An Analysis of the Textual Purpose of the *Madhyamakapañcaskandhaka*:

With a Focus on Its Role as a Primer on Abhidharma Categories for Buddhist Beginners

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1. Introduction

Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakapañcaskandhaka*, preserved only in its Tibetan translation, is an exceptional Madhyamaka treatise that systematically explains the Abhidharma categories employed by the Sarvāstivādas. Since this treatise reveals the concrete contents of the Abhidharma categories discussed by the Madhyamaka school, it serves as one of the most important sources for investigating the Madhyamakas' understanding of them.¹⁾ Before I start to analyze the detailed doctrinal points of this treatise, I must first investigate its textual purpose in order to elucidate its general characteristics. As such, it is necessary to pay attention to the position of Abhidharma categories in Buddhist thought, as many Buddhist traditions treat these categories as basic knowledge. Taking this fact into consideration, it is possible to conceive that these Abhidharma categories served a similar function for the Madhyamakas, who may have also adopted them as a form of preliminary instruction. Preceding studies, which have focused on the criticisms of the Yogācāra theory in the MPSk's *prajñā* section, have neglected this perspective.²⁾ In the process of exploring the MPSk's adoption of the Sarvāstivādas' Abhidharma categories, it is also necessary to analyze the logic employed in the MPSk to deny the independent intrinsic nature of *dharma*s, which is inherent to the Sarvāstivāda theory and which contradicts the Madhyamaka theory of Emptiness.

2. Abhidharma Categories as Preliminary Knowledge for Understanding the Theory of Non-self

First, the opening and closing verses of the MPSk concisely demonstrate that its purpose is to explain Abhidharma categories: [Opening verse] “In order to awaken the intelligence (*buddhi*) of the people who do not have a clear mind (*mati*), I will explain the summarized correct definitions of *skandha*, *āyatana*, and *dhātu*” (D 239b1–2, P 273b7–8); [Closing verse] “For the benefit of the worldly people, who do not make efforts, Candrakīrti made this treatise, which explains the summarized correct meaning of five *skandhas*” (D 266b5–6, P 305b3).³⁾ These verses tell us that the MPSk is a primer that explains the essence of the Abhidharma categories in order to develop the intelligence (*buddhi*) of the people who do not have a clear mind (*mati*). We can thereby understand that the MPSk regards the Abhidharma categories as preliminary knowledge that hones the people’s intelligence.

Next we have to consider the benefits ascribed to developing one’s intelligence by learning Abhidharma categories. In Sarvāstivāda’s doctrine, *prajñā*, or Understanding, which is one of the entities associated with thought (*cittasamprayuktadharma*) and which has the function of discerning our physical and mental components, plays a central role in the ontological analysis of Abhidharma. The MPSk’s definition of *prajñā* (D 248a2–4, P 284a2–6) also describes the significance of honing one’s intelligence by learning Abhidharma Categories:

Understanding (*prajñā*) is a thorough discernment (*pravīcaya*) of *dharma*s. As for a discernment (*vicaya*), it is so named because a man observes an object, which is like an assemblage of the essences of the things, with it. Discerning particularly is thorough discernment. It works in such a manner that a man divides a thing into pieces with his intelligence (*buddhi*), considering what its innate form (*svarūpa*) might be or whether there is a steady core in the object of the perception. For instance, this is like stripping the stem of a banana tree, seeking [to reveal] its core. When a man strips the layers from a banana tree’s stem one by one, seeking [to reveal] its core, he does not find a core therein. Likewise, when a man who has a [clear] mind (*mati*) seeks their innate form of *dharma*s and *pudgalas*, he does not perceive any core in them.⁴⁾

Here, *prajñā* is defined as “a thorough discernment” of *dharma*s, and its function is explained as a concrete action of human intelligence that breaks things into pieces and seeks an essential being in them. The definition then ends with the description of a

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man who has a clear mind and does not perceive any independent essential being in either *dharma*s or *pudgalas*. By synthesizing this function of *prajñā* with the textual purpose of the MPSk shown in the verses above, we can understand the benefit of learning the Abhidharma categories as follows: by learning the Abhidharma categories, people can obtain enough knowledge concerning the physical and mental components of the world, and acquire the intelligence to analyze them. When intelligence is sufficiently developed and the mind becomes clear enough, the theory of Non-self can be understood. In brief, the Abhidharma categories are the preliminary knowledge necessary for understanding the theory of Non-self. However, in the process of adopting Abhidharma categories of the Sarvāstivādas, the MPSk had to carefully repudiate the intrinsic nature of *dharma*s, which is the fundamental principle of Sarvāstivāda doctrine and which contradicts the Madhyamaka theory of Emptiness. In the following section, I will investigate the logic employed in the MPSk to deny the independent intrinsic nature of *dharma*s.

