Meaning of the Thirty-Seven Practices to Attain Enlightenment for Bodhisattvas:
The Significance of Canonical Citations in the SAVBh ad MSABh XVIII

KISHI Sayaka

1. Introduction

_Mahāyānasūtraālamkārabhāṣya_ (MSAbh) is generally attributed to Vasubandhu (ca. 400–480). The original Sanskrit version of the text—important in the Yogācāra School—consists of 21 chapters. In the MSAbh, the MSAbh ad MSA XVIII explains the thirty-seven practices for bodhisattvas to attain enlightenment (_saptatrimśad bodhipakṣadharma_), a training method which was also practiced by Early Buddhist monks, _Madhyāntavibhāgaṭikā_ (MAVT) ad MAV II says that these practices are the same for śrāvakas and pratyeka-buddhas. Although the MSAbh defines these thirty-seven practices as bodhisattvas’ practices, little attention has been paid to the characteristic content of the training method. Therefore, little research has explicitly examined whether these thirty-seven practices have aided bodhisattvas with their enlightenment in the MSAbh.

On the other hand, _Sūtraālamkāra-vṛttibhāṣya_ (SAVBh), an MSAbh commentary attributed to Sthiramati (ca. 510–570), clearly emphasizes that bodhisattvas are superior to śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, owning to these thirty-seven practices they follow for attaining enlightenment. For explaining differences between the bodhisattvas’ training method and that of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, the SAVBh comments on the MSAbh through many canonical citations.

In this article, we investigate how to show the magnificence of bodhisattvas by accurately exploring the association between descriptive passages and canonical citations in the SAVBh.

1. Definition of the Bodhipakṣadharma in the SAVBh ad MSABh XVIII

First, Sthiramati reveals his understanding of the definition of the thirty-seven practices of the bodhisattvas in the SAVBh ad MSABh XVIII. According to the SAVBh, Sthiramati

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regards all contents of the MSABh ad MSA XVIII as practices for bodhisattvas, explaining why Vasubandhu notes the four types of meditation (catuh-smṛtyupasthāna) after two types of accumulations. The thirty-seven practices to attain enlightenment include four types of meditation that form the basis of others of the thirty-seven practices. The passage can be translated as follows:

Analysis of the four types of meditation consists of three stanzas. Why are the thirty-seven practices to attain enlightenment interpreted after explaining two accumulations? [Sthiramati says as follows: bodhisattvas] exercise these practices to take away afflictive hindrances and cognitive hindrances by means of two types of accumulations. Therefore, [Vasubandhu] arranges the topic of practices for attaining enlightenment after explaining two types of accumulations.  

Depending on an understanding of Sthiramati, Vasubandhu shows his understanding of the four types of meditation for bodhisattvas on the assumption that bodhisattvas remove afflictive hindrances and cognitive hindrances by using two types of accumulations: accumulation of merit and accumulation of wisdom. This definition of four types of meditation shows bodhisattvas’ features because only bodhisattvas eliminate the two types of hindrances. In SAVBh, Sthiramati states that the two types of accumulations differ from those of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas using effective canonical citations in.

2. Canonical Citation from the Kāśyapaparivartakasūtra in the SAVBh

Through canonical citation from the Kāśyapaparivartakasūtra (KP) in the SAVBh, Sthiramati emphasizes that bodhisattvas’ two types of accumulations are better than those of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas. This citation from the KP distinguishes two types of accumulations between bodhisattvas and śrāvakas. Therefore, the SAVBh ad MSABh k.38 runs as follows:

Bodhisattvas’ two types of accumulations, accumulation of merit and accumulation of wisdom, are more excellent than śrāvakas’. This stanza makes known what accumulations are and why [bodhisattvas] gather accumulations. In this case, bodhisattvas’ accumulations are twofold, that is accumulation of merit and accumulation of wisdom. Because accumulation of merit and accumulation of wisdom are gathered by bodhisattvas for their own sake and for all sentient beings, [this act by bodhisattvas] is distinguished from that by śrāvakas’. In short, these two accumulations are not equal in quality to śrāvakas’ accumulations.

