A Background of One Sautrāntika’s Theory in the *Abhidharmakośa*

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1. The Aim of This Essay

The aim of this essay is to consider a background of one Sautrāntika theory in the *Abhidharmakośa* (AKBh). I shall conclude that the background of this problem is related to the Gandhara branch of the Sarvāstivādin sect in this essay. Until now, the Sautrāntika has been discussed in the relation to the Yogācāra or the Dārśāntika but not enough been discussed in relation to the Gandhara branch. However, I am convinced that the Gandhara branch has a relationship to the Sautrāntika.

2. A Controversy about *asamvara* (不律儀) between the Vaibhāṣika and the Sautrāntika

In the AKBh, the controversy about the *asamvara* (the unrestrained precepts) occurs between the Vaibhāṣika and the Sautrāntika as both have a different understanding of it. There are the two points of this controversy. One occurs from the question; “which is the unrestrained person, unrestrained with respect to all beings,” the other occurs in the question; “which is the unrestrained person, unrestrained with respect to all the infractions (*sarvāṅga*)” 1 The Vaibhāṣika answer that the unrestrained person is unrestrained with respect to all beings and all the infractions. But the Sautrāntika answer is that the unrestrained person is not necessarily unrestrained with respect to all beings and all the infractions. The AKBh explains the difference between both answers using an example of a sheep-killer. That is as follows,

The Vaibhāṣika insist a sheep-killer is a person killing sheep for his livelihood, and has an intention to kill with respect to all beings because he will kill all beings reborn as sheep. Furthermore they insist because the sheep-killer destroyed his good intention when he became a sheep-killer, he is unrestrained with respect to all the infractions.
However, the Sautrāntika criticize these arguments. They insist the sheep-killer does not necessarily have an intention to kill with respect to all beings because at that time he does not have an intention to kill his family. According to the insistence of the Sautrāntika, lacking an intention to kill all beings, he is not unrestrained with respect to all beings. Moreover, the Sautrāntika insist that the sheep-killer who is unable to speak may be content to have sex only with his wife, does not steal, and is not unrestrained with respect to the infractions.

In the AKBh, both positions never come to a resolution. I note the contents of those arguments as follows:

- The Vaibhāṣika
  - The unrestrained person is unrestrained with respect to all beings and all the infractions.
  - They do not accept the unrestrained person lacking any infractions.

- The Sautrāntika
  - The unrestrained person is not necessarily unrestrained with respect to all beings and all the infractions.
  - They accept the unrestrained person lacking some infractions.
  - They use the parable of the sheep-killer unable to speak in order to proof above insistences.

3. The Discussion about asaṃvara in the Mahāvibhāṣā

In the Mahāvibhāṣā (MVī, Da pi posha lun 大毘婆沙論), there is a discussion about the unrestrained precepts (Taisho, vol.27, 608b20–27). This discussion is composed of the following one question and two answers.

Question:

Don’t all types of the unrestrained possess all actions which belong to the unrestrained as if some types of the restrained precept (samvara) didn’t possess all actions which belong to the restrained?

Answer 1:

The scholars in Gandhara say “The [person of] unrestrained karma does not necessarily possess [all unrestrained] precepts. A person who was born in a family that carry out unrestrained actions for their livelihood (種種不律儀家) is born unable to speak. This person possesses [the ability to make] the four unrestrained actions by the body, but does not possess [the ability to make] the
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three unrestrained acts by talking because this person is unable to speak.”

Answer 2:
The scholars in Kashmir say “All types of [people with] the unrestrained [karma] absolutely posses [all unrestrained] precepts. All types of these precepts of restraint are accepted in stages so that some types of the restrained precept [of believers and priests] don’t possess all restraint precepts. But all types of unrestrained precepts are not so. Because [people] easily accept all unrestrained precepts at the same time [they absolutely possess all unrestrained actions].”

In this discussion, we can identify Answer 1 with the Sautrāntika theory and Answer 2 with the Vaibhāṣika theory in the AKBh. In Answer 1, the scholars in Gandhara use the same example as the AKBh. Moreover, they accept the unrestrained person lacking the some infractions. It means that a sheep-killer is unrestrained because he exactly possesses an infraction which is taking of life, but he possesses only one infraction and does not possess the others if he is unable to speak, is content to have sex only with his wife, or does not steal. The sheep-killer is unrestrained owing to possessing one infraction and lacks other infractions. On the other hand, the scholars in Kashmir do not accept this understanding. They insist the unrestrained person absolutely possesses all infractions. Although a sheep-killer only kills a sheep, he possesses all infractions. Because he destroyed his good mind owing to killing a sheep, he possesses all infractions even though he does not actually tell a lie, steal. I note the contents of both arguments as follows:

- The scholars in Gandhara
  - They accept the unrestrained person lacking some infractions.
  - They use the parable of the sheep-killer unable to speak in order to proof above insistences.

