The Status of the Akutobhayā in the Madhyamaka and the Uniqueness of *Piṅgala’s Zhonglun

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I shall focus on the Akutobhayā (ABh) and *Piṅgala’s Zhonglun 中論 (ZL) which are regarded as the oldest commentaries of the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (MMK). These two commentaries are known to have remarkable similarities. Thus, some preceding studies assume that both commentaries are originally identical, but this issue is still unclear. The ABh is preserved only in the Tibetan translation. It is considerably simple compared with other commentaries because of its minimum annotations to the verses of the MMK. The ZL is preserved only in Kumārajiva’s Chinese translation. The origin of this text is problematic, and the only clue to know about it is written in the preface of the commentary by Sengrui 僧叡. According to the preface, Kumārajiva revised the text of the ZL when he translates it, since the annotations of the original text of the ZL were somewhat imperfect. The ABh is quoted in other commentaries such as Buddhapālita’s Vṛtti (BP), Bhāviveka’s Prajñāpradīpa (PP), and Candrakīrti’s Prasannapadā (PSP). Nevertheless, all of the commentaries do not mention the name “Akutobhayā,” and the quotations from the ABh are not even stated to be the quotations. Moreover, there are some cases that these three commentaries all quote the same passages from the ABh. Meanwhile, the ZL tends to show different interpretations from the ABh in such cases.

Therefore, I shall pick up one appropriate example which shows these issues above.

2. The Variations of the Annotations of MMK 18.6

Firstly, I will examine MMK 18.6 and its annotations. The main topic of this chapter is
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“self” (ātman), especially the verse 18.6 shows Nāgārjuna’s distinctive understanding of it. As for the commentaries, the quotations from the ABh are found in the BP, the PP, and the PSP. The annotation of the ABh is as follows.

ABh 18.6, D. 70a6–70b6, P. 82a3–82b4

sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das sems can rnams kyi bsam pa dan dang la nyal mkhyen pa la mkhas pa rnams kyi/ gdul ba de dang de dag la yang dag par gzigs nas/ gdul ba gang dag la (1) 'jig rten 'di med do/ / 'jig rten pha rol med do/ / sems can rdzus (rdzus D; brdzus P) te skye ba med do snyam pa'i lta ba de lta bu byung bar gyur pa de dag gi bdag med par lta ba bzlog pa'i phyir bdag go zhes kyang btags (btags D; gtags P) par gyur to/ / (2) gdul ba gan dang dag la las dge ba dang mi dge ba rnams kyi byed pa po dang de dag gi 'bras bu za ba po dang (dang D; dag P) bcings pa dang thar pa dag ston par byed pa'i bdag ces bya ba de ni 'ga' zhig yod do snyam pa'i lta ba de lta bu byung bar gyur pa de dag gi bdag tu lta ba bzlog pa'i phyir (phyir P; phyir ro D) bdag med ces kyang bstan par gyur to/ / (3) gdul ba bzang po gang dag dge ba'i rtsa ba'i tshogs yongs su smin pa/ srid pa'i chu bo las brgal bar nus pa don dam pa'i gta m gi snod du gyur pa de dag la ni bdag dang bdag med pa (pa P; n.e. D) 'ga' yang med par bstan to/ / (4) yang na gzhan du brtag ste mu stegs byed kha cig 'du byed bdag med pa (med pa P; med pa byed pa D) skad cig ma re la rnam par 'jig pa'i ngang can nam dus gzhan du nges par gnas pa rnams la bdag med na/ las dang 'bras bu med par brtags nas 'jigs ('jigs D; 'jig P) par gyur pa dag gis ni bdag go zhes kyang btags par gyur to (gyur to D; 'gyur ro P) / / (5) gzhan gang dag 'di ni lus dang dbang po dang blo'i tshogs tsam du zad de/ 'di la rgyu dang 'bras bu la gang rtags par 'gyur ba'i bdag ni ngo bo nyid kyi (kyis D; kyi P) med de (de D; do D) / / sems can du (du D; n.e. P) bgrang ba'i 'du byed bdag med pa nges par mi gnas pa gnas su ma byas pa 'di dag (dang D; dag dag P) la yang 'khor ba ni 'thad do zhes bya bar rig (rig D; rig P) nas/ rgyu dang 'bras bu'i 'brel pa la rorga pa dag gis ni bdag med ces kyang bstan par gyur to/ / sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das chos thams cad la mkhyen pa lko gu ma gyur pa (gyur pa P; gyur pa 'jug pa D) rnams kyi ni/ bdag dang bdag med pa 'ga' yang med par bstan to/ /

Both “a self” is indicated and “a non-self” is taught.

The Buddhas also have taught that “there is neither self nor non-self.” [6]

Having known the will and the inclination of beings, the blessed Buddha skillfully understood each of the disciples. (1) And he indicated “[There is] a self,” in order to dispel the dogma of non-self of disciples who produce a view, thinking as “This world does not exist, another world does not exist, and apparitionally-born creatures do not exist.” (2) [He] taught “[There is] a non-self,” in order to dispel the dogma of self of disciples who produce a view, thinking “There exists a doer of good and bad deeds, a recipient of the effects, and something called a self which bondage and liberation are showed.” (3) [He] taught “Neither self nor non-self exists” to the
good disciples whose collection of merit is mature, who are capable of crossing the river of existence, who [deserve] to be taught the ultimate meaning. (4) And there is another interpretation. Non-Buddhists, who think, as “If a self does not exist in conditioned things, and if a self does not exist in something that keeps ceasing at every moment and remaining steadily until the next life, there are no actions and effects” and are afraid of it, indicated “[There is] a self.” (5) Others, who are ignorant regarding the connection between the cause and the effect and indicated that “[there is] a non-self,” by thinking as [follows]: “This is merely an assemblage of a body, sense faculties, and knowledge. In [the assemblage] a self, which is formed by its cause and effect, does not exist by nature. Conditioned things, which are considered to be beings, do not [have their] self, do not remain steadily, and do not [own their] basis. It is unreasonable that such things transmigrate.” [Therefore,] the blessed Buddha who is not isolated from the knowledge of all dharmas taught that “There is neither self nor non-self.”

