

A Re-examination of Vasubandhu's Use of the Term "Prabhāvita" in His *Mahāyānasamgraha-bhāṣya*

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The exact meanings behind the use of the Sanskrit term "prabhāvita" in the Yogācāra literature has already been explored by a few Buddhist scholars. In particular, Lambert Schmithausen gave four possible nuanced senses behind "prabhāvita" in the Yogācāra context.¹ Among these four senses, the second one means "to be disclosed (through something)." While recognizing that this use of "prabhāvita" is reflected in Xuanzang's Chinese rendering "so hsien 所顯" (*suo xian*) and the Tibetan rendering "rab tu phye ba," Schmithausen claims that this specific usage is not attested in the Yogācāra literature. This paper aims to refute Schmithausen's claim and argues that this second sense of "prabhāvita" is prominent in Vasubandhu's *Mahāyānasamgraha-bhāṣya* (henceforth abbreviated as *MSgBh*), namely, his commentary on Asaṅga's *Mahāyānasamgraha* (henceforth abbreviated as *MSg*).

I argue that Vasubandhu intentionally uses "prabhāvita" to characterize the relation between Thusness (*tathatā*) and the Dharma-body (*dharmakāya*): the Dharma-body is "disclosed" through Thusness. For example, Vasubandhu says that "It is through this Thusness that is purity (*viśuddhi-tathatā*) that the Buddhahood is disclosed (*prabhāvita*). (*MSgBh* on *MSg* II.26²). Vasubandhu also claims that "The Buddhas are disclosed through (*prabhāvita*) that [non-existence of existence which is Thusness]." (*MSgBh* on *MSg* X.28A[三]) The underlying premise for this specific usage of "prabhāvita" is that for Vasubandhu Dharma-body is regarded as unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*) (*MSgBh* on *MSg* X.4), eternal (*nitya*) and is Thusness (*MSgBh* on *MSg* X.29A, esp. the Tibetan translation).

The first implication of this usage of "prabhāvita" points to the different understandings of the Dharma-body of Asaṅga and of Vasubandhu. For Vasubandhu, Dharma-body is identified with Thusness, but this is not the case for Asaṅga.³

Vasubandhu's use of "prabhāvita" is also the key to his incorporation of the notion of "tathāgatagarbha" into his Yogācāra system. According to Vasubandhu, the first two of the four kinds of purity (*caturvidhavyavadāna*) (*MSg*, II.26)—i.e., the "purity by nature" (*prakṛti-vyavadāna*) and "purity devoid of defilements" (*vaimalya-vyavadāna*)—are "without change (Tib. *mi 'gyur ba*; Ch. *wuyou bianyi xing* 無有變異; Skt. *avikāra*). This suggests that both kinds of purity are unconditioned and identical: the second kind of purity is simply the disclosed (*prabhāvita*) state of the first one. This explains why Vasubandhu cites the notion of "tathāgatagarbha" in his *MSgBh* in this context: when Thusness is covered by defilements, it is named "tathāgatagarbha"; but when Thusness is devoid of defilements, it is named "Dharma-body."

¹ See Lambert Schmithausen, 1969. *Der Nirvana-Abschnitt in der Viniscayasamgrahani der Yogacarabhumih*. Wien: Böhlau. Pp. 109-111.

² For the section number of the *Mahāyānasamgraha*, I follow the number assigned by Nagao. See Nagao Gajin, 1982-1987. Shōdaijōron: *Wayaku to chūkai* 攝大乘論：和訳と注解. Tōkyō: Kōdansha.

³ When discussing the notion of "purity by nature" (*prakṛti-vyavadāna*) (*MSg*, II.26), the first of the four kinds of purity, Asaṅga gives a list of synonyms: "tathatā śūnyatā bhūtaḥkoṭīr animittaṃ paramārtho dharmadhātus ca." Note that "dharmakāya" is missing from the list.