

Paper proposal for the Conference on “From Abhidhamma To Abhidharma: Early Buddhist Scholasticism in India, Central Asia, and China”, Ghent University, Belgium, 8-9 July, 2013

Truth and Liberation in Abhidharma and Chinese Yogācāra: On the theory of *svalakṣaṇa* and *sāmānyalakṣaṇa*

Chen-kuo Lin (National Chengchi University, e-mail: cklin@nccu.edu.tw)

Is the cognition of *general object* or the cognition of *individual object* capable of eliminating the hindrances for attaining liberation? This is the question on the nature of *ālambana* (support-object of cognition), the object which should be thoroughly discerned in the course of meditation. According to the Abhidharma teaching, this form of meditation is designed to lead the practitioner to realize impermanence, suffering, and no-self of existence, which in turn helps him free from ignorance and defilement. The impermanence, suffering, and no-self are called “general aspect” of object, *sāmānyalakṣaṇa*. The individual objects in the categories of five aggregates, twelve fields, and eighteen realms are taken as individual aspect of object, which is also called “*svalakṣaṇa*”. Now, one has to push the question further and ask: Which kind of cognition of the object in meditation, cognition of *svalakṣaṇa* or cognition of *sāmānyalakṣaṇa*, leads to the elimination of defilements for attaining liberation? According to the Abhidharma teaching, *sāmānyalakṣaṇa* is the right answer to the question. This is clearly stated in the Abhidharmavibhāṣa: “Only in the path which takes *sāmānyalakṣaṇa* as the object one is able to eliminate the defilements.”(T27.820a.)

Regarding this Abhidharma answer, however, there are disagreements in the Yogācāra School. In the response to this question, Kuiji (648-714) and Huizhao (632-682) cited three theories of interpretation from *Fodijing lun*. The first theory holds that in the Abhidharma both *svalakṣaṇa* and *sāmānyalakṣaṇa* are cognized by perception in the concentrated state of mind, whereas in the logical treatise (*hetūvidya*) (i.e., *Nyāyamukha* and *Nyāyapraveśa*) *svalakṣaṇa* and *sāmānyalakṣaṇa* are cognized by perception and inference respectively in the non-concentrated state of mind. The second theory holds that only *svalakṣaṇa* is cognized in the concentrated state of mind. However, in the progress of meditative cultivation *sāmānyalakṣaṇa* is used as a provisional tool (*upāya*) that helps the practitioner to cognize the truths which are manifested in the form of *sāmānyalakṣaṇa*. Hence, provisionally speaking, one can say that the *sāmānyalakṣaṇa* is also cognized in the

concentrated state of mind. The third theory attempts to elaborate the positions favored in the Buddhist logic and the *Buddhabhūmyūpadeśa*. That is, in the concentrated state of mind, since the mind is free of conception, all of cognitive objects are the particulars, which are perceived by *pratyakṣa* only. Even if practitioner is able to cognize impermanence, suffering, and so forth, these *sāmānyalakṣaṇa*-s are perceived as something within the individual object. Hence these common characteristics are also taken as *svalakṣaṇa* on the level of concentrated state of mind, for they are not separate from the individual object. Accordingly, *tathatā* should be also taken as *svalakṣaṇa*, instead of being taken as *sāmānyalakṣaṇa*. This theory is opposed to the Abhidharma teaching, which maintains that only the cognition of *sāmānyalakṣaṇa* is capable of eliminating the defilements.

In this paper I plan to examine how Chinese Buddhists in the 7th-8th century appropriated the Abhidharma teachings in their Yogācāra theory of truth and liberation.