On Philosophical View of the Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra

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1. Introduction

The position of Śāntideva in Madhyamaka philosophy has not been defined clearly. In the grub mtha' texts, he is generally considered to belong to the Prāsaṅgika school. However, interpretation of his attitude toward epistemological theory has not reached any consensus, such as (a) whether external objects exist or not, or (b) whether images (ākāra) exist in cognition or not. Now we can find three different views on this point: (1) he maintains the existence of external objects; (2) he maintains there exist no objects external to the mind; (3) he maintains the theory of cognition with images (sākāra, here, precisely satyākāra theory of the Viśṇunāvāda, which claims images to be true). The ideas of (1) and (2) are found in the BSAP, the commentary by an unknown author on the BSA preserved in the Dunhuang collection, while the idea in (3) is presented by Jñānaśrimitra and derives from an interpretation of a verse included in the canonical version of the same text, the BCA.

There are prior works on these views by Akira Saito, and the philosophical standpoint of the BSAP concerning (1) has been studied in detail. Although the BSAP takes the position of (1) based on a verse in the BSA, Saito believes that the view of the BSAP author made this excessive interpretation, and therefore he does not extend his study to the philosophical view of the BSA itself. As for (2), we can presume from the criticism found in the BSAP that there was such an interpretation of Śāntideva. However, there is no description of the name of the interpreter or the reason why he took such a position. We do not know which version this philosophical position is based on, whether the BSA or the BCA. As for (3), this seems to be the arbitrary opinion of Jñānaśrimitra who was a Sākāravādin.

The reason for the existence of such varied opinions may be as follows: 1) Śā-
ntideva did not directly discuss cognitive issues; 2) thoughts that developed later were applied to the interpretation and 3) there are differences between the BSA and the BCA texts. Recently, it has been clarified that the BSA is an earlier version than the BCA and has better organized contents. In this paper, I will discuss the verses in the BSA that concern the cognitive theory, and I will analyze why Śāntideva was regarded as having the attitude of ②.

2. Interpretations of ③

In this section, I will discuss the view of ③, as it has a close relation to ②. The BSAP considers that Śāntideva believed in the existence of external objects. This is based on verse VIII-27cd of the BSA (=BCA IX-36): “So the body of the Conqueror (Jina) appears because of the [accumulated] virtue of living beings.” The BSAP interprets this as denying the idea that there is no body of the Buddha, and that assertion leads to a unique interpretation of BSA ③. What we should pay attention to is BSA VIII-6:

BSA VIII-6  gzugs stogs mnon sum blo yis ni// rab du grags kyi tshad mas myin//
de ni myi gtsan las stogs la// gtsan stogs grags pa bzin ste brdzun//

Form etc. is established as directly perceptible by the intellect, not by a valid cognition. That intellect is false, just like the establishment of purity etc. with regard to impurity etc.

Here, “the intellect” corresponds to the term used in BSA VIII-2d, which says, “The intellect and word are the veiled” (blo dañ sgra ni kun rdzob yin). It is clear that this verse discusses conventional cognition. The phrase “that intellect is false” follows Prasannapadā which says, “Such experience (i.e. experiential cognition) is false” (anubhava esa mṛṣa). This is a fundamental thought of the Madhyamaka school.

As for the first half of this verse, the BSAP says, “Form etc. through ripening of the traces (bag chags) of discursive proliferation (spros pa), as directly perceptible, erroneously appears and is not established by valid cognition.” This reminds us of the theory of the Yogācāra school, and the BSAP author, who held view ③, did not consider the verse as Śāntideva’s view. In other words, the BSAP considered verse 6 to be Yogācāra’s criticism of the Sautrāntika school instead of interpreting them as Śāntideva’s criticism of the Sautrāntika, as other commentaries do. Saito says that if we interpret the verse content as the BSAP, and if we consider that in-
terpretation as Śāntideva’s without the restriction that he should be regarded as ①, then it would be close to the interpretation of some people who considered him as ②. ⑧

3. BSA’s viewpoint

Now I will examine the above interpretation, comparing it with some other verses in the BSA. I will introduce BSA VI-43, on which the BSAP commented with the same word “error” (khrul) as it did on BSA VIII-6. For convenience I will quote the previous and the following verses.

BSA VI-42cd rkan pa’i sdu bgnas lag pa myin// ci phyir de ni des dsaRua bya//

A pain of the foot is not that of the hand. Yet why is it (foot) protected by the other (hand)?

BSA VI-43 rgyud dan tshogs sves ba ni// phren ba chu rgyun nags tshogs bzin//

Continua and aggregates are, like garlands, water flow or forests, delusions in one’s memory and the intellect. All of the world is the mind.

BSA VI-44 ci ltar lag pa las stogs pa// lus kyi yan lag yin ’dod ltar//

de bzin ’gro ba’i yan lag du// ci phyir lus can rnams myi ’dod//

Why are not living beings loved as a part of the world just like the way that hand etc. are loved as a part of the body?

