

Introduction to the *Abhidharmakoṣabhāṣya*:
Author, Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma Literature and
Subsequent Indian Commentarial Tradition

By

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“The Challenges of Translating the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* (*Apidamo jushe lun*) from Chinese into English: An Inaugural Project by an International Team of Buddhist Scholars”

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Introduction

- Only two complete sets of canonical **Abhidharma** teachings have survived within two Buddhist traditions:
 - a) **Theravāda** and
 - b) **Sarvāstivāda**.
- The *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (hereafter AKBh) belongs to the tradition of the **latter**.

Introduction

- The style and structure etc., of Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (hereafter AKBh), a seminal work among the Sarvāstivādins, are not entirely an innovation of Vasubandhu.
- This leads us to a long Abhidharma commentarial *paraṃparā* (tradition) among Sarvāstivādins.

Sarvastivada Scholasticism, the Abhidharmakosabhasya (AKBh) and Its Commentaries

- a) the Abhidharma literature among Sarvāstivādins,
- b) the AKBh and the post AKBh sub-commentarial works,
- c) An example: How commentaries reveal the meaning of the root text?

Sarvastivada History and Scholasticism

- Sarvāstivāda school with its distinct philosophical position **already existed at the time of king Aśoka.**
- **Seven treatises (七論)** of this tradition are the basis of the classical Sarvāstivādin scholasticism.
- **The *Jñānaprasthāna*** is the earliest and considered **the most important Abhidharma manual**, collected by Kātyāyanipūtra.
- Kaśmīra Sarvāstivādins wrote a huge commentary called the ****Mahāvibhāṣā*** on this text, that established the **Vaibhāṣika orthodoxy.**
- This is the point of depart of its scholasticism.

Sarvastivada Scholasticism

- There appeared number of **other treatises in the following order**, sometimes challenging Vaibhāṣikan orthodoxy inherent in Vibhāṣā, inspired by Vasumitra's Prakaraṇapāda.

Sarvastivada Scholasticism

- 1) Ghoṣaka's (瞿沙 (妙音)) *Amṛtarasaśāstra* (甘露味論 T 1553); alternative name Apitan ganluwei lun (**Abhidharmāmṛta-rasa-śāstra*, **Abhidharmāmṛta-śāstra* 阿毘曇甘露味論); two fascicles.
- 2) Dharmasrī's (also reconstructed *Dharmaśreṣṭhin, *Dharmottara 法勝) *Abhidharmahr̥daya* (end of 3rd century C.E) Apitan xinlun 阿毘曇心論 T 1550. Four fascicle; **Abhidharmasāra*, The. Also reconstructed as **Abhidharmahr̥daya*
- 3) Upasānta's *Abhidharma-hṛdaya* (阿毘曇心論)
- Upasānta's Abhidharma manual, Abitan xinlun (阿毘曇心論), having same title as Abitanxin lun jing 阿毘曇心論經 (T. no. 1551), was translated into Chinese in 555-561 C.E.

Sarvastivada Scholasticism

- 4) Dharmatrāta's (Fajiu法救) *Abhidharmahr̥daya-vyākhyā* (or **Miśra-abhidharmahr̥daya* Za apitan xin lun, 雜阿毘曇心論T no. 1552; 11 fasc.; also **Samyuktābhidharma-hṛdaya-śāstra*),
- This Manual follows Upaśānta's commentary, and is Vasubandhu's direct reference.

Sarvastivada Scholasticism

- 5) Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* and *Bhāṣya*
- Following the style of Dharmatrāta, Vasubandhu composed *Abhidharma-kośa* (*kārikās* or stanzas), mostly from the point of view of Vaibhāsika orthodoxy. While writing its own auto-commentary, called *Bhāṣya*, he criticizes several Vaibhāṣikan foundational teachings, often taking Sautrāntika position.

