Criticism of Entity Theory and the Acceptance of ālayavijñāna: The Investigation of the Sautrāntika for Vasubandhu

HORIUCHI Toshio

1. Introduction

The study of the Sautrāntika has recently made great advances, mainly because of the discovery of a relationship between the Abhidharmakosabhāṣya (AKBh) and the Yogācārabhūmi (YBh). In this regard, some scholars argue that Vasubandhu was already a Yogācāra when he wrote the AKBh. Although it is true that from this point of view the study of the Sautrāntika is of great importance, I cannot agree with this opinion when one considers the following two situations. First, Vasubandhu defines the Mahayana as a teaching that possesses seven greatnesses (*saptavidha-mahattva) in the Vyākhyaṇyuktī (VyY), a text written after the AKBh by the same author. These seven are, in short, summarized as the interpretation of dharma and buddha. With regard to buddha, he declares that Śākyamuni is a manifestation. With regard to dharma, on the other hand, he emphasizes the ineffableness of all dharmas. These are Mahayana doctrines that he himself clearly articulates. Second, the interpretation of dharma on the basis of the tenets of the Mahayana, that is, the interpretation that all dharmas are ineffable, can be regarded as an innate Yogācāra doctrine based on the description by Sāgaramegha. In his Yogācārabhūmi-ivyākhyā, Sāgaramegha describes the position of Yogācāra in the history of Buddhist thought as follows. After the Buddha’s nirvana, many of the Buddhist sects adhered to the view of existence. Then, Nāgārjuna countered this by expounding the teaching of emptiness. However, some of his followers misunderstood this teaching, adhered to emptiness, and fell into nihilism or the view of non-existence. Therefore, Maitreya / Asaṅga taught the YBh. Such is the gist of his account. The key terms of the doctrine are “not existent, not non-existent” and ineffableness, which are assumed to have been first clearly propounded in the “Tattvapātala” of the Bodhisattvabhūmi. The point is, things do not exist as expressed (namely, are not existent); however, they are not non-existent in every way. Dharmas of ineffable nature exist,
or rather, all dharmas are ineffable. This emphasis on the ineffableness of all dharmas can be regarded as one of the consistent or penetrating Mahayana-Yogācāra doctrines since it is found not only in several layers of the YBh, starting from the Bodhisattvabhūmi, but also in Asaṅga’s Mahāyānasamgraha and Vasubandhu’s VyY and Vīṃśikā (Vś).³

Turning back to the relationship between the AKBh and YBh, as far as I can see, their corresponding passages do not contain these two doctrines that Vasubandhu himself defines as the teachings of the Mahayana. Neither is it related to the penetrating Yogācāra doctrine of the ineffableness of all dharmas, which is also regarded as distinctive of Vasubandhu’s thought in that it is found in both the VyY and Vś. Thus, what one can safely conclude is that Vasubandhu was aware of the existence of the YBh when he wrote the AKBh and borrowed some ideas from it.

However, it is also true that a development of ideas is found in the trajectory of Vasubandhu’s thought and Sautrāntika theories whose relationship with the YBh has been revealed by previous studies play important roles. One of the most important terms among them is, as is well-known, samtatiparīṇāmavīśeṣa, which is found in the AKBh, Karma-siddhi (KS), and Pratityasamutpādavyākhyā (PSVy) and finally developed into the term vijñānaparīṇāma in the same author’s Vś and Trimśikā. Another theory, although it can be traced back to the “Dārṣṭāntika” in the Mahāvibhāṣā, is criticism of the entity (dravya) theory of the Sarvāstivāda.

In this paper, I would like to first point out that one of the most important or at least most frequently mentioned Sautrāntika theories in the AKBh is criticism of the entity theory of the Sarvāstivāda. Then, I shall argue that this criticism, especially that of the existence of jīvitendriya (life faculty) and nikāyasabhāgatā (homogeneous character) as entities, became one of the stepping stones whereby Vasubandhu came to accept ālayavijñāna in his later works.

2. The Sautrāntika for Vasubandhu in the AKBh

Since there remains no text that summarizes Sautrāntika doctrine by Sautrāntikas themselves, one must rely heavily on what later commentators or opponents such as Samghabhadrā say. However, there are two problems. First, their opinions cannot always be taken at face value since it is sometimes the case that not only in later commentaries on the AKBh but also in commentaries on the KS and Vś the opinions of the commentators differ:
Criticism of Entity Theory and the Acceptance of ālayavijñāna (T. Horie Chi) (147)

Theories that some attribute to the Sautrāntika are attributed to the Abhidhammika, etc., by others. Therefore, it is questionable how much of what they say reflects the actual state of the Sautrāntika (if there was any such thing). Second, I have reservations about the usefulness of relying heavily on the attributions of commentators or opponents when investigating the meaning of the Sautrāntika for Vasubandhu.

