On Cognition of the past:
the Concept of smṛti and svapna in Praṣastapādabhāṣya

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Cognition of the past has been one of the most important problems in philosophy. However, only few attempts have so far been made at this problem in the field of Indian thought. In this paper, the author intends to consider cognition of the past in Praṣastapādabhāṣya (PBh: 6C. A. D.), which is one of the main texts of the Vaiśeṣika system. In PBh, we can see some types of cognition of the past. Nevertheless, basic things are two types, which are Memory (smṛti) and Dream (svapna); the other cognition is special cognition by yogin or saints. Thus, I would like to focus on these two types of cognition of the past.

1 Memory (smṛti)

Memory (smṛti) is one of the four types of right cognition (vidyā), and it is based on the confirmation of continuous cognition of the past experiences (attasya jñānaprabandhasya pratyavekṣaṇa). It happens because of the particular contact mind and self (ātmamanaso samyogaviśeṣā), which is caused by seeing sign, wish, and recollection, or because of the invisible mental faculty (saṃskāra), which is caused by strength, repetition, and noting.

As for the characteristics of Memory are caused by confirmation of the remainder, wish, and recollection. It is worthy of notice that the cognition of the past, which is caused by Memory, is equivalent to continuous cognition. In this conjecture, knowing the past can be possible only when it can be confirmed by continuous knowledge. Therefore, the past, which cannot be confirmed in the present time, does not exist. To put it another way, the objective past does not exist.

However, cannot a forgotten knowledge, which is not continued as knowledge, be known by the cognition of Memory? In this theory, a forgotten thing is perceived by cognition of Memory as a style of 'I forget it'. However, it does not mention on oblivion in detail. Moreover, it is not examined on a wrong Memory or misunderstanding. Because, in epistemology of PBh, the wrong knowledge of past is Dream (svapna).
2 Dream (svapna)

Dream (svapna) is one of the four wrong cognition (avidyā). as well as Memory, it is based on the confirmation of continuous knowledge of past experience, and is caused by the particular contact of mind and self, or the invisible mental faculty. 4) We should bear in mind that Dream is cognized when it is finished (i.e. when a man awaken from sleep). Because, when we are dreaming we cannot judge whether it is a Dream or not. Therefore, the cognition of Dream is based on the present experience.

Thus, as well as Memory, the knowledge of Dream is cognized by recollecting in the present tense: that is present experience.

3 Conclusion -Memory and Dream as present experience-

It should be concluded that the cognition of the past (Memory and Dream) reveals three significant characteristics.

3-1 Firstly, Memory is the continuation of knowledge (jnāna prabandha). In this theory, Memory occurs to one because of the particular contact of mind and self, which is caused by seeing sign, wish, and recollection, or of the invisible mental faculty, which is caused by strength, repetition, and noting. At that moment, Memory can be the knowledge on the past experiences. However, it must be the past knowledge, which has been continued until the present.

Therefore, in the theory of Memory, we cannot assume that “The past itself objectively exists somewhere”. Because we cannot know about the past experiences without the knowledge of past, which is continued until the present.

3-2 Secondly, it should be emphasized that Memory and Dream are based on the present experience. The continuation of the past knowledge is confirmed at the present. In other words, the cognition of past, regardless of Memory or Dream, is concluded as an experience of the present. Therefore, knowing the past can only be possible by confirming the continuation of the cognizance as the present experience. Thus, both Memory and Dream are just present experiences.

To sum up, the cognition of the past can only be known as the present experience by Memory or Dream.

3-3 Finally, we may go on from the argument above to the conclusion: the theory of time
in PBh is marked by Monism of present experience. BHADURI, Sadananda, suggests that one of the features of the time argument of Nyaya-Vaiśeṣika school is Monism of the present experience. 5) I agree with his suggestion because the epistemology in PBh is based on the direct cognitions (pratyakṣa) and inference (anumāṇa) at the present, and two types of cognition of the past, which are Memory and Dream, is based on the present experience, too. From this standpoint, it can be concluded that the theory of time in PBh has an aspect of Monism of present experience as well as other philosophers in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school.

In this connection, we may note, that the thought on the past of PBh closely resembles in the theory of time of OMORI Shozo (1921-97) who is a philosopher in the present day Japan. 6) His theory of time is characterized by the remembering-past theory. According to his theory, time is not a linear, which is understood by modern science (i.e. objective past), but the past is only known by remembering. That is to say, the past is arranged by present experience that is remembering.

We should notice that there are some points in common on the theory of time between an Indian thought of 6C. A. D. and a contemporary Japanese philosopher, however, this problem includes important argument that it has been too involved a subject to be treated here in detail.

[Source Text] PBh: The Praśastapāda Bhāṣya with Commentary Nyāyakandali of SRIDHARA, Edited by Vindhyasvari Prasad Dhivedin, Banaras, 1895 (Reprint, Delhi, 1984)

1) An early form of this work was first appeared in MIURA Hirofumi. "How do we know past? -A study of cognition of past (smṛti and svapna) in Praśastapādabhāṣya-", Bulletin of Graduate School, Toyo University Graduate Program of Liberal Art, Vol. 35,1998, Toyo University, Tokyo. 2) PBh: p.256,11.17 ~ 20. 3) This objective past is one of the key concepts of OMORI Shozo's theory of time. He gave a definition of time in modern science as objective past, which made time an object. This question is taken up in the 3-3. 4) PBh: p.183,1.13 ~ p.184,1.15 5) BHADURI, Sadananda, Studies in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika methaphysics, Bandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1947 (Reprint, 1975), pp. 21213. 6) See, in particular, OMORI, Shozo's three works of his later years. (1) Jikan to Jiga (Time and Self), Seito-sya, 1992, Tokyo. (2) Jikan to Sonzai (Time and Being), Seito-sya, 1994, Tokyo. (3) Toki ha nagarezu (Time never pass), Seito-sya, 1996. Tokyo.

(Key Words) Praśastapāda, Vaiśeṣika, smṛti, svapna, theory of time, Monism of present experience

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