Opponent of Vasubandhu

- 6) Saṃghabhadra's (Zhongxian 衆賢)**Abhidharma-nyāyānusāra*
(Apidamo shun zhengli lun 阿毘達磨順正理論T 1562; 80 fasc.
- Saṃgabhadra defends Vaibhāṣika orthodoxy in the **Abhidharma-nyāyānusāra* and counter attacks Vasubandhu's several of the Vaibhāṣikan understanding in the AKBh.

The *Abhidharmakośa* and its *Bhāṣya*

- The style and structure along with the sequence of chapters are not entirely an innovation of Vasubandhu.

Vasubandhu, the *bhāṣyakāra* and his text, the AKBh

- Inferred from the existing Chinese, Tibetan and Sanskrit sources, the author of the AKBh, **Vasubandhu, probably lived** in the North-western part of India **sometimes during the 5th century CE.**
- Extremely popular text - dozens of sub-commentaries were written in India, Tibet, and China.
- Among all the Abhidharma works, **Tibetan translators decided to translate the AKBh, only to the exception of *Prajñapti***; for, it was believed that the former would include the contents of all the others.

Structure of the AKBh

- The AKBh is a non-canonical text divided into **nine chapters** (*kośasthāna*), each chapter dedicated to a certain Buddhist doctrinal theme.
- Neither Vasubandhu nor Yaśomitra explain the overall structure of the AKBh.
- However, Vasubandhu offers **two *uddeśa*-s** (a brief expositional topic) in the first chapter:
 - ***A) sāsrava-*** (with-outflows)
 - ***B) anāsrava*** (without-outflows)
- The entire AKBh is based on these two categories.
- Chinese native commentator, **Pu Guang** offers **two vital information**:

Structure of the AKBh

- A) the AKBh focuses on no-self (among three seals)
- This is explained in 20th verse of the first chapter of the AKBh
- The entire last chapter is on this topic, especially the refutations of wrong ideas of Pudgalavadins.

Structure of the AKBh

B) Chapters in cause and effect sequence

- i) the first two chapters expound = with-outflow and outflow-free;
- ii) 3rd, 4th & 5th – *loka, karma and anuśaya* = the sequence of the fruits, the causes and the conditions (*pratyaya*): [...] = with-outflows
- iii) 6th, 7th & 8th – *mārga-pudgala, jñāna and samāpatti* = the sequence of the fruits, the causes and the conditions = without-outflows

Indian Commentaries on the AKBh

- **Seven commentaries** were written in India on the AKBh.
- **Yaśomitra's *Sphuṭārthā*** (T 4092, preserved in Skt.),
- Vinītibhadra's / Saṅghabhadra's **Sūtrānurūpā* a.k.a.
**Abhidharmakośaśāstrakārikābhāṣya* (T 4091),
- Pūrṇavardhana's **Lakṣaṇānusāriṇī* major & minor (T 4093 & 4096),
- Śamathadeva's **Upāyikā* (T 4094),
- Dignāga's **Marmapradīpa* (T 4095), and
- Sthiramati's *Tattvārtha* (T 4421, recently discovered in Sanskrit).

Yaśomitra's the *Sphuṭārthā Nāma* *Abhidharmakośavyākhyā* and his commentarial dexterity

- We know very little about the author of the *Sphuṭārthā Nāma Abhidharmakośavyākhyā* (hereafter AKVy), Yaśomitra.
- Most probably he was an *ācārya* in one of those celebrated North Indian universities, and lived, as per Mejer, **around the 7th century CE**.
- It is considered the **most exhaustive/comprehensive commentary** on the root text in terms of **linguistic and doctrinal analysis**.

Yaśomitra's the *Sphuṭārthā Nāma* *Abhidharmakośavyākhyā* and his commentarial dexterity

- We immediately notice two main features of his authorship
 - 1) It is replete with grammatical and linguistic analyses, mostly from the Pāṇinīya system; also Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, the *Cāndravṛtti* and the *Kāṣikāvṛtti*.
 - 2) Valuable information on Buddhist philosophy and the positions taken by different Buddhist masters or schools.

