

Recent Japanese Studies in the Pāli Commentarial Literature: Since 1984

I. Introduction

After extensive research, my dissertation of nearly 750 pages, entitled *A Study of the Pāli Commentaries: Theravādic Aspects of the Aṭṭhakathās* (in Japanese with an English summary), was published in 1984. Although there had been a few works preceding it abroad,¹ this work (abbreviated as *SPCJ* hereafter) was really the first major publication in this field of study, at least in Japan. In the twenty years or more since then, Japanese studies related to the Pāli commentarial literature (Aṭṭhakathā texts)² have improved remarkably, far beyond my own expectations.

Based on *SPCJ* and other later works by me, many Japanese scholars have done research in the Pāli commentaries using various points of view and lines of inquiry. This research, which dealt with the commentaries not only as objects of research in and of themselves, but also as primary material aiding the exploration of many issues in Buddhist studies, can be classified here into the following six categories. I will subsequently discuss some of the outstanding achievements in each category.³

¹e.g.(1) E.W. Adikaram, *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon* (Colombo: M.D. Gunasena, 1946). His philological study on the commentaries in this book, however, appeared only in 42 pages of Part I. (2) F. Lottermoser, *Quoted Verse Passages in the Works of Buddhaghosa* (Göttingen: author, 1982). Its subject was very limited, not like a general discussion. Cf. Mori 1985 (in English) as a review.

²This literature is to be limited here to the Visuddhimagga and the direct commentaries to the Pāli Tipiṭaka.

³As for the works published by foreign scholars, some of which are surely very important, I shall discuss them in another article.

2. Japanese Translations of Some Commentaries

The publication of a Japanese translation series of the Pāli Tipiṭaka with some other texts in Pāli was completed in 1941, six years after it was begun, as a result of the sincere cooperation of many scholars. It contained seventy volumes altogether, and a useful general index was later added by Kogen Mizuno.

As to the Japanese translations of the Pāli commentaries, the *Visuddhimagga*, *Atthasālinī*, the *Bāhiraṇidāna* of the *Samantapāsādikā*, *Kathāvatthu-aṭṭhakathā*, and the *Nidānakathā* of the *Jātakaṭṭhakathā* had been published before 1984 when *SPCJ* was published. These translations were generally preceded by their English translations which had been published mostly by the Pali Text Society.⁴

Since 1984, several translations of the commentaries into Japanese have been published: some were preceded by their English versions and others were not, meaning that the latter cases were the first translations in the world. These are Murakami and Oikawa (1985–89) in four volumes, the first translation of the *Paramatthajotikā*; Naniwa (2004), which consists of a full translation of the *Vibhaṅgaṭṭhakathā* and the first translation of its *Mūlaṭīkā*; Katsumoto (2007), as her dissertation contains the initial full translation of the *Cariyāpiṭakaṭṭhakathā*, a text of the *Paramatthadīpanī*. In addition, there is Fujimoto (2006 in Japanese), a dissertation which also contains a new translation, i.e. the translation of the major stories of the *Petavatthu-aṭṭhakathā* with an abridged translation of the rest of the stories. It can thus be expected that the translation of works of the Pāli commentaries into Japanese will continue concurrently with future English translations.

3. Historical Studies of Buddhist Doctrine and Thought

Prior to the publication of *SPCJ* in 1984, the *Aṭṭhakathā* texts which were referred to for the doctrinal studies were usually limited to a few *Abhidhamma* works such as the *Visuddhimagga*, *Atthasālinī*,

⁴Regarding all the publications of the Pali Text Society including English translations, see its web site (<http://www.palitext.com>).

Samhavinodanī, Kathāvatthu-aṭṭhakathā, and so on. Since 1984, however, many other commentaries have gradually been taken up as important original texts, and now the achievements of this new approach have progressed splendidly in both quality and quantity. I will introduce here only the following five dissertations out of a great many excellent examples.

