How Did the Indian Masters Read the *Lotus Sutra*?

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0. Introduction

The *Lotus Sutra* (*Saddharmapūṇḍarikasūtra*)¹ is one of the most popular scriptures in East Asia and many scholars have been studying on it. They discuss the complex developments of its compilation or its philosophical themes like the idea of one vehicle (*ekavāna*), but these attempts seem to be independent from the history of Indian Buddhism. So I will try to put the *Lotus Sutra* into the stream of Indian Buddhism again, comparing its citations as they appear in commentaries by later Indian masters.²

1. Commentary on the *Lotus Sutra*

There is a commentary on the *Lotus Sutra* attributed to Vasubandhu, the *Saddharmapūṇḍarikopadeśa* (妙法蓮華経婆提軌)³ in the Chinese Buddhist canon, but we have no information on it in Indian sources. Therefore I do not confirm its authority to Vasubandhu in the history of Indian Buddhism.

2. Citations and references of the *Lotus Sutra* in Indian literature

2.1. Mādhyamika literature

2.1.1. Nāgārjuna

2.1.1.1. *Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa* (大智度論)⁴

This cites the *Lotus Sutra* most frequently and the numbers of citations or references come to 23.⁵ It refers to various chapters of the sutra and considerably depends on this scripture. But this made a strange impression on us because later commentaries never refer to this text and their references are different from those of this text.

2.1.1.2. *Bodhisamābhāra* (菩提資糧論)

The author refers to the *Lotus Sutra* twice in this small text which exists only in the Chi-
nese translation. Both references are in the context on the prediction (vyākaraṇā) of the two vehicles to become a Buddha, therefore he could acknowledge it as one of the main themes of the sutra. And they come to be recognizes as the oldest references to the sutra in the Indian Buddhist literature.

2.1.1.2. Sūtrasamuccaya

Though the compiler of this anthology seems to be different from the author of the Madhyamakakārikā, it has a great influence on later Indian masters. We can see four citations from the Lotus Sutra in it, that is to say, in the theme on the utmost rareness of a Buddha’s apperance, twice on the utmost rareness of beings who are truly and resolutely intent on the Tathāgatas’ completion, and on the utmost rareness of beings who are resolutely intent on the vehicle of oneness. Especially, the last citation of this text is also referred to in later Tibetan Buddhism, so this would be the first example of the reference to the theory of one vehicle in the Lotus Sutra. Of course we must not forget the third citation on the immeasurable lifespan of the Tathāgata.

2.1.2. Bhavya: Tarkajvāla

In the fourth chapter of the Tarkajvāla, the commentary to his Madhyamakārdaya, the author cites the Lotus Sutra and Jikido Takasaki has already discussed this context and concludes 1) Bhavya admits the theory of the three vehicles of Yogācāra as the teaching of the great vehicle (mahāyāna), 2) teaches also the theory of one vehicle in the Buddha nature, 3) depends on the literature of the Yogācāra, and 4) cites the scripture in order to prove the theory of the one vehicle. Bhavya seems to acknowledge the main theme of the sutra as the theory of the one vehicle. And the citation of the famous phrase, “there is only one vehicle, not two nor three (= ekayāna phrase),” begins here in the Mādhyamika literature.

2.1.3. Avalokitavrata: Prajñāpradīpaṭikā

Though Bāviveka (or Bhavya?) does not cite the Lotus sutra in the Prajñāpradīpa, Avalokitavrata cites it in its commentary. In the commentary on the 10th verse of the 22nd chapter on the Tathāgata he refutes those who do not accept his omniscience and refers to the sutra in order to exclude his humanity because the scripture says that he had already been the Buddha long ago.
2.1.4. Candrakīrti

2.1.4.1. Madhyamakāvīvatārabhāṣya

Candrakīrti refers to the Lotus Sutra three times in his Madhyamakāvīvatārabhāṣya. In the first verse of the first chapter he cites the verse of its fourth chapter in order to explain the meaning of the word of Śrāvaka. In the 36th verse of its 12th chapter he cites the ekayāna phrase of the sutra in order to prove the one vehicle theory as truth and to negate the three vehicles theory as intended meaning and in the 38th verse he refers to the simile of a visionary castle in the sutra. Candrakīrti also seems to acknowledge the main theme of the sutra as the theory of the one vehicle. There is a sub-commentary named Madhyamakāvīvatārāṇīkā by Jayānanda and he also refers to the sutra.