Yaśomitra's the *Sphuṭārthā Nāma Abhidharmakośavyākhyā* and his commentarial dexterity

- Two examples presented here, taken from the first chapter, the Dhātunirdeśa, of the AKBh mainly highlights two points:
 - a) a highly sophisticated **convention of employing Sanskrit grammar** while exposing a Sanskrit text of a particular tradition.
 - b) the **commentarial dexterity of a commentator**.

Yaśomitra's the *Sphuṭārthā Nāma Abhidharmakośavyākhyā* and his commentarial dexterity

a. Definitions of the term *buddha* as per different *kāraṅka*-s

- The system of *kāraṅka* is a specific feature of Sanskrit grammar and is vital in terms of understanding syntactic as well as semantic functions in a sentence.

Lost in Translation: Definitions of the term *buddha* as per different *kāraka*-s

- In other words, it is primarily concerned with the question of ‘agency,’ anything that helps to understand in a sentence the main action (*kriyā*) and its completion.

buddha: Kta denoting an agent (kartari)

- i) **First definition:** the first definition of the word ‘buddha’ as per *kartari kta-vidhāna* (application of *kta* in the sense of an agent).
- As for *kta* denoting an agent, one can say, *gato devadatto grāmam*, which is the sense we get from the explanation of Yaśomitra.

Kta denoting an agent (*kartṛ*)

- [The word] ‘*buddha*’ is an application of *kta* in the sense of an agent. ‘*Buddha*’ is in the sense of the blossoming of the mind; the meaning is [the same as] ‘blossomed’ just like in the expression ‘the lotus has blossomed.’ Alternatively, ‘*buddha*’ is in the sense of having removed the twofold sleep of ignorance; the sense is ‘awakened.’ It is like the expression ‘an awakened person.’

• *buddha iti kartari kta-vidhānaṃ. buddher vikasanād buddhaḥ. vibuddha ity arthaḥ. vibuddhaṃ padmaṃ iti yathā. atha vāvidyā-nidrā-dvayāpagamād buddhaḥ prabuddha ity arthaḥ. prabuddhaḥ puruṣa iti yathā.* [Wogihara (1932-36): p. 2].

buddha as karma-kartari

- ii) **Second definition:** He assigns the second definition of the word *buddha* as per the understanding of *karma-kartari* (object-agent).
- ‘An object-agent’ or ‘object-containing agent’ i.e., ‘an agent which is at the same time the object of an action’
- The classic example, *pacyate odanaḥ svayam eva*. For details, see [Abhyankar (1986): p. 110].

The word *buddha* as *karma-kartari*

- Yaśomitra says, “‘The Buddha’ means ‘he becomes awakened by himself.’”

- *karmakartari kta-vidhānam ity apare. svayam budhyata iti buddha ity arthaḥ.* [Wogihara (1932-36): pp. 2-3]. In addition to Pāṇini 3.4.72, Pāṇini 3.1.87 too governs the second interpretation. Kāyāyana says the following regarding this *sūtra*: “Kātyāyana notes the reason why A 3.1.87 is formulated. A participant such as the rice of (21), which was a *karman* and is now spoken of as an agent (*karmakartari* “object agent”), has the property of being an agent (*karṭṛtvam*) because one wishes to speak of its independence (*svātantryasya vivakṣitatvāt*): Bh. II.67.10: *kimartham punar idam ucyate. 3.1.87 vt. 5: karmakartari karṭṛtvam svātantryasya vivakṣitatvāt*; Bh. II.67.12–13: *karmakartari karṭṛtvam asti | kutaḥ | svātantryasya vivakṣitatvāt.*” [Matthew & Bryant (2014): p. 97, footnote no 34].

Lost in Translation

- Example:
- Without such commentarial glosses, we would lose all these grammatical / syntactic / philosophical aspects when we translate **the term** *buddha* as fó (佛)

An analysis of the compound *sarvahatāndhakāraḥ*

- Yaśomitra's explanation of the compound *sarvahatāndhakāra* has two main concerns:
 - (a) the relationship between *sarva* and *hatāndhakāra* and
 - (b) *sarva* being placed prior to *hata*, whereas it qualifies *andhakāra*. That is to say, the *sarva* should have been placed nearer to what it qualifies; hence, the compound should appear as *hatasarvāndhakāra*. However, that is not the case.

