Who is *pudgalavādin*?: A Study on *Mahāyānasūtrālāṃkāra* XVIII 92–95 and its Bhāṣya

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0. Introduction

The MSABh (*Mahāyānasūtrālāṃkārabhāṣya*) attributed to Vasubandhu (ca.400–480) is one of the most important treatises of the Yogācāra tradition. Modern scholars have estimated that the eighteenth chapter (i.e., the *Bodhipaksādhikarana*) of the MSABh was composed under the strong influence of the seventeenth chapter (i.e., the *Bodhipaksyapaṭalā*) of the BBh (*Bodhisattvabhaṅgū*). Since these two texts largely share their teachings, and since, according to Odani [1984: 43–47], the BBh is supposed to have been composed earlier than the MSABh, the exceptions are the theories of *pudgalanairātmya* and *kṣaṇabhaṅga*, for they appear not in the BBh XVII but solely in the last part of MSABh XVIII. Hence, Iwamoto [1997] [2000] has assumed that these theories were later added to MSABh XVIII. She even characterizes the theory of *pudgalanairātmya* in the MSABh as “Abhidharmic.” Concerning the relationship between the AKBh and the YBh, in turn, Kritzer [2005] has revealed a resemblance between the teachings of AKBh I–VIII and the YBh, suggesting the possibility that the AKBh imported many discussions from the YBh. Based on these preceding studies, the present paper aims at clarifying whom exactly the *pudgalavādin* refers to in the MSABh *ad MSA* XVIII 92–95. For this purpose, I would like to conduct a careful comparison of the three texts, viz., MSABh XVIII, AKBh IX and the relevant part of the YBh, with regard to their criticism of *pudgalavāda* or *ātmavāda*.

1. Structure of the MSABh *ad MSA* XVIII 92–95

According to Sthiramati’s commentary (SAVBh) on the MSABh, the discussion of *pudgalanairātmya* appearing in the MSABh *ad MSA* XVIII 92–103 is divided into two parts: the MSABh *ad MSA* XVIII 92–95 is to refute a *pudgalavādin*, and the MSABh *ad MSA*...
VIII 96–103 is to refute an ātmanavādin. The MSABh ad MSA XVIII 92–95 is, Sthiramati says, further divided into two parts: an investigation of the relation between pudgala and skandhas (the MSABh XVIII 92–93) and its analogy with the relation between fire and fuel (the MSABh ad MSA XVIII 94–95). It is, however, unclear what group of thinkers the MSABh calls pudgalavādin. The SAVBh explains it as sam bi ti pa dag. Eltchinger [2010: 314; cf., Duelinger [2009:289]] identifies this sam bi ti pa dag as Sāmmitiyas. Although this identification is acceptable, we should be careful about the appellation Sāmmitiyas. There may be two possibilities: 1) It is supposed to have been used for pudgalavādin in general, or 2) for the Sāmmitiya school. Naitō [1984:140], for instance, has shown that sāmmitiya is the generic term for all of pudgalavādins in later writings than the MSABh and the AKBh. Accordingly, it may also be possible that Sthiramati calls a group of pudgalavādins sam bi ti pa dag in his SAVBh, which is not restricted to the Sāmmitiya school. Apart from Sthiramati’s interpretation, our central question now is who exactly the MSABh refers to by “pudgalavādins”?

The aforementioned theoretical resemblance between the MSABh ad MSA XVIII 92–103 and AKBh IX might provide a clue for solving this question. Okada and Kishi [2008: 61–103] have attempted to identify citations from old sūtras in the MSABh ad MSA XVIII 92–103. One of remarkable results is that the authors of the MSABh, the AKBh as well as according to Miyashita [1986:17], the YBh (the Mauli Bhūmi) all quote the same passage from the Paramārthaśūnyatāsūtra of the SĀ (Samyuktāgama). This strongly suggests the close relation among these three texts. As Murakami [1993:140] has pointed out, there are obvious textual similarities between the MSABh ad MSA XVIII 92–95 and AKBh IX in the way of refuting pudgalavāda. However, for clarifying our question, I think more accurate examination of their contexts necessary. In the following, I would like to analyze the context of the MSABh ad MSA XVIII 92–95 and compare it with that of AKBh IX where the pudgalavāda of Vatsiputriyas is refuted as well as with that of the YBh where the refutation of ātmanavāda appears.