2.1.4.2. Catuhṣatikaṭikā

Candrakīrti refers the Lotus Sutra also in his Catuhṣatikaṭikā again. He explains here the wisdom of the Tathāgata and says that we must acquire the supreme wisdom first because an enlightened mind as its seed does not disappear not only from Bodhisattva but also Śrāvaka and Pratyekabuddha.

2.1.6. Jñānagarbha: Anantamukhanirhāradhāraṇīkā

Jñānagarbha who is well known as the author of the Satyadvayavibhaṅga refers to the Lotus Sutra in his tantric commentary named Anantamukhanirhāradhāraṇīkā. In its last section he discusses on the prediction of Śrāvaka and refers also to the Daśadharasūtra.

2.1.7. Kamalaśīla

2.1.7.1. Madhyamakāloka

Kamalaśīla discusses the one vehicle theory and criticizes the three vehicles theory of the Yogācāra school and refers to the Lotus Sutra five times. The first two are cited in the section of the opponent. That is to say, they consider the Lotus Sutra as a sutra expressing the intended meaning on the basis of the Mahāyānasūtrālāmkāra and the prediction in the sutra as to only two special kinds of Śrāvaka. Then Kamalaśīla criticizes them and cites the ekayāna phrase of the sutra in order to assert the one vehicle theory as truth. He obviously acknowledges the sutra as having definitive meaning. Further there is a reference to the sutra also in his Prajñāpāramitāvajracchedikāṭikā.

2.1.7.2. Tattvasaṃgrahapaṇḍikā

In the commentary to the Tattvasaṃgraha of Śāntarakṣita Kamalaśīla seems to refers to
the *Lotus Sutra* without its title.\(^{16}\) He considers the Mādhyamakāvādin as a wise person of the great vehicle and cites the passage, “only the one vehicle is the great vehicle.” He admits the one vehicle theory as the ultimate teaching, as seen in his *Madhyamakāloka.*

2.1.8. Śāntideva: *Śīkṣāsamuccaya*

This is an anthology of scriptures compiled also by Śāntideva and we can see four citations in it.\(^{17}\) The first is cited for those whom Bodhisattvas consider undesirable, the second for the possibility for all beings to be enlightened and the last two for the gift of teaching the dharma. Therefore he never refers to the one vehicle theory of the sutra in this text.

2.1.9. Dipamkaraśrījñāna: *Mahāsūtrasamuccaya*

Dipamkaraśrījñāna (Atiśa) also cites the *Lotus Sutra* in his anthology, the *Mahāsūtrasamuccaya.*\(^{18}\) This citation is the same as the first reference in the *Śīkṣāsamuccaya,* but it is longer than that of Śāntideva. This means that he cites these verses not from it but from the sutra directly though he must have read the *Śīkṣāsamuccaya.* And he also never refers to the one vehicle theory of the sutra in his works.

2.1.10. 堅意：*Mahāyānāvatārasāstra* (人大乘論)

We can find eight references\(^{19}\) to the *Lotus Sutra* in the *Mahāyānāvatārasāstra.* There is no reference to the author of this work in Indian Buddhist literature.\(^{20}\) In the third reference the author refers to the meditation of the *Lotus Sutra* (法華三昧), a phrase which I can not find in Indian Buddhist literature. Further he never refers to its one vehicle theory, therefore it does not seem to have been written in India.

2.2. Yogācāra-vijñaptimātravādin Literature

2.2.1. Maitreya: *Ratnagotravibhāga*

There are not so many references to the *Lotus Sutra* in the Yogācāra-vijñaptimātravādin literatures as in the Mādhyamika literatures. We can see a context of the one vehicle theory in the 11th chapter of the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṁkāra* of Maitreya and two further references to the sutra in the *Ratnagotravibhāga* attributed to him,\(^{21}\) which seems to be a later text. The first is a reference to the simile of the visionary castle in the sutra in order to explain the identification of buddhahood and nirvāṇa. The second is a reference to its title and he classifies beings into two, those who are entered into the nirvana and those who have entered into nirvāṇa with the sūtra. Here he admits the three vehicles theory and considers the sutra as the teaching for the Bodhisattava,
2.2.2. Vasubandhu

2.2.2.1. *Mahāyānasamgrahabhaṣya*

In the last chapter of the *Mahāyānasamgraha* Asaṅga discusses the one vehicle theory with a citation from the *Mahāyānasūrāṃkārakārikā.* In its commentary Vasubandhu considers the one vehicle theory as intended meaning and refers to the *Lotus Sutra.* Therefore he considers the three vehicles theory as the ultimate meaning.

