as the first item, whereas here in Ch. 5 the first item of the exegesis is said to be “[a story] about hearing the teaching with respect.” The question then arises as to which should be understood as the first item in the method of exegesis in the VY.

When investigating this question, the following two points seem to be worth noting. First, this statement in Ch. 5 of the VY does not seem to be rejecting the method of exegesis elucidated in Ch. 1 because Vasubandhu himself states that he has [already finished] explaining the method of exegesis ((B) above). Secondly, at the same time, this part of the VY is not a mere supplementary section of the *codyaparīhāra*, because he also states that he has [already finished] explaining the method of exegesis ((A) above) in which *codyaparīhāra* is the fifth and last item. But it is true that he refers to “purpose,” the first item of the exegesis, in Ch. 1 and places “a story about hearing the teaching with respect” prior to that.2)

Then again, how is this chapter of the VY to be positioned? A clue to resolving this contradiction seems to be the phrase *chos smra ba po* or “preacher of the doctrine” at the start
of Ch. 5, which is not found in the previous chapters of the VyY. In the other chapters of the VyY, on the other hand, similar but different kinds of people are indicated as exponents of the teaching. Namely, at the start of the VyY, Vasubandhu declares that this text is written "for those who wish to explain the sūtras" (mdo rnam s’chad ’do d’og la; VyY, Lee 1.14). Furthermore, Ch. 2 begins with the preliminary statement that this chapter is explained "in order to give rise to skillfulness in explaining (bshad pa) the meaning of the words for others" (VyY, Lee 33.11-12). In this case, to "explain" (’chad, bshad) the sūtras does not necessarily mean to "preach" (in the presence of an audience), unlike chos smra ba or "preach the doctrine." Thus, Ch. 5 is understood as dealing with another subject, namely, instructions for those who preach the teaching in the presence of an audience, not as a continuation of the fifth method of exegesis, codyaparihāra.

Indeed, Ch. 5 of the VyY is unique in that it includes many stories for the preacher(s) of the teachings.3) In the next section, therefore, I shall introduce some passages from Ch. 5 and demonstrate this characteristic of the VyY as instructions for preachers.

2.2. Exegesis and preaching

In Ch. 5, Vasubandhu elucidates [a story] about hearing the teaching with respect as follows:

[Question] How should one explain [(a story) about hearing the teaching with respect]? [Answer]
By (1) exhortation, (2) showing the purpose, and (3) producing (*upa-sam-hṛ) (a) marvelous, (b) joyful, and (c) depressing stories for (a’) [those who are] dispirited (a’) by torpor (*styāna) and (b’) by drowsiness (*middha) and (c’) those whose minds are disturbed by wrong thoughts [respectively]. (VyY, Lee 251.10-15)

Among the above items, (3)-(b’) “to produce joyful stories for those who are dispirited by drowsiness” would not be thought of without actual experience of preaching. In Ch. 5, a long chapter of 20 folios in the Derge edition (D114a-134a; Lee 250-310), Vasubandhu elucidates these items, stories for preachers, with many illustrations.

3. On the final verse of the VyY

Finally, to show more of the characteristics of the VyY which I have examined in this paper, I shall take up the final verse of the VyY (Ch. 5).

VyY, D134a7-134b1, P156a3-4; Lee 312-313:
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ji ltar me ’i sgo bud shing yin//
ji ltar chu ’i lam gtod 4) pa ltar//
de bzhin blo dang ldan rnams la//
mdo sde bshad pa ’i shan5) ’di bstan//

As the door of fire is firewood, [and] as the way of water is curving, likewise, this small bit of the method of exegesis was taught for wise persons.

“Wise persons” here refers to those who interpret and preach the teaching. As is seen also from this final verse of the VyY, this text was written for preachers and interpreters of the teaching.

