On expressions regarding "śūnya" or "śūnyatā"
in the Northern Āgamas and the Pāli commentaries

Norihisa BABA

The Northern Āgamas and the Pāli Nikāyas have commonly been regarded as some of the earliest sources for the philological study of Buddhism. Despite this tendency, these canons do not necessarily correspond to one another. For example, the Northern Āgamas include passages that correspond to the Pāli commentaries (Atthakathā), but not to those found in the Pāli Nikāyas. Hence, a comparative study of the Pāli commentaries and the Northern Āgamas is key to revealing new aspects of the history of early Buddhist canons. In this paper, by focusing on the terms “empty” (śūnya) or “emptiness” (śūnyatā), I will show that some expressions that occur in the Northern Āgamas correspond to statements which appear in the Pāli commentaries rather than those in the Pāli Nikāyas.

I. Paramārthaśūnyatāsūtra

The Paramārthaśūnyatāsūtra (= Pss) is a well-known sutra that influenced both Abhidharma and Mahāyāna thought. This sutra speaks of (1) emptiness in the ultimate sense (paramārtha), (2) the idea that “eyes and such neither come nor go,” (3) the denial of a doer (kāraka) through the theory of karma and result (vipāka), and (4) dependent origination expounded in connection with emptiness. These arguments are not found in the Pāli canon. (1) In the Pāli commentaries, however, it is stated that, in the ultimate sense, this world is empty, and that, in the ultimate sense, the four noble truths are empty of self. (2) In the Viśuddhimagga (=Vism), one of the Pāli commentaries, it is stated that all formed bases do not come from anywhere and do not go anywhere. (3) In Vism, it is stated that a doer doesn’t exist and karma and its result causally maintain their rounds. (4) In Vism, it is said that the twelve factors are empty of self because their existence is dependent on conditions. Therefore, these elements of the Pss correspond to similar ideas.
found in the Pāli commentaries, but not to those found in the Pāli canon. This correspondence is as follows:

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<th>Sutra</th>
<th>Pāli texts</th>
<th>Northern Āgamas</th>
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II. "Twofold emptiness" and "sixfold emptiness"

An illustrative statement regarding emptiness in a Northern Āgama is cited in the Bodhisattvayogācārataḥsatatakāṭikā and is as follows: "Samrddhi, the eye is empty of self, or of the property of a self, or of permanence, or of constancy, or of eternality, or of not being subject to change (caksuh samrddhe śūnyam ātmanātmiyena ca nityena dhruveṇa śāsvatenāviparināmadharmenaṇī) 7).

It is clear that some expressions regarding emptiness in the Chinese Āgamas 8) are parallel to the above Sanskrit sentence 9), since the terms, "self (我)," "the property of a self (我所)," "permanence (常)," "constancy (恒)," "eternityality (住)," and "not being subject to change (不變易法)" are used in the Chinese Samyuktāgama (=SA) as well as the Madhyamakāgama.

On the other hand, in the Majjhimanikāya (=MN) and the Samyuttanikāya (=SN) 10), only the statement "empty of self or of the property of a self" can be found (in this paper, this expression will be referred to as "twofold emptiness" 11). In the Patīsambhidāmagga (=Pts) and the Cullaniddesa (=CNd), however, we find the statement "empty of self, or of the property of a self, or of permanence, or of constancy, or of eternityality, or of not being subject to change" 12 (in this paper, this expression will be referred to as "sixfold emptiness" 13).

In summary, "twofold emptiness" is found only in the MN/SN, but "sixfold emptiness" is found in both the Northern Āgamas and the Pts/CNd. Since the Pts/CNd were composed later than the first four Nikāyas, and, in fact, as many statements in the first four Nikāyas are cited and commented on in the Pts/CNd 14), the Pts/CNd can be seen as virtual commentaries. In the other words, these statements regarding that which is "empty" in the Northern Agamas do not correspond to passages in the MN/SN, but, instead, correspond to texts composed at a later date. This cor-
On expressions regarding "śūnya" or "śūnyatā" in the Northern Āgamas and the Pāli commentaries (N. BABA) (11)

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<tr>
<td>Commentary</td>
<td>Sixfold emptiness</td>
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III. Conclusion

Certain elements of the Pss do not correspond to the contents of the Pāli canon, but are analogous to certain elements of the Pāli commentaries. Furthermore, expressions in the Northern Āgamas (such as "sixfold emptiness") do not correspond to the statements in Pāli MN/SN, but do correspond to the passages in the Pts/CNd. Based on these two facts, we can conclude that the Northern Āgamas include expressions of emptiness that are more recent than those in the first four Pāli Nikāyas.

1) There are three Chinese translations of Pss: T2.92c12-26, T2.713c12-714b12, T15.806c20-807a20. The original Sanskrit of this sutra is cited in Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam (P. Pradhan [1975] Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu, Patna, 129.9-11; 299.12-14; 468.20-22).
2) Sumanāgalavilāsini II 82.25-28. 3) Vism 512.32-514.17. 4) Vism 484.5-11. 5) Vism 602.32-35. 6) Vism 578.9-15. 7) K. Suzuki [1994] Sanskrit Fragments and Tibetan Translation of Candrakīrti's Bodhisattvavyāpācāracaturahātakaṭikā, Tokyo, 164.4-6. 8) T2.56b24-5, T2.72c14-5, T2.150a2-5, T1.542c15-9. 9) É. Lamotte hypothesized that the original Sanskrit for "śūnya" in the Chinese SĀ was "śāsvatenāviparināmaharmena śūnyam āṃśayaṇa śūnyam" (É. Lamotte [1976] Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse, Tome IV, Louvain, 2114.). A. Mukai, however, while pointing out Lamotte’s hypothesis, offers a new theory, which is equivalent to "sixfold emptiness". cf. A. Mukai (向井亮) [2000] “On Two Aspects of śūnyatā in the Samyuktāgama [空]の二面性について—阿含経における考察—” Indotetsugaku bunkyōgaku 印度哲学仏教学15,1-20. I find Mukai’s hypothesis preferable, since Mukai was able to base his views on texts that were unavailable to Lamotte. 10) MN II 297.35-298.1, MN II 263.25-27, SNIV54.5-14, SNIV296.32-297.2. 11) cf. Vism 653.31-33. 12) Pts I 109, Pts II 178.8-13, Pts II 181.3-19. 13) cf. Vism 654.20-26. 14) cf. K. Mizuno (水野弘元) [1997] Pāli Doctrinal Studies (『パーソリ論書研究』), Tokyo, 3-117.

Note: References to Pāli texts are to the Pāli Text Society editions.

〈Key Words〉 śūnya, śūnyatā, the Northern Āgamas, the Pāli commentaries

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