

Zeitschrift:	Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie
Herausgeber:	Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft
Band:	46 (1992)
Heft:	1: Études bouddhiques offertes à Jacques May
Artikel:	A note on Vasubandhu and the Lankavatarastra
Autor:	Schmithausen, Lambert
DOI:	https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-146964

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 26.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

A NOTE ON VASUBANDHU AND THE LAṄKĀVATĀRASŪTRA

Lambert Schmithausen, Hamburg

The present paper does not aim at a comprehensive treatment of the complicated problem of the relation of Vasubandhu and the Laṅkāvatārasūtra (LAS), still less of the controversial question of Vasubandhu's date or of whether we have to assume one Vasubandhu or two (or even more than two). I only want to contribute to the discussion with an observation of a minor nature. Yet, provided that my interpretation of the facts is correct, this observation does have some bearing not only on how we have to figure out the relation of Vasubandhu and the LAS but also on the date of Vasubandhu.

As has already been noticed by G. Tucci and L. de La Vallée Poussin¹, the LAS contains, among others, two particularly close parallels to Vasubandhu's *T r i ṡ m ṣ i k ā* (Tr), viz. LAS 169,3ff² ~ Tr 28³, and LAS 163,10ff⁴ ~ Tr 20⁵. Both passages form part of the LAS text already

- 1 G. Tucci, Notes on the Laṅkāvatāra, in: IHQ 4/1928, 551f; L. de La Vallée Poussin, *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi*, 516 (and 585). Cp. also K. Yasui, A Textual Study of the Anityatā-Parivarta in the Laṅkāvatārasūtra (in Jap.), in: Ōtani-daigaku Kenkyū Nempō 20/1967, 68; N. Funahashi, *Shoki-yuishiki-shisō no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Kokushokankōkai 1976), 371f (cp. also IBK 30.1/1971, 323f); J. Takasaki, *Ryōgagyō* (Tokyo: Daizōshuppan 1980) [Butten-kōza vol. 17], 57; id., *Yugagyō-ha no keisei*, in: *Kōza-Daijōbukkyō*, vol. 8 (Tokyo: Shunjusha 1982), 34; id., Sources of the *Laṅkāvatāra* and Its Position in Mahāyāna Buddhism, in: Indological and Buddhist Studies, Vol. in Honour of Prof. J. W. de Jong (ed. L. A. Hercus et al., Canberra 1982), 553f.
- 2 *punar api Mahāmatir āha: yat punar idam uktam bhagavatā “yadā tv ālamb�am artham nopalabhatे jñānam, tadā vijñaptimātravyavasthānam bhavati; vijñapter grāhyābhāvād grāhakasyāpy agrahanām bhavati; tadagrahanān na pravartate jñānam vikalpasamśabdītām”, ...*
- 3 *yadā tv ālambanam jñānam naivopalabhatे, tadā /
sthitam vijñānamātratve^{a)}, grāhyābhāve tadagrahāt //*
a) Tib. *mam par rig pa tsam* corresponds to *vijñaptimātra*^o, as is in fact the reading in the quotation of the verse by Advayavajra, *Tattvaratnāvalī* 19,4.
- 4 *punar api Mahāmatir āha: yat punar etad uktam bhagavatā “yena yena vikalpena ye ye bhāvā vikalpyante, na hi sa tesām svabhāvo bhavati; parikalpita evāsau”, ...*
- 5 *yena yena vikalpena yad yad vastu vikalpyate, /
parikalpita evāsau svabhāvo; na sa vidyate //*

in the earliest extant⁶ Chinese translation, viz. that by Gunabhadra,⁷ dated 443 A.D.⁸

In both cases, LAS introduces the phrases parallel to Tr as former utterances of the *Bhagavān*, the Buddha, i.e. it virtually presents them as quotations from another Sūtra. If this way of presenting the quotation is accepted as literally true, it would mean that there was a third source, i.e., another Sūtra, from which Vasubandhu, too, may have borrowed in case he did not borrow from LAS. But as has already been pointed out by G. Tucci⁹ and J. Takasaki¹⁰, it is equally possible that LAS draws, after all, upon Tr, and merely pretends to quote from a Sūtra because as a Sūtra LAS cannot of course quote a Śāstra (as such).