4. Conclusion

In this paper I have examined the method of exegesis in the VyY. In Ch. 1, Vasubandhu advocates a fivefold method of exegesis beginning with *prajñāna ‘purpose’. In Ch. 5, on the other hand, he points out that “[a story] about hearing the teaching with respect” comes prior to “purpose, etc.,” viz., the fivefold method of exegesis. By focusing on the word “preacher of the teaching (chos smra ba po)” at the start of Ch. 5, I have argued that the theme of Ch. 5 is to instruct preachers on how to preach in the presence of an audience. That means, in the case of preaching, that the preacher first explains “[a story] about hearing the teaching with respect.” Next, I have shown the characteristics of the VyY as instructions for preachers and interpreters of the teaching by introducing some passages from Ch. 5.

〈Abbreviations〉
bShad bsdu: Rnal ’byor spyod pa ’i sa las rnam par bshad pa bsdu ba; P No. 5043, D No. 4042. VyY: Vasubandhu, Vyākhyaḥukti; D No. 4061, P No. 5562; see Lee.; VyYT: Gunamati, Vyākhyaḥukti-tīkā; D No. 4069, P No. 5570.

〈Bibliography〉

〈Notes〉
1) My reconstruction of this Sanskrit word is based on similar phrases found in the following sources: Śrāvakabhūmi (Śrāvakabhūmi Study Group, Taishō University Sōgo Bukkyō Kenkyūjo
(94) How to Interpret and Preach the Buddha’s Teaching (T. Horiuchi)

Series IV, 1998, The Sankibo Press, Tokyo), 252-253; Bodhisattvbhāmi (U. Wogiwara, ed.), 175.9-10; PTSD, 718 (sūtādhāra); BHSD, 536a: śrutādhāraḥ: “holding fast (retaining in their minds) the sacred word.”

2) Immediately afterwards, Vasubandhu enumerates three reasons that “[a story] about hearing the teaching with respect” is explained prior to *prayojana ‘purpose’, etc.

3) As is suggested by the title, the Rnam par bshad pa bṣdu ba (hereafter bShad bsdu) of the Yogācārabhūmi has many similarities to the Vyākhyāyukti (Rnam par bshad pa’i rigs pa), and a comparative study of the two texts is necessary. However, although the bShad bsdu also contains the item of “hearing [the teaching] with respect (gus par nyan pa)” as its method of exegesis, it does not include a detailed elucidation of it as shown in the VyY (bShad bsdu, D57b5 ff., P68a8 ff.).

4) This ggod pa could be a rendering of *ābhoga or “winding/curving.” This phrase is thus understood as a dynamic simile. Vasubandhu compares the method of exegesis to winding and a person who undertakes the interpretation or preaching of Buddhism to water which flows in a meandering fashion.

5) This shan seems to be a rendering of *leśa, which means a small bit or portion (cf. Pramāṇavārttika, R. Gnoli, ed., 32.23: leśavīśeṣataḥ, and its Tibetan translation: shan gvi khyad par gyis [D Če 279a2, P Če 425b4]). This word shan is also recorded in Negi’s Tibetan Sanskrit Dictionary as a translation of leśa based on the usage found in the Tattvasamgrahapāṇītikā. Further, this assumption is also supported by Guṇamati’s VyYT (D301a5-6, P194a2-3): mdo sde’i bshad pa’i shan ’di nił mdo sde’i bshad pa stel rnam par bshad pa ni mdo sde bshad pa’o// mdo sde’i bshad pa’i shan te’ phyogs gcig dang cha shas ni mdo sde bshad pa’i shan no// Guṇamati here comments that this shan means phyogs gcig and cha shas, both of which mean “part,” “portion.” Thus, this phrase (mdo sde bshad pa’i shan ’di bstan) in the final verse in the VyY (Ch. 5) is translated as: “this small bit of the method of exegesis was taught.” Interestingly enough, this expression tallies well with the opening verse in Ch. 1 of the VyY (man ngag cung zad bstan par bya). Further, a similar expression is also found in the final verse (pāda ab) of the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya (P. Pradhan, ed., 1967, 478.21): iti dīnātram evedam upadiṣṭam sumedhasām.

These are understood as expressions of modesty.

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