Bonpo Abhidharma Theory of Five Aggregates

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Introduction

Buddhism spread out from India and gradually combined with local religions and spiritual traditions. The Bon, an indigenous religion in Tibet and the Himalayas, seems to have been originally centered on funeral rituals and divination. Since the second diffusion of Buddhism to Tibet, the Bon is regarded by Western philologists to have started to absorb Buddhist doctrines in full scale. Western researchers such as Karmay (1988) proved that the Bon, especially its esoteric doctrine rDzogs-chen, has similarities with Buddhist rNying-ma doctrines. Regarding its philosophy, Martin (2000) proved that an Abhidharma theory remarkably exists within the Bon. What is the structure of the Bonpo Abhidharma theory and what are its characteristics? This paper aims to briefly outline the Bonpo Abhidharma, especially focusing on its theory of "Five Aggregates" in comparison with Buddhist theories.

1. Bonpo Abhidharma Texts

The most important Bonpo Abhidharma text is the Srid pa'i mdzod phug 1) (Innermost treasury of existence; SPDP hereafter). Bonpo tradition insists SPDP was ancienly composed by the founder of Bon religion, gShen-rab mi-bo (16016–7816 BC), and later rediscovered by gShen-chen Klu-dga' (996–1035) in 1017. SPDP is regarded as the main source of Bonpo Abhidharma traditions.

SPDP, composed of 17 chapters, is regarded to have been originally written in the Zhang zhung language (ZZ hereafter) and later translated into Tibetan. The Tibetan version covers the whole text while the original text written in ZZ remains only in part. Fortunately, Martin (2000) introduced an outline of SPDP but its details still remain unresearched.
In order to understand the detailed meanings of its complicated verses, its commentaries such as *Srid pa'i mdzod phug kyi 'gral ba 'phral gyi sgron me* (PGGM hereafter) composed by mNyam-med Shes-rab rgyal-mtshan (1356–1415) and the sections of Abhidharma in doxographical texts such as *Bon sgo gsal byed* (BGSB hereafter) composed by Tre-ston rGyal-mtshan-dpal (14th century) can be proven to be helpful.

One of the biggest contributions by Martin (2000: 43–50) has been his discovery that the second, fifth and sixth chapters of SPDP quote several passages from the third chapter of the *Abhidharmakośa* (AK hereafter). Martin (2000: 42) has also tried to attribute the 51 mental states given in SPDP to the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* (AS hereafter), and also compare SPDP’s 14 non-concurrent formations with AS’s 23.

Actually, a closer similarity can be found with Vasubandhu’s *Pañcasāṇkhya* (PS hereafter) than with AK and AS in some respects. One example would be the subcategories of “unconditioned element” (*ZZ. rgyun min / hrun min / dhun ming*, Tib. *du ma byas*, Skt. *asaṃskṛta*). The Bonpo doxography BGSB defines the “unconditioned element” as “that which is not produced from cause and condition” (*rgyu rkyen las ma skyes pa*) and gives the four elements as its subdivisions: “analytical cessation” (Tib. *so sor brtags pa'i 'gog pa*, Skt. *pratisaṃkhyānirodha*), “non-analytical cessation” (Tib. *so sor ma brtags pa'i 'gog pa*, Skt. *apratisaṃkhyānirodha*), “suchness” (Tib. *de bzhin nyid*, Skt. *tathatā*) and “space” (Tib. *nam mkha'*, Skt. *ākāśa*). Thus, SPDP seems to be more similar to PS, which also gives the above four elements, than to AK which gives three and AS which gives six.

Furthermore additional similarities can be found in the SPDP’s 10th chapter on “Five Aggregates” as seen in the following sections.

2. Bonpo Theory of Five Aggregates Influenced by PS

2.1. Aggregate of Physical Elements

The aggregate of physical elements (*ZZ. rko pun srog ri / rko phung seng ge*, Tib. *gzugs kyi phung po*, Skt. *rūpa-skandha*) is divided into the following three categories:


b) Five sense faculties and five cognitive objects: 4) “visual faculty” (*ZZ. ma mig*, Tib.
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c) “Unmanifest action” (ZZ. tha yud go ra, Tib. rig byed ma yin, Skt. *avijñapti) 3)

SPDP provides the above 15 physical elements in total 6) while Buddhist treatises AK and AS admit 11 excluding the four major elements. It should be noted that PS lists “four major elements,” “five sense faculties,” “five cognitive objects,” and “unmanifest action” in that order; therefore it apparently seems to provide 15 physical elements like SPDP. 7) However, PS regards its “four major elements” as part of its “tangible object” (brahmanaya), 8) so it substantially provide only 11 physical elements as do AK and AS. On the other hand, SPDP does not include its “four major elements” in its element of “tangible object” and as such, lists 15 physical elements in total. This is thus a conceptual similarity and yet an organizational difference between SPDP and PS.