Verse 43 considers continua and aggregates, or objects of cognition such as garlands, etc., to be delusions in one’s memory and the intellect. This verse forms a part of the theoretical foundation for Śāntideva’s preaching on compassion, which considers one’s self and others to be equal. ⑩

Pada d, “All of the world is the mind,” reminds us of the phrase about cittamātra in the Daśabhūmikasūtra. But we can not easily say that pada d denies the existence of external objects as the Yogācāra does. About this phrase we know other interpretations, such as: a) Candrakīrti quoted this phrase in the Madhyamakāvatāra, saying that one’s mind alone was the subject of one’s action on the conventional level, and rejected the Yogācāra’s interpretation, which considers the phrase as denying the existence of external objects; ⑪ and b) Subhagupta even claimed the existence of external objects based on this phrase. ⑫ Nevertheless, if we consider that continua and aggregates are in the intellect and intellection is therefore affected,
it might be said that this verse as a whole has an affinity with the theory of the Yogācāra.

BSA VIII-6 is in the chapter on prajñā that analyzes the issues of cognition. BSA VI-43 is included not in here but in the chapter on virya. However, the corresponding verse BCA VIII-101 is included in the verse group which instructs on the equality of oneself and others. It appears at the end of the chapter on dhyāna, i.e. immediately before the chapter on prajñā. As we think about the ideas of samatha (meditative serenity) and vipaśyanā (insight), dhyāna and prajñā can be combined. So it is plausible to think that the contents of the chapter on dhyāna and verse BSA VI-43 treat the issues of cognition. Even though they focus on different points, BSA VI-43 and BSA VIII-6 can be considered similar in content.

In fact, commenting on these two verses, the BSAP uses the same word: "error/erroneous" (khrul). Regarding BSA VIII-6’s assertion "that [intellect] is false," the BSAP says, "Form etc. erroneously (khrul nas) appears." And, regarding BSA VIII-43’s assertion that "continua and aggregates are delusions in one's memory and the intellect," the BSAP says that "it is because of error (khrul pa'i dban gis) that we apprehend a conscious stream (rgyud) from former lives or a physical assemblage such as a hand as being one thing." That is to say, in both verses the BSAP looks upon the objects of cognition as errors of the intellect, and it is probable that the BSAP considers the two verses to have quite similar contents.

By the way, while the BSAP presents BSA VIII-6 as the opinion of the Yogācāra school and not that of Śāntideva, it does not regard BSA VI-43 as the opinion of the Yogācāra school. As a matter of fact, it is impossible to think of BSA VI-43 as a theory of other schools because it forms a part of the foundation for Śāntideva's theory on the equality of self and others. Therefore, although the BSAP does not attribute BSA VIII-6 to Śāntideva, regarding him rather as a Madhyamaka master who maintained the existence of external objects (-floating existence), this view is inconsistent with the BSAP’s attitude toward BSA VI-43. In view of BSA VI-43, it is only natural to presume that BSA VIII-6 also represents Śāntideva's view. We could read these two verses as follows: Form etc., correspond to continua and aggregates and are illustrated by such things as garlands, water flow, or forests. Being established conventionally by the intellect, all these objects of cognition are false or delusions of...
the intellect.

In addition, I will introduce a verse in the chapter on prajñā, which refers to memory.

BSA VIII-21  
gal te ran rig yod myin na// rnam šes ci ltar dran par 'gyur//
don dran gyurd pa'i sgo ŋid nas// dpyad myi dgos par de dran no//

If self-awareness does not exist, how is cognition remembered? That [cognition] is, without doubt, remembered just by the objects which are remembered.

In response to the question of the Yogācāra (ab), Śāntideva denies the concept of self-awareness (cd). He says that objects are remembered, and here people might find room to assume that he accepts cognition with images.

4. BCA's viewpoint

It is interesting that in the argument about self-awareness between the Madhyamaka and the Yogācāra schools, we find the word “image” (ākāra) in a half-verse only in the BCA (not in the BSA). This argument consists of ten and a half verses in the BCA. Among them there are three half-verses that only appear in the BCA, and one of them includes the word “image.” This insertion makes the matter very complicated, shifting the combination of half-verses from the BSA to the BCA, but I would not like to go into details in this paper since I have already examined it in another.

The verse in question can be interpreted in two ways: either as an opinion of the Yogācāra school or as one of the Madhyamaka. If we take the latter, the verse would be interpreted as follows:

BCA IX-16cd  
cittasyaiva sa ākāro yady apy anyo 'sti tattvatah/

Even if this image is just of the mind, in reality, something other exists.

If this interpretation is correct, there is some possibility that Śāntideva had a view similar to that of cognition with image on the conventional level.

5. Conclusion

Since the BSA does not use the word ‘image’, it leaves some ambiguity. However, so far as the verses examined above are concerned, they have the tendency to allow the existence of objects in cognition. This probably led to the interpretation of Śāntideva as seen in (2).
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