Pratityasamutpāda in the Daśabhūmikasūtra:
How Many Lifetimes?

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Recently I have been preparing an English translation and analysis of the pratityasamutpāda section of the Abhidharmasamuccaya and Abhidharma-samuccayabhasya. As Matsuda Kazunobu has pointed out in the introduction to his Japanese translation of this section1), as well as in his article on the Ādiśrīśāhāgasūtra², one of the most striking features of Asaṅga’s treat-
tment of pratityasamutpāda is his arrangement of the members into four
groups, two of which can be assigned to one lifetime and two to the next.
This system, known as liang shih i ch’ung (両世一重), or two lifetimes/single
(causation), is a departure from the orthodox Sarvāstivādin san shih liang
ch’ung (三世両重), or three lifetimes/twofold (causation), system, in which
the members are arranged into three groups, with one group assigned to
the past life, one to the present life, and one to the future life.

In my research, I was led to a passage in the Sanskrit edition of the
Daśabhūmikasūtra in which the first ten members of the formula are divided
among three lifetimes, while the last two members seem to belong to yet
another lifetime. When I consulted the various Chinese translations of the
sūtra, I discovered that there are two distinct versions of this passage. In
this paper I shall trace these versions among the various Chinese and Ti-
betan translations of the Daśabhūmikasūtra. I also hope to show a doctri-
nal significance in the variation by examining each version in the context
of the two lifetimes/single causation and three lifetimes/twofold causation
theories. Although my conclusions, based on such a short excerpt from
the text, are largely speculative, I believe that the difference between the
two versions reflects developments in Yogācāra thought: the earlier tradi-
tion may have been a source for the pratityasamutpāda section of the
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Abhidharmasamuccaya, while the later tradition seems to have been influenced by the fully developed two lifetimes/single causation theory.

I have looked at ten versions of this passage: 1) Dharmarakṣa’s Chinese translation (T. 285, p. 476, c. 3); 2) Kumārajiva’s translation (T. 286, p. 515, c. 1-2); 3) Buddhahadra’s translation of Avataṃsakasūtra (T. 278, p. 559, c. 1); 4) the root text in Bodhiruci’s translation of Vasubandhu’s commentary (T. 1522, p. 170, c. 1); 5) the text as quoted within Vasubandhu’s comment (see 4); 6) Śīkṣānanda’s translation of Avataṃsakasūtra (T. 279, p. 194, c. 2); 7) Śiladharma’s translation (T. 287, p. 553, c. 3); 8) the Tibetan translation (Peking Bka’-’gyur v. 24, p. 264, f. 105a. 5-7); 9) the Tibetan translation of Vasubandhu’s commentary (Peking Bstan-’gyur, v. 104, p. 104m f. 249a. 3—f. 256b. 1. 3); 10) the Sanskrit text based on Nepalese manuscripts (Kondo edition, p. 101).

In the case of our section of the sūtra, texts 2, 3, 4, and probably 1 agree, and I shall refer to them as the first version. Texts 6–10 essentially agree, and I shall refer to them as the second version. Text 5 contains elements of both versions.

If we compare the two versions, we can find two significant differences. The first version explicitly includes jāti and jarāmarāṇa in the future life, while the second omits them from it. Secondly, the final sentence of the first version states that the twelve members are to be assigned to three consecutive lifetimes, while the last sentence of version two implies that jāti and jarāmarāṇa do not belong to the same life as trṣṇā, etc., and that, therefore, another lifetime is required to complete the chain. Text 5 resembles the first version in including the sentence yu shih chien yu san shih chuan (於是見有三 世轉), while it resembles the second version in omitting ati and jarāmarāṇa from the future life.

In order to understand the significance of this variation, we must first look at the Sarvāstivādin position as found in Abhidharmakośa (see chart). According to this system, the past life is the cause of the resultant aspect of the present life (i.e., from viññāna to vedanā). The causal aspect of the present life (trṣṇā, etc.) produces the future life.  This system, probably

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the most widely known division of the members, appeals to commonsense, suite the contention of the Sarvāstivādin school that past and future really exist, and is at least superficially simple since it does not disturb the order of the members.