2. Comparative analyses

2.1. Fundamental position

The fundamental position of the author of the MSABh is stated in the following discussion:
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[Pudgalavādin:] Should one say that pudgala exists, [or] should one [rather] say that it does not exist? [The MSA:] answers: The pudgala must be said to exist as a [mere] designation (prajñā-aptastyāti), but not as a real substance (dravyatas) [MSA 18.92ab]. And because one can say [with equal legitimacy] that [the pudgala] exists as a [mere] designation [and] that it does not exist as a [real] substance. (MSABh ad MSA XVIII 92ab; cf., tr. Eltschinger [2010: 307, 6–308, 4])

In short, the MSABh explains the position of MSA XVIII 92ab that pudgala is real by way of conception, but it is not real substantially. We can see the same statement in both AKBh IX 461, 4f, and YBh 136, 9f. All these three texts share the view that pudgala can be said to exist as a mere designation.

2.2. Relationship between pudgala and skandhas

Thereafter, commenting on MSA XVIII 93, the MSABh starts to analyze the relationship between pudgala and skandhas.

[The pudgalavādin:] But [according to you,] should one say that the pudgala is one [and the same] with or rather distinct (anyā) from the [real] thing (vastu) named “corporeity” etc., with regard to which the [verbal] designation “pudgala” [takes place]? [The MSA] answers: This [pudgala] can be said to be neither one [and the same] with nor distinct from the [basis of its designation, i.e., from the five skandhas] [MSA 18. 93ab].

[The pudgalavādin:] For which reason? [Answer:] Because of the two faults [that would ensue] [MSA 18. 93b]. [The pudgalavādin:] Because of which two faults? [Answer:] Because [if the skandhas and the pudgala were one and the same,] the skandhas would be (prasānga) the self, and [if the skandhas and the pudgala were different,] the [pudgala] would be a [real] substance. [MSA 18. 93cd]. For if [the skandhas and the pudgala] are one [and the same], it follows that the skandhas are the self, and that the pudgala is a [real] substance. But if [the skandhas and the pudgala] are distinct [., then it follows that] the pudgala exists as a [real] substance, For [it is] in this way, since the pudgala exists as a [mere] designation, [that] one is justified [in saying] that it cannot be said [to be either one and the same with or distinct from the skandhas]; [and] therefore, it is established as a point [to be left] unanswered (avyākṛtavastu). (MSABh ad MSA XVIII 93; cf., tr. Eltschinger [2010: 311, 3–312, 10])

In case that pudgala can be said to be real by way of conception, the question arises: Does the pudgala is identical with or distinct from five skandhas? The MSABh ad MSA XVIII 93 states that the pudgala is neither identical nor distinct from five skandhas. It is because, if the pudgala can be said to be either identical with or distinct from five skandhas, the pudgala must be real and this would contradict the fundamental position that the pudgala can be said to be real only by way of conception. We can see the same argument
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in AKBh IX, which runs as follows:

The *pudgalavādins* assert that a *pudgala* exists. [To determine whether or not their assertion conforms to the Buddha's teachings, we must first consider whether in their view a person is substantially real or is real by way of a conception.

If the *pudgala* is a distinct entity like form and other such things, it is substantially real; but if [by analysis] it is [shown to be] a collection [of substances], like a milk and other such things, it is real by way of a conception. Consequently, if the *pudgala* is substantially real, it must be said that it is other than the *skandhas* in the way each of them is other than the others, since it will possess a different essence [than is possessed by any of the *skandhas*] if it is other than the *skandhas*, it must be either causally conditioned or causally unconditioned. If it is other than the *skandhas* and is causally conditioned, [because we cannot understand it, the *pudgalavādins*] should explain its causes. Also, if he is [other than the *skandhas* and is] causally unconditioned, the false theory [of *ātman*] espoused by the Tirthikas is held and the *pudgala* does not function as a person. Therefore, since the *pudgalavādins* cannot say that *pudgala* is other than the *skandhas*, they cannot say that it is substantially real. If it is real by way of a conception, [it is the collection of *skandhas*, and] this is the theory [of *ātman*] found in the Buddha's sūtras and is held by us. [But the *pudgalavādins* assert that] a person is neither substantially real nor real by way of conception. (AKBh IX 461, 14–19; cf., tr. Duelinger [2009: 289, 10–290, 2])

Thus, the AKBh is arguing the relationship between *pudgala* and *skandhas* in the similar manner as the MSABh. Adding to this, AKBh IX continues to discuss the case that *pudgala* is distinct from five *skandhas*: Such a *pudgala* must be either conditioned or unconditioned, but both possibilities are eliminated, since they are untenable and false. The *pudgalavādins* or the Vātsiputriyas here in the AKBh also approve that *pudgala* can be said to be neither identical with nor distinct from five *skandhas*, but they also insist that *pudgala* is neither substantially real nor real by way of conception.

With regard to the relationship between *pudgala* and *skandhas*, I would further like to cite the following refutation of *ātmavāda* from the YBh:

He (i.e., the *ātmavādin*) should explain the followings. Do you assert that a designation of person (*sattvaprajñāpiti*) [refers to] 1) *skandhas* themselves, or 2) something with *skandhas*, or 3) something other than *skandhas*, or 4) something not belonging to *skandhas*?

