Nigrahasthāna in the Vādanyāya:
Controversy between Dharmakīrti and the Nyāya School

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0. Preface

The Vādanyāya (VN) is a philosophical work by Dharmakīrti (ca. 600–660) in which he criticizes the definition of “the point of defeat” (nigrahasthāna) used in the Nyāya school1) and uniquely redefines the term from the position of his theory of Buddhist logic. As can be seen in the following passage, the definition of “the point of defeat” in VN is contrasted with the traditional definition of the Nyāya school.

VN 1, 4–5: Asādhanaṅgavacana and adosodbhāvana are the points of defeat for the two (debaters, i.e. a proponent and an opponent, respectively).2) However, other [points of defeat that the Nyāya school and the like explain]3) are not correct, hence [they are] not accepted.

Here Dharmakīrti presents his original idea of dividing “the point of defeat” into asādhanāṅgavacana (the point of defeat for a proponent) and adosodbhāvana (the point of defeat for an opponent). In the first half of VN (pp. 1–24), many issues with the interpretations of these two concepts are considered, and ultimately the former is shown to have five types of interpretations and the latter two types of interpretations.4) On the other hand, the twenty-two types of “the point of defeat” established by the Nyāya school are criticized individually in the latter half of VN (pp. 25–68), with consideration given to the interpretations presented earlier in the first half.

VN was translated and critically edited by M. T. Much in 1991 and he presented comprehensive results of VN research up until that point, marking a significant contribution to research on the text. However, it still cannot be said that the analytical framework of “the point of defeat” in its whole context has been clearly explained. Accordingly, this paper aims to demonstrate a method for analyzing “the point of defeat” in VN and to partially clarify the originality and historical significance of Dharmakīrti’s definition through a comparison of the first and second halves of VN.
1. Dharmakīrti's Criticism of the Nyāya School in the Second Half of VN

"Deficient" (nyāna), the eleventh point of defeat among the twenty-two types established by the Nyāya school, provides a good example of the clear contrast of Dharmakīrti's definition of "the point of defeat" with that of the Nyāya school. The Nyāya school defines "deficient" as the lack of any one of the five parts that comprise an inferential statement: a thesis (pratijñā), a logical reason (hetu), an example (udāharaṇa), an application (upanaya), and a conclusion (nigamana). This definition is based on the perspective that all five parts are means of proof (sādhanā) that are indispensable for establishing what is to be proven (sādyā). Dharmakīrti, however, presents the following criticism of the Nyāya school in the second half of VN.

VN 49, 9–13: It has been already explained that [an inferential statement] deficient in a thesis is not lacking [in a means of proof] because apprehension takes place [even] when it (a thesis) is not included [in an inferential statement]. [On the other hand] another person (Uddyotakara) [insists that] it (an inferential statement deficient in a thesis) is certainly lacking [in a means of proof] because defeat takes place even when [an inferential statement is] deficient in a thesis. A person who makes an useless speech which is already known is to be defeated and is not a speaker of meaningful things. Therefore, this is a thoughtless remark [by Uddyotakara].

The Nyāya school considers a thesis to be a means of proof, whereas Dharmakīrti considers that it can be understood through paksadharma (a logical reason’s being a property of a subject) and vyāpti (pervasion) if it is not mentioned in an inferential statement; hence he thinks that a thesis given in an inferential statement is useless and is not in fact a means of proof. Furthermore, he applies this view to an application and a conclusion also. However, like the Nyāya school, he considers a logical reason and an example to be indispensable means of proof.

2. Dharmakīrti’s Definitions of the Point of Defeat in the First Half of VN

Let us focus on the first, second, and third interpretations of asādhanaṅga vacana, which are considered in the first half of VN, in order to make a comparison with Dharmakīrti’s criticism of “deficient” in the second half of VN. The first interpretation is explained as follows.

VN 1, 6–11: Proof (sādhana) means establishment of what is intended [to be proven], and a factor (āṅga) means what accomplishes it (proof). Not stating it (a factor of proof), [that is to
say] not uttering this factor, is a point of defeat for a proponent. The reason is either that [a proponent] falls silent because he does not think of [a factor of proof] despite accepting it (what is intended to be proven), or that he does not verify the factor of proof. That is to say, the factor that establishes what is not being perceived is [confined to] the only three logical marks, which are essential property, effect, and non-apprehension.