2.2.2.2. *Buddhadhātuśāstra* (仏性論)

Its authority to Vasubandhu is doubted, but we can find a reference to the *Lotus Sutra* in *Buddhadhātuśāstra.* He says that the *Lotus Sutra* and so on have the true teachings but he does not discuss its thought.

2.2.3. *Asvabhāba: Mahāyānasamgrahapanibandhana*

As the citation in the *Mahāyānasamgraha,* *Asvabhāba also refers to the Lotus Sutra* in his commentary like the references of Vasubandhu’s commentary. He classifies the single statement of the Buddha into two, namely for Śrāvakas who have become convinced of identification with the Buddha and for Bodhisattvas who receive the same prediction. Therefore he also thinks of the three vehicles theory as truth. In the 11 chapter of his commentary to the *Mahāyānasūrālāṃkāra* he refers to the *Lotus Sutra.*

2.2.4. Sthiramati: *Mahāyānasūrālāṃkāravṛttiḥāṣya*

In the 9th chapter of his commentary to the *Mahāyānasūrālāṃkāra* he refers to the *Lotus Sutra* in order to explain the merit of the sense faculties, not the context of the one vehicle nor the prediction of Śrāvaka. In the one vehicle context of the 11th chapter he criticizes its one vehicle theory on the basis of the *Mahāyānasūrālāṃkāra.* It seems to be the *Lotus Sutra* and he acknowledges it as a sutra of the intended meanings.

2.2.5. RatnakaraŚānti: *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa*

RatnakaraŚānti refers to the *Lotus sutra* as the provisional meanings in his *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* on the one hand, he explain the one vehicle theory of the sutra in his commentary on the *Sūtrasamuccaya.*

2.3. Abhisamaya Literatures

2.3.1. Ārya-Vimuktisena: *Abhisamayālāṃkāravṛtti*

It became popular in later Indian Buddhism to read the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* based of a knowledge of the *Abhisamayālāṃkāravṛtti* by Maitreya, but there seem to have been two streams, namely, the Mādhyamika reading and the Yogācāra reading. Regarding the *Lotus
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*Sutra*, the former actively cites it in the context of the one vehicle theory. Ārya-Vimuktisena explains the various aspects of the nirvana on various stages and cites the *Lotus Sutra* to explain the nirvana of Śrāvaka. But he says that these nirvanas are expressions of the intended meaning. And there is a reference to the sūtra in the *Abhisamayālaṁkāra-rakārikāvārtti* of Vimuktisena.

2.3.2. Haribhadra: *Abhisamayālaṁkāroloka*

It is well known that Haribhadra criticizes the three vehicles theory of the Yogācāravādin in his commentary to the *Abhisamayālaṁkāra*. In this context he cites the *Lotus Sutra* to prove the one vehicle theory as the truth. Therefore he obviously acknowledges the three vehicles theory as the truth by Yogācāra and reads the *Abhisamayālaṁkāra* from the standpoint of the Madhyamaka.

2.3.3. Abhāyākaragupta: *Munimatiālaṁkāra*

Abhāyākaragupta also cites the same passage of the *Lotus Sutra* as Haribhadra does. He criticizes the opponents who consider the one vehicle theory as the intended meaning and says that they do not follow the ultimate one vehicle theory of the *Lotus Sutra*.

2.3.4. Dharmamitra: *Abhisamayālaṁkāraprajñāpāramitopadesaśāstraṭikā Prasphutapada*

The above-mentioned commentaries refer to the *Lotus Sutra* in the context of the one vehicle theory or the prediction of Śrāvaka, but references in Dharmamitra’s commentary give us a different impression. There are three citations in it. He refers to the Buddha’s dharma in every aspect or teaching dharma with compassion, but not to its one vehicle theory.

Further there is a reference to the sūtra in the *Bhagavatāṁyānayānusārinīvyākhyā* of *Jagaddalanivāsin*.

3. Conclusion

In the Madhyamika literature, without the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, the *Lotus Sutra* is cited in the context of the one vehicle theory or the prediction of Śrāvakas and these references develop into the criticism of the three vehicles theory of the Yogācāra. In the Yogācāra literature the one vehicle theory in the *Lotus Sutra* is also referred to, but it is as intended meaning, not as the ultimate meaning. Therefore they do not seem to acknowledge the *Lotus Sutra* as an important scripture. In the Abhisamaya literature Haribhadra criticizes the three
vehicles theory as truth by the Yogācāra on the one hand, but Dharma
mitra never refers to the one vehicle theory on the other hand. Therefore we can see different readings of the
sutra in the Abhīṣamāya literature.