Thus, one of the safer methods for investigating the position of the Sautrāntika for Vasubandhu would seem to be to confine oneself to materials that he himself declares to be of the Sautrāntika.

According to Katō 1989, the Sautrāntika theories in this sense in the AKBh number seventeen. They are as follows:

Criticism of the Sarvāstivāda theories that 1. prthagjanatva, 2. four characteristics of conditioned forces, 3. asamskṛta, 4. samsthāna or form, 5. kāyavijñāpti, 6. avijñāpti, 7. samvara, and 8. past and future are entities (dravya). 9. Interpretation of the term kāmarāga. 10. The problem of the maintenance of the mental continuum in the immaterial world (I will pick up the tenth argument in section 3; 9 and 10 are also related to criticism of the entity theory). 11. How visual consciousness arises. 12. The Buddha's knowledge about the future dharma. 13. The reason that some gods have different images. 14. Interpretation of dependent origination. 15. Interpretation of nutriment of volition.4) 16. The state when one obtains the avijñāpti of samvara and asamvara. 17. Fall from arhatship.

As can be seen in the above list, as many as about 10 of the seventeen (or sixteen) Sautrāntika theories are criticisms of the entity theory of the Sarvāstivāda.

Further, the importance of this criticism in the AKBh is also attested by the fact that Vasubandhu himself mentions this when he refers to his AKBh in his later PSVY.

PSVY (Muroji ed.), 100: Forces not associated with the mind (cittaviprayukta-samskāra) are not entities (dravya). They are just names for another state [of existing elements] ... As for the way in which these do not exist as entities, you should understand it from [the description in] the Abhidharmakośa.

In the following sections, I would like to show that this Sautrāntika doctrine of criticism of entity theory foreshadows Vasubandhu's introduction of ālayavijñāna in his later works.

3. Criticism of entity theory and the introduction of ālayavijñāna

In this section, I would like to take a look at the function of jīvitendriya (life force) and
nikāyasabhāgatā (homogeneous character), members of the cittavprayukta-samskāras (forces not associated with the mind), as described in the AKBh.

These two dharmas, life force and homogeneous character, are discussed in detail along with other members of the forces not associated with the mind in the second chapter of the AKBh. They are further discussed in the first part of the third chapter (AKBh [Pradhan ed.], 112). The argument is, in short, as follows.

The Ābhidharmikas (Sarvāstivāda) state: in the kāma- and rūpa-dhātu (world), mind and mental states are supported by rūpa (form / visible matter). Although there is no rūpa in the ārūpya-dhātu (immaterial world), mind and mental states have life force and homogeneous character as their basis since, being arisen from special absorption (samāpatti), they have strong power. Further, life force and homogeneous character support each other.

The Sautrāntikas criticize: if that is so, since mind and mental states themselves are also arisen from special absorption in the immaterial world, they are strong enough to support each other. Therefore, there is no need of another basis such as life force or homogeneous character.

As previous studies have pointed out, this argument by the Sarvāstivāda can, of course, be traced back to the Mahāvibhāṣā (T27.137a). It states that in the immaterial world, where there is no rūpa, the mental continuum, etc., exist with their bases in just the same manner as in the kāma- and rūpa-dhātu, and in the kāma- and rūpa-dhātu the mental continuum, etc., are supported by rūpa too.5) In the immaterial world, on the other hand, the basis of the mental continuum, etc., is merely forces not associated with the mind, such as life force, homogeneous character, and attainment (*prāpti).

In this way, the Ābhidharmikas assume the existence of the support for mind and mental states in the immaterial world (ārūpya-dhātu), whereas the Sautrāntikas do not admit its existence. However, if one further investigates the state of existence in the immaterial world, this Sautrāntika position turns out to be illogical. And that illogicality is solved by the introduction of ālayavijñāna.6)

4. Proof of the existence of ālayavijñāna

The KS proves the existence of ālayavijñāna by pointing out four illogicalities that arise if one does not admit its existence. In the third and fourth arguments, the KS points out the illogicality that occurs in the maintenance of the mental continuum in the immaterial
world.

KS (Muroji ed.), 41 (19b (iv)): When non-returners in the summit of existence who try to terminate impurity arouse the pure mind that belongs to the sphere of nothingness, what is the body that is another entity by the existence of which it is said that they do not die from this world? There is no other entity such as homogeneous character or life force at all. They are designations for the mere similarity and continuing force of aggregates of retribution.\(^7\) There is no other entity such as similarity or continuing force.

This text also points out that there is the problem of the existence of gati, realms of rebirth, if one does not admit the existence of ālayavijñāna (KS, 41.19b (iii)).

