Problems regarding Kyōryōbu (Jingliangbu) as a Translation for Sautrāntika

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1. Introduction

In Japanese, the term Sautrāntika is usually rendered as Kyōryōbu 経量部 (Ch. Jingliangbu). The term Kyōryōbu means the sect (or group; bu 部) that considers kyō 経 (sūtra) as ryō 量 (pramāṇa—“valid source of authority”). However, does the term “Sautrāntika” actually mean the sect that considers the sūtras as the pramāṇa? Of course, the definition of the Sautrāntika in the Abhidharmakośavyākhyā (AKVy) is as follows: “The Sautrāntika are those who depend on the sūtras, and do not depend on the śāstras.” (AKVy, p.11.29–30) According to this definition in the AKVy, the term Sautrāntika surely means that the sect considers the sūtra as the pramāṇa, and does not consider the śāstra as the pramāṇa. Nevertheless, I argue that the term Sautrāntika does not mean “the sect that considers the sūtra as the pramāṇa.” In order to prove my argument, I will present some evidence.

2. Xuanzang’s Translations

The term Sautrāntika is always rendered as “Jingbu” 経部 by Xuanzang 玄奘 in his Chinese translation of the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya (AKBh). And we cannot find the term “Jingliangbu” 経量部 in his other translations. In the Xuanzang’s translation of the Samayabhedoparacanacakra (SBh, Yibu zonglun lun 異部宗輪論), the term Jingliangbu appears to be an anomaly. But according to Katō [1989], the original word of the Jingliangbu in the Chinese translation of the SBh is Sūtrāntavāda, in addition the Jingliangbu mentioned in the SBh is not connected with the Sautrāntika in the AKBh.

This fact must not be overlooked. It seems that at least Xuanzang did not feel it necessary to translate Sautrāntika into the Jingliangbu, and did not probably think that the Sautrāntika meant the people who understood the sūtra as the pramāṇa. If we didn’t know the definition of the Sautrāntika in the AKVy, would we think the Sautrāntika meant the people...
who consider the sūtras as pramāṇa?

It is a fact that the term Sautrāntika doesn’t appear even once in the Chinese translation of the AKBh. This suggests that it may not be necessary to translate Sautrāntika into the Jingliangbu.

3. Jingbu in the MVī

In the Mahāvibhāṣā (MVī, Da piposha lun 大毘婆沙論), the term Jingbu appears twice. Hitherto, the Jingbu in the MVī is not identical with Sautrāntika, which we know because Katō proved that the earliest appearance of the term Sautrāntika is in the AKBh. However, is it impossible to connect the Jingbu in the MVī with the Sautrāntika in the AKBh?

When we consider that Xuanzang always translated Sautrāntika into the Jingbu in the AKBh, we can suppose that the original word of the Jingbu in the MVī translated by him is the Sautrāntika. But Katō did not think so, nor did he accept the idea that Jingbu in the MVī was the Sautrāntika. Katō examined a passage “considering the sūtra as the pramāṇa” (jing wei liang 経為量) in the MVī of Xuanzang’s translation with the corresponding passage in the Apitan piposha lun 阿毘毘婆沙論. As a result, he concluded that the liang 量 in the MVī was an addition by Xuanzang, therefore the Sautrāntika which considered the sūtra as the pramāṇa did not exist during the period when the MVī was compiled.

Katō’s argument is generally accepted but there are some counterarguments made by Honjō, Fukuda and Muroji. These scholars admit that the Sautrāntika had existed since the MVī period. I accept these arguments, because Xuanzang consistently translated the Sautrāntika into the Jingbu and we cannot judge whether or not liang 量 in the MVī is an addition by Xuanzang only from the point of view of the Chinese translation.

4. The Suttantika in the Pāli Canon

Is it inevitable that the usage of the term Sautrāntika begins to occur from the time of the appearance of the AKBh? In other words, is it possible that the term Sautrāntika existed before the AKBh? I examined the Suttantika in the Pāli Canon to settle this question.

Up to now, the Suttantika in the Pāli Canon has not yet been not examined well enough to clarify the situation of the Sautrāntika. Here I will present some examples of the usage of Suttantika in the Visuddhimagga (Vis) and the Vinaya Piṭaka (Vin).

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4.1. The Suttantika in the Viśa

To begin with, let us look at two examples in the Viśa.

(1) As regards medicine, all four ways are proper. But is it proper or not proper to use such an obtained medicine after recovery from an illness? The Vinayadhara say that "it is proper because the Bhagavat has allowed it." But the Suttanta say that "it is not proper because though there is no offense, and yet the mode of living is disturbed." 5)

(2) The meeting (gaṇa) [in the Saṅgha] is the Suttantika meeting or the Ābhidhammika meeting. 6)

In the Viśa, the Suttantika appears with the Vinayadhara and the Ābhidhammika. We can consider the Vinayadhara as the people who keep precepts or learn provisions in the Vinaya Piṭaka, and the Ābhidhammika as the people who learn the Abhidhamma Piṭaka or produce it. Likewise, the Suttantika probably are the people who learn the Sutta Piṭaka or recite it. Frankly speaking, the Vinayadhara is the expert on the Vinaya Piṭaka and the Ābhidhammika is the expert on the Abhidhamma Piṭaka and the Suttantika is the expert on the Sutta Piṭaka.