2) See also Kaie Mochizuki (望月海智), “Adoption of Saddharma-\textit{parrikasutra} in Mādhya-
mika Literature (中観派文献における法華経の受容),” in Ryugen Taga (田賢龍彦) ed., \textit{The
Lotus Sutra: its Adoption and Evolution} (法華経の受容と展開), 1993, Kyoto, pp.539–569.
3) T. Nos. 1519, 1520.
5) T. No. 1509, vol. 25, 1) p. 109b22–25 (chap. 11); 2) p. 127a1–9 (chap. 26); 3) p. 130c6–9
(chap. 22); 4) p. 249b29–c4 (chap. 15); 5) p. 280a18–21 (chap. 1), 6) p. 299b14–28 (chap.
7); 7) p. 300b8–13 (chap. 11), 8) p. 303b21–c7 (chap. 14); 9) p. 308a4–7 (title); 10) p.
339a17–22 (chap. 18); 11) p. 339c15–18 (chap. 6); 12) p. 394b16–20 (title); 13) p. 420b20–
26 (chap. 1); 14) p. 466b5–6 (title); 15) p. 619b3–14 (chap. 2); 16) p. 648c2–4 (chap. 3); 17)
p. 682b5–11 (chap. 22); 18) p. 712b6–21 (chap. 2); 19) p. 713b15–c2 (chap. 2); 20) p.
713c24–714a2 (chap. 1); 21) p. 714a9–15 (chap. 7); 22) p. 754b13–18 (title); 23) p. 756b6–
10 (title). See also Keisō Tsukamoto (塚本清祥), “\textit{The Daichidoron and the Lotus Sutra} (大
智度論と法華経),” in Yukio Sakamoto (坂本幸男) ed., \textit{The Lotus Sutra and Chinese Bud-
dhism} (法華経の中国展開), Kyoto, 1972, pp. 611–660.
6) Chin. T. No. 1660, 1) p. 528b27–c5; 2) p. 533b2–5. See also Yuukihiro Okada (岡田行弘),
“Nāgājuna and the Saddharma-\textit{parrikasutra} (ナーガールジュナと「法華経」),” \textit{Śūnyatā
and Reality: Volume in Memory of Professor Ejima Yasunori} (江島恵教博士追悼論集: 空と実
在), Tokyo, 2000, pp. 369–382.
7) Bhikkhu Pāsādika, Nāgājuna’s \textit{Śūtrasamuccaya}: A Critical Edition of the \textit{mDo kun las bhus
ed., p. 319); 2) p. 121 (Kern ed., p. 133); 3) p. 121 (Kern ed., p. 318); 4) p. 126 (Kern ed.,
475–499.
8) D. No. 3856, 173b2–6 (Kern ed., p. 46). See also Jikido Takasaki (高崎直道), “Contro-
versies over the Tathāgatagarbha Theory: From Bhāvaviveka’s Auto-commentary on his \textit{Madhya-
manda-hṛdaya-kārikā},” \textit{Collected Works of Jikido Takasaki 6: The Tathāgatagarbha or Buddha
Nature Theory} (高崎直道著作集 6 如来蔵思想・仏性論 I), Tokyo, 2010, pp. 505–541 and
Honshu Nakai (中井本秀), “Bhāvaviveka’s View on the Prediction of Śrāvakas’ Attaining

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Buddhahood in Tarkajvāla (『法華経』「声聞授記」の受容と変容),” in Taga, op. cit., pp. 519–537.
9) D. No. 3859, 193a4–6 (Kern ed., p. 323).
11) D. No. 3870, 1) 6b7 (title); 2) 354a2 (Kern ed., p. 65).
12) D. No. 3865, 221b5–222a1.
15) D. No. 3817, 226a5 (title).
16) D. No. 4267, 103b7–104a1.
20) Sugro considers him as a Mādhyamika master because the author says Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva and Rāhu labhadra as the great masters and cites their texts.
26) D. No. 4029, 1) 71a4–5 (title); 2) 108b3–4 (Kern, p. 46).
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29) D. No. 4079, 135b7 (title).
32) D. No. 3788, 13a4 (title).
35) D. No. 3796, 1) 21a5–b2 (chap. 20); 2) 36b6–7; 3) 89b5–7.
36) D. No. 3811, 26b3 (title).

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