The reason that Vasubandhu had to deny the existence of homogeneous character and life force as entities immediately after this argument seems to be that if one admits them as entities, this illogicality will not occur. It is the KS, which does not admit their existence as entities, that would face this illogicality. In this sense, the negation of the Sarvāstivāda entity theory is closely related to the introduction of ālayavijñāna.\(^8\)

5. Sautrāntika in the KS

Vasubandhu refers to the Sautrāntika only once again in a text later than the AKBh. In the KS, he supports the argument by "some Sautrāntikas" that asserts that ālayavijñāna exists even in the absorption of cessation (nirodhasamāpatti) (KS, 37 (18)). The Sautrāntika to which Vasubandhu himself refers is thus associated with the introduction of ālayavijñāna in the KS. In the AKBh, on the other hand, many of the Sautrāntika theories were negations of entity theory. On the basis of the above, then, I would like to point to the Sautrāntika as a factor in Vasubandhu's close connections with the introduction of ālayavijñāna. It may also be possible to assume that he had in mind the existence of ālayavijñāna when he denied the existence of jīvitendriya and nīkāyasabhāgata in the AKBh.

6. Later Abhidharma texts

In order to reinforce the point that the criticism of jīvitendriya and nīkāyasabhāgata was closely related to the introduction of ālayavijñāna, I would like to take a look at the proof of existence of these two dharmas in later Abhidharma texts. The point is that the argument that the later Sarvāstivāda uses in order to prove the existence of these two as entities is similar to that which the Yogācāras or Sautrāntikas used in order to prove the existence of
(150) Criticism of Entity Theory and the Acceptance of ālayavijñāna (T. HORIUCHI)

ālayavijñāna.

Saṃghabhadra’s Nyāyānusāra (T29.458c) cites and criticizes the above Sautrāntika position (section 2 of this paper), namely, the negation of the two dharmas. It states: when one who is born in the immaterial world (*ārūpya-dhātu) arouses the mind of another stage (i.e., of a lower stage) or pure (*anāsrava) [mind], if there is no dharma at all that becomes a basis for the mental continuum, to what stage does this one belong?

The Abhidharmadīpa, on the other hand, argues as follows:

AD (Jaini ed.), 89: The jīvitendriya that is the material cause of denominating realms of rebirth (*gati) exists as an entity. Since, otherwise, how can one assume that which arose as maturation by which existence this one will not die from the realm of rebirth (i.e., ārūpya-dhātu).

We find a similar argument in the Abhidharmāvatāra9) too.

Since these points can, as far as I can see, not be found in earlier Abhidharma texts, one may even speculate that they borrowed this argument from those who tried to prove the existence of ālayavijñāna.

7. Conclusion

In this paper I have pointed out the close relationship of the Sautrāntika for Vasubandhu in the AKBh to the introduction of ālayavijñāna by pointing out that the negation of the Sarvāstivāda entity theory, which is the most frequently mentioned Sautrāntika position in the AKBh, especially that of jīvitendriya (life force) and nikāyasabhāgataḥ (homogeneous character), requires the existence of ālayavijñāna since they perform a similar function.

<Notes>

1 ) For details, see Kritzer 2005.
2 ) These points are not discussed in detail here since I have dealt with them in Horiuchi 2009. For reasons of space, reference should be made to this earlier work for the abbreviations and a detailed bibliography of the present paper.
3 ) According to Kanō 2008: 345, “Vimśikā seems to be the original” title of Vasubandhu’s twenty verses.
4 ) I am skeptical about counting this as a Sautrāntika theory since although the Sanskrit text and Xuanzang’s Chinese translation have “sautrāntika” here, it is missing in Zhendi, Tib. (AKBh (t), P Gu 162b3f., D Ku 141a5f.), and commentaries such as the Abhidharmakośavyākhyā (Wogiwara ed., 318.4), Laksanānusārinī (P Ju 380b4f.), and Tattvārtha (P Tho 91a1f.).
5 ) They are also supported by forces not associated with the mind.

— 1224 —
6) Vasubandhu negates the Sarvāstivāda definition of these two dharmas, Miyashita 2002 points out that Sthiramati, having seen that this position is criticized by Samghabhadra in connection with the problem of the maintenance of the mind and mental states in the immaterial world, introduced ālayavijnāna in order to defend Vasubandhu.

7) *āvedha. Compared to the shooting of an arrow.

8) This point has already been made in Muroji 1986 and Schmithausen 1987. The latter (249–250, n. 36) states: “The arguments are, of course, valid only on the assumption that a metaphysical ātman or pudgala and hypostatized entities like the jīvītendriya and the nikāyasabhāgata of the Vaibhāṣikas do not exist.”

In this paper, I have tried to take a further look at the argument about these two dharmas in Abhidharma texts, show the importance of criticism of entity theory in the Sautrāntika theories as found in the AKBh, and trace a connection between the Sautrāntika position in the AKBh and the introduction of ālayavijnāna.

9) T No. 1554, D No. 4097 (Nyu 318b–319a), P No. 5599 (Thu 412a).

〈Bibliography〉

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(Research fellow, The University of Tokyo, Ph.D.)