According to the annotation above, MMK 18.6 can be interpreted in two ways. In the first half of the annotation, whole sentence of this verse is regarded as the Buddha’s statement. And in the second half, the views of “self” and “non-self” are indicated by non-Buddhists, and the statement which is said “There is neither self nor non-self” is the only statement of the Buddha.

This annotation is partially quoted by the BP, the PP, and the PSP as below.

(1) BP, D. 242a2, P. 273b4–5; PP, D. 185b6–7, P. 231b4–5; PSP, LVP [1903–1913], p. 356.6–7
(2) BP, D. 242a4–6, P. 273b6–274a1
(3) BP, D. 242a6–7, P. 274a1–3
(4) PP, D. 186b1–2, P. 232b2–4; PSP, LVP [1903–1913], p. 360.3–4
(5) PP, D. 186b2–4, P. 232b4–6

According to these correspondences, it is considered that the ABh’s annotation was accepted as the traditional understanding of the MMK in Indian Madhyamaka. However, only the ZL shows different understanding as follows:

ZL 18.6, T. 30, p. 24a1–2, c10–20

諸仏或説我 或説於無我 諸法実相中 無我無非我 [6] 2) 諸仏以一切智観衆生故,種種為説.亦説有我.亦説無我. 若心未熟者, 未有涅槃分. 不知畏罪, 為是等故, 説有我. 又有得道者, 知諸法空但仮名有我, 為是等故, 説我無咎. 又有布施持戒等福德, 譲離生死苦惱, 畏涅槃永滅. 是故仏為是等, 説無我. 諸法但因縁和合. 生時空生, 滅時空滅. 是故説無我. 但仮名説有我. 又得道者知無我, 不墮斷滅故. 為是等故, 皆説我無咎. 是故偈中説, 諸仏説有我亦説於無我, 若於真実中不説我非我.
As stated above, wo 我, wuwo 無我, and wuwo wufeiwo 無我無非我 are all regarded as the statement of the Buddha unlike the ABh and other commentaries. This difference is resulted from its translation.

In the MMK, “buddhair” (Tib. sangs rgyas rnams kyis) is placed in the second half of the verse, and that is followed in the Tibetan translation as well. That is the reason that two kinds of interpretations are possible to be established. However, in the Chinese translation, “zhufo” 諸仏 is placed in the beginning of the verse. Therefore, the ZL can show only one interpretation. Moreover, a word “zhufa shixiang” 諸法實相 which is not found in the MMK is added in the Chinese translation. As is commonly known, Kumārajīva adds his own explanation intentionally, rather than translating literally when he translates Sanskrit into Chinese. “Zhufa shixiang” is one of the most typical example of such addition. Accordingly, this verse is revised by Kumārajīva, and the succeeding interpretation is also supposed to be revised by him.

3. Conclusion

From the above investigation, the following conclusions may probably be drawn. First, the ABh gives a remarkable annotation to MMK 18.6, and it is quoted by other commentaries. Thus, the ABh is supposed to be the basic understanding of the MMK in Indian Madhyamaka. Second, the ZL is likely expected to be revised by Kumārajīva.

Notes
1）ātmety api prajñāpitam anātmety api deśītam/ buddhair nātmā na cânātmā kaścid ity api deśītam/ / (Ye [2011], p. 302) Both a self is indicated, and a non-self is taught. It is also taught that there is neither self nor non-self by the Buddhas.
2）In the MMK 18, all verses are provided first unlike other chapters, and the interpretation is written following them. For convenience, in this paper, the verse concerned and its interpretation are arranged together.

Abbreviations
ABh Akutobhayā. D. no. 3829, P. no. 5229.
BP Buddhāpālita Mūlamadhyamakavṛtti. D. no. 3842, P. no. 5242.
D sDe gье edition.
LVP Louis de la Valée Poussin.
MMK Mūlamadhyamakakārikā. See Ye [2011].
P Peking edition.
As stated above, "I", "me", "I", "me", and "I", "me" are all regarded as the statement of the Buddha unlike the ABh and other commentaries. This difference is resulted from its translation. In the MMK, "buddhair" (Tib. sangs rgyas rnams kyis) is placed in the second half of the verse, and that is followed in the Tibetan translation as well. That is the reason that two kinds of interpretations are possible to be established. However, in the Chinese translation, "zhufo" is placed in the beginning of the verse. Therefore, the ZL can show only one interpretation. Moreover, a word "zhufa shixiang" which is not found in the MMK is added in the Chinese translation. As is commonly known, Kumārajīva adds his own explanation intentionally, rather than translating literally when he translates Sanskrit into Chinese. "Zhufa shixiang" is one of the most typical example of such addition. Accordingly, this verse is revised by Kumārajīva, and the succeeding interpretation is also supposed to be revised by him.

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