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The Buddhist Doctrine of Momentariness: A Survey of the Origins and Early Phase of This Doctrine Up to Vasubandhu, Alt- und Neu-Indische Studien Nr. 47. By Alexander von Rospatt. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1995, ISBN 3–515–06528–8, 285 pages, [currently out of print].

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Acceptance of the notion that all phenomena are momentary, passing away in an instant (*kṣaṇa*) after arising, is a standard doctrine in most Indian and Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Despite this, no mention of the doctrine of momentariness is found in the early texts of the Nikāyas or Āgamas. According to proponents of the doctrine, the conditioned (*saṃskṛta*) entities of the world — that is, those which are subject to the processes of causality — are different in each moment, though they are also linked to past and future moments through the process of causality, which allows for both continuity and change. Like the frames of a movie that pass by at a sufficient speed to produce the illusion of seamless continuity, the doctrine of momentariness holds that the process of arising and perishing happens so rapidly that we are not normally aware of the succession of moments.

In this study, Alexander von Rospatt sets out to examine the origins of the doctrine of momentariness and the main arguments in support of it adduced by Indian Buddhist philosophers. His work is reminiscent of Lambert Schmithausen's landmark study *Ālayavijñāna* (Tokyo, 1987), which surveyed a vast range of Yogācāra literature to examine the origins and development of the *ālayavijñāna* doctrine, and so it comes as no surprise that Schmithausen was von Rospatt's dissertation advisor and that this is the published version of his Ph.D. thesis at the University of Hamburg.

As von Rospatt points out in the introduction, the doctrine of momentariness has been studied before, most notably by Stcherbatsky, Mookerjee, and la Valle Poussin, but this is the first comprehensive study of the doctrine in its formative phase. He limits himself to an examination of early Buddhist sources, and concludes that momentariness is never mentioned until at least the time of Buddhaghosa. He then studies several early Yogācāra texts (such as the *Abhidharmako'sa* and *Bhāṣya*), highlighting some of the significant developments in the concept and some of the central arguments that were developed in its defense.

The study begins by examining early canonical and post-canonical Abhidharma literature, and von Rospatt demonstrates that although phenomena are frequently described as impermanent (*anitya*), they are not said to be momentary. He then discusses the doctrines of Hīnayāna traditions that accepted the doctrine of momentariness, arguing that the Vātsputrīyas and Saṃmatīyas only accepted the momentariness of mental events and that in their earliest literature Theravādins did not assert the doctrine of momentariness. The Sarvāstivādins and related traditions, however, did assert that all conditioned entities are momentary.

After establishing a basis for comparison, von Rospatt moves on to examine early authors of the Yogācāra tradition, discussing various doctri-

nal problems that developed from the doctrine of momentariness and how they were dealt with, and then presenting various formulations of the nature and duration of moments. Following this, von Rospatt examines the three most prominent arguments for momentariness: the fact that conditioned things change, the fact that they pass away, and the experience of momentariness in meditation. In the final part he speculates that the doctrine may have developed as a philosophical consequence of accepting that phenomena are impermanent, but that it may equally well have been a response to yogic experiences in which meditators perceive the flashing by of mental events and contemplate the evanescence of things. The book concludes with an overview of the most significant points touched on in the previous sections. In an appendix, von Rospatt translates the sections on momentariness in the fourth chapter of the *Hsien yang sheng chiao lun*, traditionally attributed to Aśaṅga, but only extant in Chinese.

This is a solid piece of scholarship which clearly defines its focus and then surveys an impressive range of literature in Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese, along with relevant scholarship in Japanese, French, English, and German. Meticulously footnoted, the work examines its subject with great thoroughness and precision, maintaining a very readable text (at least for specialists) that is supplemented by an impressive array of footnotes that back up the author's contentions. This is clearly a significant contribution to the field and sets a standard for similar studies in the future. My only caveat is that although von Rospatt mentions other studies on later developments in the doctrine of momentariness (pp. 4–6), he never indicates how his own work relates to these. It would have been interesting, for example, to learn to what extent the works of Vasubandhu and Aśaṅga that develop and argue for the doctrine differ from those of Dignāga, Dharmakīrti, and Kamala'sīla, for example. In his introduction, von Rospatt hints that he sees some differences between earlier and later formulations of the doctrine, but this idea is never developed. This is, however, a minor quibble, and the work as it stands is very comprehensive and provides a great deal of information for the specialist interested in the early development of this important Buddhist doctrine.