

"Abhidharma-Texts and Xuanzang's Xiyu-ji"

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Abstract:

Abhidharma texts are normally studied as compendia of Buddhist doctrine and philosophical knowledge of all kinds, although it is well-known that they also contain, for example, cosmological knowledge and information. The present paper intends to show how Xuanzang 玄奘, in his famous "Records of the Western Regions of the Great Tang" (Datang-Xiyu-ji 大唐西域記, T.2087), used the Abhidharma texts which he himself translated, mainly the Abhidharmakośaśāstra (Apidamojushe-lun 阿毘達磨俱舍論, T.1558) and the Abhidharmamahāvibhāṣāśāstra (Apidamo-da-piposha-lun 阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論, T.1545), for the description of Buddhist cosmology and other general information about things Indian. The paper will concentrate on the cosmological section in the first fascicle in the Xiyu-ji and the general description of India in the second fascicle and their parallels / sources in the Abhidharma literature. It will be suggested that the inclusion of Abhidharmic information or material in the Xiyu-ji and its reproduction in Chinese Buddhist encyclopedic writing had a much stronger "popularizing" impact on Chinese and, more generally, on East-Asian notions of Buddhist cosmology and India than the passages in the Abhidharma literature themselves could have had.