1) If [the designation of a person refers to] *skandhas* themselves, there would be an *ātman* which is not different from *skandhas* [and] substantially lasting. Therefore, this is incorrect.

2) If [the designation of a person refers to something] with *skandhas*, is [such] a person impermanent or permanent? (....)

3) If [the designation of a person refers to something] other than *skandhas*, due to it, a person would be unconditioned. Therefore, this is incorrect.
4) If [the designation of a person refers to something] not belonging to skandhas, due to it, an ātman unconnected with a body would be without pollution at all times. Therefore, this is incorrect, (YBh 132, 13–133, 3)

Comparing the aforesaid passages from the MSABh, the AKBh and the YBh, one could say that the authors shares the idea that pudgala or ātman can be said to be neither identical with nor distinct from five skandhas. They consider that if pudgala or ātman can be said to be either identical or distinct from five skandhas, it must be real. This is the traditional Buddhist doctrine of nairāmya. Considering the historical orders of these three texts, one may assume that this doctrine handed down from the YBh to the MSABh and the AKBh.

3. Fire and fuel analogy

In the MSABh ad MSA XVIII 95, the author criticizes the people who employ the analogy of fire and fuel to explain the relationship between pudgala and skandhas. In AKBh IX, the author uses the same argument to refute the Vātsīputriya, whereas it does not occur in the YBh. Let us first see the MSABh:

If [ in the absence of any reason, ] it were merely due to an example that they accepted that the pudgala cannot be said [ to be either one and the same with or distinct from the skandhas, stating: ] “As fire can be said to be neither distinct from nor the same as the fuel (indhana),” One should reply to them as follows: Because of [ their distinct ] characteristics, because of [ that which is ] observed in the [ ordinary ] world and because of the [ authoritative ] treatises [ that speak to the contrary ], it is not correct [ to affirm ] that fuel and fire cannot be said [ MSA 18.95ac ] to be either one [ and the same ] or distinct [ from one another ]. For what we call “fire” is [ nothing but ] the element fire (tejodhātu), whereas the fuel [ consists of ] the remaining [ three ] elements [ i.e., earth, water and wind ] , Now since their characteristics are distinct, fire is simply other than fuel. (MSABh ad MSA XVIII 95; cf., tr. Eltschinger [2010: 314, 10–315, 8])

Compare what the AKBh says:

If a burning material is both fire and fuel, fuel will be the fire. Due to it, that in reliance upon which fire is conceived will be the fire itself. Fuel is comprised of three elements [ of earth, air and water ]. Moreover, since the skandhas themselves would also be the pudgala, it follows that they could not avoid the theory that a pudgala is not other than his skandhas. (....) Therefore, they have not shown that a pudgala is conceived in reliance upon the skandhas in the way [ in which they believe ] that fire is conceived in reliance upon fuel. (AKBh IX 462, 26–463, 1; cf., tr. Duelinger [2009: 292, 18–28])

Here the opponent Vātsīputriya asserts that pudgala can be said to be neither one and the

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same with nor distinct from five skandhas like fire and fuel, and that pudgala can be said to be neither real substance nor real by way of conception. Pointing out inconsistencies in what the opponent says, the author of the AKBh criticizes his opponent in the same manner as the author of the MSABh does. They share the argument that fire is the element fire and fuel is comprised of three elements (earth, air and water).

4. Concluding remarks

Based on the careful comparison of the three texts above, we can gain a clearer comprehension of the pudgalavādin in MSABh XVIII. The points of my discussion are to be summarized as follows: 1) The MSABh ad MSA XVIII 92–93 shares the theory of nairātmya and the refutation of pudgalavāda or ātmavāda with the YBh. It is presumable that the MSABh took over the idea from the YBh. 2) The MSABh ad MSA XVIII 92–95 also shares the way of refuting pudgala with AKBh IX. 3) In both the MSABh and the AKBh, the appellation pudgalavādin refers to the opponent who demonstrates the relation between pudgala and skandhas by using the example of fire and fuel. Therefore, I assume that the pudgalavādin in the MSABh ad MSA XVIII 92–95 can be identified with the Vātsiputriya, who is criticized as pudgalavādin in AKBh IX.

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**Texts**

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<td>SAVBh</td>
<td>Sūtraśāstra (Sthiramati) (Tib): D.No.4034, P.No.5531.</td>
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**Bibliography**


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(Key words) Mahāyānasūtrālāṃkāra (bhāṣya), Abhidharmakośa (bhāṣya), pudgala, ātman, nairatmya

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