Endo (1997), a work in English, discussed in detail the development of the Buddha concept along with the Bodhisatta concept in Theravāda Buddhism, referring to the Pāli Canon, commentaries, and some sub-commentaries. His work was highly esteemed in Sri Lanka, where it was published, as well as here in Japan. Oikawa (1998, in Japanese, unpublished) studied the Paramatthajotikā, the commentary on the Khuddakapāṭha and Suttanipāta, for the first time, focusing on its philological, historical, and social aspects, as well as its background. This was written on the basis of his co-translation of the Pāli original as stated earlier. The greater part of his research appeared as Part II in the work he co-authored with Murakami in 1990 (in Japanese). Fujimoto (2006 in Japanese with an English summary) discussed the Buddhist idea of merit transference with reference to the Peta stories as related in the Pāli Petavatthu and its commentary, a text of the Paramatthadīpanī. His study added a great deal of new thought and knowledge to that which was already prevalent in the Northern tradition, and contained Japanese translations of many Peta stories in the commentary, related to the above subject. Baba (2006, in Japanese, unpublished) is a very valuable study which discusses the history of the *ti-vijjā* (three-knowledge) tradition with special reference to changes in the biography of the Buddha and to the formation of the meditation system in Sektarian Buddhism of India. In his research, the Pāli Canon, the Visuddhimagga, and the commentaries on the first four Nikāyas were primarily referred to in comparison with certain classical Chinese texts of Northern Buddhism. Katsumoto (2006, in Japanese, unpublished), already touched on in the previous section, is a very unique piece of research which examines certain Mahāyāna elements depicted mainly in

the Cariyāpiṭaka and its commentary, Buddhavaṃsa and its commentary, and also the Nidānakathā of the Jātakaṭṭhakathā. Her research could clear up, as a result, some questions regarding the relationship between the Pāli commentaries and Mahāyāna texts, and the influence of Mahāyāna, especially the Yogācārin school, on the Pāli commentaries. It also raises many new questions as to the historical interchange between Theravāda in Sri Lanka and Mahāyāna in India.

4. Philological Studies in the Source References for the Commentaries

Of the source materials for the Pāli commentaries, *SPCJ* initially classified them according to the following six categories: (1) the Pāli Tipiṭaka; (2) three semi-canonical texts following the Tipiṭaka; (3) the Pāli Aṭṭhakathās themselves; (4) the so-called “lost” Sīhaḷa Aṭṭhakathās; (5) source references of other schools: views attributed to “some” (*keci*) and views attributed to “sophists” (Vitaṇḍavādins); and (6) others: Dīpavaṃsa, Kaccāyanappakaraṇa, Mahāniruttippakaraṇa, and so forth. Among the above source references, (1), (2), (3), and (6) were already known, but (4) and (5) were entirely unknown sources. Consequently, I investigated each of the altogether 35 categories of such sources in *SPCJ*.⁵ However, according to subsequent research done by me after *SPCJ*, their final number amounted to 40.⁶ Meanwhile, more detailed research has been done on some sources. For instance, Endo (1999, in English) studied thoroughly the Paramatthadīpanī of Dhammapāla, with a special reference to “some” (*apare, keci*, etc.) as its source, and conclusively found certain important differences in passages between the Paramatthadīpanī and some works of Buddhaghosa, and also between those in the Paramatthadīpanī and certain sub-commentaries, both of which have traditionally been ascribed to Dhammapāla himself. These findings provided new

⁵Incidentally, Adikaram (*Early History of Buddhism*, p. 10, sec n. 1 in this article) listed only 28 categories of such sources.

⁶Mori (1987D, 1989A in English; 1989 in Japanese).

questions as to the authorship of some of the commentaries and sub-commentaries together with biographical details pertaining to Dhammapāla. His study exerted a great influence on Katsumoto's study as will be explained later. Endo (2002) investigated *pothaka*, a vague source reference in the commentaries (other than those above), and concluded that it was not a particular source reference which is now in question. Then Endo (2003, in English) examined the quotations from the Bhāṇakas, as a sort of old source, and further Endo (2005, in English) discussed the chronology of the "Aṭṭhakathā" which has always been expressed in the singular form, and which, though now lost, is a work regarded as the basic source material of Indian origin.