Furthermore, KP runs as follows: Accumulation of wisdom for bodhisattvas can be compared to a wide space empty in all directions. Accumulation of wisdom for śrāvakas can be compared to a
space as minute as a hole eaten by a bug in a poppy seed. Accumulation of merit for bodhisattvas can be compared to a vast expanse of waters spreading in all directions. In contrast, accumulation of merit for srāvakas can be compared to a drop of water clinging to the tip of a strand of hair.3)

This canonical citation from the KP asserts that from point of view of amount the two types of accumulations for bodhisattvas are different from those of srāvakas’. The body text of this canonical citation also points out a distinctive quantitative difference between bodhisattvas’ accumulations and those of srāvakas’: however, the body text of the KP states that accumulations of merit for bodhisattvas are refferred to as “a vast expanse of waters covered from fresh butter.” According to Kāśyapaparivartaka-tikā (KP), commentary on the KP, this simile should be interpreted on the basis of understanding of the Viniścayasamgrahanī (Vinś) of the Yogācārabhūmi.4) In the Vinś, accumulation of merit for bodhisattvas is not compared to a vast expanse of waters covered with fresh butter but a vast expanse of waters spread in all directions. The canonical citation from KP in the SAVBh is similar to analysis of accumulation of merit for bodhisattvas in the Vinś. Therefore, it is highly likely that Sthiramati, author of the SAVBh, is a learned scholar of KP, KP and Vinś.

3. Canonical Citations from the Akṣ in the SAVBh

In the SAVBh ad MSABh XVIII, canonical citations from the Aksayamatinirdeśasūtra (Akṣ) are the most numerous. The Akṣ is one of the most popular Mahāyāna Buddhist sūtras along with the KP. An outstanding feature in the SAVBh is that Sthiramati explains the major part of the thirty-seven practices to attain enlightenment by depending on canonical citations from Akṣ. Vasubandhu shows fourteen viewpoints for explaining the four types of meditation in the MSABh, and Sthiramati further describes fourteen viewpoints in the SAVBh. In this case, according to Braarvig [1993: liv], Sthiramati cites two canonical citations from Akṣ for explaining the four types of meditation for bodhisattvas. Within the fourteen viewpoints and from the viewpoint of cognitive objects, the following passage of the SAVBh shows that the four types of meditation for bodhisattvas are different form those of srāvakas using a canonical citation from Akṣ.

If anyone asks that [how the four types of meditation for bodhisattvas can be distinguished from those of the others] from the viewpoint of their cognitive objects, [we answer as follows]: because [bodhisattvas] regard bodies of all sentient beings as their cognitive objects. Also, if anyone asks
how the [four types of meditation for bodhisattvas] can be better [than those of the others] by referring to this sort of cognitive object, [we answer as follows]: śrāvakas regard only one’s own body and one’s own senses etc., as objects for their practices. In contrast, bodhisattvas recognize both one’s own body and bodies of all sentient beings, as well as one’s own senses and the senses of all other sentient beings. For this reason, bodhisattvas’ cognitive objects are superior to śrāvakas’ cognitive objects [when they practice the four types of meditation]. Therefore, we should refer to the passages in the Akṣ: if anyone asks how bodhisattvas practice observing bodies, [we answer as follows]: he observes both his own body, the bodies of all sentient beings, and so on.\(^5\)

According to the SAVBh, when they practice their four types of meditation, Bodhisattvas’ cognitive objects include both one’s own body and those of the others. Sthiramati intends that bodhisattvas themselves are superior to śrāvakas, using the explanation of four types of meditation through a canonical citation from the Akṣ. Likewise, Sthiramati explains four types of meditation from the viewpoint of acquisition by using another canonical citation from the Akṣ:

