A New Viewpoint on the Sautrāntika School of Buddhist Philosophy Based on a Study of Sarvāstivādin School in Gandhāra

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1. Introduction

We have yet to fully understand the substance of the Sautrāntika school of Buddhist philosophy. Here I will propose a new point of view in this essay to better understand the Sautrāntika school of thought. It is my contention that the Sautrāntika school has some relation to the Sarvāstivādin school in the Gandhāra area. This idea is a new point of view in the understanding of Sautrāntika and the various theories concerning it. Generally speaking, the Sautrāntika considered the sūtras to be the most important in the *tripiṭaka*, which means that they made sure their theories had no inconsistencies with the Sūtras. Since this tendency is also seen in the Sarvāstivādin school in Gandhāra, likely there is some relationship between the two. In order to substantiate this relationship, I will present two instances of evidence from the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (= *AKBh*).

2. The Definition of the Sautrāntika School and the Characteristics of the Sarvāstivādin School in Gandhāra

The meaning of Sautrāntika as defined by Yaśomitra in the *Abhidharmakośavyākhyā* (= *AKV*) is as follows: “What is the Sautrāntika? The Sautrāntika are those who depend on the sūtras, and do not depend on the śāstras.”¹⁾ Possibly the origin of this definition comes from a passage in the *AKBh*: “We are those who depend on the sūtras, but do not depend on the śāstras.”²⁾ There is yet another similar passage in the *AKBh*: “Even if not consistent with the śāstras, it still must be consistent with the sūtras.”³⁾ This last passage is describing the characteristics of the Sarvāstivādin school in Gandhāra.

In the *AKBh*, the two passages are very similar. For this reason, I suggest there must be some relationship between the Sautrāntika school and the Sarvāstivādin school of Gandhāra. Likely, the Sautrāntika school is a sub-group within the Sarvāstivādin school in

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Gandhāra, hence there is a resemblance between the definition of the Sautrāntika school and the description of the characteristics of the Sarvāstivādin school in Gandhāra.

3. What is the Sarvāstivādin School of Gandhāra?

Before I argue the relationship between the Sautrāntika school and the Sarvāstivādin school of Gandhāra, I must discuss the definition of the Sarvāstivādin school of Gandhāra. The Sarvāstivādin school in Gandhāra is defined in some texts as identical to the Pāścātya, the “Buddhist scholars of the western region” (Xifangzhushi 西方諸師 or Xifangshamen 西方沙門). According to some commentaries on the *AKBh* (written by Puguang 普光, Fabao 法宝, and Yaśomitra), the Pāścātya are the scholars of the Sarvāstivāda school in Gandhāra, which is located in western Kaśmīra. Based on these commentaries, we might accept that the Pāścātya group is the same as the Sarvāstivādin school of Gandhāra. The first appearance of the term Xifangzhushi occurs in the *Mahāvibhāṣa* (*Dapiposhalun* 大毘婆沙論 = *MVi*), and the first appearance of the term Pāścātya occurs in the *AKBh*. From the original *AKBh* text cited above and these two Chinese versions (translated by Xuanzang 玄奘 and Paramārtha 真諦), we can understand that “Xifangzhushi” corresponds to “Pāścātya.” However, the Sarvāstivādin school of Gandhāra is distinct from the Sarvāstivādin school of Kaśmīra, so next I would like to consider the relation between the Pāścātya group of scholars and the Sarvāstivādin school of Kaśmīra.

4. The Controversy Concerning *saṃkṣipta-citta* (略心)

In order to clarify the characteristics of the Pāścātya group, I will now examine the controversy about *saṃkṣipta-citta* that occurred between the Pāścātya group and the Sarvāstivādin school of Kaśmīra. The Sarvāstivādin school of Kaśmīra defines *saṃkṣipta-citta* as “good mind” but the Pāścātya group define it as “a mind with a sleep.”⁴⁾ The difference between the two definitions arises from an inconsistency between the sūtras and the śāstras. The Sarvāstivādin school of Kaśmīra chooses the definition consistent with the śāstras, whereas the Pāścātya group chooses the definition consistent with the sūtras. The Pāścātya group chides the Sarvāstivādin school of Kaśmīra with the phrase, “Even if not consistent with the śāstras, it still must be consistent with the sūtras.” I consider this point to be the distinguishing difference between the Pāścātya group and the Sarvāstivādin school of Kaśmīra; confirmed by these two different views regarding being inconsistent

with either the sūtras or the śāstras.

According to a comment by Yaśomitra, the import of the phrase above is that “the Abidharma treatises were not expounded by the Buddha.”⁵⁾ This comment is commonly taken to be the defining principle of the Sautrāntika school in the *AKV*. In the controversy about *saṃkṣipta-citta*, we can say that the Pāścātya group’s attitude is the same as the Sautrāntika school’s.

5. Differing Definitions of *anuśaya* (睡眠) between the Sautrāntika and Vaibhāṣika Schools

In the *AKBh* there is another controversy with the same background as the controversy about *saṃkṣipta-citta*. This controversy is about the two different interpretations of *anuśaya* between the Sautrāntika and Vaibhāṣika schools.

The seven kinds of latent afflictions (*anuśaya*) are introduced in the fifth chapter of the *AKBh* (*anuśaya-nirdeśa*). *kāmarāgānuśaya* (欲貪睡眠), “craving-dormant,” is one included among the seven. A controversy arises between the Sautrāntika and Vaibhāṣika schools concerning its meaning. The Vaibhāṣika school understands *anuśaya* as an “active *kleśa*” (*paryavasthāna*), whereas the Sautrāntika school understands *anuśaya* as a “latent *kleśa*.”