Concurrently, Hayashi (2005 in Japanese) analyzed the Vipākakathā, another source material referred to in the Visuddhimagga, and reached the conclusion that the section named the Vipākuddhārahakathā in the Atthasālinī, which contains a special reference to the Ussadakittana, which is the same as in the Vipākakathā, is none other than the Vipākakathā itself of the Visuddhimagga. Thus the study of the source materials for the commentaries is still very much in progress.

5. Problems of Authorship Pertaining to Each Work

Regarding the traditional belief in the authorship of the Aṭṭhakathā texts, there remain a great many problems yet to be solved. Some scholars have worked on this quite difficult and complicated matter. Hayashi (1997 in Japanese, 1999 in English) criticized the view that the Atthasālinī is not the work of Buddhaghosa, which was once insisted on in detail by P.V. Bapat⁷ and more recently by O.H. Pind.⁸ To the contrary, Sasaki (1997, in Japanese, (1), pp. 57–58, n. 23) pointed out a contradictory textual fact existing between the Atthasālinī and the

⁷P.V. Bapat and R.D. Vadekan, eds., *Aṭṭhasālinī*, Poona, 1942: Bhandarkar Oriental Series No. 3, pp. xxviii–xl.

⁸O.H. Pind. 1992. "Buddhaghosa: His Works and Scholarly Background", *Buddhist Studies* 21, pp. 135–56. Mori (1992 in Japanese) reviewed this article.

Samantapāsādikā, both of which are attributed to Buddhaghosa himself in the Theravāda tradition.

Incidentally, Sasaki and Yamagiwa (1997, in Japanese) started their project of research on the Samantapāsādikā, the Vinaya commentary, comparing it with the Pāli Vinaya-piṭaka and other Vinaya-piṭakas, some of which originally contain their respective commentaries from the Northern tradition. As a part of their research, Sasaki (1997–99) examined certain complicated relations among the three works, the Visuddhimagga and the Samantapāsādikā, both equally ascribed to Buddhaghosa, and the Gedatsu-dō-ron, the Classical Chinese version of the Pāli Vimuttimaggā authored by Upatissa, which is, in spite of the non-Mahāvihāra fraternity text in ancient Sri Lanka, one of the most fundamental source references for the Visuddhimagga.⁹ His conclusion at present is as follows: it cannot be asserted that the author of the Visuddhimagga was the same person as that of the Samantapāsādikā, whereas there can be found a certain accord between the Samantapāsādikā and the Gedatsu-dō-ron on some points. In fact the triangulated relations among the Visuddhimagga, the other commentaries and the Gedatsu-dō-ron still remain unclear.

Concerning this, Mori (1982 in Japanese) had already given another example as follows. Regarding the doctrine of the *kammaṭṭhāna* (the object of meditation practice), the Gedatsu-dō-ron states 38 kinds of such objects, while the Visuddhimagga states 40, and since the latter work was followed in this regard by such later Pāli texts as the

⁹The Vimuttimaggā is still a very problematic text: not only the school to which it belonged, but also the words and passages in the Classical Chinese version and so on are being seriously questioned, e.g., K.R. Norman, “The Literary Works of the Abhayagirivihārins”, *Collected Papers IV* (Oxford: PTS, 1993), pp. 202–17; Peter Skilling, “Vimuttimaggā and Abhayagiri: The Form-Aggregate According to the *Samskṛtāsamskṛtaviniścaya*” (*JPTS XX* (1994)), pp. 171–210; Kate Crosby, “History Versus Modern Myth: The Abhayagirivihāra, the *Vimuttimaggā* and Yogāvacara Meditation” (*Journal of Indian Philosophy* 27-6 (1999)), pp. 503–50; Hayashi (2003, 2004, 2006 in English). Cf. Mori (1988C in English).

Abhidhammāvātāra of Buddhādatta and the Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha of Aruruddha, the system using 40 kinds as shown in the Visuddhimagga has been widely recognized as the standard doctrinal system in the Mahāvihāra tradition. With careful examination, however, it could be found that the system using 38 kinds is also described in certain commentaries such as the Samantapāsādikā, Sāratthapakāsinī, Sammohavinodanī, and Paramatthajotikā, just as in the Gedatsu-dō-ron, a non-Mahāvihāra text. The philological aspects as found among the Visuddhimagga, the other Aṭṭhakathā texts and the Gedatsu-dō-ron show thus such a complicated situation that further research will be needed for the final solution of the authorship problem of the commentarial literature to be revealed.