In the first interpretation, asādhanāṅgavacana is resolved into sādhanāṅgasya avacanam, translated as “not stating a factor of proof.” A “factor of proof” (sādhanāṅga) in this context is one of the three logical reasons, namely, essential property, effect, and non-apprehension. Therefore, asādhanāṅgavacana means “not stating any one of the three logical reasons.” It seems reasonable then to conclude according to Dharmakīrti’s theory that a proponent is defeated if he intends to prove a thesis but fails to state any one of these logical reasons. Dharmakīrti’s comprehension of the point of defeat differs from that of the Nyāya school in how they define the logical reason, but they are similar in that both of them accept the logical reason as means of proof.

The second interpretation of asādhanāṅgavacana is explained as follows.

VN 17, 4–8: Alternatively, a means of proof (sādhana) is what proves a thing that is not known by others, [namely,] the set of statements expressing a logical reason satisfying the three characteristics. An element (aṅga) of it (a means of proof) is the statement expressing a property of a subject and so forth. Not stating any one of them (elements) is “not stating an element of a means of proof” (asādhanāṅgavacana). This is also a point of defeat for a proponent. The reason is that when it (an element of a means of proof) is not stated, there is no establishment because of not stating just the characteristic of the logical reason.

In this second interpretation, asādhanāṅgavacana is resolved into sādhanāṅgasya avacanam, translated as “not stating an element of a means of proof.” An “element of a means of proof” (sādhanāṅga) is one of the three characteristics of a logical reason; therefore, if a proponent who intends to prove a thesis does not sufficiently state the three characteristics of a logical reason, he is defeated. Furthermore, bearing in mind Dharmakīrti’s notion that the logical reason satisfying the three characteristics implies the concept of the example, we can indirectly reach the conclusion that a proponent who does not state an example is defeated. We can conclude that this comprehension of Dharmakīrti is similar to that of the Nyāya school, as in the first interpretation.

Lastly, the third interpretation of asādhanāṅgavacana is explained as follows:

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VN 17, 9–11: Alternatively, a thesis, an application, a conclusion, and so forth\textsuperscript{23} are not the element of the means of proof [that is to say, not the element of the set of statements expressing a logical reason satisfying the three characteristics]. Making mention of “what is not the element of a means of proof” (asadhanāṅga)\textsuperscript{24} in the inferential statement is a point of defeat for a proponent because [it is] a useless reference.

In this interpretation, asadhanāṅgavacana is resolved into asadhanāṅgasya vacanam, translated as “stating what is not the element of a means of proof.” Here, “what is not the element of a means of proof” (asadhanāṅga) are a thesis, an application, a conclusion, and so forth, so asadhanāṅgavacana means “stating a thesis, an application, a conclusion, and so forth.” Thus, a proponent who refers to a thesis, an application, or a conclusion is defeated. Dharmakirti’s comprehension of this point of defeat is the exact opposite of the Nyāya school’s understanding, and shows originality based on Dharmakirti’s own ideas about the means of proof.

3. Conclusion

This article shows the following three important points.

1. Dharmakīti defines “the point of defeat” (nigrahasthāna) using two totally new concepts of asadhanāṅgavacana (the point of defeat for a proponent) and adosodbhāvana (the point of defeat for an opponent).

2. Dharmakīti’s theory of logic is reflected in asadhanāṅgavacana and adosodbhāvana. Within the narrow limits of this article, the three types of logical reasons are reflected in the first interpretation of asadhanāṅgavacana; the three characteristics of a logical reason are reflected in its second interpretation; and what is not the means of proof is reflected in its third interpretation.

3. Based on a comparison of Dharmakīti’s interpretations of asadhanāṅgavacana in the first half of VN and his criticism of the eleventh point of defeat, namely “deficient” (nyūna) of the Nyāya school, in the second half of VN, some similarities and differences in thoughts on “the point of defeat” between Dharmakīti and the Nyāya school become clear.

From what has been discussed above, we can conclude that Dharmakīti reflects his diverse theory of Buddhist logic in asadhanāṅgavacana and adosodbhāvana, and thereby redefines “the point of defeat” in a way that has both differences with and similarities to the Nyāya school’s definition. These brief highlights show the originality and historical significance of his definition. A future direction for work in this area will be to compare Dharmakīti’s whole definition of “the point of defeat” in the first half of VN with his refutation of all the other Nyāya school’s definition of it in the latter half of VN.
Nigrahasthāna in the Vādanyāya (R. Sasaki)

Notes

Abbreviations and Bibliographical References


(This research was supported in part by a Grant-in-Aid for JSPS Fellows.)

(Key words) Dharmakirti, Vādanyāya, nigrahasthāna, asādhanāṅgavacana, nyāna
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