If anyone inquires if it is possible [to explain four types of meditation for bodhisattvas] from the viewpoint of acquisition, we answer as follows: why is the acquisition of bodhisattvas superior to that of śrāvakas? it is said that śrāvakas practice [four types of meditation] for leaving one’s own body and one’s own perception, etc. In contrast, bodhisattvas practice neither for leaving [bodies and perceptions, etc.] nor for clinging to [bodies and perceptions, etc.] Therefore, [bodhisattvas are superior to śrāvakas] from the viewpoint of acquisition, If anyone inquires how bodhisattvas do not leave [bodies and perceptions], we respond to them like this: [bodhisattvas] do not leave [bodies and perceptions] because of clinging to three types of bodies associated with tathāgata. If anyone inquires that how bodhisattvas do not close [bodies and perceptions], we respond to them like this: because bodhisattvas do practice leaving their bodies produced by their acts and afflictions, but bodhisattvas do not close [bodies and perceptions produced by their acts and afflictions]. Also [this passage being susceptible to another interpretation], bodhisattvas do not leave their own bodies for the sake of acquiring three types of bodies, that is, bodhisattvas eager to practice acquiring three types of bodies [associated with tathāgata] on the basis of their own bodies [produced by their acts and afflictions]. Furthermore, the Akṣ runs as follows: bodhisattvas observe their bodies in the past, their bodies in the future, and their bodies at present... [bodhisattvas] recognize selflessness on the basis of their own bodies and truthful things on the basis of their untruthful bodies. What are truthful things in this passage? For example, it is established that body of tathāgata, dharmakāya, vajrakāya, etc., which are distinguished from all of the three realms of existence (prajñā-tuka) on the basis of being truthful things, Bodhisattvas are not attached to a fault called their own bodies. Therefore, bodhisattvas acquire the body of tathāgata that is apart from all faults. For this reason, bodhisattvas practice [four types of meditation] with their power observing their own bodies which are composed of four elements because they experience goodness.\(^6\)
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In this manner, the SAVBh points out that acquisition of bodhisattvas means adopting the body of tathāgata, etc., by using this canonical citation from the Akṣ. In addition, AkṣṬ, a commentary of the Akṣ attributed to Vasubandhu, gives countenance to two canonical citations from the Akṣ for explaining four types of meditation. 7) Although Vasubandhu does not explain four types of meditation for bodhisattvas by using the technical term of mahā-yāna buddhist thoughts, such as a body of tathāgata, etc., in the MSABh, it is known that Sthiramati intends to emphasize the four types of meditations for bodhisattvas by means of canonical citations Akṣ.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, we investigated explanations of the thirty-seven practices to attain enlightenment, especially four types of meditations for bodhisattvas, which are closely associated with canonical citations from the KP and the Akṣ in the SAVBh. Despite the MAVṬ mentioning that the thirty-seven practices to attain enlightenment of bodhisattvas are similar to those of śrāvakas, Sthiramati’s discussion is the subject of the thirty-seven practices to attain enlightenment as bodhisattva’s training method in the SAVBh. The SAVBh explains the thirty-seven practices to attain enlightenment for bodhisattvas on the basis of canonical citations such as the KP and the Akṣ. There is little foundation for Sthiramati’s interpretations ad MSABh XVIII, except for these canonical citations: however, commentaries of the KP and the Akṣ state that canonical citations from the KP and the Akṣ in the SAVBh play an important part of emphasizing the descriptive passages in the SAVBh depending on Yogācāra theory in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Therefore, the SAVBh is successful in emphasizing bodhisattvas’ superiority on the basis of these canonical citations. Thus, we recommend that future research on Mahāyāna texts and their commentaries, such as the MSABh and SAVBh, focus on relationships with the Mahāyānasūtra and their commentaries involving the KP and the Akṣ.

(Notes)
1) See MAVṬ 89, 12–90, 13.
2) dran pa nye bar gzhag pa rnams par dbye ba'i tshigs su bcad pa gsum ste zhes bya ba la / tshogs kyi skabs bshad pa'i rjes la byang chub kyi phyogs kyi chos sum cu rtsa bdun bshad par 'brel pa ci yod snyam na de ltar tshogs bsags pa des nyon mongs pa dang shes bya'i sgrib pa spang ba'i phyir byang chub kyi phyogs la sgom (P.: bsgom) par byed de de bas na tshogs kyi rjes la byang chub
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kyi phyogs kyi skabs bsbad par 'brel to /P.://i de la yang dran pa nye bar gzhag pa bzhi bsgom pa ni tshigs su bcad pa gsum gylis bstan to // (SABvH D.Tsi 103a2–3)

3) byang chub sms dpa'i tshogs dag ni // mi mnyam bsod nams ye shes so // (18-38ab) zhes bya ba'i tshigs su bcad pa gcig gis tshogs gang yin pa dang / gang gi phyir tshogs su gyur pa de ston te / de la byang chub sms dpa'i tshogs ni rnam pa gnyis te / bsod nams kyi tshogs dang ye shes kyi tshogs so // byang chub sms dpa'i bsod nams dang ye shes kyi tshogs ni bdag dang sms can thams cad kyi don du bsags pa ni nyan thos la sogs pa'i tshogs las 'phags pa'i phyir mi mnyam pa zhes bya'o // de bas na dkon mchog brtsegs pa'i mdo las kyang / byang chub sms dpa' mnams kyi ye shes kyi tshogs ni phyogs bcu'i nam mkha' lta bur blta'o // nyan thos rnam kyi ye shes kyi tshogs ni yungs 'bru srin bus zos pa'i nang gi nam mkha'i khyon tsam du blta'o // byang chub sms dpa'i bsod nams kyi tshogs ni phyogs bzhi'i rgya mtsho'i chu lta bur blta'o // nyan thos kyi bsod nams kyi tshogs ni ba'i rmig rjes kyi chu lta bur blta'o zhes gsungs so // 'dis ni tshogs gang yin pa bstan to // (SABvH D. Tsi 101a3–6)

4) See Otake [2008: 242–243].