This difference of opinion between the two schools is due to whether they are following the sūtras or the śāstras. The Vaibhāṣika school’s understanding is consistent with the śāstras, but not with the sūtras. On the other hand, the Sautrāntika school’s understanding is consistent with the sūtras, but not with the śāstras. Indeed, the *AKBh* suggests that the Vaibhāṣika school interpretation (*kāmarāga evānuśayaḥ*) is inconsistent with sūtras and the Sautrāntika school interpretation (*kāmarāgasyānuśayaḥ*) is inconsistent with the śāstras. Both argue the other school is wrong due to inconsistency, the Vaibhāṣika school being inconsistent with sūtras and the Sautrāntika school being inconsistent with the śāstras.

6. The Resemblance between the Sautrāntika School and the Sarvāstivādin School of Gandhāra

Now let’s consider the two controversies about *saṃkṣipta-citta* and *anuśaya*. The former controversy occurs between the Pāścātya scholars and the Sarvāstivādin school of Kaśmīra. The latter controversy occurs between the Sautrāntika and Vaibhāṣika schools. A re-

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semblance can be found in these two controversies.

First, the cause of these controversies is the inconsistencies between the sūtras and the śāstras. Second, the Sarvāstivādin school of Kaśmīra and the Vaibhāṣika school elected to be inconsistent with the sūtras. Whereas, the Pāścātya scholars and the Sautrāntika school did the opposite; they followed the sūtras and refuted any theories inconsistent with the sūtras. Hence, the Pāścātya scholars and the Sautrāntika school likely have the same background. I consider this to be the most important point that distinguishes the Sarvāstivādin school of Gandhāra from the Sarvāstivādin school of Kaśmīra.

Therefore, we can assume that the Sautrāntika school belongs to the Sarvāstivādin school of Gandhāra. If the Sautrāntika school does indeed belong to the Sarvāstivādin school of Gandhāra, then we can establish the origin of the Sautrāntika school in the period when the *MVi* was compiled. However, this does not necessarily mean that the name “Sautrāntika” already existed in this period, merely we can see a Sautrāntika school inclination in the Sarvāstivādin school of Gandhāra. The name “Sautrāntika” first appears in the *AKBh*, and it cannot be found in Abhidharma literature before the *AKBh*. That does not mean, however, that the essence of the Sautrāntika school did not yet exist. Because there is a resemblance between the Sautrāntika school and the Sarvāstivādin school of Gandhāra, I think that the essence of what would later be labeled the Sautrāntika school already existed before the *AKBh*.

7. Conclusion

In this essay, I have proposed a relation between the Sautrāntika school and the Sarvāstivādin school of Gandhāra. Considering the definition of *saṃkṣipta-citta*, we can understand that the Sarvāstivādin school of Gandhāra regarded the sūtras as being of primary importance. Similarly, the Sautrāntika school likewise chose to follow the sūtras when there was an inconsistency between the sūtras and śāstras. This resemblance demonstrates some relationship between the two. If the Sautrāntika school is a sub-group of the Sarvāstivādin school, then they must belong to the Gandhāra school, rather than Kaśmīra school.

Accepting my proposal presented here, it can logically be applied to some preceding studies. It is not necessary to my argument that all theories of the Sautrāntika school are strictly related solely to the Yogācāra or Dārṣṭāntika schools of thought. The Yogācāra and Dārṣṭāntika schools of thought perhaps belong to the Sarvāstivādin school of Gandhāra. If

so, then the philosophy of the Sautrāntika school bears some relation to both philosophies. Whether the Sautrāntika school was established during the period when the *MVi* was compiled or during the period of the *AKBh*, the Sautrāntika school nevertheless has some relation to the Sarvāstivādin school of Gandhāra. My proposal needs further verification, but the resemblance between the Sautrāntika school and the Sarvāstivādin school of Gandhāra should not be overlooked.

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- 1) *AKVy* p.11, “*kaḥ Sautrāntika. ye sūtra-prāmāṇikā na śāstra-prāmāṇikāḥ. te Śautrāntika.*”
 - 2) *AKBh* p.146, “*sūtrapramāṇakā vayanṇa śāstrapramāṇakāḥ,*” cf. Katō, Junshō, *Etude sur les Sautrāntika* (経量部の研究), Tokyo: Shunjūsha Press, 1989, pp.87–88.
 - 3) *AKBh* p.397, “*varamśāstravirodho na sūtravirodhaḥ.*” This passage agrees with the definition of Sautrāntika by Yaśomitra. cf. Sakurabe, Hajime, and Odani, Nobuchiyo, and Honjō, Yoshifumi, *Kusharon no gentenkenkyū: chihon, jōhon* (俱舍論の原典研究 智品・定品), Tokyo: Daizō-shuppan Press, 2004, p.45, n. 43.
 - 4) *AKBh* p.396, “*saṃkṣiptaṃ middhasamprayuktaṃ.*”
 - 5) *AKVy* p.621, “*abuddhoktaṃ Abhidharma-śāstraṃ.*”

Texts

AKBh = Pradhan ed., *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* of Vasubandhu, Patna, 1967.

MVi = Dapiposhalun 大毘婆沙論: Taisho Vol.27, No.1545.

AKVy = U.Wogihara ed., *Sphuṭārthā Abhidharmakośavyākhyā*, Tokyo, 1971.

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