Two Aspects of the Simile of māyā in the Mahāyānasūtrālāmākaṇa

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Introduction  The Mahāyānasūtrālāmākaṇa (MSA, 4th cent.), Chap. IX (esp. kk.15-29, tattvā māyopapamaparyēṣṭih), uses the simile of māyā in the context of discussing the trisvabhāva theory. Although the passage in question has been taken up by various studies up until now, it seems that most of them have rather one-sidedly understood māyā as ‘magic’ (or the action of creating an illusion), failing to notice that the significance of this simile has two aspects: (a) the aspect of the cause of an illusion (corresponding to ‘magic’ or ‘material for magic’), which serves as a cause of error (bhṛāntinimittam), and (b) the aspect of an illusion itself, which manifests but does not exist in reality. However, it is thought that the existence of these two aspects of māyā plays an important role in characterizing abhūtāparikalpa, which is compared to māyā in the MSA.

In this paper, I will point out that the above-mentioned two aspects are found in the usage of māyā in the MSA, and I would like to clarify the peculiarity of this interpretation by considering the interpretations given in the commentaries and in comparison with examples of the simile of māyā in other works of the early Yogācāra, especially the Madhyāntavibhāga (MAV).

Two Aspects of māyā in the Mahāyānasūtrālāmākaṇa  The first aspect of this simile appears in the first half of the passage concerned (kk.13-18). First, “vyaktiḥ tannimittasya” ([true] appearance of a cause of that [māyākṛta]) is shown to correspond to “asatkalpasya [vyaktiḥ]” in k.17. Now, māyā is used as a simile for abhūtāparikalpa, which is identical to “asatkalpa” in k.15. Therefore, it is evident that “tannimittam” (= tasya māyākṛtasya nimittam) refers to māyā, that is to say, māyā is here characterized as a cause of māyākṛta, corresponding to dvayabhṛānti. This is the first aspect of māyā.

But this interpretation cannot be applied to the latter half of the passage (kk.18-
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29). There *māyā* is compared to "rūpa," "dharma," and so on. In this case, the most appropriate interpretation would seem to be that *māyā* means some manifestation, that is, an illusion itself. This is the second aspect.

Thus we can detect two aspects with regard to the simile of *māyā* in the MSA. Next, let us turn our attention to how the commentaries of the MSA interpret this simile.

### Interpretations of the Commentaries

**Interpretation of the *Mahāyānasūtrālāmkaṇārabhāṣya***

First of all, the interpretation given in the *Mahāyānasūtrālāmkaṇārabhāṣya* (MSABh) will be examined. It is divided into two parts in the same way as the MSA.

In the first part, it seems that the MSABh ad k.14 shows its fundamental understanding. There, unlike in the MSA, "*māyākṛta*" is compared to "paratantra" (= abhūtaparikalpa), corresponding to aspect (b), and "*hastitvādi*" (a state of an elephant, etc.) is described as what is compared to "dvaya" (= parikalpita), which is not mentioned separately in the MSA. This relationship can be simply represented as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MSA</th>
<th>MSABh</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>paratantra</td>
<td><em>māyā</em> = a piece of wood, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>māyākṛta</em> = elephant, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parikalpita</td>
<td><em>māyākṛta</em> = an elephant, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dvaya</td>
<td><em>dvaya</em> = a state of an elephant, etc.</td>
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On the other hand, the MSABh interprets *māyā* in the same way as the MSA in the latter part. For example, the MSABh states, "Thus the dharmas which belong to the opposite side have no characteristics, and they are not existent but appear. Therefore they are compared to *māyā*."4)

Consequently, the interpretation of the simile of *māyā* in the MSABh is only interpretation (b), which agrees with that in the latter part of the MSA.

**Interpretation of the *Sūtrakaravṛttibhāṣya***

Next, the interpretation given in the *Sūtrakaravṛttibhāṣya* (SAVBh) will be examined in the same way. The basic understanding of the SAVBh is thought to be what appears in the following passages: "a cause, [namely,] a piece of wood, a lump of clay, and so on, of the manifestation of *māyā*, [namely,] a horse, an elephant, and so on, appears by the power applied by an incantation and a drug of a magician,"6) and "various figures of a horse, an elephant, and so on, which have the form of *māyā* (*māyāṛūpa*), [namely,] a lump of clay, a piece of wood, and so on, appear by the power applied by an incan-
In this case, there can be no doubt that the SAVBh is applying interpretation (b) to māyā. Most other expressions in the SAVBh can be understood in the same way.

Thus, it is to be surmised that the fundamental understanding of the SAVBh is interpretation (b).

Interpretations of Other Works Finally, we will consider the general interpretation of this simile in the early Yogācāra by examining the interpretation of the Madhyāntavibhāga (MAV) with its commentaries, which serves as a reference in considering the MSA’s ideas because the authors and their philosophical tendencies are thought to coincide with the ideas of the MSA.

The MAV/bhāṣya (MAVBh) gives the following simile in k.17:

“The existence and non-existence of the object are thought to be like māyā and so on.”