- The scholars in Kashmir
  - The unrestrained person is unrestrained with all the infractions,
  - They do not accept the unrestrained person lacking any infractions.

The relationship between the scholars in Gandhara and the scholars in Kashmir in the MVi is the same as the relationship between the Sautrāntika and the Vaibhāṣika in the AKBh. It is an important point that the Gandhara scholars and the Sautrāntika accept that the unrestrained person lacks some infractions. The argument of Kashmir scholars and the Vaibhāṣika is thus against the argument of scholars in Gandhara and the Sautrāntika.
4. Some Groups in the Sarvāstivādin Sect

I think that the Sarvāstivādin sect is roughly classified into two groups. One is the Gandhara branch, the other is the Kashmir branch. The Gandhara branch which is composed of scholars in Gandhara contains the Sautrāntika. The Kashmir branch which is composed of scholars in Kashmir contains the Vaibhāšīka people. Probably, there are some Sautrāntika people in the Kashmir branch and there are some Vaibhāšīka people in Gandhara as well. The AKBh chapter 8 (samādhi-nirdeśa) states that “according to the [theories] accomplished by the norm of Kashmir Vaibhāṣika, for the most part I (Vasubandhu) wrote as the Abhidharma.” In the Abhidharmakośaṣvyākhyā (AKVy), this statement is noted as follows:

There are Kashmir people who are not Vaibhāṣīka, namely an erudite scholar about Vinaya or the Sautrāntika in which there are virtuous priests (bhadanta) and so forth. There are Vaibhāṣīka who do not live in Kashmir, namely the Vaibhāṣīka living in a foreign country (i.e., outside of Kashmir).

This passage elucidates that there are many types of scholars and branches in the Sarvāstivādin sect. To say the least, Yaśomitra who wrote the AKVy probably imagined the Sarvāstivādin sect is composed of many types of scholars, namely the scholars in Kashmir or Gandhara, the Vaibhāṣīka or the Sautrāntika. This reference by Yaśomitra is very important to understand the actual conditions of the Sautrāntika.

5. Conclusion

In this essay, I discuss the unrestrained person in the AKBh and the MVi. In the AKBh, the unrestrained person is not necessarily unrestrained with respect to all the infractions. To proof this contention, the parable in which a sheep-killer is unable to speak is used. In the MVi, the argument of the unrestrained person is the same as the AKBh. It means that the Sautrāntika theory in the AKBh originated from the Gandhara branch theory in the MVi. Hence, this is evidence to elucidate the relationship between the Sautrāntika and the Gandhara branch. The Sautrāntika has not only the relationship with the Yogācāra or the Dārṣṭāntika, but also obviously with the Gandhara branch. I conclude, therefore, that the origins of Sautrāntika lie in the Gandhara branch. According to the evidence in this essay, at least, we should recognize the relationship between the Sautrāntika and the Gandhara
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branch of the Sarvāstivādin sect.

1) *asamvara* (不律儀) is composed seven karmas, i.e., taking of life (殺生), stealing (偷盜), improper sexual behavior (邪婬), treachery (兩舌), lying (妄語), slander (惡口), flattery (綺語). Those seven karmas are all the infractions of *asamvara*. Taking of life, stealing and improper sexual behavior are that the karma made by the body. Treachery, lying, slander and flattery are that the karma made by talking.

2) I argued that the Gandhara branch accepts the restrained (*samvara*) person lacking some restrained precepts. On the other hand, the Kashmir branch absolutely does not accept the argument of the Gandhara branch. The principle of the Gandhara branch about the restrained person is the same as the principle of the Gandhara branch and the Sautrāntika about the unrestrained person. See Ishida [2011a], [2012].

3) AKBh p.459, “kāśmiravaibhāsikanitisiddhah, prāya mayā’yam kayito ’bhidharmah.”

4) AKVy p.694. “santi kāśimirā na vaibhāṣikāh, ye vinaya-vid-ādayaḥ sautrāntikā bhadant’ādayaḥ, santi vaibhāṣikā na kāśimirāḥ, ye bahir deṣākā ity ubhaya-viśeṣaṇam.”

Text & Bibliography


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