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Psychology and the Beauty of Logical Symmetries: Once again on the "Three Kinds of Individuals" in Buddhism

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As is well known, Buddhist authors of different schools have introduced a classification of 'three kinds of individuals' that became a constituent part of the Tibetan system of the "Stages of the Path (to Enlightenment)". This classification is not only found in a well-known stanza from Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, but also in several works from both the Madhyamaka and the Yogācāra schools. Scholars have previously discussed the correspondences of this classification with a fourfold scheme found in the Pāli Nikāyas and in the corresponding canonical Sanskrit scriptures; moreover, a correspondence of this threefold scheme with the classification into five *gotras* has been suggested.

In my paper I would like to come back to the questions of the correspondences of – and the differences between – the threefold and the fourfold scheme. I will introduce passages from Asaňga's works and from the canonical scriptures dealing with three, four, or five kinds of individuals and analyse their respective definitions of these kinds of individuals. In addition to the well-known classification that became so important in Tibetan Buddhism, there is a wide range of similar schemes of three or four kinds of individuals, some of them giving 'graded classifications' and some of them giving 'classifications by qualities', and some combining both techniques. A closer look at the respective passages and the commentaries will help to gain a clearer picture of how the authors, redactors, and commentators understood these passages, and how doctrinal concepts as well as the suggestive patterns of logical possibilities have influenced these classifications. The analysis therefore yields a better understanding of how this highly influential scheme emerged and, at the same time, throws light on the role of numbered lists and logical symmetries in the formation of theories.