“The non-existence and existence of the object, which are mentioned just before, are thought to be like māyā and so on. [That is to say,] māyā does not exist in the state of an elephant and so on, but it is not because it exists as a mere error; likewise, an object also does not exist in the manner of appearing in the state of what is to be seized and what seizes, but it is not because it exists as a mere error.”

Here, māyā is described as what corresponds to an object (artha), and it is clear that the MAV/Bh adopts interpretation (b).

On the other hand, the part of māyopamatā which is the fourth of the daśa vajrapadāni gives a slightly different explanation as follows:

“He dispels this [criticism] by means of māyopamatā (the fact that it is compared to māyā) in the same way as māyākṛta does not exist but is recognized.”

In this case, māyākṛta is interpreted as a so-called illusion, which corresponds to interpretation (b) in other cases.

In regard to this point, we may consult the commentary (MAVT) of Sthiramati, who is also the author of the SAVBh. Although his commentary gives only a literal interpretation in the former case, “māyākṛta” is paraphrased by the word “māyā” in his commentary in the latter case. Therefore, it is to be surmised that Sthiramati regarded māyā as a synonym of māyākṛta.

Thus, we may assume that the MAV applies interpretation (b) to both māyā and māyākṛta, at least according to the MAVT.
In this section, we have considered the general interpretation of *māyā* in the early Yogācāra, taking the MAV and its commentaries as examples, while in other works, such as the *Mahāyānasamgraha* (§§1.6IC, II.27, III.12), we can find only interpretation (b) and not interpretation (a). \(^{12}\) Accordingly, it is to be surmised that interpretation (b) was common in the early Yogācāra.

**Conclusion**  In the above we have examined the simile of *māyā* in the MSA and the MAV with their commentaries. As a result, we can conclude as follows.

In the MSA, *māyā* is compared to *abhūtaparikalpa* in two aspects: (a) the aspect of the cause of an illusion (corresponding to ‘magic’ or ‘material for magic’), which functions as a cause of error, and (b) the aspect of an illusion itself, which appears but does not exist as it appears.

The second interpretation, which adopts aspect (b), is considered to be common in early Yogācāra works excluding the MSA, and generally speaking *māyākṛta* is used separately from *māyā* in the sense of aspect (b).

The MSABh does not give a consistent interpretation. This means that the MSABh pays attention to interpretation (a) of the MSA and manages to include the second aspect (b) at the same time.

In the SAVBh, aspect (a), which represents a cause of error, is hardly related to this simile, and instead aspect (b) comes to the fore.

Additionally, we can point out the following. It is thought that the interpretation characterizing *abhūtaparikalpa* by aspect (a) of the simile of *māyā* is peculiar to the MSA. At the same time, the MSA also characterizes it by means of aspect (b). The commentaries of the MSA, on the other hand, sought to interpret it in a unified manner in accordance with aspect (b), which is the more general interpretation in the early Yogācāra.

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1) In this paper, the MSA means mainly the *kārikā* sections. 2) The simile of *māyā* in the early Yogācāra is understood as an ‘illusion’ in general; see G. M. Nagao, *Shōdaijirōn wayaku to chūkai* (in Japanese), vol. 1, Tokyo, 1982, p.267, note 1. There are many studies that have dealt with this simile of *māyā* in the MSA in recent years as well: e.g. K. Hyōdō, “Sanshōsetsu ni okeru yuishiki mukyō no igi (2)” (in Japanese), Ōtani Gakuhō 70-4, pp.1-23; N. Azami, “The Doctrine of the Three Natures in Early Yogācāra” (in Japanese), JIBS, pp.388-386. Although these studies point out the differences between the interpretations of
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the MSA, MSABh and SAVBh, their understanding of this simile seems to be as stated above. 3) On the other hand, MSABh ad k.13 also shows a different understanding. In this case, māyā is understood as "a cause of error" (bhrāntinimitta), to which "abhūtaparikalpa" or "paratantra" is compared. However, this understanding does not seem to be in accordance with the above-mentioned understanding. It seems reasonable to assume that this understanding is the result of trying to make it conform with the different understanding of the MSA. 4) MSABh ad MSA XI, k.28. 5) The Mahāyānasūtrālambkaratikā, another commentary on the MSA/Bh, is not taken up here because its comments, referring only to passages from the MSABh in the part with which we are here concerned, do not help resolve the difference of interpretation between the MSA and MSABh. 6) SAVBh ad MSA (k.15ab), Hayashima ed. 75.4-5. 7) SAVBh ad MSA (k.15cd), Hayashima ed. 75.11-13. 8) On the contrary, there is an example (SAVBh ad MSA k.16cd) where interpretation (a) should be adopted. In this case, however, it does not seem to insist on the aspect of a cause of error, which is the point of interpretation (a). 9) MAV V, k.17ab, Nagao ed. 66.11. 10) MAVBh ad MAV V, k.17, Nagao ed. 66.13-16. 11) MAVBh V, daśa vaṇr padāni, Nagao ed. 69.1-2. 12) In other works of the early Yogācāra, such as the Yogācarabhumi, we can find this simile of māyā, but māyā is not directly connected with abhūtaparikalpa. In these cases as well, māyā seems to represent what does not exist in reality.

〈Key words〉 māyā, māyopamatā

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