6. Comparisons with the Texts of Northern Sects

The following has been taken as an effective method for the study of early Buddhism: In a comparison of the Pāli Vinaya- and Sutta-piṭakas (with the exception of the Abhidhamma-piṭaka) with those of the Northern sects in India, the corresponding passages and ideas among them can be generally regarded as an older stratum which had been formed before the initial schism of the Buddhist Order, and are therefore more closely connected to the Buddha. The discordant passages and ideas, on the other hand, are a newer stratum which was later altered or added inside of each sect founded after the initial schism. Based on the above methodological idea, studies on early Buddhism and sectarian Buddhism were accomplished as a whole, searching the older and newer strata of the two Piṭakas. For sectarian Buddhist studies in general, the Abhidhamma-piṭakas and other Abhidhamma texts are of course to be taken up as the essential material.

On the other hand, *SPCJ* pointed out the textual facts that the present Pāli commentaries consist of two fundamental strata: one is of the older portions which were composed or cited mainly on the basis of earlier source material of Indian origin, the contents of which can be considered as closer to those of early Buddhism, and the other is of the newer portions which were composed on the basis of the later sources of

Sri Lankan addition and alteration, the contents of which were accordingly transformed into the Theravāda tradition. Since then a new methodological tendency has been gradually prevailing which suggests that the Pāli commentaries should be properly utilized for the research of Indian Buddhism including even early Buddhism in certain cases. As a result, some portions which had not been found in the Pāli Sutta- and Vinaya-piṭakas, but were found only in the texts of the northern tradition, could be newly discovered as being dormant in the Pāli commentaries.

For example, Yamagiwa (1996) and Sasaki (20002) respectively searched the Samantapāsādikā in comparison with altogether six sorts of Vinaya-piṭakas available today in Pāli or Classical Chinese, and found that certain corresponding passages or ideas are recorded not in the Pāli Vinaya, but in its commentary, i.e. the Samantapāsādikā under consideration. Based on their findings, they expressed their view that the Samantapāsādikā should be included as a necessary work for comparative study of Vinaya texts within different traditions, which is definitely useful to the study of the history of the Buddhist Order in India.

While on the other hand, Baba (2003, in Japanese) investigated some Sutta texts preaching the theory of the “Chain of Dependent Origination” (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) which is differently transmitted in some sects. Regarding the Sutta-piṭaka he reached the same conclusion as that of Yamagiwa and Sasaki concerning the Vinaya-piṭaka. Baba’s dissertation, as touched on before, was a result of his further studies on this subject. In any case, it should be noted that various studies which sufficiently make use of the Aṭṭhakathā texts as indispensable references can thus contribute not only to the historical studies of Theravāda Buddhism in Sri Lanka, but also to Indian Buddhist studies in general.

7. Comparisons with Mahāyāna Texts and Studies in Sri Lankan Mahāyāna

Although comparative study of the Aṭṭhakathās with Mahāyāna texts had previously never been considered at all, my research after *SPCJ* (Mori 1993 in Japanese; 1997, 1999 in English) became a pioneering

study on this frontier. It can be summarized in the following manner. A view of anonymous elders (*ekacce therā*) is negatively referred to as deniable in some commentaries such as the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*, *Papañcasūdanī*, *Manorathapūraṇī*, and *Saddhammapajjotikā*, but this anonymous source reference can be known as the “Andhakas” and “Vijñānavādins” through the valuable comment on it recorded in their sub-commentaries (*ṭīkā*s). In this regard, setting aside the case of the Andhakas, whose trustworthy texts are not extant today, it is possible to compare the commentaries in question with certain Vijñānavādin texts, i.e. the *Viṃśatikā Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi* in Sanskrit of Vasubandhu (4–5c) and some Classical Chinese versions. As a result, the comment under consideration could be proven as correct and this study gave us the important insight that some of the compilers of the sub-commentaries and perhaps of the commentaries possessed certain adequate knowledge of the Vijñānavādins, as a Mahāyāna school, at least in this topic.

