

9. Buddhist Studies

The problem of personal identity in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*

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One of the characteristic features of Abhidharma Buddhism is seeking a reasonable answer to the problem of personal identity. The Sarvāstivādin, which was one of the leading schools of Abhidharma Buddhism, also spared much of its time for it. According to it, a person cannot be endowed with two different kinds of mind, i.e. good (*kuśala*) and bad (*akuśala*), at the same moment. Then, how can the two heterogeneous and incompatible qualities of a person be explained to be linked together to form an identity of a person? A *dharma* called *prāpti* (attainment), which is unassociated with mind (*citta-viprayukta*), is introduced for this.

Vasubandhu, the author of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (AKBh), interprets and criticizes this theory of the Sarvāstivādin, more precisely that of Vaibhāṣika. He also criticizes the Pudgalavādin for its propagation of a pseudo-self, *pudgala* (person), while dealing with the problem of personal identity in the last chapter of the AKBh. He offers an alternative means to solve this problem, i.e. the seed (*bīja*) theory.

However, there still remains the problem. How can it explain the synchronous relation of the mind (*citta*) to the function of mind (*caitta*) along with the materiality composed of sense organs and their external objects, which determine the personal identity in a series of continuum? Can it be a satisfying answer to the problem of synchronic identity which establishes the diachronic identity? How can the momentarily established perception at a time be joined with the diachronic *santati-piṇāma-viśeṣa* (particular/specific evolution of continuum) at the same time without a device like *prāpti*?

In this paper, the reason why the Sarvāstivādin's view was unacceptable to Vasubandhu, and how he tried to solve the problem of personal identity is explained. This explanation makes the defective aspects as well as potentiality of his idea clear. It helps us see the point that creates all the controversial arguments related to the personal identity and therefore the exact position of the seed (*bīja*) theory of Vasubandhu in this matter. Saṃghabhadra's criticism on this theory offers us some of the important points related to the issue. Nevertheless, the criticism could neither justify the Sarvāstivādin's view nor offer another cogent alternative.