An analysis of the compound *sarvahatāndhakāraḥ*

- Yaśomitra informs that *sarvahatāndhakāraḥ* is a *saptamī tatpuruṣa* compound (i.e., *sarvasmin hatāndhakāraḥ sarvahantāndhakāraḥ*).
- He offers four possible explanations to form this compound, each governed by certain grammatical rule.
 - a) it is a seventh *vibhakti* compound as per **Pāṇini 2.1.40**, i.e., *saptamī śauṇḍaiḥ*.
 - b) The second justification he offers is through the rule of *yogavibhāga*.
 - c) The third justification is through *utsarga*, a general rule.
 - d) The fourth justification is by defining the compound as per the irregularly formed *tatpuruṣa* compound within **the group of *mayūra-vyaṃsaka*** etc.

An analysis of the compound *sarvahaatāndhakāraḥ*

- The relationship between *sarva* and *andhakāra*
- Yaśomitra explains that *sarva* is not connected with the *andhakāra*, but it is connected with the destruction of darkness (*andhakāraghāta*)
satyaṃ nāndhakāram anenābhisambadhyate. andhakāra-ghātas tv anenābhisambadhyate. [Wogihara (1932-36): p. 3].

An analysis of the compound *sarvathāndhakārah*

- Yaśomitra offers an explanation on the relationship between *sarva* and *andhakāraghāta* is as follows:
- Because of the connection with the quality of destruction of darkness, the Bhagavat, the Buddha is called ‘he who destroyed the darkness.’ Hence, the destruction of darkness has the term ‘everything’ (*sarva*) as its basis. This relationship is to be understood in reference to *akṣesu śauṇḍa = akṣaśauṇḍaḥ*, **an example of the rule *saptamī śauṇḍaiḥ* mentioned above.** *yena hy andhakāra-ghātena yogād Bhagavān hatāndhakārah sa tasyāndhakāra-ghātaḥ sarvādhāro ’vagantavyaḥ.* [Wogihara (1932-36): p. 3].
- Yaśomitra offers a parallel, ‘*akṣesu dhūrtaḥ;*’ here *dhūrtaḥ* (cunning or skilled) comes from the same *śauṇḍādi* class. *yathā akṣesu dhūrta iti....* [Wogihara (1932-36): p. 3]. As for the examples of *śauṇḍādi*, see [Vasu (1962): Vol I, p. 425].

An analysis of the compound *sarvathāśarvathāndhakārah*

- Xuanzang and Paramārtha deal with this compound, *sarvathāśarvathāndhakārah*, in two different ways.
- Paramārtha renders this compound adding the implied meaning of this compound, i.e., **the omniscience** [of the Buddha] destroys all darkness (一切種智滅諸冥).
- Xuanzang tries to be more literal by being a bit innovative in order to be faithful to the source text: 諸一切種諸冥滅. Here, the first 諸 is *yah*; 一切種 is *sarvathā*; and, he maintains the *saptamī-tatpuruṣa* compound *sarvathāndhakārah* as, 諸冥滅.

An analysis of the compound *sarvathāndhakārah*

- Hence, as their translations demonstrate, they were aware of the grammatical relationship in this compound.
- However, due to the linguistic constraints of Chinese language, and in the lack of glosses such as the one offered by Yaśomitra, Chinese readers are deprived of all these syntactic/semantic/philosophical implications of this compound.

Conclusion

- The AKBh is almost the culminating point of **Sarvastivada Scholasticism**.
- The art of writing a commentary in the Indian *śāstric* literature is a very complex skill, as we have noticed in the case of Yaśomitra's glosses.
- Such commentarial works are indispensable while unpacking ancient Indian root texts.