5) ji ltar dmsg she na / 242 sms can rnam kyi lus la sogs pa la dmsg pa'i phyir ro zhes bya ba la / ji ltar dmsg pa'i rnam pas khyad zhugs she na / nyan thos la sogs pa ni bdag gi lus dang tshor ba la sogs pa tsam zhig la dmsg shing sgom par byed kyi / byang chub sms dpa' mnams ni bdag dang sms can thams cad kyi la sogs dang / tshor ba la sogs pa la dmsg par byed do // de bas na dmsg ni khyad zhugs so // de bas na 'phags pa blo gros mi zad pa'i mdo las kyang / ji ltar na byang chub sms dpa' lus la lus kyi rjes su lta zhin gnas she na / de bdag gi lus dang gzhan gyi lus la lus kyi rjes su lta zhin gnas te zhes bya ba la sogs pa gsungs so // (SABvH D.: 104b5–7)

6) ji ltar thob pa zhe na / lus la sogs pa dang bral ba yang ma yin ma bral ba yang ma yin pa'i phyir ro zhes bya ba la / ji ltar thob par khyad zhugs she na / nyan thos la sogs pa ni lus dang tshor ba la sogs pa dang bral bar bya ba'i phyir sgom gyi / byang chub sms dpa' rnam ni bral bar bya ba'i phyir sgom pa yang ma yin te / mi 'bral bar bya ba'i phyir sgom pa yang ma yin pas thob pa'i rnam pas khyad zhugs so // ji ltar 'bral ba yang ma yin zhe na / de bzhin gshegs pa'i sku gsum dang mi 'bral zhing de thob par bya ba'i phyir bsgoms pas 'bral ba yang ma yin no // ji ltar mi 'bral ba yang ma yin zhe na / las dang nyon mongs pas bskyped pa'i lus dang bral bar bya ba'i phyir bsgoms pas mi 'bral ba yang ma yin no // yang na sku gsum thob par bya ba'i phyir lus 'di dang yang bral bar byed de / lus la brten nas sku gsum dgos pas na'o zhes bya ba la mi 'bral ba yang ma yin te / lus dang nyon mongs pas bskyped pa'i lus sduq bsngal ba'i rang bzhin dhu ba'i gong bu lta bu 'di la chags par byas na so so'i skye bo bzhin du rtag tu 'khor bar gnas par 'gyur ba'i phyir / lus 'di ni 'di dang 'bral bar yang byed do // de bas na 'phags pa blo gros mi zad pa'i mdo las kyang / lus kyi sngon gyi mtha' la yang rtog / lus kyi phyi ma'i mtha' la yang rtog ces bya ba nas / lus 'di la bdag gir mi bya'i bdag lus snying po med pa 'di la snying po mngon par 'tshang rgya bar bya'o // 'di lta ste / snying po gang zhe na / gang 'di de bzhin gshegs pa'i sku / chos kyi sku / rdo rje'i sku / mi shigs pa'i sku / brtan pa'i sku / kham gsum thams cad las bye brag tu 'phags pa'i sku de bdag gis bsgub par bya'o // bdag gi lus nyes pa du ma'i skyon chags mod kyi / de bzhin gshegs pa'i sku nyes pa thams cad dang bral bar tu thob par bya'o // des legs pa mthong bas na so sor rtog pa'i stobs kyis 'byung ba chen po'i gnas kyi lus la spyod do

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zhes bya ba la sogs pa gsungs so // (SAVBh D. 104b2–105b2)

〈Abbreviations〉

Akṣ  ṭhags pa blo gros mi zad pas bstan pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po ‘i mdo (Aryākṣayamati-nirdeśanāmaḥāyānasūtra). D. No. 175, P. No. 842.
AkṣṬ Vasubandhu, Ārākṣayamatinirdeśasūtraṭīkā. D. No. 3994, P. No. 5495.
MSA See MSABh.
MAV See MAVṬ.
SAVBh Sthiramati, Sūtrālaṃkāravṛttibhāṣya. D No. 4034, P No. 5531.
Vinśg Vinis'cayasamsgrahaṇī. D No. 4038, P No. 5539.

〈References〉


〈Key words〉 Mahāyānasūtraṭīkārābhāṣya, Sūtrālaṃkāravṛttibhāṣya, Sthiramati, saptatīṃśad bodhipakṣadharma, Aksayamatinirdeśasūtra

(Graduate Student, Tsukuba University)