Actually, a closer investigation of the two passages shows that the alleged third source would have to be so close to Tr as to be practically indistinguishable from it.

Firstly, the quotation at LAS 169,3ff uses the term *vijñaptimātra*. This term is, to be sure, aberrant in LAS which prefers *cittamātra* instead; according to Suzuki's index, *vijñaptimātra* does not occur in any other place in LAS except for two passages of the Sagāthaka chapter¹¹ which, however, does not yet form part of Guṇabhadra's version. But *vijñaptimātra* is in perfect harmony with the terminology of Tr where only¹² this term is used but not *cittamātra*.¹³

Secondly, when LAS 169,3ff starts the quotation with the words *yadā tu* ..., it presupposes, by *tu*, that in its original source the present statement followed upon, and contrasted with, a statement concerning the state in which the mind still perceives something objectified. This is actually the case in Tr, where the preceding verse, viz. Tr 27, deals with the phase in

6 According to the Chinese catalogues there was an earlier one by Dharmakṣema who was active between 412 and 433 (Takasaki, Sources ... [see n. 1], 546); but there is, of course, no way to decide whether already this translation, if it existed at all, contained the passages under discussion.

7 T vol. 16, 501c24f and 502c8ff.

8 See LAS, Preface p. viii.

9 Op. cit. [see n. 1], 552.

10 See n. 1 (*Ryōgagyō* and Sources).

11 Viz. X.44a and 77a. Cp. also Tucci's (op. cit. [see n. 1], 552f) remarks on *vijñapti* in LAS.

12 Apart from *vijñānamātratva* (but with v.l.: see n. 3) in Tr 28.

13 This is also true of the Vimśatikā, with the exception of the introductory passage of the autocommentary quoting the famous *cittamātra* sentence from the Daśabhūmikasūtra.

which one understands that the object is nothing but mind but still visualizes it in front of oneself.

Similarly, the quotation at LAS 163,10ff presents a definition of Imagined Nature (*parikalpita svabhāva*) only, which is obviously isolated from the context of a definition of all the three *svabhāvas*. In Tr, the corresponding passage forms in fact part of a definition of all of them.

What is more significant is the fact that this latter passage, though slightly differing from the wording of Tr, has yet preserved clear traces of the metrical structure of its source: *yena yena vikalpena* and *parikalpita evāsau* are odd śloka pādas, which moreover literally agree with Tr 20a and 20c. This means that the source utilized by LAS was a verse text, and, as far as its metrical structure has been preserved, one completely identical with Tr at that. Hence, to cling to the idea of a third source would mean that we have to postulate a third source which, at least in the portions concerned, was practically if not entirely identical with Tr – an assumption which would, virtually, reduce Vasubandhu's work to plagiarism. This, however, is not very probable, still less so because the third source does not, in spite of the LAS indication, seem to have been a Sūtra. For in this case it is not understandable why LAS should not have quoted the verses of its source verbatim instead of transforming most of them into prose, retaining but two odd pādas in their original metrical form. If, however, the source from which LAS quotes was, in reality, not a Sūtra but a Śāstra, then it becomes intelligible that while quoting from that Śāstra LAS blurred the metrical structure, especially the metrically more distinct and hence "treacherous" even pādas, in order to dissimulate the source it was actually drawing upon. [I admit that the way I have put it may suggest deliberate fraud on the part of the compiler(s) of LAS, but this is perhaps not the right way we have to understand the matter. Rather, we should perhaps start from the assumption that the compiler was convinced that what had been stated in the Śāstra verses was an excellent way of formulating an important spiritual truth, which he could not imagine not to go back, at least in substance, to the Buddha himself. Hence he did not hesitate to put it into the Buddha's own mouth but still felt uneasy to have him use the very verses of the Śāstra.]

There is, however, no cogent reason why the source utilized by LAS should not have been Tr¹⁴ but rather an entirely hypothetical Śāstra, and

14 In order to prevent misunderstanding, I should like to stress that other LAS passages

a precise duplicate of Tr at that. The only motive for assuming such a third source is that a dependence of Guṇabhadra's version of LAS on Tr may be felt to contradict other facts or assumptions taken for granted:

Firstly, the fact that verses of LAS are quoted by Vasubandhu in his *Vyākhyāyukti*.