In the Yogācāra system, at least in the Abhidharmasamuccaya and Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya, the members are quite differently grouped (see chart). The projecting set and actualizing set belong to one lifetime, while the projected set and acutalized set belong to the next lifetime. Although Asanga does not say so explicitly, by looking at the ASBh and the Savitarkasavicārābhūmi of Yogācārabhūmi, probably a major source for Asaṅga, we can understand that this system is based on a theory of seeds (bijā): the projecting set “plants” the seeds of the next life, i.e., the projected set, while the actualizing set causes the seeds to realize their potential (i.e., to become the next life itself). This interpretation reflects a theory of causation consistent with the theory of alayavijñāna even though Asaṅga does not mention the term.

Comparing the DBh first version with the Sarvāstivādin system, we see that they both refer to three lifetimes and that they include the same members in the past life. However, the DBh includes only the members from vijñāna through vedanā in the present; trṣṇā, etc., which the Sarvāstivādins consider the present-life causes of the future, the DBh assigns to the future life itself.

The DBh’s groups of past and present members correspond to the AS’s projecting and projected sets of members, with the exception of vijñāna. However, the position of vijñāna in Yogācāra interpretations of pratītyasamutpāda is problematic since vijñāna is both causal and resultant. According to the Ch‘eng wei shih lun (成唯識論), Asanga here takes vijñāna to be the karmabijas comprising alayavijñāna, while he includes the bijas of vipākavijñāna in nāmarūpa.

The DBh’s inclusion of trṣṇā through jarāmarāṇa in the future life, however, is at odds with the AS for the same reasons that it disagrees with the Sarvāstivādins: it violates the principle that causal members should
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Sarvastivādin System

Past                    Present                  Future
avidya (Ignorance)     vijñāna (Consciousness)  jāti (Birth)
saṃskāra (karmic Forces) nāmarūpa (Individual Existence)  jārāmarāṇa (Old Age and Death)
śadāyatana (Six Senses) sparśa (Contact)
vedanā (Feeling)
trṣṇā (Subconscious Desire)
upādāna (Appropriation)
bhava (Karmic Existence)

Daśabhūmikasūtra......First Version

Past                  Present                  Future
avidya                vijñāna               trṣṇā
saṃskāra              nāmarūpa            upādāna
śadāyatana           sparśa               bhava
vedanā

Daśabhūmikasūtra......Second Version

Past                  Present                  Future
avidya                vijñāna               trṣṇā  (jāti)
saṃskāra              nāmarūpa            upādāna  (jārāmarāṇa)
śadāyatana           sparśa               bhava

Abhidharmasamuccaya

Projecting Set           Projected Set
(Lifetime one)          (Lifetime two)
avidya                  nāmarūpa
saṃskāra
vijñāna

Actualizing Set         Actualized Set
(Lifetime one)          (Lifetime two)
trṣṇā
upādāna
bhava

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belong to different lifetimes from their results. In this case, the grouping of the causes of the future life together with the future life itself suggests that this passage represents a not completely systematic treatment of the pratiyasamutpāda formula.

When we come to the second version, we find that trṣṇā, etc., are no longer grouped with jāti and jāramaraṇa, which are not, in fact, mentioned by name, although the phrase ata ārdhvaṁ seems to refer to them. As a result, although the terms “past,” “present,” and “future” appear, there are actually four groups of members, which correspond to the four groups of the AS, again with the exception of vijñāna.

Vasubandhu’s comments on the second version are particularly interesting in that he points out the relative nature of the three times. In his discussion of the members assigned by DBh to the future, Vasubandhu does not mention the lifetimes by name; he simply refers to a subsequent existence. He states that trṣṇā, etc., cause production of a new existence, and he implies that this existence is equivalent to jāti and jāramaraṇa. In this case, Vasubandhu’s comment only makes sense in the context of the second version; if all five belonged to the same lifetime, the causal relationship that Vasubandhu attributes to them would be impossible.

Thus the second version, as interpreted by Vasubandhu, is a step closer to the fully developed Yogācāra two lifetimes/single causation theory. Far more than the first, it can support an interpretation consistent with the two-lifetime theory. Therefore, I suggest that the text of the DBh was altered for doctrinal reasons shortly before Vasubandhu wrote his commentary or was rewritten under his influence.

1) Matsuda Kazunobu, “Abhidharmasamuccayaにおける十二支縁起の解釈” (Interpretation of the Twelvefold Chain of Dependent Origination in the Abhidharmasamuccaya), Ōtani Daigaku Shinshū-Sōgō-Kenkyū-jo Kenkyū-kiyō 1, 1983, pp. 29-30,
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