In example (1), there is a contrast between the Vinayadhara's and the Suttantika's opinions. According to example (2), the Saṅgha has two meetings, one is the Suttantika, the other is the Ābhidhammika. These two examples elucidate that there are some experts or meetings in the Saṅgha.

4.2. The Suttantika in the Vin

Next, we study two examples in the Vin.

(3) Venerable Dabba Mallaputta who was elected assigned similar bhikkhus to the same room. Namely, the Suttantika in the bhikkhu's group were assigned to the same room in order to recite the Suttanta each other, the Vinayadhara in the bhikkhu's group were assigned to the same room in order to set the Vinaya for each other, the Dhammakathikas in the bhikkhu's group were assigned to the same room in order to discuss the Dhamma with each other . . . 7)

(4) "Preparing [a meal]" means that a bhikkhuni recommend the lay people who do not intend to give or cook [a meal] to make an offering for a bhikkhu, saying that he is a venerable preacher (bhāṇaka), he is a man of venerable knowledge (bahuṣṣuta), he is a venerable Suttantika, he is a venerable Vinayadhara, and he is a venerable Dhammakathika, give [a meal] for him, cook [a meal] for him. It is "Preparing [a meal]." 8)
In the Vin, the Suttantika appears with the Bhāṇaka, the Bahussuta, the Vinayadhara and the Dhammakathika. The Dhammakathika is the people who discuss the Dhamma, probably like Ābhidhammika.

According to example (3), we can understand that there are some schools, namely, the Suttantika, the Vinayadhara and so on in the bhikkhu’s group. In example (4), because the Suttantika together with the Bhāṇaka and so on are used as a eulogy, a bhikkhu called the Suttantika is probably an expert to be praised by lay people.

5. What is the Suttantika in the Vis and the Vin?

Examining the Suttantika in the Vis and the Vin above, we can point out the following:

1. The Suttantika is an expert on the Sutta Piṭaka.
2. There are some meetings or schools, namely, the Suttantika, the Vinayadhara and so on in the Saṅgha
3. The Suttantika is a person who performs a eulogy for lay people.

Because the Suttantika appears in the Vis and the Vin, which belong to the Theravada, it is a school or meeting in the Theravada. Probably, there are some schools within the Theravada, and the Suttantika is one of them. I do not consider the Suttantika or the Bahussuta in the Vis or the Vin as the Suttavāda or the Bahussuta which are noted in the Dipavamsa. Specifically, the Suttantika is not a sect or a branch, like the Theravada and the Sarvāstivāda, owing to some examples in the Vis and the Vin.

6. Conclusion

I examined Xuanzang’s translation and the Suttantika in the Vis and the Vin in order to elucidate the origin of the Sautrāntika. Based on Xuanzang’s translation, because he always translated the Sautrāntika into the Jingbu in the AKBh, we can consider the Jingbu in the MVi as the Sautrāntika. Moreover, according to the Vin and the Vis, we confirmed that there was the Suttantika which was an expert on the Sutta Piṭaka in the Theravada. Probably the Sarvāstivāda was in the same situation. In other words, we can suppose that there are some schools (i.e., the Sautrāntika or the Ābhidhammika) in the Sarvāstivāda. In those schools, there was a school that was especially concerned with the sūtra. Though it is difficult to clarify when the school was started to be called the Sautrāntika, I am fully convinced that there existed a group of monks which was later called the Sautrāntika. I am
confident that the early Sautrāntika was not the group which considered the sūtra as the pramāṇa. Therefore, we should not translate the Sautrāntika into the Kyōryōbu. Because the early Sautrāntika was not the group which considered the sūtra as the pramāṇa, it is possible that the Sautrāntika existed before the MVī, even so there was no idea that the sūtra was the pramāṇa in that.

1) Cf. Muroji [2004] and Ishida [2013].
4) Ishida [2013] examined the passage “jing wei liang” in the MVī. The passage “jing wei liang” appears eight times in the MVī, and once in the AKb. The AKb of Xuanzang’s translation does not use frequently this passage.
5) The Vis, p.41.
6) The Vis, p.93.
7) The Vin (PTS. vol.3), p.159.

〈Text and Bibliography〉
〈Abbreviations〉


MVī Mahāvibhāṣā, Da piposha lun 大毘婆沙論. Taisho, vol.27, no.1545.

SBh Samayabhedoparacanacakra, Yi bu zong lun lun 異部宗輪論. Taisho, vol.49, no.2031.


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