2.2. Aggregate of Sensation

SPDP classifies the aggregate of sensation (ZZ. zhim zhal rko phung, Tib. tshor ba'i phung po, Skt. *vedanāaskandha) into three: “pleasant sensation” (ZZ. zhim zhal da lad, Tib. bde ba'i tshor ba), “painful sensation” (ZZ. zhim zhal du lnga, Tib. sdug bsngal tshor ba) and “immesurable sensation” (ZZ. zhim zhal dzad min, Tib. tshor ba dpag med). 9) What the third subdivision “immesurable sensation” means is unclear but it is probably identical to the third subdivision enumerated in BGSB: “equilibrative [sensation]” (btang snyom), 10) corresponding to the Buddhist subdivision “neither painful nor pleasant [sensation]” (aduhkhāskhā) found in Buddhist texts such as AK. 11)

2.3. Aggregate of Conception

SPDP classifies the aggregate of conception (ZZ. de rmhe [rko phung], Tib. 'du shes phung po, Skt. *samjñāaskandha) into three: “grand conception” (ZZ. de rmhe ca ce, Tib. rgya che'i 'du shes), “small conception” (ZZ. de rmhe tha tse, Tib. rgya chung 'du shes), and “immesurable conception” (ZZ. de rmhe dzad min, Tib. tshad med 'du shes). 12) The three-fold classification is also identical to that of PS. 13)
2.4. Aggregate of Formations

Aggregate of formations (ZZ. gu ra [rko phung], Tib. 'du byed [kyi phung po], Skt. *sāṃskāraskandha) is subdivided into two: “concurrent formation” (ldan 'du byed, *samprayukta-sāṃskāra), i.e., “mental states” (sems 'byung, caitta) and “non-concurrent formation” (ZZ. khri gtsug ma min du zhur, Tib. mi ldan 'du byed, *viprayukta-sāṃskāra).

SPDP provides 51 mental states,14 as do PS and AS,15 while AK provides 46. Among the 51 mental states, SPDP gives different elements from the Buddhist ones concerning its 11 “virtuous states of mind” (dge ba, *kus'ala), six “afflictive states of mind” (nyon mongs pa, *mūla-kleśa) and 20 “sub-afflictive states of mind” (nye ba'i nyon mongs pa, *upakleśa); in contrast, it gives the same elements as Buddhist ones regarding their five “omnipresent states of mind” (kun tu 'gro ba, *sarvatraga), five “object-determined states of mind” (yul so sor nges pa, *pratinarya-visaya) and four “variable states of mind” (gzhan du 'gyur ba, *aniyata). That is to say, SPDP gives a partially similar system of mental states to that of PS and AS. The details of each element will be analyzed in another paper for want of space.

SPDP lists the following 14 “non-concurrent formations”:16

1. acquisition (thob pa, *prāpti)
2. attainment of non-consciousness ('du shes pa'i snyoms 'jug, *asamjñisamāpatti)
3. attainment of cessation ('gog pa'i snyoms 'jug, *nīrodhasamāpatti)
4. result of non-consciousness ('du shes med snyoms kyi 'bras bu, *asamjñi-phala)
5. vital faculty (srog dbang, *jīvitendriya)
6. homogeneity (ris mthun, *nikāya-sabhāga)
7. arising (skye ba, *jāti)
8. aging/deterioration (rgas pa, *jarā)
9. duration (gnas pa, *sthiti)
10. impermanence/destruction (mi rtag pa, *anitya)
11. [collection of] names/words (ming, *nāma[-kāya])
12. [collection of] sentences (tshig, *pada[-kāya])
13. [collection of] letters (yi ge, *vyāñjana[-kāya])
14. [the state of] an ordinary being (so skye byis pa skye bo, *prthagjana[tval])

SPDP gives 14 non-concurrent formations17 like PS and AK, while AS gives 23. It should also be noted that SPDP as well as PS enumerates the element “the state of an ordinary
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being” (prthāgjanatva) while AK instead enumerates the element “non-acquisition” (aprāpti).

2.5. Aggregate of Consciousness

SPDP lists the following eight types of consciousness (ZZ. khir zhi or shi shan [rko phung], Tib. rnam par shes pa’i phung po, Skt. *vijñāna[skandha]):

1. visual consciousness (ZZ. mig shen, Tib. mig gi rnam shes, Skt. *caksurvijñāna)
2. auditory consciousness (ZZ. rtse shen, Tib. rna’i rnam shes, Skt. *śrūtravijñāna)
3. olfactory consciousness (ZZ. layum zhing, Tib. sna’i rnam shes, Skt. *gṛṇavijñāna)
4. gustatory consciousness (ZZ. lke zhing, Tib. lce’i rnam shes, Skt. *jihvāvijñāna)
5. tactile consciousness (ZZ. rko zhing, Tib. lus kyi rnam shes, Skt. *kāyavijñāna)
6. mental consciousness (ZZ. dis yul, Tib. yid kyi rnam shes, Skt. *manovijñāna)
7. mentation (Tib. nyon mong pa can gyi yid, Skt. *manas)
8. store-consciousness (Tib. kun gzhi rnam shes, Skt. *ālayavijñāna)

SPDP can be said to have been influenced by Yogācāra treatises such as AS and PS in that it provides both “mentation” and “store-consciousness.”