Secondly, the assumption of ca. 400-480 as the life-time of Vasubandhu the Kośakāra. If he is also the author of Tr,¹⁵ and if Tr is rightly believed to be his latest work, or at least one of the latest,¹⁶ the fact that Tr has been utilized already in the LAS version on which Guṇabhadra's translation of 443 is based excludes 400-480 as Vasubandhu's life-time. This date, however, is based upon Vasubandhu's connection with two successive Gupta rulers called Vikramāditya and Bālāditya, and identified by Frauwallner with Skandagupta (ca. 455-467) and Narasimhagupta (ca. 467-473).¹⁷

One way out of these difficulties would be to doubt the sequence of the works of Vasubandhu according to which Tr is among his last works and rather consider her a quite early one. But in view of the intrinsic plausibility of such a sequence¹⁸ (which is partly confirmed by self-references)¹⁹ I for one am disinclined to reverse it as long as I am not

showing significant similarity to Tr (e.g., LAS X.870 [Tr 1d-2b]; X.874b [Tr 5b]; 711bc (read *dharmopacā*) [Tr 1ab]; III.25c (read *niścittam*) + 29c [Tr 29a]) or Vimśatikā (X.411 and 495ab [Vś 9]) have to be judged independently in each case. But I suppose that at least in the case of some of these parallels, especially those found in LAS X only, priority has to be accorded to Tr and Vimśatikā.

- 15 L. Schmithausen, *Sautrāntika-Voraussetzungen in Vimśatikā und Trimśikā*, in: WZKSO 11/1967, 109ff; cp. also E. Frauwallner, *Die Philosophie des Buddhismus* (Berlin 1969), 351. As for the criticism expressed by Amar Singh, see L. Schmithausen, *Ālayavijñāna* (Tokyo 1987), n. 101.
- 16 Cp., e.g., Frauwallner, op. cit. [see n. 15], 351; Sh. Iida and Sh. Matsumoto, *Vasubandhu's Interpretation of Pratītya-samutpāda-ādi* (paper prepared for the 188th Meeting of the American Oriental Society, April 1978), 27; St. Anacker, *Seven Works of Vasubandhu* (Delhi etc., 1984, 2¹⁹⁸⁶), 22.
- 17 E. Frauwallner, *On the Date of the Buddhist Master of the Law Vasubandhu* (Rome 1951), 25ff.
- 18 Schmithausen, *Sautrāntika-Voraussetzungen* [see n. 15], esp. 134f; cp. also *Ālayavijñāna* [see ib.] n. 101; K. Matsuda, *Vasubandhu ni okeru san-kie no kitei to sono ōyō*, in: *Bukkyōgaku Seminā* 39/1984, 96.
- 19 G. Muroji, *Kusharon - Jōgōron - Engikyōron*, in: *Mikkyō Bunka* 156/1986, 82 + 56 n. 3: *Karmasiddhi* (ed. Lamotte) § 37 refers to *Vyākhyāyukti*, and the *Pratītyasamutpādavy-*

forced to do so by unambiguous evidence or by the lack of another solution. I rather prefer to follow St. Anacker's²⁰ suggestion that the kings called Vikramāditya and Bālāditya with whom Vasubandhu was associated are to be identified not with Skandagupta and Narasiṁhagupta but with Candragupta II (375-415) and his son.²¹ I do not, however, insist upon equating, with Anacker, Bālāditya with Govindagupta (who seems to have died before his father but to have been consecrated as *yuvarāja* around 391) instead of Kumāragupta I who was the son who actually succeeded his father and whom Anacker seems to exclude because taking him as Bālāditya would extend the life-time of Vasubandhu too much. But this is another problem, connected with the question whether there were two Vasubandhus (viz. the brother of Asaṅga on the one hand and the Kośakāra on the other) or only one. This question, however, is, to my mind, still unsolved.²² Scholars who discard

ākhyā to the Abhidharmakośa[bhāṣya] (Peking blockprint chi 23b2) and to the Karmasiddhi (ib. chi 16a5).

20 Anacker, op. cit. [see n. 16], 8ff.

21 The problem with this identification is, admittedly, that it does not meet the requirement, stipulated by Frauwallner (On the Date ... [see n. 17], 27), that there should be evidence that the king in question a c t u a l l y bore the title "Bālāditya"; it rather rests on the assumption that "Bālāditya" was a title "used by Gupta princes in their minority" (Anacker, op. cit. [see n. 16], 8).