3. Negation of the Independent Intrinsic Nature of *Dharma*s in the MPSk

In the *prajñā* section, the demonstration of the Non-self of *pudgalas* and *dharma*s follows the definition above.⁵⁾ In the demonstration of *dharma-nairātmya*, the independent intrinsic nature of *dharma*s is denied on the basis of the interdependent relationships between *dharma*s.⁶⁾ The descriptions of the interdependencies of *dharma*s can be found not only in this part, but also outside the *prajñā* section. The section on *mahābhūta*s in *rūpaskandha* (D 240a5–6, P 274b6–7) contains following description:

As for these four great elements (*mahābhūta*s), when one element exists, then the other [three] elements exist too. When the other [three] elements exist, then the one element exists too. They are inseparable. Thus they are not established by themselves, because they do not exist without depending on each other.⁷⁾

Here, the independent intrinsic nature of *mahābhūta*s is denied due to the interdependent relationships between them. The section on *vijñānaskandha* (D 265b7–266a4, P 304b4–8) also includes a description of their interdependency:

What is the consciousness (*vijñāna*)? It is the grasp (*grahaṇa*), the discrimination (*paricchitti*), the cognition (*vijñapti*), and the awareness (*avabodha*) of objects. In the same way that jewels [change their own colors] on the basis of the appearance of a color nearby, the consciousness

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discriminates the figure of an object. It discriminates an object by originating in a figure of the object. However, the mere figure of the object is not the consciousness, as this would lead to the faulty conclusion that the object itself is the consciousness. The figure of the object is not different from the consciousness, as this would lead to the faulty conclusion that the figure of the object is absent from the consciousness. Thus, the external object is manifested by the figure that exists in the consciousness, and the consciousness is manifested by the external object. That is, the consciousness and the object of the cognition (*vijñeya*) are established by depending on each other.⁸⁾

In this case, the mutual relationship between *vijñāna* and its object is emphasized. Regarding these descriptions of the interdependent relationships of *dharma*s, which are inserted into the general explanation of the Abhidharma categories in the MPSk, we can see that the MPSk intends to deny the independent intrinsic nature of *dharma*s, which serves as the metaphysical underpinning of the Sarvāstivādas' Abhidharma categories, by insisting on their mutual relationships.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have pointed out that the MPSk explains the Abhidharma categories of the Sarvāstivādas as preliminary knowledge that hones people's intelligence and that well-developed intelligence leads people to an understanding of the theory of Non-self. In the process of adopting the Sarvāstivādas' Abhidharma categories, however, the MPSk had to deny the independent intrinsic nature of *dharma*s, as it contradicts their theory of Emptiness. In making this case, I clarified the logic the text employs in the section on *mahābhūta*s and *vijñānaskandha* to deny the independent intrinsic nature of *dharma*s on the basis of the mutual relationships between them.

In addition to analyzing the text's purpose, another pressing task in contemporary MPSk scholarship is the reexamination of its authorship. Some studies have pointed out the possibility that Candrakīrti only wrote the section on *prajñā* and that the other parts were composed by other author(s). As the next step in my project on the MPSk, which will take the results of this paper into consideration, I am planning to investigate this issue.

Notes

- 1) For the Sanskrit title of the MPSk and for the relationships between the MPSk and

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Munimatālaṃkāra, see YOKOYAMA 2015 and 2014 respectively.

2) For the MPSk's criticisms of the Yōgācāra theories, see notes 8 and 12 in YOKOYAMA, forthcoming.

3) For my understanding of the first two lines of the opening verse and for the reconstruction of the term *blo gros* and *blo*, see note 7 in YOKOYAMA, forthcoming.

4) Cf. MMA, p. 22, ll. 9–13.

5) For the contents of the *prajñā* section, see the second section in YOKOYAMA, forthcoming.

6) For the details of the demonstration of Non-self of *dharma*s, see the third section in YOKOYAMA, forthcoming.

7) Cf. MMA, p. 14, l. 14.

8) Cf. MMA, p. 37, ll. 4–11.

Abbreviations and Primary Sources

MMA LI Xuezhu 李学竹, and KANŌ Kazuo 加納和雄, eds. “Bonbun kōtei Muni ishu shōgon dai isshō (fol. 48r4–58r5): *Chūgan goun-ron* ni motozuku issaihō no kaisetsu” 梵文校訂『牟尼意趣莊嚴』第一章 (fol. 48r4–58r5): 『中觀五蘊論』にもとづく一切法の解説. *Mikkyō bunka* 密教文化 234 (2015): 7–44.

MPSk *Phuṇ po lña'i rab tu byed pa* (*Pañcaskandhaprakaraṇa*). C ya 236a7–263a7, D no. 3866 ya 239b1–266b7, G no. 3266 ya 326a–365b3, N no. 3258 ya 264a6–295a3, P no. 5267 ya 273b6–305b5.

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Key words madhyamaka, 中觀, Candrakīrti, 月称, *Madhyamakapañcaskandhaka*, 中觀五蘊論, textual purpose, 著作目的, Abhidharma, アビダルマ, categories, 範疇論, svabhāva, 自性

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