Conclusion

This paper outlined Bonpo Abhidharma theory found in SPDP, especially focusing on the theory of “five aggregates.” Martin (2000) has claimed that SPDP had been influenced by AK and AS, but this paper clarified that PS, the Yogācāra Abhidharma treatise composed by Vasubandhu, had had a stronger influence on SPDP’s chapter 10 concerning its “five aggregates” than AK and AS. The further details of the theory of “five aggregates” will be further analyzed in comparison with the other Buddhist and Bonpo Abhidharma treatises in another paper.

Notes

1) Its Zhang zhung title is Ti ka rgya se lig min rkya.
2) BGASB (Mimaki and Karmay 2007: 3.5–6): ’dus ma byas kyi mtshan nyid / rgyu rkyen las mas skyes pa yin te /
3) SPDP (46.21–47.10). Cf. PS (Li and Steinkellner 2008: 1.8–9): catvāri mahabhūtāni katamāni / prthividhātur abhātus tejodhātur vāyudhātus ca / (Li and Steinkellner 2008: 65.8–9; D no 4066: 11b6): ’byung ba chen po bzhi dag gang zhe na / sa’i khams dang / chu’i khams dang / me’i khams dang / rlung gi khams so /

5) SPDP (48.12–15).

6) SPDP (46.21–22): ZZ. rko phung seng ge cu nga dru, Tib. gzung kyi phung po bco lnga la.

7) PS (Li and Steinkellner 2008: 1.6–2.5).

8) PS (Li and Steinkellner 2008: 3.5–7): spraṣṭavayākadeṣaḥ katamaḥ / kāyasya visāyo mahābhūtāni sthāpayitvā śākṣatvam karkaṣatvam gurutvam laghutvam śītāṃ jighatsā pipāsā ca / (Li and Steinkellner 2008: 67.1–4; D no. 4066: 12a4–5): reg bya’i phyoṣ gcig gang zhe na / lus kyi yul te / ’byung ba chen po rnam bzhag ste / ’jam pa nyid dang / rtsub pa nyid dang / lci ba nyid dang / yang ba nyid dang / grang ba nyid dang / bkres pa nyid dang / skom pa’o / (I am grateful to Associate Professor Izumi Miyazaki and Mr. Takeshi Yokoyama of Kyoto University who have provided me with this information.)


12) Regarding “small conception,” see SPDP (49.1–2): ZZ. de rmhe tha tse rko pung ni, Tib. rgya chung ’du shes lnga bstan pa. Regarding “great conception,” see SPDP (49.4–5): ZZ. de rmhe ca ce rko pung ni, Tib. rgya che’i ’du shes lnga bstan pa. Regarding “immeasurable conception,” see SPDP (49.7–8): ZZ. de rmhe dzad min rko pung ni, Tib. dpag med ’du shes lnga bstan pa.


14) See SPDP (46.19): ZZ. gu ra nga drug ci tog ri, Tib. ’du byed lnga bcu rtsa gnyis ston. We here need to note that Tibetan translation is “52” (lnga bcu rtsa gnyis) but it seems to be a mistranslation and is required to be modified to “51” (lnga bcu rtsa gcig) because only 51 mental factors are enumerated in SPDP. BGSB also gives the number “51” (lnga bcu rtsa gcig). See BGSB (Mimaki and Karmay 2007: 41.10): sems ldan lnga bcu rtsa gcig ste ’og tu ’chad do.

15) Martin (2000: 43) says “the closest match with the mental states list in the mDzod phug is probably to be located in the AS, or at least in lists descending from it, and not in a work of Vasubandhu,” which suggested that he had excluded PS.

17) Martin (2000: 40–41) gives the following 14 concepts as Non-concurrent formations found in SPDP with question marks: [1?] thob pa, [2?] 'du shes med snyoms, [3?] 'gog pa'i snyom 'jug, [4?] srog dang, [5?] dbang po, [6?] skye ba, [7?] rigs mthun, [8?] rigs, [9?] ri, [10?] mi gnas, [11?] ming gi tshogs, [12?] thig gi tshogs, [13?] yi ge'i tshogs, and [14?] so'i byis pa skye bo.

We need to combine the two concepts [4?] “srog” (life) and [5?] “dbang po” (faculty) into one concept “srog gi dbang po” (vital faculty) according to the modification made from “srog dang dbang po” to “srog gi dbang po” in mNyam-med's PGGM (558: 18–20). We also replace [10?] “mi gnas” (non-duration) with “gnas pa” (duration). We also need to add the element “’du shes med snyoms ‘bras bu” (result of non-consciousness).

Abbreviations


AS Abhidharmasamuccaya (Chos mgon pa kun las btus pa) by Asaṅga. Tib. D Tohoku no. 4049; P Otani no. 5550. Chi. Taisho no. 1605.


PS Pañcaskandhaka (Phung po lnga'i rab tu byed pa) by Vasubandhu. Skt./Tib./Chi. ed. Li and Steinkellner 2008. Tib. D Tohoku no. 4059; P Otani no. 5560.


Bibliography


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