Next to my study above, Shimoda (2000, in Japanese) tried to examine a similar sort of topic. It was a discussion that made clear a certain similarity between the *Aṭṭhakathā* and Mahāyāna texts: The similarity in question is that the four kinds of classifications of Buddhist preaching which were adopted in the later stratum, i.e. the commentarial part, of the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* are actually identical with those explained about in the first four Nikāya-commentaries ascribed to Buddhaghosa, although their terms themselves are not in concord.¹⁰ Shimoda discussed this matter, based on his detailed research of the above Mahāyāna text. At any rate, we can be sure that barely perceptible relations seem to be lying between the Theravāda commentaries and the Mahāyāna Sūtras.

¹⁰In the Pāli commentaries, it is called *suttanikkhepa* (*attajjhāsaya*, *para-jjhāsaya*, *pucchāvasika*, *aṭṭhuppattika*), whereas in the Mahāyāna Sūtra in question, it is called *dharmaparyāya*. As for the Pāli terms explained in the commentaries, von Hinüber seems to have found them earlier: Oskar von Hinüber, *A Handbook of Pāli Literature* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), pp. 114–15.

In the same year, i.e. in 2000, a continuing study by Katsumoto began to be published. Among her already published articles, we may draw special attention to Katsumoto (2005, 2006, in Japanese) for a point of view on the relationship between Theravāda and Mahāyāna texts. Furthermore, an abundant stock of more knowledge and information obtainable from this research in the future will improve the study of Sri Lankan Mahāyāna history, and then the study of Sri Lankan Mahāyāna and that of Indian Mahāyāna should be compared and unified into one theme, giving mutual influence and cooperating on research. Mori (2006 in Japanese) can be a useful guide to further studies in this field.

8. Further tasks and final goals of research

The above is a brief description of the present state of study in the six classified subjects about the Pāli commentaries which have been accomplished by Japanese since *SPCJ* was published in 1984. Needless to say, further studies in each of these six subjects along with some new subjects, if any exist, have to be continuously made. Concurrently, however, we have to pay attention to a fundamental problem which remains. That is the search concerning the earlier aspects on the older stratum of the Pāli commentaries, which is closely connected to early Buddhism and sectarian Buddhism in India. Incidentally, this new search would contribute to the whole introductory study or general remarks of the commentarial literature, while *SPCJ*, with the sub-title, “Theravādic Aspects of the Aṭṭhakathās” was none other than the other half. It mainly discussed the later aspects on the newer stratum of the Pāli commentaries, which were surely added in the Theravāda tradition of ancient Sri Lanka. In any case, in order to succeed in this task, the methods of analysis to be adopted are the most essential: any suitable problems which can be related to all commentary texts should be first selected, and also more than one such problem should be independent, with no mutual relationship which would indicate different phases of the older stratum being necessary. I am now considering a few such problems.

Thus, when some matters concerning the older stratum — such as its chronology; or its philological, doctrinal, or historical characteristics; and so forth — have been illuminated as a whole via the methods stated above, more exact and trustworthy results of research will be possible, and then the comparative study of the Pāli commentaries with the northern sectarian or Mahāyāna texts based upon the above results can be further improved. This will surely contribute to the study of Indian Buddhist history itself.

On the other hand, as a final task in this particular field, “the study of the formational history of the Pāli commentarial literature” should be pursued in the future. In addition, another ideal goal of our research should be considered in parallel, that is a publication of the Japanese translation series of all the commentaries in question, as a sequel to the *Nanden Daizōkyō*, the Japanese translation series of the Pāli Tipiṭaka plus other texts in Pāli, published altogether in seventy volumes between 1935 and 1941 as mentioned above.

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References to Pāli texts refer to the Pali Text Society’s editions unless otherwise stated.

Sodo Mori

ABBREVIATIONS

- JPTS* *Journal of the Pali Text Society*
SPCJ Mori 1984 in Japanese
SPCE Mori 1989 in English (This is not a translation of *SPCJ* above, but a collection of my articles on Aṭṭhakathā study.)
 Mori Festschrift *Buddhist and Indian Studies in Honour of Professor Sodo Mori*. Hamamatsu: Kokusai Bukkyōto Kyōkai, 2002, in English

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