22 Unfortunately, some of the more recent treatments of this question teem with arguments based on faulty evidence. To give just one example: St. Anacker (op. cit. [see 16], 25) blames de La Vallée Poussin for having mistranslated Yaśomitra by making Sthavira-Vasubandhu the master of Manoratha (the teacher of Vasubandhu the Kośakāra), whereas "what Yaśomitra actually says is: *Apara iti Sthavira-Vasubandhor ācāryo Manorathopādhyāya evam āha.*" But this text is nothing but N. N. Law's wilful emendation of the mss. which, as Law himself notes in the critical apparatus to his edition (III p. 43), read *Vasubandhur ācārya-Ma*°, as does Wogihara's ed. (289,6) and the Tibetan translation (*slob dpon yid 'on gi mkhan po gnas rtan dbyig gien de skad* ...). Hence, de La Vallée Poussin's rendering of the passage is perfectly correct. Thich Mangiac (The Philosophy of Vasubandhu, S. Berendo St. 1990, 42f) not only defends Law's "emendation" but even goes so far as to blame de La Vallée Poussin for having followed the reading of the ms., and lightly discards P'u-kuang's support. But there are several mss., and neither Law nor Wogihara indicate any v.1., and as mentioned before the reading of the mss. is also supported by Tib. (cp. also M. Mejor, Vasubandhu's Abhidharmakośa and the Commentaries Preserved in the Tanjur, Stuttgart 1991, 44 n. 191). Besides, Thich Mangiac misrepresents the reading of the mss. (printing *ācāryo* instead of *ācārya-*), thereby creating the false impression that Law's text contains only one emendation whereas actually there are two of them. If such an arbitrary treatment

Frauwallner's two Vasubandhu theory may welcome the evidence produced in this paper; but actually all it does is to force us — provided that we exclude the "third source" and want to keep to the assumption that Tr is one of his latest works — to place Vasubandhu the Kośakāra somewhat earlier than Frauwallner did, but not necessarily more than a few decades (five or six, or even less).

As regards the quotation of LAS verses in the Vyākhyāyukti, Takasaki²³ has already pointed out that these verses are not expressly quoted a s s t e m m i n g f r o m L A S. This means that at the time when the Vyākhyāyukti was written some materials now found in LAS were, to be sure, already in existence, but LAS as a composition or compilation of such materials need not have existed yet. And even if it did exist,²⁴ it need not yet have existed in the form presupposed by Guṇabhadra.

The fact that LAS is quoted in the Sūtrasaṃuccaya²⁵ does not seem to be a valid counter-argument to this since the evidence adduced in support of the ascription of this text to Nāgārjuna (viz. confirmation of this ascription by Candrakīrti and Śāntideva)²⁶ is hardly sufficient. The same holds good for the Bodhicittavivaraṇa.²⁷ At any rate, undisputed evidence for the antiquity of LAS cannot be gathered from quotations or parallels in works of disputed authenticity and date. As regards the parallels between LAS and the doubtless authentic works of Nāgārjuna,²⁸ the priority of LAS is open to serious doubt as long as the opposite possibility of its drawing on Nāgārjuna is not convincingly excluded, and even if this could be achieved in some cases, it would merely prove that some of the materials incorporated in LAS were already in existence at Nāgārjuna's time, but not the Sūtra as a whole.

of the original sources were accepted, we may just as well dispense with using them at all.

23 Yugagyō-ha no keisei [see n. 1], 34.

24 Cp. n. 6.

25 Chr. Lindtner, Nāgārjuniana (Copenhagen 1982), 176; Bhikkhu Pāsādika, Nāgārjuna's Sūtrasaṃuccaya (Copenhagen 1989), 125; 131; 171f; 175.

26 Lindtner, op. cit., 172.

27 Ibid., 181. Lindtner's view has been rejected in detail by C. Dragonetti in: WZKS 30/1986, 115ff.

28 Lindtner, op. cit., 122 n. 149. Cp. also Bhikkhu Pāsādika in: The Tibet Journal 13.1/1988, 6.